

Melbourne<sup>The Best TV Reception in</sup>

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Fitzroy 'Low-life'  
& the  
Invasion  
of the  
Renovator

In the 1960s the inner-Melbourne suburb of Fitzroy began a process of economic and social change, resulting in the dislocation of many long-term residents. Some people were shifted out of the suburb as a result of government 'housing reforms'. Others were more gradually dislocated. It was the renovator's paint-brush and the commodification of Fitzroy's 'diversity' that would eventually transform the suburb into the place that it is today; a place of 'real delis', 'taste' and 'fashion sense'. This article engages with some of these Fitzroy narratives.

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For much of the twentieth century the inner-Melbourne suburb of Fitzroy<sup>1</sup> was represented as a dangerous and decaying abyss, an archetypal urban 'shadow' against the 'light' of a society making claims to modernism and development, particularly during the era of postwar reconstruction in Australia after 1945. This discourse of urban dystopia had its foundations in the nineteenth century, developing from concerns about the rapid expanse of the metropolis and a more general critique of urbanism at the height of the Industrial Revolution.<sup>2</sup> Negative images of Fitzroy as a locus of social evil emerged soon after the area was 'settled' in the 1840s,<sup>3</sup> with debate about the fall from grace of Melbourne's 'first suburb' first formulated during the depression of the 1890s.<sup>4</sup> Historian Chris McConville has written that during the last decade of the nineteenth century 'Fitzroy as a whole, not just certain Fitzroy streets, had come to epitomise all the evils of big city life'. As a result of both the poverty experienced in Fitzroy and relentless civic and press attention, the wider community was provided with a steady diet of stories of 'Fitzroy low-life' for the wider community.<sup>5</sup>

The negativity attached to Fitzroy was not challenged until the 1960s, when the area was suddenly discovered as one of the select places to reside in inner-city Melbourne. The subsequent dislocation of members of the Fitzroy community has been largely attributed to the misguided benevolence of the 'well intentioned' slum clearance programs of the Victorian Housing Commission (VHC). This article argues that whatever the intention of slum eradication it came at tremendous cost to those who lived in Fitzroy, a loss that is too easily ignored or forgotten today. Additionally, it is clear but again often ignored that working class, Koori (Aboriginal) and migrant groups were more likely to be displaced by home renovators and political evangelicals than by government bulldozers.

It was in the late 1960s, at the same moment that many people were losing their homes to slum clearance and housing evictions that the suburb was also being discovered by the middle class and reconstructed in the imagination as the local equivalent of New York's Greenwich Village.<sup>6</sup> These manoeuvres commodified 'Slumland Fitzroy' for the marketplace through a package deal that re-imaged and re-created Fitzroy as a bohemian and desirable place in which to live and play, additionally producing a 'consumable' Fitzroy for new 'insiders', which in the process all but 'consumed' many of the suburb's existing residents.<sup>7</sup>

## OLD FITZROY HOUSE IS NOW A REAL JOY

In October 1973 the *National Times* newspaper extolled the virtues of Fitzroy as *the* new attraction of domestic style in Melbourne, while simultaneously producing a lurid narrative dealing with the surviving 'relics' of an earlier era. The feature highlighted the social and cultural shifts that were altering Fitzroy's identity. Initially bypassing Fitzroy's (until then) predominantly negative image, the *National Times* now found it 'a pleasant, convenient place to live, with a lively and growing cultural *tradition*' (my italics) enjoyed primarily by 'the relatively affluent professional class moving into terrace dwellings'.<sup>8</sup> Following this glowing introductory image the 'old-timers' and welfare-dependent residents of Fitzroy also appeared in the article, representing both a hindrance to fully-fledged gentrification and a commodity that attracted the suburb's new arrivals wanting to briefly 'walk on the wild side'.<sup>9</sup> The *National Times* argued that such a stroll, which allowed Fitzroy's new residents to flirt with 'the *demi-monde*',<sup>10</sup> was now possible as the new residents could retreat behind the fortress architecture of 'high brick fences and bars on front windows' that accompanied many a terrace renovation at the time.<sup>11</sup> It also reported that the long-term poor who remained in Fitzroy to greet the affluent 'migrants' from the middle suburbs of Melbourne were suffering from 'high-density neurosis', with the newspaper informing readers that the welfare and recreational needs of the poor and dysfunctional were catered for by thirty-nine social welfare agencies and thirty-eight hotels in the suburb.<sup>12</sup>

This *National Times* feature ignored the charity networks and went straight to the pubs in search of a story about these 'old-timers'. Here it discovered the (racialised) debauchery of the now antiquated Fitzroy citizen in a familiar state of immorality and apathy:

*[Here are people] who place no worth on themselves...brain damaged alcoholics,...a raddled, painfully thin white woman doing a grotesque dance,...a slack mouthed young black woman who might have been pretty had she not early become a victim of the booze,...[while] in the corner a vacant-eyed Slav-looking man kneads the thighs and nuzzles the face of a hefty white woman.*<sup>13</sup>

The Fitzroy grotesque, which in the past had created as much genuine fear in outsiders as it had titillation, was suddenly an attraction for people who had previously avoided the suburb. They could now read

about the ‘evils’ of Fitzroy in a nominally left-wing newspaper right in the heart of a suburb that would have been enjoyed previously at a suitably safe distance. New Fitzroy residents, be they the middle-class ‘paint-strippers’, students or artists were now able to thrill over a Fitzroy address that had not only witnessed ‘more murders than any other street in the country’, but one that also provided instantly formed ‘villages’ where one could experience the ‘art of life’ (as the remnant working-class or migrant street theatre was now described).<sup>14</sup> Housing that previously was of primary attraction to the bulldozer alone now offered so much more:

*Period character...ripe for change [with] the renovators busy all around, giving the outsider suitably comfortable quarters to view the picturesque people and their charmingly traditional way of life.*<sup>15</sup>

The suburb’s new aesthetic extended to its children who, previously characterised at best as Dickensian Artful Dodgers, were now regarded as the ‘most exuberant’ and ‘merry’ pupils their teachers had ever seen.<sup>16</sup> This new attachment to ‘slum kids’ was endorsed by one of the recent arrivals, ‘an academic’s wife’, who informed a touring press journalist that she wanted her children ‘brought up in Fitzroy because it teaches them that there are people who can’t afford all the things that they want’.<sup>17</sup> And yet, while the children of the new Fitzroy residents were tutoring their children to learn to live affluently with a token dose of humility, the same children were also prevented from learning too much from poorer children as they were more likely to attend expensive private schools outside the suburb, as ‘Fitzroy schools are well recognised as having a poor academic standard’.<sup>18</sup> Therefore the new residents selected the elements of the ‘charmingly traditional’ Fitzroy that suited their lifestyle and mores, with the middle-class migration to Fitzroy in the 1970s producing a form of ‘chic voyeurism’<sup>19</sup> in which ‘diversity’ and ‘difference’ was produced and consumed as palatably ‘exotic and foreign flavours’.<sup>20</sup>

While the attraction of Fitzroy in the early 1970s was sometimes expressed through the strategic eulogising of ‘old-timers’ who were being gradually displaced from the suburb, its value was articulated more frequently with regard to the economic potential of the suburb that privileged a particular language of style. In this, the narrative of the real estate market was dominant. As early as 1969 an *Age* real estate feature reported that Fitzroy’s previously depressed terraces were suddenly ‘blooming into showpieces [and] coming up chic’ after extensive

refurbishment.<sup>21</sup> Couched in the hyperbole of the real estate tout, the rhetoric saw south Fitzroy reconstructed as ‘the place to live and invest...the Toorak of the district’.<sup>22</sup> Fitzroy stories increasingly appeared under headlines such as ‘They’re Young, Rich—and Buying Near Town’, reflecting how rapidly representations of Fitzroy had shifted.<sup>23</sup> This new Fitzroy discourse was produced by real estate spruikers working ‘hand-in-hand’ with others also discovering the inner city, such as artists and those involved in the heritage industry.<sup>24</sup>

The crucial elements of this discourse, including the attempt to highlight the gulf between ‘old’ and ‘new’ Fitzroy, were apparent in a *Herald* feature describing the renovation of a Victoria Street terrace. Previously imagined as ‘bedraggled, sleazy [and] coming apart at the seams’, the newspaper noted that the house had been transformed to ‘combine the splendours of a more gracious past with the advantages of mod cons’, thus producing ‘A Most Desirable Residence’. The ‘more gracious past’ alluded to in the article was far enough back in time to ensure that the market value of the residence was not ‘tainted’ by its more recent and culturally relevant working-class and migrant history. To ensure that potential purchasers of this property realised both its physical and social transformation, the adjacent property was ‘deliberately left in its seedy, near-slum state’.<sup>25</sup> In another celebrated terrace renovation, the *Age* regaled its readers with the story ‘Old Fitzroy House Now a Real Joy’, explaining the intricacies of a Fitzroy terrace renovation:

*It took a psychiatrist, an interior decorator, and a student social worker to transform this two-storey Victorian-era house... When they hit upon it, several families were living there in hutch-like rooms... After extensive renovations this is now one of the most imaginative and interesting houses we have seen.*<sup>26</sup>

The changes occurring in Fitzroy during the early 1970s, however, did involve more than a property and *Vogue*-led conservation boom. Some who moved to the suburb, including students and activists were influenced by left politics and the protest era of the 1960s and ‘with their emphasis on participatory democracy, on activism and on protest,...[they] found fertile ground in Fitzroy’.<sup>27</sup> ‘Shopfront’ community organisations, such as the Fitzroy Legal Service and a range of Koori social services, including the Aboriginal Health Service and Legal Service, were established in the early 1970s, while other members of the Fitzroy

community were heavily involved in both anti-slum clearance and anti-freeway protests during the same period.<sup>28</sup> Members of Fitzroy's migrant communities also formed their own political and social action groups.<sup>29</sup> But while some may have felt that they were transforming ideals into action in Fitzroy, some of these new political arrivals in particular also contributed to the broad demographic shift of the suburb and the eventual displacement of many of the older residents. Whether renovator or activist, the very presence of new migrants to Fitzroy created a form of dislodgment that the VHC had not been able to achieve through slum clearance, a point noted in a 1974 *National Times* piece that remarked on how 'the trendy twees expelled the blue collars and ethnics':

*The slum stigma and the prejudice against the migrant have largely been swept away... A despised bungalow existence in the suburbs is replaced by an equally materialist worship of the terrace townhouse... Ultimately the rich and more articulate will win the day, and the poor will be banished, although Resident Action Groups, like those of Fitzroy claim to speak for the people—that is, all residents, the number of migrants, pensioners and factory workers in their midst is minimal...their campaign issues are too environmental rather than welfare oriented.*<sup>30</sup>

#### GET OUT OF FITZROY

While some celebrated the rejuvenation of south Fitzroy, others were ambivalent. Most who had lived in Fitzroy prior to the 1970s appeared to accept the suburb's make over with resignation or indifference (or an initial sense of helplessness in the case of slum clearance). Others, however, did ponder the effects of the middle class 'moving in, doing up cottages, (and) pushing up the values that squeezed out the oldies', with one resident asking: 'where else could the drunks sleep it off...Kew? Balwyn?'<sup>31</sup> Yet the rapid demographic and social change occurring in Fitzroy in the 1970s did not pass without more rigorous public challenge. Opposition to what was labelled 'Trendy Kulture' was voiced loudly by a particular activist group, the 'fitzroy anarchists', comprising of both old and new Fitzroy residents. The group produced a series of newsletters and pamphlets from mid 1974 to 1975 entitled *GET OUT OF FITZROY!*<sup>32</sup>

The campaign launched by the fitzroy anarchists focused on the social and economic baggage that accompanied the changes in the suburb. In an uncompromising and many ways prescient fashion, they

tackled head on many of the groups who felt that they were acting in the best interests of Fitzroy's poor and marginalised. *GET OUT OF FITZROY!* attacked 'the student population with their trendy bourgeois tastes and friends'. It called for 'a boycott on all the pizza places the kentaky [sic] fried chicken houses and trendy pubs and shops'.<sup>33</sup> The fitzroy anarchists were critical of the Fitzroy City Council for abandoning its working-class and migrant constituency, for pandering to 'trendy tastes' expressed in the council's period-detail restoration of the City Library. The anarchists claimed that through this restoration the council was attempting to identify with the renovated terrace owners in the surrounding area, rather than its working-class 'heartland', subsequently launching a catchcry 'MULTI-LINGUAL PAPERS NOT CHANDELIERS!'<sup>34</sup> In another campaign, this time in response to the council's predilection for the construction of traffic barriers and roundabouts (a definite middle-class fetish), the anarchists offered the ultimate solution to Fitzroy's traffic problems: 'if necessary, create a bubble over Fitzroy—let them go round'.<sup>35</sup>

The group also waged a graffiti campaign that saw the slogan 'PISS OFF TRENDIES, PISS OFF' daubed on factory walls and inside some properties under renovation.<sup>36</sup> Some of its more serious criticism, however, was reserved not for 'trendy' renovators but for those perceived by the fitzroy anarchists as nothing more than 'trendy' political activists:

*The trendy [Marxists] are the very people who are making the area one of the 'best' middle-class areas of Melbourne...as well as making the needy suffer and with an apparent complete lack of conscience... [They] are to blame for the suffering, in spite of the fact that FITZROY IS NEEDED for the poor, the migrants, the single mothers, the alcoholics, the pensioners and the lower working-class whites.*<sup>37</sup>

In a poster that was pasted throughout the suburb, 'GET OUT!...OF FITZROY', the fitzroy anarchists lampooned the baggage of the 'trendies' and provided an eclectic list of all that it wanted banished from the suburb: 'charity organisations, antique joints, The Flying Trapeze (café) and The Melbourne Crime' (a variant on the name of a local newspaper that carried extensive real estate advertising). Perhaps the most effective expression of the fitzroy anarchists' cause came in the form of a poem by long-time south Fitzroy resident and poet ΠΟ. A founding member of the group, ΠΟ wrote his 'get out of fitzroy' to remind the middle class of

what they had previously feared or despised and how they had transformed the suburb:

1)  
*GET OUT OF FITZROY*  
 ...you've side stepped the blood pools  
 the pus holes &  
 raised the rents  
 classed the restaurants  
 closed down the hamburgers  
 gouged out the stomachs of houses  
 & photoed the bedrooms of drunks  
 you've made this place hell.  
 we'll burn down the streets signs  
 we know our way around

*GET OUT OF FITZROY*<sup>38</sup>

Although the 'GET OUT OF FITZROY' campaign received wide publicity and some media support,<sup>39</sup> over the next twenty years Trendy Kulture proliferated across the suburb. In many other parts of inner-city Melbourne also, an increasing number of properties were transformed from 'slums' into places where the middle class could imagine the 'respectable self'; where they could ensconce themselves in such fashionably renovated accommodation as a 'balcony terrace in Gore Street, Fitzroy' that 'brought the idea of the Victorian bourgeois family into the present'.<sup>40</sup> Throughout the inner suburbs, but perhaps in south Fitzroy most dramatically, the arrival of the new bourgeois family began to displace those who found it increasingly difficult to afford to live in a previously maligned suburb that had been their home.

### MOVING OUT

James Moodie was born in Young Street in 1936 and grew up in a strong Koori household, living in a small three-roomed terrace with 'my mother, my grandmother, my auntie, my two cousins and two sisters'. His reoccurring memory of his family home is one of warmth and security:

*We had a wood stove...and in the winter we used to sit around it and have supper of a night after tea and listen to the radio...it was a*

*beautiful house. I was looked after by my mother and her sisters, my aunties. I was loved in that house.*<sup>41</sup>

As acute as this memory of happiness is, another that Moodie carries as strongly with him is the result of this home being bulldozed, leading to the dispersal of his extended family to public housing estates across Melbourne. Witnessing the physical and emotional loss of his Young Street house left its mark on Moodie:

*I remember going up there... I'd moved to Carlton, and went up to Fitzroy and my place had been pulled down. I found a tea strainer in the rubble that they'd left. It must have belonged to my mother and grandmother. And I felt very sad when I saw this tea strainer in amongst a lot of broken bricks and that, you know... And I felt resentful about them pulling it down... We all got sort of separated after that, the whole family.*<sup>42</sup>

In more recent times the loss of home and community in the wake of processes such as the VHC's slum clearance and urban renewal program has been understood as having a negative impact on those subject to displacement.<sup>43</sup> In North America at least it was recognised as early as the late 1950s that the bulldozing of homes and communities can result in real grief, and that former residents could feel that 'it was like a piece being taken from me'.<sup>44</sup> The people forced out of Fitzroy in the 1960s remember their loss of community and home with similar emotion, although it was largely ignored as *mere* nostalgia and sentimentality at the time. The expression of such emotion is too often dismissed by an ideology and language supporting the inevitability and *necessity* of progress, whereby attachment to place and community is considered 'merely quaint and eccentric...obstructive and inadequate to modern reality'.<sup>45</sup> The VHC made no attempt to assess the effect that the destruction of homes and sites of culture, such as hotels, networks and streets, would have on the people who lived in the communities destroyed in order to renew and modernise the inner city. A critic of the VHC who wrote that urban renewal and the relocation of displaced communities was an 'extremely relevant social issue' believes that over many years the VHC has 'been responsible for the wholesale disruption of communities without apparent regard for the implications of its actions'.<sup>46</sup>

Those who lived in postwar Fitzroy had created viable lives and communities for themselves, and when this was taken from them the loss felt was real and lasting. Decades after his home and family business had been destroyed, John Kyrious, who had arrived in Australia from Greece in the early 1950s, continued to experience what he called an 'emotional vibration' when he passed the Atherton Gardens estate after it opened in 1970.<sup>47</sup> As he walked through a landscape that had once contained the physical repositories of his identity and memory he found his emotions brought together in the remembrance of 'stone, earth [and] wood'.<sup>48</sup>

*The landscapes of my childhood, the laneways, the streets, the fire hydrants, the drains, the verandas with the lead around the base that we used to pull out and sell to the iron-mongers...the building of the old Australian woman with the big fat leg, that lived across the street. I can't point to her house. I can't point to the house that I first saw television in. We used to hang out on the doorstep looking into someone's lounge that just got a TV set, you know. I can't go to the Indian woman's house and look at the tree that I climbed. It's all gone. There isn't a scrap that I can point to that I can say 'that's mine'.<sup>49</sup>*

Fitzroy residents did protest against their forced evacuation from their homes and streets but without success. Some simply did not want to leave, while others demanded that they be compensated for both their emotional and monetary loss if eviction was to occur. When the demolition of the Atherton Gardens site commenced in the mid 1960s along with smaller pockets north of Brunswick Street (having been sold off to private developers by the VHC in the early 1960s), the public protests were led by members of migrant communities who had purchased homes in Fitzroy and refurbished them (with no attention to 'period features' that would become the fashion of the middle class). In 1965, for instance, Mr Antonio Leuzzi, of King William Street refused to leave his home as other dwellings were being demolished around him. During the dispute contrary views of what constituted the 'Australian way of life' were expressed by Leuzzi and the then State Housing Minister, Mr Lindsay Thompson. Leuzzi angrily stated, 'they tell you to come to Australia, and then they pull our houses down'. Thompson replied by informing Leuzzi 'I'll make sure you get a fair go'.<sup>50</sup> There was no fair

outcome, however, as Thompson subsequently claimed that the reason for the dispute was as a result of Leuzzi's apparent confusion, as he 'speaks poor English'.<sup>51</sup>

Another migrant Drago Gorlicki, who was 'sticking it out' in the last house standing on the Atherton Gardens site in late 1967, refused to leave his home. He had paid \$9800 for the premises two and a half years before the VHC offered him \$8370 for the home.<sup>52</sup> And in a desperate effort to resist the VHC's demolition efforts, one woman threw bricks at the workmen bulldozing her Brunswick Street espresso bar before being evicted eventually by the Sheriff's Department.<sup>53</sup> In another case, the daughter of a woman who had lived in a Webb Street terrace for over forty years and raised six children in the house remembered that when the eviction notices began to be hand-delivered by VHC officials her mother 'wouldn't answer the door':

*Because she knew it was them. She was desperate to stay in that house. Her whole life was there. Her world. They'd sent her letters, and she'd say she never got the letters. She used to stall for time, you know, because she didn't want to move away from her home.<sup>54</sup>*

Dawn Corcoran, a Fitzroy mother of five, remembers the experience of being forced from her home with a sense of despair and helplessness that was common to many in a marginalised and in many respects powerless community:

*I didn't want to go. And then they just come along and said to me well they'd put me out on the street, with all my things, with my little kiddies. My youngest was just a baby so if I hadn't of went when I went, the next week my things would have been moved onto the street. Everything I had would have been there on the footpath. I was going to be evicted out...would have been put out... That's the only reason I went.<sup>55</sup>*

Fitzroy was not only a suburb of transients or a temporary 'stepping-stone' for migrants who worked toward a better life in the suburbs. Although some clearly did pass through the suburb before moving on, many families had lived in the district for decades, establishing social and economic networks with other family households and friends. It was 'their corner of the world'.<sup>56</sup> Dawn Corcoran had five family households 'all

living within a minute of each other...my mother; my sister, her boyfriend and three kids; my husband's sister and her four kids; his cousin and husband, and two kids; [and] my grandmother, my auntie, my uncle and my cousin'.<sup>57</sup> These multiple households enabled families to fulfil supportive social and economic roles outside formal relationships with the welfare state: 'there were communities there...mothers, brothers, sisters... They didn't need social support systems because they had their in-built support systems'.<sup>58</sup> When a young Fitzroy resident, Sandra Nicholson became pregnant at fifteen, and moved into a rented house near her mother, living 'within a minute' of family was important for her survival:

*My mother used to mind the kids and take them to school. And then my father would help. He'd come and chop the wood and light the fire. And my brothers would, they'd help me out with money and everything.*<sup>59</sup>

Similar to the extensive family networks established by others, Phillip Morris remembers growing up in Mahoney Street with a sense of security, being 'very close to nearly all of my family...an auntie and an uncle lived just around the corner, my dad and his wife, and her mother; and another auntie who lived in Moor Street'. As the family homes were gradually demolished or acquired by the VHC it 'sort of splintered families up'. Morris remembers this with anger:

*Families were all sort of inclined to live in the one area, [but following demolition] it made it very hard for visiting and things like that, because very few people had cars or anything like that, and we were all over the place like lost sheep. It was wrong. They did wrong to us. They were bastards to us. We'd paid top rent there for years. Never got so much as a nail to fix a thing...then the Commission just come along and said 'out'. They could have done a lot better by us. 'Out' and that was it. We were told to go. They didn't care about us. Nobody did.*<sup>60</sup>

Although living conditions in Fitzroy were substandard, particularly the physical state of housing, it is simplistic and erroneous to assume that people were desperate to leave, as media portrayals dramatically claimed.<sup>61</sup> Don Richards remembers that his mother fought her landlord in the Victorian Fair Rents Court to avoid eviction from 'a dingy little two-

bedroom and a kitchen which today would probably be demolished'. He believes that 'there were no great aspirations to get out of the place because the money was low...so there was no suggestion of putting anything away and say buying a block of land and eventually moving somewhere else'. His mother eventually had to move, to a 'granny flat' in Don's suburban backyard, but he believes that had she been able to she would have stayed in Fitzroy:

*I think if the status quo had been maintained, with all her friends staying there and everything, I don't think there would have been too much suggestion to move. Her place was run down to buggery. Jesus it was run down. But she loved it there, in Fitzroy with her mates...it's hard to define happiness, but she seemed to be very happy in Fitzroy.*<sup>62</sup>



The Fitzroy of the 1990s was imagined as a vastly different location to the suburb that had existed in the immediate postwar decades. While it has been argued that the suburb's high-rise public housing estate contributes community diversity, segregation in Fitzroy is all too apparent. In 1994 when the newly formed City of Yarra attempted to close the Fitzroy Swimming Pool supporters of a group opposing the closure singled out the 'ethnic children living in the near-by Housing Ministry flats' who might turn their idle summer time to crime. In the same year the near terminal Fitzroy City Council, promoting 'diversity' as a potential life-saving cure for its own impending death, claimed that the suburb required 'urgent surgery', being the demolition of the Atherton Gardens public housing estate.<sup>63</sup> One historian has written that whereas in the 1960s 'shopkeepers were terrorised by cheeky youths and exasperated by impoverished mothers', (rhetorical) post-poverty-stricken Brunswick Street has been 'revived as the centre of a cosmopolitan, urbane, postmodern culture...bohemian culture' consisting of 'Fitzroy men' who 'now demand indulgent displays of their taste and fashion sense'.<sup>64</sup> One of the sites previously considered among the suburb's most notorious, the former Champion Hotel on the corner of Brunswick and Gertrude Streets now plies 'Persian' rugs.

By the mid-1990s, despite the 'horror' of a public housing estate towering above it, Fitzroy was confidently promoted as a suburb 'where

culture meets cuisine'.<sup>65</sup> At one time 'home to the down-trodden and the rush of postwar migrants [who] not uncommonly had up to five families living in one decrepit house', the Fitzroy of the 1990s was 'crammed with an incredible assortment of interesting eating places, delis (real delis with loads of green olives), entertainment spots and galleries'.<sup>66</sup> The 'disadvantaged' appear here only as an exotic marketing device, a bit of rough trade. Along with the 'writers, painters, actors, producers, academics, the well-off, the foodaholics, gays and greenies' of Fitzroy, the 'impoverished' are mentioned simply in order to legitimate the contemporary Fitzroy cliché that it is 'an incredibly diverse local community'.<sup>67</sup>

In 2002 irony, whether expressed consciously or not, is a new feature of Fitzroy's identity. In a recent article, 'Sold on the City', several 'up and coming warehouse artists' stated that the arts community had deserted Fitzroy in favour of the more 'gritty' city centre. In a contrast to the 1980s and 1990s, Fitzroy is avoided because 'there's too much political bullshit, hanging out in cafés and bars and waving copies of *Green Left Weekly*'.<sup>68</sup> Meanwhile one of Melbourne and Fitzroy's premier arts events, the 'Fringe Festival', celebrated its twentieth birthday in 2002. This festival, which was one of the attractions of Fitzroy for those on the hunt for 'culture', can no longer afford to rent a space in a suburb where floor space is now sold at a premium. The Fringe Festival 'is now being chased onward...just ahead of the gentrification tide'.<sup>69</sup>

This article has discussed how sites of 'evil' can be easily reinvented to suit the needs of either the marketplace or those with a claim on cultural capital. Those who were pushed out of Fitzroy by these processes 'look back in anger'. But even they might be amused by the note struck in one of the more recent imaginings of Fitzroy. In June 2001 the *Age* produced an 'investigative piece' on public housing in Melbourne. In this 'booster' report on an 'uplifting' style of domestic living that could boast 'the best TV reception in Melbourne', the *Age* had the following to say about a particular location in Fitzroy that has suffered more bad press than any other place in Melbourne for much of the previous century:

*The good news is that the gentrification of inner Melbourne casts the high-rise in a new light. Private high-rise apartment towers have risen at Southbank and elsewhere to challenge the notion that only the poor live above the ground. Property developers covet the views of, say, the Atherton Gardens estate in Brunswick Street, Fitzroy.*<sup>70</sup>

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Fitzroy, as referred to throughout this work, is the area bounded by Victoria Parade, Smith Street, Alexandra Parade and Nicholson Street, being more specifically South Fitzroy.

<sup>2</sup> See J Freeman, *Lights and Shadows of Melbourne Life*, Sampson Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, London, 1888; Graeme Davison, David Dunstan and Chris McConville (eds), *The Outcasts of Melbourne: Essays in Social History*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1985; Alan Mayne, *The Imagined Slum: Newspaper Representations in Three Cities 1870–1914*, Leicester University Press, Leicester, 1993; Andrew Mearns, *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London*, ed. A Wohl, Leicester University Press, Leicester, 1970 (first published in 1883); A Fried and R Elman (eds), *Charles Booth's London: A Portrait of the Poor at the Turn of the Century, drawn from his 'Life and Labour of the People in London'*, Hutchinson, London, 1969; P Quennell (ed.), *Mayhew's London: Being Selections from 'London Labour and the London Poor'*, William Kimber, London, 1951; JA Riis, *How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York*, Dover Publications, New York, 1871 (first published in 1890); James Winter, *London's Teeming Streets 1830–1914*, Routledge, London, 1993.

<sup>3</sup> For a narrative overview of the initial white 'settlement' of Fitzroy, see Miles Lewis, 'The First Suburb', in Cutten History Committee of the Fitzroy History Society (ed.), *Fitzroy: Melbourne's First Suburb*, Hyland House, Melbourne, 1989, 6–31.

<sup>4</sup> For a general history of the 'decline' of Fitzroy as the preferred suburb of city businessmen for their 'gentlemen's townhouses' in the mid- to late nineteenth century, see *Fitzroy: Melbourne's First Suburb*, *passim*.

<sup>5</sup> Chris McConville, 'On the Street', in *Fitzroy: Melbourne's First Suburb*, 190. See also his 'From "Criminal" Class to "Underworld"', in *The Outcasts of Melbourne*, 69–90.

<sup>6</sup> *Herald*, 8 June 1973. Although described as bohemian enough by a variety of the 'middle classes escaping the boredom of the suburbs', it was still possible to find 'a homeless beaten-up drunk slumped in the front seat of a car', lending a suitable history of notoriety to those seeking a little more excitement than the streets of suburbia.

<sup>7</sup> On the 'consumption' and marketing of place, see Jennifer Barrett and Caroline Butler-Brown (eds), *Debating the City: An Anthology*, Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales in association with the University of Western Sydney, Sydney, 2001; John Urry, *Consuming*



*Places*, Routledge, London, 1995; John R Logan and Harvey L Molotch, *Urban Fortunes: The Political Economy of Place*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1987; John R Gold and Stephen V Ward, *Place Promotion: The Use of Publicity and Marketing to Sell Towns and Regions*, John Wiley & Sons, Chichester, 1994; Leonie Sandercock, *Cities for Sale: Property, Politics and Urban Planning in Australia*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1975.

<sup>8</sup> *National Times*, 27 October 1973.

<sup>9</sup> This phrase was used to describe a similar phenomenon in the Tenderloin district of San Francisco. See Rob Waters and Wade Hudson, 'The Tenderloin: What Makes a Neighborhood', in James Brook, Chris Carlsson & Nancy J Peters (eds), *Reclaiming San Francisco: History, Politics, Culture*, City Lights Books, San Francisco, 1998, 301–16.

<sup>10</sup> Fran Tonkiss discusses such 'market-based processes' that accompanied inner-city gentrification in the 1970s 'from London to Melbourne and San Francisco to Perth'. See her 'Inner City Living', in *Debating the City*, 3–11. For a similar analysis on the history and processes of gentrification as a phenomenon of the 1970s and 1980s, see Jane M Jacobs, 'Hybrid Highrises', in *Debating the City*, 13–27; Jane M Jacobs, 'Eastern Trading: Diasporas, Dwelling and Place', in her *Edge of Empire: Postcolonialism and the City*, Routledge, London, 1996, 70–102; Sharon Zukin, 'Gentrification, Cuisine, and the Critical Infrastructure: Power and Centrality Downtown', in her *Landscapes of Power: From Detroit to Disney World*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1991, 179–216; Patrick Wright, 'The Ghosting of the Inner City', in his *On Living in an Old Country: The National Past in Contemporary Britain*, Verso, London, 1985, 215–49; Raphael Samuel, 'Retrochic', in his *Theatres of Memory: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture*, Verso, London, 1994, 51–135; Rebecca Solnit (text) & Susan Schwatzenberg (photographs), *Hollow City: The Siege of San Francisco and the Crisis of American Urbanism*, Verso, London, 2000; Janet McCalman, 'Fitzroy 1989', in *Fitzroy: Melbourne's First Suburb*, 316–19; Paul Harrison, *Inside the Inner City: Life Under the Cutting Edge*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1983.

<sup>11</sup> *Herald*, 8 June 1973.

<sup>12</sup> *National Times*, 27 October 1973.

<sup>13</sup> *National Times*, 27 October 1973.

<sup>14</sup> *Age*, 3 February 1973.

<sup>15</sup> *Age*, 3 February 1973.

<sup>16</sup> *Age*, 15 November 1974.

<sup>17</sup> *Herald*, 8 June 1973.

<sup>18</sup> *Herald*, 8 June 1973.

<sup>19</sup> Wright provides a similar instance of a 'chic radical' moving into a largely working-class and migrant inner-city suburb of London who explained that that 'she wanted her child to go to school with children of all races'. See Wright, 'The Ghosting of the Inner City', 238–9. Wright goes on to say that while this sort of voyeurism of the 'white imagination...may not be deliberately practiced, it doesn't exist any less for the fact that it is passive' (239).

<sup>20</sup> Tonkiss, 'Inner City Living', 9.

<sup>21</sup> *Age*, 17 March 1969.

<sup>22</sup> *Age*, 31 March 1971. Toorak, an inner-eastern Melbourne suburb, was at the time and remains one of the wealthiest and most exclusive areas in Melbourne.

<sup>23</sup> *Age*, 6 December 1972. The article went on to quote a local real estate agent who stated that 'about 95 per cent of the sales have been to Australians, not Europeans...isn't that good enough reason why it is not going to stop'.

<sup>24</sup> Jacobs has written of comparable developments in Britain in which the 'saving' of an inner-London area (Spitalfields) 'relied upon the participation of financially and aesthetically equipped purchasers' allied to the conservation industry. See Jacobs, 'Eastern Trading', 80. Likewise Samuel has discussed the relationship between the developer and the gentrifier in inner London, whereby the 'twilight zones' (inner-London areas that had been subject to slum clearance) of the 1960s, were suddenly re-imaged (and eventually re-zoned) as 'conservation areas' by the 1970s, with 'character', 'period features' and 'restoration' dominating the language of the residential property market. See Samuel, 'Retrochic', 119–135.

<sup>25</sup> *Herald*, 22 August 1975. The article detailed the extent to which the renovated property had been 'ripped apart' before being 'extended and converted...with the latest equipment'.

<sup>26</sup> *Age*, 15 May 1976.

<sup>27</sup> For a summary of the political culture of the period and its influence in Fitzroy, see John Chesterman, 'Community Politics', in his *Poverty Law and Social Change: The Story of the Fitzroy Legal Service*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1996, 44–70.

- <sup>28</sup> For a discussion of these campaigns, see Chesterman, *Poverty Law and Social Change*, *passim*. For an analysis of the anti-VHC and slum clearance protests at Brookes Crescent in North Fitzroy in the early 1970s, see Kay Hargreaves (ed.), *This House Not For Sale: Conflicts Between the Housing Commission and Residents of Slum Reclamation Areas*, Centre for Urban Research and Action, Melbourne, 1976. Although this protest did involve some members of the migrant community, it was clearly led and directed by more recently arrived 'professionals'. The F19 anti-freeway protests from 1970 to 1977 involved a wide cross-section of the Fitzroy community, including business and residential interests. The most 'militant' action was directed by anarchists, however, and included the 1977 blockades at the junction of Alexandra Parade and Wellington Street that included the construction of a brick wall. For a history of the F19 freeway protest, see Australian Independence Movement, *Barricade: The Resident Fight against the F19 Freeway*, Australian Independence Movement, Melbourne, 1978. For an image (and brief discussion) of this protest, see Chris McConville, 'On the Street', in *Fitzroy: Melbourne's First Suburb*, 183–97.
- <sup>29</sup> For a discussion of this history and the formation of the Ecumenical Migration Centre, see Michele Langfield, *Espresso Bar to EMC: A Thirty-Year History of the Ecumenical Migration Centre*, Monash Publications in History, no. 22, Monash University, Clayton, 1996.
- <sup>30</sup> *National Times*, 14 January 1974.
- <sup>31</sup> *Age*, 15 November 1974. Both Kew and Balwyn are 'leafy' middle-class suburbs of Melbourne.
- <sup>32</sup> Six *GET OUT OF FITZROY!* newsletters were produced, in addition to posters, letter-drop notices and graffiti slogan campaigns. All material is undated, although media coverage dates it between late 1974 and the first half of 1975. I have copies of the newsletters and other material. The originals are in the extensive personal archive of Melbourne poet, ΠΟ, and I thank him for his generosity in allowing me access to this material. The many spelling errors in the newsletters were obviously deliberate, hence the explanatory note 'FUCK THE SPELLING'.
- <sup>33</sup> *GET OUT OF FITZROY!*, no. 2, fitzroy anarchists, 1974.
- <sup>34</sup> *GET OUT OF FITZROY!*, no. 2, fitzroy anarchists, 1974.
- <sup>35</sup> *GET OUT OF FITZROY!*, no. 2, fitzroy anarchists, 1974.
- <sup>36</sup> In the mid-1990s I presented a paper in the History Department at the

University of Melbourne dealing in part with this protest. The paper's title was 'PISS OFF TRENDIES'. On the night before the paper, I was contacted by a senior academic and asked to speak with 'sensitivity' because a staff member had discovered the lounge walls of his Fitzroy cottage daubed with the 'PISS OFF' slogan after an extensive renovation.

- <sup>37</sup> *GET OUT OF FITZROY!*, no. 6, fitzroy anarchists, 1975.
- <sup>38</sup> ΠΟ, 'get out of fitzroy', in *Fitzroy Brothel*, Strawberry, Melbourne, 1974, n.p. Campaigns of a similar nature have been conducted in other cities, both in Australia and internationally. For language and motivation similar to the 'GET OUT OF FITZROY!' protests, see the discussion of San Francisco's 'Mission Yuppie Eradication Project' that called on people to 'VANDALISE YUPPIE CARS', in Solnit and Schwatzenberg, *Hollow City*, 119–35.
- <sup>39</sup> See, for example, criticism levelled at 'the invading middle-class people who want to turn a down-at-heel refuge into a fashionable suburb' in the *Age*, 15 November 1974.
- <sup>40</sup> Graeme Davison, 'The Meanings of "Heritage"', in Graeme Davison & Chris McConville (eds), *A Heritage Handbook*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1991, 8.
- <sup>41</sup> Interview with James Moodie, 24 November 1992.
- <sup>42</sup> Interview with James Moodie, 24 November 1992.
- <sup>43</sup> See, for example, Peter Read, *Returning to Nothing: The Meaning of Lost Places*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996; Peter Read, 'Our Lost Drowned Town in the Valley: Perceptions of the Inundation of Adaminaby, 1956–1957', *Public History Review*, vol. 1, 1992, 160–74; Peter Read, 'Lost Places and the Language of Destruction', *Australian Folklore*, no. 10, 1995, 160–67; Meredith Fletcher, 'Dismantling a Garden City', in her *Digging People Up For Coal: A History of Yallourn*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2002, 162–94; Patrick Wright, 'Moving House in a Welfare State', in his *On Living in an Old Country*, 193–213; Christian Norberg-Schulz, 'Place', in Malcolm Miles, Tim Hall & Iain Borden (eds), *The City Cultures Reader*, Routledge, London, 2000, 228–31 (republished from *AA Quarterly*, 1976).
- <sup>44</sup> Quoted in Marc Fried, 'Grieving for a Lost Home: Psychological Costs of Relocation' in James Q. Wilson (ed.), *Urban Renewal: The Record and the Controversy*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1966, 365. See also Marc Fried, 'Transitional Functions of Working-class

Communities: Implications for Forced Relocation', in Mildred B Kantor (ed.), *Mobility and Mental Health: Proceedings of the Fifth Annual Conference on Community Health Research, Social Science Institute, Washington, 1963*, Charles C Thomas, Springfield, Ill., 1965, 123–65. The social geographer and historian, Herbert J Gans began to address the issue of slum clearance, the destruction of place and relocation in North American cities in the 1950s. For a collection of his essays dealing with this period see his *People and Plans: Essays on Urban Problems and Solutions*, Basic Books, New York, 1968, in particular the essays in Part 4, 'Planning Against Urban Poverty And Segregation', 203–301.

<sup>45</sup> See Wright, 'Moving House in a Welfare State', in his *On Living in an Old Country*, 193–213. See in particular Wright's discussion of the determined, though eccentric, May Alice Savidge who, when faced with the potential demolition of her home, relocated the entire cottage (193–6). Gans referred to the forces of slum clearance as 'the destruction of tradition by mass-produced modernity'. See Gans, 'Urban Vitality and the Fallacy of Physical Determinism', in his *People and Plans*, 25–33.

<sup>46</sup> Colin Gibson, 'Relocation and Urban Renewal: A Study of the Victorian Housing Commission's Activities', unpublished essay, 1970, 1. A copy is available in the Architecture and Planning Library, University of Melbourne.

<sup>47</sup> The Victorian Housing Commission's Atherton Gardens Housing Estate comprised of four twenty-storey blocks constructed on thirteen acres of land bounded by Brunswick, King William, Napier and Gertrude Streets. The site had previously been home to around six hundred residents in addition to several of the suburb's hotels, gambling clubs and espresso bars. Demolition of the site commenced in 1960, with the last residents evicted in 1967.

<sup>48</sup> Norberg-Schulz, 'Place', 229. It is important to note here that Kyrious and others interviewed would not regard 'feelings' as passive and internalised only, but also political, and demand to be accepted as the 'owners' of Fitzroy, or to quote Kyrious more succinctly, 'it fucking belonged to us, not the government'. Interview with John Kyrious, 23 August 1992.

<sup>49</sup> Interview with John Kyrious, 23 August 1992.

<sup>50</sup> *Herald*, 12 October 1965.

<sup>51</sup> *Sun*, 13 October 1965.

<sup>52</sup> *Sun*, 12 November 1967. Mike Jones research on the owners of houses in reclamation areas concludes that 57 per cent of Fitzroy owners were 'foreign born'. See M.A. Jones, 'The Slum Clearance and Urban Renewal Activities of the New South Wales and Victorian Housing Commissions', unpublished essay, 1969, 6. A copy is in the Department of Housing and Construction Library, Melbourne.

<sup>53</sup> *Age*, 11 November 1967.

<sup>54</sup> Interview with Sandra Nicholson, 24 August 1992.

<sup>55</sup> Interview with Dawn Corcoran, 16 August 1992.

<sup>56</sup> I have borrowed this phrase from Fletcher's 'Dismantling a Garden City' (p. 178), which deals with the 'company town' of Yallourn in the La Trobe Valley and its destruction by the State Electricity Commission in the 1970s. This was a corporation that, like the VHC, 'linked its own importance to the social order of the State', (165).

<sup>57</sup> Interview with Dawn Corcoran, 16 August 1992.

<sup>58</sup> Interview with Judy Kunstek, 18 March 1993.

<sup>59</sup> Interview with Sandra Nicholson, 24 August 1992.

<sup>60</sup> Interview with Phillip Morris, 9 August 1992.

<sup>61</sup> For instance, see a 1965 *Four Corners* investigation into poverty segment contained in *The Unfair Go*, Film Australia, 1989.

<sup>62</sup> Interview with Don Richards, 5 May 1994.

<sup>63</sup> For a discussion of the 'Save Fitzroy Pool' campaign see Tony Birch, "'Profoundly Profonda": The Moral Salvation of the Public Swimming Pool', *Republica*, no. 6, 1999, 207–14.

<sup>64</sup> See John Spierings, 'Buying and Selling', in *Fitzroy: Melbourne's First Suburb*, 209–10.

<sup>65</sup> *Sunday Age*, 2 July 1995.

<sup>66</sup> *Sunday Age*, 2 July 1995.

<sup>67</sup> *Sunday Age*, 2 July 1995.

<sup>68</sup> *Sunday Age*, 6 October 2002.

<sup>69</sup> *Age*, 26 September 2002.

<sup>70</sup> *Age*, 21 June 2001.



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