Sensory History at the Water's Edge: an historical and cultural analysis of Australian urban waterfronts in Perth and Cairns

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Abstract

Through historical analysis and contemporary site studies this thesis considers urban experiences of touch, movement and smell at the water's edge in the Australian cities of Perth and Cairns. It argues that the way these sensations are enhanced and enjoyed or curtailed and manipulated contributes significantly to a city's waterside identity. In Australia, almost every major city has been established on a harbour, coast or river approaching its coastal outlet. Since European settlement Australian waterfronts have been continually transformed to meet aesthetic and functional needs and desires, first for British colonists, and later for the growing Australian population. The history and importance of these sites makes them ideal places for reinterpreting material, cultural and sensorial aspects of Australian history.

This thesis and research has three key aims. First and foremost, it is both an exploration, and a demonstration, of the potential for sensory history to provide unique and beneficial critical perspectives on waterside environments. Secondly, in developing sensory histories of city foreshores in Perth and Cairns, it identifies how proximate sensory experiences of these places have changed over time—and in understanding—due to forces such as technology, tourism and, more broadly, cultural change. Finally, the thesis aims to generate a discussion of the value of sensory experiences in forming place identity, in conjunction with (or sometimes contrasting to) more dominant visual understandings of waterside places.

Perth and Cairns are located on opposite sides of an expansive island continent and they are both celebrated for their appealing recreational waterfronts. The Perth foreshore was once marshy wetlands, but since European settlement dredging and infilling have shaped and reshaped the shallow shoreline. Around the turn of the twentieth century three waterside facilities—the Perth City Baths (1905-1920), the Crawley Baths (1914-1964) and the Perth Water Chute (1905-unknown)—provided novel, exciting and sometimes unpleasant haptic and olfactory encounters with the Swan River on the city foreshore. In 2016 the Elizabeth Quay redevelopment again transformed the waterfront, highlighting certain desirable waterside sensations, and eliminating others. The Cairns foreshore has also evolved over the past 150 years as sand and mudflats have been partially replaced by urban tropical parklands and an artificial lagoon. In Cairns, enhancing the quality of aquatic recreational facilities and leisure landscapes was essential to meet the desires of locals and the expectations of tourists. Comparing the sensory regimes of the Perth and Cairns around 1900 (prior to redevelopment) and 2000 (after or during redevelopment) offers new perspectives on the aspirations behind redevelopments, tensions arising from mixed experiences of the water's edge, and controversies arising from regimes of power present on the waterfront and amongst its occupants at different periods of time.

The thesis finds that from the late 1800s onwards desires for opportunities to bathe and swim on the waterfront increased, and physical encounters with water in waterside urban contexts remain popular today. However, it is now manmade water features—such as artificial lagoons and interactive fountains—that are the locus of water-related recreation. These places are enjoyable, however, visitors do not form the complex topographical, material and ecological understandings of place the come from diverse, complex and changing sensory encounters. Additionally, while waterfronts were transformed to meet European sensory, aesthetic and functional expectations around 1900, today some waterside places are being ‘returned’—via revegetation, landscaping or preservation—to indigenous conditions. These ‘revitalized’ landscapes provide a very different range of sensory experiences and encourage different sensory expectations of Australian waterside places. Greater awareness of the complex and often-neglected ‘sensory histories’ of waterside places can contribute to future consideration of the types of places that can be created, and lost, through design.
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Acronyms

Australian Institute of Architects - AIA
Australian Institute of Landscape Architects - AILA
Australian Institute of Urban Studies - AIUS
Ashton Raggatt McDougall Architecture – ARM
Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation – CSIRO
Darwin Waterfront Corporation - DWC
Environmental Impact Assessment - EIA
Kings Park and Botanic Gardens - KPBG
Metropolitan Redevelopment Authority (Perth) - MRA

Abbreviated Newspaper Titles

CP - *Cairns Post* (Cairns, 1884-1893, 1909-present)
MP - *Morning Post* (Cairns, 1897-1907)
CMP - *Cairns Morning Post* (Cairns, 1907-1909)
SMH - *Sydney Morning Herald* (Sydney, 1831-present)
TWA - *The West Australian* (Perth, 1879-present)
ST - *Sunday Times* (Perth, 1890s-present)
Chapter One

Introduction to the Thesis

1.1 Graphics from the 2008 Perth Foreshore redevelopment proposal by LandCorp (Image from Architecture Australia, 1 May 2008).

The Australian cities of Perth and Cairns sit on opposite sides of an immense island continent and both are celebrated for their appealing waterfronts. Australia is in many ways a ‘waterside’ nation, with 85% of the population living within 50 kilometres of the continental fringe (CSIRO 2013), 66% living in capital cities (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2013), and almost every major city situated on a harbour, coast or river approaching its coastal outlet. Australian waterfronts have been continually transformed both before and after European settlement, making them ideal sites for reinterpreting material, cultural and sensorial aspects of Australian history. Sensory historian Alain Corbin writes that:

A sensory appreciation of the city does not begin and end in the stones of its architecture, that is to say, in its nature morte or still life. It goes far beyond this
materiality. A city’s sounds, odors, and movement make up its identity as much as its lines and perspectives (2014, 47).

Furthermore, sensory historian David Howes observes that “different senses produce different takes on the same space” (2005c). Waterfronts are widely celebrated for their visual appeal, yet the ‘fluidity’—in environmental, historical and cultural terms—of water-, river- and ocean-fronts as sites of building and additional activities makes them ideal settings for exploring the multi-sensory character of such places. To the contrary, Stevens believes that research on contemporary Australian urban waterfronts “rarely looks below the surface to question the importance, role and condition of water in these settings, or the physical experiences these landscapes enable” (2009, 3). This research attempts to redress this oversight in scholarship. It is an exploration of the potential role of ‘sensory history’ in developing new understandings of Australian waterside places which are arguably amongst the nation’s most culturally and historically significant settings.

1.2 This image shows the distribution of Australia’s major cities along its coastline. The two cities examined in this thesis, Perth and Cairns, are located on opposite sides of the country. Perth is on the lower west coast, while Cairns is on the upper east coast, within the bounds of the Great Barrier Reef (Map from http://www.lahistoriaconmapas.com/atlas/australia-map/major-cities-of-australia-map.htm).
1.3 A map of Perth and its surrounds showing how the Swan River flows past the city and out the Indian Ocean (Screenshot from Google Maps, 11 March 2016).

1.4 An aerial view of the Swan River and the city of Perth in 2014. Infilling has significantly altered the shape of the shoreline since European settlement in 1829. The waterside facilities discussed in this thesis were located on or near the city foreshore. Kings Park on Mount Eliza, places of historic significance, can be seen on the left side of the image (Photo from http://www.perthstadium.com.au/images-and-video/aerial-photos).
1.5 A map of Cairns showing Trinity Bay, which is part of the Coral Sea. Grafton Channel, to the south-east of the city, and adjacent corner of the Trinity Bay were originally sites for shipping and industrial activities and have now been redeveloped into recreation and tourism precincts (Screenshot from Google Maps, 11 March 2016).

1.6 An aerial view of the Cairns showing the artificial Cairns Esplanade Lagoon fronting on Trinity Bay in the foreground. Grafton Channel, which flows into the bay and the wider Coral Sea, is in the background. The artificial lagoon is positioned as an inland extension of the shoreline and was a central feature of the 2003 Cairns Esplanade redevelopment which is discussed in this thesis (Image from http://cairnslifestyle.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/cairns-esplanade-lagoon-1.jpg).
Aims

This research contributes to extending the range of types of analysis—environmental, economic, and aesthetic—that take as their subject urban waterfronts by highlighting the importance of sensory experiences for understanding waterside places. This thesis and research has three key aims. First and foremost, it is both an exploration, and a demonstration, of the potential for sensory history to provide unique and beneficial critical perspectives on the built environment, and specifically recreational urban waterfronts. As places of activity, movement and participation, recreational urban waterfronts are particularly suitable for the analysis of proximate bodily experiences of touch, movement and smell.

Secondly, it identifies how proximate sensory experiences of urban foreshores have changed over time due to forces such as technology, transport and tourism. These forces are associated with cultural change and they shape the sensory expectations, or the ‘sensory model’, of a society. Examining waterside places and facilities that have appeared, and later disappeared, from urban foreshores can reveal the types of sensory experiences that have been widely considered pleasant, valuable, or undesirable over time. For example, in Cairns, the gradual increase in tourism along the coast was an impetus for the 2003 foreshore redevelopment. Adding an artificial swimming lagoon and beach provided the ‘tropical’ sensations of sand and tepid water desired by tourists and locals (albeit in a sanitised form), and curtailed potentially unpleasant encounters with sticky, odorous mud or dangerous local fauna.

Finally, the thesis aims to generate a discussion of the value of multi-sensory experiences in forming place identity. It seeks to examine haptic and olfactory understandings of places in conjunction with—or sometimes in contrast to—more dominant visual understandings of waterside places. Greater awareness of these often-neglected ‘sensory histories’ can contribute to future consideration of the types of places that can be created, and lost, through design. Furthering knowledge of how we are—and have once been—sensorially in touch with and aware of our waterside environments contributes to how people experience and might learn from waterside places.
Overview

Through historical analysis and contemporary site studies this thesis considers urban experiences of touch, movement and smell at the water's edge, arguing that these sensations have been and may continue to be significant components of a city's waterside identity. Comparing the sensory regimes present on Australian waterfronts in Perth and Cairns around 1900 (prior to redevelopment) and 2000 (after or during redevelopment) offers new perspectives on the aspirations behind redevelopments, tensions arising from mixed experiences of the water's edge, and controversies arising from regimes of power present on the waterfront and amongst its occupants at different periods of time. The following discussion provides an overview of the burgeoning field of sensory history, trends in urban waterfront redevelopment, and the forces and desires which shape waterside places and peoples' experiences of them.

Sensory History

‘Sensory history’ is a field of historical, anthropological and cultural inquiry that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s from the work of scholars including Alain Corbin (The Foul and the Fragrant: Odour and the French Social Imagination 1986, The Lure of the Sea: Discovery of the Seaside in the Western World 1750-1840 1994). This work was followed by Constance Classen (Worlds of Sense: Exploring the Senses in History and Across Cultures, 1993, Aroma: the Cultural History of Smell, 1994, The Deepest Sense: A Cultural History of Touch, 2012), David Howes (The Bounds of Sense: An Inquiry Into the Sensory Orders of Western and Melanesian Society, 1992, Empire of the Senses: the sensual culture reader, ed. 2005) and Mark M. Smith (“Making Sense of Social History”, 2003, Sensing the Past: Seeing, Hearing, Smelling, Tasting, and Touching in History, 2007). Sensory history seeks to explore the different cultural meanings that are attached to particular sensations in specific places and periods of time (Smith 2010, 860). The value, and primary aim, of sensory history for studies of the built environment lies in countering and perhaps challenging the overweening and potentially generalising dominance of ‘the visual’ as a critical category in humanities research (Smith 2010, Classen 2005, Pink 2006). Emphasis on the visual attributes and interpretations of a waterfront can lead to the neglect of other sensations that may arise from or be purposefully promoted there. A diverse range of sensations are, as noted by Corbin and emphasised above, an important component of encounters with urban and waterside places.
Sensory history challenges the commonly held assumption that the senses are merely biological attributes and are therefore universal and constant, rather than cultural artefacts which are socially determined in some measure (Smith 2007, 842, Howes 2003, Classen 1997). Studying sensory history affords an opportunity to consider not only the character and interaction of certain forms of human behaviour in terms of their settings, but also beliefs about 'nature' and 'culture' and the questionable divide between a 'natural' or 'built' environment (see Hirst and Woolley 1985 and Soper 1995). Practitioners of sensory history acknowledge how a range of Western perspectives, such as the philosophies of Locke and Descartes, the phenomenological thinking of Heidegger, or scientific developments relating to evolution and physiology, contribute to cultural understandings of the senses in different places and periods. However, sensory history also appreciates that viewing the senses entirely from one or the other of these perspectives and critical frameworks risks neglecting consideration of the cultural construction of the senses and the historical specificities of the senses in different places and periods of time.

Classen argues that the senses are not merely ways of discerning the surrounding environment, but pathways for the transmission of cultural values through activities such as listening to music and speech, viewing art and reading texts, as well as experiencing and interpreting odours and flavours (Classen 1997, 401). Cultural values are linked to social norms, which can “be understood as a kind of grammar of social interactions. Like grammar, a system of norms specifies what is acceptable and what is not in a society or group” (Bicchieri and Muldoon 2014). Appropriate sensory behaviours, levels of tolerance and the interpretation and meaning of sensory experiences are dictated by the social conventions of a particular place, time and society (Classen 1997, 402). This research has noted how participation in and appreciation of hygienic or recreational activities at the water’s edge spread cultural messages and norms about both bodily and behavioural propriety. For instance, bathing and swimming along the Cairns foreshore was once seen as both a necessary hygienic practice and a source of pleasant thermal relief from the tropical climate. Today, swimming along the ‘natural’ shoreline is prohibited, and violations of this are viewed by some as deviant behaviour which endangers one’s own body and potentially damages a fragile ‘natural’ environment.

In short, sensory history is also a history of human relations, power relations, and social norms. It concerns relationships between people and the ‘natural’ world, however partially or vaguely understood or abused these connections may sometimes be. An
increasing number of scholars from a range of disciplines are writing or draw upon the resources of sensory history. Smith observes that:

*It is a good moment to be a sensory historian...sensory history is brimming with promise, so much so that recent bangs will likely prove, upon reflection, prefatory whispers, smells, anticipatory whiffs, touches, mere caresses, tastes, alluring nibbles, and sights just glimmers in what is a rapidly growing 'field'*(2007a, 841).

Topics of sensory analysis include subjects such as the ‘history of smell’ in Corbin’s *The Foul and the Fragrant: Odour and the French Social Imagination*, and the many facets of the lived experience of touch from medieval times to modernity in Classen’s *The Deepest Sense: A Cultural History of Touch*.

This thesis examines how people interpreted sensations of touch, movement and smell on the Perth and Cairns foreshores at the beginnings of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. There is not always an obvious ‘answer’ to the questions raised by sensory inquiry; one of the challenges of sensory history is the different and even contradictory ways of valuing sensory experiences within a culture. For example, in early twentieth century Perth some found the malodorous foreshore a sufficient disincentive to patronising the City Baths (seen in image 1.7) while for others, the tactile appeal of cool water in a warm climate was sufficient to overcome any olfactory displeasures. Varying sensory responses to places may reverberate through social norms, power regimes or political discourse. They may even impact on the form of the built environment by precipitating the creation or removal of certain elements from the urban landscape.

![1.7 The Perth City Baths in 1899. The facility was an important site for haptic encounters with the Swan River on the Perth foreshore. High walls surrounding the building helped to maintain a degree of visual propriety by preventing people on the shore or in boats from seeing into the baths (State Library of Western Australia 2980920).](image)

Waterfronts are experienced, to varying degrees, through the haptic sense, which encompasses the sensations of touch, proprioception (body position) and kinaesthesia (movement). The haptic sense provides information about the both the body and its
immediate physical surroundings. Aquatic environments like swimming baths and artificial lagoons are places which are actively sought for the pleasant haptic sensations they provide. Scents are also “subtly involved in just about every aspect of culture, from the construction of personal identity and the defining of social status to the confirming of group affiliation and the transmission of tradition” (Drobnick 2006, 1). Smells may also be “spatially ordered or place related” (Porteous 2006, 91). Odours, and their associated cultural meanings, can indicate whether a place or object is clean, salubrious and appropriate or contaminated and dangerous. Consider a swimmer entering the water: the skin, muscles and joints sense temperature, current and depth, while the olfactory system detects odours and their source. These sensations provide the swimmer with an understanding of the state of the immediate environment—such as the dangers of strong currents or contaminated water—determining how they feel physically and emotionally and how they can or should proceed.

**Urban Waterfronts**

The redevelopment of urban waterfronts from docklands, brown fields or industrial sites into cosmopolitan leisure precincts has been a global phenomenon since the 1960s (Breen and Rigby 1996, Malone 1996, Marshall 2001, Dovey 2005). Most major Australian cities have redeveloped their urban foreshores in some measure to foster commerce and recreation, and to enhance the city’s identity. Perth opened the public areas of its Elizabeth Quay redevelopment in January 2016 (see image 1.8), sections of Sydney’s Barangaroo redevelopment opened in 2015, and other Australian waterfronts will likely be transformed in the future. Generally speaking, waterfront precincts are linked to the city physically by geography and spatial proximity and oftentimes through the coordinated design of one and the other, although the character of redeveloped waterfronts is often intended to be significantly different from other urban contexts.

Dovey writes that “the waterfront is an edge of the city and it has a certain edginess; it is a ‘front’ or ‘frontier’, a ‘face’ or ‘mask’ of the city and that constructs urban character and identity” (2005, 24). Waterfront redevelopments frequently “have historic connections, very often including the founding place of a city or its reason for being” (Breen and Rigby 1994, 27). The interplay of the history and working life of a waterfront, its present condition, and aspirations for an idealized future contribute to the identity of waterside places. Waterfronts in Australia and elsewhere can also be sites for the creation of local
and national identity, as well as sites where identity is questioned and debated (see Cusack 2007, 2010, 2012, Taylor 2003, 2007). On an individual level, the water’s edge is a place where people have the opportunity to shed one mode of behaviour, possibly even their ‘identity’ (however contestable) and adopt others (Cusack 2012, 3). For Dovey, “urban waterfronts often represent a margin to the predominate urban spaces of political and commercial power. And they often represent a form of liberation from the city and its forms of spatial and social containment” (2005, 24). Waterfronts are intriguing and attractive because they are visually, physically and culturally distinct from the wider urban milieu.

Converting disused or ‘problem spaces’ on waterfront sites of former industry or general neglect into ‘spaces of opportunity’ can generate controversy and even resistance to redevelopment, in particular when plans contribute to gentrification or come to be viewed as facile attempts to ‘brand’ a city (Desfor and Laidley 2011, 2). Desfor and Laidley argue that tensions in waterfront developments arise because:

Waterfront spaces are dependent on local economies but are also crucial sites for competitive global growth strategies; these spaces embody the past and represent opportunities for the future; they generate growth within the city and impel growth outside the city; they are both subject and object of cities’ ambitions and growth strategies; they are within a jurisdiction but are often outside that jurisdiction’s
control; they are both colonized and colonizing territories; they are represented as spaces of promise but have often been spaces of oppression; they are planned and unplanned; and of course, they are both natural and artificial (2011, 3).

These overlapping dynamics are played out in a sensory realm as well as material or geopolitical arenas.

Today urban waterfronts, and waterfront redevelopments, are often cities’ most visible and expensive efforts aimed at creating a specific ‘identity’ or even ‘brand’, and increasing touristic and recreational appeal. This frequently involves the creation of visual spectacle and the addition of recreational activities centred on dynamic bodily experiences, for example interactive fountains or thematic playgrounds. Such facilities cater to culturally determined desires for novel, pleasurable, thrilling or even risky bodily experiences. However, aspects of waterfront redevelopments also seek to eliminate undesirable sensory encounters—foul odours or noisy industrial activities—and curtail activities which may be perceived as inappropriate or dangerous. The Sydney Opera House and its surrounds—the equally iconic harbour bridge, the renowned Botanic Gardens, the attractive harbour—are both national and global symbols of the city. The iconic Sydney waterfront arguably helps to shape Australia’s identity at home and abroad as a ‘waterside’ nation.

There are limited opportunities to live on an urban waterfront in Australia, meaning that “in a sense, we are all visitors in our own cities” (Morel-Ednibrown 2012, 214).

Approaching a waterfront as tourists with expectations of visual and physical pleasure, indulgence and even excitement or risk may impact on behaviours and sensory experiences of these places. The two major ‘site studies’ of the Perth and Cairns foreshores examine how desires for certain sensations (and the elimination of others) has helped shape each city’s foreshore and identity. Themes relating to many of these
issues and activities arose from the site studies, including the impacts of technologies and regimes of power and desires for experiences of novelty, pleasure, thrill, and risk. These themes can be considered in a number of ways, for example how technology can generate thrilling physical experiences (i.e. mechanical amusements), and can also inspire the desire for thrilling experiences, which has, for example, driven the proposal for the Docklands Surfpark (image 1.10 below). Interconnected themes form a basis for discussion and comparison within and between the site studies. These themes are introduced here and elaborated further within each site study.

1.10 A rendering from a 2014 proposal for the construction of the Docklands Surf Park on Melbourne’s Yarra River near the city’s CBD. The proposal demonstrates a continuing desire for playful leisure opportunities on the waterfront. It is also an example of how surfing, an activity which is arguably associated with Australian identity, is called upon to visually and physically enhance the urban waterfront, shaping the place identity of the city. Additionally, the proposal exemplifies the complex roles of technology and power in shaping the built environment (copyright Damian Rogers Architecture 2014).

Technology, including new construction and engineering strategies and materials, along with communication technologies which allow for the spread of ideas and beliefs, have shaped the built form and expectations of urban waterfronts. Technology has allowed for the creation of fantastic new waterfront settings and aquatic features and often improved or enhanced human encounters with the water’s edge. The work of Jonathan Crary on vision and technology, discussed further in chapter two, “suggests that the history of technology is central to the understanding of the development of human sensibilities and modes of perception” (Taylor 2004, 9). Technology is often promoted as improving, enhancing or augmenting the ‘natural’ environment, or natural capabilities of the body. This is seen in features such as artificial lagoons, which provide pleasant and
appealing tactile encounters, and also serve—at least in part—to protect fragile ecosystems on ‘natural’ shorelines from human activities. However, some types of sensations and experiences are also lost when technology is used to ‘improve’ on certain environments or experiences. Technology both improves, and in some ways sanitizes and universalizes encounters with the water’s edge.

Power, meaning in this context the ability to control people’s actions and behaviours—to cultivate some and limit others—plays a pervasive yet sometimes unacknowledged role in the formation and function of the urban realm. Not only large buildings, but urban designs can be demonstrations of power which promote certain regimes, national or local identities. Vale notes that for many regimes the process of city or nation-imaging “involves the construction of visually enhanced narratives of an idealised heritage designed to serve an equally idealised future” (1999, 392). Shifts in the visual appearance, physical form or cultural perception of a place brought about through design or regulations, particularly in culturally significant sites like urban waterfronts, can bring about radical changes in individual and collective understandings of place. In other words, a place may potentially bring together a shared community, but it may also divide or exclude members of a community. The governing bodies that oversee and in many ways control the design and function of urban waterfronts exert significant power over the types of experiences provided, and thus control to a large degree the ‘place identity’ created, and who it is or is not created for. Efforts to improve what those in power perceive as ‘problem spaces’ through planning and branding can generate controversy and resistance by members of communities who don’t see themselves as part of a gentrified or branded place (Desfor and Laidley 2011, 2). In some instances power is ostensibly used to protect human health and wellbeing. However, it often extends further, into regulations or surveillance, both formal and informal, which may limit behaviours, activities or access to an area, sometimes based on characteristics like (but not limited to) gender, age or ability. Petrow observes that one should not underestimate the ability of “messages delivered by design and its subtle power to make people of different social and cultural backgrounds feel comfortable or not” (2011, 7).

In recent decades power has purportedly been utilised to protect the natural environment from the effects of human activities, though there are sometimes hidden objectives. Cho argues that successful urban redevelopments which seek to restore ‘natural’ environments usually result in visually appealing sites of spectacle and place-marketing which bring visitors and economic property. The visual appeal of revived or reinvented urban nature can be readily “perceived as the icon of a new monumental
achievement by urban political leaders, which in turn gives rise to renewed political backing within the local governing machine” (Cho 2010, 148). For example, the Cairns Esplanade Lagoon keeps people away from the ecologically fragile mudflats, an effort which is arguably widely perceived as environmentally responsible. Yet the development has significant underlying economic and social imperatives. It is worth considering how developments promoted as apparently magnanimous designs intended to protect human and environmental health and provide free and just opportunities for recreational pleasure may mask political or economic objectives, intentionally or by omission.

Places of Novelty, Pleasure, Thrill and Risk

While people may visit a waterfront for a wide variety of diverse and complex reasons, some common desires or expectations of waterside places can be examined. People may visit a waterfront seeking sights or sensations which are novel, pleasant, thrilling or potentially risky. Tourism is, broadly, a quest for novel sights and sensations through encounters with new landscapes, climates and cultures, though this is often counterpoised with a desire for the familiar, e.g. conventional hotel rooms or restaurants (see Urry and Larsen 2011). Novel experiences are often actively sought because they may be physically or emotionally pleasurable. Sensory pleasure in the context of this research includes activities which are often public and generally socially sanctioned, as distinct from erotic or private experiences of pleasure. However, these types of pleasure are not wholly distinct, and activities like swimming and sunbathing may have an erotic component, particularly considering the voyeuristic aspects of the activity.

Dovey argues that “from Barcelona and Bilbao to Brighton and Blackpool...the lure of the waterfront is that of the place of pleasure (2005, 25). Classen notes that pleasure is “a sensation which offers both the most self-affirming and self-transcending of experiences, which is culturally elaborated in endless variations, and which we seek relentlessly throughout our lives” (2005, 69). While in many cases pleasure is found through social interaction, political machinations or consumption, it can also be achieved through embodied experiences of places. Many urban waterfronts are intended to engender experiences of physical or emotional pleasure through recreation and play.

Play can be associated with pleasant or exciting sensory experiences of games or exercise involving running, sliding, falling and jumping; experiences of speed and trajectory that
propel the body beyond its normal speed or position. Swimming, diving and playing in water provides a range of novel bodily sensations induced by buoyancy (usual sensations of proprioception and kinaesthesia) and water on skin (global touch). Some playful activities involve sensations of vertigo, brought about by movements which generate disoriented experiences of space and gravity described by Stevens as “intoxicating physical sensations of instability and distorted perception” (2007, 1).

Elements of the built environment like skate parks and water-slides are often designed to aid in the creation of thrilling or exciting sensations, albeit in a controlled environment. Elias and Dunning observe that while people may experience excitement during potentially dangerous or critical situations, in times of leisure some will actively seek “pleasurable excitement” (1986, 63). The quest for thrilling and potentially risky bodily sensations can also be considered a form of mild deviance, and Urry and Larsen note that the study of ‘deviant’ practices (unusual or idiosyncratic social practices), and why those practices are considered deviant, can reveal social norms and practices that would otherwise remain hidden (2011, 3). Tourism, and by association recreation, can include participation in ‘deviant’ activities, which involve a finite departure from every day life, “allowing one’s senses to engage with a set of stimuli that contrast with the everyday and mundane” (Urry and Larsen 2011, 3).

On the waterfront complex understandings and experiences of water, such as the real and ever present danger of drowning whilst engaging in pleasurable activities such as swimming, lend overtones of thrill, risk and a multitude of other complex emotions to human encounters with water. The potential for accidents also drives regulations aimed at limiting certain activities and behaviours, which in turn limits sensory experiences. Features constraining people can be physical (walls, benches or landscaping), visual (instructive signage), or social norms which create conditions that encourage certain types of behaviour and discourage others. For Stevens,

*Taking risks adds strength and depth of people’s experience in the world. They know that play is not reality, yet within the delimited context of play events they allow themselves to believe and to act as if some aspects of risk are real and large, and to experience the tension and thrill of handling such risks* (2007, 36).

However, opportunities for exciting physical or emotional experiences of the urban realm are arguably becoming increasingly limited. Franck and Stevens note that the increased commodification, sanitization and privatization of public urban spaces positions people more as docile consumers rather than expressive participants (2007, 4).
This research is important because we are all ‘in touch’ with our immediate environment through a range of senses, though we are often most consciously aware of the view from our eyes. Exploring the ‘view’ from our fingertips, toes, skin, joints, and noses reveals how sensory experiences and importantly, expectations, of waterside places have changed over time as our cities grow and their waterfronts develop. This research is unique as it brings together the author’s background in architecture and sustainable design with the field of sensory history, expanding the potential scope of the field while exploring sensory history’s benefits for scholars, historians and designers. The increasing number of scholars taking part in similar studies of sensory history is testament to the fascinating potential of such research at a point in time when concerns over environmental, social and economic sustainability have come to the fore in discussions of the built environment. Some believe that such concerns are one of our greatest challenges. Through detailed historic and contemporary case studies of recreational urban waterfronts the thesis makes a contribution to the innumerable ways of understanding urban foreshores and Australian places.

**Approach**

The novelty of this thesis and grounds for its contribution to new understandings of urban places rests with its approach: combining studies of the built environment with the growing field of sensory history. Both fields share an emphasis on ‘the subjective’ dimensions of place based experiences. This section outlines principal aspects of the approach. It begins by highlighting the work and influence of key scholars in related fields. It then turns to the reasoning behind the sites selected and the timeframe considered, along with the methods used to undertake the studies and the selection, value and use of sources. The section concludes by summarizing the chapters of the thesis.

**Related Studies**

Certain types and sources of research influenced the early direction and methodology of this thesis. Of central importance is the work of sensory historians Alain Corbin, David Howes and Constance Classen, which is discussed at length in chapter two. Another important body of work comes from Celmara Pocock, an Australian researcher whose
studies of sensory history inspired the historical components of this research, in particular her publications “Reaching for the Reef: Exploring Place Through Touch” (2008), “Blue Lagoons and Coconut Palms: The Creation of a Tropical Idyll in Australia” (2005), and her PhD dissertation Romancing the Reef: history, heritage and the hyper-real (2003). While these texts focus mainly on the Great Barrier Reef, they touch on themes relating to the ‘bush’ the ‘tropics’ and Australian identity (discussed further in chapter three and the site studies) which have influenced the direction of this thesis.

In “Reaching for the Reef: Exploring Place Through Touch” Pocock focuses on twentieth century shifts in haptic experiences of the Great Barrier Reef, examining how early European and Australian encounters with the Reef were highly tactile. In contrast, contemporary encounters are primarily visual or, using Rodaway’s term, akin to ‘imagined touch’, the memory or anticipation of tactile encounters (Rodaway 1994, 54). Developments in tourism, transport and technology drove these changes, resulting in vastly different physical experiences of the Reef over time (Pocock 2008, 83). Pocock explores past experiences of the Reef by analysing historic accounts of visits to the Reef, such as private and public writing by tourists, the literature and correspondence of scientific groups, newspapers, photographs, maps and government publications. Period writings, taken in the context of the cultural conventions of their respective times, reveal how conventions regarding clothing, behaviour and bodily propriety significantly shaped early visits to the Reef (Pocock 2008, 78-79). Pocock also demonstrates how the development of underwater technologies (scuba diving, snorkelling and underwater photography) and the proliferation of resorts and transport on the Reef changed how people physically and visually experienced it and how they reflected on their experiences (2008, 81).

A second influential body of Australian research is the work of Quentin Stevens, a researcher on urban design whose areas of interest include urban waterfronts, sensory experiences, play and risk. These matters are examined in publications such as “Artificial Waterfronts” (2009), “The Design of Urban Waterfronts: A Critique of Two Australian ‘Southbanks’” (2006), and The Ludic City: exploring the potential of public spaces (2007). In “The Design of Urban Waterfronts” Stevens considers ‘quality’ in two Australian recreational waterfront redevelopments, informed by theories of leisure behaviour and the study of the everyday uses, function, and sensory experiences of waterfronts (2006, 178). In "Artificial Waterfronts" Stevens notes that many studies of urban waterfront redevelopments focus primarily on the landscape and built environment situated away from and above the water’s edge, rather than the edge condition and the water itself.
This observation inspired this research on sensory experiences of the urban context at the water’s edge.

The importance of the ‘water’s edge’ and issues of identity are also highlighted by the work of Tricia Cusack. Cusack addresses the relationship between bodies of water and identity in *Riverscapes and National Identities* (2010). She highlights how riverscapes can “provide a powerful metaphor for the vital stream of national history flowing unimpeded out of the past and into the future” (Cusack 2010, i). Riverscapes can also represent a “nation’s myths about itself” (Cusack 2010, i). Koranyi and Cusack argue that the notional concepts of ‘nationalism’ and ‘nation’ are linked to “recognisable ‘national landscapes’ [like rivers or ocean fronts], for example through tourist guides and travel writing, literary, and visual art” (2014, 192 see also Cusack, 2010, Kosjar, 1998). They observe that “the national landscape is physically shaped to meet the ideas formed of it” and it is also “conveyed or sold to others, for example as a tourist sight” (Koranyi and Cusack, 2014, 192). The transformation and promotion of waterside places to meet visitor expectations and shape place identity is examined in the site studies.

**Site Selection**

Australia, with its predominantly coastal population and numerous water-oriented cities, is an excellent context for a study of waterside sensory experiences. In choosing the site study locations, the central requirement was their adjacency to a natural body of water, be it a river, estuary, bay, harbour or ocean front. Many Australian cities are positioned between two or more such bodies of water. For example, Perth is centred on the Swan River but reaches to the Indian Ocean, as seen in the map at the beginning of this chapter. However, there is often one body of water that is most strongly associated with the city. Sydney Harbour in Sydney, the Yarra River in Melbourne, and the Swan River in Perth are all examples of water bodies that are strongly linked to their city.

Major east coast waterside precincts in Sydney (Darling Harbour, Circular Quay), Melbourne (the Docklands, Southbank) and Brisbane (Southbank) have received significant scholarly attention (see for example Dovey 2005, Oakley 2011, Stevens 2006, 2009 and Taylor 2012). Additionally, these waterfronts are largely (though not entirely) focused on more ‘urban’ activities such as sight seeing, dining, shopping, and visiting museums or cultural centres. While some of these waterfronts do contain more
‘recreational’ features focused on bodily activities (for example Streets Beach on Brisbane’s Southbank), they remain largely urban in character. It was elected to focus on other city waterfronts, specifically Perth and Cairns, whose foreshores have been used for recreational purposes both historically and in contemporary contexts, and whose waterfronts have received less scholarly attention. The Perth and Cairns foreshores are places where people engage in optional activities (e.g. recreational activities like jogging and swimming), and social activities (like casual sports, picnics, entertainments), rather than necessary activities such as work or travel.

The site study locations were specifically considered with regard to:

i) The physical aspects of the land/water interface in the early twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, and comparisons between these.

ii) Turn of the twentieth and twenty-first century cultural customs and concerns about how the water and the waterfront should be approached, used or altered and the types of former or present-day recreational activities taking place at the water’s edge.

iii) How new technologies and developments have facilitated new ways of encountering the water’s edge.

The Perth foreshore has been used, to varying degrees, as a place of recreational engagement with water since the time of European settlement, making it an ideal place to begin to formulate a sensory history of the water’s edge. Graham Taylor observes that Western Australia “does not have a tradition of river histories as seen in other parts of the world” and “there is not one but many river stories and many approaches” (2011, 130). Thus, this research is also an opportunity to generate a unique history of the Swan River and the Perth foreshore. Contemporary perceptions of the foreshore vary, and Yabuka observes that the “grassy reclaimed land between the central city and the Swan River has for many years been viewed with two sets of eyes - one seeing a blight of untenable vacuousness and the other seeing an idyllic and untouchable natural setting” (2008, 46). These two perspectives have made debates and proposals to redevelop the foreshore—which commenced in the 1960s—contentious matters. After decades of discussion and several years of construction the public areas of the Elizabeth Quay commercial, recreational and residential precinct opened in January 2016. Elizabeth Quay incorporates aspects of more recreation-focused waterfronts (like Brisbane’s Southbank), and features found on commerce and tourism based waterfronts (such as Sydney’s Darling Harbour). However, it is also of a relatively modest scale, leaving large areas of
the contested parklands along the city foreshore intact. The mix of urban and recreational features makes the Perth foreshore an interesting site for sensory studies.

![Aerial photo of Perth showing grassy parklands along the water's edge.](image)

### 1.11 This aerial photo of Perth shows the grassy parklands that line the water’s edge around much of the Swan River. On the left is the Kings Park. The Elizabeth Quay redevelopment was in progress on the foreshore at the time this image was taken (Government of Western Australia, Landgate, 2015).

![Map of Perth foreshore with key sites highlighted.](image)

### 1.12 This Image from Hocking Heritage’s 2012 heritage study suggests that connections, both visual and physical, exist between key sites along the foreshore. These are examined further in chapters four and five (“Perth Waterfront Heritage Interpretation Strategy” Hocking Heritage 2012, 14).

The second study site is the Cairns foreshore, which was redeveloped in 2003 to include a large artificial lagoon and expansive parklands. Cairns is the largest city in northern Queensland and has evolved into a major tourist destination and gateway to the Great Barrier Reef. It is a particularly popular destination for Australian and international backpackers. Stevens argues that the Cairns waterfront “meet[s] the image that tourists—mostly foreigners—have of a tropical island resort, in both its natural and civilised elements” (Stevens 2009, 9). Its proximity to the historically, culturally and
ecologically significant Reef and its tourism driven economy have impacted on the way the water’s edge has been imagined and contrived, making it an interesting site to study shifts in sensory experiences and expectations. The conclusion draws comparisons between the histories of the Cairns and Perth foreshores and two related urban waterside sites in Darwin and Melbourne.


1.14 A contemporary map of Cairns showing the location of the CBD titled ‘Cairns City’, with Grafton Channel flowing inland from Cairns Harbour. The section of waterfront considered in this thesis runs from the Cairns City to Cairns North (Map from The Australian Government, Geoscience Australia)
**Timeframe**

This research examines the decades around 1900 (1890s-1930s) and the decades around 2000 (late 1980s-present), two periods that fall within what can be defined, sometimes uneasily, as ‘modernity’. Lengthy reflection on the characteristics, timeframe, terminology and debates surrounding ‘modernity’ is beyond the scope of this research. Nonetheless, it seems useful to discuss some of the widely recognized characteristics of both modernity and these periods insofar as they have impacted on sensory experiences and practices.

Nead writes that:

> the simplest understanding of modernity is in terms of what is new or contemporary and represents a distinct temporal break with the past. Within this model, modernity takes form in all areas of historical experience: at an economic level; through the organization of the state; through social and cultural configurations; and at the level of individual perception (2000, 4).

In *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air* Berman argues that modernity has been underway for around 500 years. He divides this period into three phases, with the first phase being from around 1500 to the 1780s. The second phase begins with the French Revolution in 1789 and lasts until around 1900, and the third phase encompasses the twentieth century (1983, 15-19). Of interest to this research are the social, political and technological shifts which took place around 1900 and which had a profound impact sensory regimes and values.

Highlighting this impact are two recently published series of books, *A Cultural History of the Senses* (Bloomsbury 2014) and *A Cultural History of the Human Body* (Berg 2010). Each series is divided into volumes based on timeframes. The final two volumes of each series consider the ‘Age of Empire’ (1800-1920), and ‘The Modern Age’ (1920 to the present). The research conveyed by this thesis considers the decades around 1900 (1890s-1930s), and the decades around 2000 (late 1980s-present), periods which fall at transitional points within Berman’s ‘periods’ of modernity.

The ‘Age of Empire’ of the preceding series was a period when the French and Spanish empires were in decline, but Britain and its colonies, including Australia, witnessed expansive political, commercial and sensorial expansion and transformation (Classen 2014, 10). For example, commercial products that underscored the geographical reach
and power of the British Empire (tea, tobacco, sugar, spices, cotton and others) shaped
gustatory, olfactory, auditory and tactile experiences of life in Britain and its colonies.
These so-called ‘sensory goods’—lamentably often linked to, produced or conveyed by
the global slave trade—and the sensory practices they encouraged arrived on or departed
from city waterfronts (Classen 2014, 10).

Berman writes that “to be modern means to know ‘both the thrill and the dread’ of a
world in which everything changes” (1982, 3). Classen argues that many of the changes
in the urban ‘sensescape’ in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century were
indications of “the passing of old ways of life and the beginning of new” (2014, 6). It was
a heterogeneous sensory age, and she observes that “this diversity of sensations and
sensibilities was characteristic of an age of sharp contrasts between wealth and poverty
and also of growing cross-cultural interaction and rapid social and technological change”
(2014, 2). The material, cultural and sensorial nature of waterfronts during this period is
expanded upon in chapter three, and in the historic site studies. The studies reveal how
in some instances disparate sensory regimes, particularly those relating to odours and
bodily cleanliness, were under pressure as a result of social and technological changes,
and ‘new’ sensations and experiences—like swimming and diving—were received with
conflicting levels of enthusiasm, acceptance or distrust amongst different social groups
or classes.

As well as registering these changes, Australia became an independent nation in 1901,
and the decades immediately preceding and following the new century were times of
cultural and technological change. Sports, particularly swimming, were gaining
popularity in Australia and elsewhere for both men and women around 1900 (see
Winterton 2009, Parker 2010). This increase in popularity was partly due to the
inclusion of swimming in the 1896 Olympic games, and cultural changes which began to
position leisure as corporeal activity (see Sally 2006). This, in turn, encouraged the
construction of swimming baths in rivers, harbours and seaside around the country to
cater for not only bathers, but an increasing number of recreational swimmers, divers
and lifesavers. Cultural changes in the modes of dress and behaviour accompanying
these activities, particularly for women (see Johns 1997), stemmed from a growing
number of people actively engaging with ocean- and riverfronts.

The second period that this research considers is the decades preceding and immediately
following the millennium. Howes argues that the mixture of rapid social
transformations and technological advances which occurred between 1920 and 2000
dramatically reformed the sensory world (2014, 1). Taller buildings, faster vehicles, increasing ethnic, class and gender diversity, and processed foods are amongst the features and objects that generated new and alluring sensations (Howes 2014, 1). The decades around the millennium have seen a wave of recreational waterfront redevelopments around Australia. Brisbane’s Southbank was revitalized for World Expo 88 and includes Streets Beach, an artificial swimming lagoon adjacent to the Brisbane River. The Cairns foreshore was redeveloped to include the Cairns Esplanade Lagoon in 2003, and Darwin transformed its Waterfront Precinct in 2008. In these redevelopments and others (for example Geelong, Townsville and Airlie Beach) the provision of opportunities to encounter water was central. The popularity of large scale, interactive and often fully immersive water features continues, and Perth’s Elizabeth Quay includes the 10 million dollar BHP Billiton Water Park. Water, despite its relative neglect in academia, was and remains a sensorially significant feature of pre- and post-millennial waterside redevelopments.

Methods and the Use of Sources

The following section describes methods of using both archival and contemporary sources and their theoretical relevance in terms of the opportunities and limitations they provide for researching and writing sensory history. Corbin compares the sensory historian to “the hunter crouched in the mud, searching for the trace of some invisible game, [who] has to deduce the behaviour of the other from minute and subtle indicators” (Corbin 1995, 189). While some records of ‘visual’ environments are found in photographs, plans, maps or paintings, the proximate bodily senses leave less obvious traces in historical records and artefacts, which in turn makes finding and interpreting ‘evidence’ one of the challenges of sensory history. The historic and contemporary studies use the sources discussed below to examine a range of architectural, sculptural and landscape features and materials found along the shoreline around 1900 and today. The types of sources used in this research are discussed here, while the methodological challenges posed by sensory history itself are examined further in chapter two.

As noted at the beginning of the chapter, this research has three aims:

• Exploring and demonstrating the potential for sensory history to provide unique and beneficial critical perspectives on the built environment.
• Developing a sensory history of the Perth and Cairns foreshores and identifying how and why proximate sensory experiences of these places have changed over time.

• Generating a discussion of the value of sensory experiences in forming place identity, in conjunction with (or sometimes contrasting to) more dominant visual understandings of waterside places. Examining how greater awareness of these often-neglected ‘sensory histories’ can contribute to future consideration of the types of places that can be created, and lost, through design.

To achieve these three main aims it was necessary to first understand the material form of the historic and contemporary Perth and Cairns waterfronts. For the historic site studies this involved discovering the types of buildings and landscaping which were present on the shoreline around 1900—bathing structures, industrial sheds, jetties—using historic photographs, plans and maps sourced from both physical and digital sources. Materials were found on the National Library’s ‘Trove’ website (http://trove.nla.gov.au), and in state libraries (including the Battye Library, the State Library of Western Australia, the John Oxley Library and the State Library of Queensland) and state records collections. The contemporary sites were understood through site visits, photographs, maps, plans, websites and journal articles.

Photographs, used with caution, have been an important medium for understanding the physical layout of waterfronts and they can also reveal, to some degree, the various ways which people engaged with the water’s edge. Around the turn of the twentieth century photography—first in black and white and then colour—became not only an activity for professionals, but an affordable hobby for many middle-class families (Howes 2014, 12). The increasing popularity of amateur photography was part of “the nineteenth century impulse to map, control and render a wide range of phenomena visible as spectacle” (Edwards 2012, 2). In Britain and elsewhere amateur photographers sought to document buildings, places and cultural events in order to create a visual record of their times, their places and their nation. This impulse was, in part, a response to the rapid and dramatic transformation of both the physical and social landscapes of the time (Edwards 2012, 2).

This research has drawn on historic photographs from a variety of sources, particularly state libraries and digitized newspapers. Some of the images from state library collections originally came from private collections or family albums, such as the photos of children playing in the mud in chapter six, which were taken by S.A. Doblo and are
part of the John Oxley Library’s collection of Pinney Family Photographs. Howes notes that the family photo album was an important means of embodying and preserving individual and family histories via a series of images from the past (Howes 2014, 12). Other photographs record places or events, and can show the shape of a shoreline (for examples images of the Cairns shoreline in chapter six), the form of a building or the way it was used (for example the picture of diving at the Crawley Baths in chapter four). Photographs that were reproduced in newspapers have also been used, though these are often of poor quality. For example, the image of the Perth Water Chute from the Western Mail in chapter four was included in spite of its poor quality because it was the only image of the Perth Water Chute that could be located.

As a source of information for sensory history, photographs can be valuable, but also problematic, in particularly because they are primarily understood using the sense of sight. While a lengthily discussion of photography is beyond the scope of this research, it is worth considering some key points about photographs as they relation to multi-sensory understandings of places. Sontag argues that photographs have widespread authority in modern society because they are perceived as something taken directly from the real, rather than a second-order representation (1973, 154). Photographs intentionally frame and highlight certain features or activities, which may reveal what is
valued about a site and how people prefer to see or portray it, yet the viewer’s understanding does not go beyond the frame of the photograph. Importantly, photographs eliminate all sensory information save the visual, which in turn enhances the value of the visual (Howes 2014, 12). Even the act of taking a photograph is a largely visual activity, where once sketching a scene involved tactile and visual coordination (Howes 2014, 12). In 1936 Walter Benjamin wrote that “photography freed the hand of the most important artistic functions which henceforth devolved only upon the eye looking into a lens” (1999, 73). The connection between photographs, memories and expectations of places has become increasingly important over time, particularly in relation to tourism and place identity. Howes notes that around the turn of the twenty-first century photos and films on the Internet “began to acquire a life and value of their own” (Howes 2014, 12, see also Classen 2014, 89-92). While photographs are largely visual, Hunt argues that urban photography “has enormous potential to...highlight feelings, experiences, and textures of place” (2014, 151). While it is essential to remain mindful of what photographs cannot reveal about the sencescape, they can provide valuable information about the form and use of waterside places.

Plans and maps also provided varying degrees of information about features of sites and buildings including paths, viewpoints, recreation areas, transport features and access to the water. Maps, closely linked to landscapes, are highly pictorial and generally experienced primarily through the visual sense. Classen notes that maps, like photographs, “provide yet another way of transforming multi-sensory environments into visual icons” (2014, 8). Nead writes that “on the sheets of the map modernity could be absorbed in a single glance...it was a reassuring sight, in contrast to the incoherent sensory experience of the street” (2000, 13). Maps and photographs, simplify a complex, multi-sensory world into a place that is visually digestible.

According to Cosgrove maps can be considered for a number of attributes including their form, the technique or process through which they are created, and the geographical information they represent (2008, 1-2). Mapping can be regarded as having scientific and practical purposes (navigation, way finding, recording points in space), and cognitive and creative ones, aimed at formulating the human place in the world through maps, images, pictures, narratives (Cosgrove 2008, 68). Lewi observes that beginning in the late nineteenth century, sporting and recreational activities which once took place at “found sites”, for example playing football in the street, “were gradually identified, enclosed and modified into dedicated sporting venues” (2008, 279). She argues that the formation of designated recreation areas imposition formal geometric order over large
sections of the ‘natural’ landscape (Lewi 2008, 279). Maps and plans can reveal where such geometric interventions have occurred. For example, the maps of the Perth foreshore at the beginning of chapter four show the increasingly geometric form of the shoreline, a result of infilling for the creation of structured public recreation and sporting areas.

An interesting feature of maps is their ability, at times, to direct the movements of the body, or a vehicle or vessel transporting the body, to a physical location (Casey 2002, xvi). This is particularly true in the case of mapping tourist destinations, where large numbers of people visit an unfamiliar area and rely on maps not only for way finding, but to determine the types of activities they engage in. Maps can, in some cases, enable further, more specific and also more controlled encounters with a real environment. Historic maps of Perth and Cairns—relatively true to scale—have provided important details about the past form of the foreshore and key buildings. Tourist maps of these places provide information about key features, paths or activities but are often inaccurate in scale and general detail.

After developing an understanding of material and physical features of the Perth and Cairns shorelines from photographs, plans and maps, it was necessary to develop an understanding of historic events and activities undertaken along the shoreline and within key facilities like public baths. The historical component of the case studies draws from a selection of archival sources, including newspaper articles, and letters or opinion pieces written to newspaper editors, tourist brochures, histories of places and events, and government documents. The contemporary studies draw on journal articles, newspapers, magazines, books, government documents, websites and photographs. Gaynor and McLean note that:

the creation of historical perspectives... often requires the use of ‘non-scientific’ evidence. Such perspectives can be gained in some instances from historical documents, such as written descriptions, statistical returns, and (from the 1850s) photographs, though each of these sources has limitations (for example, photographs are often undated and favour particular content and perspectives; written accounts, too, are highly selective in their coverage) (2008, 188).

Written texts were a key source and it was important to be mindful of the time, place and cultural context in which each text was written. Corbin emphasises that it is critical to be aware of the social norms which dictate what is perceived and what is not, and beyond this, what is (or is not) appropriate to speak of or record. Understanding these
norms allows for consideration of whether new forms of perception have arisen, or instead it is old forms of perception appearing in text for the first time, or in a different guise (2005, 135).

Community newspapers were one of the primary sources used in the thesis. The rise of the popular press allowed for new (and possibly recast) experiences to be articulated in writing. Community newspapers represented citizens to themselves, shaping, spreading and confirming opinions and ideas. Specialist newspapers (for example socialist, trade-related or sport-related newspapers) from late nineteenth and early twentieth century Australia “are important, not only for the information that they contain but because they reflect the growth and development of Australian society” (Willmott 1994, 31). Lovell argues that in late nineteenth century Queensland local newspapers “played a vital role in generating community cohesion” (2015, 89).

Trove, the National Library of Australia’s online site for resources relating to Australia, was used to access digitized community newspapers. Starting with simple search terms like ‘Perth City Baths’ or ‘Cairns foreshore’ and limiting dates often yielded useful information about a building, an activity or an event. Searches were used to locate articles detailing foreshore improvements or construction, events, city council meetings, regular columns and, importantly, letters to the editor. Locating articles about relevant events also generated more specific search terms. For example, searching for articles about swimming led to the discovery of regular columns on swimming by ‘Trudgeon’, a name that was subsequently searched and several years worth of regular columns on swimming on the Perth foreshore were assembled.

Narratives of events, such as the opening of a new water chute, were often lively and descriptive, particularly when photographs were not included and the author endeavoured to convey not only the event, but also the physical and human context in which it took place. Such descriptive articles are a first-hand interpretation of a site-specific event, and they intentionally endeavour to share the experience, contributing to a communal understanding of a place or event. As pieces of writing documenting a specific place and moment in time, it was determined that an historic comparative study using these as a core source would be possible, supplemented by other historic materials.

Community newspapers often published letters to the editor, which provided a forum for citizens to learn about and express their opinion on urban and social matters. In some instances a series of letters to the editor written by individuals with disparate views on matters relating to propriety, waterfront activities or facilities highlighted different ideas.
of how a waterfront should or could be utilised. Many of the turn of the century articles do not list an author, or, in the case of letters to the editor, utilise a pseudonym like ‘Traveller’, ‘Visitor’, or the more descriptive ‘Evil be to Him that Evil Thinks’. Names were often intentionally vague (sometimes even moral), allowing the writer to express their opinion without fear of personal reprisals. They were often a caricature of the writer’s personality, or the personality they wanted to project in the letter. For example, in a 1905 letter to the editor of The West Australian ‘Fair Play’ critiqued the police for punishing young boys who swam naked on the foreshore, but turning a blind eye to members of the Rowing Club doing the same thing nearby (TWA 27 February 1905, 2).

In the thesis, when a pseudonym is used the name is enclosed in single-quotes to indicate that it is not a surname, as seen above. Unattributed articles are also used extensively throughout the thesis, and in order to prevent in-text citations from becoming disruptive, some unattributed articles are cited with an abbreviated name of the newspaper, date and page. Frequently cited newspapers have been abbreviated as follows:

*CP* - Cairns Post (Cairns, 1884-1893, 1909-present)
*MP* - Morning Post (Cairns, 1897-1907)
*CMP* - Cairns Morning Post (Cairns, 1907-1909)
*SMH* - Sydney Morning Herald (Sydney, 1831-present)
*TWA* - The West Australian (Perth, 1879-present)
*WM* - Western Mail (Perth, 1885-1955, 1980-1988)
*ST* - Sunday Times (Perth, 1890s-present)
*DN* - Daily News (Perth, 1882 - 1950)

Written histories of places and people have also provided beneficial insights relating to historic shorelines. The history of Perth has been drawn from books such as C.T. Stannage’s *The People of Perth* (1979) and Jenny Gregory’s *City of Light* (2003). Summers notes that Stannage and Gregory “pay considerable attention to the layout of the city and to recreation within it” in their writing, and Gregory also provides “an intensive analysis of city planning” (2007, 17). Journal articles by Gregory, including “Stephenson and metropolitan planning in Perth” (2012) and “Perth’s Waterfront and Urban Planning 1954 – 93: The Narrows Scheme and the Perth City Foreshore Project” (2009), also provided beneficial insights into transformations to the Perth foreshore. The writing of geographer and historian George Seddon (*Swan River Landscapes 1970, Swan Song*):
reflections on Perth and Western Australia, 1956-1995, 1995 and A City and its Setting with David Ravine, 1981) also address the geographical, cultural and visual aspects of Perth and its surroundings. Summers describes A City and its Setting as Seddon’s “most intensive analysis of the city, which uses Kings Park as a launching point for an analysis of the city below” (2007, 17). More detailed foreshore histories have also been drawn from the work of Sue Graham-Taylor, Hannah Lewi and William M. Taylor.

Similar newspaper articles, letters to the editor and historical texts and journal articles have been used for the Cairns site study. My Tropic Isle (1911) by E.J. Banfield and Australia’s Great Barrier Reef (1955) by Vincent Serventy provided period-specific information about the region, while newspapers, photos, postcards and maps provided specific details about the Cairns foreshore and activities undertaken there. More recent histories of places and environmental activism, including Bowen & Bowen’s The Great Barrier Reef: History, Science, Heritage (2002) and William Lines Taming the Great Southern Land (1991) provided contemporary context. Journal articles, architectural reviews of the 2003 foreshore redevelopment and tourism and government websites have provided support for the contemporary site study.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter two considers ‘Sensory History and the Senses’ and is divided into two parts. It begins with a review of Western philosophical understandings of the senses, including the conventional division of the ‘five’ senses. Discussion touches on the work of Locke and the scientific and social shifts in understandings of the senses during the Enlightenment, including the increasing importance one finds at the time of delimiting a number of boundaries such as mind/body or nature/culture. This discussion is linked to an overview of the dominance of the visual sense in Western cultures, and the resultant diminution in value of other senses and modes of experience, a perception which has impacted on understandings of environments. For example, in Australia (and elsewhere) during the 1800s the privileging of the visual justified a range of landscape and riverscape transformations aligned with European aesthetic preferences and desires for power over the land and its inhabitants (see Taylor 2003, 2007).

Chapter two then turns to an extended discussion of the field of ‘sensory history’, which attempts to reveal how and why past experiences were formed and interpreted by certain
understandings and uses of particular senses, and why past uses and interpretations might differ significantly from modern sensibilities (Smith 2007a, 842). Discussion focuses on the haptic and olfactory senses, which are referred to as ‘proximate’ bodily senses because they detect sensations in close proximity to the body.

The third chapter begins by briefly addressing issues of place and ‘place identity’, an assemblage of concepts about place and identity sometimes favoured by scholars and professionals in fields such as urban planning and design, architecture, politics and the social sciences (Hague 2004, 3). Discussion then turns to the overlapping circumstances of waterfront development and historic and contemporary sensory encounters with waterfronts. It then considers Australian recreational urban waterfronts, and trends in global and Australian waterside redevelopment. The chapter concludes with discussion of certain types of Australian or more generic places including ‘the bush’, the tropics, and tourist places, insofar as these may influence waterfront redevelopments.

Chapters four through seven contain the two major site studies with two chapters devoted to each location. Chapter four considers the Perth foreshore around 1900, 70 years after European settlement in 1829. It considers the transformation and regulation of the foreshore, and looks closely at several recreational buildings, the Perth City Baths (1898-1914), the Crawley Baths (1914-1964), and the Water Chute (from 1905-unknown). These facilities transformed encounters between an individual’s body, the bodies of others, and the city foreshore. The chapter presents a broadly sensuous rather than primarily visual perspective on the Perth foreshore at this time.

Contemporary experiences and understandings of the Perth foreshore are examined in chapter five. An overview of various proposals and projects from the 1960s until the present demonstrates the desires and challenges attendant in redeveloping the foreshore. Three sections of the contemporary foreshore are considered: the major Elizabeth Quay redevelopment, the Point Fraser ‘sustainable’ parklands (2003), and the Lotterywest Federation Walkway in Kings Park (2003). The chapter examines these projects and the sensory experiences they may provide or aim to fulfil.

Chapter six crosses the country to the second site study, Cairns (founded in 1876) in tropical North Queensland. The town’s shallow, muddy shoreline—so unlike the sandy beaches found on the Great Barrier Reef and either side of the town—was an unsuitable area for recreational bathing and swimming. Yet in spite its inadequacies and the challenges posed by dangerous marine life and a cyclone-prone climate, locals enjoyed swimming and campaigned vigorously from the late 1800s onwards for the provision of
bathing and swimming facilities. The chapter examines the issues at stake in providing swimming and bathing facilities in Cairns, drawing comparisons to the Perth study. Both early site studies reveal that the water’s edge was understood in various and sometimes-conflicting ways: as a place for bodily cleansing, a site for pleasant recreational sensations, and a dangerous or potentially insalubrious place.

The 2003 redevelopment of the Cairns foreshore into the Cairns Esplanade Lagoon and parklands is the subject of chapter seven. The addition of a large artificial lagoon and expansive parklands along the shoreline aimed to fulfil tourists’ and locals’ desires and expectations for ‘tropical’ scenery and sensations. The Lagoon caters to these visual and multi-sensory desires by providing a relatively safe and sanitary artificial beach and swimming area. While the redevelopment provides a number of desirable experiences it also limits and controls, via design and regulation, where people go and what they do along the foreshore, particular in relation to the natural shoreline. The site study also makes comparisons to the recent developments in Perth and draws out the complex roles that technology, tourism and regimes of power have had on sensory experiences of the contemporary shoreline.

Chapter eight, the concluding chapter of the thesis, summarizes major themes from the Perth and Cairns site studies and links them to two other sites: the recently redeveloped Darwin Waterfront Precinct (2008) and a proposal for the Docklands Surf Park in Melbourne which was put forward in 2014. The site study research will demonstrate that at different points in time there have been multiple and even conflicting sensory desires and expectations of the built environment at water’s edge.

Conclusion

Through historical analysis and contemporary site studies this thesis considers urban experiences of touch, movement and smell at the water’s edge, arguing that these sensations have been and may continue to be significant components of a city’s waterside identity. This research also raises questions about history—the history of sensory experiences—and what it tells us about both the built environment and the human condition. The aim of many urban redevelopments is to enhance their recreational appeal, frequently encompassing a number of dynamic, bodily activities which may facilitate the culturally determined quest for novel, pleasurable, thrilling or even risky bodily experiences. Such experiences are generated through direct contact
with natural and built environments, strongly mediated by cultural and historical meanings, and are thus central to understandings of the body’s physical and emotional capacities as well as the ways in which they are engaged, enhanced or manipulated. Attention now turns to a more detailed examination of the field of sensory history and its potential to provide alternative historical and sensorial understandings of urban waterfronts.
Chapter Two

Sensory History and the Senses

‘Sensory history’ is a form of inquiry that is cultural (i.e. historical, anthropological and/or sociological) in character. It is therefore distinct from the biological, psychological, and philosophical (including existential or phenomenological) study of humankind’s sensory apparatus. This chapter commences with an overview of philosophical—and later more ‘scientific’—understandings of the senses in Western cultures, including consideration of what these terms mean in historical and social contexts. This is essential because ways of knowing (historical, anthropological etc.) are inseparable from understandings of what ‘the senses’ are or could be, which are part of the senses’ cultural formulation. The chapter examines the gradual rise and prevailing dominance of the visual sense in Western discourses, and discusses how sensory history seeks to counter this dominance. The emergence of sensory history and its key aims are outlined along with methods and concepts associated with researching and writing sensory history. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the haptic and olfactory senses as the main sensations under scrutiny in the site studies to come.

Sensory History

Western Perspectives on the Senses

This research begins within the widespread and commonly understood Western cultural tradition of the five senses. It acknowledges that the senses can be and have been understood and categorised differently in other cultures, and are strongly interconnected. It draws on the work of sensory historians such as Classen and Howes, and particularly the work of Jonathan Crary, which has been central to rethinking vision and regimes of visuality and laying the groundwork for research in sensory history.
Much of the contemporary Western understanding of the senses can be traced to Aristotle’s De Anima, c. 330 BCE (Hoffer 2003, 3). Aristotle enumerated five senses, ranking them in order of importance as: sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch (Smith 1931, Book III.1). He linked them respectively to five material elements: water, wind, fire, earth and quintessence (also known as ether) (Stewart 2005, 61, Classen 1993, 2). According to Aristotle’s schema vision is linked to water (which can absorb light), hearing is tied to air, smell is associated with fire, and touch is linked to earth and considered the least of the senses because touch is a faculty common to all animals (Stewart 2002, 61). In spite of its lowly status in Aristotle’s view, Classen argues that touch, particularly manual touch, was an essential part of everyday life in early periods of Western history as a form of communication and self-defence, and entailed in day-to-day activities such as eating and manual labour (2005, 3). Sensory history attempts to ‘right the balance’ and understand touch and the broader range of senses as ingredient in everyday life and self-understanding.

Aristotle noted that certain classes of phenomena could only be perceived through a single sense: colour could only be detected by sight, sound by hearing and flavour by taste (Stewart 2005, 61). This notion is sometimes challenged by sensory history. For example, sounds are vibrations, which can also be sensed by the skin. Classen argues that Aristotle’s influence has been significant and largely fixed the number of senses valued by Western culture, though there have been occasional divergences from his scheme (1993, 2). Into the middle ages the ranking of the senses still corresponded largely with Aristotle’s hierarchy, though Thomas Aquinas’ work sometimes placed hearing—through which one perceives the word of God—as the highest sense (Classen 1993, 3).

To aid in theorising the senses, philosophers and artists, including Euclid, Aristotle and Leonardo da Vinci, were familiar with the camera obscura (‘dark room’), the box-like device into which light and images of the world without were allowed to enter through a tiny aperture. Philosophers (like John Locke) have speculated on how this phenomenon may in some way correspond to the functioning of vision (Crary 1988a, 30). Crary reminds us that it is important to separate the empirical aspects of this phenomenon (as it has always functioned and will continue to) and the camera obscura itself as a socially constructed artefact, which reveals certain regimes of visuality (1988a, 30). From the late sixteenth to late eighteenth century the camera obscura “became a model, obviously elaborated in a variety of ways, for how observation leads to truthful inferences about an external world” (Crary 1988a, 31). Additionally, during the Renaissance the connection
between vision and knowledge was strengthened as paintings, books and the activity of reading became more prevalent (Howes and Classen 2014, 1).

2.1 A nineteenth century camera obscura, (image from "The Museum of Science and Art" by Dionysis Larder, 1855, Museum of Victoria)

At various times scholars such as Philo, a first-century BCE interpreter, included language among the senses because speech was imagined to be a natural faculty of human beings (Classen 1993, 2). Running in parallel to discourses on the senses was speculation on human ‘nature’ versus humankind’s inculturated status. In the ancient world and throughout the Middle Ages the dichotomy of ‘man’ versus ‘animal’ was source of continual interest, though what distinguished the two was not clearly defined (Hirst and Woolley 1985, 151). The ability to use language was often seen as a delimiting feature. In the Middle Ages Frederick II (1194-1250), the Holy Roman Emperor, ordered a group of babies to be kept isolated from all language to determine which dialect they would ‘naturally’ speak – Latin, Greek Hebrew or a vernacular language. The experiment failed when all the babies died (Rivlin and Gravelle 1984, 90-91).

During the Enlightenment consideration of the senses turned away from theological and allegorical perspectives to consider scientific and philosophical interpretations (Classen 1993, 4). Descartes (1596-1650), a rationalist, sought to separate the mind from the senses (Proudfoot and Lacey 2010, 103). He considered the senses to be deceptive and relied wholly on intellectual judgement, rather than sensory evidence, for personal
understanding (Classen 1993, 4). In contrast to Descartes’ body/mind dualism, John Locke’s (1632-1704) notion of the tabula rasa argued that all knowledge comes from sensory experience, an understanding that was fundamentally empirical. While he believed that ideas come from direct experiences, links between ideas could also be known a priori (Proudfoot and Lacey 2010, 222). In An Essay Concerning Human Understanding Locke wrote that:

Whatever the Mind perceives in itself, or is the immediate object of Perception, Thought, or Understanding, that I call Idea; and the Power to produce any Idea in our mind, I call Quality of the Subject wherein that power is. Thus a Snow-ball having the power to produce in us the Ideas of White, Cold, and Round,- the Powers to produce those Ideas in us, as they are in the Snow-ball, I call Qualities; and as they are sensations or perceptions in our understandings, I call them Ideas, if I speak of sometimes, as in the things themselves, I would be understood to mean those Qualities in the Objects that Produce them in us (1975, Book II, Chapter VIII, p. 134).

For Locke, “all knowledge of the external world, all complex ideas, consists in generalisations from simple ideas which are the mental images of sense perceptions” (Hirst and Woolley 1985, 153). Locke and Descartes both characterised the senses as exclusively physical mechanisms, means of conveying information about the earthly world to the mind, with no link to a spiritual or cosmic realm (Classen 1993, 4). It was Emmanuel Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason (1791), which endeavoured in part to reconcile the views of Rationalism and Empiricism (Gelernter 1995, 177). Gelernter writes that:

On one side, where the Empiricists stressed the importance of sense impressions, they failed to realize that experience alone is not sufficient for understanding. For example, one may hear a quick sequence of four clanging sounds originating in the sensory world, but only when one understands the concept of ‘clock striking four’ will the sounds have meaning... On the other side, while the Rationalists emphasized the rational, conceptual basis of knowledge, they failed to realize that a concept without any experiential basis says little about reality... So Kant made a clear distinction between intuitions, the immediate impressions of sense, and understanding, the minds ability to think in concepts (1995, 177 original emphasis).

Kant argued that knowledge could only arise from the union of sensory impressions and understanding (Gelernter 1995, 178).
Locke, Descartes, and other philosophers championed sight as the primary sense associated with scientific pursuits (Classen 1993, 6). Vision gained increasing cultural significance alongside the rise in scientific forms of study during the eighteenth and nineteenth century (Classen 1997, 402). During this period truth and knowledge became tied to vision and the scientist’s focused gaze (see Foucault 1973). It was vision’s seeming detachment, and thus assumed objectivity, which elevated it as the sense for science. Classen notes that “this objectivity, nonetheless, by its very visual basis, is grounded in a particular ‘view’ of the world, and, bird’s eye thought it may be, this view is still limited and conditioned by the characteristics of vision” (Classen 1993, 6, citing Howes 1992, 17-22).

Both Descartes and Locke conceived of the human mind as “an inner space in which clear and distinct ideas passed before an inner Eye...an inner space in which perceptual sensations were themselves the objects of quasi-observation” (Rorty 1980, 49-51). The mechanical, monocural authority of the camera obscura was trusted and elevated beyond other sensory evidence generated by the body (Crary 1988a, 32). Crary argues that the camera obscura was an apparatus that guaranteed ‘truth’ for artists or scientists, empiricists or rationalists and was important for both the observation of empirical phenomena and self-observation or introspection (1988a, 31). The treatment of the senses as ‘natural’ and/or ‘scientific,’ as opposed to cultural, endures today (Classen 1993, 4).

In the eighteenth century the definition of ‘man’ came to denote “a finite set of attributes specifiable by biological and social scientific discourses” (Hirst and Woolley 1985, 152). Étienne Bonnot de Condillac (1746) developed Locke’s ideas further and positioned the senses as the origin of human knowledge (Classen 2012, 160). Hirst and Woolley argue that:

Condillac carried empiricism or sensationalism to its logical conclusion: the differences between classes of being are acquired properties which depend on their capacity to receive, store and utilize experiences. Men are superior to other animals because they possess reason, but they do so only because they have developed the use of complex signs. Signs, and language in particular, enable us to develop ways of representing complex perceptions, a means of calling them to mind again, and of forming links between them. Language thus provides the basis for reasoning in providing connections between and generalizations from sense perceptions (1985, 153).
Language emerged as a characteristic separating man from animals, or the natural from the cultural, alongside increased interest in how the senses communicated with each other, and to what extent the senses were subjective, or directly responsive to an external reality (Classen 2012, 160). 'Molyneux’s Question' (1688) asked whether a man who was born blind and suddenly given the capacity to see would be able to visually distinguish between a cube and a sphere, objects he had only previously known through touch (Classen 2012, 160). This expanded interest in the blind resulted in new modes of tactile education and the eventual creation of Braille and manual languages for the blind. This proved, to some degree, that the sense of touch (and by extension haptic activities) could operate as a medium to convey language and thought, a notion that contradicted the dominance of the visual sense in Western sensory ideology (Classen 2012, 160-161).

As explorations of other sensory capacities expanded in eighteenth century vision remained the dominant sense, though understandings of its nature changed. Crary argues that the *camera obscura* collapsed as a model of human vision and understanding in the early nineteenth century, “when it was displaced by radically different notions of what an observer was and of what constituted vision” (1988a, 29). He suggests it was the arrival of the body—meaning the fuller range of senses and bodily experiences—into discourses and practices of vision—where these had previously been excluded in favour of the trusted mechanical eye—that precipitated this shift (1988a, 33). Crary believes that the publication of Goethe’s *Theory of Colours* (1810), which positions the body—and its range of capacities—as the source of visual experiences, is evidence of this shift (1988a, 34).

Goethe was one of many European researchers who, in the 1820s-30s, became fascinated with retinal afterimages. This widespread preoccupation led to an understanding of vision as an “amalgam of physiological processes and external stimulation, and dramatized the productive role played by the body in vision” (Crary 1988a, 34). Afterimages and related phenomena, which were once considered evidence of the unreliable nature of the body, became proof of the reality and reliability of vision (Crary 1988a, 35). Importantly, this also contributed to the collapse of the dialectic of interiority and exteriority that the *camera obscura* model of vision depended upon. The science of physiology provided an avenue for new forms of reflection on reason (including epistemology) by describing vision as an organic process (Crary 1988a, 36)
2.2 A painting by J.M.W. Turner in 1843 titled ‘Light and Colour (Goethe’s Theory) – The Morning after the Deluge – Moses Writing the Book of Genesis.’ The painting was influenced by Turner’s interest in the work of Goethe (Tate Gallery, London, Wikimedia Commons).

The science of physiology in the early and mid-nineteenth century contributed to the segregation of the body into discrete functions and systems. The distinction of sensory and motor nerves, and the division of five types of sensory nerves corresponding with the five senses, contributed to a scientific ‘separation of the senses’ (Crary 1988a, 38). Physiological studies of the eye mapped quantitative characteristics, charting zones, features and functionality. Such studies were in part the product of a time when increased factory production meant that human labour could be rationalised and categorized. Knowledge of the visual and sensory capacities needed to undertake rapid, repetitive tasks could result in improved productivity, and potential economic benefits (Crary 1988a, 37).

In the 1826 Johannes Müller (1801-1858) demonstrated how a common agent (such as electricity) could cause different sensations in different types of nerves and how diverse agents could produce identical sensations in one type of nerve, a phenomenon which was later named the ‘law of specific nerve energies’ (Finger and Wade 2002, 235). Müller revealed what could be seen as an inherently arbitrary relationship between stimulation and sensation (Crary 1988a, 38-39). Müller’s work impacted on understandings of vision by demonstrating that it could be “affected by sensations that have no necessary link to a
referent, thus threatening any coherent system of meaning” (Crary 1988a, 40). Crary argues that “the issue was not just how does one know what is real, but that new forms of the real were being fabricated and a new truth about the capacities of a human subject was being articulated in these terms” (1988a, 40). The human subject was no longer a unified tabula rasa, but multi-faceted body on which multiple and varied forces could induce a variety of experiences, all of which could be considered ‘real’ (Crary 1988a, 41).

For Crary modernisation was responsible for the collapse of the camera obscura as a model for vision and the status of the observer by the 1840s. In contrast to its earlier separation from vision, the body became the locus of vision. Paradoxically, the technologies of photography and film reinvigorated myths of vision’s truthfulness and incorporeality (Crary 1988a, 43). However, “if cinema and photography seemed to reincarnate the camera obscura, it was only as a mirage of a transparent set of relations that modernity had already overthrown” (Crary 1988a, 43).

Relatedly, Hirst and Woolley note that the understanding of different species—particularly ‘man’—as stable, with enduring and defining attributes, is a notion that has persisted in spite of the development of evolutionary biology. This is, in part, because during the Enlightenment, at the same time as scholars could biologically define man’s characteristics, they also began to celebrate human uniqueness as a cultural and qualitative, “both related to and distinguished from biology” (Hirst and Woolley 1985, 152). Crary positions physiology as “one of those sciences that stand for the rupture that Foucault poses between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in which man emerges as a being in whom the transcendental is mapped onto the empirical” (1988a, 36).

Taylor writes that towards the end the Enlightenment “attentiveness to the environment was given a boost with the publication of landmark texts such as Thomas Malthus’s Essay on the Principle of Population (1798), Charles Darwin’s On the Origin of Species (1859) or George Perkins Marsh’s Man and Nature (1864),” texts which “provided a philosophical gloss to widespread beliefs in natural order and the interdependence of species and animate and inanimate matter” (2004, 96). Relatedly, transformations in perceptions and understanding of interiors, particularly domestic spaces, were also significant at this time. Texts on domestic advice, such as Cuthbert Johnson’s Our House and Garden: What We See, and What We Do Not See (1864) explained some of the sensory, chemical and biological aspects of the home and garden (Taylor 2004, 97). Taylor argues that as people came to understand the reasons behind certain bodily sensations and discomforts they were better able to interpret and even alter their
surroundings (2004, 97). Attention to elements such as earth, air and water in household and garden settings unveiled biological processes and inter-relations (Taylor 2004, 97). These attentions were not merely visual, but multi-sensory, considering the smells and bodily sensations which pervaded life with increased scrutiny. Related to these concerns is the work of Georges Canguilhem (1904-1995) who:

described the life sciences as developing as both an ensemble of knowledges and of practices - technologies for managing tensions between humans and their surroundings. By relating the health of human beings to the state of environs, biology and related disciplines opened a domain of moral and ethical concerns for the ‘problem’ of life and death (Taylor 2004, 216).

In the early decades of the twentieth century another form of inquiry concerned with the individual’s sensory experiences of the world emerged. The philosophical tradition of Phenomenology—which sensory history actively challenges—evolved from the work of Edmund Husserl (1859 -1938), his student Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961). Phenomenology considers sensory experiences and issues of ‘place’ and can be partially defined as:

the study of ‘phenomena’: appearances of things, or things as they appear in our experience, or the ways we experience things, thus the meanings things have in our experience. Phenomenology studies conscious experience as experienced from the subjective or first person point of view (Smith 2013).

In architectural disciplines, interested in phenomenology grew in part from the work of Heidegger and a growing interest in ‘place’ from the latter decades of the twentieth century. More recent architects and theorists interested in the field include Christian Norberg-Schulz (The Genius Loci: towards a phenomenology of architecture, 1979), Juhani Pallasmaa (The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses, 2005) and Alberto Perez-Gomez (Built upon Love: Architectural Longing after Ethics and Aesthetics, 2006). Taylor and Levine are critical of phenomenology and the phenomenological perspectives held by Pallasmaa and Perez-Gomez, arguing that their claims for ‘timeless’ or ‘universal’ sensibilities are ‘theory-laden’, and “procrustean in their efforts to make often a single theory account for all cases. What is needed instead are more philosophically nuanced and historically attuned views of human subjectivity and experiences” (2011, 100).

Pallasmaa and Perez-Gomez, and other phenomenologically oriented architects, are sometimes critical of the modern built environment, however, phenomenological positions may fail to consider that planners, politicians and municipal authorities will
have many justifications for their enterprises and decisions. A phenomenological approach to the sensory history of a place risks neglecting the cultural construction of the senses and the wider social context in which experiences occur.

The work of Marshall McLuhan (The Gutenberg Galaxy: the making of typographic man, 1962) and Walter J. Ong (The Presence of the Word: some prolegomena for cultural and religious history, 1967, Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word, 1982), is part of what is broadly termed the ‘Great Divide’ theory, arguably a recently influential frameworks which has shaped how scholars study the senses (Smith 2007b, 8). Smith explains:

*The argument maintains that following the invention of movable type in the sixteenth century and under the ensuing influence of an eye-centered Renaissance and Enlightenment, vision came to dominate Western thinking, serving as authenticator of truth, courier of reason, and custodian of intellect, while the senses of taste, touch, and smell especially, were essentially sidelined (2007b, 9).*

Classen believes McLuhan and Ong’s explorations of the role and importance of sound and speech—and its subversion to vision—are important, but insufficient when considered across a broad range of cultures whose sensory experiences, perceptions and behaviours include senses beyond sight and hearing, such as touch or vibration (Classen 1997, 403). Smith also sees both benefits and drawbacks to McLuhan and Ong’s work, noting they “did much to help us historicize an often unwitting privileging of sight. In arguing for a shift in the ratio or balance of the senses, both Ong and McLuhan helped us see that sight was historically contingent” (Smith 2007a, 849-850). However, he also argues that “sensory history must avoid leaning too heavily on such meta-historical frameworks [like the Great Divide Theory] that some times fail to capture the complexity of events, trends, and tendencies thrown up by new research (Smith 2007a, 850). Smith argues that widely accepted beliefs that modernity celebrated the visual and diminished hearing, smell and touch are undermined by sensory history, which can demonstrate the significance of all the senses, particularly the proximate bodily senses, for experiencing and interpreting daily life (Smith 850-851).

The work of Michel Foucault, including The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception (1963) and Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison (1977) has also been significant to considerations of the built environment, the visual sense and power. *The Birth of the Clinic* considers the nature of vision, or ‘the gaze’. Foucault argues that:
The clinic was probably the first attempt to order a science on the exercise and
decisions of the gaze...the medical gaze was also organised in a new way. First, it
was no longer the gaze of any observer, but that of a doctor supported and justified
by an institution, that of a doctor endowed with the power of decision and
intervention (1973, 89).

Urry and Larsen argue that “the concept of the gaze highlights that looking is a learned
ability and that the pure and innocent eye is a myth” (2011, 1). They write that “to depict
vision as natural or the product of atomised individuals naturalises its social and
historical nature, and the power relations of looking” (2011, 2).

In Discipline and Punish, Foucault argues that new modes of surveillance, scheduling and
reform used in prisons have become a model for control over society (Gutting 2013).
Foucault writes:

throughout the social body, procedures were being elaborated for distributing
individuals, fixing them in space, classifying them, extracting from them the
maximum in time and forces, training their bodies, coding their continuous
behaviour, maintaining them in perfect visibility, forming around them an apparatus
of observation, registration and recording, constituting on them a body of knowledge
that is accumulated and centralized (1977, 231).

Places and institutions of social control include factories, hospitals, and schools, which
may be in some ways modelled (literally or theoretically) on the modern prison, and can
also include public areas such urban waterfronts. Gutting writes that “Foucault’s analysis
shows how techniques and institutions, developed for different and often quite
innocuous purposes, converged to create the modern system of disciplinary power”
(2013). Such places condition their patients, prisoners or students to exercise
normalising behaviours. Examining patients in clinics or students in schools “is a
method of control that combines hierarchical observation with normalizing judgment”
(Gutting 2013). Waterfronts and other public places are often designed to include both
obvious and inconspicuous surveillance techniques (i.e. lifeguards in bright uniforms
and hidden security cameras) intended to normalise behaviour.

The range of philosophies and perspectives on the senses presented above touch on ideas
which are deeply enmeshed in Western culture. Smith writes that:
No small amount of historical writing on the history of the senses has been performed by intellectual historians who have traced the way senses and their meanings have preoccupied great thinkers, especially in the Western Cannon. The dividends of this emphasis are undeniable: we know what a range of thinkers thought about the senses, especially from the seventeenth century on in Western history. But we should be careful not to allow intellectual discourses on the senses to be our sole guide (2007b, 14).

As noted previously, this research works within the confines of the Western tradition of the five senses. However, this model has been challenged at times, and while it endures in Western cultures—especially popular culture—some scholars have considered it to be arbitrary or incomplete (Classen 1993, 1-3, Vannini et al. 2012, 6). Additionally, science has further characterised, subdivided or in some instances partially realigned the senses. For example, touch can be broken down into sensations including kinaesthesia (movement), pain and temperature (Classen 1993, 5). Discussion now turns the emergence of the field of ‘sensory history’ in the late twentieth century.

The Emergence and Objectives of Sensory History

New ideas about the senses began to emerge in the early decades of the twentieth century. The work the Annales School, co-founded by Lucien Febvre (1878–1956) and Marc Bloch (1886–1944), “aimed to broaden our understanding of the past by investigating collective beliefs and practices within their social, physical, and economic environments” (Classen 2012, xv). Febvre suggested in 1947 that studies could be done on the sensory foundations of thought during different periods of time (Classen 2012, xv). The work of Febvre and other Annales historians brought sensations and perception into the historical domain (Classen 2012, xv).

Howes describes the provenance of sensory history thus:

The emergence of sensory studies... has come at the end of a long series of turns in the human sciences. For instance... there was the linguistic turn of the 1960s and 70s inspired by Saussurian linguistics (and Wittgenstein’s notion of language games) that gave us the idea of culture as ‘structured like a language’ or ‘text’ and of knowledge as a function of ‘discourse’. This was followed by the pictorial turn of the 1980s, which emphasized the role of visual imagery in human communication—
particularly in our ‘civilization of the image’—and gave rise to the ever-expanding field of visual culture studies. The 1990s witnessed two new developments: the corporeal turn, which introduced the notion of ‘embodiment’ as a paradigm for cultural analysis, and the material turn, which directed attention to the physical infrastructure of the social world, giving birth to material culture studies (Howes 2005c).

Howes positions sensory history—and more broadly, sensory studies and its variants such as sensory anthropology, sensory sociology etc.—as arising progressively through a number of critical developments or ‘turns’. The most recent, the bodily turn of the 1990s, saw increased interest in theorising the body, both culturally and scientifically, as the locus of social, material and physiological dynamics. Michel Foucault, Alain Corbin, Roy Porter, and Judith Butler are amongst the scholars who introduced ‘the body’ as a realm of scholarly inquiry (Sappol 2010, 2).


Other recent publications in sensory studies range from broad overviews of major themes relating to sensory experiences to more specific examination of individual senses, places or timeframes. The Sensory Formations Series (Berg) includes the broad survey volume Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader (Howes ed. 2005) and focused volumes The Taste Cultural Reader: Experiencing Food and Drink, The Smell Cultural Reader, The Auditory Cultural Reader, The Book of Touch, Visual Sense: a Cultural Reader, and The Sixth Sense Reader. The Cultural History of the Senses (2014) and The Cultural History of the Body (2014) series mentioned previously, the journal Senses & Society (since 2006), and the Centre for Sensory Studies (www.centreforsensorystudies.org) also make significant contributions to the field.

Amongst researchers and writers of sensory history there is general consensus as to the value of the field. Vannini and his co-authors state that:
Whether one studies the senses and sensation from the viewpoint of geographical space, historical time, technological medium, culture, social structure, or the individual, we understand the senses and sensations as the lifeblood of embodied sociality and materiality, as the very tools and techniques allowing for the transaction between human and non-human agents, and the very condition for the carnal experience of selfhood, society, and culture (2012, 15).

Corbin refers to sensory history as “a project—or rather a gamble—which is risky but fascinating” and states that “the historian working in this field faces many problems; rigorous precautions are also essential” (2005, 129). Smith refers to sensory history as “possibly one of the most significant advances in the writing of history in recent years” (2003, 165) and is optimistic about the growing interest in the field, but also notes “problems loom, especially concerning methodology and presentation” (2007, 841).

There are a number of common objectives shared by many practitioners of sensory studies. Pink enumerates these common objectives as: i) countering the ‘ocularcentricity’ of Western cultures, ii) examining sensations as embodied experiences which are cultural rather than ‘natural,’ and iii) highlighting the interconnection of the senses (2006, 43-44). These objectives have much in common with the three aims of this thesis (put forward in chapter one), which also seek, through studies of waterside places, to explore the value of sensory experiences beyond the visual, and demonstrate the cultural foundation of the senses and their interconnections. It is important to emphasize this place/time/culture specific study of sensory experiences differs from more general or phenomenological approaches.

The key objectives of sensory historians are considered further below—particularly where they intersect with the aims of this thesis—along with some of the challenges of sensory history including conflicting accounts of experiences or events, historical anachronism, and the difficulty of finding ‘evidence’.

Countering the Dominance of the Visual in Western Cultures

The dominance of the visual in Western culture has underscored a large domain of research spanning many disciplines and is a notion that sensory history actively challenges. As discussed previously, vision garnered increasing cultural significance alongside the growth in number and importance of ‘scientific’ studies of the senses
during the Enlightenment. It can be argued that sight has continued to increase in importance from the last decades of the nineteenth century, due in part to the development of visual technologies, specifically photography and film (Jay 1993, 3, Classen 1997, 402, Classen et al., 1994). Howes argues that the link between science and reason, technologies of observation and reproduction, and capitalist displays have also contributed to the contemporary dominance of vision (2003, xii). He states that: “while the image of sight as the medium of a monolithic, rationalist worldview has been successfully shattered by recent work in the humanities and social sciences, it retains its sensory dominance through myriad scattered reflections” (Howes 2003, xii citing Jay 1993).

Visual technologies such as photography, film and the Internet, and more recently touch screen electronic devices (tablets and phones particularly) continue to affirm the dominance of the visual. Most touch screen devices are difficult to use to their full capacity without the sense of vision. Such contemporary technological developments are a small but powerful example of the way technology can radically and rapidly transform or confirm the relationship between the senses.

Classen’s concern with the dominance of the visual is that it becomes the primary, and often only line of inquiry into the sensory aspects of a culture, and can overshadow both the role of the other senses individually, as well as, importantly, the interconnectedness of the senses (2001, 402-403). She argues that: “the culture of touch [or the haptic] involves all culture. Yet at the same time, we live in a society of the image, a markedly visual culture, in which, while there may be many representations of touch, there is often nothing actually there to feel” (Classen 2005, 2). She also argues that while smell has never been dominant over sight in Western cultures, it “once occupied a much larger part of our sensory and symbolic consciousness” (Classen 1993, 36). Sensory history seeks to “look behind assumptions that the visual is necessarily the dominant sense in modern Western cultures to explore how the relationships between categories of sensory experience figure in informants lives” (Pink 6006, 42).

**Positioning the Senses as Cultural**

Sensory history seeks to position the senses and sensory experiences as cultural, countering the commonly held assumption—which has lingered since the
Enlightenment—that the senses are biological features and thus universal and constant (Smith 2007, 842, Classen 1997, 402, Howes 2003). Sensory history offers an opportunity to mediate between widely understood notions of ‘nature’ and ‘culture’ in human activities and the built environment. Howes argues that the senses are customarily linked with nature, understood as ‘innocent’ or ‘savage’, and even seen as the ‘antithesis of culture’. However, the sensorium “never exists in a natural state. Humans are social beings, and just as human nature itself is a product of culture, so is the human sensorium” (Howes 2005a, 3). As the arguments of Hirst and Woolley (1985) demonstrate, delimiting a boundary between natural and cultural aspects of human features and behaviours is difficult, and potentially unrealistic or unnecessary. The biological and the cultural aspects of the senses operate in complex and interconnected ways which cannot—and arguably should not—be separated.

As cultural artefacts, the senses intertwine with many aspects of private and social life and are also neither ahistorical nor apolitical. Smith writes that “what are usually considered history ‘fields’—diplomatic, gender, race, regional, borderlands, cultural, political, military—could all be written and researched through the habit of sensory history” (2007a, 842). Subjects of sensory analysis include the importance and interpretation of different sounds, smells, tastes or bodily sensations in specific places or periods, and how the use or significance of a specific sense shaped both cultures and places. The growing understanding of the senses as cultural artefacts makes it clear that “the senses are the media through which we experience and makes sense of gender, colonialism and material culture” (Howes 2005, 4). Shared sensory experiences and expectations can connect people and shape the built environment in both positive and negative ways.

Classen states that sensory symbolism—for example the way certain odours can or have been identified with certain classes or groups of people—“forcefully reveals the hierarchies and stereotypes through which certain social groups are invested with moral and political authority and other groups disempowered and condemned” (2001, 409). Smith argues that “we must stress the primacy of context if we are to avoid becoming hostage to the rhetorical sensory hierarchy sponsored by a given class of a particular place and time” which entails considering “multiple voices from multiple contexts and discourses” (2007b, 15, citing Corbin 1995, 190-191). Some sources may be historically suspect, for example those which are promoted by elites for elites, and thus reflect one group’s preferred perspective (Smith 2007b). For example the Cairns lagoon—and the government websites and brochures promoting it—is in part an appeal by those in
power to the expectations of certain types of tourists (and their money). Providing the ‘safe’, child-friendly, alcohol-free lagoon addresses the sensory desires of a ‘desirable’ group whilst not so subtly eliminating other ‘undesirable’ elements from the area, and controlling where people go and what they experience (see Fantin 2005).

*Highlighting the Interconnectivity of the Senses*

A further objective of sensory scholarship is to emphasise the interconnectedness of the senses and their combined role in the production of memory, information and the generation of new knowledge and understanding (Pink 2006, 45). While the ‘five senses’ prevail in Western cultures, many non-Western cultures will utilise and comprehend their senses in distinctly different ways (Ong 1991, 26, Stoller 1997, Howes 2003). For example, the Ongee of Little Andaman Island position smell as their central cosmic principal. Odour for the Ongee is the source of life and death, a system of medicine, communication and movement, and a means by which they can control their cosmos (Pandya 1987, 17). Howes notes that “too often studies of the senses will consider each of the senses in turn, as though sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch each constituted a completely independent domain of experience, without exploring how the senses interact with each other in different combinations and hierarchies” (Howes 2003, xi). Ong observes that touch and sight combine to comprehend three-dimensional space, sound is partially sensed through vibration, and speaking is both the physical act of producing sounds and using the mouth to shape them (1991, 25-26).

Not only are the senses interconnected, but activities that are commonly divided into categories like ‘sensing’ and ‘perceiving’ (sometimes conceived of as ‘body’ and ‘mind’ activities) in scientific disciplines are more complex, interconnected and culturally determined than is often assumed. Vannini and his co-authors posit that “humans sense as well as make sense. This process of sense-making entails minded and embodied social and cultural practices—including emotional responses and judgements—that cannot be explained or reduced to physiological processes alone” (2012, 15). The senses are not just receptors or merely reactive. They also comprise a set of behaviours and skills, where sensations are sensed, perceived, and interpreted, thereby ‘making sense’ of experiences (Vannini et al. 2012, 15). For Vannini and his co-authors “sensing and sense-making are necessarily conjoined, codetermined, and mutually emergent in active and reflexive
practices in which we are both the subject and object of sensations we perceive or, for that matter, fail to recognize” (2012, 15).

Somatic, meaning “of or relating to the (or a) body; bodily, corporeal, physical “ (OED 2015) is a term frequently used in relation to sensory perception. Vannini and his co-authors use the term ‘somatic work’ to indicate “the range of linguistic and alinguistic reflexive experiences and activities by which individuals interpret, create, extinguish, maintain, interrupt, and/or communicate somatic sensations that are congruent with personal, interpersonal, and/or cultural notions of moral, aesthetic, and/or logical desirability” (Vannini et al. 2012, 19). The concept of somatic work is useful for this research because it argues that sensations and their interpretation are conjoined act, rather than a series of separate, sequential steps. Furthermore, this ‘work’ can connect the senses to what are otherwise explained in philosophical terms as ‘place’ and ‘placefulness.’ For example a tourist entering the Cairns lagoon feels the temperature of the water and the texture of the sandy ‘beach’, and makes judgements related to, for example, their comfort, happiness or safety. These judgements may be influenced by previous knowledge or expectations of ‘tropical’ beachside places, even though they are experiencing a largely human-made environment. The site studies examine how it is not just sensations but their emotional responses which influence understandings of places and place identity.

**Researching and Writing Sensory History**

A central challenge of researching and writing sensory history is conveying the nature of a sensation though text or images, what Hoffer refers to as the ‘lemon problem’:

> I can taste a lemon and savour the immediate experience of my senses; I can recall the taste after I have thrown away the fruit: but can I use words and pictures to convey to another person exactly what that sensation was? (2003, 14).

Difficulties go beyond conveying the nature of a sense, and Corbin cites understanding the ‘transience of the evidence’—meaning discerning the way the senses were used, how their significance was perceived, and what their ‘lived hierarchy’ entailed—as a significant methodological challenge (2005, 31). For instance, much of the material grounds for sensory experiences of a past environment, such as common foods, living conditions, sanitary practices, landscape, flora and fauna can be conjured through
historical and anthropological studies or—like lemons—are still in existence. What cannot be recreated is precisely how elements were experienced, understood or ‘consumed’ in the past, which may be significantly different to how people experience and interpreted them today (Smith 2007, 841). This poses a risk of historical anachronism, or simply inaccuracy of interpretation. Smith writes that:

*How a lemon tastes is contingent on the tongue doing the licking, its specific history and culture... Imagine trying to recapture the “taste” of a lemon from, say, the fourteenth century when people who had yet to encounter sugar tasted food in ways that would be different after sugar had been introduced to their diet. Thus, the taste of a lemon is far from historically or culturally constant and how it tastes, its meaning, its salivating sharpness or margarita, Jimmy Buffet-laden signature, is dependent on many factors, not the least of which is history (Smith 2007, 847-848).*

Drawing out past sensory experiences and their cultural significance must be largely done via sources that were not overtly aimed at conveying these experiences and their significance. Sensory experiences of the past must be explored primarily through period sources such as newspapers, journals and letters, rather than modern interpretations or assumptions about sites, facilities or events (Smith 2007, 841). Period texts about travel, outings or events—such as descriptions of new places, waterside picnics or swimming carnivals—or writings on hygiene and behaviour, when used carefully, can reveal some ‘transient’ or ephemeral aspects of sensory history and the system of norms at work within a society. Written sources can be supplemented by visual sources such as photographs, paintings, sketches, and plans, which may contribute to an understanding of sensory norms at specific places and moments in time.

Discussing the use of period texts, Corbin notes that it is crucial to consider the author’s understanding of the sensory apparatus and their conception of the nervous pathways for the transmission of sensory information; these understandings are central to an author’s formulation of the sensory hierarchy (1995, 189). He highlights the importance of being

*careful not to confuse what is not said with what is not experienced. The historian can never be absolutely sure whether the emergence of an innovation, observed by reading documents, indicates a transformation of the way in which the senses were used and of the emotional system or, more simply, the crystallization of new rhetorical forms. It is still the case that the latter, as they spread, helped to shape behaviour (1995, 189).*
One strategy for sensory research, noted by Corbin, is discovering the available or prevailing types of sensory experiences, expectations and behaviours in a specific place, revealing the development of the sensory hierarchy in a particular society at a given point in time (2005, 129). An inventory can generate a comprehensive overview of a given place and time across a range of age, social or ethnic groups and decrease the potential for historical anachronism (Corbin 2005, 130). For example, research on the Perth foreshore at the turn of the twentieth century (drawn from period texts) reveals that a range of individuals in different social classes (city councillors, doctors, swimmers and patrons of the Perth City Baths) were widely in agreement about the unpleasant odours emanating from the foreshore, but had divergent opinions about the value (or hazards) of bathing in the river. This is an example of the potential for a social heterogeneity in how the senses are used, and in significance, perception and thresholds of tolerance of sensations (Corbin 2005, 130). It also demonstrates how sensory history can reveal social structures, regimes of power and the unique cultural nuances of sensory experiences; what is noticed, what is not, and how it is interpreted and even how it impacts on the built environment.

When writing sensory history it is important to be alert to sensory metaphors, particular those relating to vision and touch, which are deeply enmeshed in both everyday and academic language (Classen 1993, 58, 2005, 5, Jay 1993, 1). Visual metaphors link clear vision to knowledge and truth to light; research can ‘shed light’ on a subject, present new ‘viewpoints’, and ‘look’ for new ‘perspectives’. It is also possible to ‘grasp’ a subject, ‘grapple’ with a concept and ‘weigh’ an idea. For Jay, and others, this is evidence of the intricate parallels between language and perception (1993, 1). Classen argues that academics are frequently inclined to use visual metaphors which encourages a perspective of detached observation more akin to scientific frameworks, which results in a distancing of the researcher from the subject. For Classen, visual metaphors “also mask the tensions that touch based terms indicate are involved in intellectual processes” (Classen 2005, 5). Mindfulness of the deep infiltration of sensory metaphors into common and academic language is important when both reading and writing sensory history.
The Haptic and Olfactory Senses

Figure 3.1 The range of the senses

2.3 A diagram of the range of the senses showing taste, touch and smell as the proximate bodily senses (Diagram by Skurnick and George 1967, from Rodaway 1994, 27).

The sensory history composed by this thesis considers the proximate bodily senses—haptic and olfactory senses—which Rodaway refers to as ‘intimate’ because they provide information about the environment in immediate proximity to the body. Vision and hearing are considered more ‘distant’ senses, which provide information about the environment beyond the reach of the body (Rodaway 1994, 26).

The Haptic Sense

The haptic sense plays multiple and important roles in this research. Focusing on what the body feels in a place, alongside other sensations, allows people, and their full range of faculties, sensory capacities and immersion in social formations, to enter the picture. Pocock explains that “the term ‘haptic sense’ is more inclusive of the diversity of sensations taken in by our skin” (2008, 78). The term ‘haptic’ has been utilised by a number of key thinkers in the fields of sensory history, architecture, anthropology and geography including Kent Bloomer and Charles Moore in Body, Memory, and

Classen notes that “in the academic world touch [and by extension the haptic sense] has often passed under the radar. Like the air we breathe, it has been taken for granted” (2005, 5). Classen addresses the sense of touch in The Deepest Sense: A Cultural History of Touch (2012) and The Book of Touch (2005 ed.). Touch, one of the two primary components of the haptic sense, has historically been positioned as the least important and/or most ‘primitive’ sense in Western cultures, and ‘movement’ has not been widely considered a sense. This makes the haptic, with its arguably under-appreciated or unacknowledged components, an interesting counterbalance to the visual. This research demonstrates that haptic sensations are often a desirable and actively sought aspect of a visit to the water’s edge. Various technologies—for example those related to construction and communication—can enhance the desirability of this interface, particularly in providing pleasant encounter with water.

Cultural factors govern what is widely considered appropriate to touch, ‘how’ one touches, and how touching and being touched are interpreted. For example, automatic doors and motion activated faucets are not merely technical advances for ease, but taken in their social and cultural contexts enforce ideas of hygiene and socio-behavioural propriety. It is social perceptions shaped by understandings of germs, pollution, and a myriad of other factors that determine such regulations, and a society’s response to them. These types of regulations are a form of power ingredient in social formations.

Features of a place or body of water such as temperature, tidal flow or the makeup of a beach or riverbed can be more fully understood through touch, the most corporal and direct of the senses. Encounters with water in its purest form are nearly devoid of sensation; it is odourless, colourless, and tasteless. When still and at the same temperature at the body, lying or floating in water will evoke limited tactile sensations. However water is rarely encountered in this state of stillness or purity, and natural and ‘artificial’ bodies of water have unique combinations of sensory characteristics that are place specific.
In *Touching: the human significance of the skin* Montagu argues that touch’s primary sensory organ, the skin, is the most important organ for basic survival (1971, 77). The skin is the largest organ in the body, the most central component of the haptic system, and the primary organ that mediates between the body and the external environment (Rodaway 1994, 42-44). The skin is rarely consciously attended to unless it is injured or damaged, however, the loss of other senses (e.g. blindness or deafness), result in the skin and the sense of touch becoming central to experiences and understandings of places and objects. The skin is also the only sensory organ which can both perceive and visually reveal aspects of the environment; it can bruise, scar, burn, or change colour based on contact with temperatures or surfaces.

Touch is unique for its physical intimacy and reciprocity: to touch is to be touched (Rodaway 1994, 41, Montague 1971). How such reciprocal encounters are perceived is determined by culture. The intention to touch or to be touched is the prerogative of the individual, and Rodaway posits three levels of reciprocity: i) simple contact whereby two surfaces are passively in contact, ii) exploratory activity where one agent is actively exploring the environment, iii) and communication involving active exploration by one or both agents, where both agents respond (Rodaway 1994, 45). Aquatic environments can be reciprocal on all three levels as the body rests passively in water, moves actively through water, and encounters the bodies of other swimmers or aquatic life. Thermal encounters between the skin and material surfaces or substances have a reciprocal nature as temperature transfers between them, not only making one or the other warmer or colder, but provoking emotional responses like pleasure or dislike (Heschong 1979, 19). Gibson observes that:

> in touching a solid object one can attend either to the external resistance of a thing or to the impression on the skin...within limits, you can concentrate either on the edge of the table, say, or on the dent it makes in you. It is as if the same stimulating event had two possible poles of experience, one objective and the other subjective (1966, 99).

There are numerous ways of categorising types and experiences of touch, from simple categories such as active and passive, to complex analysis of specific sensations and their associated receptors and pathways. Rodaway defines four categories that acknowledge the major types of touch and allow for a qualitative discussion of tactile experiences: global touch, reach, extended touch, and imagined touch (1994, 50-54). Global touch encompasses sensations that register upon the skin: the friction of wind or water, or the
heat of sunlight. Underwater sensations of global touch are particularly intense not only because of the encompassing bodily experience, but for the way that the underwater environment transforms all the senses. Reach or active touch is an outcome of a number of factors: an evolved human capacity to reach for things, technologies that assist and alter this capacity, and cultural factors which determine what is and is not appropriate to touch. Cultural factors may determine that some objects and surfaces may only be appropriately experienced via extended touch. For example, in many Western cultures before food enters the mouth it is only touched with utensils, and in many clinics doctors will wear gloves when examining patients.

Imagined touch is the memory and anticipation of tactile encounters based on past experiences and is often associated with specific material, geographic and climatic features. In *Matter and Memory* (originally published in 1912) Bergson argues that “there is no perception which is not full of memories. With the immediate and present data of our senses, we mingle a thousand details out of our past experiences” (2004, 36). For example, it could be argued that for many Australians the taste of Vegemite is appealing, in part, for its emotional connections to childhood memories and its historical association with being an ‘Aussie’.

Imagined touch also impacts on expectations of convenience and comfort. Crowley describes physical comfort as “self-conscious satisfaction with the relationship between one’s body and its immediate physical environment” (2005, 82). In some instances the rise of desires for comfort, convenience and recreation have enhanced the importance of tactile experiences. Writing about Victorian houses, Taylor explains that “involving a passive response to the sensation of heat and light and the perception of spatial qualities, comfort was and remains an inherently normalising principal. It forms and directs expectations for a certain kind of experience within buildings” (2004, 162 citing Crowley 2001). This ‘normalising’ of expectations for certain types of sensations and experiences can be extended to cities and landscapes. Maldonado argues that proliferation of desires and expectations for comfort “has played, from the beginning, a fundamental role in the task of controlling the social fabric of the nascent capitalist society (1995, 248).

Normalising and enhancing the availability of certain types of tactile encounters, like swimming in the Cairns Lagoon, and prohibiting others, like swimming on the Cairns foreshore, is a means of social control.

The ‘movement’ components of haptic experiences are proprioception, the body’s sense of balance and the location of its parts, and kinaesthesia, the body’s overall sense of
motion and the motion of its specific parts. Proprioception and kinaesthesia are closely connected and can be interceptive and exteroceptive experiences, sensing the movement and position of the body both in relation to itself, and to the outside world. Rather than being immediate and pre-given experiences, proprioception and kinaesthesia have altered over the past century as a result of changes to the cultural milieu, transformations in the form of built environment, and technologies that alter where and how people move. Activities such as jogging, cycling, rollerblading, or skateboarding are now generally acceptable public behaviours and increasingly popular forms of recreation and transport. They frequently take place in public areas such as recreational urban waterfronts. Concurrently, as cultural conditions allow for a broader range of physical activities in public places, the standardisation of building codes has introduced greater uniformity into aspects of the built environment like sidewalks, stairs, benches and handrails, normalising aspects of the physical experience of many public places.

Additionally, mobility technology such as elevators, escalators and cars now allow people to move though some places with minimal bodily movement, eliminating, for example, the exertion of climbing stairs, and also the minor yet cumulatively significant physical and emotional benefits of such activities.

Rodaway argues that “relationships to touch are sometimes, though not always, reflected in differences in the organisation of the built environment” (1994, 55). He also observes that “the built environment is a historical artefact reflecting past behaviours as much as, if not more than, present ones (which might have changed markedly), but we ‘make do’ with existing structures” (1994, 55). The varieties of touch can conflict with each other and other sensations, which can result in multiple interpretations or understandings of places. For instance, ‘shooting the chutes’ at the Perth Water Chute provided ‘thrilling’ sensations of vertigo and speed which were for some undermined by the sensation of ‘mal de mer’ that the ride could also induce.

The haptic sense provides a variety of tactile and bodily sensations—thermal pleasure or discomfort, friction, vertigo etc.—which provoke different responses to material conditions. Attention now turns to the olfactory sense, which plays an essential role in the experience and memory of places and environments.
The Olfactory Sense

A reinvigorated interest in the sense of smell was part of the rise of sensory history in the 1980s and 1990s. Corbin’s *The Foul and the Fragrant: Odour and the French Social Imagination* (1986) “drew out the profound influence of odours upon major social, political and cultural events during France’s modernisation in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries” (Drobnick 2006, 3). Corbin’s text also influenced Patrick Süskind’s 1985 novel *Perfume: The Story of a Murder*, an international bestseller whose evocative olfactory world brought ‘scent’ matters into popular culture (Drobnick 2006, 4). In 2006 the novel was turned into a major movie.

Corbin argues that the sense of smell has been suppressed since the eighteenth century (1986, 5). The sensory shift from smell to sight was bound up with a decline of myth, community, and domestic manufacture, and a rise in empiricism, individualism and industrialism (Classen 1993, 36). Classen, writing in 1993, observed that there has been a recent ‘olfactory revival’, exemplified by trends including an increased interest in aromatherapy and the proliferation of books on scented gardens. She noted at the time that this revival was more of a ‘fashion’ than the return of a ‘genuine’ olfactory consciousness, and comments that “a properly socialised modern nose vaguely enjoys pleasant scents and shuns foul ‘unhygienic’ ones, but goes no further than that” (1993, 36). However, writing in 2006 Drobnick assesses the arrival of oxygen bars, aromatic cookbooks, designer room sprays, customised perfumes, and odour-enhanced entertainments and theme parks, arguing that “it seems that smell is now the first and most popular sense people wish to *indulge*” (2006, 1 original emphasis). He believes that scents are now actively sought “to revivify over sanitised environments and provide richer, more complex, sensory experiences” (Drobnick 2006, 2).

Olfaction is a type of ‘somatic work’, combining both the physical (chemical) activity and mental interpretation of scents, which are often associated with memory (Rodaway 1994, 64). Smell, like all the senses, is “a function of person, of place, and of time” (Porteous 2006, 89). Rodaway links smells to specific objects, organisms, places or situations, creating a ‘smellscape’ (1994, 64). The notion of a ‘smellscape’ suggests that smells can be place specific and spatially ordered in the same way which haptic and visual experiences are (Porteous 2006, 91, see also Rodaway 1994, 64-71). However, it is important to note that the smellscape is likely to be fragmentary in both location and time, and influenced by the distance of the nose from the ground or the source of odour (Porteous 2006, 91). Smellsapes may be transient; for example, the combination of
smells on a waterfront may change as tides rise and fall or during different periods of human activity.

The olfactory system, like the haptic system, may take little heed of common, everyday scents. However, it is activated by novel odours, and in this manner may serve as a warning system, drawing attention to changes in the surrounding environment (Rodaway 1994, 64). For example, it can warn of contaminated food or water and the presence of fire or natural gas (Rivlin and Gravelle 1984, 148-149). People who are ‘smell blind’ are more susceptible to the dangers of fire or contaminated food, and tend to worry more about body odour or serving spoiled food to others; matters that those with functioning olfactory systems generally take for granted (Rivlin and Gravelle 1984, 149).

Smell often has negative connotations in an urban context. Odorous ‘miasmas’ in cities and on waterfronts (discussed alongside urban sensations in the next chapter) were a major source of anxiety up until the 1900s (see Corbin 1986, 2014). Today concerns remain about scents with negative connotations—like air pollution and second-hand smoke—and are also evidence of increasing importance placed on the physiological and psychological impact of smells (Drobnick 2006, 2). The increasing prevalence of Sick Building Syndrome illustrates a ‘negative’ interface between the olfactory sense and the built environment. Drobnick notes that while smell has widely been considered obsolete in the digital age, some are beginning to believe that smell may have the potential to mitigate the alienating effects of technology (2006, 1).

Porteous argues that olfactory preferences are learned and there is scant evidence that—aside from widespread adult aversion to faecal odours—universal standards for pleasant or unpleasant smells exist (2006, 90). For example, a hypothetical aristocrat newly arrived in late 1800s Perth may have found the odours of the shoreline abhorrent, while a fisherman, born and raised in Perth who daily plied the river for his living might associate riverine odours with pleasant memories and income. Porteous does note that there are some common Western preferences for the scents of flowers, fruit or vegetables (2006, 91). While Porteous seems to be suggesting that olfactory preferences are entirely culturally formed, some of his comments about widely abhorred and commonly appreciated scents suggest there may be both ‘naturally’ and ‘culturally’ formed olfactory preferences. This is an example of how the dichotomy of ‘nature and culture’ as a critical perspective is potentially useful for determining relations between universal and culturally determined values.
Smells are frequently and powerfully linked to memory and anticipation. “Enigmatically lacking a well-defined or extensive vocabulary, odours are unmatched in catalysing the evocation of distant memories and places” (Drobnick 2006, 1). Rodaway observes that “olfaction plays an important part in remembering in general and the association of current and past place experiences” (1994, 64). The provision or elimination of odours on city waterfronts is one way of influencing the associations made with these places. Cultural beliefs that scents like ‘ocean air’ or ‘tropical gardens’ are pleasant, wholesome and desirable can be used to the advantage of certain stakeholders in the design of waterfronts. On the other hand, eliminating odours with suspicious or unpleasant associations, like mangrove mud or drainage water, are often essential to the ‘success’ of waterside places.

**Conclusion**

Sensory studies have until recently been predominantly the domain of anthropologists, sociologists and human geographers. However, Howes observes that interest in sensory studies is “crossing over into other disciplines, including architecture and urban studies” (Howes 2005). It offers new perspectives from which to consider our built environment, particularly in historically, materially and culturally significant sites such as urban waterfronts. Classen argues for an approach to the study of the haptic that is ‘rough and ready’, that concedes and confronts the ‘tangled, bumpy and sticky nature’ of the subject (2005, 5). Likewise, the ephemeral nature of odours makes formulating a continuous narrative of olfactory history challenging. However, in moments when scents or bodily sensations come to the fore—like during a visit to the Perth City Baths around 1900—their influence on society and the built environment is undeniable. Overcoming the challenges inherent in researching and writing about these senses can yield new and interesting perspectives on our material culture and history. The next chapter examines the senses and sensory history in urban and waterside contexts and considers how they contribute to notions of place and identity.
Chapter Three

Urban Waterfronts

The sensory history of Australian urban waterfronts is the history of specific places with different identities; each waterfront is unique, yet most share some qualities and characteristics. This chapter commences with a limited discussion of issues of place and place identity, themes which have received much scholarly attention and are an important component of this research. It then considers waterside places over time, surveying common themes in Western waterfront development over the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with an emphasis on sensory qualities and conditions. The chapter then turns to international and Australian trends in waterside redevelopment and the gradual transformation of some Australian waterfronts into recreational precincts which are understood as different as types of ‘places’—Australian places, tourist destinations, recreational zones, historic sites—by different users. It examines how understandings of landscapes, waterscapes, tropical regions and tourist places are all linked to urban waterfronts in complex ways.

An Overview of Place and Place Identity

‘Place’, ‘space’, ‘place identity’ and ‘sense of place’ are largely qualitative concepts which are frequently invoked—sometimes problematically—in discussions of building community or identity. Taylor notes that over the past three decades “research into the built environment, including studies of urban planning, architecture and landscape theory, have been shaped by interest in ‘place’ and related terms such as ‘place making’, ‘sense of place’ and ‘placelessness’” (2014, 8). ‘Place’ supports a range of research initiatives in diverse disciplines and some key geographers, historians, architects and planners who have addressed place include Jane Jacobs in The Death and Life of Great American Cities (1962), Lewis Mumford’s The City in History: Its origins, its

Patterson and Williams believe that “seeing systematic coherence [within place-based research] requires a pluralistic world view that understands place, not as a single research tradition but as a domain of research informed by many disciplinary research traditions” (2005, 361). This thesis approaches ‘place’ from a cultural and geographical perspective, acknowledging how place related concepts can contribute to understandings of certain contexts by providing a loose yet commonly understood framework for discussion. However, the fluidity of place makes it potentially essentialising, though sensory history, by considering the time, location and culturally specific sensations of a ‘place’, may in part counter this tendency.

The notion of ‘space’ is frequently counterpoised with ‘place’ in scholarly sources (see Vanclay, Higgens and Blackshaw 2008, Relph 1976, Gieryn 2000). ‘Space’ can be understood as an area defined by quantitative forms of measurement and lacking definitive characteristics, while ‘place’ is widely conceived of as ‘space’ imbued with defining characteristics and social and historical meaning (Vanclay, Higgens and Blackshaw 2008, 3). ‘Space’ and ‘place’ can be considered on a spectrum and sites such as airport terminals or shopping malls may, for some, feel more like spaces than places. According to Hague, a planner, “place is a geographical space that is defined by meanings, sentiments and stories rather than by a set of co-ordinates” (2004, 5). Dovey writes that:

*The concept of ‘place’ itself is inherently fluid; while it is reified as a stable ground of everyday life, it is also formed from a confluence of flows - of water, geology, histories, events, memories, colonies, industries and designs. Urban development is necessarily a place-making activity in the sense that urban experience is transformed - new places are created and old ones disappear, for better or worse. The ungrounding comes from a realisation of the fluidities of place; places are not a stable ground that are simply subject to flows of ideas, people, information and money; the experience of place is produced by such flows (2005, 3).*

Places are invested with meaning and identity, in part, through sensory encounters which are linked to culture, history, memory and imagination. Hague believes that place
“implies some mix of memory, sensual experience (in particular visual, but possibly also aural and/or tactile) and interpretation” (2004, 4). Chapter two highlighted how haptic and olfactory experiences are not only encounters of a specific moment, but can invoke memories or anticipation linked to sites, events or experiences.

Terms like ‘place identity’, ‘sense of place’, and ‘genius loci’ are sometimes used interchangeably to describe feelings about places or “a sense of personalised recollection and engagement with a geographic location” (Morel-Ednbrown 2012, 211). The terms ‘sense of place’ and ‘genius loci’ are often associated with phenomenological thinking or scholars (for example the architectural writing of Christian Norbert Schulz or Juhani Pallasmaa). However, even scientific disciplines may call on the term ‘sense of place’, as the CSIRO (Australia’s national scientific agency) did in the 2001 “State of the Environment Report”, which defined sense of place as “an intensely personal response to the environment, social and natural, which the individual experiences in daily life, and at a broader level it can be the individual’s perception of the whole region, state or nation” (CSIRO 2001). The term ‘place identity’ is used in this thesis and is associated with geography and planning. It offers a more culturally and geographically grounded alternative for discussing how sensory experiences, history and cultural context contribute to understandings of places. ‘Place identity’ is a concept that can bridge the theory/practice divide and one that “is attracting increasing interest both from practising professional planners and politicians as well as in social science research” (Hague 2004, 3).

The term ‘place identity’ arose in the 1970s alongside growing interest in place related concepts. Place identity can be shaped or affected by the material features of a setting (buildings, landscapes, furniture), the activities undertaken there, and the cultural and/or historical meaning of an area. The interaction of people and these elements influences how place identity is formed and understood (Bernardo and Casakin 2012, iii). Drawing on literature from cultural studies and geography, Hague argues that our understandings of place identity are shaped by cultural conditions, including “what others tell us about the place, and filtered by our own socialization, as shaped by class, age, gender, ethnicity, nationality, professional education” (2004, 5). Place identity is thus firmly associated with culture according to much of the literature, while this thesis emphasises that the senses are an integral and integrating part of the connection. Hague argues that the:
process of developing even an individual identity, while seeming to be quintessentially subjective, is one that is fundamentally social; that is to say it develops through interaction between the individual and others in the society, both directly and indirectly. The idea that the meanings and identity imputed to places are relational rather than only subjective means that from an infinity of possible identities for any place, we can discern some shared, even dominant ones (2004, 6).

Place identity is influenced by the urban fabric and “colours, materials, smells and sounds become an inseparable part of any one spot in the city, and thus emotional components of the urban image” (Sepe 2013, xiii). Thus sensory experiences are a component of the place identity of natural landmarks, constructed landmarks and public spaces. Natural landmarks or features of the landscape, such as the Swan River in Perth, contribute to place identity by “providing an icon to which symbolic meaning can be ascribed” (Hague 2008, 3). Constructed landmarks, such as the Sydney Opera House, or the Swan Bell Tower, may similarly contribute to the identity of a place. In addition to natural features and built landmarks, public places where people gather, including parks, waterfronts and recreational areas can also garner significance through their social meaning (Vanclay, Higgins and Blackshaw 2008, 3).

Public spaces (and specifically recreational areas) are places where people are likely to undertake activities or social interactions that are multi-sensory, rather than primarily visual. When a riverscape, like the Swan River, is physically encountered it is often in the context of a recreational park or swimming area, places that are distinct from the wider riverscape. Because these sites are encountered more physically than landscapes or landmarks, they offer a multi-sensory contribution to place identity. Sites with both positive and negative personal significance (a favourite swimming hole, a gravestone), can contribute to the identity of a place more personally that wider landscapes or landmarks which offer primarily visual information. The built environment is linked to both the history of a place (as a site of activity) and the culture of a place (as it shapes activity), and when “activity is remembered, it is the built environment that provides the sense of authenticity of recollection” (Morel-Edniebrown 2012, 214). Water and the water’s edge are places where the confluence of built, natural, cultural and sensory factors can contribute significantly to place identity. Discussion now turns to more specific consideration of historic and present day sensory qualities of urban waterfronts, and recent trends in urban waterfront redevelopment.
The Senses in Cities and on Waterfronts

Sensory historians, particularly Classen, Corbin and Howes, have written about the sensory qualities of historic cities and waterfronts. Classen acknowledges the difficulties attendant in endeavouring to present an overview of the senses in a particular period of time across a range of places and cultures (Classen 2014, 2, see also Howes 2014, 1-2). However, it is possible to draw common ‘sensorial observations’ about the senses in cities and on harbours, seashores and riverfronts across a variety of periods. The discussion in this section commences with a brief overview of radical transformations in perceptions of the seaside that took place in Enlightenment Europe, as elaborated in Corbin’s seminal text The Lure of the Sea: Discovery of the Seaside in the Western World 1750-1840 (1988). It then turns to the changes that ‘modernity’ wrought on sensory experiences of cities in the late 1800s and early 1900s. As will be seen in this overview, and later in the site studies, many shifts in sensory understandings and expectations of waterside places have links to contemporary contexts, particularly where physical interactions with water occur. The overview is intended to provide context for the upcoming site studies and highlight some Australian circumstances as they relate to or differ from European contexts.

The Senses at the Seaside, in the Home and on the Harbour during the Enlightenment

In Europe, understandings of water drawn from biblical accounts were of enormous significance in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as oceans, mountains, and coastlines—and their irregular features and forms—were viewed as an aftermath of the Flood. They were thus something to be feared, as they provided evidence of God’s wrath. These topographical features stood in stark contrast to familiar pastoral landscapes composed of gentle forms and moderate climates; images of Eden did not include water (Corbin 1994, 2-6). Fear of the ocean was inspired by not only its perceived power and resistance to human control, but also by the creatures, both real and mythical, purported to lurk within (Corbin 1994, 13-14).
This perception began to change in the 1750s when ‘cure-takers’ started to visit the once-feared seaside to garner what were understood to be the health benefits of bathing in cold seawater (Corbin 1994, 57). This shift was instigated by prominent physicians in British towns such as Brighton and Scarborough who promoted the health benefits of swimming in sea-water (J. Smith 2005). Sea bathing, drinking salt water and the ‘therapeutic qualities of the ocean’ were believed to be beneficial for a wide range of ailments (Metusela 2009, 63). Prior to this time, river or sea bathing was considered a lower class and even immoral pastime (Corbin 1994, 59). The sensory aspects of these visits were part of the ‘cure’, and physicians and bathers alike believed that the sea offered three particular experiential and beneficial qualities: salinity, a cool or cold temperature, and turbulence, as pleasure was derived from the movement of the waves (Corbin 1994, 62-73).

Corbin argues that “before the sea-shore could enter the range of attractive places, the desire had to arise for visions of the sublime, and the therapeutic necessity had to make itself felt” (1994, 61). For Corbin, the fashion for the beach is based on a paradox: “the sea became a refuge and a source of hope because it inspired fear” (1994, 62). The experience was sublime, in that bathers were subjected to the violence of the sea, yet they were also safe, as the flat beaches, bathing attendants, and the presence of ‘expert’
bathers and physicians mediated much of the danger (Corbin 1994, 73). Swimming at the time was not merely playing about amongst the waves, but an active and even aggressive practice (Corbin 1994, 76).

![Image of painting](image)

3.2 Brighton Beach with Bathing Machines, painting by J.M.W. Turner, circa 1830. Turner’s image contrasts the order and light of the human occupied beach with the looming presence of the ocean and the sky (Tate Museum, www.tate.co.uk).

“The discovery of the virtues of sea water lead to the invention of the beach” (Corbin 1994, 70) as a desirable setting. Doctors in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century addressed the characteristics of a salubrious beach: it should be ‘neat and tidy, sandy but flat enough to traverse in a bathing machine, and free of mists and fogs and various other landscape and climatic conditions (Corbin 1994, 70-71). With the rise of picturesque values the ‘ideal’ beach became more ‘visual’, catering to “marine aesthetics” and “splendid seascapes” (Corbin 1994, 72). At this time the beach was also a place of escape from the insalubrious city and a site for the cultivation of curiosity; even aristocrats could dawdle at the water’s edge collecting novelties and engaging in childlike wonder (Corbin 1994, 72, for further on collecting see Elsner and Cardinal eds. 1994).

This shift in perception led to a boom in seaside resorts in Britain (e.g. Brighton and Lyme Regis), throughout Europe, and in European colonies. Metusela writes that “the
medicalised beach of the 1800s diversified to the ‘pleasure beach’ of the early 1900s” (2009, 66). Sea bathing evolved into the British tradition of seaside holidays, which are in turn linked to the modern phenomenon of mass tourism (Hudson 1996, 33). Through colonisation, British seaside “pleasures, practices and desires were exported to Australia, along with bathing costumes and bathing machines” (Metusela 2009, 60). Illiwarra and a myriad of coastal Australian resort towns (some of which later became cities) were largely modelled on the British seaside resort (Metusela and Waitt 2012, xvii). Bathing in rivers and lakes became a more widely accepted practice, and the site studies in this thesis examine how, by the 1900s in Australia, opportunities to bathe and swim in close proximity to cities was considered a right (for health) and a necessity (for recreation).

3.3 Bathers at Asnières by Georges Seurat, 1884. Bathing was not only a seaside activity, but one that could be indulged in rivers and lakes. While the foreground depicts swimmers in the Seine and people relaxing on the verdant banks, signs of industrialization—smokestacks and large buildings—are featured in the background (National Gallery, London).

Relatedly, the widespread domestication of water in the eighteenth century transformed household life through the invention of indoor plumbing (Taylor 2004, 106-107). As scientific advances revealed the properties of water and a wider understanding of germs, disease and cleanliness developed, water began to appear with increasing frequency in daily life and new attitudes towards water emerged. The widespread availability of domestic water supply on an industrial scale turned it from a desired convenience to an expected necessity (Taylor 2004, 108). The advent of hot and cold running water and
separate water closets and bathrooms were all directed at improving hygiene (van Leeuwen 1998, 8).

People’s haptic encounters with water expanded and increased as cleansing the body and the home became increasingly important. People also became aware of the health hazards posed by mouldering organic contaminants lurking in water. While the senses of smell and taste could often detect putrefying food, they were less able to detect impurities in water (Taylor 2004, 108). Goubert asserts that the ‘conquest’ of water was a double-edged victory, as its victors became subject to the demands of water systems and hygienic regimes when then became essential parts of both commercial and domestic life (1986, 24-25). The presence of water in daily life, and the bodily habits and rituals that evolved around it, have become norms in the developed world, though the significance of this is often forgotten.

While oceans-, river- and lake-fronts were increasingly patronized as sites of leisure from the late 1700s, harbours continued to be essential to trade and travel. During the Enlightenment in Europe a visit to the harbour was an opportunity to see and be seen, and harbours were “a stage on which spectators could observe particularly manifest
Emerging Sensory Regimes in the Modern City

British settlement in Australia took place from the late eighteenth century onwards, bringing British traditions and perceptions with it. Globally and in Australia, settlements were frequently founded along rivers, harbours or estuaries which were sheltered, accessible and provided a secure location from which colonials could expand their domain and explore (Hudson 1996, 1-2). To varying degrees, settlements often subsumed—via reclamation—proximate shorelines, shallows, wetlands, and in some cases expanses of deeper water, whilst at the same time straightening and narrowing indigenous watercourses (Hudson 1996, 2).

3.5  A boat in the rushes along the shallow, marshy Perth foreshore in the 1890s. This image depicts a shoreline which appears almost inaccessible and overgrown. The area was shortly after reclaimed to create flat, grassy recreation grounds (Battye Library 55632P).
Material for reclamation was often created by dredging, levelling and excavating, altering the topography of the surrounding area (Hudson 1996, 116). Reclamation processes transformed many shorelines, including those in Perth and Cairns, into flat expanses of land running to a seawall which prevented damage from flooding and erosion and also limited access to the water itself.

During the late 1800s and early 1900s, the British Empire remained an expansive and influential political, commercial and sensorial empire. The diversity of goods and ethnic groups on the waterfront “allowed observers to travel without leaving home, brought exoticism to their doorstep, and emphasised the civilising mission of the harbour” (Corbin 1994, 191). As noted previously, products of this Empire, such as tea and spices, and the practices of its citizens were exported to colonies, including Australia (Classen 2014, 10-11). Flint writes that “to draw attention to the engagement of the senses in creating, wearing or eating something is a way of drawing connections between people; to show how the senses may participate in broad and invisible networks” (2014, 26). The people and products of Empire were offloaded on waterfronts, which were constructed with—and to cater for—the rapidly evolving transport and industrial technologies of the age.

The 1800s and early 1900s were generally a malodorous time and in Europe and elsewhere “the streets and waterways which traversed cities, in turn, often stank of refuse and waste” (Classen 2014, 5). Inadequate sewers, insufficiently buried corpses, smokes and fumes from industrial processes (such as tanning leather), rotting food, animal waste
and a myriad of other smells were present in cities (Flint 2014, 30). Corbin argues that in the urban context of the nineteenth century “the sense of smell merits more serious consideration insofar as, being supposedly the most animalistic of senses, it could detect and evade the threats posed by this organic matter, this human swamp associated with sin, sickness and mortality” (2014, 50-51). For example, the Perth foreshore, used since settlement as a dumping ground for the city, was by the late nineteenth century a foul and odorous place.

Odours were often associated with the threat of disease-causing miasmas, a major source of anxiety and preoccupation. Towards the end of the nineteenth century campaigns for sanitation and the introduction of sewerage and garbage collection began to address the issue (Classen 2014, 5, Corbin 2014, 56). Hygienic campaigns were often aimed at the dwellings of the poor, consistent with beliefs that the cleanliness of a city was determined by the summary character of its dwellings, and underscored by bourgeois desires to differentiate themselves from the stench of the masses (Corbin 2014, 56). The Pasteurian revolution (mid-late 1800s) gradually assured the “triumph of contagionism over miasmism, rendering the previous olfactory vigilance unnecessary” (Corbin 2014, 54). In cities like Perth reclamation was often seen as the solution to a contaminated shoreline. Covering the offensive mud and enlarging the extent of useful land above water level resulted in a shoreline deep enough to prevent exposure during periods of low water (Hudson 1996, 60).

3.7 Trams, carriages, horses, and people contributed to the sensescape of King Street, Sydney around 1900. Mechanical sounds and smells added new dimensions to the urban sensescape around the turn of the twentieth century (Tyrrell Photographic Collection, Powerhouse Museum).
Just as understandings of odours and disease were evolving, visual perspectives on cities shifted in the late 1800 and early 1900s. Urban design in the latter half of the nineteenth century was concerned with opening up vistas, controlling the urban environment and eliminating potentially disease-causing miasmas. The visual spectacle and new technologies on show at Britain’s Great Exhibition of 1851 and the Haussmanisation of Paris were both manifestations of and influences on such aims (Classen 2014, 8). Paxton’s Crystal Palace, and his unbuilt proposal shortly after for the ‘Great Victorian Way’ (a 10 mile enclosed loop around London) “capitalised on new modes of perception and discernment and new forms of urban experiences” (Taylor 2004, 96). The ‘Great Victorian Way’, a proposed transit corridor encircling London, was intended to mediate climatic discomforts and the smoke, dirt and traffic in the city; socially, it would have resulted in the division and segregation of public space (Nead 2000, 27-28). These unique built and proposed structures served to make urban residents and visitors “aware, not only of the qualities of other, urban or seemingly more ‘natural’ surroundings, but of the potential for human beings to alter or improve both” (Taylor 2004, 96).

A “predilection for sweeping, even Icarian views” (Corbin 2014, 54) became increasingly common during the nineteenth century. In London, the view from St. Paul’s Cathedral was popular with tourists and locals (Classen 2014, 7). In Paris, hot air balloons, the Eiffel Tower and Sacre Coeur facilitated novel aerial perspectives on the city, while the Haussmannian balconies appearing during the period of Haussman’s rebuilding provided less dramatic yet still birds-eye views of the city (Corbin 2014, 54).
Shock of the New (1980) Hughes underscores the importance of the Eiffel Tower in transforming for the masses ways of perceiving and thinking about a city (1980, 14). Aerial perspectives on the city became increasingly common as building height increased, expanding “the power of vision over the city while decreasing the potency of smells and noise” (Classen 2014, 7). The view of Perth from Mount Eliza was often lauded as one of the city’s greatest assets and its ‘preservation’ became a point of controversy when alterations to the foreshore were considered at various points in time.

Modernist architecture and planning contributed to sanitising and separating the city. Le Corbusier called for houses to become ‘machines for living in’ and his utopian city plans, though seldom realised, were influential as they sought to divide cities in discrete areas and eliminate competing spaces along with social and sensory diversity (Edensor 2014, 33). From the 1930s the looming presence of skyscrapers began to dominate urban skylines (Howes 2014, 7). Howes argues that the view from and the view of skyscrapers is their most striking feature and one with highlights the power of sight to encompass and survey (2014, 7). Focusing the gaze upwards on what were regarded as emblems of efficiency, ingenuity and corporate might diverted attention from the immediate and often unappealing streetscape (Howes 2014, 6–7). Waterfronts garnered increasing importance as places from which to view the city skyline. For example, in Brisbane from the 1990s the incongruous juxtaposition of viewing (and photographing) the city skyline from the artificial waters of Street’s Beach became a tourist draw (MacArthur 1999, 177).

The spread of gas street lighting in the nineteenth century, followed by electric lighting around the turn of the twentieth, “blurred the age-old sensory divide between the visuality of daytime and the tactility of night-time” (Classen 2014, 8). Waterside activities were freed from their daylight confines, exemplified by the ‘electric beaches’ of Coney Island and comparable amusements elsewhere. In Perth around 1900 the installation of electric lighting allowed for night-time swimming at the City Baths and in Cairns turning off the electric lights at the baths allowed for a ‘moonlight’ swimming carnival to take place in 1910, an event which ‘returned’ the emphasis to haptic and olfactory (and potentially salacious) experiences in the dark.

In cities and on waterfronts modernisation, and the gradual elimination of ‘old’ technologies (e.g. horses and carriages) began, in some ways, to homogenise perception (Classen 2014, 17). Modern nations required railways, factories, armies, schools, prisons, and museums, which were coordinated via standardised time zones and measures of distance (Schivelbusch 1986, 43–47). Mass media—including print, radio and film—
spread images, sounds, and the ‘values of modernity’, along with common languages and ways of framing experiences (Classen 2014, 17). Social distinctions became less disparate as working class conditions improved and women were accepted into previously male dominated spheres and activities—like competitive swimming—creating more opportunities for shared perceptions (Classen 2014, 17). However, shared perceptions could also be diverse as “age-old social distinctions were dissolving, in which the faces seen and the voices heard took on an unprecedented diversity in terms of ethnicity, gender and class” (Howes 2014, 1). Commentators on cities writing in journals, newspapers, reports, travelogues or novels in the nineteenth and early twentieth century “endlessly commented on the visual plenitude, the mingling of odours pleasant and foul—more often than not foul—and the constant clanging, shouting, rattling, barrel-organ-churning sounds of the streets” (Flint 2014, 28).

Noise, including the shouts of vendors, rattle of carriages and the sound of singing and whistling were a significant part of the city soundscape (Classen 2014, 6). Bells played a particularly important role, announcing celebrations, calling people to gather, raising the alarm and performing a myriad of other roles in the soundscape (Corbin 1999, x-xii). Over time the more ‘human’ sounds of footsteps and voices were gradually drowned out as the sounds of machines—engines, horns and tires—came to dominate the urban soundscape (Corbin 2014, 53). Because of the sonorous overlay of the city “any abrupt silence took on an unsettling significance, becoming a sign of malfunction in the urban machine” (Corbin 2014, 53).

Waterfronts and port facilities were places of diverse and increasingly ‘modern’ sensory encounters. The heyday of many Western industrial ports was from the late nineteenth to early twentieth century, when the coordination of railroads and shipping created a highly functional transport system (Rafferty and Holst 2004, 10). The effects of the increased ‘speed’ of technologies relating to industry and transport were significant. New railways, port facilities and warehouses further separated cities from their waterfronts (Rafferty and Holst 2004, 8-9). Ports often subsumed much of the viable waterfront adjacent to a city. For example, Sydney Cove was seen as an undesirable area for much of the city’s history, with Circular Quay operating as a work zone, and the Rocks as a poor, run-down working neighbourhood until nearly the 1960s (Marshall 2001, 18).
On some waterfronts technological and industrial development “brought a mechanical dimension to life at the same time as they created new sensory worlds” (Classen 2014, 12). Trains and ships brought a wider range of products into cities, and at the same time allowed farming activities (and the associated sounds, smells and materials) to move outside the city (Schivelbusch 1986, 41-47, Classen 2014, 13). Thus, by the early twentieth century the products of factories, the goods and foodstuffs delivered to industrial ports and cities by ships and trains, and even the water piped into houses were all products of a mechanised and sensorially transformed world (Classen 2014, 15). Image 3.9 shows the Cairns Wharf in 1889, a bustling work zone where the smells of the tidal mudflats intermingled with the sounds and smells of mechanical technology, and the goods and passengers arriving and departing. Smells associated with the industrial and working life of cities were often considered unpleasant. Containing and eliminating the smells, smoke and pollution of the city, a goal which arose from the scientific reasoning and moral imperatives of the nineteenth century, gained momentum in the twentieth (Edensor 2014, 33).

The proliferation of automobiles in cities further shifted a wide range of sensory perceptions (Howes 2014, 2). Howes argues that, for some, the smell of automobiles (for
example petrol and oil) represented freedom and progress, and the vehicles themselves appealed to the sense of touch. Cars also isolated people from their surrounds and the social aspects of public transport, making travel a strongly visual experience (Howes 2014, 2-3). Modernist artists attended to the way automobiles framed the surrounding world as a series of pictures, yet at the same time blurred the images (Howes 2014, 2, see for example the work Vija Celmins, Freeway 1966). Importantly, automobiles transformed the water’s edge in cities like Perth and Cairns, where the modest size of industrial zones allowed for the creation of Riverside Drive in Perth and the Esplanade in Cairns, accommodating the desires of motorists to view the water from a moving vehicle, and creating a partial barrier between the shoreline and the city.

Scholars have drawn different conclusions about the impacts of twentieth century developments on haptic experiences. Howes notes that both urban and natural environments “tattoo our skin with tactile impressions” which we use “to make sense of ourselves and the world” (2005, 28). He argues that most modern urban environments have been increasingly designed to avoid obstructing the body or causing minor brushes with buildings, infrastructure or foliage (Howes 2005, 28). Sennett refers to this as “cities filled with neutral spaces, cities which have succumbed to the dominant value of circulation” (1994, 256), and argues that unimpeded movement diminishes the sensory stimulation that a place, and the people in it, provide (1994, 256). For Howes, the design of the city means that people are often out of touch with the material world around them, and instead have “alternative, mechanized, ways of knowing—signs, sculptures or monuments—which are enormously important to their understanding of the environment, and which often substitute for direct sensory perception” (2005, 30).
While this may be true in some instances, many new waterfronts—places like the Cairns Esplanade lagoon or the Darwin Waterfront Precinct—have also been designed to provide some new and decidedly tactile ways of encountering urban waterside places.

Edensor argues that the complexity and perceived sensory disorder of the twentieth century sencecape fostered a range of efforts to regulate environments and impose order on the social and sensory experiences of the city. This, in turn, “had the unanticipated effect of instigating the active persistence of unfamiliar kinetic, aromatic, sonic, and visual sensations” (Edensor 2014, 32 original emphasis). For example, the advent of mechanical amusements, such as merry-go-rounds and water chutes, “celebrated and fostered thrill seekers as sensuous beings who experienced leisure not just through their eyes, but with and through their entire bodies” (Sally 2006, 294). Edensor argues that:

> While the dominant urge has been to seek refuge in reconstituted regimes of order in the face of continual change, the desire to transcend regulated minds, bodies, and environments has constantly bubbled just below the disciplined surface of twentieth century everyday life and found various outlets (2014, 33).

Today it is commonly assumed that waterfronts have always been sites and sources of pleasure, but, as the previous history demonstrates, this is not so. The historic case studies will examine the problematic sensory encounters which occurred when efforts to provide recreational facilities and experiences clashed with the ambitions or consequences of modernity. Discussion now turns to late twentieth century waterfront redevelopments, which transformed many waterfronts into sites of leisure, spectacle and consumption that are familiar—and considered desirable—today.

**Urban Waterfront Redevelopment from the Late Twentieth Century**

From the 1960s onwards, following international trends, ports began to move out of cities and the abandoned brown-fields were redeveloped into recreational urban waterfront; places of culture, consumption, residence and recreation (Sairinen and Kumpulainen 2006, 212, Rafferty and Holst 2004). Many Australian cities have redeveloped sections of their urban foreshores over the past several decades (for example the Melbourne Docklands, Sydney’s Darling Harbour and Perth’s Elizabeth Quay in 2016). Others are in
the process of doing so at the time of writing (e.g. Barangaroo in Sydney), or will redevelop parts of their waterfront in the future.

A common theme in recent waterfront redevelopment globally is “the public’s desire to be near a body of water—a rather sharp contrast to the time when many waterfront areas were lined with heavy duty industry, docks and fenced-off warehouses, or marred by abandonment and dereliction” (Breen and Rigby 1996, 18-19). Petrow argues that bodies of water contribute to “the city’s image and its power to create a sense of identity with and attachment to place (Petrow 2011, 6). During redevelopment brown-fields are mostly cleansed of pollution, while, at the same time, the ‘image’ of the city, is revitalised and “nature is made to reappear in a sanitised and controlled form” (Stevens 2009, 4).

Gissen refers to some of the “peripheral and often denigrated forms of nature” found in urban environments as “subnature” (2009, 21). He defines “subnature” as features of the environment (natural or as a consequence of human activity) “deemed primitive (mud and dankness), filthy (smoke, dust, exhaust), fearsome (gas or debris), or uncontrollable (weeds, insects and pigeons)” (Gissen 2009, 22). These types of places, atmospheres or objects are generally understood as undesirable and can be contrasted with more appealing forms of nature like sun, clouds, trees or wind (Gissen 2009, 22). Indeed, the case studies will repeatedly demonstrate places where the citizens and governing bodies have actively sought to replace subnatures (muddy baths, malodorous shorelines) with more desirable alternatives. Redevelopments transform sites into places for a whole new range of ‘experiences’, enhancing both the visual appeal and physical ‘cleanliness’ of the surrounding area. Waterside leisure activities, passenger transport, personal watercrafts, and even some forms of aquatic recreation have returned to the redeveloped waterfront, though in forms, such as interactive fountains or artificial lagoons, that seldom allow encounters with natural bodies of water. Not only the buildings, but the landscapes of redeveloped waterfronts are contrived to be sites of spectacle while providing for certain types of visual and bodily experiences (Stevens 2009, 3).

Consequently, it is not surprising that a variety of professional, scholarly and popular books on waterfront redevelopment have appeared over the past several decades. Some key international and Australian texts include The New Waterfront (Breen and Rigby, 1996), Waterfronts: a New Urban Frontier for Cities on Water (Brutomesso ed. 1993), Fluid City: Transforming Melbourne’s Urban Waterfront (Dovey 2005), Revitalising the Waterfront: international dimensions of dockland redevelopment (Hoyle, Pinder and Husain eds. 1988), City, Capital and Water (Malone ed. 1996), Waterfronts in Post-
industrial Cities (Marshall 2001), and Remaking the Urban Waterfront (Urban Land Institute 2004).

Desfor and Laidley argue that some of the more self-congratulatory texts (Marshall, Bruttomesso) by project-insiders can be prescriptive in terms of material form and value. By comparison scholarly work—such as Hoyle and co-authors, Malone, and the work of Cusack, Dovey, Oakley, Stevens and Taylor engaged in this research—is often “more analytic, and more reflective... examining waterfront change within the context of broader social systems, historical events, scientific processes, and nature–society relations” (Desfor and Laidley 2011, 4). Desfor and Laidley also note that leading texts of both types are up to two decades old, and thus “no longer adequately engage with today’s realities or tomorrow’s expectations” (2011, 4). These observations indicate that new academic perspectives on waterfronts are both necessary and timely.

3.11 A view of the Brisbane skyline from the artificial Streets Beach. Contrasting the visually ‘natural’ conditions of a beach with the urbanity of the city skyline provides intriguing vistas and photo opportunities, but few of the sounds, smells or tactile sensations of a real beach (Photo by Michela Breveglieri, Wikimedia Commons).

Globally, waterfront redevelopments have followed similar patterns relating to economic forces, technological developments and environmental concerns. However, each waterfront is shaped by its own unique history, scale and topography as well as local expectations and aspirations (Rafferty and Holst 2004, 7). Well known waterfront redevelopments include Canary Wharf (London), Battery Park City (New York), Granville Island (Vancouver), and Darling Harbour (Sydney). The 1997 opening of ‘starchitect’ Frank Gehry’s Guggenheim Museum on Bilbao’s waterfront, and the ensuing urban revival of the river Nervion’s industrial belt, precipitated increased demand for
iconic waterside buildings, a trend and result now popularly referred to as 'the Bilbao effect' (see for example The Economist, 21 December 2013 “The Bilbao Effect”). Buildings like the Guggenheim Bilbao or Santiago Calatrava’s Milwaukee Art Museum on the shores of Lake Michigan lure tourists with the promise of unique structures and planners, alert to this appeal, “consciously associated visual spectacle with income streams” (Schwarzer 2005, 25). New projects often aspire—sometimes unsuccessfully—to achieve similar economic, cultural or touristic outcomes.

3.12 The Guggenheim museum on the Bilbao waterfront in 2011. The building is arguably more famous than the contents of the museum itself, and the iconic structure has been credited for reviving the city’s urban foreshore (Image from Wikimedia Commons).

Seddon argues that Australian cities are unique as, in many instances, major industrial and port activities have taken place outside of the capital cities. He argues that cities such as Newcastle (outside Sydney), Geelong (near Melbourne) and Fremantle and Kwinana (south of Perth) have allowed city centres to remain administrative and commercial zones (Seddon and Ravine 1986, 56).

Oakley identifies urban waterfront regeneration as one of the greatest changes in the form of Australian cities, particularly in the decades immediately preceding and following the new millennium (2011, 221). Australian redevelopments are often part of government strategies to promote capitol cities, increase population density, and convert degenerated waterside precincts into zones of spectacle and consumption (Oakley 2011, 222). In the 1960s Sydney undertook a number of large-scale waterfront redevelopments including The Rocks and Woolloomooloo Bay, and in the 1980s Darling Harbour was transformed in the ‘Festival Market’ model (Marshall 2001, 30). In Fluid City: Transforming Melbourne’s Urban Waterfront Dovey explore the interconnected desires for visual appeal, identity, profit and power at play in the transformation of Melbourne’s waterfront between 1983 and 2003. Fluid City at times engages with multi-sensory understandings of the Melbourne waterfront, for example in chapter four, where Dovey
and Stevens describe a walk through Southbank, examining not only its visual qualities, but its aural and multi-sensory characteristics (2005, 67-73). However, overall, the sensory qualities of the water’s edge in Australia have received limited scholarly attention and it is this gap that this thesis aims, in part, to address.

The defining feature of a waterfront is the ‘edge’ condition, a zone where sensations are concentrated, and visitors may experience sensations associated with both terrestrial and aquatic environments. As places of leisure between the water and the city, urban waterfront precincts are liminal zones, and Dovey writes that:

_The waterfront is a boundary, and edge condition... that mediates a series of dialectical oppositions - order/chaos; being/becoming; place/space; culture/nature; closed/open; striated/smooth; solid/void. It is the mediation of these oppositions, which lends the waterfront a good deal of its experiential potency... and that constructs urban character and identity (2005, 24)._  

Dovey highlights some important ways of perceiving waterfronts, although it may be more useful to consider waterfronts not in terms of dialectical oppositions, but as complex zones that provide diverse yet interconnected sensations, all of which contribute to a waterfront’s identity.

The ‘betweenness’ of the waterfront derives from both its unique physical nature and the new behaviours that people adopt when they engage with it. For Cusack, the water’s edge is potentially a liminal site where individuals have the opportunity to shed one mode of behaviour, possibly even their ‘identity’ (however contestable) and adopt others (Cusack 2012, 3). Researchers need to move beyond the visual appeal of these waterfronts and begin to examine visitors “richly embodied perceptions” at the water’s edge, along with “the diversity of user behaviour, and how these are all shaped by material changes in the environment” (Stevens 2009, 4).

The supposed ‘freedom’ of waterfronts allows visitors to pursue a wide variety of activities, including prohibited activities—like skateboarding or swimming outside designated areas—which may have risks or repercussions (Franck and Stevens 2007, 2). While physical barriers (such as railings or embankment walls) exert conspicuous controls over the use of space, people also conform their behaviour to what they believe is acceptable, appropriate or attainable (Franck and Stevens 2007, 11). Waterfronts are in fact highly controlled areas and efforts to eliminate ‘risks’ occur through both design and regulation. The case studies demonstrate how recent urban waterfront redevelopments
have eliminated most opportunities to encounter natural water features like rivers and bays (and the attendant risks these environments entail), providing instead safe, comfortable, regulated spaces, like the Cairns Esplanade Lagoon, which are playful and even exciting, yet ultimately benign.

Redeveloping an urban waterfront may—often controversially—eliminate historic, industrial, architectural cultural and environmental features of a place. Beginning in the 1960s and 70s historic preservation movements drew attention to the aesthetic value of waterfronts and the historic structures located there, though curating what remains and how it is refurbished or reinterpreted is a complex and problematic process. Fitch argues that places, buildings or objects are both selected for preservation (and thus something must be excluded) and interpreted (or re-interpreted), and are often also ‘pretified’ (1982, 80).

In some instances, aspects of a site's heritage are more easily 'represented' than preserved, particularly during a sweeping redevelopment of a large space. Breen and Rigby argued that one of the roles of landscape architects in the design of new waterfronts is to provide commemorative and educational features, such as plaques, signs, public art and furniture, which inform the public about local natural, cultural and industrial heritage (1991, 128). Seeing and reading informative plaques, artworks, monuments or texts are ways of understanding historic aspects of redeveloped waterfronts, but the sounds, smells and haptic sensations present generally have limited connection to the site’s past.

Stevens argues that as landscapes dedicated to commerce and leisure waterfronts “often reuse natural elements and sensations (images, sounds and textures)” though they “often have no direct or obvious relation to natural water bodies, except views of them” (2009, 20). Waterfronts like Cairns, which appear ‘natural’ in many ways, have ecologies that “are often radically unnatural and separated from their context. Their disregard for natural hydrological systems and their efforts to overcome natural variations of cold, wet and darkness may in fact lead to substantial negative impacts on the ecology of waterways” (Stevens 2009, 20). These observations raise a number of questions about the benefits and drawbacks of visually oriented waterfront redevelopments—for people as well as other species and ecological systems—which are considered further in the case studies.

Rivers, oceans, beaches and harbours themselves play important roles in historic and contemporary understandings of Australian places. However, tourists and locals may
also expect waterfronts to relate to certain idealized ‘Australian’ places which are linked to the country’s national identity, settler heritage, or widely understood yet paradoxically ill-defined landscapes such as the Australian ‘bush’ and the more generic ‘tropics’. The following discussion of settler heritage, riverscapes, the ‘bush’ and the ‘tropics’ draws on the work of Cusack and Pocock to develop a more detailed discussion of places and identity.

Places and place identity can be linked to the physical environment which is, in turn, often tied to (or representative of) individual, communal and national identity. Visitors may expect a waterfront or its features to look or feel ‘Australian’ via its landscapes, waterscapes or features. These expectations have been shaped by heritage, myths, beliefs—emanating from both popular and scholarly circles—relating to the appearance and experience of various settings.

Tourist Places

A significant difference between waterfronts around 1900 and contemporary redevelopments is tourism. Today many Australian urban waterfronts are tourist places, designed to show off a city and its setting, and provide a range sights, sounds, smells, tastes and tactile encounters via recreation and consumption. Stevens argues that because people visit waterfronts in their leisure time (when they have a range of options about where to go), waterfronts need to meet users’ desires, expectations and fantasies about relaxation and pleasure (Stevens 2009, 3). He notes that “these spaces thus tell us a lot about what qualities people want from the urban public realm more generally: comfort, control, rich sensory stimulus, flexibility, novelty and escapism” (2009, 19).

Tourism is a leisure activity and evidence of the way that modern societies separate the spheres of work and leisure. It involves the consumption of non-essential goods and services, which, it is widely believed, will generate novel, pleasurable experiences outside the realm of the everyday (Urry and Larsen 2011, 1). There are limited opportunities to live on a waterfront in Australia, meaning that even local urban or suburban dwellers are likely to approach a waterfront as tourists. Morel-Ednibrown argues that “we are all visitors in our own cities” (2012, 214). People can be tourists for brief periods of time (locally) or for longer durations at greater distances; a key feature of tourism is that it involves a journey to a specific place for a designated period of time. Places visited are
3.13 The Milwaukee Art Museum by Santiago Calatrava on the shores of Lake Michigan. Like the Guggenheim Bilbao, Calatrava’s museum is a tourist draw. The image shows how large rocks have created an artificial waterline which is lined by a flat concrete walkway and railings, a mundane formulation which makes the building the centre-piece of the waterfront (Image from Wikimedia commons)

The phenomenon of ‘architourism’—tourists visiting iconic modern buildings such as the Guggenheim Bilbao for their architectural value—also applies to urban waterfronts precincts, like Elizabeth Quay, which have been designed to be sites of novelty, intrigue and visual appeal. Schwarzer observes that architourism’s predecessors, ecotourism (which arose in the 1980s) and cultural tourism, seek to provide more in-depth understandings of ecosystems or cultures (2005, 27). While the ‘depth’ of these encounters is unavoidably limited (for example by the desires of local residents for privacy), they do provide “a more thoughtful sort of visit” (Schwarzer 2005, 27). He wonders: “can mass tourism, drawn by the icon [a famous contemporary building, urban space or waterfront], subsequently be channelled into a larger engagement with the built environment and historical culture?” (Schwarzer 2005, 27). Providing more place
specific multi-sensory experiences of the built environment in waterside places may be one way of facilitating more in depth experiences of a place.

Tourists and locals in waterside places may adopt new identities and behaviours (Cusack 2012, 3). They may engage in activities which are playful or risky, and stimulate a range of senses. The multi-sensory aspects of such visits and their contrast to more familiar sensory environments are a crucial part of the experience. As almost everyone visiting a waterfront is a ‘tourist’, a certain artificiality at the water’s edge may be expected, and experiences there are moderated by that knowledge. Likewise, people may actively engage in the role of ‘tourist’, which also shapes sensory experiences.

Vision is central to the experiences of tourists, who examine their surroundings with a culturally constructed ‘gaze’. Cultural conditioning, personal experiences and memories, and exposure to texts and images of or about a place are some of the ‘lenses’ which empower tourists and visitors to view places, forms and materials as attractive, admirable or interesting (Urry and Larsen 2011, 2). These cultural lenses have significant consequences for the built environment (Urry and Larsen 2011, 2). For example, chapters six and seven consider how in Cairns the increasing importance of tourism shaped (and was shaped by) expectations for ‘tropical’ scenes and experiences. It can be argued that the 2003 redevelopment of the Cairns Esplanade Lagoon was in part a result of these ways of seeing.

Importantly, the gaze in the context of modern tourism is tied to particular technologies including digital and film cameras, video recording devices and televisions (Urry and Larsen 2011, 2, see also Pocock 2008, 82-82). Film and photography are also associated with imagined touch, the memory and anticipation of touch, themes examined further in the site studies.

Twenty-first century Australian waterfronts are understood as different as types of ‘places’—Australian places, tourist destinations, recreational zones, historic sites, etc.—by different users. The second part of this chapter identifies and discusses different types of ‘Australian’ places that may be associated with waterfronts or expected by visitors.
Many urban waterfronts attend to national identity and an area’s settler heritage thorough the design or preservation of landscapes and built forms, or the provision of historic imagery and educational signage. However, Pocock has pointed that as tourism grows, ideas and expectations of places are spread and reshaped. For example, the Great Barrier Reef has become an increasingly idealized tropical place, and less clearly demonstrative of its Australian location (Pocock 2003, 218). This observation prompted consideration of how urban foreshore may or may not be reflective of local identity or linked to ideas of ‘the bush’, settler heritage, or the tropics. The history of how these sites were transformed and why tells us something of how they are valued and understood today.

The early perceptions and understandings of Australian landscapes and waterscapes formed by European settlers were strongly influenced by the importation of European expectations to an undeniably different physical environment (Seddon 1997, 64). It was frequently assumed that systems, features, flora and fauna that bore a visual or functional resemblance to a European counterpart would operate in a similar manner, a belief which broadly affected physical approaches to and expectations of the landscape (Heathcote 1976, 29). Early landscape paintings sometimes aestheticized visual aspects of the ‘bush’, neglecting a fuller range of both positive and negative sensory experiences of places which were filled with unfamiliar sounds, smells, and sights. For example, Garling's watercolour study of the view from Mount Eliza, painted during the 1827 exploration of the area, “depicted the landscape with an overlay of European trees – the familiar in the unfamiliar world” (Morel-Edniebrown 2008, ch. 4, fig. 9).

3.14 Fredrick Garling, View from Mt Eliza, 1827. Some of the vegetation and landforms, such as the large tree on the left and the almost pastoral landscapes in the background, can be linked to common European species and landforms (Holmes à Court Collection, Perth).
Many European settlers believed that human effort could transform the alien landscape into a more acquiescent and familiar place (Taylor 2007, 144). This provided a justification for clearing forests, planting gardens, building and even transforming rivers by altering their depth and edges (2007, 144). Settlers chose to introduce European plants and landscape traditions and remove native vegetation to create for themselves a more familiar environment (Pocock 2005, 337). Such efforts enhanced the visual appeal of the land to colonial eyes, shaping a landscape of unfamiliar sensations into one that, in appearance at least, was more familiar. Bonyhady writes that:

Colonists also came to feel a deep affection for particular places that satisfied their taste for the picturesque and the sublime. Rural settlers identified with fern gullies, waterfalls or mountains in their local area, but the places which excited most colonists were all within easy access of the cities (2000, 4).

Kings Park was one such picturesque destination. Indigenous rights to and understandings of these landscapes were largely, though not entirely, neglected by early settlers. Increasingly, efforts are been made to include indigenous narratives of places and experiences in contemporary redevelopments.

Riverscapes were particularly significant to the success of settlements, and Taylor argues that “rivers provide for forms of self-awareness and identity insofar as people acquire a sense of themselves (however complex or ambiguous) in relation to novel (culturally significant or ecologically dynamic) terrain” (2007, 144). Facing rivers that functioned in sometimes unfamiliar ways, settlers concluded that “Australia’s rivers, whether they looked or behaved English or not, could nonetheless be regarded as infinitely transformable through human energy just as nature's forces worked to alter river banks or scour river beds” (Taylor 2003, 31). Shaping and becoming familiar with the multisensory nature of riverscapes was an important component of forming place, individual and communal identity. Adding ‘the national’ to the picture, Cusack writes that:

The growth of nationalism from the nineteenth century created a demand for the creation and representation of national landscapes in which rivers provided significant points of reference. Many national and regional capitals are built around and closely identified with a particular river, which may come to signify the nation (e.g., the Thames, the Seine, the Vltava or the Bagmati). Rivers have long signified life and regeneration, and have been appropriated as symbols of national vitality. They have long represented the passage of time, and provide an excellent metaphor for the uninterrupted ‘flow’ or ‘course’ of national history. The nation, ‘Janus-faced’,
forges a modern aspect for itself; yet simultaneously looks back to a putative historical identity or to a golden age to justify the collectivity, and pretends to the merging of past, present and future in a single stream of ‘history’. Stories and legends accreted around rivers have been adapted for national histories and myths of origin, while ill-fitting historical episodes are occluded from national memory (2007, 101).

Urban waterfronts too can be a ‘Janus-faced’ representation of a nation’s history and identity. Through the creation of certain images and experiences, and the elimination of others, waterfronts can (and often do) present an idealized history of a place. The role of rivers in forming and understanding not only place identity but national identity is complex and potentially contradictory, even as nations fabricate histories of unity and continuity (Cusack 2007, 102).

National identity must be constructed and then maintained and regularly reaffirmed. Cusack writes, “the identification and reification of a national river provides assurances of continuity and a vivid image for the national imagination, but it does not do so naturally and much ideological work is performed by and through the riverscape” (2007, 102). Harbours, like Sydney Harbour, and ocean-fronts, such as the Coral Sea in Cairns, may be similarly linked to national identity.

National and place identity on the waterfront—be it river, ocean or harbour—is fabricated and then perpetuated and promoted through media (tourist brochures, internet sites) which link the waterfront to a body of water with all of its historical and cultural accretions. The Swan River, Bondi Beach, Sydney Harbour, the beaches and islands of the Great Barrier Reef, the Yarra River, and the Brisbane River are just some of the water bodies which have become symbols of places, communities and even the nation.

National Identity and The Bush

The contribution of riverine environments and waterfronts to Australian national identity cannot help but encompass that ‘other’ icon of settler society on the Australian continent: the bush. The ideo-topographical features are connected and not just because one sits opposite or can be logically counterpoised to the other, but through histories and myths which are disseminated through both popular and academic culture and even
through the design. For example, in Perth the restoration of the Mount Eliza Scarp is also an effort to re-frame how the Swan River is ‘seen’. This is, in turn, part of wider efforts to shape topographical features and sensory experiences to bolster the prestige and aesthetic and recreational appeal the Swan River and its surrounds.

American writer Bill Bryson wrote in his 2000 travelogue *Down Under* that: “to Australians anything vaguely rural is ‘the bush’. At some indeterminate point ‘the bush’ becomes ‘the outback’. Push on for another 2000 miles or so and eventually you come to ‘the bush’ again, and then a city, and then the sea. And that’s Australia” (2000, 38). Bryson’s statement exemplifies how popular culture perpetuates notions of the ‘bush’ and the ‘outback’, two widely understood yet paradoxically ill-defined and somewhat interchangeable types of Australian landscape.

In *The Australian Legend* (1958) Ward argued that:

> National character is not, as once held, something inherited; nor is it, on the other hand, entirely a figment of the imagination of poets, publicists and other feckless dreamers. It is rather a people’s idea of itself and this stereotype, though often absurdly romanticised and exaggerated, is always connected with reality in two ways. It springs largely from a people’s past experiences, and it often modifies current events by colouring men’s ideas of how they ought ‘typically’ behave (Ward 1965, 1).

This notion can be extended to a range of presuppositions—some of them having acquired near-mythological status—about what both Australians and visitors ought ‘typically’ experience in an Australian place, particularly a physically and culturally significant place like settler landscapes, the bush and the water’s edge.

Ward notes that most writers on Australian character “have felt strongly that the ‘Australian spirit’ is somehow intimately connected with the bush” (1965, 1). National identity is tied to the trying and often inhospitable nature of the bush by the figure of the bushman, typified in *The Australian Legend* (Pocock 2005, 336, Ward 1958). Ward presented a history of this ‘national image’—rather than a portrait of an everyday Australian—and described this mythical ‘Australian’ in terms that remain familiar and are often utilised today: practical, rough and ready, willing to have a go, loyal to his mates, stoic and an independent character (Ward 1965, 1-2). Ward’s description suggests how such a character might appear to others, and even how he might sound (using rough language), smell (sweat, earth, drink) and move - ‘rough and ready in his manners’
(Ward 1965, 1-2). Paradoxically, the description also suggests the man himself is someone insensitive to the hardships of the bush, or at least capable of enduring ‘stoically’. Sensory history may offer other perspectives on such historical stereotypes.

Many writers have endeavoured to both portray what the Australian identity might be, and explain the quest for it, as it can appear in scholarly and popular literature as pervasive and enduring. Ward (1958), White (1981), Blainey (1997), and Hudson & Bolton (eds. 1997) are amongst a number of academics, journalists, artists and other observers who have addressed the subject of ‘the bush’ and ‘bushmen’. As a national type, the bushman has been criticised for its lack of contemporary relevance and its disjuncture from the daily life of most Australians (Pocock 2005, 335-336). However, Hudson and Bolton contend that a large section of the Australian public and some academics are still enamoured of the bushman character, who “remains an appealing stereotype for a nation at least three-quarters of whom live in substantial [coastal] cities” (1997, 1). An extended discussion of the literature on and concepts of Australian identity is beyond the scope of this research, however, what is of interest here is the landscapes that are linked to this character.

The bush itself, and people’s relationship to it “is complex and often contradictory” (Pocock 2005, 335). Historically the bush was frequently portrayed as a dry, rural inland place of struggle and adversity where the vegetation needed to be tamed and subjugated (Pocock 2005, 335). In the 1960s and 1970s increasing environmental awareness and concerns about conservation led to the gradual re-characterisation of the bush as the ‘natural’ environment (including ‘natural’ beaches and rivers) in opposition to the urban environment (Pocock 2005, 336 citing Robin 1998, 122-124). In recent decades the ‘bush’ has been reconsidered as a place for escape and renewal. Pocock argues that:

> while the rural way of life is not necessarily encountered through everyday practice, and its significance is heightened through its distinction from urban living, the centrality of the bush in constructions of national identity renders it part of the everyday Australian imaginary (2005, 336).

This understanding reinforces Cusack’s view of how history can be occluded when reifying riverscapes; the same is true of ‘the bush.’ Today the bush has come to be seen as many interrelated places: a native landscape, a ‘natural’ place of rejuvenation away from urban life, an agricultural landscape, a place of trials, mateship and possibility. In some instances encountering the bush has become a leisurely and adventure-related activity, undertaken for recreation, exercise, enjoyment or education (Pocock 2005, 336).
Even in urban environments, the distinctiveness of the ‘bush’ is often drawn on through landscape or artistic interventions. Chapter five discusses two instances—the revegetation of the Mount Eliza Scarp with ‘native’ plants and the creation of artificial wetlands—where the bush becomes an integral part of the place identity of a waterside city.

In some cases these manufactured or ‘replanted’ bush landscapes may provide some multi-sensory encounters where visitors can see, smell, hear, touch and taste the mythologized Australian landscape, however contrived these sites may be. The sensory aspects of these encounters are fabricated and sanitised for tourists’ consumption and may be distant from the sensory life of the historic bush. These types of tourist places present tourists not with reality, but an amalgamation of what the designers, governments, councils or parks authorities believe is important and the tourists desire to consume.

The symbolism of the bush and specific features of the landscape that are recognisably Australian (particularly flora and fauna) are also linked to Australian identity (Pocock 2003, 85). Both people and things can be indicators of Australian ‘place’ including: Indigenous people, Aboriginal paintings/artefacts, accents, architecture, Casuarinas, Hoop Pines, eucalypts, Tournefortias, pandanus, grasses, lizards, Kangaroos, Koalas, birds, water lilies, general context and maps (Pocock 2003, 85). Water and waterscapes in a country known for its love of “sun, body and landscape” (Hartoonian 2003, 65), can also be a powerful and multi-sensory indicator of Australian place.

Design interventions like reintroducing ‘native’ vegetation, aboriginal sculptures, or recreational facilities that cater to ‘national’ pastimes like swimming are just a few examples of the ways that the built environment can draw on national mythologies in an effort to create an Australian or specific local identity. In some instances, as will be seen in the case studies, closer reading of these interventions can challenge their aims and efficacy. Moreover recent efforts to ‘restore’ the scarp of Mount Eliza or preserve the Cairns mudflats in ways associated with imagined pre-settlement conditions are part of wider beliefs in the importance of ‘native’ or ‘bush’ landscapes, at times to the detriment of what might also be considered landscapes important to settler heritage.
Tropical Places and Identity

While discourses and design motifs relating to distinctly Australian places or cities are strongly reinforced on some urban waterfronts, in other cases, equally idealised but more widely recognised ‘exotic’ settings prevail, particularly on the central and northern coasts of Australia, where the ‘tropical’ nature of the coast and cities is reinforced with themes drawn from broader narratives of ‘Pacific’ places. Pocock’s research on how “the Great Barrier Reef has become more idealised and less reflective of its Australian location” (2003, 218) prompted consideration of how urban foreshores in tropical regions have also become gradually disconnected from their ‘Australian’ location.

Waterfronts in Cairns, Airlie Beach, Townsville, and Darwin have elements of their design—artificial lagoons and tropical landscaping—which provide tropical imagery and sensations like sandy beaches, blue waters, palm trees and tropical fruit. Some of the issues and histories relating to the tropics—and the work of scholars such as Richard Grove (who provides an ‘environmental’ perspective) and Bernard Smith (a more visual and historical perspective) are introduced here and considered in more detail in the site studies in chapters six and seven.

The formulation of the tropics as a desirable paradise and sometimes, paradoxically, a place of danger, has been occurring in the West for centuries as explorers narrated their experiences in different ways. Tropical islands, particularly in the Pacific, have been idealized as places of escape, relaxation and plenitude (Grove 1995, 3 Pocock 2003, 336-337). The quest for ‘paradise on earth’ originated in the bible and was reinforced by Enlightenment philosophers (Taylor 2004, 131). Grove writes that “the commercial and utilitarian purposes of European expansion produced a situation in which the tropical environment was increasingly utilized as the symbolic location for the idealized landscapes and aspirations of the Western imagination” (1995, 3). In European Vision and the South Pacific Smith argues that the abundance of new information—about people, places, flora, fauna, biology etc.—that arrived in Europe in the wake of the Cook voyages in the Pacific transformed European understandings of biology and other sciences (1985, 167). The historical quest for Paradise and the formation of tropical botanic gardens (places to both study and enjoy nature) are narratives which fostered a deep-rooted association of paradise with tropical regions, islands and landscapes (Grove 1995, 5), and one that is manifest on some urban waterfronts.
3.15 The idealized landscapes and peoples of Tahiti in Paul Gauguin’s “Nave, Nave Moe”, 1894. The fruits, flowers and demeanour of the subjects in the painting suggest not only visual, but gustatory, olfactory and haptic pleasures (Image from Wikimedia Commons).

Robinson Crusoe (1719), Treasure Island (1883), and Gauguin’s images of Tahiti (late 1800s) are amongst the representations that helped spread an idealized notion of the Pacific (Pocock 2005, 336). More recently, the consequences of war, such as GI’s posted to tropical islands in WWII, television shows such as Gilligan’s Island (1964-1967), and communication technologies, globalisation and the internet have continued to spread and promote ideas about the scenic beauty and sensory appeal of the tropical Pacific. Just as landscape, flora, fauna, people and the built environment can be indicative of an Australian place, the tropics can be symbolised by feature like sandy beaches, clear blue waters, palm trees, hibiscus and frangipanis, many of which are not native to Australia (particularly coconut palms) (Pocock 2005). These specific ‘pleasant’ material features of the tropics and, importantly, their sensory qualities, are examined further in the site studies.

While the material features of ‘the tropics’ are frequently linked to pleasure, other narratives relate the oppressiveness or potentially insalubrious nature of tropical climes, or the dangers of tropical waters. Tropical shorelines—including the Cairns foreshore—have been linked to tropical diseases, and were sometimes seen as variants on the ‘white man’s grave’ in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (see Curtin 1961, 94-110). Furthermore, dangerous or poisonous aquatic fauna—including jellyfish, sharks, crocodiles and cone shells—are frequently found in tropical waters. The pain these creatures may inflict has had an enormous impact on cultural understandings of interaction with tropical waters, as well as the physical design of urban waterfronts.
Some of these creatures—such as the minute jellyfish which cause the painful and potentially deadly Irukandji syndrome—are seldom seen and poorly understood, though the pain they cause is well known and casts doubt upon the ability of the visual sense to protect one from harm. The perceived danger of an encounter—much like urban legends about deaths caused by falling coconuts—may be far greater than the actual potential of such an occurrence. The presence of and myths surrounding dangerous fauna has significantly impacted on the way people interact with oceans, rivers and estuaries in northern regions, and been partially responsible for the creation of artificial swimming lagoons.

Conclusion

The complexity of the form, function, identity and history of cities at the water’s edge results in multiple, overlapping and even contradictory place identities. Histories of European settlement and development and evolving notions of other environments—like the bush and the tropics—all contribute to understandings of Australian places. Understanding how sensory experiences help to shape these identities in diverse ways is important because these environments and identities are re-presented in urban contexts. Furthermore, urban waterfront redevelopments are long-term propositions. Dovey notes that “waterfront planning and design is a form of wealth creation...And the vast majority of those who will share it have not yet been born; urban design and planning decisions have very long term consequences” (2006, 4). Krieger too notes that waterfront redevelopments are long term projects which require lifetime planning and support to create enduring value and appeal to both visitors and residents (2004, 23). The characteristics of a waterfront shape its identity and link it to iconic and enduring Australian notions of place and environment.

The water in urban waterfronts has played many roles: facilitating transport and trade, as an appealing visual backdrop to a city, as a place of bodily cleansing and bodily pleasure. Understanding the sensory history of waterfronts, including sensations gained and lost over time, may contribute to the design of future waterfronts which, rather than being primarily visual, are place which provide a diverse range of pleasant and informative sensations and contribute to the richness of a place’s identity. The next four chapters address the historic and contemporary waterfronts in Perth and Cairns, considering the intersection of sensory experiences and understandings of Australian waterside places.
Chapter Four

Fashioning the Perth Foreshore circa 1900: aquatic encounters and civic duties

In Western Australia the Swan River has been central to the cultural, commercial, and material life of the region for thousands of years, first for Aboriginal peoples, and later for European settlers who arrived in 1829. The foreshore, river and city are also places of iconic prominence and defining visual appeal that have drawn the attention of artists, writers, and commentators since European settlement. The shoreline is a contrived landscape which, since the mid-1800s, has been shaped to meet settlers’ aesthetic, recreational, and commercial needs and desires.
Beliefs that because the river was visually attractive and inviting it should be simple to find a suitable place for bathing and swimming facilities that ‘felt’ pleasant drove the creation of baths. Around the beginning of the twentieth century several recreational facilities on the foreshore promoted new aquatic leisure practices that provided heightened sensory experiences of the river and the water’s edge. Swimming at the Perth City Baths (1898-1914) and the Crawley Baths (1914-1964) and ‘shooting the chute’ at the Water Chute (1905-unknown) transformed encounters between an individual’s body, built and natural environments and the bodies of others.

Rather than being primarily visual or observer-based, swimming and bathing practices were focused on providing multi-sensory encounters with the river which were appealing specifically because they were novel, pleasurable, thrilling or potentially risky (particularly in the case of the Water Chute). This site study addresses the dynamic relationships between haptic, visual, and olfactory experiences of these waterside structures during a period when modernity saw the transformation of leisure practices, allowing for broadly sensuous rather than primarily visual experiences of the river’s edge. Howes notes that “different senses produce different takes on the same space” (2005c). Diverse sensory experiences and interpretations of the Swan River—pleasant haptic sensations and unpleasant smells—generated multiple and sometimes conflicting cultural understandings of the river and views on how it could or should be experienced and ‘improved’.

Over time there have been a range of factors such as by-laws, reclamation works and riverside embankment walls which have ‘improved’ and also limited—intentionally or otherwise—where, when and how people interacted with the shoreline. However, while bathing structures provided socially sanctioned access to the river and offered modern ways of engaging with the water’s edge, they can also be seen as restrictive. Lewi observes that the history of swimming facilities demonstrates that “they have become highly controlled and controlling environments, with lanes for regulated competition and fitness, facilities for instructing children, means of surveillance for moral and physical safety, regulation of entry-points and spectatorship and so on” (2008, 280). In some instances enjoyment of these new activities and sensations also generated controversy about bodily and gender propriety. Swimmers regarded their sport as both morally and physically efficacious while others considered the activities of swimming and bathing to be morally questionable and the form of the body in wet bathing costumes to be visually offensive. The sensory history of these structures explores how technological developments and cultural change facilitated the rise of new aquatic
leisure practices and partially shaped the water’s edge. These practices involved close physical interaction with places and environments and intimate contact with physical sensations and smells. Consensus on how the river could or should be encountered was unachievable because of multiple and even opposing sensory values, which resulted in different positions of ‘sensory’ self-understanding.

**Historic and Contemporary Maps of Perth**

The following maps and images provide some basic geographic information about Perth.

![Historic and Contemporary Maps of Perth](image)

4.2 Captain James Stirling’s ‘Chart of Swan and Canning Rivers’ in 1829. The chart shows the Swan and Canning rivers and the Indian Ocean, and the Darling Ranges running from north to south. Other rivers and geographic features are notably absent (Battye Library 009453D).
4.3 A detail from Captain James Stirling’s ‘Chart of Swan and Canning Rivers’, 1829. The chart shows how the Swan River flows down from the northwest and is joined by the Canning River before running to the Indian Ocean. Mount Eliza is shown to the north of the largest expanse of the river (Battye Library 009453D).

4.4 A reproduction of a map of Perth from 1838. The map shows the uneven shoreline and lakes that were later infilled. It also shows the planned road layout, and blocks projecting over Perth Water hint at future reclamation. The reproduction was printed in the 1950-1951 City of Perth Lord Mayor’s report and the author is unknown (The National Library of Australia, http://trove.nla.gov.au/work/2268).
4.5 This 1903 map of Perth shows significant infilling extending into the river to the east of Mounts Bay. The location of the Baths and Kings Park have been added (Map from Seddon and Ravine 1986, 147).

4.6 A partial image of the Plan of the City of Perth from 1910. The Perth City Baths are sketched lightly in red below the recreation grounds. Labels identifying the sites of the baths and the Water Chute have been added (State Records Office of Western Australia, series 2168, cons 5698, item 1385).
4.7 A contemporary aerial image of Perth identifying key features discussed in the thesis. A) Kings Park on the Mount Eliza Scarp, a key point for viewing the city that is discussed in this chapter and chapter five. B) The Perth foreshore in front of the central business district. In the past this was an industrial zone of jetties and boats. It was the location of the Perth City Baths discussed in this chapter, and it has recently been redeveloped into Elizabeth Quay, discussed in chapter five. C) Perth Water, a briny, tidal section of the Swan River. D) Herisson island and the roads and bridges crossing the island. This area is referred to as the Causeway. E) The Narrows Bridge and the Mounts Bay Interchange. Mounts Bay was infilled to accommodate the highway. Around 1900 an area of the bay known as Point Lewis was the location of the Water Chute, a mechanical amusement discussed in this chapter. F) Melville water. G) The site of the Crawley Baths from 1914 to 1964.

Shaping the Perth Foreshore

This section examines settler’s attitudes towards the Swan River and the physical reshaping of the Perth foreshore around 1900. While projects such as infilling, extending and firming up the topography of the shoreline were clearly undertaken for pragmatic and aesthetic reasons, exerting control over haptic and olfactory experiences along the shoreline also influenced the form of the foreshore.

At the time of European settlement in 1829 British authorities elected to place Perth, which was to be the colonial capital, 15 kilometres up the Swan River from the Indian Ocean on the northern shores of Perth Water. While early British explorers such as Captain James Stirling described the river in a manner which suggested a pastoral idyll, settlers found the Swan and other West Australian rivers to be salty, sluggish, and prone to winter floods and summer droughts (Taylor 2003, 25). The Swan River was in need of ‘improvement,’ meaning almost wholesale transformation, and Taylor argues that early West Australian settlers:
Approached the land by imposing codes of reference and meaning on wilderness understood as infinitely malleable. This provided a rationale for felling trees, clearing and building, planting gardens and refashioning entire river systems by straightening, widening and deepening them and by defining their edges more precisely (2007, 143).

The river was ‘trained’ through such pragmatic activities and aesthetic predilections and jetties, buildings and recreational areas were constructed on the foreshore. While some transport and industrial activities took place along the shoreline, its shallow, muddy composition made Perth unsuitable as a port facility. Fremantle, at the river’s mouth, and later Kwinana, positioned further south along the coast, became Perth’s commercial ports (Seddon and Ravine 1986, 56).

By the 1890s infilling had taken place along much of the shoreline, providing land for recreation, light industry and riverside transport facilities. These diverse undertakings would have generated a myriad of sights, smells and sounds, as well as encounters with novel and modern materials (like sealed roads) and technologies (like electric trams).
Flint comments that “the busy thoroughfares of nineteenth and early twentieth-century cities continually stimulated the eye, nose and ear, refusing sensory rest to the perceiver” (2014, 25).

Since European settlement the visual appeal of Perth’s setting has been referred to by visitors and captured by artists and later photographers. Efforts to define and aestheticize the edge of the capital city’s principal watercourse to address concerns for health and create recreational spaces were consistent with British, European and American urban design objectives of the late nineteenth century. Such objectives sought—influenced in part by the redevelopment of medieval Paris—to open up vistas and remove potentially dangerous miasmas from urban environments (Classen 2014, 8). Oliver describes efforts to create controlled ‘natural’ waterside places as very a ‘modern’ approach to riverside design which originated in the development of the Thames Embankment between 1864 and 1874 (2000, 227).

In Perth, desires for attractive riverside parklands were associated with the City Beautiful movement (1890s-1920s), which promoted the social benefits of public parks (Bolleter 2014, 572). An 1893 letter to the editor of The West Australian suggested that “steps should be taken to add to the attractions of the River. Nature has lavished her gifts upon the river Swan...it should not be difficult to make Perth as regards its surroundings one of the most beautiful of the capital cities of the world” (26 January 1893, 4).

In 1906 and 1907 improvements to terrestrial aspects of the shoreline and the creation of Barrack Square reflected “the shift in the role of the river from general transport to recreation” (Hocking Heritage 2012, 19). Improvements were not only a visual
enhancement to the experience of the foreshore, they were also a sensory intervention asserting a measure of control over people, the river and the landscape. The formation of Barrack Square on reclaimed land defined a civic ‘place’ along the water’s edge, while east of Barrack Street an embankment wall replaced the “low-lying and frequently odoriferous bank” (TWA 16 January 1907, 7). According to The West Australian the wall had “both a hygienic and an aesthetic value. As a substitute for the old-time reeds and mud, this wall may be said... to supply a long felt want” (16 January 1907, 7). Riverside walls imposed control over the river’s flow, and limited people’s access to the water. The article in The West Australian commented that the river “now swishes gently against the solid woodwork instead of overflowing on to a mud bank, as of yore” (16 January 1907, 7). The developments were celebrated in terms akin to the ‘conquest’ of nature, and describing the redevelopment of Barrack Square, The West Australian stated that: “where there was chaos, there is now symmetrical arrangement. Where there was mud or scrub there is now footpath or gravelled walk. Where there was a wilderness there is now a garden” (16 January 1907, 7).

At the turn of the century the provision of formal bathing facilities became increasingly important for purposes of promoting public hygiene, recreation and civic propriety. Sensory factors—including the muddy and odorous nature of the shoreline and the visual appeal of the setting—would become issues requiring redress when the construction of the Perth City Baths brought greater numbers of people into direct contact with the water and the water’s edge.

**Bathing on the Foreshore**

Perceptions of the water’s edge as a place of health and leisure originated in the late 1700s, arising in part from “prescriptions by Western medical practitioners of seawater bathing and drinking that continued into the 1900s” (Metusela 2006, 64). The construction of the Perth City Baths, and other bathing structures on beaches, rivers and harbours around Australia were often aligned with medical and moral imperatives which sought to increase public health whilst upholding certain ideals of behavioural propriety. Around the turn of the twentieth century maintaining careful control of how, when and particularly where people bathed and were seen bathing by others was a significant social concern and extended the significance of the topographical manipulations outlined earlier. At the time, for many British colonial gentry, “revealing naked flesh in
public, initially that of women and later that of men, was understood as disgusting, uncivilised and disrespectful” (Metusela and Waitt 2012, xiii). There were others who felt differently, exemplified by an 1883 commentator in The Inquirer who expostulated: “The fact is that the English notions of decency and morality are of such an absurd nature that everything else, including even personal comfort, cleanliness, and health, have to give way to them” (4 February 1883, 3). In Perth, and elsewhere in Australia, as long as bathing took place in the privacy of a designated, gender segregated bathing facility it was accepted, encouraged, and often seen as morally acceptable endeavour to achieve ‘hygienic’ purity (Metusela and Waitt 2012, xiii).

Bathing, and later swimming—terms used somewhat interchangeably around 1900—were also associated with recreational pleasure and leisure time. Globally, industrialisation resulted in greater differentiation between the places and times associated with work, and those affiliated with leisure activities. Metusela argues that in Australia the ocean became “conventionally understood as an ‘escape’ from work time-space” and regarded as “both natural and healthy” (2009, 62). The Perth City Baths, though situated on an estuarine river, were similarly regarded.

The diverse and pleasurable sensations experienced when swimming or bathing—e.g. cooling or cleansing the skin, buoyancy, and weightlessness—were the central appeal of the activity. Discussing British bathing practices during the late 1800s Crook observes that:

> Public baths also allow for an exploration of the material facets of Victorian liberalism, of its spatial and corporeal dimensions. Washing was a practice that not only took place within a privatizing architecture but one that also entailed an intensified awareness of the materiality of the self; and especially its covering, the skin (2006, 21).

The encompassing nature of immersion makes global touch (the movement of water upon the skin) a prominent tactile aspect of swimming and bathing. The varying weight and mobility of the body in water and the feeling of buoyancy were strong experiences of proprioception and kinaesthesia, as was the active process of propelling one’s body through the water. Extended touch was experienced via the sensations of immersion whilst wearing the bathing costumes of the era, which were intended to maintain visual propriety but also mediated the experience of the body in an aquatic environment. In the following section the sensory history of bathing at the baths is examined first through consideration of restrictions placed on public bathing (and the body), followed
by an examination of the experiences of the baths, the increasing popularity of the sport of swimming and demands for new bathing facilities.

Restrictions on Bathing and Attire

In Australia around 1900 there were conflicting visual regimes—resulting, in part, from rapid modernisation and social change—relating to the types of activities, attire and ‘bodies’ which could respectfully be seen (or displayed) at bathing places. Concerns for visual and bodily propriety were at the root of social tensions surrounding bathing and contributed to demands for enclosed bathing facilities in many cities and towns. Many governments or council’s instituted by-laws which limited when, where and how one could bathe, and some citizens supported and even desired to extend these laws. In Perth in the late nineteenth century open bathing in the river was illegal in daylight hours, and many citizens strongly disapproved of the practice at any time (Lewi 2008, 281). Debates over propriety, modesty and behaviour in Perth during this period were aligned with similar discussions taking place around Australia and in Britain at the time (Lewi 2008, 282). Some locals advocated that public bathing be permitted to encourage the growing tourist trade and that bathing be understood in the British manner; as therapeutic rather than obscene (Metusela and Waitt 2012, 1). The popular press played an important role in cultivating attitudes towards the baths and bathing, and more broadly, debating issues relating to propriety.

In Perth in the late 1800s there were anxieties about the rising number of nude male bathers and larrikin behaviour taking place around the foreshore, and the possibility of women seeing men’s naked bodies (Graham-Taylor 2009, see also Booth 2001, chapters 2 and 3). A tin-bathing shed was erected along the shoreline in 1884 and a Police Act in 1892 prohibited nude bathing, however these measures failed to deter enthusiasts (Graham-Taylor 2009). A summary of the various by-laws regulating the locations, times and attire required for bathing was published in The Daily News in 1906:

1. Under the Jetty Act regulations, bathing from any jetty, pier, bridge, or wharf, between the hours of 7.30 a.m. and 9.30 p.m. is prohibited.

2. Under the Perth City Council by laws, bathing is prohibited, from any jetty, etc., or within 100 feet of any jetty in the municipality, between 7 a.m. and 8 p.m.
3. In open water bathing is permissible at any time, but bathers between the hours of 7 a.m. and 8 p.m. must wear a proper costume, which the Police Court has ruled shall be a costume covering the body from neck to knee. Accordingly, swimming can be indulged in anywhere on the river, except at jetties, wharves and recognised landing places, at any time, and between certain hours at the partially prohibited places, provided suitable costume is worn (7 February 1906, 6).

The specific details of the by-laws were not common knowledge, and although notices of the regulations were obliged to be posted on all applicable jetties and related structures, the obligations they imposed on Perth residents were rarely straightforward (DN 7 February 1906, 6).

The laws also attempted to govern multiple and potentially conflicting uses of the watercourse at a point in time when the river was a primary means of travel and transport. The by-laws maintained visual and physical distance between the intimate acts of bathing and swimming and more public activities on the river, endeavouring to prevent individuals with disparate opinions on the propriety of public river bathing from coming into direct contact or conflict with one another. Violations of the by-laws arose because of the lack of free public bathing facilities in close proximity to the city, as well as ignorance, mischievousness or deviance (demonstrated by children and teenagers in particular). Importantly, at the time river bathing offered one of the best and in many cases only respite from the heat, and for many the only opportunity for cleansing the body.

An example of the problems associated with enforcing the by-laws is seen in the 1905 case of five boys who were charged with "having bathed in the Swan River during prohibited hours" (DN 21 December 1905, 10). The hours, location and attire of the bathers were all in violation of the by-laws, although the official charge laid related specifically to the time the infraction occurred. However, in court the police stated that the main issue was that the boys had disrobed in public to put on their trunks. The boys were ruled to be at fault because, according to the Police Magistrate "persons so bathing should wear proper neck to knee costumes. These trunks are worse than nothing, and are simply a suggestion of indecency" (DN 21 December 1905, 10). The boys' defence council argued for leniency given the heat of summer, particularly as the Government provided no free public bathing facilities. The magistrate decided to permit bathing during restricted hours in the summer, providing that bathers were appropriately attired.
Such cases were not unusual, and in a 1905 letter to the editor of *The West Australian* ‘Fair Play’ desired to “point out the way in which different classes are treated” (27 February 1905, 2). ‘Fair Play’ complained that the police often chose to make an example of young boys, whilst ignoring older men and members of certain clubs, like the Fremantle Rowing Club, who regularly violated the by-laws (*TWA* 27 February 1905, 2). The episode illustrates that of the many facets of the by-laws, the ones aimed at controlling the location and visual exposure of the body in public were central. It also highlights how desires for thermal respite, bodily cleansing and the haptic pleasures of swimming were for many worth the risk of legal prosecution and/or the moral disapprobation such ‘deviant’ activities elicited.

The form of the body (both male and female) revealed by swimming costumes was considered by some to be potentially offensive and bathing attire—in particular the amount of coverage it provided—was a point of contention. Bathing ‘trunks’ were prohibited, and a full ‘neck to knee’ costume was required for both men and women. In a 1906 letter to the editor of *The West Australian* ‘Evil be to Him that Evil Thinks’ pointed out that if swimming attire was objectionable, then “all manly sports such as football, cycling, and foot racing” ought to be stopped, “their garb being just about as brief as that of the swimmers” (20 January 1906, 3). The author of the letter highlights the disparity in the ways that swimmers and other sportsmen (or women) are ‘seen,’ and how their figure and appearance is interpreted. The use of the caricatured pseudonym allows the writer to remain anonymous and, via the name, impart a further ‘moral’ message.

Flint observes that “to be touched, to be compressed by clothing; this is something that is at once intimate, but that connects one with a larger world that assesses and places
one according to one’s adherence to, or disconnection from, fashionable norms” (2014, 40). ‘Fashion’ and expectations of ‘appropriate’ attire are amongst the material and cultural products of the British Empire which were imported to Western Australia (Eluwawalage 2007, 85). Wearing fashionable clothing and swimwear and seeing what others were wearing, and reading about fashion in local papers was ingredient in sensory experiences shared by residents across cities and nations as ‘fashion’ became more global.

Clothing and swimwear that was ‘fashionable’ or ‘appropriate’, particularly women’s swimwear, could limit the body’s ability to move, and the intimate contact of fabric on skin could be itchy, painful or uncomfortable. Pearson describes women’s swimming costumes worn in the Geraldton Baths (north of Perth) in the late 1800s as “three piece bathing suites of bloomers frilled at the ankles with a long sleeved top and separate overskirt” (Pearson 2010 443, citing Norris 1989). Discussing female swimmers in America, Johns writes that “women had expressed dissatisfaction with the usual [cumbersome] bathing costumes in the late 1860s. Those who swam in deep water wanted lighter garments which also allowed greater freedom of movement” (1997, 7). She argues that in spite of concerns about modesty women gradually began adopting swimwear which was less cumbersome when pursuing recreational and competitive aquatic activities (Johns 1997, 7).

There were some, such as Annette Kellerman, a famous Australian swimmer and movie star, who strove to overcome many of the social and material barriers that hindered women from participating in swimming (both casually and competitively) around the turn of the century. Kellerman is credited with inventing the streamlined one-piece women’s swimsuit “a liberating garment, which became her trademark” (Wells 2013). She garnered fame, and also notoriety, when at one point she was “arrested for wearing a
one-piece bathing suit in public” (Johns 1997, 70). Her somewhat scandalous reputation popularized her performances (Johns 1997, 70). Kellerman was lauded not only as an athlete and performer but also for highlighting the haptic pleasure of swimming for all ages and genders, and promoting bodily and visual “freedom that was in total contrast to the Victorian sense of behaviour and dress” (Wells 2013).

The dynamic between visual regimes, gender specific dress, the riverine environment and bodily propriety was heightened and further complicated where mixed gender bathing—another area of contention and anxiety—was concerned. While not specifically prohibited in the by-laws, in 1908 some residents of the Perth suburb of Applecross endeavoured to prohibit bathing entirely between 8am and 8pm in order to prevent mixed bathing. In opposition to such an aim J.M. Silk argued in a letter to the editor of The West Australian that mixed bathing is practiced without objection across the Eastern states of Australia, Europe and the United States, and concluded that: “it seems to be reserved for Western Australian ignoramuses to raise a question that stamps them at once as far and away behind modern civilisation” (14 February 1908, 7).

In a regular column on swimming in The West Australian ‘Trudgeon’ observed that there was an element of pretence on the subject of mixed gender bathing, and pointed out that “there is a great deal of mock modesty in regard to the matter, and ladies who condone—and rightly, too—the mixed bathing at Cottesloe find fault with the practice in the river” (17 February 1906, 12). Many accepted the sight of bodies on a beach or within a venue such as the City Baths, but were intolerant of river bathing (DN 7 February 1906, 6).

It may have been more difficult for some people to view the foreshore, a place associated with history, urban activities and certain behaviours, as a place where the modern trend of mixed-gender bathing—or public bathing in general—could be widely embraced. In a
period of changing social norms it was difficult to reconcile those who viewed bathing and swimming as decidedly private activities which should take place in a socially sanctioned gender-segregated enclosures such as the baths, with others who believed a public dip in the river on a hot day or for the purposes of exercise, health or pleasure was a necessity and a right.

**Demands for Enclosed Bathing Facilities**

Driven in part by concerns about visual and gender propriety, demands for enclosed public bathing facilities became increasingly strident in the latter decades of the 1800s. An 1875 article opined that:

> We can hardly conceive how Perth could have existed for even twelve months without having made some provision for a bathing place... the neglect in their construction robs the city of one-half of its due modicum of health, besides denying to all, one of the most invigorating luxuries in a warm climate (Western Australian Times 31 August 1875, 2).

An 1879 article proclaimed “the desirability of some steps being taken to enable heated and perspiring citizens to indulge in the luxury of a dip in the river without violating public decency” (Western Australian Times 28 March 1879, 2). An 1883 article in The Inquirer and Commercial News calling for formal bathing facilities argued that citizens should be able to “lave their heated dusty limbs in the refreshing waves of the Swan during the hot summer season” (14 February 1883, 3). While public health and the control of when and where people bathed were primary concerns, the pleasant sensory experiences of bathing in a warm climate were also framed as an entitlement.

In Britain at this time there was a boom in the construction of public baths not only for purposes of health and recreation, but ‘civic pride’ (Crook 2006, 24). In Australia, Perth was not alone in its efforts to secure suitable baths. Cairns, Sydney (the Corporation and Domain Baths seen in image 4.14) and other growing towns were also meeting demands for bathing facilities, as were other sites in the British Empire (for example see Kossuth 2005 on demands for baths in London, Ontario, Canada). Similarly, in America in the late 1800s “to curb disease and mortality, medical experts called for free neighbourhood baths and wash houses. All citizens were expected to benefit” (Johns 1997, 78).
It was not until the late 1890s that the Perth City Council selected a site for the baths on the foreshore between Barrack and William’s Streets. It was believed that placing the facility in close proximity to the city would insures that it remained lucrative, even though the material conditions of more distant parts of the river—such as the sandy riverbed and clear water west of the city—were more suitable for bathing. The Perth City Baths were nearing completion in early 1898 when J.M. Kelly wrote a letter to the editor of *The West Australian* titled “Public baths and Sanitation” in which he raised concerns about the intersection of bodily cleanliness, social propriety and the public purse:

> I say our public baths above all other institutions should be free... To the workers and the great floating population of Perth free baths would be an immense boom [sic], and economically considered, as reducing the liability to fever and other diseases, would be found far cheaper in the long run (19 January 1898, 6).

Plans to charge entry fees were seen as undermining the original intention of providing a free facility to encourage the poorer classes to take up better hygienic practices. In Britain a mid-1800s authority on hygiene, Erasmus Wilson, praised public baths as institutions which:

> are calculated to carry cleanliness into the abodes of the labouring classes; they do infinitely more than this... they elevate the moral position of those whom they
succour, and the numberless benefits which they confer are not only enjoyed by those who receive, but are reflected upwards and around upon society at large (Wilson 1855, xiii cited in Crook 2006, 24).

Issues of class, and by association regimes of power, can be linked to perceptions of baths and its patrons. The wealthy considered the poor to not only inhabit a rough, odorous environment, but to be coarse and smelly themselves; insensitive to the sensory discomforts of their lot (Classen 2014, 2-3, for further on baths, class, cleanliness and profit see Sheard 2000). By reviling the sensory conditions of the poor the wealthy asserted the propriety of their own ‘refined’ sensory environment (Classen 2014, 3).

In Perth, despite ostensible benefits to the broader public, the government decided that free baths risked encouraging larrikin behaviour, so a small fee and specific by-laws were established to discourage this (TWA 7 March 1898, 2). Thus from the inauguration of the baths monetary value was associated with the availability of socially sanctioned bodily encounters with the river, and formal rules governing personal behaviour were established to regulate such encounters.

![The Perth City Baths circa 1900. The building’s attractive appearance revealed nothing of the muddy, odorous nature of the riverbed below (Photo by Ernest Lund Mitchell, Battye Library 001739D).](image)
The Perth City Baths, designed by Mr G.R. Johnson, opened in March 1898. The timber building perched at the end of a wide jetty extending 91 metres into the river. Its most eye-catching features were four cupola-topped towers facing the foreshore which The West Australian described as 'Moorish' in style (7 March 1898, 2). Emphasis was placed on the visual appeal and convenient location of the building and it was said to form a “pretty back ground to the Esplanade” (TWA 7 March 1898, 2). The building was, for a time, considered “much more imposing than the generality of bathing-houses in Australia or elsewhere” (TWA 16 January 1907, 7).

The exterior aesthetics of the Perth baths were likely influenced by ‘Oriental’ structures such as Brighton’s Royal Pavilion, begun in 1787 and completed by John Nash in 1815. Sweetman argues that rather than drawing on the aesthetics of one ‘oriental’ culture, Nash drew on Chinese, Indian, and ‘Mughal’ references and the exterior of the building exhibits some generic qualities of an ‘Oriental’ style (Sweetman 1988, 107, image from The Brighton Museum, Royal Pavilion).

4.16 The Royal Pavilion at Brighton by John Nash. Nash drew on Chinese, Indian, and ‘Mughal’ references and the exterior of the building exhibits some generic qualities of an ‘Oriental’ style (Sweetman 1988, 107, image from The Brighton Museum, Royal Pavilion).

Antram and Morrice argue that Nash’s iconic Royal Pavilion influenced the design of seaside resorts in Britain and elsewhere (2008, 3). Gray observes that from the mid-1800s new construction technologies were used to create inventive modern seaside architecture in Britain, and new buildings were “determinedly ornamental and often Oriental in [their] design and purpose” (2006, 49). There is evidence of the influence of Orientalism elsewhere in Australia, for example in the design of the St. Kilda Baths outside of Melbourne (image 4.17), which exhibit ‘Oriental’ towers at the entrance to the building and elsewhere.
The visual appeal of the Baths was to become its only enduring attribute. A decade after the facility opened, ‘Recte et Suaviter’ wrote in a letter to the editor of *The West Australian* that “the only thing in favour of the present baths is its outward appearance, in that it somewhat resembles an Oriental mosque. But a person need be no cynic to assert that its position is unsuitable” (22 January 1908, 4).

The interior form of the baths reveals some of the moral lessons about body and gender propriety that such structures were intended to enforce and impart. Crook observes that many British baths were divided on three grounds. Firstly, British and most Australian baths of this period were segregated by gender, and secondly, by class, as many charged different entry fees for certain areas. Lastly, private bathing and changing cubicles separated individuals (Crook 2006, 30). Booth notes that English traditions of segregating bathers by gender were maintained in Australia into the early twentieth century (2006, 163 for further on the architecture of bathing facilities in Australia and elsewhere see Booth 2006, chapter 6).
Patrons approached the building along a jetty which led to two entry vestibules where they entered spatially and visually separated men’s and women’s bathing facilities. Each facility provided river bathing, private hot water bath chambers, showers and changing rooms. Piles sunk into the riverbed supported the building and the fences surrounding the bathing areas. The under water fences were a particularly Australian (rather than British) feature of bathing structures, intended to keep baths safe from the hazards of sharks or ‘sea monsters’ (Cordell 1876, 26). The walls around the upper portion of the baths limited patrons from seeing out, and those outside from seeing in, though there were areas within the building where men and women could see each other, which sometimes proved problematic. In a 1902 letter to the editor of The West Australian H. Seiler, a female bather, complained of being “subjected of rude stares and remarks of the men” (9 April 1902, 6), who could peer into the ladies baths while awaiting their turn in the men’s hot baths.
The baths proved popular and were well patronised soon after opening; however, there were early hints that the building’s tenancy on the foreshore would be tenuous. The following section relates how a range of factors—particularly the preferential attention given to aesthetics and convenience over haptic and olfactory concerns when selecting the site—proved problematic shortly after the opening of the facility, and eventually led to the baths demise.

**Bathing in Malodorous Mud**
The olfactory history of bathing sites tells something of the conflicting beliefs, desires and expectations of such places. Urban cities and waterways in Western nations during the 1800s and early 1900s were malodorous places which often reeked of the sewerage and refuse of the city (Classen 2014, 5). London’s ‘Great Stink’ of 1858 foregrounded the trials of providing sewerage and refuse disposal for rapidly increasing urban populations (see Samalin 2013, 23-65 and Halliday 1999 for further on the ‘Great Stink’ and urban sanitary reform). Australian foreshores, though not as long established or as heavily industrialised as many of their European counterparts, were none the less sites where the detritus of human habitation and modernisation sometimes accumulated problematically. For example, Otto notes that in the latter decades of the nineteenth century Melbourne’s Yarra River contributed to the smell (and the reputation) of the city. “What had been christened Marvellous Melbourne was known concurrently as Marvellous Smellbourne” and the Yarra was, at the time, “one of the filthiest rivers in the world” (2011, 98).

The ‘smellscape’ of the Perth foreshore was already generating criticism prior to the construction of the Perth City Baths in 1898. In 1894 a column in The West Australian protested:

*One has only to walk in the vicinity of the river when the water is low to discover how objectionable to every possible sense are the mud flats which compose the foreshore... Daily, as the tide recedes, the atmosphere in the vicinity of the river is poisoned by a smell, or rather by a variety of smells, which baffles description, and while the water is low, a walk along the bank is an ordeal which no one with a normal nostril would willingly undergo (2 June 1894, 4, see also TWA 18 July 1903, TWA 24 December 1903, 6).*

The writer also expressed concerns that it was “a reflection upon the community which has permitted it to exist so long” (TWA 2 June 1894, 4).

Sources causing the odours were manifold, including sewerage, runoff, refuse, animal waste and fertilizers accreted over seven decades of European settlement. The waste was malodorous in its own right and over time had altered the biological and chemical composition of the river. Boats manoeuvring along the foreshore and even swimmers in the baths churned up the muddy riverbed, exacerbating odours and turning the water fetid and murky. While the natural odours of the mudflats and the water may never have been aromatic by the local standards of the time, human habitation and activity
increased their pungency and repugnance. The 'Fremantle Doctor', a prevailing southwesterly breeze which provided bodily respite from the heat of summer, also spread noxious odours across the city as “unhappily, most of the foulness of the river has a tendency to sweep up on the north side of Perth Water, along the foreshore” (TWA 24 December 1903, 6).

It was only after the baths were in operation that the physical experiences of the muddy water and anxieties about odours and miasmas generated widespread concerns about health and debates about the building's location. The original scheme had recommend a jetty extending further into the river, unfortunately, efforts to save money resulted in a shorter jetty and shallower baths (Graham-Taylor 2009). Early mornings within the baths were often calm and glassy, but when the daytime activities of modern boats and bathers stirred the fetid riverbed the water turned foul and murky. A commentator in 1905 observed that “one has only to go down to the Baths of a morning, and even the most fastidious could not wish for a better or clearer sheet of water than that which meets their eye; the real trouble begins when the various boats start stirring up the mud, and in a couple of hours time the water begins to get dirty, and gets worse as the day goes on” (ST 17 December 1905, 16).

The noisome and potentially unhygienic nature of the City Baths quickly became a perennial topic in newspaper articles and city council meetings, where concerned bathers and swimmers gave voice to the emotions their noses incited. An anonymous visitor from the Goldfields wrote to the Sunday Times in 1903 after a visit to the baths, declaring that “when one emerges from the sewer (mistakenly called a bath) a shower is absolutely essential in the interests of cleanliness” (1 February 1903, 4). At a 1904 City Council meeting Cr. Haynes described the baths as a “duck pond” that “provided work enough for two or three doctors in the city. If they were removed, it would be better for the people and worse for the doctors” (DN 20 December 1904, 1).

Concerns about the foreshore were not based merely on 'bad' smells, but fears of contaminating vapours or 'miasmas'—emanating from the earth via mud, water, mist, or smoke—which posed a threat to individual and communal health. Concerns about miasmas have a long history, appearing in texts from the first century B.C. and earlier. Vitruvius (circa 75-15 BC) described the threat that miasmas posed to an improperly sited city:

> For when the morning breezes blow toward the town at sunrise, if they bring with them mist from marshes and, mingled with the mist, the poisonous breath of
creatures of the marshes to be wafted into the bodies of the inhabitants, they will make the site unhealthy (1914, I.4.1).

Corbin argues that in the urban context of the nineteenth century the sense of smell, considered a more animalistic sense, was valuable as it could perceive and avoid dangerous miasmas (2014, 50-51).

It was not until the 1880s that Pasteurian germ theory—understandings of bacteria, micro-organisms, infection and prevention—began to become widely understood (Otto 2011, 98). Writing about Pasteurian and Miasmic theories of disease in relation to concerns about the Yarra River, Otto argues that in “some ways the theories coincided: bacteria in waste could contaminate water and transmit disease; the smell and vapours were a clue to their presence” (Otto 2011, 98). While potentially unsanitary in their own right, odorous vapours were sometimes considered to be an even greater danger when polluted by human waste (Corbin 1986, 27-29). By the early 1900s in Perth it was not merely bad smells, but the invisible threat they suggested, which bolstered citizens’ discontent.

The material conditions of the baths—and the haptic sensations they provided—were also a source of malcontent. ‘Four Amateur Swimmers’ wrote to the editor of The West Australian in 1906 describing how:

any unfortunate who takes a dive, and puts his head in the mud will remember the occasion for a long time. There are often dead fish in the baths, and the water turns as thick as soup when two or three people begin to swim. It cannot be healthy, it is certainly not pleasant, and, considering the number who patronise the baths in summer, it is astonishing that nothing has been done to improve matters (22 October 1906, 9).

‘Cygnet’ observed that “the piles are covered with sharp barnacles which are a source of danger to the unwary bather” and the shallow end of the baths “is full of sharp pieces of rock, which are, to say the least, very unpleasant for the feet” (TWA 25 January 1907, 7). In a 1908 letter to the editor E.N. Blackmore, President of the Amateur Swimming Club, described the ‘bad’ situation at the baths: “on entering if not very careful you resurrect the black, slimy, odourous mud which reminds one of the Yarra when the steamers are berthing at Melbourne” (TWA 22 January 1908, 4). In another letter, published on the same day, ‘Recte et Suaviter’ wrote that: “one need only see [bathers] come out of the sluggish water with slime caked on their faces and cut and bruised feet to also assert that
the water is dirty and unhealthy and the bottom jagged and uneven” (TWA 22 January 1908, 4).

By the 1910s it was widely felt that the baths were “a monument to the short sightedness that led to the selection of such a spot for public saltwater baths” (TWA 18 December 1912, 6). In spite of the fact that many perceived the facility to be operating in opposition to one of its original intentions and detracting from the overall health and enjoyment of the population, the need for enclosed bathing spaces to maintain visual propriety, prevent open bathing in the river and facilitate an increasing number of swimmers kept the baths in operation until they were replaced by the Crawley Baths in 1914.

Haptic Sensations and the Sport of Swimming

The smelly, muddy conditions within the baths were problematic, however the facility was kept in operation due to increasing public participation in recreational and competitive swimming. Swimming was a markedly haptic activity, connecting the body with a series of distinct objects and pursuits—swimming costumes and towels, the riverbed, the swimming enclosure, and swimming styles—which were associated with
cultural traditions of bathing and swimming and also distinctive from the day-to-day terrestrial activities of work and home life.

Australia’s extensive coastal beaches, river systems and baths, along with its warm climate, make it a place that is particularly amenable to aquatic activities. From the late-nineteenth century onwards “outdoor swimming became a popular sport for all classes and both sexes” (Lewi and Phillips 2013, 290, Winterton 2009, 2086, for further on swimming in Australia see also Winterton 2011, 146-164, and for further on women in swimming see also Love 2013, chapter 2). Swimming’s inclusion in the modern Olympics in 1896, and the success of Australian Frederick C.V. Lane in the 1900 Paris Olympics further enhanced the sport’s popularity. In Australia ‘sport’, often taking place on or near beaches and rivers, has been central to the formation of Australian identity (Lewi 2010, 114). From the nineteenth century onward physical education and sports were lauded as a means of increasing health and shaping the body (Lewi 2010, 115). Participation in or consumption of sport could also build moral character by teaching sportsmanship, fair play, and elevating common goals over individual desires (Wickham 1992, 223). On the beach, the figure of the swimmer, lifesaver, and sun-bather “all became central to justifying, legitimating, imagining and performing the Australian subject and nation” (Metusela and Waitt 2012, xix, for further on beaches, surf life saving, surfing and Australian identity see Booth 2001 and Booth 1994 231-254).

Within Australia swimming competitions were coordinated via a hierarchy of national, state and local swimming clubs, and venues like the City Baths hosted regular contests and carnivals during the hot summer months (for further on the rise of amateur and competitive swimming and swimming clubs in Australia see Winterton 2011, 161-163). The Perth Swimming Club promoted swimming as a “manly and delightful” activity “which improves the health, physique, and cleanliness of the community and the individual” (DN 2 November 1905, 7). The physical lifesaving skills frequently learned alongside swimming, and the associated moral mindset, were cited as reasons that the sport could “act as a legitimate counter attraction to gambling on horses and other demoralising habits” (DN 2 November 1905, 7). Winterton notes that “while the practice of bathing could be morally contentious, the sporting aspect of swimming was beyond reproach, due to the moral education sport was thought to provide” (2011, 160, for further on the swimmer as an heroic figure see Sprawson 1992).

Swimming (as a hobby and a sport), and the body of the swimmer, were legitimised in part by association with an appropriate venue under certain ‘visual’ conditions, as
opposed to taking place in the restricted or contested open areas of the river. Above water the walls of the baths limited visual access into, or out of, the facility, however the bathing area was unroofed and bathers were subjected to the local climatic conditions. The underwater portion of the structure consisted of timber pickets spaced three inches apart, partially screening the view of the bodies of bathers, but allowing water to move through the enclosures. In many bathing facilities these screens provided physical (and mental) protection against the threat of shark attacks (Cordell 1876, 26). The motion of tides, currents, wind and bodies in the baths provided participatory haptic experience of the river, and swimmers both touched and were touched by the water.

4.23 The Perth City Baths viewed from the yacht club. The building was not standing alone in the river, but was surrounding by buildings and boats dedicated to recreation, commerce and transport. All these activities contributed to the material conditions in and around the baths (State Library of Western Australia).

Swimmers were conscious of the impact of river conditions on their sensory experiences and athletic performance. A 1905 race commentator wrote:

*though the temperature of late has been more akin to winter than to summer conditions, the swimmers did not find the water too cold for the sport, though several complained that the stream had rather too much 'body' in it to permit record-breaking performances (WM 7 January 1905, 38).*

Regular swimming normalized relations between a swimmer’s body and the riverine environment, making swimmers attuned to changes in the movement or ‘body’ of the
water. Thermal encounters between the skin and material surfaces or substances have a reciprocal nature as temperature transfers between a surface and the skin, not only making one or the other warmer or colder, but also providing a sensational component resulting in pleasure or discomfort (Heschong 1979, 19). Repeated visual and haptic experiences of the river generated stronger individual place-specific environmental knowledge of daily and seasonal patterns and characteristics, such as temperature and flow, which could not be attained through visual experience alone.

In the early twentieth century swimming styles were evolving, with new ways of moving through water being developed, tested and displayed. As ‘Diver’ noted: “this race (220 yards) will be an eye-opener to swimmers and spectators, when they see the Australian champion ‘crawling’ with his unique stroke over the course” (TWA 8 February 1908, 13). New strokes were novel in both the way they appeared to spectators and for the sensations they induced in swimmers. The preceding observer continued:

> it was thought at the inception of this mode of swimming that the ‘crawl’ would be of little use over 100 yards. That this has proved a wrong prediction is evinced by the fact that Healy has proved successful in all distances up to the half-mile with this stroke alone (TWA 8 February 1908, 13).

Aquatic activities at the baths were not limited to swimming but increasingly offered opportunities to test and display new ways of moving through water. Regular carnivals and exhibitions featured contests and displays that both demonstrated and inspired new swimming, diving and lifesaving techniques. Events aimed to be entertaining, informative, and even thrilling, driven in part by changing social conventions and expectations relating to leisure and entertainment (for further on Australian swimming carnivals see Winterton 2011, 157-158). An 1899 exhibition at the City Baths by Captain Gore’s Professional Swimming and Diving Troupe included:

> Ornamental swimming, imitations of the whale and porpoise, swimming with the hands and feet tied. The best methods of rescuing the drowning, the Monte Christo feat, a long dive, and a laughable water sketch entitled ‘Angling; or, a bite at last.’ The final item is a sensational high dive (TWA 29 November 1899, 4).

Ornamental swimming and the water ballets popular in the early twentieth century were the forerunners of today’s sport of synchronised swimming. Originally, ornamental swimming was performed by men, but it was soon determined that women, being more buoyant, were better suited to making “pictures with their bodies on the surface of the
water” (Federation International de Natation 2013). Participants strove to perform synchronized, dance-like movements against the resistance and buoyancy of water. Spectators were directed to the visual appeal of synchronised motion, with its links to mechanised production and assembly line technology. Appreciation of such mechanised motions can be associated with regimes of power, control and even surveillance as found in schools, hospitals and prisons; places which encouraged people to value activities and even movements which conformed best with dominant ideals.

Techniques such as ‘Swimming Like a Porpoise’ drew on nature in the form of lessons afforded by observing aquatic mammals. Escape acts like ‘the Monte Cristo feat’ aimed to provide spectators with excitement and suspense, playing on the risks (such as drowning) often associated with water. In opposition to such risky feats, lifesaving displays demonstrated the potential to mediate or even master the dangers of water. New diving techniques allowed participants to experiment with various heights and trajectories before the sudden and powerful haptic sensations of impact and immersion. Van Leeuwen believes that springboards were “introduced into the domain of swimming to enhance feelings of abandonment and weightlessness” (1998, 2).

New swimming techniques, diving styles and aquatic ‘feats’ engaged and extended participant’s bodily capacities, adapting them to the broad characteristics of aquatic environments and the specific characteristics of the river. It can be argued that these unconventional and imaginative bodily undertakings in water were partially caught up in a larger social shift from leisure as visual spectacle to leisure as both spectacle and bodily experience (see Sally 2006). They were also relatively ‘safe’ explorations, taking place within the socially sanctioned venue of the baths, under the gaze of other swimming enthusiasts. Desires for novelty, pleasure, and even thrills were legitimised in part by association with an appropriate venue, and the increasing popularity swimming kept the baths in operation.

**Demands for New Baths**

The untenable material and olfactory conditions in the baths and increasing participation in swimming fuelled demands for larger facilities in a more suitable location. In 1905 local swimming clubs put forward a petition—discussed in ‘Trudgeon’s’ regular column in *The West Australian*—calling for “the removal of the baths from the present mud-hole to a spot where immersion is calculated to produce cleanliness and
not increased dirtiness" (TWA 28 October 1905, 12). The petition demanded new baths “at the nearest spot at which clear and deep water can be found or formed, with a clean and sloping bottom” (TWA 28 October 1905, 12). Swimming brought the body into intimate contact with the riverine environment and swimmers desired not only visual clarity, but odours and tactile sensations that were considered ‘clean’, by the standards of the time. The befouled city foreshore failed to meet these haptic and olfactory desires.

Articles and reports demanding certain types of conditions be met encouraged further aestheticization and sanitization of the practice of swimming. Enthusiasts perceived the river as a place with the potential to be physically, mentally and morally beneficial if an appropriately ‘clean’ site for new baths could be procured. A commentator on a 1905 Perth Swimming Club Carnival wrote that:

swimming is one of the cleanest of sports, and deserves to stand high in the estimation of the public... Perth has the advantage over its rival clubs at Claremont and Fremantle that the water is always smooth - the less said about the cleanliness of the water the better (TWA 23 December 1905, 12).

The construction of new baths was repeatedly delayed due to bureaucratic hindrances and disputes over potential sites. The Perth City Council insisted, as they did with the original baths, that a convenient location be made the top priority. One proposal suggested that the baths be relocated to a site at the foot of Mount Eliza below Kings Park. The Kings Park Board expressed concerns about the visual and auditory experiences of park visitors, insisting that “there should be no chance of persons on the high grounds of the Park, the terraces, for example, looking into the baths” and demanded that new baths be located “out of ear shot of the frequented parts of the Park”, citing concerns over “disgraceful language” (TWA 28 November 1905, 4). Responding to these issues in a letter to the editor of The West Australian, the President of the Western Australian Amateur Swimming Association, Stirling Mitchell, declared that concerns about noise and foul language were unfounded (5 December 1905, 3).
4.24 A cartoon depicting concerns about visitors to Kings Park being able to see the bodies of swimmers and bathers in the baths if new facilities were built below the Mount Eliza Scarpe (WM, 11 November 1911).

4.25 Looking across Perth Water from Mt Eliza—which would become Kings Park—circa 1864. While this image was taken decades before the construction of formal bathing facilities, it shows how a visitor to the scarp is able to gaze down upon the water’s edge below, and likely would see into an unroofed bathing facility (State Library of Western Australia, 6909B/23).

The proposed site was shifted further west towards the local breweries. Swimmers argued that it was “bad enough in all conscience to have to swim in practically mud, without having the refuse from two breweries as well” (ST 17 December 1905, 16). They expressed concerns about negative haptic and olfactory experiences of mud and brewery
wastes, worries which were markedly different from the Kings Park Board’s anxieties about those outside the baths seeing and potentially being offended by the bodies of swimmers and bathers, or the language they used. The swimming clubs promoted their sport as physically and morally principled, while others viewed the physical and moral activities at the baths as questionable, and raised concerns about visual experiences arising from circumstances external to the baths over the sensory experiences of those within.

The Kings Park Board was also concerned that placing new baths below the park would degrade the ‘picturesque’ view of the park seen from the city foreshore or the river. The views between the river, city and Kings Park played a significant (if mixed) role in the creation of Perth’s identity since settlement, and were considered of great importance in the decades around Federation in 1901 (see Seddon and Ravine 1986, Lewi 2000, 2002, Taylor 2007). The Board argued that “King’s Park, as here seen by visitors coming upstream, is universally approved as one of the scenic pictures of Australia - truly Australian in its native ruggedness...a happy blending of native and artificial picturesqueness” (TWA 13 March 1909, 4). The board felt that the “truly Australian” visual experience of Kings Park needed to be preserved and protected, and placing a bathing structure beneath the park would be “an aesthetic calamity - a prostitution of the artistic to soulless utilitarianism” (TWA 13 March 1909, 4). The wider significance of the views from Kings Park to issues of place and national identity are discussed in chapter five.

By 1909 a battle-of-sites was taking place between the Council, State government, Kings Park Board, swimming associations and other concerned parties. The Council favoured a location conveniently close to the city, while the Government and Kings Park Board preferred more distant sites.
The increasingly mechanised and modernizing city, as seen in image 4.26, was also beginning to present challenges to the practicality of bathing on the foreshore by the 1910s. 'Swandrop' complained about the unpleasant sensory experience of a journey to the baths in a 1910 letter to the editor of *The West Australian*:

*A long wearying tram ride through superheated streets, accompanied by all manner of clanking, clanging, grinding and hissing noises, clouds of germ-laden dust (why I have seen the germs), the whole aggravated by continuous and irritating stoppages - that is what takes the weary one to the cleansing briny. It also brings him back again, and the last state of that man seems worse than the first* (29 January 1910, 14).

For ‘Swandrop’ the jarring haptic, auditory and olfactory experiences of the modern city were taxing, and in this context the baths acquired new meaning as a place of rejuvenation and refreshment in the “cleansing briny”. The sensory overload of modernity served to highlight the multi-sensory enjoyment and relief that many believed could (or should) be found in aquatic environments.

During the debates over sites keen swimmers visited potential bathing locations themselves. In a 1911 letter to the editor of *The West Australian* ‘Swan Riverite’ presented a detailed explanation of why one site was unsuitable, drawn from personal multi-sensory observations and experiences of the location and patterns of weather, tides and currents:

*From a bathing point of view, the waters in the immediate vicinity of the chosen site are absolutely unsuitable for the purpose of baths, the bottom being silt fully three to four feet deep, on hard clay and oyster shell in patches, and even if scraped “clean”*
the following winter’s rains and storm waters will put your silt back for you. One must remember that the whole bottom of Perth Water and the river up to Guildford is soft mud and decayed vegetable matter, and the “Fremantle Doctor” [a southerly breezed that arrives in the afternoons during the summer] keeps the mixture well stirred... One has only to view the waters from the terraces on a calm morning to witness proof of the moving of the silt, and see the resultant banks or spits... Let the City Fathers stand on any jetty after a shower, and they will see the waters half way to South Perth the colour of a new gravel road... In conclusion, visit the site during the prevailing sea breezes, and if you care for a mouthful of the water, try it. You won’t want another, let alone swim in it with the bottom churned up by bathers and the wash of the ever-increasing river steamers and traffic passing (6 November 1911, 3).

The material conditions of deep silt and rotting vegetable matter were discovered through physical exploration of the riverbed, while sight was also a valuable tool for understanding the patterns of winds and currents which shaped and scoured sections of the river. Even taste is offered as a means of understanding the unsuitable nature of the site. ‘Swan Riverite’ believed that a potential site had to be naturally clean, because human effort to ‘clean’ an already silty site could not overcome the natural forces at work.

A 1913 article decried the Council for Perth’s unhappy status as the only capital city without suitable bathing facilities (TWA 1 October 1913, 6). A great deal of public frustration arose at the delays in providing new baths, and while some of these delays were economic and bureaucratic, a lack of understanding about the underlying (and underwater) nature of the river was a central part of the problem. There was not—nor could there be—consensus, or one single (and clear) understanding upon which rational decision making could take place. Multiple and possibly opposing sensory values led to different positions of ‘sensory’ self-understanding. Lingering false assumptions that because the river ‘looked’ attractive it should be simple to find a place to build bathing and swimming facilities that ‘felt’ pleasant were also problematic.
The Crawley Baths

In February 1914, after delays due to bureaucracy, finance and disputes over location, the long awaited Crawley Baths opened along the shoreline west of the city. The facility was less conveniently located, being two kilometres from Perth’s civic heart, but was favourably received for the haptic and visual experiences it provided: "the site of the baths is an exceptionally good one, the water being beautifully clean, and the sand bottom hard and white. The situation is picturesque, and the handsome buildings are an improvement to the foreshore" (DN 7 January 1914, 10). A combination of factors—including greater distance from the city and a loosening of social codes—allowed for an open bathing facility that permitted mixed gender bathing, resulting in more extensive visual encounters with other bathers and the wider riverine environment. The near resolution of the visual, tactile and olfactory conditions at the new site contributed to a certain kind of functional, architectonic and even civic integrity to the resulting facility, which remained in operation until the 1960s.
4.29 The Crawley baths circa 1914. High walls no longer visually separate male and female bathers and mixed gender bathing was permitted (Perth History Centre 2012).

Like the Perth City Baths, the Crawley baths were a site for exploring new and exciting aquatic activities. In 1919 a water slide, referred to as the 'Crawley Chute', was installed at the baths. An article in the *Sunday Times* declared that over 1000 people were braving the 60 foot length of the Crawley Chute every hour (2 March 1919, 4). A poem by ‘Dry Blower’ was published in the same article and described the thrills and sensations of the chute:

*Don’t mag of your merry-go-round*
*Swinging boats, see-saws and such*

*... It can’t be compared with the fun. Where the mixed-bathing multitudes go,*
*Where you shoot like a shot from a gun*
*To a fathom, of fluid below.*
*Come away, come away, come away.*
*Leave graft to the grimy galoot.*
*Soak yourself and your sweetheart with spray*
*Shooting*
*the*
*Chute!*
A sprint to the spring board and in!
When your bathers are well sodden through.
Up the forty-foot ladder you scoot
A few seconds later on, you are
Shooting
the
Chute!
...
Let go! And you fly down the Chute.
Where in one speedy second you flop.
Surrounded by spray and by spume!
...

(ST 2 March 1919, 4).

‘Dry Blower’ is enthusiastic about the haptic sensations of speed and trajectory including ‘flying’ or shooting ‘like a shot’. The experience included unfamiliar sensation of global touch as the body slid over the wet slide and air rushed past. Feeling ‘spray and spume’ and shooting into a ‘fathom of fluid’ indicate that the aquatic aspects of the experience were a large part of the enjoyment (even wet bathers get a mention).

4.30 The Crawley Baths circa 1920-1929. While the City Baths enforced physical and visual gender segregation, the Crawley baths permitted mixed gender bathing, allowing for wider visual experiences of the river and its surrounds (Battye Library 001046D).
The opening of the Crawley baths initiated a decline in the patronage and upkeep of the City Baths, which were removed in 1920 when aesthetic appreciation for the building had dwindled and it was regarded as an “eyesore to be removed” \((TWA \text{ 29 October 1918, 4})\). The building’s tenure on the shoreline was relatively brief and following its removal there were limited opportunities to haptically encounter the river on the immediate city foreshore, which became a place of primarily visual and terrestrial sensory experiences.

**The Perth Water Chute**

4.32 The Water Chute at Princes Court, Melbourne 1906. Photographs of amusements (and onlookers) were used for publicity and as souveniers, focusing on the monumental scale and novel form of the amusements \((Kane 2013, 9)\). Today they are valuable tools for understanding the form and even the function of an amusement, though they can only hint at the multi-sensory experience of such places. In this image onlookers surround the ride, actively participating in the creation of spectacle \((State Library of Victoria 2301713)\).
The Perth City Baths and the Crawley Baths promised—and sometimes failed to deliver, as in the case of the former—pleasant, cleansing or refreshing haptic encounters with the river. During the same period another very different form of recreation and amusement, the Perth Water Chute, provided novel, thrilling and potentially risky experiences at the river’s edge.

The turn of the twentieth century “witnessed the meteoric rise of the amusement park” (Kane 2013, 66, see also Kasson 1978). Developments in technology, transport and culture led to the increasing popularity of mechanical rides such as merry-go-rounds and water chutes in amusement parks and recreational areas worldwide. Kane argues that the main focus of mechanical amusements was “selling the experiences of pleasure itself, and for the first time, technology was employed to this end, with enormous success (2013, 67). Sally argues that Coney Island, the birthplace of many mechanical amusements, became a locus “of technological innovation that reconfigured the consumption of leisure as participatory and kinaesthetic. Spectacle became not solely a visual experience but a corporeal one, an experience that catapulted pleasure seekers out of their everyday experiences into unexpected and fantastic circumstances” (2006, 300).

This transformation occurred on a grand scale in large amusement parks, and on a smaller scale in innumerable parks and recreational areas. The combination of modern mechanical innovations and water provided popular and highly experimental entertainment.

4.33 A 1903 panorama of the Manly Water Chute, behind the Toboggan ride seen in the foreground. The 50 foot high tower leading up to the start of the chute provided an ‘modern’ aerial view of the ride and its surrounds, described by a 1904 visitor as “magnificent” (The Worker 6 Feb 1904, 2, photograph by Melvin Vaniman, State Library of NSW, a113010).

The first chute in Australia opened in Manly in 1903. The author of a 1904 article describes the experience of the Manly chute as “ultra sensational” and “a thrill of particularly thrilling character, earthly and unearthly at the same time” (Albury Banner
and Wodonga Express 5 February 1904, 29). An article in the Sydney Morning Herald declared that: “the ‘thrill’ of the experience exerted so unique a fascination that visitors returned again and again” (23 December 1903, 10). As the ride’s popularity spread new chutes opened in St. Kilda, Bendigo, Brisbane, Perth and elsewhere. At the Manly chute a song titled “Why Did They Build the Water Chute?” was performed. The lyrics exaggerated the impact of the chute, but also highlighted how the novel sensations of such entertainments were received:

A little while ago I was a happy married man.  
Never thinking of the grief I soon should know  
But now it all is changed  
Matilda’s mind’s deranged  
Since she took a trip to Manly for a blow  
She saw with great amaze, the very latest craze,  
That dizzy new sensation she thought cute.  
Now we’ve never any rest  
She’s ‘fairly off her nest’ since she booked a slither down the Water Chute!

Oh, why did they build the water Chute, Chute, Chute,  
Why couldn’t they be satisfied with merry go rounds  
Now she spends her money toggin to go on the new Toboggan  
And shoot the Chutes in Steyne Court Grounds  
Oh Grounds

She’s sure to break her neck  
Oh it really is too hard;  
The other afternoon  
I could have cried  
She’s got a bloomin’ water chute fix’d up in our backyard  
And morning noon and night she does a slide  
She’s got a baby’s wagon which she calls a ‘fiery dragon’  
And round and round on this you’ll see her ‘scoot’  
But she gives me such a fright,  
when she get’s up in the night,  
takes a dive and says she’s on the Water Chute!  
(Composed by H. Spencer, 1904).

In early 1905 the Perth Water Chute was erected at Point Lewis, along the Swan River to the west of the city, modelled on the highly successful Bendigo chute (TWA 12 Jan 1905, 4). Stairs leading up an 11 metre high timber tower brought participants to the start of the ride, which consisted of two sets of slide rails angled down at 26 degrees, with a
slight upward tilt at the water’s edge to increase the trajectory of the boats. Boats holding 8-12 people were launched down one set of rails and pulled to the top on the other by an electric motor. The chute was a new form entertainment for Perth, and prior to its opening *The Daily News* described not only the structure and how it operated, but what was enjoyable about it: “the fun, which is described as exciting and exhilarating, is derived by descending the chute in specially built boats at great speed, and dashing into the water at the foot of the incline” (5 January 1905, 7).

The opening ceremony and inaugural launch were staged as a spectacle and punctuated with moments of dramatic tension. Hints that it was the first time the boats had been trialled added an aura of potential danger, exacerbated by delays and extra safety checks. *The West Australian* described the first launch:

> The word was given, the cradle tilted, and the boat slid with the velocity of an infant avalanche down the slippery rails. In a second she struck the water, flinging off a huge shower of spray on either side, and rose gracefully several feet above the surface; dropping again, again she jumped, and flitted out into the river as neatly as a skipping pebble. A sigh and a cheer from the crowd on shore hailed the successful launch (12 January 1905, 4).

The second launch, carrying a group of dapper young men, overturned due to the boisterous behaviour of the occupants, providing great amusement but also some consternation from the crowd (*TWA* 12 January 1905, 4). Audience participation, discussed further below, was an important part of the spectacle.

4.34 *The Perth Water Chute with a large crowd of onlookers. The chute brought participants in contact with sprays and splashes of river water, or complete immersion if the boat overturned. The potential for such a ‘disaster’ was part of the thrill (WM 4 February 1905).*
New and unfamiliar bodily sensations were central to the appeal of water chutes and *The West Australian* wrote that: “to the uninitiated it is not easy to convey an adequate idea of the feelings excited by a descent in a chute. Those who tried it at Point Lewis yesterday seemed to enjoy the whole performance fully” (12 January 1905, 4). The emphasis on the body as the locus of exhilaration and excitement was a shift from more traditional understandings of excitement as an emotion often associated with visual or auditory experiences (as a spectator), or even experiences of taste and smell. Sally argues that “mechanical amusements celebrated and fostered thrill seekers as sensuous beings who experienced leisure not just through their eyes, but with and through their entire bodies” (2006, 294).

Speed and a forward and downward trajectory were the physically provocative and intentionally frightening aspects of the experience, and many journalists noted how a boat “flies down the declivity” (TWA 12 January 1905, 4) and rushes “with lightning speed” (*The Catholic Press* 31 Dec 1903, 5). The descent resulted in novel experiences of touch, proprioception and kinaesthesia as the forces of gravity, acceleration and even momentary weightlessness acted on the body. *The Western Mail* wrote that: “the water-chute is one of the latest devices to minister to the needs of those who enjoy physical emotions of the kind formerly found in the giddy flight of merry-go-rounds, ‘ocean-waves,’ and swinging boats” (4 Feb 1905, 26), linking emotions with powerful bodily experiences. ‘Shooting the chutes’ was not always enjoyable, as the *Bendigo Advertiser* noted: “to a person who has just partaken of a sumptuous repast, the first ride is some times like the first symptoms of ‘mal de mer’” (21 April 1904, 2).
Like mixed-gender bathing, the Water Chute also generated concerns relating to behavioural propriety, as “rapid-motion mechanical rides had explicitly sexual overtones: couples (or complete strangers!) were thrown together from the movement of the rides” (Sally 2006, 30). Shortly after the Perth chute opened a gossip column in the Sunday Times wrote: “the water chute is the most thrilling invention that has yet struck Perth. That the girls hang grimly on to the nearest man when the boats strike water. That seasoned shootists agree that this is the most satisfying thrill of the show” (22 January 1905, 1). Sally notes that at the turn of the century such active, public physical encounters between men and women were a profound shift away from traditional Victorian understandings of public bodily propriety. They were also evidence of the way technology and mechanized entertainments were beginning re-shape social expectations relating to behavioural propriety (2006, 30).

The water chute was consumed physically by participants and visually by spectators. Ekström explains how in the ‘disaster shows’ on Coney Island, such as Fighting the Flames (a performance centred around a staged fire) “the spectators were incorporated into the scene, playing the part of the gazing onlookers in the street. This arrangement turned them into performers in the displays” (2012, 476-477). Disaster shows sought to diffuse the boundaries between participants and spectators and also exposed spectators to not only the sights, but the sounds, tactile sensations and even smells of the event (Ekström 2012, 475-477). Sally too notes how the amusement parks of Coney Island were “an invitation to spectators to become corporeally engaged in the manufacture and consumption of spectacle, spectacle that was not solely visual but that appealed to all of the senses” (Sally 2006, 299). At the water chute both spectators and riders experienced the sights, sounds and smells associated with the chute, but the haptic experience, central to the chutes, was only available to riders. The distinctively corporeal nature of ‘shooting the chute’ in Perth provided a new dimension for ‘knowing’ one’s body, the bodies of others and the surrounding riverine environment; a distinctively haptic experience of place.

Ekström notes how ‘disaster’ exhibitions “created involvement in the displays through affect and physical presence as much as making the audience adhere to a particular script or ideology” (2012, 477). The combination of what people saw and felt when they watched the riders, what they felt if they chose to ‘shoot the chutes’ themselves, and what was written and said about the chute, perpetuated various understandings (sometimes conflicting) of the chutes as thrilling, novel, risky or safe. A 1904 spectator describes watching a descent at the Manly chute: “it looks to the spectators as if the
occupants must inevitably be pitched out into the water or irretrievably drenched, but as
a fact, not a drop of water touches them and the exhilarating ride is safe” (*Albury Banner
and Wodonga Express* 1904, 29).

Thrills and the fear of potential disaster were an integral part of the experience of the
chutes. The sensation of speed and the lack of personal control over the vessel’s
movements generated a ‘domesticated’ sense of terror, in which technology—and faith
in technology—played a central role. Sally observes that “the kinaesthetic thrill of
mechanical amusements was bound up in their recreation of dangerous situations”
(2006, 301). Rabinovitz argues that mechanical rides “reversed the usual relations
between the body and machinery in which the person controls and masters the machine:
the person surrendered to the machine which, in turn, liberated the body in some
The “fantasy of seeing technology go out of control” (Rabinovitz 2001, 90) was also a
significant part of the experience. Imagining disaster was linked to the surrender of the
body to the control of mechanical technology (Sally 2006, 301). The exhilarating fear
accompanying the ride may have lessened as riders gained confidence from repeated
engagement and the observation of others. This drove the need to create newer, more
daring and more powerful amusements which could provide stronger bodily sensation
and renew the essential and sensational experience of fear.

Like the City Baths, the Water Chute positioned the river’s edge as a place which
provided not only pleasant views, but enjoyable or exciting multi-sensory experiences
which generated a wider understanding of one’s body and the surrounding environment.
Feeling the river in the context of the chute was exciting, thrilling and even momentarily
frightening. The construction of the Water Chute in Perth in 1905 took place 20 years
after the first water chute was built in in the US, and 10 years after the first chute was
built on Coney Island. This is testament to the rapid spread of mechanical amusement
technologies during this period and reveals how technology was shaping new leisure
practices centred on corporeal (rather than mostly visual) experiences (Sally 2006, 300).
The global proliferation of water chutes resulted in the sensations associated with them
becoming part of a ‘shared’ realm of experiences at the water’s edge (in both natural and
artificial bodies of water), that was understood not only locally, but even globally. The
rapid spread of technology resulted in international dimensions to sensory regimes and
the cultivation of certain haptic experiences.
Conclusion

The Perth foreshore is a contrived landscape which, since the time of European settlement, has been modified to meet many of the beliefs, needs and desires of the population, and at the same time exert some control over their activities and behaviours. The construction of the Perth City Baths was intended to increase the propriety and pleasure of riverside amenities as well as impart messages of medico-moral reform, entailing lessons about bodily hygiene. A condition of indulging in these pleasures was that visual experiences of both participants and those outside the facilities were carefully controlled through high walls and gender segregated bathing areas. However, insufficient consideration was given to the placement of the baths and the muddy, polluted nature of the shoreline when selecting the site for the facility. Citizens’ interpretations of the value or hazards of a visit to the baths demonstrate a social heterogeneity in how the senses are used, and in significance, perception and thresholds of tolerance of sensations (Corbin 2005, 130). A range of individuals in different social classes (city councillors, doctors, swimmers and patrons of the Perth City Baths) were widely in agreement about the unpleasant odours emanating from the foreshore, but had divergent opinions and levels of tolerance relating to the pleasures, benefits or risks of bathing in the river.

The baths and the Water Chute are also evidence of how recreational pleasure took on a more corporeal dimension at the turn of the century, first in the gradual transformation and expansion of swimming practices at the City Baths (and later the Crawley Baths), and more powerfully in the encompassing bodily experiences of the Water Chute. These features of the foreshore are distinctive as they facilitated activities that were primarily valued and actively sought as entertainments inducing pleasurable and exciting haptic experiences. The knowledge of ‘place’ generated through haptic and olfactory experiences at the baths resulted from direct contacts with currents, temperatures, and textures. Knowledge garnered was in many ways location specific, though not always positive because of the muddy condition of the site.

While new trends in corporeally based recreation were emerging, older understandings of visual and bodily propriety sometimes operated in opposition to these shifts. Dissent and confusion about the benefits (hygiene and fitness) and dangers (corporeal, sanitary and moral) of encounters with the river are evidence of this conflict. The multiple, overlapping and at times conflicting sensory regimes and understandings of place on the foreshore eventually limited the lifespan of the baths. These conflicting sensory values
also insured that in the future the immediate Perth foreshore would become a place of primarily visual value.

Early twentieth century swimming techniques and bodily thrills may seem pedestrian today, more than 100 years later. Furthermore, it is impossible to understand fully an early twentieth century bather’s experiences, though accounts from the time suggest that such sensory experiences partially transformed peoples’ experiences of the environment and their own bodies. Today different sensory regimes are shaping recreational urban waterfronts, and present day sensory encounters are explored in the chapters to come.
In 2004 the Swan River was listed as Western Australia’s first Heritage Icon, a strong indication of the value placed on the river, and further impetus for this thesis to consider the contemporary sensory history of the river’s urban edge. The preceding chapter explained how since European settlement the Swan River on the city foreshore has been shaped by infilling, the construction of riverside retaining walls and the creation of grassy recreational spaces and facilities. These transformations were undertaken to meet settlers’ imported expectations of how a river and its foreshore should appear and be utilized. In the latter decades of the twentieth century the grassy opens spaces of the
foreshore became a site of contention. Some felt the wide waterside parklands created
an untenable disconnect between the river and the city, while others viewed the large
recreational area as “an idyllic and untouched natural setting” (Yabuka 2008, 46).
Fears over the loss or commercialization of public space were at the root of decades of
debate over the form and function of the water’s edge.

This chapter commences by considering some of the major foreshore transformations
that have occurred along the Swan River since the 1920s and efforts in more recent
decades to ‘reconnect’ the city (meaning the central business district that extends for
around one kilometre along the foreshore) and the river. These introductory comments
set the stage for discussion of the major Elizabeth Quay redevelopment which was
ongoing during the writing this thesis and partially opened in January 2016. The chapter
considers aspects of the development including the BPH Billiton Water Park, the ‘Island’
recreational area, and the Florence Hummerston Kiosk. The focus then turns to Point
Fraser, a 2003 project that transformed disused waterside brownfields at the eastern end
of the Perth Esplanade Park into ‘sustainable’ parklands, a place to encounter up-close
some of the flora and fauna of the area in a multi-sensory setting. The chapter also
considers the Lotterywest Federation Walkway in Kings Park, a setting which celebrates
the visual appeal of the city and its surrounds. Of note are the different ways that each
project selectively appropriates the ‘native’ or ‘ecological’ heritage of the river, in some
instances ignoring, or even seeking to reverse, the transformations wrought on the
riverscape by settlers. These three very different foreshore interventions provide a
variety of types of haptic and olfactory experiences which shape different understandings
of the city’s foreshore, the river and Perth’s place identity.

Foreshore Transformations and ‘Reconnecting’ with the River

The Foreshore from the 1920s to the 1980s

The removal of the Perth City Baths in 1920 and the completion of continuous riverside
walls between Barrack Square and the Causeway Bridge on the eastern end of the
foreshore in the 1930s created a visually ‘tidy’ edge for the Swan River but also eliminated
most opportunities for corporeal encounters with the shoreline, such as swimming or
wading. In 1937 Riverside Drive was constructed, running along the water’s edge from
below Kings Park to the Causeway at the eastern end of the foreshore. The road partially
transformed the foreshore into a transit corridor; a space mostly experienced visually from within the sensory isolation of a moving vehicle.

5.2 Perth circa 1930. The river’s edge has been straightened and wide grassy parklands separate the city from the river. Riverside Drive is the long, straight road running along the water’s edge. Kings Park is seen in the background. Mounts Bay, the body of water that is furthest to the right in this image, was later infilled to accommodate the Narrows Bridge and a freeway interchange (State Library of Western Australia b2387995 S2).

In 1955 The Plan for the Metropolitan Region- Perth and Fremantle (often referred to as the Stephenson Hepburn Plan) resulted in the construction of the Narrows Bridge (completed in 1959) and the infilling of 43 acres of Mounts Bay to connect the bridge to a large freeway interchange (Gregory and Grant 2014, 46). Many post-war planners, including Stephenson (an engineer), subscribed to “the authority of science and the promise of progress” and “enthusiastically embraced technological solutions for major urban projects” (Gregory and Grant 2014, 44). This approach was frequently enacted to the detriment of the environmental, aesthetic and sensory values of a site. As lead planner, Stephenson recognized the Swan River’s importance to Perth residents, noting that:

“Not only does its cool, blue expanse appear in delightful views from many points, but its waters also give infinite pleasure to thousands of children, yachtmen, fishermen and swimmers. It is in effect a vast and magnificent wedge of open space driving right into the heart of the metropolis” (Stephenson and Hepburn 1955, 97).
However, Gregory and Grant observe that as Stephenson designed the freeway he unconcernedly recommended eliminating Mounts Bay to create the freeway interchange, in spite of local protests about the Bay’s civic and environmental value (2014, 46).

From the 1960s onwards a number of different foreshore redevelopment proposals sought in various (sometimes ill-defined) ways to ‘reconnect’ the river with the city. ‘Reconnection’ seemed, in many instances, to entail a combination of physical, visual, vehicular and pedestrian linkages, though how greater ‘connectedness’ was to be achieved was frequently contested. While not often explicitly expressed, many of the proposals from this period (examined below) hint at desires for a more complex and multi-sensory place, and experiences beyond what the flat, grassy, visually ‘sanitized’ shoreline with its long, straight riverside walls offered.

The 1977 findings of the *Perth Regional Tourism Study* and the *Swan and Canning Rivers Activity Study* expressed interest in reconnecting the city to the river and removing Riverside Drive in favour of increased cycle and pedestrian access. They suggested locating commercial and recreational activities along the waterfront; a physical and activity based reconnection. These studies were followed by the *Central Perth Foreshore Study* in 1985, a collaboration between city and river management authorities which also included a proposal to develop a connection between the river and the city by
eliminating Riverside Drive (Gregory, Jenny 2003, 313 citing Perth City Council Minutes 16 Sept 1985 and 17 Feb 1986).

Debates over ‘Reconnecting’ with the River 1990 - 2008

The decades approaching Australia’s Bicentennial in 1988, which included the Millennium in 2000 and the Centenary of Federation in 2001, were a time of collective reflection (for some, handwringing) on Australia’s history since European settlement (Taylor 2007, 150). It was a period that “witnessed the substantial growth and ethnic diversification of the nation’s population as well as Perth’s, along with the considerable expansion of the Western Australian economy. It also saw increased pollution, algal blooms and related fish kills in the Swan River” (Taylor 2007, 149). The meanings ascribed to historical sites and natural environments, and the place identity this informed, came to the fore in debates about additions to or redevelopment of the foreshore.

In 1989 an international design competition for the redevelopment of the foreshore was announced, co-funded by the City and the State and offering a $50,000 prize for the winning design (Gregory 2009, 13-14). This kicked off a period of intensive design, redesign and debate that took over two decades to be resolved (if partially and controversially) in the Elizabeth Quay project. Bolleter writes that “the legacy of this prolonged design process is a comprehensive record of evolving trends in waterfront design and changing notions of what Perth is, and could be, as expressed through designs for the waterfront” (2014, 570). Yabuka describes two different perspectives on the foreshore that had existed for many years: firstly, as a place of uninhabitable emptiness and, opposing this view, an idyllic natural landscape (2008, 46). At the time of the design competition the parklands offered little incentive to draw visitors; they were used for sports and events on the weekends, but remained largely unoccupied on weekdays and evenings (Bolleter 2014, 572).

Prior to the competition a seminar—which included design professionals, planners and creative arts groups—was convened to discuss the foreshore and the proceedings, Perth’s Foreshore: A Creative Challenge, were published in 1991 by the Australian Institute of Urban Studies (AIUS). One goal that emerged from the seminar was the integration of the city and the river, and recognition of the foreshore as Perth’s most important site.
(AIUS 1991, 42, see also Gregory 2009, 13-14). Kay Callahan, Minister for Planning and the Arts, highlighted the “need to study ways to reduce barriers, whether physical or psychological, between the City and its foreshore” (AIUS 1991, 4). For Max Hipkins, the Chair of the AIUS and Member of the Swan River Trust, it was the river itself that could be a point of both interest and physical engagement. The Trust, according to Hipkins, favoured “activities on or adjoining the river which are water related” and “better utilization of the foreshore by those more interested in enjoying the river” (AIUS 1991, 7). The report contained suggestions about how the river could be more positively encountered including the creation of swimming beaches, lakes, islands, fountains or even buildings in the river itself, creating an atmosphere with a “degree of whimsy and humour” in relation to the waterfront (AIUS 1991, 42-43).

Many of the redevelopment proposals suggested in *Perth’s Foreshore: A Creative Challenge* indicate that in the 1990s there was interest in providing a variety of different, multi sensory ways of encountering the river to enhance positive perceptions of the city. Ironically, some of the proposed elements, such as beaches, lakes and islands, existed along or near the foreshore at the time of European settlement, though not necessarily in forms acceptable to European tastes at the time – or local tastes today. The seasonal, silty, marshy or ‘smelly’ nature of these early features resulted in their near complete elimination through infilling and the visual and olfactory ‘tidying-up’ of the water’s edge. Proposals to re-create these features suggest that such waterside ‘places’ are desirable, albeit with more favourable sensory qualities. Oliver refers to efforts to create controlled ‘natural’ waterside places a very ‘modern’ approach to riverside design which arose in the mid-1800s and is exemplified by the development of the Thames Embankment (2000, 227).

Kevin Lynch’s Massachusetts environmental design firm Carr, Lynch, Hack and Sandell won the 1991 competition. Their landscape-focused proposal (pictured below) sought to reconcile the Swan River’s place-identity with ‘City Beautiful’ imperatives (Bolteer 2014, 588). These including creating attractive parks, promenades, and plazas, as well as riverside roads and bridges along the waterfront (Breen and Rigby 1994, 12). Bolteer, an urban planner, notes “the overt directive of the brief for a landscape response can be attributed to the role of [local historian] George Seddon as competition advisor” (2014, 573). Seddon’s work is highly regarded in Perth and his many books, including *Swan River Landscapes* (1970) and *A Sense of Place* (1972) address how Perth’s biophysical features contribute to the city’s identity. However, Bolteer argues that Seddon’s work offers “little direct guidance as to how architectural form could be reconciled with this
landscape” (2014, 573). Gregory notes that the public’s reaction to the winning scheme “was positive, even enthusiastic”, however, there were also some who worried about cost or wanted a more ‘twenty-first century’ design (2009, 15). Bolleter too notes that there were objections to the winner’s strong emphasis on landscape and he argues that other competition entries, such as local firm Donaldson and Warn’s proposal, foreshadowed the urban focus that would later be established at Elizabeth Quay (Bolleter 2014, 574).

The winning scheme included the ‘Grand Crescent’ a large curving jetty leading to a swan shaped island. The jetty was intended to re-create the shape of Mounts Bay and connect people with Kings Park via an aerial tramway (Gregory 2009, 14). The jetty was also intended to emphasise sweeping views of the Perth skyline from across the water (Bolleter 2014, 54). The design proposed to reconnect the city to the river by excavating a large area of Langley Park—following to some degree the contours of the original shoreline—to create an artificial waterway named ‘Old Shore Creek’. This was presented as a means of “bring[ing] the river back to the edge of the existing city structure, rather than advancing the urban form of the city itself to the river’s edge” (Bolleter 2014, 574).
Some of the key features of the winning design include the ‘Grand Jetty’, which curls in from near the Mounts Bay freeway interchange, and a series of lakes named ‘Old Shore Creek’ which were intended to refer to the form of the shoreline prior to reclamation (image from Gregory, 2009, 14).

The extensive manipulation of the water’s edge was, in the case of the jetty and Swan Island, largely focused on visual experiences of place. Lynch’s design philosophies—related in his seminal book, The Image of the City (1960)—sought to transform "our new city world into an imageable landscape: visible, coherent and clear" (Lynch 1960, 91). For Lynch the ‘edge’ condition was a crucial and defining element in a city, and the most important condition on the Perth foreshore (Bolletter 2014, 575, see also Lynch 1960, 62-66). Preserving the original urban edge along the parklands and creating the island provided features and vistas to be viewed from the Grand Crescent. Within the parklands the artificial water feature ‘Old Shore Creek’ was intended to trace the original shoreline and contain plants which represented the biodiversity of the river and its surrounds (Bolletter 2014, 576). However, placing an artificial creek in a reclaimed landscape seems like a further intervention rather than a means of acknowledging or recovering the historic shoreline. Yabuka argues that Perth’s urban layout has encouraged traditions of visual (rather than physical) interactions with the river (2008, 46). The scheme was relatively popular, however it became caught up in contractual, development and management issues and was never implemented (Gregory 2009, 15).

While the major redevelopment did not take place in the 1990s, smaller transformations occurred on the foreshore in the years around the millennium. In 1994 Barracks Square—the ‘civic heart’ of the foreshore since its completion in 1907—was upgraded with a new jetty. On the jetty stood the ‘Old Perth Port’, a cluster of maritime-themed buildings intended to recall a busy river port of the 1900-1920s (Heritage Perth 2014). Re-
creating historic maritime facilities seems at odds with the prevailing 'landscape' or 'urban' desires for the foreshore at the time and the buildings were never a major draw for locals or tourists.

5.6 The Bell Tower was a millenial projected that was intended to create a large visual icon on the foreshore to enhance the identity of the city. The original proposal was scaled down significantly (the final tower is 82.5 metre high) and the resulting building is somewhat lost amongs the higher city backdrop (photo by SatuSuro, Wikimedia Commons).

In 1998 the state government commissioned Hames Sharley architects to further redevelop Barrack Square and construct the Bell Tower to house the Swan Bells. Journalist Zoltan Kovacs argued “what Perth needs is some sort of architectural eccentricity that cannot go unnoticed" (Kovacs 1999). There were hopes that the tower’s height and ‘futuristic’ design could enhance the visual identity of the city. Some believed that the tower could reconnect the city and the river, redressing "the lack of integration between the city and the riverside that has contributed to Perth’s reputation as a city without a heart” (TWA 20 October 1998).

The height, design and cost of the tower generated public controversy. A 1999 article in The West Australian argued that the tower—intended to be around the height of the Statue of Liberty, 93 metres—was “too big for the site and absolutely unconnected to WA’s history, lifestyle or aspirations" (12 January 1999). Subsequently, the tower’s height was limited to 82.5 metres. The steel and glass spire was intended to call to mind a range visual representations of Perth such as the wings and neck of the iconic Black Swans or the billowing sails of yachts on river. Taylor argues that the 'uncertain' representational motif highlights the opposing environmental and cultural inspirations behind the design (2007, 154). On one hand, better understandings of ecosystems (which contribute to the sensory features of river) means that many of the qualities of the river have come to
make ‘sense’. On the other hand, there is a history of cultural aspirations to ‘tame’ or ‘improve’ the river, eliminating what were once considered unpleasant natural characteristics. By the time it was completed the cost, modifications to the tower’s height and the dubious contribution of its spire to the identity of the city—‘identity’ being an already contestable concept—had raised the ire of taxpayers who paid for the structure and critics who lampooned it (see letters to the editor from TWA 22 October 1998 and Kovacs 1999).

The Bell Tower, while intended to be ‘secular’ according to the architects (see Hames Sharley 2015) calls on historic, relatively familiar and potentially dubious sonorous associations. European colonizers brought with them sound-technologies, often of medieval provenance, which had distinctive cultural meanings (Smith 2007b, 56). Bells, according to Corbin, once played multiple roles in European cities. They provided auditory synchronisation across the city, transmitted information, marked celebrations and sounded the alarm “impos[ing] an immediate and obligatory membership and shap[ing] the auditory landscape” (2014, 49). Bells, frequently linked to a clock, were used in Australia by “colonizers who attempted to use clock-regulated bells to discipline not only the nascent Australian working classes but also aboriginal people” (Smith 2007b, 57). This linked the sounds of bells to efficiency, wages and bodily discipline (Smith 2007b, 56). It also associates the sound of bells with the subjugation of the indigenous and convict populations, problematic historic connections which may not be widely known.

The potential benefits or nuisance of the sound of bells on the foreshore were an additional source of public conflict. In a letter to the editor of The West Australian Ian D. MacLeod wrote: “bell ringing at the tower will provide the opportunity for the public to see and hear an ancient art that evokes the full spectrum of human emotions associated with celebrations of our national days and public mourning” (22 October 1998). In opposition, Bruce J. Crane states in his letter to the editor in the same issue that “if, once the new bell is installed, there is any need to grind off any metal to tune it, there will be no prizes for guessing which bit should come off first” (TWA 22 October 1998), suggesting that silencing the clapper might become necessary. The comments reveal two opposing understandings of the sound of bells: one harkens back to a time when the tolling of bells communicated events of cultural, religious or historic significance, while the other indicates that in a modern context the tolling of bells might be just one more source of clamour in an already polluted acoustic environment. The auditory association the bells imply, and their connection to distant England, seem out
of step (or out of tune) with the modern, multicultural and ‘Australian’ image that both the public and governing bodies seem to (at times) be seeking.

The Bell Tower failed to meet desires (maybe unachievable) for an iconic visual structure to generate a strong experience of place identity on the foreshore, or the acoustic potential of the bells to contribute to a distinctive or novel acoustic realm which combines new and old traditions. While tourist brochures provide appealing visual imagery of the tower on the foreshore, in reality the spire is lost amongst the buildings and trees, and will continue to shrink as the large scale Elizabeth Quay development proceeds (the Bell Tower is noticeably smaller than the prospective new buildings in the rendering of Elizabeth Quay in image 5.1). The tower remains a ‘modest’ enterprise, “distant to other, more celebrated harbour or riverside schemes in Sydney or Melbourne” (Taylor 2007, 156).

A variety of waterfront redevelopment schemes were proposed in the early 2000s, and in 2008 Ashton Raggett McDougall (ARM) and Richard Weller were selected by the Office of the Government Architect and LandCorp as the lead consultants on the waterfront redevelopment (Bolleyer 2014, 577). Their Circle Scheme broke the visual demarcation between urban form, parklands and river that had been maintained in the 1991 scheme by Lynch’s firm (Bolleyer 2014, 577). The Circle Scheme referred to Perth’s history as a site of British empirical expansion, but less to its original physical form. Bolleyer describes it as a variety of ‘post-modern eclecticism’ which generates a pastiche design incorporating fragments of historic forms (Bolleyer 2014, 59, for further on post-modern eclecticism see Gelerter 1995, 278-281).

For Bolleyer the scheme demonstrated “a growing awareness of Perth’s relationship with its global context” (2014, 579). Stickells wrote that the scheme’s “waterside restaurants and cafes, residential towers and obligatory promenade are rendered ready to be
dropped into any post-industrial city as property development and civic boosterism” (2008, 46). He also commented that he “would be heartened by a vision that allowed for the infiltration of more informal spatial practices - appropriations, resistances and evasions (beyond the vision’s perfunctory suggestion of ‘kiosks’ on the promenade)” (Stickells 2008, 46). Some sections of the community embraced the more urban Circle Scheme, while others felt it was disconnected from Perth’s identity, and the plan was ultimately scrapped when a new state government was elected in 2008 (Bolleter 2014, 582).

Elizabeth Quay

Following the failure of the ‘Circle Scheme’ the designers, ARM and Weller, were retained (somewhat controversially), and they created a new design based around a rectangular inlet (CityVision 2013, 3). The new Rectangular Scheme is similar in scale to Sydney’s Circular Quay and Melbourne’s Docklands, and Bolleter suggests that this “perhaps represents an attempt by administrators to position Perth’s waterfront within the canon of now well-established and ‘safe’ waterfront models” (2014, 589). Today the Rectangular Scheme, now named Elizabeth Quay, has been partially completed and the public areas of the new waterfront opened in January 2016.

5.8 Site plan for Elizabeth Quay. Numbered plots in white or green are sites which have or will be purchased by private sector investors. The remainder is the public domain showing the names of various precincts and features (MRA 2015).
The project, like many large redevelopments, has polarised public opinion, particularly given the two dominant ‘urban’ and ‘landscape’ desires for the foreshore. The conversion of ‘problem spaces’ into purportedly non-discriminatory public spaces which contribute to the identity of a city seldom occurs without some level of controversy or resistance (Desfor and Laidley 2011, 2). The Metropolitan Redevelopment Authority (MRA) is the government entity directing the scheme, and their website and advertising campaigns are a primary source of public information on the progress of the project. However, some of the information provided by the MRA can be seen as propaganda, promoting the government’s vision of the ‘success’ of the project, justifying the expenditure and seeking to lure visitors and investors to the project. Two advocacy groups, CityVision (a local think-tank and advocacy group) and The City Gatekeepers (a group of professionals and non-professionals promoting better planning) have been active critics of various aspects of Elizabeth Quay. The often-conflicting views of various facets of the Elizabeth Quay redevelopment put forward by these groups demonstrate the problematic nature of large-scale transformations of historically, culturally and environmentally significant public places.
Some of objections to the scheme have related to projected sensory conditions at the site, or features and activities which have been either included or excluded. The transformation of waterfronts into sites of recreation and the provision of certain sensations therein is sometimes accompanied by demonstrations—often subtle or misleading—of power. “Waterfronts are spaces best understood as operating within networks of historical relations, through the shipping of objects, information, and people. And these historical relations greatly influence the formation of power relations throughout the network” (Desfor and Laidley 2011, 6). Petrow observes that the design of public areas “reflects overall urban development strategies more than initiating – even mental – changes itself. Nevertheless, it inscribes political priorities into the built environment and makes them tangible” (Petrow 2011, 18). The preservation of some historical artefacts and ‘histories’ (and the removal of others) and the provision or elimination of certain activities shapes how a place and its history are understood. Moreover, a waterfront may be designed by and for certain groups to promote some behaviours, such as walking, dining and shopping, activities considered socially acceptable and which may have economic benefits for some stakeholders. Design and by-laws may limit the ability of some users to enjoy or feel comfortable on the waterfront, or may prohibit activities they enjoy (for example skateboarding or playing loud music). Different understandings of or concerns about these power relations are at the core of some of the objections to Elizabeth Quay (including its name, a controversial tribute to the British monarchy). Discussion focuses on the following areas or aspects of the project: The Inlet, the Promenade, solar access, the BHP Billiton Waterpark, The Island, and the Florence Hummerston Kiosk.

The Inlet and the Promenade

5.10 Site works showing the dredging of the 150 x 200 metre inlet. The significance of ‘returning’ the shoreline to its original locale in one small section of the river (at vast expense) is debatable. Dredging removed over 150,000 cubic metres of soil (ABC News 3 June 2015).
The design of the public realm centres on ‘The Inlet,’ a rectangular body of water dredged from the infilled shoreline. The Inlet brings the river back, in part, to its original shoreline at the time of European settlement. The 150 x 200 metre inlet includes a public jetty for small boats and is intended, according to the MRA, to be the visual feature “reconnecting the city with the river” (MRA 2015). It also serves as “a contemporary response to the historic Perth Port” (MRA 2012). Krieger stresses the importance of intertwining terrestrial and aquatic elements in an urban design, arguing that “the broader the zone of overlap between land and water, the more successfully a city will capture the benefits of its water assets” (2004, 33). Elizabeth Quay attempts, and to some degree succeeds, in knitting the river and shoreline together, but only over a relatively small section (several hundred metres) of the waterfront.

5.11 A 2015 rendering of The Inlet and the Promenade surrounding it. Note how tall buildings, which are indicated on the site plan and renderings (5.1 and 5.8), are absent from the image (MRA 2015).

The Inlet brings water in as a visual feature which is encircled by a one-kilometre split-level pedestrian ‘Promenade’ connecting opposite shores via bridges and an artificial island. The Promenade is intended to be “a busy pedestrian area on the upper level with a more casual space at the lower level” (MRA 2015). Maintaining circulation through the space by dividing flows of people limits, to some degree, people’s ability to move through the space freely.

Franck and Stevens argue that urban waterfronts have the potential to be places for “people to pursue a wide variety of activities, including activities that the space was not intended for, and may have risks or repercussions” (2007, 2). However, controlling design strategies and “preventative architecture”, like metallic tipped benches to discourage skateboarding, creates zones “of high social control and regulation” (Petrow 2011, 10). Petrow argues that this kind of urban design sends a message that certain groups (for example teenagers, drug addicts, or the homeless) are not welcome, “while at the same time raising the sense of security for ‘normal’ users and thus attracting the
‘right sort of people’ (Petrow 2011, 10 citing Zukin 1998). The controlled movement corridors of the Promenade may limit more informal spatial practices or appropriations—for example, street performers or informal gatherings—which can add character and diversity to a space. Limiting or controlling peoples’ movements (as occurs in shopping malls or airport terminals) positions everyone equally as observers moving through an area, contributing to a collective visual understanding of place, but also limiting the diversity of peoples’ sensory encounters.

The Promenade curtails the range of materials and surfaces that people come in contact with. As noted previously, Howes observes that most modern urban environments have been designed to avoid obstructing the body or causing minor brushes with buildings, infrastructure or foliage (2005, 28). Sennett argues that this results in cities composed of neutral, circulation oriented spaces, which diminish the potential for diverse sensory stimulation (1994, 256). The design of cities can result in people being ‘out of touch’ with surrounding material world, and designs may instead provide informative signage, monuments or sculptures which provide conceptual (rather than haptic, auditory or olfactory) ways of understanding the immediate environment (Howes 2005, 30). A direct consequence of the more ‘urbanised’ scheme for Elizabeth Quay may be a decrease in the diversity of materials and surfaces which are haptically encountered. The project covers a relatively small area, and common materials and motifs (seen in image 5.13 below) include granite pavers and benches, wooden boardwalks, concrete and steel – materials which have little or no historic connection with the area.

Haptic encounters with the area come mainly from walking on the promenade, or sitting on the benches, seating areas or grassy spaces. The various sculptures around the redevelopment are visually and tactily engaging, but disconnected from the river and its material history or present conditions.

**Solar Access**

Concerns about insufficient solar access—which could result in cool and unpleasantly over-shaded areas—have been raised repeatedly in regards to the Perth foreshore. The issue of solar access is a growing concern in many cities experiencing significant development and increased urban density. The public area is, at the time of writing, open to the sun (with places for shelter if it becomes too hot) and the lack of tall buildings or obstructions allows a breeze off the river to refresh the precinct. The City Gatekeepers draw attention to the fact that the large commercial and residential buildings in the Quay have yet to be built, and “people experience their city at street level so to really ‘feel’ this space try and imagine yourself on the footpath inside the development surrounded by tall office buildings” (The City Gatekeepers 2014). The character of the large paved areas of the project could be altered significantly—becoming
potentially cold, draughty or stagnant—depending on the form that the large buildings take.

The City Gatekeepers have produced computer renderings (see image 5.14) of the foreshore based on proposed lot and building sizes, suggesting that tall buildings will limited daytime solar access (Bolletter 2014, 586). Discussing ARM’s rendering of the site (image 5.15) The City Gatekeepers website notes “the complete lack of shadow cast by the buildings” and “the very poor interface between the human-scale buildings of Barrack Square and the proposed [new] buildings” (City Gatekeepers 2014). The City Gatekeepers argue that renderings by the designers are not portraying a ‘true’ version of the solar shading, and that in reality there will be too much shadow cast by tall, poorly placed buildings. Bolletter observes that “in the publicly released images of the scheme, ARM have opted to ‘ghost’ these buildings and to use a summer sun setting that minimizes the overshadowing of this area—a representational approach which is perhaps telling” (2014, 586), and misleading. Controlling solar access at different times of the year plays an important role in providing thermal comfort for a range of users. Too much shadow can result in physically cold and visually dark areas. City Vision has proposed an alternative scheme, which would graduate the scale of buildings around the waters edge to “ensure greater sun penetration throughout the year, while still allowing taller, substantial buildings away from the foreshore” (City Vision 2014). The visual and, importantly, physical discomfort of overly shaded areas may impact negatively on Elizabeth Quay’s identity as the area evolves.

5.14 The City Gatekeepers have generated an image of the shadows cast over the foreshore at 2 pm on June 22nd to demonstrate the extent of daytime shade that the large-scale buildings would create (City Gatekeepers 2014).
BHP Billiton Water Park

Mining company BHP Billiton funded a $10 million dollar interactive water feature in the northwestern corner of the site. The design of the Water Park is inspired by the seasonal nature of many Western Australian lakes, which fill and drain during wet and dry periods (MRA 2014). The ‘interactive’ water feature operates in various modes, including shooting jets of water, creating mists and operating as still reflective ponds. It incorporates light displays, and it can be drained to host events for up to 800 people (BHP Billiton 2015).

The inclusion of the waterpark is evidence that opportunities for corporeal encounters with water are still a desirable feature on the waterfront, albeit in a sanitized form. From the early nineteenth century the Swan (and other rivers) were ‘improved’ to eliminate undesirable or unfamiliar characteristics and sensations. In the twenty-first century redevelopment, estuarine ecology—in the form of the now-infilled seasonal lakes that surrounded original settlement—is called upon and selectively appropriated to ‘brand’ the site as a unique place and provide distinctive (though highly manipulated and sanitized) sensory encounters with water.
5.16 A computer generated image of the waterpark with boardwalk seating areas. While activities undertaken at the water park are distinctive (arguably more corporeal and playful than some other parts of the precinct), the park is constructed with the same granite, timber and forms used throughout the area. In some ways this detracts from the ‘uniqueness’ of the park, the sensory experiences it provides, and the aquatic features it references (Rendering from the MRA 2015).

Jetting water, mists and pools all provide very different haptic sensations, for example, mists feel light and temporary, while jetting water creates a sensation of impact. Some of the sensations provided by the various features of the water park are only possible because of technology (a theme that overlaps aspects of the previous chapter). The water in the fountain is fresh and filtered, with none of the scents or physical characteristics—pleasant or otherwise—which define the brackish Swan River. While the baths were a haptic and olfactory experience of the river that was place, time and culture specific (not to mention controversial and potentially risky), the fountain incorporates technologies found on many other waterfronts, and water which has no sensory qualities linking it to a specific place. Ironically, though the Water Park is intended to be a safe, sanitary place for aquatic play, it has been plagued by repeated incidents of bacterial or amoebic contamination since it opened and has remains closed for weeks at a time.

The form of the park, and materials use to build it (granite, timber, concrete) are contiguous with the rest of the precinct. Concrete is a ubiquitous urban material whose tactile and olfactory characteristic reveal little about the place in which it is situated. There is little to suggest that the water park will provide sensory experiences that are novel or place specific. In creating more safe and pleasant places it is also worth
considering the types of sensations that have been lost or curtailed, and what this means for peoples’ experiences of natural and built environments, as well as their own bodies.

5.17 A rendering of the BHP Billiton Water Park at night (MRA 2015).

While the water park may not provide place-specific environmental knowledge, it is still a place of (somewhat formulaic) enjoyment. Discussing a similar fountain which shoots jets of water from the pavement in front of the Casino on the Melbourne waterfront, Dovey and Stevens write that “the wetness is real, and so is the delight experienced by those who engage with it” (2005, 72). The unpredictable nature of the jets of water and the audience of spectators it draws can spur people into spontaneous engagement with the fountain, creating a situation where “strangers encounter each other in informal games framed around the jumping jets” (2005, 73). The fountain is an indicator that the area is a place for fun, and even risk, as people dodge the unpredictable jets of water (Dovey and Stevens 2005, 73). The BHP Billiton Water Park may one day generate a similar atmosphere of spontaneity and enjoyment, if it can overcome its technological teething problems.

The Island and the Florence Hummerston Kiosk

![Image](https://au.news.yahoo.com/thewest/wa/a/30725532/drone-captures-elizabeth-quay-from-above/)

A key water-related feature of Elizabeth Quay is the Island, a site which provides enjoyable views of the city, the precinct and the surrounding riverscape, though only limited and highly controlled haptic and olfactory encounters with the river’s edge. The Island is part of the circular walk around the inlet, and, according to Bolleter, it is
intended to provide “leisure and relaxation in the overall circuit of the riverside promenade” (2014, 583). A series of interweaving paths circle the artificial island, wandering through planted gardens and hard landscaping. Large boulders or concrete embankments form the edges of the island, limiting access to the river (see image 5.20). Visiting the island is a strongly visual experiences, as it allows visitors see the surrounding urban zone from a variety of angles; the opportunity to see and understand the waterfront from somewhere ‘different’ is an important—yet manufactured—part of the experience.

There is only one obvious opportunity to physically encounter the river on the island (or anywhere in the precinct), a small ramp of sand leading down to the water’s edge (see image 5.21). With its narrow form and hard edging this patch of sand fails to provide any ‘beach’ like sensations. Artificial beaches have become a popular feature in Australia and abroad. For example, Paris Plages, a seasonal artificial beach built on the banks of the Seine, draws thousands of enthusiastic visitors each summer (for further on artificial beaches see Stevens 2009). The beach on the island seems like a token gesture that fails to provide a significant opportunity to encounter the river, or the pleasures of an artificial beach.
The sandy ‘beach’ that provides the only—and very limited—opportunity to physically engage with the river. The narrow width of the ‘beach’, particularly where it meets the water, mean that it can be used by only a few people at one time (Photo by author February 2016).

The relocation of the Florence Hummerston Kiosk (a heritage listed structure) from the foreshore to the Island has raises issues relating to heritage and sensory environments. The brick and tile octagonal refreshment kiosk was once located on the Esplanade near Barrack Street. The building was commissioned in 1928 and contained five men’s dressing rooms and one for women (TWA 23 October 1928, 16). From its inception until its recent relocation it has housed a variety of restaurants and services, including, most recently, the Grand Palace Cantonese Restaurant (Hocking Heritage 2012).
Chapter three discussed how redeveloping an urban waterfront can result in the controversial elimination of historic buildings or features of a place. Curating what remains and how it is refurbished or reinterpreted is a complex and often contradictory process. The $11 million dollar cost of dismantling and relocating the historic kiosk onto The Island has drawn criticism from ratepayers and factions of the government (O’Connor 2015). However, plans to remove the 85-year-old kiosk (which is named after Perth’s first female councillor) were opposed by the Heritage Council and members of the community (Mullany 2012). Fitch argues that places, buildings or objects are both selected for preservation (or demolition) and interpreted (or re-interpreted), are often also ‘prettified’ (1982, 80). In the case of the Kiosk, reinterpretation has included moving it to an artificial island and adding a playground and nearby artworks. The visual appearance and physical form of the building (which is being completed at the time of writing) has been preserved and rebuilt in a ‘pretty’ context. However, the olfactory, auditory, tactile and visual settings in which the building once operated—a significant component of its sensory history and its heritage—have been radically transformed. When it re-opens as a café the kiosk will operate in a visual, physical, haptic and olfactory context which never existed in its past. This is a largely unavoidable consequence of redevelopment and, as discussed in chapter two, sensory regimes used to understand any building and its setting will invariably change. However, the building’s removal to not only a different area of the foreshore, but one with different and artificial geographical features, extends the distance to the building’s sensory past.

Breen and Rigby argue that public waterfronts provide opportunities to educate people about the cultural, environmental and maritime heritage of an area (1994, 27). According to documents from Hocking Heritage “a number of different strategies may be used to interpret the kiosk and provide linkages to the broader recreational history of the place” (2012, 45). They suggest the addition of interpretive features in and around the reconstructed kiosk including ‘historic images,’ ‘didactic panels’, and possibly a digital and/or sculptural artwork inside the building. They also suggest the provision of artwork based on the function of the changing rooms and exploring the theme of ‘undressing/dressing’” (Hocking Heritage 2012, 45). Though the completed building remains to be seen, it is likely that new features and artworks will engage primarily visual or informative—rather than multi-sensory—interpretive strategies.
Responses

The construction of Elizabeth Quay has finally come to pass after decades of debates (some ongoing) over the physical form of the foreshore. Responses to the precinct have been diverse, and sometimes divisive. Senior Labor MP Fran Logan described the design and architecture of Elizabeth Quay as “trashy boganism” stating that “there is no architectural merit down there, it has no appeal” (Kagi 2016). In contrast, the Liberal State Premier Colin Barnett argued that “the quality of the work is outstanding, the design is great, the public art is fantastic” (Kagi 2016). The redevelopment is still taking shape, and as it is completed peoples’ sensory experiences of the foreshore will shape (or re-shape) the area’s identity. In some instances, haptic experiences are cultivated and enhance (as in the water park), while in other areas (the designated promenades, the hard edging around the Island) sensory experiences are limited or controlled. Petrow observes that “restrictions are created by design to eliminate conflicts between users in advance. The benefits of providing a safe place come with a downside: the more the developers seek visual coherence and order, the more artificial the place becomes” (Petrow 2011, 10). Regimes of power aimed at increasing the economic benefits of the redevelopment and forming certain types of identity for the city (urban, safe, attractive, enjoyable) may result in a ‘nice’ place that provides many different ‘managed’ experiences, rather than opportunities to discover the unexpected. Bolleter argues that in the years between the 1991 design competition and the implementation of Elizabeth Quay there has been wider acceptance of urbanity on the foreshore, a shift which imparts “aspects of Perth’s collective identity” (Bolster 2014, 569). The sensory experiences of Elizabeth Quay may be largely ‘generic’ and ‘urban’, and it may be the visual and ‘human’ spectacle that shapes Elizabeth Quay’s identity into the future.

Point Fraser

The form of the urban realm and the amenities and activities contained therein were a central concern in the decades leading up to the Elizabeth Quay redevelopment. However, recent decades have also seen growing environmental concerns, originating from previous eras when “evidence of environmental degradation mounted, soil salinity rose, rivers became polluted and indigenous plants and animals disappeared” (Taylor 2007, 143, see also Bonyhady 2000, 4). Graham-Taylor explains how in Perth “the history of the Swan River since European settlement in 1829 can also be read as a story of a slow
deterioration in river water quality and an accompanying loss of the vital riparian vegetation that plays so important a role in maintaining a biologically balanced and healthy waterway” (2011, 125). Concerns over the river’s health and calls to curtail and regulate activities which may inflict further harm are becoming increasingly strident. Taylor also observes that recently “efforts aimed at enhancing the aesthetic appeal of Perth’s most notable topographic feature, the Swan River, have coincided with growing unease over its vulnerability at a time of extensive development” (2007, 142). The desire for more pleasing or contemporary aesthetics at the river’s edge can be seen in Elizabeth Quay, while efforts to improve riverine ecology have been undertaken at Point Fraser.

5.23 An aerial photo of the Point Fraser recreational area showing wetlands, paths, parking and amenities. The wetlands and parklands seen in the right-hand side of the photo are the focus of this section (Photo from Perth Now 22 December 2011).

Present-day environmental concerns relating to the Swan—which may be at odds with the river’s ‘healthy’ visual appearance—feature regularly in local media. For example, a 2014 Sunday Times special report, “Swan Dive”, contained an article titled “Is the Swan Suffocating?” detailing problems with oxygenation levels, pollutants and the health of flora and fauna in the river (Paddenburg 2014, 64-65). Scientists from local universities (UWA, Curtin and Murdoch) and the Swan River Trust have generally agreed that the Swan is unhealthy (Paddenburg 2014, 64-65). In spite of this ‘environmental’ analysis, in ‘Swan Dive’ Premier Colin Barnett is quoted describing the river as “stunning” and “beautiful”, and stating that “we’d like [the river] to be a little healthier and that’s a medium to long-term change. I think sometimes we carry on a bit too much about the problems of the Swan River” (Paddenburg 2014, 64). Graham-Taylor, writing in 2009,
observed that “on a clear day, as the waters of the Swan River sparkle in the sun, it is easy to forget that the river is under stress” (Graham-Taylor 2009, 371), noting that “it is now well understood by scientists, although not as well by the community, that although the river may appear to be clean, the legacy of our treatment and mistreatment of the waterway is held in the sediments for possibly generations to come” (Graham-Taylor 2009, 384). The dominance of the visual sense in understanding the river is clear in statements such as those made by Barnett. The redevelopment of the Point Fraser precinct in 2003 endeavours to address—and educate visitors about—both the physical and visual degradation of sections of the river’s edge.

The redevelopment of Point Fraser, which also known by its Aboriginal name Boodjargabbeenup meaning ‘the place of water and the land’, is an approach to foreshore redevelopment which endeavours to mediate between the needs of ecosystems and human desires and expectations for the public realm. In 2003 work commenced on the 9 million dollar redevelopment of 15 acres of reclaimed brownfield land at the eastern end of the Perth foreshore (Sustainable Sites 2010). Prior the redevelopment the site, like much of the foreshore, had been reclaimed from tidal river flats and covered with lawns and non-native trees (Sustainable Sites 2010). Despite its proximity to the city and prime river-frontage the site was poorly utilized and contaminated from previous industrial activities. Architect Deborah Kuh’s design for the site is indicative of emerging trends in edge-sensitive design that aim to improve the health of the River. The project highlights
the intersection and consequences of human activities and natural ecosystems, aiming to provide education through multi-sensory experiences and educational signage.

The resulting project is a contemporary landscape built on a sound understanding of the local and regional environment. The landscape features biodiversity, ecological restoration, habitat creation, interpretation, active and passive recreation, educational programming, community, stakeholder and indigenous consultation, and the re-introduction of endemic plant communities previously alienated from the area by development (Syrinx Environmental PL 2009).

The central feature of the development is artificial wetlands composed of settling ponds filled with native plants and reeds which provide some of the noticeable visual, haptic, olfactory and auditory features of the area. The ponds collect and filter stormwater and runoff (which previously washed straight into the river) from 44.5 acres of East Perth before returning the ‘cleaned’ water to the river. Vegetated swales and pervious gabion walls also control and contain the flow of runoff (Sustainable Sites 2010). The treatment of the runoff is not only beneficial for riverine ecosystems, but the design of the wetlands, boardwalks and surrounding parklands at the river’s edge provides educational, information and dynamic haptic, olfactory, visual and auditory experiences of native plants, animals and wetlands. The sensory experiences of Point Fraser are a marked contrast to the urbanity of Elizabeth Quay.

5.25 The artificial wetlands, planted with reeds which originally dominated the site. The city can be seen in the background (Photo by author 2015).
The site is criss-crossed by concrete sidewalks, wooden boardwalks and cycling trails. Visitors can follow a series of interpretation trails which highlight the historical, environmental and indigenous heritage of the area. The trails “are designed to promote passive recreation and an intimate understanding of the site” (Sustainable Sites 2010), placing an emphasis on engaging not only visually, but physically with the area. Gabion walls and concrete benches form seating areas, and quotes from period newspapers run across the back of many benches, sometimes in braille, providing, for those capable, a tactile reading of the site’s history. Visitors may touch the surrounding plants, smell the ponds, local vegetation and marshy river edges, and hear the sounds of rustling plants and local birds and wildlife. The site is not secluded from nearby urbanity, and close proximity to Riverside Drive means that the sounds of traffic pervade the area and the city skyline and structured line of palm trees at the water’s edge are part of the visual experiences of the area. Thus the site provides a complex and contrasting array of urban and ‘natural’ sensations, revealing and intertwining the city’s waterside and urban identity.

Physical engagement with the site is encouraged, though mounded earthworks have been created using existing fill from the site to protect sensitive areas from human activities. This has also saved the expense of removing excess soil from site (Sustainable Sites 2010). Eisenstein writes that “ecologically designed urban landscapes should communicate cultural ‘cues’ for sustainable behaviour; these landscapes should be implemented in partnership with ecological education efforts; and the cultural meanings
and ecological place values created over time will be fundamentally local” (2001). Visitors may, in combination with informative signage, find sensory ‘cues’—unavailable in more urban settings—about how the river’s ecological systems operate and how human activities impact upon them.

Restoring the ‘habitat value’ of the site by rebuilding a range of native riverine habitats was another goal of the redevelopment. Returning not only native vegetation but wildlife enhances the diversity of sights and sounds in the area. A local observer exclaimed: “the birdlife here is amazing and shows that with a bit of thought and care, the river right in the middle of a city, can be a haven for wildlife” (Adams 2013). The Sustainable Sites website argues that “the Point Fraser Swan River intertidal zone now resembles a more natural environment, offering aquatic and terrestrial habitat and riverbank stability that provides a safer and more aesthetically pleasing landscape for the public” (2010).

May argues that simply excluding people from riverine ecosystems is not the solution to river degradation (nor possible), and notes that as the dominant species we are a part of that connection. She argues that “the values of ecological and hydrological connectivity do not fit into our established ideas of how cities engage with rivers” and advocates instead for “a new way of communicating and understanding those values” (May 2006, 481). The Point Fraser parklands are arguably an example of such a connection. The precinct mediates between a cognitive and sensorial understanding of the river’s edge,
providing a range of sensory encounters beyond the more sanitized conditions of long embankment walls or the evolving urban conditions of Elizabeth Quay.

Cusack also argues that “insofar as rivers symbolise the vitality and continuity of the nation, their despoilment may signify national decline” (Cusack 2007, 102). Thus ameliorating environmental degradation along the Swan may provide both ecological and civic benefits. Today, as demonstrated by media coverage of the river, there is widespread belief in the link between the river’s integrity and its ability to contribute to human health, leisure, pleasure and define Perth, and the Swan itself, as unique and valuable places. There are also widespread beliefs in communal and individual obligations as good citizens to ‘do what is right’ by the river. While desires for ‘urbanity’ seem to have prevailed on Elizabeth Quay, the design of the Point Fraser recreation area exemplifies a range of very different concerns. Point Fraser allows people to experience—at least partially—some of the area’s ‘intangible’ sensory heritage; the smells and tactile sensations of a more ‘natural’ shoreline, though these will be interpreted through contemporary sensory regimes.

The View from Mount Eliza

5.28 A Panoramic view of the foreshore from Kings Park on the Mount Eliza scarpe. The park is one of the favored vanatage points and materials promoting the city often depict the view from the scarpe (2009 MER-C Wikimedia Commons).

Kings Park, perched on the Mount Eliza scarp west of Perth, has played a significant role in historical, cultural and environmental understandings of the city, foreshore and river since European settlement. In the nineteenth century tourists began climbing hills around harbours to take in panoramic views, a practice which often involved picnics and was framed as a ‘pleasurable outing’ (Corbin 1994, 193). A lengthy discussion of the importance of Kings Park is beyond the scope of this thesis, however scholars who have addressed this subject include Lewi (2000, 2002), Seddon and Ravine (1981), Seddon (1970, 1972, 1995, 1997) and Taylor (2007). In the early days of settlement depictions of
idyllic views from the park were used to display the discernment of the colonist’s
decision to settle in Perth to those back home, and affirm citizen’s possessive sentiments
towards their city (Seddon 1997, 83). Stannage describes the setting as:

An arcadia – a statement of the ancient pastoral of Virgil and the landscapes of
Claude and his British and colonial romantic followers through to the city planners
of the last quarter of the twentieth century. As Stirling had described the Swan River
in the picturesque language of the romantic era, so Perth has been described in word
and picture ever since. In short, the Swan River forms part of the great Western
tradition of the pastoral idyll, a tradition which was central to the gentry’s quest for
internal peace and belief in a harmonious society where men were at one with each
other and with nature (1979, 329).

Largely owing to its prominent location, the park “became the most recognised locale
and viewing platform for the commemoration of local, national and imperial identities”
(Lewi 2002, 53), as well as “collective memories of place” (Lewi 2000, 9). It can also be
seen as a venue for contesting these notions. Transformation to the foreshore (and thus
the city’s visual identity) are obvious when seen from the scarp. Elizabeth Quay, now
that the public sector has been completed, provides a markedly different and more
urban vista. A brief history of Kings Park and the scarp of Mount Eliza is followed by
consideration of the Lotterywest Federation Walkway. This section explores how the
relationship between Mount Eliza and the city contributes to certain sensory
interpretations of place and identity.

Mount Eliza was designated for future use as parklands in the 1870s, though it remained
largely bushland until the 1890s when rapid expansion led to efforts to transform the
bush into parklands (Lewi 2002, 53). Transformations were wrought via “a process of
clearing, planting and manipulating; shaping, contouring and remodelling the native
terrain into a European-style garden” (Goldswain 2003, 78). Lewi argues that “it was felt
that the indigenous bushland of the scarp was in need of much improvement and
management so as to create a suitable and comfortable setting for recreation and
collective commemoration” (Lewi 2002, 53). Just as the river was shaped for functional,
aesthetic and recreational purposes, on the scarp citizens used imported plants and
gardening techniques to create parkland that provided the sights, scents and tactile
experiences of familiar plants and surrounds; the ‘place’ desired was some ‘other’ setting.

By 1900 scenic walkways punctuated with seating, shelters, pagodas and picturesque
vistas were formed and roads were threaded through the park. Swaths of bush were:
recomposed into a gardened place which held associations, if somewhat remote and perverse, with the memories of more familiar English places. The language of English landscaping therefore represented a shifting cultural dialogue between colony and Empire, amidst a growing sense of self-conscious local identity and nationalism (Lewi 2002, 53).

At this time the park also began to be utilised as a “repository for monuments that helped to place the West Australian colony in the greater context of the British Empire” (Goldswain 2003, 78). A collection of artillery guns, a monument to the Boer War and a dominant statue of Queen Victoria “reinforced the collective memory of a culture at the fringe of an imperial domain” (Goldswain 2003, 78).

Over the course of the twentieth century a variety of monuments were added, including the 18 metre Cenotaph of the State War Memorial in 1929, the State War Memorial Court of Contemplation in 1954, and the more eccentric DNA Tower and Vistas in 1966. Most monuments incorporate a sculptural element, an informative plaque or signage, and a carefully constructed relationship with either views to the city, the river or local bushlands. The Kings Park and Botanic Gardens (KPBG) website boasts that the park “has more memorials, statues and honour avenues than any other park in Australia” (KPBG 2014). Today the park is also one of the state’s most popular tourist attractions and images of the parklands themselves or photos of the city taken from park are used heavily in tourism promotions and other visual representations of the city.
The majority of early monuments are static and primarily encountered visually as visitors move around the park. Some surfaces (e.g. embossed lists of names) invite manual tactile exploration, but the primary aesthetic emphasis remains on seeing the monuments and their surroundings, reading the historical details and absorbing the moral lessons that are intended (however, obtuse, mixed or mistaken these may be). Understandings of place and history are largely informed by signage and the visual sense. Several more recent additions to the park, the DNA tower (1966), Synergy Parklands, and the Lotterywest Federation Walkway (2003), involve climbing, walking and more multi-sensory experiences of the area.

Between 1996-2003 the KPGB undertook the gradual rehabilitation of key areas along the scarp, aiming to recognise the cultural heritage of the site, repair environmental damage and protect ecological value, remove ‘exotics’ such as pines and agaves, and stabilise the cliff-face(Taylor 2007, 151). The restoration endeavoured to turn portions of the scarp back into indigenous ‘bush’. From the emphasis placed on views from the edge of the park through and over these rejuvenated bushlands it is apparent that visual drama remains central to understandings of the park and its relationship with the city.

Just as the BHP Billiton Water Park appropriates characteristics of West Australian lakes, and Point Fraser promotes the qualities of local wetlands, sections of Kings Park celebrate ‘the bush’. In the park attractive displays and meandering pathways position the bush as a site for relaxation and renewal, as well as moral education about the value of distinctly Australian species and landscapes. Regionally themed sections of the park contain plant species from throughout Western Australia, bringing the vegetation of the bush and the ‘outback’—and its attendant smells and tactile qualities—in close proximity of the city. For example, informative signage (image 5.30) draws attention to not only the olfactory pleasures and historic uses of native vegetation, but their commercial appeal – potentially conflicting ways of valuing sensory experiences of indigenous plants. Kings Park and the Swan River were once shaped to meet settlers expectations for British style landscapes, but today it is the Australian flora and geography—and their sensory qualities—that are considered crucial to a regional and national identity.
5.30 Informative signage in Kings Park draws visitor’s attention to not only views, but some of the olfactory qualities of the ‘bush’ (Photo by author, 2015).

The Lotterywest Federation Walkway

The Lotterywest Federation Walkway (completed in 2003) is sited on the southeastern slopes of the park and composed of five distinct elements. Terrestrial paths lead visitors through the Botanic Gardens to a series of elevated boardwalks that rise gradually up through native Karri, Marri, Tingle and Jarrah trees, emerging out of the treetops and connecting with the centre piece of the structure, a dramatic steel and glass bridge. The bridge provides sweeping views of the Swan River and glimpses of the city, and is also intended to provoke a sense of the dreamtime serpent the Wagyl, an intention which is emphasized by metal panels at either end of the bridge which incorporate motifs associated with the local Nyoongar people. The return path at the far end of the bridge links to the Law Walk, which passes through what architect Geoff Warn describes as a ‘cathedral of Marri trees’, while the open mesh walkway draws attention to the valley floor below (Goldswain 2003, 78).
The Law Walk eventually passes beneath the bridge, weaving amongst the pylons which have been embossed with images of seedpods, Banksia leaves and geological stratifications. Goldswain writes that:

*Initially the applied outline of flora appears slightly naïve and superfluous, overwhelmed by the monolithic simplicity of the pylons. However, they are transformed by the weathering of the WR steel – the collection of water in the weld ridges create patches of golden ochre oxidisation, wind-driven rain streaks mimic the fall of seed pods, the areas exposed to sun become blackened as if burnt (2003, 82).*
Taylor notes that the ample use of self-rusting (Coreten) steel in the bridge “exemplifies the current fashion in Australia to use rust as a design element, to denote the red earth of Australia, for instance, whether or not such earth is apparent nearby” (Taylor 2007, 154, see also Taylor 2005). The KPBG website states that “the rusted steel structure finish was designed to blend in with the trees in the gardens. It provides a potent reminder of the rusted steel of camps, farms and mines in the Western Australian bush at the time of Federation” (KPBG 2014). The comments by Taylor and the KPBG website suggest that, in some ways, the use of self-rusting steel harkens to a generic Australian place, as red earth and rusty ‘outback’ sheds are not part of the physical or historical makeup of Kings Park, though they feature prominently in tourism promotions and more broadly in myths of Australian identity.

Alternatively, the weathering can also be seen as a visual symbol of the natural processes of climate at work over time. ‘Rusting’ is a process that is immediately understood by visitors who may only pass through once, or locals who return to observe changes over time. Both readings can aid in forming a sense of place, one which is cultural, if somewhat generic, and another which is environmental, yet paradoxically human-made. The Walkway, like the Bell Tower discussed earlier, is a design intervention which offers multiple, potentially ‘inconclusive’ or even conflicting ‘readings’ or interpretations of place and identity.

5.33 The view of Perth from the beginning of the walkway. This perspective potentially reinforces somewhat problematic understandings of (or beliefs in) human dominance over the landscape (Photo by author 2014).
Goldswain argues that the walkway operates “by both challenging and reinforcing picturesque modes of viewing” (2003, 78), facilitation novel ways of experiencing and interpreting the area. The aerial position provides a unique vantage point above the terrain, playing on the thrills and potential risks of such an adventurous position. A sense of vertigo can be induced by gazing down through the glass panels of the bridge or the mesh grating of the walkway. Vertigo is brought about by visual stimulation which manifests in a bodily sensation of imbalance and can be exciting, thrilling or nauseating, while railings insure that it is not truly dangerous. The drama of the vistas and the body’s position in space overshadow the reality that the walkway is in fact a highly regulated experience.

Goldswain notes that the path through the gardens to the walkway is “prescribed” and “views are framed, scenes are set, landscapes manipulated” (2003, 78). Signage provides direct information, drawing visitors’ attention to historic, cultural or environmental features of the parklands or riverscape, while paths, railings and barriers carefully control where visitors go and what they see. Taylor argues that:

*The experience is characterised not so much by the impulsive ‘psycho-kinetic’ activities of visitors, but, through their careful management, the control of alternative, less officially sanctioned routes and by the obviousness of security measures such as glass doors at either end of the bridge preventing crowding and after-hours access. Just as this experience is hardly spontaneous, neither is it entirely controlled by these techniques* (2007, 153).
The walkway offers ‘controlled’ opportunities for experiences of place generated through playful exploration or curiosity, and there is little evidence of what Stevens would call ‘loose’ space. Taylor explains that the walkway strives to link ‘peripatetic activity’ with ‘adventure and enlightenment’. By heightening and framing views of the river, it seeks to make them “better somehow, more expansive or panoramic” (2007, 153). He argues that “the bridge draws on and reinforces...an aestheticized experience of the place” (Taylor 2007, 153).

Classen, Corbin and Hughes have underscored the importance of height in broadly transforming ways of perceiving and thinking about a city (Classen 2014, 7, Corbin 2014, 54, Hughes 1980, 14). Discussing Perth and the much loved view of the city from the scarp, Seddon emphasizes that “the aerial view, later to be widely available from flying machines, has changed our perceptions of the relations between human artefacts and the natural environment” (Seddon and Ravine 1986, 17). Glimpsing the city from the bridge through the surrounding trees further enhances and transforms what is already a famous aerial viewpoint, and reinforces the dominance of people over the land, river and city. It also removes them from the sounds, smells and tactile sensations at ground level, placing them within or above the trees.

The ‘regeneration’ activities along the scarp in the late 1990s call into question the types of history that visitors are expected to appreciate, particularly the moral dimensions of these histories. Taylor argues that “by claiming to remove exotics and other non-native species in order to preserve the health of a unique ecosystem, one sidesteps possibly contentious issues associated with re-writing of history” (Taylor 2007, 158). Thus the view from the Walkway is a present-day re-creation of what may (or may not) have been present prior to European settlement. As a result, visitors are denied some opportunities to see how settlers shaped the landscape and framed views of the riverscape through Edwardian style garden features (Taylor 2003, 34). Removing exotic plants also served to avoid contentious issues around the meaning of the scarp for indigenous people and non-European migrants (Taylor 2007,158). The restoration of the Mount Eliza Scarp is also an effort to re-frame how the Swan River is ‘seen’. This is, in turn, part of wider efforts to shape topographical features and sensory experiences to bolster the prestige and aesthetic and recreational appeal of the Swan River and its surrounds. Sensory history cannot promise a ‘remedy’ for such problematic ethical situations, thought it can suggest perspectives on different landscapes and environments beyond the visual.
The carefully positioned paths and walkways allow visitors to view the natural and built environment, and, importantly, observe others doing the same thing (Taylor 2007, 152). Watching others appreciating the views, taking photos or reading signs reinforces the importance of the view of the city, fostering a communal experience of place that is uniform and controlled. The continual viewing (and photographing) of the city as a distant object, framed by a controlled setting, hints at a ‘look but don’t touch’ perception of the city and landscape and suggests it is best viewed from an idealized and prescribed setting.

Conclusion

The ‘urban’ qualities of Elizabeth Quay, the ‘environmental’ focus of Point Fraser and the continued ‘visual’ importance of Kings Park collectively provide a diverse and complex range of multi-sensory experiences of the Perth Foreshore. Elizabeth Quay, when complete, may provide the sights, sounds and tactile sensation of a post-millennial Australian city. In contrast, Point Fraser draws on the historic form and function of the marshy shoreline to impart a very different range of haptic, olfactory and auditory experiences, however contrived these might be. From the Mount Eliza scarp, developments in and around Kings Park clearly serve to emphasise certain visual understandings of the city, the river and the ‘bush’. All three areas have sought to highlight (or capitalize on) certain ‘native’ features of the region, in contrast with efforts made in the past to shape or transform the river and its surrounds into a more familiar British-style landscape.

In their 2012 Perth Waterfront Heritage Interpretation Strategy Hocking Heritage wrote that:

> The aims of the Interpretation Strategy are to reveal the cultural significance of the place in order to help consolidate a sense of identity and sense of place. This is to be achieved by presenting the stories of previous occupation, former use and particular events through a range of media within and around the site (2012, 1).

They suggest that interpretive elements on the Perth foreshore—signs, storylines, messages—might draw connections to other areas near Elizabeth Quay, including Kings Park, the WA Rowing Club, and Point Fraser, as depicted in image 5.35 (Hocking Heritage 2012, 14).
They also suggest that “the City of Perth Self-Guided Walks programme may also be relevant to the interpretation, with several walks passing through streets and sites within the project area (e.g. The Esplanade, Barrack Square) and visiting historical places elsewhere in the city” (Hocking Heritage 2012, 14). This suggests a peripatetic emphasis on experiences of these diverse sites. Encountering the urbanity of the foreshore, the ‘native wetlands’ of Point Fraser and the vistas of Kings Park highlights the contrasting sensory values of each site, potentially bringing greater emphasis and meaning to understandings of these places and the city as a whole.

Providing visitors and locals with a heterogeneous range of sensory experiences of the city and it surroundings is one way of highlighting cities’ complexity and revealing the diverse histories, people and environments that contribute to a place’s identity. This diversity, particularly sensory diversity, may be of more value than any attempt to create a ‘uniform’ identity across the foreshore though visual and physical interventions. The focus now turns to tropical North Queensland to examine how issues of recreational pleasure and identity have evolved on the Cairns foreshore.
Chapter Six

Cairns circa 1900: desires, dangers and place promotion

A swim! A bath! the old man cried,
Do I hear you aright?
Or is it that my ears have lied?
Or is it but your spite?
In Cairns we do not swim at all.
It must be many years
Since such a word as that did fall
Upon these ancient ears.
But once this town that seems so fair,
Before my eyes grew dim.
Contained a bath that stood out there,
And people used to swim.
He nodded with a toothless leer
Where stood upon the sands,
A broken rail, a battered pier,
A thousand rusty cans.
"Young friend," he said, "if words were deeds,"
Our Council would be great.
And satisfy the people's needs
With talk, at any rate.
But greatness is in actions traced,
Not in the lengthy word.
Results are found when work is faced
And voices are not heard.
- Edward Thompson (Cairns Post 20 May 1920, 2)
This chapter explores the ambitions, pleasures and apprehensions associated with the Cairns foreshore in the early twentieth century and the circumstances which lead to the eventual redevelopment of the foreshore into an idealized ‘tropical paradise’ in the early twenty-first century - the subject of the next chapter. Approaching the turn of the twentieth century Cairns residents, like Perth’s, viewed bathing and swimming facilities on their respective city’s foreshore as necessary for reasons of health, hygiene and pleasure, as well as for cultivating community and civic ‘propriety’. Like Perth, Cairns had a shallow, muddy shoreline and local authorities placed prohibitions on public bathing and swimming. The Cairns Post (CP), a local newspaper, declared that the construction of public baths was necessary “not only as a much to be desired luxury, but also as a sanitary measure” (CP 7 May 1887, 2). While the Cairns and Perth foreshores shared certain physical characteristics, and both sets of residents held similar beliefs about bodily and behavioural propriety, in Cairns there were two additional factors that influenced attitudes towards interactions with the water’s edge.

Firstly, around 1900 the provision of bathing facilities—a potential centrepiece for the Cairns foreshore—became increasingly important to appeal to the growing (and
lucrative) tourist trade. In their efforts to attract tourists, locals were alert to the image and reputation of the town and its residents, and desired to promote their area not only for its visual appeal and tropical climate, but also for the waterside pleasures it could offer. A series of letters to newspaper editors in 1917 highlight how community papers were used to give voice to a wide variety of concerns associated with the sensory pleasures and visual propriety of bathing in tropical waters—as well as the dangers that these waters harboured. Local newspapers highlighted the challenges posed by environmental, geographic and climatic conditions—the trials of ‘the bush’—and efforts to overcome them. These newspapers also played a “vital role in generating community cohesion” (Lovell 2015, 89). Overcoming barriers to the provision of safe and acceptable bathing facilities was a shared goal as the community recognized the value of the growing tourist trade.

The risks posed by dangerous aquatic fauna are the second factor which differentiates Cairns (and other tropical coasts) from Perth. Cairns newspapers circulated concerns about the bodily risks attendant in swimming outside an enclosed facility, highlighting anxieties about the “dangers of the deep” and “the presence of the ferocious crocodile” (CP 7 May 1887, 2). The multiple and varied dangers of tropical waters—including, for example, crocodiles, sharks, stinging jellyfish (both visible and invisible), venomous cone shells and barbed lion fish—shaped understandings about the safety of open-water swimming in the tropics. The provision of ‘safe’ encounters with the water’s edge and the promotion of Cairns’ desirable tropical climate, landscapes and waterscapes would become increasingly important over the course of the twentieth century as the local population grew, and tourism (and its associated economic benefits) increased.

**Historic and Contemporary Maps of Cairns**

6.2 Trinity Bay illustrated as the corner portion of A Chart of the East Coast of New Holland by Captain James Cook, May-June 1770 (From The Charts and Coastal Views of Captain Cook’s Voyages, Heritage Alliance 2011, 23)
6.3 A chart of Trinity Bay created by Lieutenant Edward R. Connor in 1878. The chart shows the area where the Cairns Baths were located in the late 1800s, and where the Cairns Esplanade Lagoon was built in 2003 (John Oxley Library, item 1344).

6.4 An 1877 plan of the township of Cairns. The town’s main waterside street, the Esplanade, runs along Trinity Bay, facing out into the coral sea. Shipping and industrial sites were located in Grafton Channel, on the righthand side of this map (State Library of Queensland, Record 695688).
6.5 A contemporary map of Cairns and Trinity Bay, part of the Coral Sea. Grafton Channel, on the southeast side of the city, has been a site of shipping and industry since settlement in 1876. Recreational activities are centred on the norther shoreline, facing out into Trinity Bay (Google Maps 2015).

6.6 An contemporary aerial view of Cairns showing Grafton Channel on the left and the Trinity Bay (part of the Coral Sea) on the right. The main recreational areas extend from point along the shoreline to the right. Infilling, particularly around the point, has played an important role in shaping the shoreline (Photo by Marc McCormack, Cairns Post, 1 November 2013).
Tropical Places

The formation of the tropics as a desirable paradise and also, paradoxically, a place of danger, has been evident in Western discourse for centuries as the experiences and impressions of European explorers to the world’s tropical regions were disseminated through texts, paintings and narratives. Tropical islands, particularly in the Pacific, have been idealized at times as places of escape and relaxation, as well as reserves of nature’s plenitude (Grove 1995, 1-72, Pocock 2005, 337, 2003). Grove explains that from the end of the fifteenth century onwards increasing travel and trade resulted in an abundance of new ideas and impressions of diverse environments around the world, which in turn transformed traditional European ideas about nature. He argues that “the commercial and utilitarian purposes of European expansion produced a situation in which the tropical environment was increasingly utilized as the symbolic location for the idealized landscapes and aspirations of the Western imagination” (1995, 3).

The quest for ‘paradise on earth’ was originally inspired by biblical accounts and was reinforced by Enlightenment philosophers (Taylor 2004, 131). Searching for Eden was strongly linked to voyages of discovery from the fifteenth century onwards and resulted in newly discovered and colonized tropical islands being considered paradises. The eventual establishment of tropical botanic gardens on these islands by colonial officials intensified these beliefs (Grove 1995, 5). Soon these ideas expanded beyond the botanic garden to encompass entire islands, and then entire ‘wild’ tropical landscapes, so that eventually “the whole tropical world became vulnerable to colonization by an ever-expanding and ambitious imaginative symbolism” (Grove 1995, 5). By the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century increasingly complex European notions of Eden included such widely divergent places as Australia and the Antarctic (Grove 1995, 5). Today there remains a deep-rooted association of paradise with tropical regions, islands, landscapes and waterscapes. There are also historical and present-day narratives which focus on the oppressiveness and potentially insalubrious nature of tropical climates.

Smith argues that the abundance of new information—about places, people, flora, and fauna—that arrived in Europe in the wake of the Cook voyages in the Pacific transformed Western understandings of biology and the ‘life’ sciences (1985, 167). He highlights two aspects of British perspectives on ‘nature’ that emerged from the Pacific voyages. Aesthetically, nature came to be rendered “not with her imperfections clinging to her but in her perfect forms” while, scientifically, nature came to be observed, recorded and made subject to experimentation (Smith 1985, 1). As the early European views from
Kings Park in Perth were often portrayed in ways which rendered the ‘bush’ familiar, the tropics (in Australia and elsewhere) were likewise idealised. Tropical settings were dramatized in paintings, as though their sensory appeal as well as their scenography, light and colours, could be captured in pigment. For example, Paul Gauguin’s paintings of Tahiti and surrounding islands (late 1800s) have helped to spread a romanticized notion of the Pacific (Pocock 2005, 336).

In addition to paintings, literature such as Robinson Crusoe (Daniel Defoe 1719), The Coral Island (Robert Ballantyne 1858) and Treasure Island (Robert Louis Stevenson 1883) also helped to spread romanticised ideas about tropical places. In H.G Wells’ Island of Doctor Moreau (1896), the castaway narrator describes the island as covered in dense vegetation, primarily a type of palm (Taylor 2004, 129). In The Coral Island the landscape was “covered almost everywhere with the most beautiful and richly coloured trees, bushes and shrubs” (Ballantyne 1858, 19). Taylor notes how the authors attended closely
to the details of tropical flora, fauna, climates, geographies, and human inhabitants (2004, 129). Such detailed descriptions help to spread certain imaginative and idealised perspectives on the visual appearance of tropical places, particularly islands. These texts also used the topography and characteristics of the environment to “structure fictional narratives, subordinating the actions of characters to an imagined experience of novel places” (Taylor 2004, 131). This, in turn, invited readers to envisage their own novel sensory interactions which these imagined environments (Taylor 2004, 31).

The uniqueness of these striking new environments was central to most narratives, but sometimes other desires, such as European expectations for comfort or convenience, were also present. Crowley highlights how in Robinson Crusoe, comfort becomes an important measure of ‘civilised’ existence on the castaway’s island. Crusoe expends much effort creating not only shelter, but also furniture and clothing, while catering for these and additional material needs. Crusoe states that:

*I began to apply myself to make such necessary things as I found I most wanted, particularly a chair and a table; for without these I was not able to enjoy the few comforts I had in the world; I could not write or eat, or do several things, with so much pleasure without a table* (Defoe 1719, 82).

Providing these material artefacts, and reconciling the range of sensations encountered on the island or recalled from memory with thoughts of ‘home’ by obtaining comfort was a way of civilizing and taming the wild tropical landscape.

In the twentieth century the forces of war (such as GI’s posted to tropical islands in WWII), television shows like Gilligan’s Island (1964-1967), globalisation and the internet have continued to spread and promote ideas about the aesthetic appeal and sensory allure of tropical Pacific islands. For example, the centuries-old Hawaiian sport of surfing arrived in Australia in 1914, introduced by the Hawaiian swimmer Duke Kahanamoku (Booth 2001, 36, see also Booth 1994, 44-50). The proliferation of this bodily activity linked to waterside pacific places is one way in which Australia is linked to Pacific cultures. Over time, tropical islands, like the Australian ‘bush,’ have become increasingly popular holiday destinations: places of relaxation and rejuvenation. As will be seen in the upcoming site study, community newspapers actively promoted the sensorial pleasures of bathing on the Cairns foreshore, and, more broadly, Cairns’ tropical climate as conducive to health and relaxation. The provision (and promotion) of these amenities and activities was also a means of demonstrating the civic ‘propriety’ of the town and its inhabitants.
Sensory Transformations

Over the course of the twentieth century the landscapes of towns, resorts and islands along the Reef were transformed to enhance a ‘South Pacific’ identity, rather than placing strongly emphasise the unique Australian features of the region, particularly the native vegetation (Pocock 2005, 335). Just as landscape, flora, fauna, people and the built environment can be idealised as indicative of an Australian place, the tropics can be symbolised by features like sandy beaches, clear blue waters, palm trees, hibiscus and frangipanis; features seen or mentioned in many written and visual depictions of the South Pacific (Pocock 2005, 335-340). Many of these ‘tropical’ symbols—such as coconut palms—are not native to Australia, yet have been planted and employed to associate some parts of Australia, like Northern Queensland, with idyllic notions of the South Pacific (Pocock 2005, 335). These features all have specific sensory qualities—characteristic sounds, smells, tactile qualities or visual appearances—which define them as tropical. The removal of ‘native’ features and vegetation—and their attendant sensory qualities—in favour of tropical symbols (frequently non-native imports), has shaped the nature of some Australian urban foreshores over the past century.

6.8 Grass Huts at Trinity Bay, an engraving by Samuel Calvert, 1877. The coconut palms seen in the image are not native to the area (Heritage Alliance 2011, 13).

Coconut palms are one of the most widely recognized symbols of the tropics (Pocock 2003, Pocock 2005). In Cairns, native palms, including the Pandanus Palm, Fan Palm, Atherton Palm and some climbing palms are locally common. In his 1955 guide *Australia’s Great Barrier Reef* Serventy notes that during Cook’s passage north through
the Reef in 1770 he named many sites along the way, including Palm Island (1955, 70). It was originally assumed that the name was selected based on the presence of Coconut Palms, but later determined that they were Pandanus trees. Serventy wrote: “it would appear man is the main spreader of the Coconut and the trees which now add romantic interest to the islands of the Reef have all been brought since the arrival of the white man” (1955, 70). His statement suggests that the native vegetation of the island has been (and possibly should be) enhanced by more ‘romantic' imports.

Pocock argues that “the coconut palm, as a symbol of earthly paradise, has played an important role in realizing both an imagined landscape and the physical transformation of tourist locations’ (2005, 335). Both the economic objectives of the tourist industry and the collective imagination and desires of tourists precipitated the gradual removal of native vegetation on Reef islands and coastal resort towns and cities in favour of coconut palms, with their iconic visual appearance and familiar rustling sound (Pocock 2005, 335). The removal of native trees, particularly Casuarinas (which produce distinctive haunting whistles when stirred by the breeze and have unique, drooping foliage) has altered visual and aural experiences of the Reef and coastline (Pocock 2005, 338). Cairns and other cities in Australia’s northern tropical regions (for example Darwin and Airlie Beach) have enhanced their shoreline to meet multi-sensory desires and expectations of tropical places. Creating and privileging different types of sensations has been essential to the fabrication of idealised tropical places.

Bodily Hazards in the Tropics

The material features of ‘the tropics' are commonly associated with pleasant sensations; however, other narratives relate the oppressiveness of the tropics and the potential for insalubrious, dangerous or painful experiences. Cairns, like many tropical places in Australia, has been linked to tropical diseases. Anderson explains that in Australia:

*By the end of the nineteenth century, the temperate zone of the continent was exonerated as a cause of disease or degeneration among transplanted Britons, but above Capricorn heat and moisture still threatened to sap the vital forces of working white men and their dependent wives and children* (2005, 73).

A pioneer of tropical medicine, German doctor Edward Koch, resided in Cairns from the 1880s until his death in 1901. Koch is famed for his recognition of the link between wet
environments, mosquitos and malaria before scientific proof of this connection was
empirically established. He worked to eradicate the prevailing myths that miasmas and
vapours from the local mangrove swamps were the cause of diseases like malaria, and
also promoted the infilling of swamps and estuaries and the use of long sleeved clothing
to avoid insect bites (Watling 1976, 36). His innovative medical thinking changed both
the form of the foreshore and understandings of disease risk in Cairns.

The presence of poisonous or dangerous aquatic creatures, found primarily (but not
exclusively) in tropical regions, has had a considerable impact on cultural
understandings of human interaction with water, the design of waterfronts, and the
provision of swimming facilities. Increasing human activity on the Cairns foreshore led
to more people encountering jellyfish, sharks, crocodiles, snakes and other poisonous
marine life. The haptic discomforts these creatures can inflict (intentionally or
inadvertently), and their visibility (or, more worringly, invisibility) are central to the
fear they install in locals and visitors.

In northern Australian waters jellyfish are one of the primary aquatic hazards, and their
seasonal transience, transparency, and the pain and potential fatality of their stings has
made them a feared inhabitant of coastal waters. Two species of large Box Jellyfish,
*Chironex fleckeri* and *Chiropsoides quadrigatus*, are found in coastal and estuary waters
around Cairns. Their presence is seasonal, dependent on geographic location, and also
hard to predict. When the weather is calm these jellyfish may move into shallow rivers
and creeks to feed on small prawns, making them a hazard to swimmers (Dangerous
Australians 1985, 26). As a larger species of jellyfish they can weigh up to 6 kg and
measure 20-30 cm across, with tentacles extending for up to several metres (Australian
Venom Research Unit 2013). While they are large enough to be easily seen, the summer
wet season can make creeks, rivers and shorelines murky and jellyfish difficult to spot
(Dangerous Australians 1985, 26). Accidental contact with a box jellyfish can cause
waves of excruciating pain, cardiovascular problems, difficulty breathing, and in severe
cases, death. The tentacles leave brown and purple welts on the skin which may become
permanent scars (Dangerous Australians 1985, 26).
The Irukandji jellyfish (including *Carukia barnesi* and *Malo kingi*) are tiny, around 1 centimetre wide, with tentacles ranging from a few centimetres to 1 metre (Australian Venom Research Unit 2013). As a result of its miniscule size the species was not identified by scientists until 1961 (Dangerous Australians 1985, 93). The jellyfish cause Irukandji syndrome, a condition which may include muscle spasms, severe pain, nausea, headaches, vomiting, and other symptoms. Much about the jellyfish causing Irukandji syndrome is poorly understood by scientists as well as the general public, but they have garnered a growing amount of attention over the years as their stings frequently require hospitalization and in rare cases cause death. The site study to come examines how their near invisibility and potential to cause significant (although unintentional) harm has made them a feared feature of northern coasts. Articles and letters to the editor spread stories about the danger of injury or death from jellyfish stings. Fear of poisonous jellyfish has influenced the way people interact with oceans, rivers and estuaries in northern regions, and been partially responsible for the creation of inland swimming pools and later artificial swimming lagoons.

While jellyfish are a somewhat mysterious and visually elusive hazard, larger ‘dangerous’ fauna are more easily spotted, but also pose the threat of pain and physical damage. Saltwater crocodiles inhabit coastlines, estuaries and rivers and are both an aquatic and terrestrial hazard in northern Australia. Sharks species, both harmless and potentially deadly, may visit coastal shorelines and are a periodic cause of concern. Unlike jellyfish, whose stings result from unintentional contact, crocodiles and sharks are predators who may actively stalk humans in the water. A range of other aquatic creatures, such as cone shells and lionfish, have barbs or spines that can inject a painful or deadly poison. Australian conservationist and television personality Steve Irwin, ‘The Crocodile Hunter’,
died when the barb of a sting ray accidentally stabbed him in the heart whilst snorkelling on the Great Barrier Reef in 2006. The tragic incident drew worldwide attention to the potential dangers of the northern Australian waters.


Potentially dangerous aquatic creatures, the physical pain and damage they may inflict, and the sometimes invisible threat they pose to otherwise haptically pleasant activities like swimming casts doubt upon the ability of the visual sense to protect one from harm. The perceived danger of an encounter—much like urban legends about deaths caused by falling coconuts—may be far greater than the actual potential of such an occurrence. Concerns about dangerous aquatic fauna have had a significant impact on cultural understandings of interaction with water as well as the physical design of urban waterfronts, as will be demonstrated in this and the following chapter.

Shaping the Shoreline

Captain Cook identified, named and sketched Trinity Bay during his voyages to the Pacific on the Endeavour in 1770 (Heritage Alliance 2011, 22, see images 6.2 and 6.3). European settlement in the Cairns Region commenced in the 1870s as a result of gold discoveries in the surrounding area (Heritage Alliance 2011, 13). Since the founding of the
township of Cairns in 1876 the foreshore has been a site of historic, economic, cultural and recreational importance, and a favoured site for bathing and swimming. The town was established to service the northern goldfields and the town-site selected based on its ready access for shipping, the primary means of transporting goods and people in the decades after settlement. The shallow shoreline stretches for two kilometres along Trinity Bay, facing outwards onto the Coral Sea. A mix of salt and fresh water flows out from Grafton Channel, a sheltered inlet southwest of the foreshore containing wharves and maritime facilities. The Esplanade, running parallel to the waterline of Trinity Bay, was the first street surveyed when the town was founded (see image 6.4).

The construction of seawalls, the continual dredging of Grafton Channel, and infilling along the foreshore have had a lasting impact on the character and accessibility of the shoreline. Maintaining seawalls was (and remains) an ongoing concern, as currents, tides and weather (particularly tropical cyclones) erode and alter physical conditions along the bay (see for example “The Damaged Esplanade” CP 4 April 1911, 8). Dredging was (and is still) necessary to keep the shallow channel open for shipping, while infilling was undertaken at various times to allow for the construction of wharves, improve the visual appeal of the water’s edge, and (as in Perth) alleviate fears of disease-causing ‘miasmas’ emanating from swamps and mangroves.
In recent decades debates have arisen over whether the muddy shoreline is ‘natural’ (meaning it has always been muddy) or a result of human activity. Some argue that, over time, silt dredged from Grafton channel and dumped in Trinity Bay has washed back onto the foreshore, gradually overlaying the sand that some argue was originally present with a layer of mud (Cairns Esplanade 2014). The debate over the original ‘natural’ condition of the foreshore became particularly significant in relation to the 2003 redevelopment discussed in the next chapter. Wolanski and Spagnol argue that “historical photographs and navigation maps of the Cairns waterfront...suggest that what was largely a sandy coast” prior to European settlement “is now buried under 1.5 m of mud” (2000, 1151). They believe that the removal of large sections of mangrove forest (which trapped sediment, preventing it from settling on the sand) has had a significant impact on the silting-up of the shoreline (Wolanski and Spagnol 2000, 1151). The image below from 1914 shows children playing in deep mud. The original shoreline may once have been mostly sandy beach, however, by the turn of the twentieth century the shallow shoreline was largely mud—as images and newspaper reports attest—most probably as a result periodic dredging and dumping regimes, runoff from the Esplanade, and tides and cyclones.
A 1908 article in the *Morning Post* advocated infilling to cover the “salt and slimy waste” (7 August 1908, 4) along the foreshore, suggesting that, like Perth, areas of the waterfront had been degraded as a result human activity. Likewise, odours emanating from the shoreline were, at times, the subject of citizens’ dismay: “At low tide there is a vile smell in the neighbourhood of the wharves. It was so pronounced yesterday afternoon, that pedestrians passing the place sheered off into the middle of the road” (CP 12 October 1904, 2). In a letter to the editor of the *Cairns Morning Post* titled “Man with a Nose” J. H. Kendall writes that:

*Cairns seems to be striving hard to emulate Scotland’s capital [known for its malodorous conditions] by stirring up the mangrove mud and depositing the refuse of this embryo city on the foreshore...The air is so awful that our visitors will take away but a poor opinion of our governing bodies that allow such a thing to exist* (13 August 1908, 5).

While the newspaper accounts above suggest that at certain places and points in time the foreshore smelled unpleasant, the photographic record also provides evidence of children enjoying themselves, engaging in very tactile play—‘racing’ on planks—on the mudflats. Images 6.13 and 6.14 show children smiling while they stand and kneel in mud. Their postures and expression suggest that they are enjoying the haptic sensations of the
slippery mud. Engaging in such play would have also involved smelling, hearing and maybe (inadvertently!) tasting the mudflats. While there is no period record of their experiences and how they were interpreted, the images suggest that the experience was enjoyable, at least for the young. Like the early explorers on the Great Barrier Reef, those who explored the mudflats would have engaged all the senses and experienced a strong bodily and place specific sensations (see Pocock 2002, 2008 for further on sensory encounters with the Reef).

6.14 Children playing on the mudflats circa 1914 (Photo by S.A. Doblo, John Oxley Library, 196461).

The accounts and images above reveal that the Cairns foreshore, like the Perth foreshore, was perceived through different and even contradictory sensory regimes. While the mudflats were, for some children at least, a place for play, for others they were a source of visual or olfactory displeasure. The mudflats were variously understood, and accounts to come will demonstrate that the water itself was haptically appealing to much of the population. The necessary activity of bathing, the increasingly popularity of swimming, and the powerful desire for thermal relief in a hot, humid climate made providing physical access to the water an important issue at the turn of the century. As the poem at the beginning of the chapter illustrates, there were a number of challenges associated with providing bathing facilities in Cairns.
Transport and tourist accommodation improved and increased on the Queensland coast and the Great Barrier Reef Islands from the late nineteenth century, and promoting Cairns—with its aquatic amenities—to tourists from interstate and inland became increasingly important. New hotels—including the Strand, Pacific and Central Hotels—were constructed for the comfort and convenience of tourists (Heritage Alliance 2011, 42). The economy was strengthened by tourism from its early days, and both railway and steamship companies increasingly promoted Cairns as a destination (Heritage Alliance 42, for further on the development of tourism in Australia see Davidson and Spearritt 2000).

Tourists were drawn to the natural features of the area, including beaches, islands, rainforests, mountains and waterfalls (Heritage Alliance 42). Thorp argues that “early travellers and tourists came with preconceived ideas and images of what a ‘tropical landscape’ should be. A tropical landscape is very different from landscapes of the
temperate zones: it looks, sounds and smells different” (2007, 107). Discussing the pleasures of tropical places, Stell writes that:

_The warm climate of Queensland contributed to its hedonistic pleasures providing year-long holiday potential, and creating lush and exotic gardens. The pleasures were not just visual – there was pleasure in the feel of the sun and the sand, in the taste of tropical fruits, and in the immersion of the body in water (2010)._

The construction of bathing and swimming facilities along the foreshore, and the pleasant haptic experiences such facilities provided, was seen as necessary for the satisfaction of both locals and visitors.

Demands for bathing facilities for locals arose in the latter decades of the nineteenth century. In February 1888 new floating baths opened, and the facility was praised as “the largest and most commodious in Queensland” (CP 4 February 1888, 2). The timber enclosure necessitated extra expenditure when “the architect finding that if the baths were placed nearer the shore the water would be muddy and unpleasant, wisely resolved to place them in the deep water where the scour of the tides always keeps the water clean” (CP 25 February 1888, 2). The pragmatic decision and extra cost of lengthening the jetty connecting the floating baths to the shore improved conditions inside the baths (an option which was not taken up in Perth), but also exposed the floating structure to greater caprices of currents, tides and weather conditions. Despite warnings, several weeks after opening, the baths “broke loose from their inefficient moorings and floated bodily down the Inlet” (CP 28 March 1888, 3). The structure was saved from drifting out onto the Reef, repaired, and became an increasingly popular source of local pride (CP 31 October 1888, 2). However, it remained susceptible to storms and tides and was eventually swept away, inciting demands for a replacement.

Around 1900 public clamour for new saltwater baths became increasingly ardent. As in Perth, finding an appropriate site proved problematic; the muddy seabed near the town was unsuitable, while acceptable sandy sites were considered too distant for convenience (MP 24 May 1899, 4). An article in the _Morning Post_ titled “BATHS! BATHS! BATHS!” pointed out that Cooktown, Normanton, Bundaberg, Maryborough and Townsville all had suitable bathing facilities, and “Cairns is about the only place on the coast where a dip in the briny is not regarded as a necessity by the local authorities” (17 March 1900, 2). Waterside towns were considered both more proper, and more appealing to visitors, when in possession of up-to-date bathing facilities (CP 6 August 1887, 2).
Promoting tourism and aquatic pleasures in Cairns was partially linked to the attraction of the Great Barrier Reef nearby, and Pocock observes that “the importance of tourism to the Australian economy was recognised at the beginning of the twentieth century” (2005, 340, see also Davidson and Spearritt 2000, 1-28). Early tourism on the Reef was promoted in various ways, including through the descriptive and engaging writings such as those of E.J Banfield. Banfield was a former Townsville journalist and passionate naturalist who lived on Dunk Island from 1900-1923, and published books, articles and documents which portrayed the Reef as an exotic and captivating place (Bowen & Bowen 2002, 283). Key publications include “Within the Barrier Reef”, a 1907 tourists’ guide published by the Queensland government, Confessions of a Beachcomber (1908), My Tropic Isle (1911), and Tropic Days (1918). The appeal of Dunk Island and interest in Banfield’s writings and island life may have come, for some, through associations with books such as Ballantyne’s The Coral Island or Stevenson’s Treasures Island; texts which to some degree idealized tropical island life.

In 1908 a lengthy article discussing Confessions of A Beachcomber appeared in the Melbourne newspaper The Argus, describing in detail Banfield’s experiences on the Reef and praising his descriptive writing about the ‘novel and interesting’ experience of life on an uninhabited tropical island (24 October 1908, 7). Such articles promoted trips to the Reef, which in turn necessitated a visit, or likely a sojourn, in a coastal towns such as Cairns, whose municipal authorities were, during the same period, endeavouring to make the town a traveller’s destination in its own right.

In the early days of tourism, it was important to promote the character of the region by both showing it, via photographs and postcards, and telling about its physical qualities or bodily benefits via texts such as books, tourism brochures and articles in interstate newspapers. In Cairns a 1905 article titled “To Popularise Scenic Queensland” reported that a travelling government photographer would be photographing the “picturesque scenery which abounds on the northern coast of Queensland” for compilation in a book to be distributed “throughout the southern colonies for the purpose of attracting tourists to Queensland” (MP 13 November 1905, 2). Cultural perceptions of the visual appeal of the tropics (as discussed earlier) were used to insinuate the wider sensory pleasures on offer if one were to visit Queensland.
A 1908 article in the *Cairns Morning Post* detailing a visit from Dr Richard Arthur, President of Immigration League of Australasia, argued that the Cairns district was attractive but not well known. It stated that there were many “well-to-do people in the southern States who might be induced to make an annual trip to North Queensland in order to escape the severe winter and to spend a few weeks pleasurably and profitably in this delightful part of the world” (19 July 1908, 3). Dr Arthur noted that existing tourist publications did not fully address tourists’ concerns about climate, which Arthur considered to be a crucial feature of the region. In his opinion “the climate of Cairns is the most delightful in Australia” and the benefits of such a climate “should be emphasized from a health point of view,” particularly “what forms of diseases and ailments would be benefited by a few weeks or months sojourn here” (*CMP* 19 July 1908, 3). He also opined that recreational activities such as boating, bathing and sight seeing should be detailed, as “people in search of health and recreation want to know how they are to be amused when staying in a place” (*CMP* 19 July 1908, 3). Dr Arthur united physically pleasant and entertaining activities with bodily and health benefits—a formulation associated with British bathing traditions—but he also emphasised the climatic aspects of the region as being particularly enjoyable and beneficial.
Thorp writes that the tropical landscapes and waterscapes of Cairns:

were highly evocative for many travellers, stimulating emotions ranging from sheer delight to melancholy. The jungle’s green abundance could fascinate as well as repel, as it exercised its influence over the imagination. Cairns appealed to nineteenth-century romantic tastes because of its dramatic landscapes, its waterfalls that range from awe-inspiring to delicate and fairy-like, and its coral gardens. Travellers were seeking the picturesque, and the Cairns region was able to provide many aesthetically pleasing scenes” (2007, 107-108).

It was not only the visually ‘picturesque’ nature of the region that was emotionally evocative; the climate (hot, humid) and material conditions (lush vegetation, warm water) all contributed to the emotional experience of the region.

Aside from appealing to interstate visitors, the potential for baths to provide “an inducement for the inland population to visit the town” was becoming increasingly important. In a 1902 Cairns Council meeting it was argued that “the town would never
become a popular resort for those people [living inland] until baths were provided” (MP 23 May 1902, 5). An editorial in the *Morning Post* three years earlier had dramatically proclaimed local desires:

In winter as in summer there exists a deep-seated longing in the minds of old Northerners for a frisky, splashy wash in the buoyant briny. The inability to safely indulge in a saltwater dip in winter time does not, however, trouble the old-timer to any tearful extent, but when our annual three months chill is in the natural order of events supplanted by nine months perspiration and tropical languor then the pores of the majority ooze not only sweat but indignation (5 July 1899, 2).

By 1903 plans were commissioned, a site was selected and the construction of new bathing facilities was underway. The building was perched at the end of a long jetty and there were concerns about insufficient water during low tides. However, remedying the situation proved difficult, and “those requiring a dip on mornings when the tide is out will have to either bathe in 18 in. of muddy water or else go further up the inlet and chance the sharks” (MP 16 January 1903, 3). The facility also faced problems with accumulated silt and mud, which, as seen in the Perth site study, were association with ‘dirtiness’ and detrimental to a bathing facility’s reputation.

In late January 1906 a cyclone struck Cairns, sinking part of the baths (MP 29 January 1906, 2). Cyclones are a seasonal hazard in the northern tropics and the ongoing threat of cyclones was one reason the Council was reluctant to substantially invest in sea baths. However, the importance of providing baths to attract visitors overrode the Council’s reluctance and the structure was repaired. At a 1906 Harbour Board meeting it was pointed out that the baths “were of greater attraction to tourists than the Barron Falls” and “greatly appreciated by country people” (MP 30 August 1906, 3). The needs and desires of tourists and country visitors were gradually garnering greater importance.

6.18 A ‘picturesque’ postcard of Cairns, circa 1910. The palm trees lining the shoreline are symbols of a tropical place. Such images helped to spread ideas about the appeal of tropical destinations (John Oxley Library 194775).
Demands for new bathing facilities continued in the latter part of the 1910s. However, the First World War, the resultant decrease in the population of Cairns, and insufficient funding were all partially to blame for inaction (CP 8 March 1917, 4). In March 1917 P.W. Moorhouse argued in a letter to the editor of the Cairns Post that:

Cairns is not being used as a seaside resort by the residents of the back country as much as it should be, and I think the building of swimming baths might cause more people of the northern highlands of Queensland to appreciate their good fortune in having such a beauty spot as Cairns so close at hand and to spend their holidays, here instead of staying on the outskirts at Kuranda, or passing through to Palm Islands, Double Island, Port Douglas, Magnetic Island, and even Southport and Tweed heads (20 March 1917, 6).

The following day an anonymous contributor, ‘Interested’, responded: “I agree with previous writers that good baths would bring our highlanders to town in place of going through to other seaside resorts” (CP 21 March 1917, 4). The ability of ‘resorts’ outside of town to lure visitors was seen as something of a threat to towns like Cairns, and impetus to increase their own touristic appeal.

In September the Cairns Swimming Club undertook to reconstruct the old baths for the 1920–21 swimming season through voluntary labour and public subscription (CP 22 September 1920, 4). In a September 1920 letter to the editor of the Cairns Post ‘Traveller’ observed:

I was greatly struck on arriving in your nice little city, to find that there were no swimming baths, and on mentioning the matter casually, my attention was directed to some men and boys, who had formed themselves into a volunteer brigade and were working on an old ruin with the object of forming a suitable place in which to enjoy a dip in the briny (22 September 1920, 8).

For ‘Traveller’ it was “beyond comprehension” that the local council had not provided baths, and a “crime” that youth could not “indulge in a swim without the fear of being dragged in by a shark or gator” (CP 22 September 1920, 8). ‘Traveller’s’ closing argument was based on his or her status as a tourist rather than a swimmer: “it is a source of general complaint on the part of the tourist or travelling public, for as a matter of fact, about the first thing, apart from business, that a traveller looks for in the tropics is a
good swimming baths” (CP 22 September 1920, 8). For 'Traveller’, the opportunity for safe, bodily encounters with water in tropical environs was not merely a desire, but an expectation.

In 1927 'Rosemary’, a regular columnist in the Cairns Post and avid proponent of new baths, argued that “a tropical seaside town of the size and importance of Cairns should possess up-to-date swimming baths” (CP 19 May 1927, 8). To 'Rosemary’, “Cairns is set like a jewel in our northern sea, but even a diamond has to be cut and polished before its full beauty is seen. Nature had done her part, now, as the boys say, ‘It’s up to us’” (CP 19 May 1927, 8). She believed that “Cairns can be made one of the show places of the world” and “more visitors (not crocodiles) mean more money, and if Cairns ever looms very large on the map, it will be as a place noted for its winter climate and its scenic beauty - reinforced with all modern convenience” (CP 19 May 1927, 8). 'Rosemary’ begins to touch on issues that would become crucial to Cairns in future decades: the visual appeal of a place, and the economic benefits of tourism. She also emphasises the importance of ‘modern convenience’, which can be assumed to include up-to-date swimming facilities.

These arguments reveal a desire to give Cairns some of the same appealing physical experiences, particularly opportunities to bathe and swim, which were available in other seaside towns, and on the tropical islands of the Reef. They highlight how, at this time, the haptic experiences of bathing and swimming were central to the creation of an appealing tourist destination. The creation and maintenance of this visual and haptic appeal would become increasingly crucial for the city of Cairns in the late twentieth century, a theme taken up in the next chapter.

Bathing: A Heated Debate

A series of letters to the editor appeared in both the Cairns Post and the Northern Herald in January 1917 that highlighted some recurring concerns about bathing practices, local governance and aquatic hazards. This episode again illustrates how local newspapers supported civic discourse on matters relating to the built environment and provision of certain types of sensory experiences. In this sequence of letters some of the authors, such as Edward Saunders, use their real name and clearly indicate their position on matters being raised. Others, particularly ‘Visitor’ and ‘Surfer’ utilize caricatured pseudonyms, which mask their real identity and position in the community.
The letter which provoked the debate was written by a self-titled ‘Visitor’ and published in the Cairns Post on January 11th 1917. Amongst a number of observations about Cairns, ‘Visitor’ commented that “one of the attractions of a seaport to the inland dweller is the possibility of sea bathing” and “considerable wonder is aroused that better provision in this direction is not provided” (CP 11 January 1917, 5).

The proprietor of the Baths, Edward Sanders, replied on January 20th, arguing that he was “generally the subject of more or less scathing remarks” (CP 20 January 1917, 3) even though he was not solely responsible for the provision of modern baths, and his application for a lease on a new site had been blocked by the Harbour Board, while the present site's future remained uncertain. He ended his letter by noting: “the Council are now permitting bathing on the foreshores, which is a highly dangerous practice in view of the prevalence of sharks” (CP 20 January 1917, 3). There were competing interests involved as, for Sanders, the council’s decision to allow open bathing in public—thus facilitation desires for haptic encounters with water—meant a loss of income for his baths.

‘Surfer’ responded on January 22nd, arguing that Sanders had “passed judgment on the Town Council for permitting bathing on the foreshores. What are beaches for, if not to make use of in every aspect?” (CP 22 January 1917, 4). He noted that some Sydney councils formerly opposed surf bathing because “they thought it improper that either sex should display their form” (CP 22 January 1917, 4). However, this had been overturned and now Sydney beaches were full of swimmers and lifesavers. He also argued that sharks should not be feared, as:

It is not very often that a rash person will go far out from shore, and the sharks are more often seen than not for they mostly swim near the surface when in close. Let the Council foster beach swimming, and then, we might have some use for our Life Saving Society, and healthier looking people (CP 22 January 1917, 4).

While by 1900s there was less concern about the mere presence of bathing bodies, the appearance or ‘health’ of those bodies was important to some, and aquatic activities were a means to achieving physical and visual ‘fitness’.

Sanders replied the following day, arguing that ‘Surfer’s’ “knowledge of the habits of sharks are very vague”, and that it was only partially true that sharks “invariably show themselves in shallow water” (CP 23 January 1917, 6). Sanders claimed that he had personally witnessed a shark cruising below the surface as he “scents his prey”, while he
only “shows himself” during the actual attack. He further argued that sharks seldom visit breakers, making the Cairns foreshore, with its lack of breakers, a more dangerous place than other sites (CP 23 January 1917, 6). In the same issue ‘Bath Towel’ also weighed in, backing Sanders’ concerns about sharks and inquiring whether ‘Surfer’ would swim on the beach when such “monsters are about?” (CP 23 January 1917, 6). Sanders’ comments reflected his beliefs on shark behaviour, but they may also be an effort to encourage people to return to the security of his baths, thus insuring his income.

Surfer replied the next day that “we speak of this [as a] free country, and yet E. Sanders wants the Council to stop persons from bathing on the sea front” (CP 24 January 1917, 6)). Sanders re-joined on January 25t, commenting that ‘Surfer’ was “bent on running risks” (CP 25 January 1917, 8). He proceeded to recount an ‘incident’ which took place on the Reef:

_{Douglas Pitt was fishing on the reef when he espied two fine crayfish cruising among the coral, Douglas wanted those crayfish and being an expert diver it did not take him long to get over board, and give chase. He was fortunate enough to capture the two crays, and just secured them when a large shark came along and evidently was about to remonstrate with Douglas for being greedy. But Douglas being a good Socialist gave the shark one of the crayfish, and he was allowed to return to the surface unmolested. There seems to be a moral in this ‘Surfer’ should note (CP 25 January 1917, 8)}

Sanders’ narrative may be real, or a fictitious allegory. Regardless, the economic value of his bathing structure cannot easily be separated from his active promotion of the dangers of bathing outside of the secure confines of a bathing structure.

On January 26th ‘Pourquoi Pas’ shifted the discussion to mixed-gender bathing, commenting that: “Queensland people, as a rule, are about 50 years behind in their ideas about [bathing], and are very narrow in their dislike of mixed bathing, which they have mostly never tried to see what it is really like” (CP 26 January 1917, 7). ‘Pourquoi Pas’ and ‘Aqua’, who wrote in support of the former on the 29th of January, both felt strongly that learning swimming at a young age was crucial, and mixed bathing was a natural custom and “a fit and proper thing” (CP 29 January 1917, 6). As in Perth, citizens who did not accept the ‘modern’ activity of mixed bathing were characterized by its proponents as dated or ignorant.
The January letters inflamed communal concerns about the lack of bathing facilities for a number of diverse reasons and on March 6th a deputation of local officials representing the Department of Education, the Royal Life Saving Society and the public visited the Mayor A.M. Donaldson endeavouring “to try to push forward some scheme for suitable baths” (CP 6 March 1917, 2). In discussions they commented on the restrictions placed on privately owned baths, and the Harbour Board’s extensive control of the foreshore (CP 6 March 1917, 2).

A letter to the editor of the Cairns Post penned by O. H. Bennett, the delegate from the Royal Life Saving Society, proclaimed that:

*Suitable baths have been a long felt want, so much so that most people have forgotten the charm and health giving properties of exercise in the water, but this lethargy, I am sure, would soon disappear on the erection of a decent structure (21 March 1917, 2).*

Bennett’s statements drew attention to the importance of memory and anticipation in promoting the physical pleasures and benefits of bathing. He noted that when the Government funds recreational facilities such as tennis courts and cricket pitches, it does so not for profit but for the “development of the physique of the people” (CP 21 March 1917, 2). Bennett, like ‘Surfer’, links ‘physique’ to health.

The series of letters summarised above demonstrate how community newspapers were forums where citizens debated issues relating to recreational waterside activities, health and hygiene, and civil governance. Controversies (many similar to those found in Perth at the time) resulted from modernizing technologies and values. Issues like the visual propriety or impropriety of mixed-gender bathing and the bodily dangers or relative safety of swimming in the ocean were clearly divisive. In contrast, the haptic pleasures of swimming and its potential to improve the physique of the swimmer (and their appearance to others), was more of an agreed personal and civic goal than a point of contention. The provision of new, larger bathing facilities would resolve almost all the concerns expressed, but the quest to secure those facilities was complicated. Unstable and at times competitive forms of agency governing different aspects of life along the water’s edge, as well as the physical makeup of the foreshore, were barriers to the construction of adequate baths.
Dangerous Waters

In addition to providing an alluring tourist destination and mediating a variety of concerns relating to visual and behavioural propriety, bathing facilities in Cairns addressed concerns about the dangers and risks associated with swimming and bathing in tropical waters. Australian bathing facilities often included under water fences (as seen in Perth) which were intended to keep bathers and swimmers safe from sharks or ‘sea monsters’ (Cordell 1876, 26). In addition, the potentially cumbersome bathing costumes of the time (the ‘neck to knee’, or women’s costumes with sleeves and skirts as seen in chapter four) may have offered some protection from stingers, just as such costumes limited movement and contact with other surfaces and materials. In spite of these intentional and unintentional preventative measures, encounters with dangerous fauna, both seen and unseen, within and outside the baths were (and still are) a source of anxiety for many. Closer consideration of a string of incidents in the mid-1920s highlights the bodily dangers of tropical waters and examines the physical and emotional security that sea-bathing structures provided.

The presence of larger aquatic fauna in the Cairns region was, as seen in some of the previous letters to the editor, a source of public anxiety. The Cairns Post alerted the public when a shark was captured in the Children’s Baths in January 1923 (15 January 1923, 4) and when, a month later, a stingray “took possession of the baths for a couple of hours” (20 February 1924, 4). Large, aggressive predators such as sharks and crocodiles have a looming and powerful visual presence, however some of their behaviours (like stalking their prey) and the hazards they pose, can be prevented by the construction of sturdy bathing enclosures, and citizens were alarmed when the security of a bathing enclosure was breached.

In early 1924 a young woman swimming in the baths was hospitalised after she was “severely stung by some poisonous denizen of the ocean” (CP 2 February 1924, 4). The tiny yet dangerous Irukandji jellyfish were unknown at the time, and these miniscule creatures were more likely to breach the confines of the baths, unlike larger jellyfish. The episode provoked demands that the barriers around the baths be repaired and secured. An article in the Cairns Post the next day speculated on the “various theories [which] have been put forward to account for the mysterious manner in which several women have been severely stung while bathing in the Cairns Baths during the past two days, but so far no solution has been arrived at” (21 February 1924, 4). Men were bathing
at the same time, though none were stung or noticed jellyfish in the water. The Cairns Post wrote:

*It has been suggested that in the majority of instances where women are in the habit of holding on to the side of the baths they could quite easily come in contact with the tentacles of jellyfish which are forced against the side by the incoming tide (21 February 1924, 4).*

Warnings were issued to avoid the edges of the baths, particularly during the incoming tide, until precautions could be put in place (CP 21 February 1924, 4). In spite of this, two weeks later a male bather was “attacked” by some “virulently poisonous marine life” (CP 3 March 1924, 4). This incident “exploded” the previous theory about women being stung while clinging to the edges as “the men positively state that they were never at any time near the side” (CP 3 March 1924, 4). It was suggested that a fine metal mesh fixed to the interior wooden structure of the baths might be beneficial (CP 3 March 1924, 4). These theories were distinctly based on ideas of bodily propriety and gender behaviour. The incidents and their interpretation in the newspapers demonstrate how experiences of the water were mediated by details of the structure and alterations to individual behaviour.

These episodes did not curtail the activities of the Cairns Swimming Club and races and events continued at the baths. However, in April it was reported that another male bather had been stung and the Cairns Post declared it evident that:

*The marine life which is responsible for the reign of terror among bathers is of such a minute nature that it cannot be seen as all persons affected have been searched for any particles of jellyfish or similar organism that would be likely to adhere to the skin and in no instance has anything been found (2 April 1924, 4).*

Several hours later a second man was stung, and an article the following day proclaimed that “it is time that the public be made fully aware to their danger, and refrain, at least for the present, from having their usual dip until such time as a remedy for the mysterious vermin is discovered” (CP 3 April 1924, 4).

The sources of the stings were often dramatically referred to as ‘monsters’, ‘serpents’ or ‘vermin,’ however, their true form was unknown. Though more or less invisible they were feared for their ability to cause extreme pain after unintended or unconscious contact. Irukanjji jellyfish may have been the source of the stings, and both scientific
information and speculative theories emerged regarding the ‘sea vermin’ plaguing many bathing sites along the coast. An article in the Cairns Post declared that a study of dates and tides revealed that most stings coincided with exceptionally high tides, and a fisherman “experienced in northern waters” postulated that “the large and poisonous jellyfish, which infest the waters in close proximity to the Reef, become broken into small particles by the heavy seas and are washed ashore by the flood tides” (4 April 1924, 4). This comment demonstrates how a certain amount of ‘environmental knowledge’—for example about the habits and ranges of jellyfish or sharks, or the seasonal patterns of tides and currents—was still necessary in spite of the enclosed bathing facility.

Stingers were feared as both dangerous and mysterious, and an article recounted how:

> In one instance of a man being stung at the baths, he was immediately examined by the lessee who noticed a fine jellylike film adhering to his neck. He at once lifted it off with his fingers, but upon being exposed to the atmosphere for a couple of seconds it entirely evaporated (CP 4 April 1924, 4).

It is interesting that the proprietor was willing to readily touch the unknown substance, given that the touch of the unknown ‘vermin’ was greatly feared, and the victim had recently been stung. Large predators such as sharks and crocodiles were visible and were to some degree a known risk, but the stingers, an invisible source of intense, tactile bodily pain (rather than physical damage), made them arguably a more frightening risk associated with the baths. These invisible stingers violated the sanctuary of the baths, and may have been part of the impetus for the creation of shore-based bathing facilities at the end of the decade.

**Bringing the Water Inland: 1920 onwards**

Fears of aquatic fauna and desires to promote Cairns to the burgeoning tourist trade drove some municipal authorities and citizens to consider an ‘inland’ solution to the provision of swimming facilities during and after World War One. Discussing pools in Australia and Britain, Lewi and Phillips note that:

> Although there were public baths and some outdoor and indoor swimming pools constructed in the later nineteenth century, the development of the artificially enclosed swimming pool type was very much a product of the twentieth century.
Pools therefore can be seen as an index of Modernity, reflecting broader design and social strategies for achieving the aspiration of a ‘Good Life’ (2013, 281).

They argue that outdoor pools were “a product of Modernism’s fixation on controlling and taming the natural environment as a potential site of play” (Lewi and Phillips 2013, 281). Pools were also a marvel of modern engineering which celebrated new materials and construction technologies (Lewi and Phillips 2013, 282). Bale observes that modern sport and recreational activities and facilities transform the ‘natural’ environment, obliterating “any legacy of what was there before and replacing [it] with concrete, plastic and glass” (1994, 11). Swimming also shaped and improved the bodies of swimmers “through public recreation, leisure and fitness programs, in line with Modernism’s larger aspirations to facilitate national fitness, hygiene and rebirth” (Lewi and Phillips 2013, 282).

Lewi and Phillips note that two British seaside swimming pools, the Scarborough Bathing Pool (1912) and the Tinside Lido in Plymouth (1935) were “designs which became influential for Australian pool-building of the same period” (Lewi and Phillips 2013, 283, for further on these and other British bathing structures of the twentieth century see Janet Smith, Liquid Assets 2005). Swimming pools became increasingly popular after they featured in the first modern Olympic Games in 1896, though rudimentary structures existed before.

The Spring Hill Baths, which opened in December 1886, were Brisbane’s first public swimming pool (Hind 2011), and a potential inspiration for pools elsewhere in Queensland. New technologies and building techniques were making pools easier to construct, and growing participation in swimming in the early decades of the twentieth century fostered the appeal of pools, though they were often still referred to as ‘baths’, a telling anachronism that speaks to some of the social and behavioural shifts taking place at the time. An article in the Cairns Post promoting the construction of ‘inland baths’ argued that "such baths would be pleasantly and healthily placed, and would be of course free from the danger of storms, which have so frequently damaged the off-shore structure. ‘Back to the Land’ may yet have to be the motto” (13 March 1917, 4).

Demands for improved bathing facilities were exacerbated when the existing baths were damaged in a devastating cyclone in February 1920 (CP 3 March 1920, 4). In May 1920 Edward Thomson published a poem (reproduced at the beginning of this chapter) lamenting the lack of baths and the inertia of local bureaucrats. In February 1927 cyclone Willis struck Cairns, and though several swimming club members endeavoured
to save the decrepit bathing facility, it “gradually broke up and disappeared” (*CP* 15 February 1927, 5).

In the ensuing years a range of proposals were debated, rejected and revisited. As in Perth, conflicts between various governing bodies, particularly the Council and the Harbour Board, centred on costs and sites, though eventually a scheme for inland baths was agreed upon (*CP* 22 June 1927, 4). A 1928 article in the *Cairns Post* lamented:

> It is unfortunate, of course, that Nature has not blessed Cairns with a beautiful beach and clean seawater right along its front, that cannot, of course, be helped. But the city and the citizens can help themselves by endeavouring to make some amends for Nature's neglect, and build a baths that will satisfy not only all local needs, but be of such a character; as will be talked of enthusiastically by everyone who visits the city (19 December 1928, 4).

This statement foreshadows the creation, 80 years later, of the Cairns Esplanade Lagoon, the subject of the next chapter.

**The Strand Hotel Pool**

While the provision of public bathing facilities floundered, in November 1928 the proprietor of the Strand Hotel outlined plans to construct “a special pool in the rear of his premises at the corner of the Esplanade and Spence Street” (*CP*, 29 November 1928, 4), a location close to where the Cairns Esplanade Lagoon stands today. An article in the *Cairns Post* praised the quick decision-making and fast construction of the Strand Hotel Baths (10 December 1928, 4). The 50 x 22 ft. concrete pool at the back of the hotel was completed in February 1929 and filled with 40,000 gallons of water from the nearby inlet, meaning that haptic experiences of the pool were connected, in some ways, to the local environment. The *Cairns Post* reported: “as far as is known, the Strand is the only hotel in Queensland which has its own swimming pool” however, the article went on to note that the pool has “not been built as a revenue producing medium” (9 February 1929, 5). Yet the private pool was clearly not intended as a community asset of the same order as municipal swimming pools, and revenue raising was likely a key motive behind its construction. Private commercial interests increasingly began to capitalise on desires for physical encounters with water that were formerly considered to be the responsibility of
governing bodies, and which these bodies often failed to provide, as seen in both Cairns and Perth.

![Image of Strand Hotel]

6.19 *A panorama of the Strand Hotel overlooking the Esplanade and the waterfront circa 1928. The Strand paired waterside accommodation and dining with aquatic activities, a lucrative formula which would be replicated by local resorts in the decades to come (John Oxley Library, 6759).*

Placing a pool at the back of the hotel it is an early example of the successful pairing pleasant aquatic leisure activities with other amenities including drinking, dining and accommodation. The Strand Hotel Baths prefigured the resorts that would soon populate the Reef islands and coastline. Lewi and Phillips argue that swimming pools are “a potent example of modern design’s ambitions to make accessible environments for leisure and recreation” (Lewi and Phillips 2013, 281).

*The Cairns Municipal Swimming Baths*

After years of the debate the Harbour Board finally granted the Council a site for terrestrial bathing facilities along the foreshore opposite Anzac Park, and the Cairns Municipal Swimming Baths officially opened in May 1931 (*CP* 11 May 1931, 5). The wooden building was situated at the water’s edge and “constructed on the most modern lines” (*CP* 11 May 1931, 5). A 150 x 50 foot reinforced concrete pool was filled with 283,000 gallons of ‘clean’ seawater pumped in from a specially dredged section of the channel to provide clear water during all tidal ranges. The pool filled to a depth of eight feet on the seaward end and four feet on the inland side and a 30hp centrifugal pump could fill the baths in 2 1/2 hours (*CP* 11 May 1931, 5).

6.21 The entrance to the Cairns Swimming Baths circa 1930 (John Oxley Library 151183).

In September 1934, ‘Veritas’, a short-term resident of Cairns, wrote:

I would like, however, to express my appreciation of the Cairns swimming pool. The water, which is pumped from the deep-water channel, is delightfully clean and
invigorating and I am surprised that the residents of Cairns do not avail themselves more of this healthy pastime. The superintendent, Mr. Moss, is courteous and helpful to patrons, and he spares no pains to keep the pool and its surroundings a model of cleanliness. The pool is certainly one of the best in Australia. (CP, 1 September 1934, 8)

![Image of the Cairns Municipal Swimming Baths](image_url)

6.22 The Cairns Municipal Swimming Baths, year unknown. The pool provided haptic experiences of salt water within a safe, concrete enclosure (John Oxley Library 178375).

Cairns finally had swimming facilities that satisfied both visitors and locals. The new swimming baths provided more regulated haptic experiences of the foreshore environment than previous incarnations. Local water was used, but the concrete pool removed the possibility of haptic encounters with sand, mud, currents, tides and debris, not to mention the risks of dangerous fauna. “This motivation to regulate, and render safe, bodies of water and topography was keenly evident in pools built on the water’s edge - at the dynamic and challenging interface between land and water where culture and nature nakedly meet” (Lewi and Phillips 2013, 282). The new facility was referred to as both ‘swimming baths’ and a ‘swimming pool’, demonstrating that it was partially understood as a new form of recreational technology, and one that was somewhat disconnected from the foreshore environment on which it stood. The Cairns Municipal Swimming Baths remained in operation until the 1960’s when the Tobruk Memorial Pool opened.

Conclusion

Cairns faced many of the same challenges as Perth when it came to providing socially acceptable locations for swimming and bathing. Visual and bodily propriety, mixed-
gender bathing, and the unpleasant haptic qualities of the muddy shoreline all features in debates found in local newspapers. However, it was the need to create an appealing destination for tourists and, at the same time, provide a bathing enclosure safe from diverse and potentially dangerous tropical aquatic fauna that shaped foreshore activities in Cairns. Reports of stings, bites or other injuries sustained along the shoreline perpetuated and expanded public anxieties about swimming and bathing and formulated the open water along the shoreline as a dangerous place.

The provision of opportunities to indulge in the haptic pleasures of bathing in a tropical climate became important to both locals and visitors. For visitors, bathing in the tropics was a sensory experience that was not only desired, but expected. While concerns about dangerous creatures in open water were not ubiquitous—as seen in ‘Surfer’s’ defence of public swimming—encounters with sharks, jellyfish and other hazardous fauna received significant attention in local papers, a powerful reminder that the risk of painful or dangerous encounters was part of the pleasure of public bathing.

In Perth a ‘resolution’ to the olfactory, haptic and visual difficulties associated with bathing was found by moving bathing facilities away from the increasingly ‘urban’ foreshore. The new site met the haptic and olfactory desires of swimmers without offending the visual experiences of visitors to the foreshore or Kings Park. In Cairns, a resolution to the difficulties of providing adequate swimming and bathing facilities came about by shifting the baths inland. New technologies allowed for the creation of the desired haptic experiences of bodily immersion within a secure facility, and the creation of this enclosed pool can be considered one of the first steps in transforming the foreshore into an imagined ‘tropical’ paradise.

Over time the idea that ‘natural’ riversides and beaches were inferior substitutes to a readily accessible swimming pool filled with clean, clear water of moderate temperature gained currency. This was reflected in ‘Rosemary’s’ comments that “Nature had done her part, now, as the boys say, 'Its up to us’” (CP 19 May 1927, 8), and the statement in the Cairns Post in 1928 that “nature has not blessed Cairns with a beautiful beach and clean seawater right along its front, that cannot, of course, be helped. But the city and the citizens can help themselves by endeavouring to make some amends for Nature’s neglect, and build a baths...” (19 December 1928, 4). Building the inland baths exerted control over not over the bodies of bathers on the foreshore, but ‘nature’, and specifically the form and function of the aquatic environment.
A 1955 handbook on the Great Barrier Reef commences: “CORAL ISLAND. What a wealth of romance there is in the words! Ever since the early navigators brought back tales of the coral islands of the Pacific, man’s imagination has been busily at work transforming reality into dreams” (Serventy 1955, 1). The next chapter turns to the 2003 transformation of the Cairns foreshore and elaborates on the ways that demands for aquatic and ‘tropical’ experiences, along with growing tourism on the Reef, influenced the 2003 Cairns Esplanade redevelopment.
Chapter Seven

A Modern Tropical Paradise

Over the course of the twentieth century Cairns has evolved into a major tourist destination in Far North Queensland and a gateway to the Great Barrier Reef. In 2003 Cairns completed a major foreshore redevelopment which includes, as its centrepiece, an artificial swimming lagoon surrounded by expansive manicured parklands. Stevens argues that the Cairns waterfront is a place that “meet[s] the image that tourists – mostly foreigners – have of a tropical island resort, in both its natural and civilized elements” (2009, 9). Generalized and more or less rendered exotic, the contrived setting resulting from the 2003 redevelopment is not necessarily ‘an Australian’ tropical environment in any precise sense, including ecological and indigenous senses. Instead, it provides the visual and haptic sensations that tourists and backpackers have come to desire and expect as a result of cultural understandings of the tropics.
Artificial lagoons have become central features of many urban waterfronts in tropical regions of Australia including Brisbane (1992), Townsville (1999), Airlie Beach (2001), Cairns (2003), and Darwin (2008). These lagoons and associated foreshore developments have evolved in response to (or as a result of) a range of issues including fears of dangerous aquatic fauna and risks associate with ocean swimming, the needs and desires of tourists and local residents, and desires to preserve vulnerable local ecosystems and wildlife. The Cairns Esplanade Lagoon, and other artificial lagoons around northern Australia, provide pleasant, safe and familiar environs, along with controlled experiences of water, sand, sunshine and vegetation.

This chapter will consider how the carefully constructed recreation zone on the Cairns foreshore actively encourages multi-sensory engagement with the artificial lagoon, beach and landscaped parklands. However, environmental concerns (including anxieties about risks for both ecosystems and people) have restricted access to the natural shoreline, which is instead understood, distantly or abstractly, via information kiosks and sweeping vistas viewed from designated vantage points. While the artificial lagoon and beach are pleasant, visitors do not form the complex topographical, material and ecological understandings of place that come from diverse, place-specific sensory encounters.

Cairns: A Destination and a Departure Point

![Image of Cairns from Google Earth](image-url)
7.3 A map of Cairns showing the Esplanade running along the foreshore and the Marlin Marina projecting into Trinity Bay. The Cairns Esplanade Lagoon is located on the land between the Marlin Marina and the Esplanade (Google Maps April 2016).

7.4 An aerial photo of Cairns showing the Esplanade Parklands edging the shoreline and the lagoon between the city and the Marlin Marina (Photo from http://www3.hilton.com/en/hotels/queensland/hilton-cairns-CRNHITW/attractions/weekend-guide.html).

Cairns actively promotes itself as a tourist destination in its own right; however, it is also a gateway to another famous destination, the Great Barrier Reef. While the Reef, understood as a unique Australian place, is geographically distant from the Cairns foreshore, it is closely associated with the city. Advertising and tourism promotions (as seen in image 7.5) intermingle images of the Reef (its sandy atolls, blue seas and
expansive vistas) with promotional text about Cairns. Such connections encourage tourists to desire and expect certain views and sensations (barefoot perambulations on the sand or the feel of warm sunshine and tepid water on the skin) both on the Reef and in Cairns. This section is based in part on some of the work of Celmarca Pocock and outlines how visits to the Reef have changed over the past century as a result of rising concerns about the health of the Reef. Addressing this issue has required authorities to limit and transform how people encounter the Reef. Some of the sensory expectations of tropical places once encountered on the Reef are now available in Cairns as the Reef is managed differently.

The Reef extends over 2300 kilometres along the northeastern Queensland coast, ranges from between 60 and 250 kilometres wide, and covers 344,400 square kilometres, much of which is heritage protected reefs, islands and coastal landscapes. It shelters portions of the coastline from large ocean swells and has an average inshore depth of 35m, making it accessible for smaller boats, swimmers, divers and snorkelers. The Reef is widely treated as a distinctive Australian place, though different groups, including scientists, indigenous communities, conservation groups, tourism operators, and mining and shipping companies have diverse and often conflicting ideas about how it should be used and perceived: a resource to be mined, an asset for tourism, a hazard to ships, a natural wonder and a homeland for indigenous peoples. Reefscape can also be considered strange, near alien environments, places of discovery and adventure that are reached after a journey from a familiar shore (often Cairns). Reefs are largely encountered underwater, where sensory experiences are dramatically altered by underwater conditions. For many the thrill of the Reef involves visual spectacle, the novel bodily sensations accompanying submersion, and a day spent in the outdoors, underwater or on the decks of pleasure boats in “the best playground in Australia” (below)

![Cairns …… the best playground in Australia – we’ve got it ALL!](image)

7.5 Advertising from www.visitcairns.com.au depicting images of the Great Barrier Reef with text which refers to Cairns. Such images contribute to tourists’ expectations about the physical form and appearance of the Cairns foreshore.
As Cairns was building its reputation as a tourist destination around the turn of the twentieth century (discussed in the previous chapter), tourism and scientific expeditions to the Great Barrier Reef and its islands were also becoming increasingly popular. Early visitors to the Reef were exposed to novel and unfamiliar sights, sounds, scents, tastes and tactile sensations. Haptic sensations were particularly prominent because visitors spent much of their time outdoors engaged in physical activities including camping, hiking, swimming and exploring at the water’s edge (Pocock 2008, 78).

Ventures onto the Reef and its islands were part of a longer European tradition of curiosity cultivated at river-, sea- and ocean-shores, including the leisure practices of collecting and studying indigenous flora and fauna and exploring novel landscapes and waterscapes (Pocock 2008, 78-79, for further on collecting see Elsner and Cardinal eds. 1994). E.J. Banfield, author and resident on Dunk Island who was mentioned in chapter six, wrote of the lure of the Reef in 1911:

*During the cool season the tides on the coast of North Queensland offer peculiar facilities to the observer of the thousand and one marvels of the tropic sea... When, therefore, the far receding water makes available patches of coral reef exposed at other times of the year merely to the cool glimpses of the moon, I am driven to explore them with an eagerness, if not of a treasure-seeker or in the frenzies of naturalistic fervour, at least with the enthusiasm of an ardent student (Banfield 1911, 126).*

Early European explorations of the Reef were strongly tactile because visitors attended to (and actively sought) unfamiliar materials and sensations including strange flora and fauna, humid tropical air, and buoyant salt water (Pocock 2008, 78-79). Understandings of place develop through such reciprocal encounters between the body and the environment (Rodaway 1994, 54). As seen in the previous chapter, the physical discomforts and dangers of tropical waters were a part of bathing on the foreshore and likewise a concern during a visit to the Reef. The hazards of a Reef visit were mediated by the pleasures and thrills of exploring a novel environment, and visitors may have regarded potentially perilous encounters as part of the experience of the Reef as a distinctive place (Pocock 2008, 80).
After WWII the growing tourism industry sought to mitigate the more unpleasant aspects of a Reef holiday, and increase the comfort and enjoyment of tourists. Tour operators and authorities also began exercising greater control over where visitors went and what they encountered. Improvements came in the form of coastal and island resorts (with swimming pools and air conditioning) which promoted the appealing tropical climate but removed many of the tactile aspects of a Reef visit, both pleasant and unpleasant (Pocock 2008, 81). Likewise, as seen in the previous chapter, cities like Cairns endeavoured—using modern technologies and construction techniques—to provide safe, convenient and appealing opportunities to swim and bathe in an effort to draw tourists to the town.

In his 1955 guidebook to the Reef, Serventy described tourism as “the most valuable by-product of the Reef area” (1955, 75). In the final chapter he listed supplies he considered necessary for visiting the Reef. He described the benefits of long trousers, socks and sturdy boots as protection against sharp corals, noting that a ‘stout spear’ is useful as both a staff and as “protection (mental mainly) against sharks” (Serventy 1955, 79). A large section of the chapter is dedicated to the nature (and potential danger) of tidal flows, a subject he considered essential knowledge but felt people were uncertain about. Serventy’s text suggests to the reader that a visit to the Reef in the mid-twentieth century was a potentially dangerous physical experience that required firsthand environmental knowledge. Similarly, before Perth and Cairns established adequate baths, swimming on the Perth or Cairns foreshore (outside the protective confines of a bathing facility), required the swimmer to be aware of local climatic and material conditions and potential hazards. Texts such as Serventy’s suggest both a growing awareness of potential hazards
and, later, the fragility of aquatic and terrestrial environs, leading in some areas to increasing environmental activism and regulation.

Northern Queensland featured significantly in the environmental turn of the latter half of the twentieth century, when rapid developments in technology and post-war economic expansion fuelled a boom in mining and land development. Newly popularised (and then exploited) areas, including reefs, islands, developing coastal zones and rain forests were under threat and “environmental degradation suddenly appeared insidiously in the lives of urban Australians” (Hutton & Connors 1999, 98).

The visible and clearly detrimental environmental impacts of economic activities generated activism aimed at the preservation of rain forests, the Reef and coastal sites like the mudflats on the Cairns foreshore. In the 1960s environmental organisations aimed at protecting the Reef emerged (Lines 1991, 205-206). Groups such as the Australian Conservation Foundation (1966), the Queensland Littoral Society (which later became the Australian Marine Conservation Society), and the Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland campaigned for various environmental concerns relating to the Reef. The latter two groups launched the Save the Barrier Reef campaign in the 1960s, a project that that has been described as “Australia’s more politically vigorous and successful early environmental protest movement” (Bowen and Bowen 2002, 4). It resulted in the Reef’s designation as a marine park by the Australian government in 1975, and receiving World Heritage status in 1981 (Bowen and Bowen 2002, 4-5).

7.7 Graphics from the 1960s Save the Barrier Reef campaign (Australian Marine Conservation Society 2014).

Artist and activist John Büsst was a major force behind the Save the Barrier Reef campaign. The Queensland Heritage Council Chair David Eades argues that “Büsst’s environmental activism illustrated his transition from being an artist interested in the aesthetics of nature to a conservationist promoting the ecological reasons to conserve the natural environment” (Queensland Heritage Council 2014, for further on Büsst see Bowen and Bowen 2002, 327, 331-333). It can be argued that one change coming out of Queensland’s environmental campaigns, like Save the Barrier Reef, was an increasing understanding of the intrinsic value of ecosystems and environments, beyond their
visual appeal. Valuing ecosystems which are not necessarily aesthetically or sensorially pleasing by the cultural standards of a time (and thus subject to threats like development) remains a significant priority for conservation groups and these values impacted on the design of the 2003 Cairns foreshore redevelopment.

In the late twentieth century the impacts of tourism on the Reef, including an increasing numbers of boats in the water and tourists coming into physical contact with terrestrial and aquatic environments, began to garner significant attention. Developments in tourism and transport were intended to mitigate the potential environmental damage caused by tourism and these measures have shaped how tourists encounter the Reef today.

7.8 Tourists are transported from Cairns to floating pontoons owned by tour operators. The pontoons offer many of the comforts of the city—dining, souvenir shopping, bars and even a post office—alongside aquatic activities like snorkeling and diving. The novelty of the sensory world of the Reef is mediated by familiar activities and sensations (Image from Quicksilver Cruises 2014, http://www.quicksilver-cruises.com/reef-tour/obr_platform/).

According to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA), “most tourists visit the Great Barrier Reef on a day tour, whether it be on large high speed catamarans to outer reef pontoons or smaller sailing and cruising vessels” (GBRMPA 2011). Visitors spend a day swimming, scuba diving or snorkelling from boats or semi-permanent pontoons under the supervision of trained guides. The pontoons provide amenities such as restaurants, souvenir shops and showers; bringing the experiences of the resorts out onto the Reef, whilst ostensibly protecting the Reef from people (Pocock 2008, 82).
Reef tours control where visitors go and what they do, and little planning or place-specific knowledge is needed as tour companies provided for every aspect of a visit, resulting in an experience that is safe and convenient. In Cairns tourists are returned to a ferry terminal adjacent to the Cairns Esplanade Lagoon and parklands, an area designed to induce and expand these visual experiences of tropical place, including sandy beaches, palm trees and tropical landscapes.

Cairns' role as a gateway to the Reef has determined some of the expectations of place, developed partly by means of the tourist industry, and subscribed to by both tourists and locals. Cairns has a history as the starting point for journeys into an environment that can provide dramatic bodily and emotional experiences of place, and are also recognised as potentially thrilling or even dangerous (see Pocock 2005, 2008). Cairns and the Reef are also a prime destination for recreational backpackers, whose presence and activities contribute to the character of the local waterfront. The following discussion of the foreshore explores the rise of tourism and the associated expectations of and demand for certain types of sensory experiences of a tropical place.

The 2003 Cairns Foreshore Redevelopment

Over the course of the twentieth century tourism in Cairns, strongly linked to tourism on the Reef, has become increasingly important for the city's economic survival. Davidson and Spearritt note that the last three decades of the twentieth century saw Cairns transformed from a provincial town to a prime international tourist destination, growth which can be seen as “testament to the innovation and avarice of private enterprise” (2000, 341). In the 1980s and 1990s a range of urban foreshore redevelopment proposals aimed to cater for tourists and improve the city’s aesthetic appeal. However, the design of these redevelopments was often at odds with campaigns to preserve the foreshore's 'natural' environment, including the Cairns Tidal Wetlands, which are registered with both the National Trust and the Register of the National Estate. While on the Perth foreshore it was the expansive and underutilized parklands that provoked controversy, in Cairns the shallow mudflats edging the shoreline generated debate about how the 'natural' or human-influenced the area was, and how it should be used and experienced.

Chapter six described how the Cairns foreshore was likely once a sandy beach that was gradually covered with mud as a result of dredging and dumping. As tourism increased
in Cairns, this mud became an increasingly problematic feature of the foreshore. A group of American tourism consultants who surveyed Cairns in 1964 “found Cairns to be ‘an attractive, tropical city’ handicapped by extensive mudflats and mangroves at low tide” (Davidson and Spearritt 2000, 341). They recommended dredging the shoreline as a means of dealing with the “un sightliness” of the area (Davidson and Spearritt 2000, 341). The mudflats were perceived as visually unappealing to tourists (no mention is made of local’s opinions) and remained a problematic area leading up to the 2003 redevelopment. The Cairns Esplanade visitor website, a government run website which is clearly aimed at justifying and promoting the redevelopment of the foreshore, explains some of the issues and perspectives surrounding the mudflats:

This infusion of mud [from dredging and dumping in the Grafton Channel] has been great for the mangrove ecosystem, but not great for tourists who would rather see a sandy beach than a muddy tidal swamp. The arguments purported by developers are that the mudflats are an artificial ecosystem that is not integral to the mangrove forests. But environmentalists assert that the area has been in it’s [sic] current form long enough to be home to thousands of species of mud-dwelling creatures, and to dump sand on top of them is environmental vandalism (Cairns Esplanade 2014).

This debate resonates with controversies that arose in Perth surrounding the ‘redevelopment’ of the Mount Eliza scarp, which involved removing European plantings from the decades after settlement and returning the scarp to a ‘native’ or pre-settlement state. The redevelopment of the scarp shapes a certain version of history, eliminating potentially controversial visual reminders of Perth’s colonial past. Similarly, the debate over the Cairns mudflats exemplify the efforts of various groups (developers, environmental groups, the government and city council) to validated or even manipulate certain histories of the shoreline to further their own objectives and generate certain understandings of the city’s past and its identity.

In the late 1980s the Trinity Point redevelopment plan proposed to infill a portion of the mudflats and construct tourist accommodation and facilities along the Esplanade. The plan generated significant community dissent and a 1990 report by the Queensland Department of Primary Industries highlighted some of the proposal’s potentially detrimental environmental impacts (see Coles et al. 1990). Local protests eventually led to the proposal being withdrawn in 1989.
7.9 A postcard showing an aerial view of Cairns in the 1970s or 1980s. The area which would eventually be redeveloped into the Lagoon is a parking lot and parkland spread along the remainder of the Esplanade seafront (Image from Queensland Places, http://queenslandplaces.com.au/cairns?page=4)


During the 1990s (prior to being redeveloped) the foreshore was approximately 600 metres long and 40 metres wide and was primarily composed of grassy spaces with
picnic tables, walking tracks and large trees. White and Calhoun of Tract Consultants, the designers of the 2003 redevelopment, reported that the area was popular with locals for morning exercise and evening recreation and was frequented by tourists throughout the day (2004, 35). The southeastern end of the foreshore (where the lagoon is now situated) was degraded, strewn with rubbish and referred to locally as ‘dead corner’ (White and Calhoun 2004, 35). The mudflats fronting the Esplanade extended 800 metres out to sea at low tide (as they still do today). Fantin (a local architect and author) notes in a review for *Architecture Australia* that in the 1990s the area had “some less savoury elements” which may have been undesirable to some but “which also made it interesting” (2005, 86). Her tone suggests, as Franck and Stevens argue in *Loose Space*, that diversity of both people and environments is crucial to the creation of lively urban space (2007, 1-4).

As noted by Davidson and Spearritt (2000, 341), some people in the tourism industry perceived the mudflats as detrimental to the tourist trade. The previously noted Cairns Esplanade visitor website—seeking to justify 2003 redevelopment—picks up the theme of vision and the tourist’s gaze, commenting that:

*Many visitors to Cairns frequently complained about the lack of a beach near the city, and said the mudflats were an eyesore. The Esplanade didn’t meet the images of paradise envisioned when departing the airplane at the Cairns International Airport (Cairns Esplanade 2014).*

The statement suggests that tourists imagined or expected to see ‘paradise’ upon arrival and that meeting these expectations was important. According to the same website tourists had also made comments such as “Cairns is a mere shell of a town that sustains itself on the tourist dollar. Its main street, the Esplanade, is no different from any other resort drag” and “Cairns, surprisingly for a coastal town, has no beach. The coastal waters are a mass of mud” (Cairns Esplanade 2014). The creation, idealization and reinterpretation of the desired ‘beach’ set within the ‘tropical paradise’ of the artificial lagoon was an endeavour to fulfil such desires, thus insuring the flow of tourist dollars to the town.
7.11 An aerial view of Cairns showing Grafton Channel on the left and the Trinity Bay (part of the Coral Sea) on the right. The redevelopment encompasses the area around the Marlin Marina on the point, the Cairns Esplanade Lagoon (to the right of the marina), and parklands edging the shoreline of Trinity Bay (Photo by Marc McCormack, Cairns Post, 1 November 2013).


In September 1998 Tract Consultants and Cox Rayner architects won a nationwide design competition to redevelop the Cairns Esplanade, a project budgeted to cost AU$25 million. Tract are known for their large scale urban design projects, and they promote their work as planning and design which “addresses land use function, economics, social wellbeing and environmental sustainability, with a focus on aesthetic order and
expression” (Tract Consultants 2015). Key waterfront projects include the award winning Barangaroo Headland Park in Sydney’s large Barangaroo waterfront redevelopment, and the ongoing Swan Hill Riverfront Masterplan in Victoria. The Cairns waterfront redevelopment, completed in 2003 (hereafter referred to as the 2003 redevelopment) sought to increase tourist revenues and enhance the city’s visual appeal. Discussing the project, the Australian Institute of Landscape Architects (AILA) website observes that it was blighted by political, funding and management issues and a significant turnover of Council Officers and Councillors, yet still managed to be completed in under six years. Moreover, “the design layout and intent remained substantially unchanged from the original competition entry to completion – evidence of a strong and clear idea, well founded in environmental, cultural, social and historical principles” (AILA 2014).

The redevelopment’s aspirations for a ‘Pacific’ style were articulated from the outset, with the Tract Consultants website stating that it was intended to be “a microcosm of Pacific, Far North and local Regional culture and craft” (Tract Consultants 2015). Their website also explains that:

The concept was designed to reflect and provide renewed waterfront recreational diversity for the people of Cairns. It has stimulated revival of the CBD heart and...has realised a unified waterfront vision that has linked the people of Cairns back to the waters edge (Tract Consultants 2015).

As in Perth, emphasis was placed on ‘reconnecting’ the city and its inhabitants with the water’s edge. In the design of Elizabeth Quay the solution to ‘reconnecting’ the city and the Swan River was dredging an inlet back to the original shoreline. In Cairns, the water was brought inland in the form of an artificial swimming lagoon built over existing mudflats, a reinterpretation of a ‘natural’ water feature that is common to the region, but not the Cairns foreshore itself. This aquatic centrepiece, and the multi-sensory experiences it provides, are essential to the project’s success.

The Strand, a flourishing lagoon development in nearby Townsville (containing the requisite tropical scenery and aquatic activities) was both an inspiration and the model for the Cairns’ design. The Cairns redevelopment includes a large sandy artificial swimming lagoon, picnic areas, barbecues, an outdoor amphitheatre, children’s playgrounds, shops, restaurants, walking tracks and a departure terminal for Reef cruises. Consultations and negotiations with traditional Aboriginal owners, the Gimuy Yindjii and Yirrganydji peoples, resulted in the inclusion of aboriginal artwork and cultural interpretation features (Cairns Esplanade 2014).

As seen in the Perth site study the water’s edge here is a place that is clearly desirable, but also contestable and subject to multiple understandings. Kevin Byrne, Mayor of Cairns in 2003, described the redevelopment as a three-way partnership, noting how the City council was “proud” to be collaborating with the Cairns Port Authority and the Queensland government (CP 28 May 2003). Public consultation, collaboration with Indigenous owners, and cooperation amongst governing bodies suggests that a wide range of needs and desires were considered (to some degree) in the project. However, protests about earlier redevelopment proposals and ongoing ecological concerns about the mudflats demonstrate how projects in liminal zones like the water’s edge may engage parties with diverse understandings of how a place could or should be encountered or preserved in conflicts which can be mostly (but never fully) resolved.

The Cairns Esplanade redevelopment opened on March 29th 2003 and encompasses 4.1 hectares of municipal parkland, of which 3.5 hectares were transformed into grassed areas while the remainder includes the Lagoon and recreational pathways. The entire project extends approximately 700 meters from the lagoon to the Cairns Public Hospital on the northwest end of the Esplanade. A north-south ‘Boulevard’ links the major CBD shopping precinct with the waterfront via the Lagoon, while the east-west ‘Promenade’, which includes paved paths and a wooden boardwalk, runs along the shoreline and connects five activity and information centres.

The Environmental Interpretive Centre, one of five small information kiosks along the boardwalk (see image 7.14), provides information about the Reefs, rain forests and the local mudflats. The Heritage Interpretive Centre addresses the history of Cairns, and the Pacific Interpretive Centre relates stories of both indigenous and more distant Pacific cultures that have played a role in shaping Cairns (White and Calhoun 2004, 35). Like
the informative signage and monuments in Kings Park or the re-interpretation of the Florence Hummerston Kiosk, the interpretive centres provide information about the ecosystems and inhabitants of the mudflats, a section of the foreshore that is off-limits for physical engagement (like swimming or walking). Understandings of the ‘natural’ shoreline are formed through more distant and abstract visual and textual information, unlike the sort of haptic experiences that result from direct contact. Interpretive centres not only provide information about a place or environment and its history, they also shape beliefs about how a ‘good’ citizen values and engages (mentally and physically) with such places. The interpretive notes also contain touchscreens which, according to the Cairns Visitor Information Guide Website, provide information about “tours, accommodation, dining and a whole host of things to do and see whilst staying in Cairns” (Cairns Visitor Information Guide 2015). Thus the ‘tourism’ concerns of the project infiltrate even the purportedly educational and environmental aspects.

![Image](image.jpg)

7.14 Two of the three Interpretive Centres designed by Peddle Thorp Architects. The information kiosks tell visitors about facets of local history, culture and environment, shaping how the area is understood and, to some degree, how it is experienced (Photo by Andrew Lane, Architecture Australia, March 2005).

The Marlin Marina jetty near the Eastern terminus of the Promenade is a popular place for walkers, joggers, fishermen and cyclists. People often travel the length of the jetty to look at the luxury yachts and gaze back on the Lagoon and the city. As in Perth, providing framed views of the city across or adjacent to a body of water is an important aspect of the project. The jetty, boardwalks and paths weaving along the foreshore draw people past, around, and into the lagoon and at the same time subtly—through the placement of railings and walls—deter them from engaging physically with the natural shoreline.

The project was well received upon opening, and Anderson refers to his visit to the Cairns Lagoon as an exploration of “the swimming pool as art...like breaststroking your
way through a magnificent work of art’ (2003). It won numerous awards in the year after it was completed including the AILIA National Merit Award for Design in 2004, and the Australian Institute of Architects (AIA) Far North Queensland Regional Commendation, the State Award for Art & Architecture, and a State High Commendation for Urban Design (AIA 2004).

The remainder of the this chapter examines how the project provides a range of desirable haptic experiences (and eliminates some of the less desirable ones), provides appealing visual experiences, and mediates concerns about environmental damage to the mudflats while providing environmental information. Aspects of the redevelopment can be understood as a kind of pedagogy through the identification, manipulation and control of recreational pleasure.

The Artificial Lagoon: Haptic Encounters with the Tropics

Catering to expectations of ‘tropical’ climatic and aquatic sensations is one of the primary purposes of the redevelopment’s centre piece, the artificial Lagoon, situated adjacent to the shoreline, the Pier, the Reef Fleet Terminal, and the Esplanade. The 120 metre long pool contains chlorinated saltwater, and technology has been essential its construction and ongoing operation. The Lagoon was built over existing mudflats and the unstable character of the ground made it necessary to rest the basin on 240 concrete pilings, resulting in “a basin standing on a large pier projecting into the mudflats” (Stevens 2009, 7). Seawater is pumped into the pool from Trinity Inlet and processed through four 9.8 tonne medium rate sand filters which circulate 3.8 million litres of water through the reservoir every four hours (Tech Summary 2014). A six-meter wide belt of sand was laid over the mudflats between the lagoon and the ocean for surface stability and visual appeal – a design decision which raised the ire of some environmental groups. People are discouraged from walking or sunbathing on this
intertidal zone via the placement of railings, benches and an embankment wall. They are encouraged to use the Lagoon’s artificial beach instead.

7.16 The Palm Court, a large paved area with evenly spaced palm trees, is located at the apex of the lagoon, seen from the Esplanade in this image. The triangular shape of the lagoon points towards Shield Street, linking the waterfront area to shopping and dining in the CDB (Image from Google Earth, 24 Mar 2014).

The triangular form of the lagoon establishes it as part of the urban context of the city, drawing visitors through the palm-filled forecourt at the intersection of Shields Street and the Esplanade and onward to the waterfront (Stevens 2009, 15). Stevens argues that “moving the water inland is the most feasible way to create a direct link [both visual and physical] between urban space and water, transforming the intertidal section of the waterfront, compressing it horizontally and clarifying it” (Stevens 2009, 7). The triangular form of the pool is a not a ‘natural’ shape for a body of water to assume, but has been chosen to provide visual and spatial links to the city. Likewise, the even spacing of the trees in the Palm Court imposes urban order and structure over nature.

7.15 Where the Lagoon meets the sidewalk, a decidedly ‘urban’ edge condition. The gradual transition from sidewalk to pool, and the gurglins fountains at the water’s edge, invite tactile explorations with hands and feet (photo by WT-shared, Wikimedia Commons).
The eastern edge of the Lagoon is an artificial sandy beach sloping gradually into the water, while the Western side resembles more conventional swimming pool forms with concrete sides, steps and timber decks positioned along the edge. The apex of the lagoon slopes very gradually downwards from the surrounding sidewalk and is lined with low, burbling fountains. It invites passers-by—even those who come to the area for purposes other than swimming—to wade in the water or touch the fountains, engaging physically with Lagoon. This enticing transitional zone replaces the natural shoreline and its varied and potentially dangerous or undesirable smells and haptic sensations with an edge condition which is safe, clean and sanitized. Tourist photographs capture children and adults exploring this playfully unconventional interface between land and water (see image 7.15). It is a site where urbanites can (and do), with a single step, suddenly become beach-goers.

A sculpture composed of granite boulders titled “The Herd” by artists Hew Chee Fong and L.M. Noonan is situated at the apex of the pool. The series of grouped forms leads from the sidewalk into the Lagoon. They are intended to resemble both a herd of nondescript animals moving out to sea and the form of the local mudflats at low tide, when the retreating waters sculpt patterns around rocks and shells imbedded in the sand.
The surfaces of the sculptures encourage tactile and bodily interaction and invite playful exploration (Photograph courtesy of Hew Chee Fong and L.M. Noonan, copyright 2003).

The boulders’ smooth carved surfaces entice passers-by to run their hands over them or sit on them and have their photo taken, tempting people gradually into the water. The boulders absorb the heat of the warm, tropical climate during the day and hold it into the evening, a warmth that could be understood as representative of the warm skin of a living animal. “The Herd” also represents an element of the local landscape, the mudflats, which are physically off limits. In a similar manner, the Point Fraser redevelopment in Perth provides controlled haptic experiences of a sensitive environment while protecting the fragile edge conditions along the Swan River. In Cairns “The Herd” is a tactile representation of the mudflats which is sanitised and idealised and which lacks their other, potentially unappealing sensory qualities: marshy smells and sticky mud.

The boardwalk between the shoreline and the lagoon looking east. Waterside benches offer visitors a chance to dip their feet into the lagoon, while a sign beneath the bench indicates prohibited activities (Image from Wikimedia Commons).
The Promenade between the lagoon and the ocean is a place, like the apex of the Lagoon, where passers-by might engage spontaneously with water. A bench running the length of the lagoon invites people to swing their feet to the other side and dip them in the water. Zones like the shallow apex and the poolside bench give visitors the freedom to participate in activities which are uncommon in urban environments. However, these moments of ‘freedom’ mask some of the ways the lagoon controls other activities and behaviours. Stevens observes how the ocean side promenade, which allows walkers to pass between the natural and artificial bodies of water, is clearly related to the original function of urban waterfront promenades as seawater restraining dikes (2009, 7). In this case the height of the walkway and railings serves to keep high tides and floods out of the lagoon and limit access to the beach and mudflats.

People engage in swimming and ‘beach’ related activities on the eastern edge of the lagoon. The artificial beach is convenient, familiar and safer that local ‘natural’ beaches as the former is free of dangerous fauna and watched over by lifeguards in their familiar red and yellow uniforms. Special equipment cleans and filters the sand to a depth of 30 cm below the surface, insuring a uniform appearance, textural consistency, and hygienic quality to the beach—with none of the shells, living creatures and interesting flotsam found on a native beach. Nor does this ‘manufactured’ shoreline contain any of the potentially uncomfortable physical reminders (such as broken coral underfoot) that one is in a ‘natural’ setting. The lagoon’s filtered and chlorinated salt water provides a sanitized version of the smell and taste of seawater. The sounds of waves lapping the shoreline may be audible from the mudflats in certain tides or weather conditions, though these sounds are disconnected from the physical condition of the lagoon itself. Visitors do experiences the temperatures and humidity of a tropical climate, sensations which act on the body and skin, raising the temperature and heightening the desirability of thermal relief in the lagoon. Thus, though the beach is pleasant environment in a
tropical region, visitors do not encounter and learn from the complex material and ecological components of ‘natural’ places.

The lagoon’s beach does provide many of the pleasant and actively sought sensations associated with beaches: lying on warm sand, digging, building sandcastles and other forms of exploration and play. Obrador-Pons writes that:

Letting the sun get in, feeling the coolness of the water on the skin and playing with the sticky textures of the sand are some of the main delights that people find on the beach. Touch holds the key to bringing back life, sensation and enjoyment on to the beach (2007, 138)

Tactile sensations, particularly those brought about though play and relaxation at the beach and in the water come to the fore at the lagoon. For Stevens, “the immediacy, reciprocity, non-functionality and transformative potential of touch suggest ways that bodily contact frames opportunities to explore playful desires” (Stevens 2007, 56). It is this opportunity to engage in pleasant, playful physical explorations of places that makes the haptic sense a powerful way of experiencing dynamic environments like the water’s edge, even in controlled situations like the lagoon. The sensations visitors find enjoyable and desire to experience through play—sensations like buoyancy or the fall of water over skin from the various fountains—define experiences of the artificial beach and the Lagoon. The safety of the Lagoon, whilst eliminating some of the complex sensory experiences of a ‘natural’ environment, allows play to come to the fore.
The water itself provides some quintessentially tropical aquatic pleasures, including tepid temperatures and the amplified buoyancy of salt water. However it is regularly filtered and is disturbed only by the motion of the bodies swimming within it, rather than by the waves, tides and currents that defined early twentieth century swimming baths, or any ‘natural’ aquatic environment. The hazard posed by dangerous fauna, tides, currents or weather are rarely encountered by contemporary tourists. At the Lagoon (or on a guided visit to the Reef) foreknowledge of such phenomena is not required to insure one’s safety.

7.21 The Fish and a jetting fountain on the far right. Water shooting from the fins of the fish or jetting up from the fountain expanding the range tactile sensations that swimmers encounter. Mechanical enhancements and representative sculptures make the lagoon ‘more’ than a pool, and different from the motions of waves and tides, providing interesting—but not place-specific—aquatic experiences (Photo By Pch808, Wikimedia Commons).

Technology, in the form of intriguing and interactive water features, contributes to playful haptic experiences of the Lagoon. Around the edges of the pool a number of knee-high jets of water burble enticingly, drawing in the hands and bodies of small children and the feet of weary tourists. In the middle of the lagoon a fountain and metal fish sculptures spray water over swimmers who actively engage with the jets of water, experiencing reciprocal touch as the water reacts to the movements of their hands and bodies. For Stevens “the pleasure [of interacting with fountains] lies in the mysterious and unpredictable forces. These actions are not what water does naturally; these are actions that water can be made to do” (2009, 18). He notes that artificial water bodies
with a range of water features can “compress a lot of experiences of water into a brief visit” (Stevens 2009, 18). Technology has expanded and diversified the actions and experiences of water in the Lagoon, providing idealized encounters with water, and elements representing nature (the fish), rather than an experiences of nature itself.

While the lagoon has been well received by patrons, Andersen comments that it has also opened “a Pandora’s box of irritations for the Cairns City Council” (2003). For some parents the lagoon, with its vigilant lifeguards, makes a convenient de-facto childcare centre, to the frustration of the lifeguards and the council (Andersen 2003). Tourists, and particularly hundreds of backpackers, gather in the parklands around the Lagoon to sunbath and socialize each day, and some of their activities and behaviours can be at odds with the councils regulations or aspirations for how the area could or should be used. Campers and backpackers “regard the barbecues and amenities block as their own” treating the change rooms as a place for shaving, showers and even hand-washing laundry (Andersen 2003). Controversies arising from visitor’s choice of swimwear (or none at all) and bodily propriety, reminiscent of debates over ‘neck-to-knee’ costumes a century before, have also arisen in relation to the Lagoon. In 2003 Cairns became the only city in Australia to allow topless sunbathing, a common European practice that was, and to some degree remains, morally suspect in Australia (Gregory, Jason 2003). Fantin asks “is north Queensland finally growing out of its colonial inhibitions and maturing into a place where nudity, tourism and local families sit comfortably side by side in the centre of town?” (2005, 86). The visual spectacle of bodies in the clear waters of the lagoon and sunbathing relatively unclad in the park is part of the experience of the foreshore that defines it as a ‘tropical’ place.

Upon first consideration the physical and visual experiences of the Lagoon and its beach are sufficient to convince many people to behave and engage physically as they would with a real beach (sunbathing, playing with sand). However, they only have to dig through the sand, walk to the middle of the pool (where the sand ends), or look with consideration at their surroundings to perceive the artifice. Macarthur notes that on Street’s Beach in Brisbane (an artificial beach and swimming lagoon similar to the Cairns Esplanade Lagoon) “the manners and mores of the beach, a certain agreed way of looking which will maintain privacy and self-possession while displaying an unusual amount of flesh, are taken up in an instant” (Macarthur 1999, 185).

Stevens refers to ‘Lefebvre’s (1991) concept of ‘second nature’, meaning an artificial landscape that gains the perception of being natural, where people become habituated to
it and cease to recognise it as artifice, as something socially produced and managed” (Stevens 2009, 4). Artificial lagoons in Cairns, Brisbane, Darwin and elsewhere are largely accepted as ‘second nature’; people adopt the physical and social behaviours of ‘the beach’ when they engage with artificial lagoons. This acceptance is a useful form of social control, encouraging the use of some areas, discouraging others, and normalizing ‘acceptable’ behaviours.

The Lagoon has shifted the character of physical encounters with the water’s edge on the Cairns waterfront in various, often-positive ways (in terms of human enjoyment at least). However, it is worth considering the artifice of the lagoon, and the understandings of place that such wholesale transformations of critical areas like the water’s edge create. Discussing Street’s Beach in Brisbane, Macarthur argues that:

There is something poignant, or frightening, in the fact of space such as a beach being reproducible in this way. In fact the ‘beach’ is just a large chlorinated pool with some sand, palm trees and life-guards dressed in red and yellow, but the question of the adequacy of its representation does not really arise; it provides a hypervisualized environment (1999, 177).

Construction techniques and technologies have made the creation of ‘replica’ environments possible and people seldom question the value or authenticity of the visual, haptic, auditory, olfactory and even gustatory sensations they provide. Stevens highlights how some new waterfront landscapes “focus on serving the voraciously consumptive desires of urban leisure, maximising environmental comfort for users by synthesising the appearance of benign nature, eliminating unwanted sensations, and allowing light, temperature and water flow to be adjusted at will” (Stevens 2009, 20).

Over time it has become increasingly important to eliminate natural elements from the physical make-up of the water so it will have a more physically and visually clear appearance, associated with being clean and thus ‘safe’ from visible and near-invisible threats such as stingers. Stevens notes that the focused leisure activities and range of generic tropical furnishings promoting ‘intense leisure’ seem ‘simplistic’ when compared with the intricate ecologies of the surrounding mangroves and estuaries. Instead, the lagoon is designed as a ‘comfortable tropical respite’, free of the potential contact with most of the native wildlife (2009, 8). New technologies have allowed for safe yet ‘intense’ recreational spaces and while such activities may be less sensorially dynamic than in the past, confining human activity to certain areas may have long-term benefits for surrounding ecosystems.
Picturing the Tropics

7.22 The Cairns Esplanade looking over Trinity Bay in 1922. The framing of the palm trees makes them a prominent feature of the photo, and one that defines the setting as ‘tropical’ (Photo by P. Bell, John Oxley Library negative 200071).

Vegetation and views play an important role the design of the Cairns foreshore and the creation of a visual spectacle of some generic and readily manipulated tropical place. Stevens argues that the Cairns waterfront “meets[s] the image that tourists—mostly foreigners—have of a tropical island resort, in both its natural and civilised elements” (2009, 9). Chapter six touched on the influence of ideas about the ‘tropics’ and the ‘South Pacific’ on coastal resort towns in Australia, particularly ideas about their visual appearance. Pocock argues that resort islands and tourist gateways like Cairns have become places “where visitors rarely enjoy Australian landscapes” and are instead presented with “a quintessential tropical holiday location characterized by lush, exotic vegetation” (Pocock 2005, 335). The creation of appealing ‘tropical’ views was essential to the Cairns 2003 redevelopment.

7.23 The native palm, Pandanus Spiralis, is visually distinctive to the imported Coconut Palm. However, it is the Coconut Palm, and species like frangipani and hibiscus, which help to define Cairns as a tropical place (Photo by Bidgee Wikimedia Commons).
Coconut Palms, other non-native palm species, and a mixture of native and non-native shade trees and manicured grassy parklands feature prominently around the lagoon and foreshore. As discussed in chapter six, Coconut Palms (and similar looking species) have become symbolic of the tropics. They are often favoured for their ‘tropical’ associations, rather than the visually distinctive indigenous Australian species, like the Pandanus Palm. Fantin explains that:

*Most [indigenous] beachfronts in northern Australia are characterised by their natural beauty: towering melaleucas, red beech trees, casuarinas, mangroves, or bauxite cliffs and tamarinds. People-made beachfronts and esplanades of the north often contain large introduced shade trees, such as figs and Indian almonds, surrounded by green lawn, dotted with the occasional barbecue and picnic table (2005, 82).*

Pocock notes that casuarinas, with their shaggy branches and distinctive whispering sounds, were once a prominent auditory and visual feature of Reef islands and the north Queensland coast; an “important and typically Australian sensory experience” (Pocock 2003, 141, 2002). These natives have mostly been removed and replaced by iconic, but imported palms, figs or flowering trees or shrubs.

The addition of palm trees along the Queensland coast and Reef islands for aesthetic purposes has taken place since at least the early twentieth century. Discussing the Cairns foreshore in a 1908 article ‘Egbert’, a visitor to the town, praised how “the coconut palms, banyans, immense fig, and other trees make its appearance quite tropical” (CMP 25 July 1908, 6). While he valued the visual appeal of the palms ‘Egbert’ also noted that “happily, especially towards the beach, clumps of native trees have been left, affording welcome shade” (CMP 25 July 1908, 6). Palms cannot provide the pleasant haptic sensation of thermal relief that shadier—though less popular—trees provide.

Coconut palms also contribute to the ocularencentric nature of the development, as they are conducive to framing views or photographs without blocking out the surrounding scenery, or hampering the movement of people through an area. The lagoon and its surrounds are carefully set up to frame certain views and emphasise a ‘tropical’ place, which can be captured and disseminated in photographs. A prominent example is the paved transition zone—the Palm Court, pictured above—between Shield Street and the Lagoon where the palm trees are uniformly spaced and frame views and photographic opportunities of the lagoon, the sea beyond, or the nearby mountains from a variety of angles.
Fantin notes how careful site planning has also aimed to enhance some aspects of the development and hide others. For example, a small building housing changing rooms, toilets and a kiosk sits at the edge of the lagoon, screening the view of the large Pier building behind it (2005, 83). Urry and Larsen note that “many tourist buildings, objects, technologies and practices (as opposed to tourist motivations) are structured around visualism” (Urry and Larsen 2011, 195). While the Lagoon and its surrounds are quite visually focused, the previous section demonstrated how it also encourages tourists to engage haptically with the pool, beach, sculptures and parklands, however contrived (yet still enjoyable) these interactions may be.

Urry and Larsen, writing about tourist precincts (though not Cairns specifically), highlight how the overriding organisational nature of the visual sense flavours experiences whereby:

the distinctiveness of the visual is crucial for giving all sorts of practices and performances a special or unique character: the palm trees by the beach, the
charming restaurant, the themed resort, the bedroom with a view, the sight of tropical birds, the colours of the exotic plants and so on. The most mundane activities, such as shopping, strolling, having a drink, or swimming or river rafting appear extraordinary and become ‘touristic’ when conducted against a striking or unusual visual backcloth (2011, 195).

Describing the visual experiences of the lagoon and it’s surrounds shortly after it opened local reporter Andersen wrote: “this is a wonderful swimming pool that offers gritty views of the Esplanade eateries and backpacker establishments at one end and a glorious outlook over the sea to the Yarrabah Peninsula” (2003). The lagoon links the urban and recreational zones, allowing tourist to conveniently engage in a range of desirable activities.

One of the most frequently photographed features, the infinity pool effect—commonplace in resorts worldwide—is created by elevating the level of the lagoon above the oceanside promenade and keeping the area between the lagoon and ocean relatively free of raised elements. This is a contemporary version of a ‘ha-ha wall’, a eighteenth century landscape design feature that creates a barrier wall and limits access, yet provides the illusion of unbroken ground and extended views. Discussing the Brisbane and Cairns Lagoons, Stevens notes that viewing the sea from a very low eye level, and the thoughtful design of the interface between the lagoon and adjacent body of water, “creates an almost seamless continuity between them, which creates an uncanny sense of
being ‘in’ the river or ocean: an enlarged version of the ubiquitous hotel ‘infinity pool’" (Stevens 2009, 8). The ha ha wall allows tourists the desired views, and also enforces the separation of the redeveloped area (and its occupants) from the mudflats.

Another frequently photographed element of the redeveloped foreshore is “The Fish”, a collection of five stainless steel sculptural fountains which are situated in the lagoon. Local artist and Torres Straight islander Brian Robinson created the sculpture in 2003. The woven pattern of “The Fish” is based on Pacific island traditions of weaving palm fronds into trinkets for children or decorations for festivals, a tactile and entertaining activity that has been adopted by Australian festival makers and goers. At times small jets of water shoot playfully from the fins and tail of the fish onto the swimmers below. “The Fish” have become an iconic visual representation of the Cairns Esplanade, and according to the City Council’s website, “one of the most memorable pieces of public art in Australia” (Cairns City Council 2014). “The Fish” are contradictory in some ways; they represent both stereotypical ‘tropical’ places (and cultural material practices), and yet are widely understood—as a result of photography, tourism promotions and the Internet—as symbolic representations of the Cairns foreshore.

Ironic, improbable, attractive or interesting photographic opportunities—and the activity of taking photos itself—is often an important part of a visit to the Lagoon. However, by focusing their attention on creating visually appealing photographs for future viewing or showing to others, visitors may be less attentive to the physical
sensations they are experiencing. Pocock argues that haptic encounters involving global touch, extended touch and reach are immediate, place and time specific encounters, while photographs are taken in preparation for future recollection, and thus disconnected from the moment and the experiences during which they were created (Pocock 2008, 83). The Lagoon and it surrounds offer opportunities for playful haptic encounters at the water’s edge (contrived but enjoyable), but the photographic appeal of the setting puts a strong emphasis on the visual, and memories of the foreshore, or anticipation of future visits, may focus on visual, rather than multi-sensory experiences.

**Endangered Environments**

In Cairns, as in Perth, concerns about damaging about the fragile shoreline environment have come to the fore in recent decades. Another objective of the 2003 Cairns redevelopment—which has been largely successfully met—was separating human activities from the shoreline, and restoring the ecology of the mudflats. Cho writes that “a successful urban nature restoration project usually results in (re)inventing a space from dereliction to spectacle with the effect of place-marketing which attracts an influx of capital and people” (Cho 2010, 148). The waterside environment is framed as a visual and educational area, which, in some ways, promotes the redevelopment itself. The visual appeal of the redevelopment and the restored natural environment are “easily perceived as the icon of a new monumental achievement by urban political leaders, which in turn gives rise to renewed political backing within the local governing machine” (Cho 2010, 148).

Cairns city officials aimed to create an “ecotourist playground” along the foreshore to educate visitors and locals “about the tropical ecosystems in an informative and interactive interpretation of the waterfront ecosystem” (Cairns Esplanade 2014). The Tract Consultants website states that the redevelopment was intended to be “an educational resource for Cairns’ people and its visitors to interpret the great natural and cultural asset of Cairns and its region” (Tract Consultants 2015). Physical interaction and play occurs in and around the artificial lagoon, while visual and written information about mudflats is conveyed along the boardwalk at the environmental interpretation kiosk and around bird watching areas.
The raised boardwalk deters attempts to access the mudflats while low railings and benches allow uninterrupted views across Trinity Bay (Photo by 04marjess, Wikimedia Commons).

The redevelopment restricted major construction (the Lagoon) to the southeastern end of the waterfront, an area deemed to be the least ecologically productive section of the shoreline (Cairns Esplanade 2014). The Cairns Esplanade visitor website, seeking to justify any environmental damage incurred by the redevelopment, states that “all planning and building has been carried out in an environmentally sensitive way” and a principle of causing “no net environmental impact” was put in place (Cairns Esplanade 2014). The website argues that an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) “found that the long-term impact of the development would be positive” (Cairns Esplanade 2014). It also notes that environmentalists were dissatisfied with the EIA, arguing that it “contravenes the spirit of the Trinity Inlet Management Plan because it ignores the No Net Loss of habitat concept, and the Precautionary Principle” (Cairns Esplanade 2014). In spite of claims about consultation (noted earlier) environmental issued surrounding the project were contentious.

The primary means of protecting the flora and fauna of the mudflats from physical human intrusion is the boardwalk which runs along the water’s edge for around 600 metres. It is a popular place for walkers and joggers, and people traverse its lengths to take in views back toward the Lagoon and the Marlin Marina on the point, as well as out over Trinity Bay and the more immediate view of the mudflats.

The mudflats are critical environment for not only their aquatic inhabitants, but also local and migratory birdlife. The impact of human settlement on bird life was noticeable prior to the redevelopment. Areas around stormwater drains on the mudflats had,
timber, built up sediment, resulting in the area around each drain remaining exposed by the tide for up to 40 minutes longer than other sections of the mudflats. Birds had learned to take advantage of this extra feeding time, and, in turn, these areas had become popular with local and international bird watchers (White and Calhoun 2004). After consultation with a bird specialist during the design phase, the Council argued that “rather than being threatened by the development, the bird life is intended to become one of its most important attractions (Cairns Esplanade 2014). While the intention is clearly to benefit birdlife, there is also an interest in the ability of birdlife to draw tourists and increase tourism, hinting at the project’s underlying economic goals.

Three bird watching zones have been designated on the boardwalk near feeding sites and these areas have been widened into platforms to accommodate bird-watchers and camera tripods (White and Calhoun 2004). The platforms are designed to allow people to see the birds, which means that birds are also exposed to sounds, sights and smells of human activities on the boardwalks - for the majority of visitors are not quietly watching the birds. In spite of potentially disruptive human activity at the water’s edge birdlife is, according to the Cairns Birdwatching website by local twitcher Lloyd Nielsen, largely unaffected. He states: “that the shorebirds have been hardly disturbed by the redevelopment is of great credit to council and the local birdwatchers who advised them. At one stage it might have become a canal estate or a man made beach” (Nielsen 2013). In this context the project has successfully mediated the needs of a number of groups and, likely ensured longer-term protection for the mudflats and their inhabitants.
Stevens argues that “new, naturalistic urban waterfronts are seldom the result of a rising ecological conscience” and, citing Dovey 2005, “they usually owe their existence to global flows of financing, and political efforts to capture those flows in the local built environment. This newly built second nature will itself most likely be re-exploited when economic needs change” (Stevens 2009, 19, Dovey 2005). Stevens is sceptical of the ecological aims of some waterfront redevelopments. While the Cairns redevelopment has to some degree exploited concerns about preserving local ecological systems, in highlighting the area’s vulnerability, the project may in fact contribute to the long-term protection of the area along certain lines. By meeting human sensory desires in a relatively ‘free’ (though in fact rather controlling) area around the Lagoon, the shoreline itself is preserved as a site for ecological education.

**Conclusion**

By way of concluding, while endeavouring to appear and ‘feel’ tropical, and highlighting the ‘natural’ environment of the mudflats, the Cairns lagoon and surrounds retain many features that characterise the area as an urban destination (shopping, dining), resulting in a range of urban sensory experiences. The close proximity to busy city streets contributes sensations like the hum of traffic, the odours of exhaust, and the sounds and smells emanating from busy restaurants. Because the lagoon is situated between several destination points (the jetty, the Pier complex and the Esplanade) many people pass through the area, adding an element of pedestrian and cycle traffic.

Fantin argues that the redevelopment provides a “pleasantly urban tropical experience” (2005, 83) and while she finds the density of bodies at odds with the relatively unpopulated expanses of coastal beaches, she notes that “for tourists and urbanists the new esplanade is perfect. It provides people with the dense comfort of an urban beach, while simultaneously giving a luscious view to the south of the rainforest and mountains meeting the sea” (Fantin 2005, 86). She believes that the redevelopment has transformed the Esplanade “into a quintessentially Queensland space; resort tourist meets rainforest feral, a little Gold Coast glamorama, some backpacker chill and a substantial dose of spectacle” (Fantin 2005, 83). Neither a ‘quintessentially Queensland space’ or a ‘South Pacific’ place are local, though they may be indicative of economic imperatives driving the form of the foreshore.
Pocock argues that “the comparison between historic sources and observation of contemporary tourist locations suggests that the Great Barrier Reef has become more idealized and less reflective of its Australian location” (Pocock 2003, 218). Much the same can be said for Cairns. The ‘waterside’ experiences of the artificial beach and lagoon serve to both connect and differentiate the recreational area from the city and provide the ‘tropical’ sights and sensations that tourist desire, while accommodating the economic imperatives behind the redevelopment. The lagoon presents visitors with idealized and relatively risk-free experiences of natural elements, or representations of natural elements in the case of the “The Herd” and “The Fish”. The presence of lifeguards, the rules governing the use of the lagoon, and technologies which cleanse the water and sand all render the lagoon ‘safe’, just as the presence of bathing attendants, doctors and bathing machines secured the seaside in the eighteenth and nineteenth century.

As in Perth, in Cairns the provision of different types of settings—recreational, urban, and ecological—allows for a variety of visual, haptic, olfactory and auditory understandings of the foreshore and contributes to the city’s place identity. Today visitors spend much of their leisure time in an idealized ‘tropical’ place, and while many tourists are visiting the Reef and coastal beaches, they are spending shorter periods of time there than they would have a century ago. The technological developments that allowed for the creation of the lagoon have also created social change, where artificial landscapes and waterscapes become destinations in themselves.

Fantin describes the lagoon as the “jewel of the development” (2005, 83), and it is a popular, pleasurable, attractive and profitable addition to the foreshore. The safety of the lagoon allows people to engage in relaxed and playful activities as the water’s edge. The lagoon is a valued and inviting place that is now central to Cairns’ identity, however, with the increasing popularity of such developments (for example, the Darwin Waterfront Precinct discussed in the conclusion) it remains important to question what types of sensory experiences are being enhanced, or eliminated through design.

The appealing tactile sensations provided by the lagoon help to keep people away from the fragile mangrove mudflats, preserving these spaces for wildlife. Efforts are made, through the Interpretive Centres and signage, to provide cognitive, if not sensory, knowledge and shape moral and behavioural responses to the shoreline. However, as Rodaway notes, understandings of place develop through reciprocal encounters between the body and the environment (1994, 54). The range and diversity of haptic experiences
with ‘natural’ environments are increasingly (and out of necessity) limited. The kinds of environmental knowledge garnered through tactile experiences at the water’s edge, as seen in chapters four and six, are becoming less common. At the same time, increasing emphasis is being placed on captivating visual experiences (distant rather than intimate sensory encounters). Photographs, which can be transported over time and space, have increasingly replaced haptic experiences, which are fleeting, individual and informative of the material character of a place in a particular and important way. The concluding chapter will reflect on the Perth and Cairns site studies and examine the recently completed Darwin Waterfront Precinct (2008) and a proposal for the Docklands Surf Park, projects which demonstrate contemporary haptic and visual understandings of the water’s edge.
Chapter Eight

Conclusion

Sensory history reveals relationships between communities and built and natural environments, however beneficial, enjoyable, misguided or damaging these might sometimes be. Australian urban waterfronts are places where increasing urbaniy meets natural bodies of water, and these places are crucial to the identity and experience of Australian cities. The waterside places, structures and activities that were presented in the site studies are relatively common; the sorts of places and undertakings that are (or have been) found in cities and towns throughout Australia or even further afield. Thus, the sensory desires and expectations—past and present—discussed in this thesis may apply, in part, to other recreational Australian waterfronts.

This final chapter reflects on the aims and outcomes of this research. It first considers the value sensory history as an avenue for considering some of the more ephemeral sensory experiences of built environments and offering new perspectives on the aims, achievements and manipulations of design. This is followed by reflections on the key findings of the research. Some of the key findings stemming from the contemporary sites studies—particularly desires for haptic encounters with water, alongside comfort, convenience, safety and visual appeal—are considered briefly in light of two other projects, the Darwin Waterfront Precinct (2008), and a proposal for the Docklands Surf Park in Melbourne. The thesis concludes by speculating on the future of some of Australia’s urban waterfronts, including challenges they may face and sensory experiences they might provide in decades to come.

Review of Findings

The first chapter of this thesis commenced with sensory historian Alain Corbin’s argument that sensory understandings of the city go beyond its visual and material
makeup: “a city’s sounds, odours, and movement make up its identity as much as its lines and perspectives” (2014, 47). In exploring the sensory qualities of waterside places the thesis had three key aims:

- Exploring and demonstrating the potential for sensory history to provide unique and beneficial critical perspectives on the built environment.

- Developing a sensory history of the Perth and Cairns foreshores and identifying how and why some of the haptic and olfactory experiences of and interactions with these waterside places have changed over time.

- Generating a discussion of the value of sensory experiences in forming place identity, in conjunction with (or sometimes contrasting to) more dominant visual understandings of waterside places. Examining how greater awareness of these often-neglected ‘sensory histories’ can contribute to future consideration of the types of places that can be created, and lost, through design.

The following section briefly summarizes some of key findings of the research, which are reflected on further in later discussions of aims one, two and three.

**Key Findings**

- Sensory history has significant potential to contribute a unique perspective to studies of the built environment. It is a particularly valuable perspective for considering edge conditions or transitional zones (waterfronts, recreational areas, the intersection of public and private spaces) which are generally sites of historical and cultural significance. Activities and behaviours, and the resultant sensory experiences and emotional impressions of these places, may be shifting and contested. Sensory history can add detail and meaning to understandings of these places.

- Haptic encounters with water on the waterfront became increasingly desirable from the late 1800s onwards, though finding a sensorially pleasing site for activities like swimming and bathing often proved problematic. Physical encounters with water in waterside urban contexts remain popular today,
however it is now manufactured water features—such as artificial lagoons and interactive fountains—that are the locus of water related recreation.

• Australian waterfronts were transformed to meet European sensory, aesthetic and functional expectations from settlement until the late nineteenth century, often removing or altering native landscapes, waterscapes and vegetation. Today some waterside places are being 'returned'—via revegetation, landscaping or preservation—to indigenous conditions. These 'revitalized' landscapes provide a different range of sensory experiences and expectations of Australian waterside places.

• In order to provide the desired 'pleasant' waterside encounters and protect 'natural' or 'regenerated' shorelines, interactive fountains and artificial lagoons have become key features of urban waterfronts. These places are enjoyable, however, visitors do not form the complex topographical, material and ecological understandings of place the come from diverse, complex and changing sensory encounters.

Reflecting on Aim One: Exploring and Demonstrating the Potential of Sensory History

Sensory history has much to offer studies of the built environment. Portions of this thesis, particularly the case studies of bathing in Perth and Cairns, demonstrate that it is a particularly useful perspective for considering waterside recreational areas where people participate in a range of pursuits that specifically engage the proximate bodily senses. Sensory history can add depth, detail and new perspectives on places or issues that are traditionally considered through other lenses. For example, bathing and propriety are often considered through more traditional lenses like history or gender studies. Examining the sensory history of swimming and bathing on Australian foreshores elaborates on the experiences and sensations that people desired and sought, or reviled and avoided, bringing the body and, importantly, its non-visual experiences, into broader understandings of bathers and bathing places.

In addition to adding depth to histories of people and places, sensory history brings the senses to the fore across a range of periods or places by revealing shifts in sensory desires
and expectations. The site studies revealed some of the types of sensations that have become increasingly sought after over time – such as haptic encounter with clean, cool water. It also showed how other sensations—such as unpleasant smells or tactile sensations associated mud or refuse—have been eliminated through design and regulation. The site studies showed how sensations—including and beyond the visual—were the underlying cause of some the transformations wrought on city foreshores. They also showed how different groups within a community, such as swimmers and city officials, had different levels of tolerance and desire for different sensations.

Greater awareness of the often-neglected ‘sensory histories’ of critical places and environments can contribute to future consideration of the types of places that can be created, and lost, through design. Furthering knowledge of how we are—and have once been—sensorially in touch with and aware of with our waterside environments contributes to how people experience and might learn from waterside places.

**Reflecting on Aim Two: Examining the Sensory history of the Perth and Cairns foreshores**

The two site studies revealed that the senses play a complex role in shaping the built environment as well as expectations and behaviours in waterside places. On the Perth foreshore around 1900 swimming at the City Baths and ‘shooting the chutes’ at the Water Chute contributed to the formation of unique sensory regimes connecting individual bodies, the bodies of others and the built and natural environments.

Howes observes that “different senses produce different takes on the same space” (2005c). For example, swimmers focused on the enjoyable haptic sensations of their sport and found the activity largely enjoyable, while city officials focused on the malodourous character of the baths, and found swimming and bathing activities concerning in relation to public and individual health. Evolving recreational activities and associated behaviours, and the new sensations they provided (through both new ways of moving through water and encounters with the riverine environment) also generated conflicting attitudes towards recreational swimming venues and their patrons.

Swimming enthusiasts believed that aquatic recreation improved the health and moral character of participants. They celebrated increasing community involvement in natatorial activities as civic progress. A condition of engaging in the multi-sensory
pleasures of aquatic activities was that visual experiences of both participants and those outside the facilities were carefully controlled through physical barriers and social behaviours. A visit to the baths was focused on the haptic, olfactory, auditory and visual experiences a controlled group of bathers inside a socially sanctioned facility. Knowledge garnered was in many ways location specific (temperatures, currents and climatic conditions) though not always positive because of the muddy, smelly conditions of the site. The acknowledgement of (and efforts to remediate) these unpleasant encounters with mud and foul smells contributed, in part, to the ‘placefulness’ of these locations.

The Perth City Baths were also a means of promoting medico-moral reform, entailing lessons about bodily hygiene and propriety that both the mainstream public and governing authorities considered important. However, the facility’s detractors were concerned that the material and olfactory conditions in the baths—the muddy riverbed, barnacles on the structure, and foul, potentially miasmic odours along the shoreline—posed a threat to community health. Others perceived the changes in dress, class-, and gender-behaviour that were occurring alongside new recreational activities as threats to the social order.

The ‘resolution’ to the various social and sensory ‘problems’ associated with swimming and bathing in Perth was to construct new baths several kilometres from the city. Shifting the site for potentially controversial recreational activities out of the growing metropolis made bodily interaction with the water’s edge something that took place away from Perth’s civic heart. The new site met the haptic and olfactory expectations of swimmers for material conditions which ‘felt’ and ‘smelled’ clean by the standards of the time (a hard sandy bottom and clear water) without violating the visual regimes of visitors to the foreshore or Kings Park. These conflicting sensory values associated with the immediate foreshore also insured that for many decades the Perth shoreline would remain a place of primarily visual value.

While swimming and bathing activities provided occasions for interactions between the body and the river, the Water Chute enhanced these encounters using modern technologies. Kane argues that the main focus of mechanical amusements was “selling the experiences of pleasure itself, and for the first time, technology was employed to this end, with enormous success (2013, 67). The chute was appealing specifically because the corporal sensations it provided were novel, pleasurable, thrilling and potentially risky. The rapid global proliferation of water chutes, and more broadly mechanical
amusements, reveals how technology was shaping new leisure practices centred on corporeal, multi-sensory experiences (Sally 2006, 300). The worldwide proliferation of water chutes means that the sensations associated with ‘shooting the chutes’ became part of a ‘shared’ realm of experiences at the water’s edge (in both natural and artificial bodies of water), that was understood not only locally, but even globally. The rapid spread of technology added an international dimensions to sensory regimes and the cultivation of certain haptic experiences.

Cairns faced similar challenges to Perth when it came to providing socially sanctioned bathing and swimming facilities on the foreshore around 1900. As in Perth, visual and bodily propriety, the physical enjoyment of bathing in a hot and humid climate, health and hygiene, mixed-gender bathing, and the remediation of some of the unpleasant haptic qualities of the shallow, muddy shoreline were amongst the bathing-related issues raised in community newspapers. However, in Cairns two other factors shaped interactions with the shoreline. The need to create an appealing water-oriented destination for the increasingly lucrative tourist trade became as important as providing baths to meet local desires. In their efforts to attract tourists locals were alert to the image and reputation of the town (its identity) and how this reflected on its occupants.

Apprehensions about aquatic fauna, the “dangers of the deep” and “the presence of the ferocious crocodile” (CP 7 May 1887, 2) also shaped aquatic practices in Cairns. Prior to the advent of enclosed bathing facilities the body was protected only by the clothing of the bather. In order to be appealing a bathing enclosure needed to be safe from the mysterious, frightening and potentially dangerous creatures found in Australia’s northern tropical waters. The invisibility of some of the stingers which threatened swimmers in open water, and occasionally within the purported safety of the baths, made the shoreline a place where neither vision nor the bathing structure itself could be relied upon to provide security. Fear of painful corporeal encounters with invisible ‘monsters’ and the need to provide a ‘safe’ swimming place for tourists and locals was one of the factors which drove the creation of terrestrial swimming pools. The built environment became the shield between the body and the dangers of the deep.

Concrete baths constructed using evolving mechanical and building technologies provided a resolution to swimming and bathing-related problems and anxieties in the 1930s, and they remain popular today. After decades of baths that failed—through storm damage, silting-up, or inadvertently admitting dangerous stingers—people turned to technology and human endeavour to create a ‘better’ aquatic environment. The concrete
baths provided the desired haptic sensations of cool, clean water and modern technology played an important part in allowing citizens and tourists to believe in the safety of the facility. The creation of this enclosed pool can be considered the first step in transforming the foreshore into an imagined ‘tropical’ paradise. It was also a way of exerting greater control over bodies and behaviours through design. Creating a playful and engaging lagoon with fountains, sculptures and an artificial beach draws people away from the contested ‘natural’ shoreline. While placing the facility at the water’s edge maintains a visual and symbolic connection to sea-bathing traditions and experiences.

The turn of the twentieth century site studies reveal how, in a period of shifting sensory values (when people began undertaking more ‘bodily’ recreational activities) there also remained lingering concerns about visual and bodily propriety. Lewi notes that the continent’s spatial and climatic characteristics, including extensive recreational waterfront spaces, have caused sport and leisure to figure significantly in “the formation of Australian identity and everyday environment in the twentieth century” (2010, 114-115). The swimmer as an Australian character, one that would later become representative of Australia’s culture of sun, sand, body and water, was uneasily gaining acceptance in the early twentieth century. How and where the physical form of this character was seen, and the form and function of the waterside facilities he or she popularized, were particularly problematic during this period of social change.

It is impossible to understand fully an early twentieth century bather’s sensory experiences, and the enjoyment, excitement and controversy that increased participation in swimming inspired seems unremarkable a century later. Yet the attention and enthusiasm—or angst and grievance—surrounding these activities are evidence that they were a significant change in behaviour at the water’s edge. Accounts from the time suggest that the sensory experiences of swimmers along the Perth and Cairns foreshores partially transformed people’s experiences of the environment and their own bodies.

The century between the historic and contemporary sites studies was a period of rapid technological and cultural change. Since the 1960s the redevelopment of urban waterfronts from brownfields into recreational zones has been a particularly important means of shaping a city’s identity. In addition to the technologies that make major redevelopments possible, the involvement of large corporate firms in such redevelopments is one factor which distinguishes recent waterside transformations from the (by-comparison) less invasive changes of the turn of the twentieth century.
In Perth swimming activities were moved away from the foreshore in 1914 and the waterfront became an increasingly important visual component of the city’s identity. The grassy expanse of the foreshore with its straight embankment walls came to be seen by some as boring, underused parklands, while others saw it as “an idyllic and untouchable natural setting” (Yabuka 2008, 46). Decades of debate over how to ‘reconnect’ the city with the river were finally resolved (to some degree) in the Elizabeth Quay redevelopment, which reveals some of the desires and expectations for haptic and visual enjoyment on urban waterfronts today.

The design of the BHP Billiton fountain is inspired by the seasonal nature of many West Australian lakes. It is an example of recent redevelopment trends that reference and seek to raise appreciation for the indigenous features of an area as they may have existed prior to European settlement. The twenty-first century waterpark selectively appropriates riverine and estuarine ecology to present the site as a unique Western Australian place. However, the fountain’s material elements (concrete, sanitised water) and its functions—shooting jets of water or creating mists—have no sensory characteristics (smells, tactile sensations, sounds) that are tied closely to the riverscape. Instead it is technology which provides enjoyable and diverse haptic sensations, however contrived or partially represented they may be. The Swan River’s history of pollution and degradation means that the river itself along the city foreshore is no longer widely perceived as a viable site for swimming. However, when creating safe, sanitized and enjoyable places for physical interactions with water it is also worth considering the types of sensations that have been lost or curtailed, and what this means for peoples’ understandings of river- and ocean fronts.

The ‘restoration’ of the Kings Park scarp and the construction of the Lotterywest Federation Walkway are efforts aimed at linking Perth with long standing notions of ‘the bush’ as a distinctly Australian place. Through emphasis on ‘the bush’ surrounding and within the park, and the descriptive signage and symbolic design (the ‘rusting’ walkway with its indigenous and ecological motifs) sections of Kings Park emphasise the city as an ‘Australian’ place. The signage and design of the park—the views that are emphasized, the features which are highlighted, the text provided—impart certain moral lessons about how and what a ‘good’ Australian appreciates about their city and its setting, particularly its visual qualities.

Point Fraser offers a more ‘natural’ (if manufactured) counterpoint to the sanitised urbanity of the Elizabeth Quay and the sweeping vistas of Kings Park. The artificial
wetlands draw on the historic form and function of the marshy shoreline, and visitors experience a range of haptic, olfactory and auditory sensations associated with the flora, fauna and microclimate of the reed-beds. These serve both functional and pedagogical purposes: filtering stormwater runoff from nearby streets and imparting information about the historical and functional nature of riverine ecosystems through both multi-sensory experiences of the wetlands and explanatory signage.

The ‘urban’ sensory qualities of Elizabeth Quay, the ‘environmental’ focus of Point Fraser and the ‘visual’ importance of Kings Park collectively provide a diverse and complex range of multi-sensory experiences of the Perth Foreshore that contributes to shaping different understandings of the city, the river and Perth’s place identity. Heterogeneous sensory experiences of the city and its surrounds highlight how waterfronts are complex places where diverse histories, people and environments interact.

The evolution of Cairns into a major tourist destination continued over the course of the twentieth century. The 2003 redevelopment of the foreshore, particularly the addition of the Lagoon, was integral to its success and continued growth. In order to provide the tropical sights and sensations that tourists expect, the redevelopment involved the creation of areas and experiences—the artificial lagoon and beach—which are ‘exotic’ in appearance and provide sensations (sand underfoot, tepid water) that are associated with ‘tropical’ places. Yet these experiences, and the area in which they occur, are contrived, generalized and more or less rendered exotic, with few of the characteristics of an Australian tropical environments in any exact, ecological or indigenous sense.

The safety of the lagoon—insured by the supervision of lifeguards, imposition of regulations and exclusion of dangerous fauna—allows people to engage in playful waterside activities. Stevens observes that artificial waterfronts like the lagoon, in spite of their artifice, become ‘places’ with social value beyond their generally understood economic benefits or visual appeal (2009, 19). The Lagoon has become a valued and inviting place where visitors and locals can find enjoyable haptic sensations and thermal relief, and it is now central to Cairns’ identity, however contrived it may be. Importantly, while the Lagoon contributes to the city’s identity, ‘beachgoers’ do not form the complex ecological and material understandings of Australian places the come from sensory encounters with more ‘imperfect’ natural shorelines.

Through both design and regulations access to the mudflats (the natural shoreline) is restricted. Efforts are made, through the Interpretive Centres and signage, to provide cognitive information and shape moral and behavioural responses to the mudflats. Like
Perth, in Cairns the provision of a range of types of places—the urbanity of the city, the ‘tropical’ lagoon and parklands, and the ‘natural’ mudflats—has allows for a variety of visual, haptic, olfactory and auditory understandings of the foreshore which contribute to the city’s place identity. The technological developments that allowed for the creation of the lagoon have also created social change, where artificial landscapes and waterscapes become destinations in themselves.

While artificial recreational water features are created for pleasure, efforts to (re)create functioning reed filtration beds at Point Fraser and preservation tactics aimed at protecting the Cairns mudflats demonstrate how nature/culture relations on urban waterfronts in the twenty-first century involve some degree of human responsibility for and efforts toward recouping and protecting ‘natural’ or ‘native’ environments. The governance of these ‘sensitive’ areas seeks to both protect them, and to cultivate environmentally responsive citizens. The water’s edge is, in particular, the focus of many of these efforts as it is accessible, visible and a site of multiple and diverse desires and expectations.

**Reflecting on Aim Three: The Value of Sensory Experiences in Forming Place Identity**

The results of aim two touched on a number of specific ways that multi-sensory experiences of waterside places contribute to place identity, alongside more dominant visual understandings. This discussion reflects on some of the broader themes relating to place identity that arose from the site studies.

Around 1900 in Perth the Swan River and the Mount Eliza scarp were transformed to meet European sensory, aesthetic and functional expectations. Shaping the river’s edge through infilling and the construction of riverside walls, building a British-style bathing structure on the city foreshore, and creating European style gardens in Kings Park all provided not only visual, but haptic, olfactory and even auditory experiences which were influenced by traditional British activities and behaviours. While bathers encountered the sensory conditions of the Swan River, it was via a medium—the Perth City Baths—which positioned local ‘Australian’ smells, tactile sensations and sound within British bathing traditions.
Today some waterside places, like Point Fraser, the Mount Eliza Scarp and the Cairns Tidal Mudflats, are being ‘returned’—via revegetation, landscaping or preservation—to indigenous conditions. These ‘natural’ landscapes provide a very different range of sensory experiences and encourage different sensory expectations of Australian waterside places. These different perspectives are evidence of a gradual (and sometimes controversial) cultural shift away from appreciation of the European landscape traditions imposed by settlers. Instead, there has been growing interest in returning to or ‘re-creating’ more ‘indigenous’ landscapes in some areas, and increasing urbanisation in others. For example, in Kings Park the removal of non-native vegetation, the emphasis on ‘the bush’ surrounding and within the park, and the descriptive signage and symbolic design (the ‘rusting’ walkway with its indigenous and ecological motifs) of sections of the park emphasise the city as an ‘Australian’ place. Even the urbanity of the Elizabeth Quay redevelopment calls on historic water features, appropriating the indigenous landscape to enhance the place identity of the city. These appropriations and transformation sometime (particularly in urban contexts) represent ‘native’ or ‘historic’ conditions symbolically, rather than sensorially, meaning that they are significantly disconnected from their original form or function.

Today urban waterfronts, and more broadly public urban redevelopments, are often cities’ most visible and expensive efforts aimed at creating a specific ‘identity’. They are also tourist places, designed to show off the city and its setting, and provide recreational spaces and amenities like dining and entertainment. Sensory history can provide an understanding of how sensory regimes highlight and potentially cultivate connections between a range of haptic, olfactory and auditory encounters and ecological, topographical and material understandings of places. Sensory history may offer insights into not only what looks appealing, but the broader range of sensations that people actively seek. This in turns allows for consideration of the place identity that can be formed through not only visual, but multi-sensory experiences of urban places.

The Darwin Waterfront Precinct and a proposal for the Docklands Surf Park in Melbourne highlight some further ways that contemporary haptic and visual expectations of recreational urban waterfronts are being met today.
Recent Developments and Proposals

The Darwin Waterfront Precinct

Looking beyond the site studies, the 2008 development of the Darwin Waterfront Precinct demonstrates some of the same sensory desires and expectations of waterside places as found in Perth and Cairns. Like many other Australian cities, Darwin had a number of shoreline bathing structures over its history that served similar needs for hygiene, recreation, thermal relief and protection from a host of other dangerous marine fauna. It also has an immense tidal range—between 1.9 and 7.7 metres—which poses challenges in terms of both navigating and physical manoeuvrability given the rise and fall of the water level and the potentially dangerous currents that tidal shifts create.

8.1 An aerial view of the redeveloped Darwin Waterfront Precinct. Note the barrier wall inside the wharves separating the recreational waterfront zones from shipping. The u-shaped beach inside the swimming lagoon is to the left of the Convention Centre and the wave lagoon is visible behind it (Image from http://www.darwincitywaterfront.com.au).

Darwin has followed the model of other northern coastal towns (Cairns, Airlie Beach) and provided a visually appealing tropical playground on the waterfront in an effort to lure tourists to the city. The first phase of Darwin’s two-part waterfront redevelopment was completed in 2008, and the second phase is currently underway. Phase one included the construction of a swimming lagoon and an artificial beach, a wave lagoon, parklands, boardwalks, apartments, hotels, retail spaces and a convention centre. Phase two, located to the east of phase one, includes a marina with a loch, 1300 apartments, retail spaces, public art, parklands and boardwalks. The city itself perches on a scarp, vertically separated from its waterfront precinct and connected by a ‘skywalk’. This
separation enhances the distinction between the urbanity of the city and the ‘tropical’ feel of the recreational waterfront.

The swimming lagoon and wave pool appeal to visitors seeking tropical sensations. The recreational lagoon is filled with seawater that is pumped in and regularly flushed and mixed by mechanical systems. The form of the lagoon has been designed to create a sandy swimming inlet cordoned off with a net, similar to stinger nets found on some northern beaches. The artificial beach is surrounded by a low wall, grass, a scattering of palm trees and covered picnic tables. Beyond the swimming net the lagoon continues to a break-wall with a walkway on top. There is no visual continuity between the lagoon and the horizon, a feature that breaks noticeably from what is otherwise an idealised beach setting.

Unlike the Cairns lagoon, the Darwin lagoon uses technology and an understanding of local fauna, tides and seasons to admit some local algae, fish and harmless jellyfish within sections of the lagoon, forming a functioning (if human-regulated) ecosystem. Sharks, crocodiles and poisonous jellyfish are excluded or removed using measures such as stinger mesh, nets, night spotting and dragging the water. However, the Darwin Waterfront Corporation (DWC, the area’s governing body) makes it clear on their website that they cannot guarantee that the lagoon is free of stingers (DWC 2014). This partial admittance of local fauna is a step towards creating a relatively risk-free ‘natural’
environment where haptic encounters with local marine life contribute to the experience and identity of the place. However, expectations of places have changed over time and the DWC’s website warns that “if swimming with large fish isn’t the experience you are after then we encourage you to swim on the beach side of the stinger net, they are kept out of this area” (DWC 2014). The careful control of species within different segments of the lagoon limits the potential for the unexpected, insuring that sensory experiences conform to expectations.

Technology has allowed for the creation of the wave lagoon, a feature which provides opportunities for playful and thrilling encounters with water in a safe and controlled setting. The 4000-sqm ‘lagoon’ is a concrete pool filled with chlorinated salt water. It can produce around 10 different types of waves up to 1.7 metres high. The wave lagoon manufactures the exciting haptic experiences of being jostled, pushed and, in the case of surfers, being supported by waves. Such experiences are somewhat limited on natural beaches around Darwin due to the terrain, tides and dangerous fauna. The popularity of wave lagoons is evidence that the quest for novel and thrilling bodily experiences, seen in development of the Water Chute and other mechanical amusements, is still part of contemporary waterside desires.

8.3 Surfing lessons are offered in Darwin’s waterfront wave pool, providing the thrills of ‘dominating’ nature in a safe, controlled environment (Darwin Waterfront Corporation media release 8 January 2015 (http://www.mediareleases.nt.gov.au/mediaRelease/10393).
Proposal for the Docklands Surf Park

In Melbourne engineering firm Arup and architect Damian Rogers have teamed up to design a proposed surf park in Melbourne’s CBD, a development which, if built, would cater to a range of contemporary desires for exciting and enjoyable haptic sensations in unusual or unexpected settings. The proposed site for the Docklands Surf park is next to Central Pier in the Melbourne Docklands. The design calls for a 160 metre long surfable wave pool, an artificial ‘floating’ beach, grassy areas, decking and retail spaces. The project could generate waves up to 1.5 metres high utilising filtered, heated salt water drawn from the harbour. If constructed it could potentially be the world’s first pool floating on a harbour (Dow 2014).

The proposal is an example of how cities use the appeal of technology—particularly the newest or most potentially enjoyable technologies—to promote or ‘brand’ the city. What makes this proposal intriguing (and maybe a bit bizarre) is that Melbourne centres on the Yarra River, and ‘surfing’ has never been an activity undertaken on the city foreshore. The proposal seems to be aimed at creating an identity which is broadly associated with Australian beach culture, rather than Melbourne itself. Rogers argues that the water surrounding the Melbourne CBD is under-utilised, and the project presents an opportunity for Melbourne to reinvent itself and “create a beach lifestyle in
the heart of the city” (Galvin 2014). A keen surfer, Rogers proposes that it would be enjoyable to “be able to hear the waves breaking and go for a surf—even if you’re not a surfer, to be able to sit there and watch it” (Nicholls 2014). It is questionable whose interests the project would serve, and who would benefit from it. Given that there would be an entry-fee for those desiring to ‘surf’ in the park (though using the artificial beach would be free), it is likely that there are economic and branding motives behind the proposal.

Proposals like the Docklands Surfpark use new construction and engineering technologies to alter not only the physical environment, but to make it mimic features of natural environments found outside the city itself. In a video on the Dockland Surf Park website Rogers highlights the importance of technology that can adjust the height of the waves to cater to a range of surfers (Dockland Surf Park 2014). Mimicking a range of different oceanic conditions could bring surfers and swimmers in contact with a variety of haptic sensations; the gentle pull of low waves or the brutal force of breakers.

The visual impact of the project is also a central part of its appeal. Noting the surrounding residential towers, Rogers states that “we also want to embrace how people could be looking at it from above, so the wave, but also the park, using the roof as a garden, and giving that back to the people of Melbourne as a public space” (Dockland Surf Park 2014). As discussed in previous case studies, the aerial perspective highlights the dominance of people over landscapes, in this case a landscape that is wholly manufactured and rigorously controlled. Its designers and proponents present the project as a visually and haptically appealing ‘public amenity’, yet there are clearly economic and identity issues behind the proposal.
Arup’s Phil Carter believes that the proposal is about reconnecting the Melbourne CBD to the water, creating “a genuine place people could go and enjoy” (Galvin 2014). Like Perth and Cairns, ‘reconnecting’ to an urban foreshore is about more than just the visual congruity. An opportunity to haptically engage with water seems to be essential to ‘reconnect’, even if it is made possible and enjoyable by technology.

Monica Hatcher from Arup indicated that design concepts for the Docklands Surfpark proposal were inspired by the Victorian Government’s Public Realm Plan, New York’s Plus Pool proposal, the Hudson River Park and the Santa Monica Pier (Monica Hatcher 2014, pers. comm, 12 October). The Plus Pool initiative seeks to construct the world’s first floating self-filtering pool in New York’s rivers. The filtration system in the walls of the floating pool removes bacteria and contaminants in stages without chemicals or additives, leaving only river water within the swimming area and filtering up to half a million gallons of water per day (Plus Pool 2014). The idea behind the pool is to not only provide opportunities for enjoyable physical recreation, but contribute to the ‘cleansing’ of New York’s rivers and transform people’s perceptions of it them:

*It started with a simple goal: instead of trying to clean the entire river, what if you started by cleaning a small piece of it? And what if you could change how New Yorkers see the rivers, just by giving them a chance to swim in it?* (Plus Pool 2014).

It has not been indicated whether the Surfpark proposal would endeavour to clean the Yarra River. However, should its proponents decide to undertake this task it would add an additional layer of ‘education’ and environmental reparation to what is already an intriguing and technologically advanced proposal.
While Plus Pool remains a proposal, in Berlin, the Badeschiff (Bathing Ship), a floating pool in the Spree River, opened in 2004. The pool reconnects the city and its river “and also taps into the history of bathhouses that lined its edges during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century” (Lewi and Phillips 2013, 289). Lewi and Phillips write that the pool:

> offers a seductive and new interpretation of the ‘Good Environment’. Unlike the earlier pools that provided protected areas for people to learn to swim within the river, the Badeschiff floats above the river allowing people to figuratively ‘swim’ in the polluted river where swimming is now prohibited (2013, 290).

Stevens argues that the careful design of the Badeschiff and its connection to the shoreline has optimized convenience and comfort, while keeping the river surface “near eye level for people standing in the pool” (2009, 10).

For Stevens, the Badeschiff, despite its visual congruity with the Spree River, is still an artificial aquatic environment. Industrial pollution is filtered, human pollution is mitigated by chlorinating the water, and comfort is provided by regulating the water temperature and protecting swimmers from the river’s currents (2009,11). He also notes that:

> This artificial aquatic environment requires less human effort to use, and offers more comfort and wider prospects for enjoyment, although at the expense of reducing prospects for encountering, comprehending and enjoying the mysteries of nature’s complexity. This pool eliminates the physical properties of the river that made the riverfront a practical site for industry: its momentum, its thermal mass, its dilutive volume. It frames instead the artifice of feeling one is in the river because one can see
the river up close at eye level; one can hear and smell the river and feel its breezes up close, without touching it” (Stevens 2009, 11).

So while haptic sensations of the river are limited, the Badeschiff nonetheless affords some of the proximate auditory and olfactory experiences obtainable from the river.

Would floating pools be popular recreational sites on Australia’s river-, lake- and oceanfronts? Lewi and Phillips write that:

New and restored pools still serve to reconnect the swimming public with immersive water landscapes, and demonstrate architecture’s ongoing role in tempering the natural environment. Rendering it ‘safe to play’ through innovative technological and design solutions, they continue to facilitate public access to health-giving recreation. In responding to the illusive desire for the ‘Good Life’, their success also highlights the collective significance and future viability of remaining twentieth century waterside pools (2013, 290).

Visually less imposing than the enclosed bathing structures of a century ago, and less flamboyantly artificial than the Cairns Esplanade Lagoon, such floating pools emphasize not the pool itself, but its surroundings. The sights, smells and sounds of the riverine, estuarine or oceanic environment are combined with haptic sensations of the local climate (sunshine, breezes), and the pool itself. In Sydney the Andrew Boy Charlton Pool (commonly known as the ABC pool) sits on the site of one of the city’s established bathing sites, the Fig Tree Baths. The popular pool ‘hovers’ about the harbour, providing some of the multi-sensory experiences of Woolloomooloo Bay. Floating or ‘hovering’ pools may be one way of reconnecting haptic encounters with water with some of the other sensory experiences of the water’s edge.

The ABC pool, when viewed from Potts Point, is centred below Sydney harbour’s two defining architectural features, the Sydney Opera House and the Harbour Bridge. It is linked physically to Woolloomooloo Bay and visually to the city (Photo by Ross Honeysett, 2003).
What next?

Redeveloped waterfronts with artificial water features are becoming increasingly popular, and Stevens argues that “more research is needed to identify the short- and long-term environmental impacts of this new phase of waterfront development, as well as any potential environmental benefits, so that artificial leisure waterfronts do not produce a new legacy of degraded brownfield sites” (2009, 20). Dovey notes that waterfront redevelopments are a means of generating wealth, “with a key task to ensure that such wealth is both created and shared. And the vast majority of those who will share it have not yet been born; urban design and planning decisions have very long term consequences” (2006, 4). As seen in the site studies, the sensory aspects of such places, those that are highlighted and those that are neglected, may have long-term impacts, both positive and negative, for the identity of a place and its community.

May advocates for the design of waterfronts that focus on the complexity and interconnectedness of people and river systems, rather than human dominance over them (2006, 482). She suggests that pedagogical elements—for example art works like “The Herd” or informative signage and images like those found at Point Fraser and in Kings Park—can call attention to the natural process of an aquatic environment through virtual or conceptual means without contributing to physical degradation of the system (May 2006, 482). Pedagogical elements in conjunction with places like the Point Fraser wetlands—which provide haptic, olfactory and auditory understandings of the shoreline—may contribute to more ‘complete’ understandings of waterside places.

One of the most significant pressures facing waterside places is climate change, and it may be climate (rather than efforts to either preserve or develop urban shorelines) that determines their future form. Bolleter notes that sea-level rise might result in most of the Perth foreshore being “reclaimed’ by the river; possibly reverting back to a pre-settlement landscape of rush beds and salt marshes” (2014, 590). The research of Nordenson, Seavitte and Yarinski suggests that ‘soft infrastructure’ which includes, estuaries and islands, could be one means of dealing with the urban impacts of climate change and also “balancing environmental, technical and economic priorities” (2010, 14-18). Bolleter argues that “as such the pendulum may in time swing back in this direction. Intuitively a degree of hybridization of both urbane and natural systems would appear ideal” (Bolleter 2014, 590). This suggests that places like Point Fraser, rather than
Elizabeth Quay, could possibly be the most viable waterfronts of the future. Thus a sensory appreciation and understanding of such places may be essential to create understanding and acceptance of climate-change mitigation measures.

Ekström writes that “in no other period in history has humanity been able to act upon distant futures to the same extent as today, and in no other period in history have we been as aware of the impact of our actions on future societies as today” (2012, 474). As human desires and expectations at the water’s edge have shifted and will continue to shift, the solution to providing a range of sensory experiences might involve ongoing exchanges of old and new techniques and technologies to provide, preserve and create meaningful multisensory experiences of waterside places.

Big questions remain. Will the creation of artificial recreational water features—lagoons, fountains, pools etc.—continue to satisfy desires for haptic encounters with water in decades to come? Will governments be forced to curtail our experiences in response to climate change, population growth or other factors? Can the creation (or preservation) of nearby ‘ecological’ zones like Point Fraser and the Cairns Tidal Wetlands satisfy human desires and maintain ecosystems’ health in the long term? Will zones like Point Fraser and the Cairns mudflats succumb to future economic and development pressures? Or, have they been saved, not only for the immediate future, but for decades, by shifting the locus of human sensory desires to the artificial waterfront?

Last Word

We are all ‘in touch’ with our immediate environment through a range of senses, even though we often attend more consciously to what our eyes ‘tell us’. Exploring waterfront places through tactile, olfactory and auditory encounters reveals how bodily experiences and importantly, expectations, of these places have changed over time as our cities grow, their waterfronts develop, and cultures change. How different sensations are valued, desired or reviled at different points in time is evidence of cultural shifts, which provide clues about how we could, should or might design waterside places in the future. Sensory history reveals relationships between communities and the natural world, however beneficial, enjoyable, misguided or damaging these may sometimes be. Explorations of the value of sensory histories to studies of the built environment—like this thesis—may open up new understandings of human/environment relations at a point in time when the sustainability of our physical relationship with the natural world
has become one of our greatest challenges. Through closer scrutiny of the non-visual experiences of historically, culturally and ecological valuable sites like the water’s edge this thesis makes a contribution to the innumerable ways of understanding urban foreshores and Australian places.
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