

The Home Front: Hostess, Housewife and Home in Olympic Melbourne, 1956

Rachel Buchanan

My Olympics begins with the tall, dark figure of Mrs John Murphy, who is preparing her Victorian terrace in Grey Street, East Melbourne for the many informal parties she expects to host there during the 1956 Games. She wipes clean her china in the kitchen end of the grey, white and lilac living room with the maple ceiling squares and she shows off her bread crock, an artistic kitchen item that was hand-thrown by potter John Percival in the shape of a merry face.¹ Phyllis Murphy, her husband John, and two other architects, Kevin Borland and Peter McIntyre, designed the famous Olympic swimming pool with its wall of mirrored windows and ceramic Arthur Boyd totem to guard the entranceway, but this achievement is almost irrelevant here.² Mrs Murphy is building more than a sports venue: she is building a nation. She is an Olympic Hostess and the success of the mammoth 20th century international exhibition that is the XVIth Olympiad, rests on her home, her smile, her ordinary housewife's hospitality.

I could begin with any one of a dozen other women. Mrs P J Norris of Market Street, Essendon, for instance, who is making test batches of japatris and cleaning out all her pots and pans with mud in preparation for the arrival of her Olympic guest, Mr Idris bin Mohammed Shah of Malaya. Mr Shah, a Muslim, had requested that any utensils that had touched pork be scoured with mud.³ Or Mrs L Gillam of Kew, who is put on the spot when her Olympic guests, the Malayan Rajah of Perlis and his Rane, arrive earlier than expected, but pulls through by making a quick curry and nipping out to buy strawberries.⁴ There is also Mrs Hamilton Sleigh of Toorak, wife of an oil company proprietor, pacing the plum-coloured carpet of her formal dining room; Mrs Maurice Nathan, wife of the chairman of the Olympic Civic Committee, showing off her shocking pink TV room and cocktail bar; or even the fictional Edna Everage, who awaits 'Unno Klammi', a tanned shot-putter from Lapland, who will be accommodated in the box room which has been spruced up with a 'pretty little ballerina shade over the naked light bulb'.⁵

Graeme Davison has argued that the great international festivals of the nineteenth century, including the 1888 exhibition in Melbourne, gave Australia a stage on which it could 'symbolically present its accomplishments to the world'.⁶ While athletes were ostensibly the stars of the 1956 Olympics, the Games can also be read as another great urban festival which allowed Melbourne and Australia to parade itself and its achievements before an imagined international audience.⁷ One of the ways Davison interprets the Olympics is as a battle for control waged by two groups of influential men who were involved in bidding for the Games and then organising them. On one side were traditional military men like Kent Hughes, the eventual chairman of the Olympic organising committee and the honorary secretary Edgar Tanner. On the other side were the modernisers such as former Olympic swimming champion and tyre manufacturer Frank Beaurepaire and

retailer Maurice Nathan. By the end of the Games, Davison suggests, the modernisers had clearly won and the narrative of city and nation was henceforth to be one of progress fuelled by business entrepreneurs who were influenced by American know-how rather than imperial tradition. This high-profile battle was certainly a part of the Games but the more intimate performances of modernity will also need to be examined in order to reveal the complexities and pleasures of the 1956 Olympics. The stage for such performances is the home and the players, in the main, are women. The title of the drama is 'The Australian way of life', a phrase that had become endemic by the early 1950s but described nothing more definite than a series of negatives: not communist; not American; not British; not poor; not rural and so on.⁸ At first, the actors and the setting may seem insignificant, or even banal, but with time and attention it becomes clear that the housewife and the brick veneer are perfect ingredients for high drama. As cultural theorist Homi Bhabha writes: '[t]he recesses of the domestic space become sites for history's most intricate invasions. In that displacement, the borders between home and world become confused; and, uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other.'⁹

Historians are beginning to turn their attention to this borderland by looking at the link between home, citizen and nation in 1950s Australia. As Judith Brett has shown, the desire to acquire and then defend a home was crucial to what Robert Menzies called 'the forgotten people', Australia's non-labouring middle class. For Menzies, the home was the source of all patriotism. It was where a person was free to express their worth and dignity, it was a site for the development and enactment of political beliefs and it was a place of safety and retreat, 'where no stranger may come against our will'.¹⁰ More recently, John Murphy has drawn on Brett's work to argue that for Menzies' middle class, feelings about domesticity 'shaped ideas about what it was to be a citizen, and what it was to be a member of a national community'.¹¹ The home and suburb had become the most important sites for nation-building, citizenship and civilisation.¹² Once they were home, the middle class could shut their doors and try to forget about migrants, poverty, communism, the dispossession of Aborigines, the threat of nuclear war and any of the other myriad threats, fears and injustices of the decade. As Murphy suggests, although post-war middle class Australians described themselves in opinion polls as friendly, generous and hospitable, they were, in fact, often fearful of strangers and quite unwilling to engage in public life.¹³

These tensions between the popular story of a nation filled with easy-going people and the rather less appealing reality of a worried and slightly fearful population are a sub-text to almost all of Melbourne's preparations for the Olympic Games. In the year leading up to the Olympics, the people were exhorted to be courteous, warm and open towards the anticipated international guests. Friendliness was essential to 'the Australian way of life' that was being constructed yet the intensity of these pleas for hospitality suggests that the label 'the friendly Games' could only have been given to the Olympics in retrospect.¹⁴

A few examples give some idea of the 'discursive explosion' around friendliness in the Olympic city.¹⁵ As the Games drew near, Ted Doyle, the organising committee's director of press and publicity, told the Melbourne Constitutional Club that only the most courteous and friendly of behaviour would

do in response to the ‘tremendous foreign but friendly invasion of the world’s outstanding sportsmen’.¹⁶ Were the troops prepared for the impending invasion? Many were unsure. Under the heading, ‘Let us crack ice barrier’, the *Herald* quoted Lewis Burne, president of the Victorian Employers’ Federation, who had raised his concerns about Melbourne’s readiness for the Games in the federation’s Weekly Service Letter:¹⁷ ‘[o]ur reputation for being somewhat chilly with strangers does not mean that we are inhospitable. It means rather that we take our time before welcoming visitors into our homes and clubs’. Such an attitude might be fine for everyday living but it was no time for being over-cautious, Mr Burne concluded.

In October the various pleas for hospitality were formalised by the Junior Chamber of Commerce’s ‘Olympic Courtesy Week’. Prizes were awarded for most courteous driver, newsboy, conductor and taxi-driver, sermons were delivered on the theme of courtesy and athletes taught children how to be polite autograph-hunters.¹⁸ With the lure of a prize flight anywhere in Australia, *Sun* readers were asked to send in their ideas for ‘spontaneous gestures’ of courtesy. The readers’ ideas flowed in. One suggested that drivers mount small flags on their cars with the words: ‘Russian athletes: welcome to Australia’, another that visiting scouts be allowed to camp free in backyards.¹⁹

The international turmoil — the Suez canal crisis and Russia’s invasion of Hungary — that immediately preceded the Games can only have added to Melbourne’s anxieties. The impending ‘friendly invasion’ was now linked with disturbingly real acts of war. In an editorial, the *Women’s Weekly* warned that women were now ‘tortured’ by the threat of another war but the following pages presented the city’s most glamorous Olympic hostesses and noted that Melbourne women had spent 250,000 pounds on dresses and jewellery for the Olympic social season.²⁰ The *Herald* reported that British and French planes had landed in Malta, en route to Suez, in scenes ‘reminiscent of the wartime Sicily invasion’. Next to this report was a large photograph of a suspicious-looking group of men in trench coats, dark glasses and fedoras — the Romanian Olympic team arriving at Essendon Airport.²¹ Boundaries were being breached everywhere. Elaborate hospitality was a popular form of defence; reporter John Hoffman noted that wine lists and menus garnished with French were ‘massing at the Town Hall as the City Council prepares for the biggest onslaught of VIPs in Melbourne’s history’.²²

Long before Suez, however, organisers had used the language of battle to exhort householders to offer a bed to an Olympic guest. Home hospitality was crucial in the great exhibition of 1956: ‘[i]n the long run the test of Melbourne as a host for the Olympic Games will not be at the various stadiums or in the organisation or the decorations, but right where Melbourne should show up best — in her homes,’ wrote architect Robin Boyd, the self-appointed interpreter of Australian homes.²³ It is no surprise that the author of *Australia’s Home* should display a patriotism so linked with domesticity:²⁴

We have in Melbourne no scenery, no skyscrapers or spectacles to impress visitors. But we have unique standards of home comfort — at all levels, not only in the three-car garages class, but in the carport and carless class as well ... We have, in short, something to show in our homes. This part of the Games is not up to

officialdom. The private citizens of Melbourne could put on a show of domestic hospitality which would open the world's eyes if the right homes volunteer.²⁵

For Menzies' middle class, a well-equipped home signalled a well-equipped citizen, and such a person was able to benefit society through gestures of 'independent domesticated citizenship'.²⁶ The 1956 Games, with its explicit appeal for well-equipped homes to house visitors, allowed women and men to enact a peculiarly domestic form of patriotism. As it was played out on the stage of the home, the Games collapsed the boundaries between the private and the public and, for a short time at least, the housewife could become not only breadwinner (Olympic hosts were paid) but a valued supplier of essential services to the nation. For housewives, the Games fired deep competitive and patriotic impulses and drew out some sterling performances.

In this suburban arena of Olympic competition, the starting pistol was fired on 2 March 1955. The Governor of Victoria, Sir Dallas Brooks, launched an urgent appeal for the people to 'throw open their homes' to accommodate the 30,000 visitors — possibly more — who were expected to come from interstate and overseas.²⁷ Such a scheme was necessary because hotels and guest houses did not have enough beds to cope with the influx. 'An assurance that Melbourne will not fail has been given. We will not fail', Dallas Brooks assured himself and his listeners.²⁸ As Dallas Brooks spoke, seven young women sat at the switchboard waiting for calls. Within an hour, 700 beds had been offered.

The council's new Olympic Civic Committee, under the leadership of Maurice Nathan, the managing director of Patersons furniture store, was charged with preparing Melbourne as host. The committee was responsible for accommodation, decoration, visitor centres, the arts festival, hospitality for sailors and social functions.²⁹ Of all Melbourne's preparations, accommodation was the most crucial. In fact, the civic committee reported that this aspect of the Games was 'possibly more important than that of the actual athletic performances'.³⁰

By the time Nathan wrote the committee's report, in May 1955, 3,150 homes, or 7,000 beds, had already been offered. A map of Melbourne was mounted on the wall of the council offices and, like generals plotting a campaign, committee members used coloured pins to indicate the location of every bed put forward. Lawyers and dentists reportedly headed the list of offers.³¹ Although the initial response had been good, enthusiasm seemed to be waning.³² The appeal had to be intensified and the extent of the subsequent publicity drive suggests that committee members were not at all confident that the required number of beds would be offered. Further anxieties about the less-than-patriotic motives of those who did offer beds are revealed by frequent denials of any 'profiteering' by would-be Olympic hosts, who could expect to be paid upwards of one pound a day.³³

The civic committee's ten point plan to boost the accommodation appeal was creative and comprehensive, a blitz almost. Government departments and private companies agreed to insert 400,000 appeal 'fillers' and stickers into outgoing mail and accounts and 150,000 brochures containing an urgent message from the Lord Mayor were distributed to Melbourne households. Illustrated with the Olympic rings and a photograph of runners Landy and Bannister battling it out in the Empire Games in 1954, the brochure was an urgent call for people to act immediately. 'A National Appeal to Melbourne's Citizens!' it proclaimed. 'Be an

Olympic host — Win friends for Australia!³⁴ Compelling fragments of the ephemera associated with this appeal can be found among the official records of the Games. A single sheet, perhaps one of the 400,000 fillers sent out with bills, is stamped in red with the City of Melbourne coat of arms. In capital letters it asks: ‘Can you help Australia by Accommodating an Olympic Guest? Willing homeowners are asked to return the slip of paper, with their name and address supplied, to the Town Hall’. An ‘accredited representative’ will then visit the homeowner and explain all the details. ‘Remember!’ the form concludes. ‘It is YOUR home that is wanted! This appeal is URGENT!’³⁵ The wording of the flyer has echoes of the conscription drives associated with the two world wars but as Australia prepared for the Games it was not bodies, but homes, that were required to defend the nation. In 1950s Melbourne, the home had become the front.

The ten point plan also called on mayors, town clerks and their wives to launch accommodation drives in their own suburbs; twenty-six councils complied and formed their own accommodation sub-committees. Operation Hostess was underway. Skirmishes flared as suburb pitted itself against suburb to fill their quota as part of the campaign’s target of 9,000 extra Olympic beds. On 20 September 1955, in an article provocatively entitled ‘Wives on the warpath for Olympic beds’, the mayor of Caulfield, Gladys Wallace, issued a challenge to the mayors of Camberwell and Malvern. ‘Our quota is 800 beds,’ she said. ‘The quotas for Camberwell and Malvern are 900 and 600 beds but I am prepared to challenge their committees that Caulfield will reach the target first’.³⁶ A few days later, the *Herald* reported that Operation Hostess had produced 362 more beds. Mordialloc housewives were particularly keen to help but needed time to talk the matter over with their husbands first. Cr Nathan urged people not to be timid about taking strangers in and reiterated the crucial rallying point that the Games was a test of Melbourne’s hospitality.³⁷

The competition escalated as door-to-door drives were organised across Melbourne. It had already been reported that Toorak and South Yarra had responded poorly and other suburbs were determined not to be similarly shown up.³⁸ As East St Kilda campaigner Mrs L Q Permezel said, perhaps with a degree of understatement: ‘[t]here’s a keen spirit of competition between the suburbs’.³⁹ Other, more private forces were at work too; the promise of an imagined exotic, athletic or cultured foreign house-guest sparked rich romantic fantasies and Melbourne women were quick to surrender to the pleasures of a gentle kind of Orientalism.⁴⁰ Mrs R J Reader of Chadstone, leader of the Malvern appeal, met one housewife who ‘positively demanded a French opera singer!’⁴¹ Later, once the athletes started to arrive, reporter Claudia Little explained that the lucky housewives of Southern Road, Heidelberg had front-row seats.⁴² It was the perfect position for enacting Olympic fantasies, even if all they wanted to do was look. Mrs Fred Greenwood, ‘grey-haired mother of three’, who lived at number 157 confined herself to peeping out her kitchen windows as the athletes got on and off their training buses. Her one concern, she said, was being deprived of her eight hours sleep because of the constant comings and goings of the sightseers who lined Southern Road until after midnight. The dark-haired Mrs Stan Moore of number 179 was bolder; she entertained Olympic visitors every night of the week. The guests included Australian boxers Max Carlos and Bill Holden and twin

brothers from Jamaica. At number 171, Mrs Thomas Black and her mother-in-law Alice spent their days thrilling to the sight of the Olympic rings displayed on a colourful bed of imported pansies. Alice was also pleased to meet the Malayan and Chinese athletes that the Blacks had invited for supper.⁴³ Was it just the desire to be hospitable that prompted these invitations? In December, the *Sun* reported on page one that seventeen-year-old Hawthorn girl Julie Scott, who worked in the personnel section of the village, was to marry Jamaican hurdler Keith Gardner after a whirlwind three-week romance.⁴⁴ How many other women would have liked to be in Julie's shoes?

Don Chipp and Maurice Nathan argued that one of the reasons the civic committee had decided to launch a home-hosting scheme was to allow the Olympic visitor to 'study his Australian counterpart in his own environment'.⁴⁵ The application form that the council sent to Olympic box offices and to 2,000 travel agents around the world gave this message too. It promised visitors that staying in private homes would give them 'an opportunity of meeting their Australian counterparts in their normal family environment'.⁴⁶ The committee's 'Meet the Australians' scheme had similar aims and visitors who choose to accept the hospitality could look forward to visits to hydro-electric schemes and farms or 'entertainment in the Family Circle'.⁴⁷ This anthropological urge to examine and compare went both ways. Due to lack of evidence, one can only imagine what the Malayan athlete made of the Mrs Blacks at 171 Southern Road but it is fair to suggest that at a time when the White Australia policy was still in place, the exotic, black male (and possibly female) Other appeared to have a strong appeal for the Blacks and other Melbourne women. The Olympics allowed hostesses to enjoy a brief but intimate flirtation with multiculturalism.

Many women were so excited about their impending encounters that they enrolled in a special Olympic etiquette course at Alice and Hans Meyer's Hawthorn finishing school.⁴⁸ Here they learnt that a Portuguese man showed his pleasure by 'pulling his right ear and winking his right eye in one polished movement' while a happy Italian would smile and point his finger at his cheek. A South American, Meyer said, was likely to take out a little pocket-knife and sample the roast as soon as it was put on the table.⁴⁹ Homecraft educators nominated their favourite dish so hostesses could 'show visitors how good our own Australian cookery can be!' Mrs Olivia Mackay suggested a bush picnic with damper cooked in hot ashes, lamb chops grilled in the embers and billy tea to follow. Mrs Margaret Kirkhope nominated creamed crayfish and mushrooms served in the shell and Mrs Joan Treloar urged hostesses to combine passionfruit with icecream and meringue to make 'a bewitching pudding'.⁵⁰

One indication of the depth of women's interest in the athletic 'Other' is that it quickly became an object for satire. In 1955, inspired by newspaper advertisements calling for Olympic billets, Barry Humphries created his first Edna Everage sketch — the Olympic Hostess.⁵¹ In the sketch, later updated to the Migrant Hostess, the civic-minded Edna describes her home in 'glutinous' detail to the Olympic billeting bureaucrat.⁵² Number 36 Humeresque Street, Moonee Ponds boasts a chenille bedspread in a pinky colour, Axminster squares, a Genoa velvet couch, sandblasted reindeer on the double-doors, a spare bedroom and a sleep-out. Two migrants could be accommodated but when the officer asks Mrs

Everage which nationality she would prefer, problems arise. New Zealanders, Swedes, Spaniards, Serbs, Croats, Czechs, Poles: none are quite right. Edna storms out. 'We'd like to sponsor a migrant but we do rather draw the line at foreigners!' are her parting words.⁵³

It is fitting that Edna is played by a cross-dressing Humphries because the Olympics forced many men to engage in women's work. Hotelier Norm Carylton was selected to travel to Europe to recruit overseas chefs for the thirteen kitchens at the Olympic Village, a task he described as 'the world's most fascinating housekeeping job'.⁵⁴ Dalton Thrower, the husband of bronze medallist Norma Thrower, cooked his wife's dinner every night and had it ready for her on the table when she got home from hurdling training.⁵⁵ As Games reception officer, Lieutenant-Colonel AM Stoyles developed an awareness of etiquette so acute that it would meet the approval of the most exacting hostess. Stoyles organised the International Olympic Federation banquet at Menzies hotel, a task that involved convoluted negotiations on dress, music, flowers, even the wording of the menu. Stoyles' ornamental descriptions of the dishes — Capricornia fruit cocktail, supreme of chicken in a nest — were amended after a letter from Mr K Donaldson, the Menzies' managing director. 'We do feel that as this is an International Banquet it is practical to use French, as this is the common culinary language'.⁵⁶ The 500 guests dined on La Choux fleur du Barry and La Supreme de Vollaile.

Humphries invented Edna Everage at a time when men were playing women but the comedian had a special advantage in the quest to understand the delicate sensibilities of an Olympic Hostesses' desires; he grew up in Camberwell and, by October 1955, that suburb was 'a long way in front' as the municipality offering most beds to Olympic visitors.⁵⁷ In fact, Crown Avenue, Camberwell, a few streets away from Humphries' parents home in Christowel Street and a little further on from Robin Boyd's house in Riversdale Road, was poised to become Melbourne's 'first Olympic street', with every home hosting a visitor.⁵⁸ Newspapers published tables which set the number of beds offered against each suburb's target. Camberwell, Caulfield and Moorabbin topped the list and Richmond, Port Melbourne and Fitzroy were at the bottom.⁵⁹ This list is a small but fascinating document that says much about class, citizenship and status in Australia in the 1950s. If citizenship was linked so explicitly with the home, then the quality of the home was a direct reflection on the quality of the person who lived there. What is interesting about this document is that the ranking of the suburbs so clearly matches the target each was expected to reach. In other words, the civic committee, in allocating quotas to various suburbs, had already made a decision about what kind of people and houses would be suitable to represent Australia by hosting Olympic visitors — houses that were predominantly in Melbourne's south and south-east — and what kind would not.

The committee's decision on quotas matches the image presented in tourist literature. The photographs published in the 2.5 million printed pamphlets, booklets and brochures that Melbourne produced about itself to publicise the Games show a city of mirrored waterways, Gothic cathedrals and broad streets. Aboriginal people are most often absent from this clean, stately place inhabited by a population that is British in origin, 'with a leavening of European migrants'.⁶⁰ The city is quaint and English but it is also sleek and American.⁶¹ The Opening

Ceremony programme boasts that Melbourne's streets are lined with modern homes: '[h]ere and there is an American-style supermarket or a drive-in theatre or branch bank, combined generally with an ideally English roses-and-lavender setting of home and garden'.⁶² This description fits the city fringe, not its centre where new Australians and their working-class neighbours lived cheek by jowl in 'squalid apartment houses'.⁶³

Olympic visitors were assured they would be staying in 'good-class private homes'.⁶⁴ Although only incomplete records survive and I was not able to find any documents that explained how quotas were allocated, I want to suggest that monocultural, middle-class, spacious Camberwell (target 2,055, beds offered 1,330) was the suburb that best represented what the organisers of the Games wished to present as 'the Australian way of life'.⁶⁵ The multicultural, working-class suburbs of Fitzroy (target 77, offers 40) and Richmond (target 98, offers 92), were Australian too but they did not represent the way of life that Australia wanted to show off to the world.⁶⁶ Olympic visitors paid between 20/- and 30/- per day for bed and breakfast and the council estimated that the 8,806 visitors who eventually availed themselves of this service spent a total of 220,000 pounds on accommodation.⁶⁷ Ironically, then, the scheme rewarded those who already had what were considered to be the best-appointed homes in the best suburbs. Newspapers boasted that 'Melbourne homes are telling the world their doors are wide open' but only a certain kind of well-equipped home could be put on show.⁶⁸ The rest, the great majority, kept their doors firmly shut.

A closer examination of what was required of hosts reveals a different domestic picture to the glossy cliché of the 1950s as a time when stylish women swooned over hoovers and washing machines. Such luxuries were an aspiration rather than a reality in Olympic Melbourne, where most people still lived in homes that were extremely basic by today's standards. As Murphy has argued, it is only in retrospect that the 1950s has become a golden era of security and wealth.⁶⁹ In 1956, a quarter of all Melbourne homes had no fridge, two-thirds had no hot running water in the bathroom and three-quarters were without hot water in the laundry.⁷⁰

Many homes of the so-called middle class were without even basic hot water services, let alone other comforts. 'A great number of people have not applied for visitors because they think their houses MUST have wall-to-wall carpets before they can be eligible!' said Mrs R J Reader, the leader of the Malvern door-to-door campaign. Mrs Reader explained to housewives that the only essentials for an Olympic host were a clean, middle-class home with good food and some hot water, '[p]lus, of course, the warm-hearted hospitality of an ordinary housewife', she would say, ending on a note that must have been both reassuring and vaguely threatening.⁷¹

At the end of the long campaign, 6,000 householders had offered about 15,000 beds — nearly double the number actually needed — to the committee. Of the 5,655 Melbourne homes that were inspected, assessed and graded by city council field representatives, only 1 per cent were classed as A grade. These homes had exceptional facilities such as wall-to-wall carpets, refrigeration, an internal toilet and some sort of special attraction, like a swimming pool or separate bathroom. Another thirty-two per cent were B grade, a home with 'most of the facilities

mentioned in A without those of exceptional nature'. The great majority of Olympic host homes, the houses graded C, had out-door toilets and were probably without refrigeration and hot water.⁷²

It is a shame that the only evidence of these inspections that remains is that which is summarised in an official report, which is a discreet and overly congratulatory document. A town clerk's file contains one of the yellow inspection cards carried by hospitality officer Mrs John Chaldjian and other field representatives.⁷³ It is blank but the spaces that have to be filled in hint at the rigorous nature of the inspections and the multiple prejudices they may have exposed. The house was inspected and ranked on standard of cleanliness; garages; distance from railway stations; nature of surroundings; lighting; table appointments and so on. Householders were asked about their age; eating habits; religious preferences; membership of clubs; and occupation. A space was left for 'special remarks'. Further, more personal questions were asked in the interest of matching guests and hosts most completely. Grade A and B homes were asked if they had any 'colour bar' or any objection to a particular nationality. A colour code was used to indicate preferences and small sticky tags were affixed to the top of each form. The code was: mauve for a member of a club such as Rotary; yellow speaks language other than English; blue has preferences for a particular nationality; white would accommodate coloured people; white linked with blue prefers coloured people rather than others; red for a specific religion; black for miscellaneous features; and brown for non-drinkers. The wording of this highly suggestive code, and therefore its meaning, was changed slightly in the official report which noted that 'white' meant a householder had a particular preference for Asian or coloured visitors.⁷⁴ Civic committee organising secretary Don Chipp, speaking on Rob McAuley's documentary *Lies, Spies and Olympics*, claimed that householders actually showed a preference for non-Anglo Olympic guests.⁷⁵ Other sources back this up. Robin Boyd, for example, notes that field officers reports on home hosts revealed almost no colour, race or religious prejudices.⁷⁶ If this was really the case, then for the duration of the 1956 exhibition of nation at least, Melbourne people must have confounded the expectations of council officials because on my reading their original 'code' was constructed around an assumption of prejudice.

In the end, the preferences of Melbourne's home front for imagined Lapplanders, French opera singers or even athletic Malaysians mattered very little. Most of the Olympic visitors were Australians visiting from interstate, New Zealanders or Americans. Guests from 'other overseas countries' accounted for only 731 of the 8,806 who stayed in Melbourne homes.⁷⁷ Perhaps most of these most exotic visitors ended up in Camberwell. There, amongst the Axminster and the chenille, they would have experienced an Australian way of life that must surely have been to their liking.

The Home Front: Hostess, Housewife and Home in Olympic Melbourne, 1956

Rachel Buchanan

- 1 *Herald*, 17 October 1956.
- 2 *1956 Melbourne, Modernity and the XVIth Olympiad*, Museum of Modern Art at Heide, 1996, p 99.
- 3 *Herald*, 10 October 1956.
- 4 *Herald*, 22 October 1956.

- 5 *Herald*, 24 October 1956; *Herald*, 28 November 1956; Barry Humphries, 'Sandblasted Reindeer', in *My Gorgeous Life*, Macmillan Australia, South Melbourne, 1989, pp 149-162.
- 6 Graeme Davison, 'Festivals of Nationhood: the International Exhibitions', in S L Goldberg and F B Smith (eds), *Australian Cultural History*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1988, pp 158-178.
- 7 Graeme Davison, 'Welcoming the World', in Judith Smart and John Murphy (eds), *The Forgotten Fifties*, *Australian Historical Studies*, no 109, October 1997, pp 64-76.
- 8 Richard White, 'The Australian way of life', *Journal of Historical Studies*, vol 18, no 73, 1979, pp 528-545.
- 9 Homi Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, Routledge, London and New York, 1994, p 9.
- 10 Judith Brett, *Robert Menzies' Forgotten People*, Macmillan Australia, Sydney, 1992, p 73.
- 11 John Murphy, *Imagining the Fifties*, Pluto Press, Sydney, 2000, p 1.
- 12 *ibid.*, pp 13-30, p 86.
- 13 *ibid.*, p 76.
- 14 Shane Cahill, *The Friendly Games? The Melbourne Olympics in Australian Culture 1946-56*, MA thesis, University of Melbourne, 1989, pp 2-5.
- 15 I am drawing here on Foucault's repressive hypothesis, see Michel Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality: 1*, 6th ed., Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1990, pp 23-24.
- 16 E A Doyle, address to Constitutional Club, Melbourne, 6 August 1956, Doyle Papers, MS 7981, Box 2833, outward correspondence 56/57, La Trobe Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library of Victoria.
- 17 *Herald*, 29 September 1956.
- 18 See *Sun*, 13-19 October 1956; also *Australian Women's Weekly*, 28 November 1956.
- 19 *Sun*, 16-18 October 1956.
- 20 *Women's Weekly*, 21 November 1956.
- 21 *Herald*, 31 October 1956.
- 22 John Hoffman, *Herald*, 10 November 1956.
- 23 Robin Boyd, *Herald*, 21 June 1955.
- 24 Robin Boyd, *Australia's Home*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1952.
- 25 Boyd, *Herald*, 21 June 1955.
- 26 Murphy, *Imagining the Fifties*, p 15.
- 27 *Sun*, 3 March 1955; and Report to Olympic (Special) Committee on the activities of the Olympic Civic Committee, 30 May 1955, p 2, Public Record Office of Victoria (hereafter VPRO), VPRS 10743, unit 2, ¼ Admin File, VPRO. The number of anticipated visitors appears to have been very elastic and eventually proved to be exaggerated. The civic committee scaled down the initial request for 30,000 beds to about 20,000 and this figure appeared to be consistent through the appeal, see *Herald*, 19 October 1955.
- 28 *Sun*, 3 March 1955.
- 29 City of Melbourne, Olympic Games 1956. A Review of the Activities of the Olympic Civic Committee and the Olympic (Special) Committee, written by chairman Maurice Nathan and organising secretary Don Chipp and submitted to the Organising Committee of the XVIth Olympiad Melbourne on 19 April 1957, VPRS 10743, unit 17, file 14/3/15, p 2, VPRO.
- 30 Report on activities of Olympic Civic Committee, 30 May 1955, p 2, VPRS 10743, unit 2, Admin File, VPRO.
- 31 *ibid.*; see also *Sun*, 4 March 1955; *Sun*, 7 March 1955; *Sun*, 14 March 1955.
- 32 *Sun*, 17 June 1955; Boyd, *Herald*, 21 June 1955.
- 33 *Argus*, Olympic Games, 1956, Melbourne, 1955, p 4, item 992.2669.75, Barnott Collection, Australian Gallery of Sport and Olympic Museum, MCG, Melbourne. In his report on home hosting, Don Chipp refers to anxieties about profiteering when he writes that 'almost without exception, the householder offered his home for national reasons rather than for personal gain', VPRS 10743, unit 17, file 14/3/15, p 4, VPRO.
- 34 Olympic Civic Committee brochure, City of Melbourne Archives, home-hosting ephemera.
- 35 Flyer, in Report on the Activities of the Olympic (Special) Committee and Olympic Civic Committee 1956, VPRS 3183/P5, Box 49, file 57/1169/92, VPRO.
- 36 *Herald*, 20 September 1955; *Sun*, 20 September 1955.
- 37 *Herald*, 23 September 1955.
- 38 *Sun*, 17 June 1955.

- 39 *Herald*, 29 September 1955.
- 40 Edward Said, *Orientalism*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1985, pp 1-28.
- 41 *Herald*, 29 September 1955.
- 42 *Herald*, 12 November 1956.
- 43 'Wives can see all...' *Herald*, 12 November 1956.
- 44 *Sun*, 4 December 1956.
- 45 Review of the Activities of the Olympic Civic Committee, 19 April 1957, VPRS 10743, unit 17, file 14/3/15, p 3, VPRO.
- 46 'A message concerning accommodation for visitors to the XVI Olympiad', VPRS 10743, unit 2, Admin file, VPRO.
- 47 'Meet the Australians: Hospitality for the Overseas Visitor', in City of Melbourne Archives, home-hosting ephemera.
- 48 *Australian Women's Weekly*, 21 November 1956.
- 49 *ibid.*
- 50 *Herald*, 22 November 1956.
- 51 Barry Humphries, *More Please: An Autobiography*, Viking, Ringwood, Victoria, 1992, pp 150-151. Humphries says that Ray Lawler, fellow member of the Twelfth Night country theatre tour, suggested the Olympic hostess might be a good comic subject for the 1955 end-of-season revue. Lawler said: 'Can't you write a sketch for the woman you used to do on the bus? Edna wasn't it? Wouldn't she be just the kind of person who would offer her spare bedroom to a Latvian pole-vaulter, provided, of course, that he was spotlessly clean and didn't hang up his jockstrap on her rotary clothes hoist in full view of the neighbours?'
- 52 Humphries, *More Please*, p 77. Humphries explains that the Olympic Hostess sketch was updated to the Migrant Hostess for his first recording in 1958. The sketch is on Humphries, *Wildlife in Suburbia*, vol 1, 1958, item C698 in the Barry Humphries Collection, Performing Arts Museum, Victorian Arts Centre. In the updated sketch, Edna goes to see an official about 'the sponsor a migrant scheme' and an amusing discussion follows. Further Olympic hostess stories are contained in *My Gorgeous Life*. For instance, Humphries notes that Edna's hosting experience ends on a rather alarming note when she enters her mother's bedroom and interrupts her athlete, Mr Klammi, and her mother, in an intimate moment. 'On the evidence of a quick glance, he seemed to be working up to a decathlon', p 162.
- 53 Edna Everage, all details from *Wildlife in Suburbia*; in *More Please* Humphries notes that 'the glutinous descriptions of the amenities and appointments' of Edna's Moonee Ponds villa had 'a galvanic effect on Melbourne audiences because it described their own homes and their own taste', p 151.
- 54 Norm Carylton, quoted in undated notes for press release, Doyle Papers, MS 7981, box 2833/4a.
- 55 *Women's Weekly*, 12 November 1956.
- 56 Mr K Donaldson, letter to Colonel Stoyles, 9 October 1956, VPRS 10743, unit 21, VPRO.
- 57 *Herald*, 19 October 1955.
- 58 *Herald*, 20 October 1955.
- 59 *Herald*, 19 October 1955.
- 60 *Olympic Games Melbourne, Australia*, Olympic Booklet, 250,000 copies produced by Organising Committee, VPRS 10743, unit 14, VPRO.
- 61 Davison, 'Welcoming the World', in *Forgotten Fifties* and Graeme Davison, 'The modern and Melbourne: Self-imaging in photography, journalism and film, 1945-1970', in Lynette Finch and Chris McConville (eds), *Gritty Cities: Images of the Urban*, Pluto Press, Sydney, 2000, pp 11-45.
- 62 *Olympic Games Melbourne 1956 Opening Ceremony Official Souvenir Programme*, 22 November 1956, p 19, VPRS 10743, unit 19, VPRO.
- 63 *Herald*, 15 February 1956.
- 64 *Olympic Booklet*, VPRS 10743, unit 14, VPRO.
- 65 See Chris McConville, 'At Home with Sandy Stone: Conserving Camberwell', in John Rickard and Peter Spearitt (eds), *Packaging the Past?* Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1991, pp 88-102.
- 66 *Herald*, 19 October 1955.
- 67 Olympic Civic Committee Review, 19 April 1957, p 8, VPRO.
- 68 *Herald*, 20 October 1955.

- 69 Murphy, *Fifties*, pp 3-8.
- 70 *ibid.*, p 6.
- 71 *Herald*, 29 September 1955.
- 72 All information from Olympic Civic Committee Review, 19 April 1957, pp 4-5, VPRO.
- 73 Melbourne City Council Field Representative inspection card and colour-coded host classification list, in VPRS 3183/P5, Box 49, file 57/1169/92, VPRO; see also *Argus*, 10 November 1956, for a report on Mrs John Chaldjian and her helpers who 'worked relentlessly, interviewing hundreds of people offering hospitality, accommodation and/or entertainment, cataloguing and indexing their names and then with all the astuteness of a chess player working out who should entertain whom to the mutual satisfaction of both'.
- 74 Olympic Civic Committee Review, 1957.
- 75 Don Chipp, interviewed on *Lies, Spies and Olympics*, ABC TV, 25 May 2000.
- 76 Boyd, *Herald*, 21 June 1956.
- 77 E A Doyle, editor, *Official Report of the Organising Committee of the XVI Olympiad*, p 199, La Trobe Rare Books, State Library of Victoria.