

beyond the **beach** | and **into** the blue

Gold Coast High-rises and the Oceanic Gaze

GRAHAME GRIFFIN

Posted like silent sentinels all around the town, stand thousands upon thousands of mortal men fixed in ocean reveries.

Herman Melville, *Moby Dick*

‘Would you ever tire of this view?’ I ask Aunty Enid who, with Uncle Jack, has holidayed on the Gold Coast almost every year since 1947 when they spent their honeymoon at the old Surfers Paradise hotel.

‘Never. It’s just so soothing.’

We’re in her tenth-floor holiday apartment at Coolangatta looking eastward through the closed picture window at an expanse of blue intersected by the horizon and the railing of the ‘wrap-around’ balcony. Where I’m standing I can just see the tops of the Norfolk pines. Ten floors higher and these would disappear so that from inside an apartment or even sitting on the balcony at that level you would see only ocean and sky. But from inside these higher apartments you actually see less sea and more sky: the horizon is further yet it appears lower, at least until you step out onto the balcony and it (the horizon) moves up. Or could it be the slight swaying of the building that creates this impression? You can see the beach from the balcony but only if you make the effort of peering down, an effort for even the mildly vertiginous. I do this on my aunt’s balcony. The scene below is as expected although fewer people seem to be lying on the sand or frolicking in the water these days. And the scale of beach walkers, tethered bicycles and be-tidy bins is all out of whack. Children are as big as parents and tourist buses as small as ice-cream vans.

— ON LOOMING

Feeling more unsettled than soothed by all this I step back. And then I observe that the sea horizon to the north is more than a line intersecting the blue. It's actually holding up something—a cluster of vertical shapes, the high-rises of Surfers Paradise. These objects, too, seem not to scale: they are too big for the distance at which I know they are. They seem to be, well ... looming. I had experienced looming once while looking from the shore at a ship off Caloundra but didn't understand it until I came across a reference to it in John R. Stilgoe's *Alongshore*, a treasure chest of information on such matters.¹ Given an atmosphere that produces abnormal refraction, distant objects, particularly at sea, appear much larger or can even be seen when they are technically beyond the horizon. It's rare but it can happen. Now the looming of Surfers Paradise as experienced from Coolangatta may be more imagined than real. But the view of Surfers, either from the sea or from a southern promontory such as Burleigh Heads or Point Danger near Coolangatta, is endlessly reproduced and promoted photographically and, regardless of whether 'natural' looming occurs, the same effect is achieved mechanically by way of a telephoto lens.

So, Gold Coast high-rises are big and tall and sometimes they appear or are made to appear bigger and taller than they really are. They also loom large in other ways. They are part of the fabric and fantasy of the Gold Coast. They are its supreme icons. Only nine per cent of the permanent population lives in high-rises and the canal estates have considerable local cachet and appeal. Yet the city turns to its high-rises not only to promote itself to the rest of the world, but also to hold its own self-image: the Gold Coast City Council sponsors a 'heritage' architectural guide to tall buildings on the Gold Coast; the *Gold Coast Bulletin* constantly features articles on new high-rise plans and developments, high-rise architects, builders and developers, and high-rise residents. No-one seems to complain about views being obscured, at least publicly, and the shadows-on-the-beach argument, once a talking point, has been abandoned—in resignation, perhaps.

Who occupies these Gold Coast high-rises? A rule of thumb for apartments in many buildings is one-third owner occupied, one-third permanent rental, one-third holiday rental. Some high-rises are exclusively residential, others provide mainly resort-style holiday accommodation. There are million-dollar residential penthouses or you can pick up a one-bedroom unit with sea view for under \$150,000. There's more diversity than might be expected. These are places where 'ordinary' Australians and their families can live, retire or enjoy a holiday by the sea with a view. Local students, particularly international students, can afford to share older apartments such as those in the Golden Gate, once owned by federal politicians but now rented out to Norwegian students. The more up-market blocks have their own private entertainment and leisure areas and could therefore be accused of discouraging a community-

centred public culture. On the other hand, concentration of population afforded by high-rise living in such places as Surfers, Broadbeach and Main Beach has helped create a fairly vibrant street-centred environment in those locations, at least in comparison to the inward-looking mentality encouraged by the Coast's canal estates.

There are, of course, dwellings that still exist in the shadows of the high-rises: the decaying fibro and tin holiday 'shacks' and 'six-pack' walk-ups, worth heaps on paper to their owners but mostly rented to the unemployed, single parents, the chronically ill and the aged poor of whom the Gold Coast has more than 'average' numbers. The old fibro houses and worn-out 'units' serve as a reminder that all is not golden on the Gold Coast. They provide an ironic contrast to the gleaming towers—ironic in the sense that what might be construed as authentic remnants of a beach holiday heritage are actually housing the contemporary underclass of Gold Coast residents. Perhaps that is why the 'looming effect' of natural illusion is duplicated by an equally illusory promotional photography—the foreshortened perspective of the telephoto lens both magnifies and compresses the high-rises, erasing the shadows and the spaces in between and all the infelicities that they contain.

What, then, is the appeal of the Gold Coast high-rise? What is the value of its ocean view? What other kinds of values, meanings and identifications can be attributed? What do they tell us about the way we see ourselves and our environment, both built and natural? How do they reflect and help determine visual cultures and the cultural constructions and social practices of space and place?

— A SHORT—AND PERSONAL—HISTORY OF THE AUSTRALIAN SEA VIEW

In Australia today, a sea view is a valued and hence valuable commodity. But as Alain Corbin has convincingly explained, the sea until the eighteenth century was viewed with fear and loathing.² It was a foul place full of disease and death, and to be avoided at all costs unless you were cut out to be a sailor. Then the sea became aestheticised and romanticised. It attracted artists and poets and soulful travellers who brooded on its deeper meaning from soaring cliffs. At roughly the same time it was medicalised but in the nicest way: the sea was healthy and invigorating and therefore should be entered at regular intervals. Then Australia was colonised and like all good colonials we followed the fashions of the mother country and eventually took to the water but not before many a settler was drowned when ships hit rocks or misjudged river bars. Finally, in the early years of the twentieth century, white Australians started beaching and swimming and putting up houses near the sea and developing something called beach culture.

White Australians may have holidayed, picnicked and promenaded by the sea and increasingly baked on beaches and surfed the waves from the first half of the twentieth century, but there is cause to question whether during this period they placed a premium on residential

sea views.³ In Sydney, for example, it was the harbour view that provided social status—arguably it still is. When urban development spread eastwards towards Bondi and Bronte it was in the form of flats and cottages for the working and lower middle classes: meanwhile ‘quality’ mansions or mansion flats with harbour views were built at Vaucluse and Woollahra.⁴ At Manly, which fronts both harbour and ocean, and where I spent my childhood and youth, nearly all of the original big houses overlooked the harbour. The houses closest to the sea were rather small and grim semidetacheds. Up on the Eastern Hill of Manly the humble seminarians at the great pile of St Patrick’s College were vouchsafed a view of the sea, while a glorious harbour vista was bestowed on the cardinal in his palace on the other side of Darley Road.

Back in the fifties every Boxing Day my parents would drag my brother and me across the harbour to the tiny seaside suburb of Clovelly where Auntie Marge—another aunt—lived in another grim little semidetached house overlooking the ocean (and now probably worth three-quarters of a million dollars). And at the end of every Boxing Day during the ferry ride home my parents would declare they could never live in a house such as Auntie Marge’s *because the view was so utterly depressing*. Did my parents have a kind of atavistic link to generations past and their sea phobias? Was there a hint of the terror that, according to Edmund Burke, accompanies our exposure to the sublime? Were they reflecting a fashionably-held Sydney attitude of the time? Admittedly, Auntie Marge’s view did take in part of the Waverley Cemetery. Perhaps, a sea view like many Sydney sea views—not ‘pure’ but encroached upon by the detritus and discharges of urban life and death.

Until the opening up of the northern beach suburbs much of the city’s headland space was reserved for public and institutional use—parks, golf courses, cemeteries, sewage outlets, lighthouses, religious and military establishments, rifle ranges, contagious diseases hospitals, and so on. This would have restricted the growth of private dwellings and perhaps reduced interest in sea view properties. But I would suggest that, more significantly, the sea view properties that were built were relatively close to (and thereby associated with) those reminders of human waste and mortality and the stresses of urban modernity combined perhaps with memories of invasion threats (first the Russians then the Japanese) and the ships that never made it through the Heads. Parks and golf courses may have been relatively anodyne but the ever present and conspicuous lavatory blocks foretold of the sewage being pumped into the polluted sea from the other side of the cliff.

And then in the late fifties and into the sixties the sea view became a more sought after and valuable commodity.⁵ In the older seaside suburbs picture windows began to appear. At Manly the big houses (St Ronins, Mayfair, Brighton House) were pulled down and replaced by towering blocks of home units, most with a harbour prospect still, but some now directly facing the sea. Military Road Mosman grew blond-brick excrescences that afforded vast views of ocean as well as harbour. Advertising types headed north to Newport, Whale Beach and

Bilgola where architect-designed bush-and-beach houses provided glimpses of the sea through gum leaves and grevillia.

Now the advertising types and their ilk are heading back to the 'old' Sydney seaside—back to Bondi. However, a 'wide-screen view of the Pacific' (as desirable as this may be) may not reflect the current appeal of Bondi where once-dominant beach and ocean imagery now has to compete with the more fashionable inventions of gentrified lifestyle, cafe society and cosmopolitanism.

Nevertheless, returning to our historical survey, it is evident that the sea view did gain status and value in Sydney mid-twentieth century, and this coincided with the onset of high-rise home units. In 1960 the first high-rise on the Gold Coast—the nine storey Kinkabool—was built at Surfers Paradise. The idea of living high at the beach was not an immediate success: there was plenty of space close to the beach and the canal estates were beginning to take off. But the Gold Coast was a long, flat forty kilometre sand dune broken up by only a few small headlands. The only way to provide a sea view for the expanding permanent and tourist population was to build up. And this is where the realty hedonics of 'location, location, location' took over with the value of any high-rise apartment being plotted proportionally to its height from the ground or distance from the beach.⁶ Thus the economic value of a high-rise apartment was determined by spatial measurements combined, as always, with the laws of supply and demand.

— THE SYMBOLIC VALUE OF THE SEA VIEW

But why the attraction of the sea view in the first place? Two broad background explanations present themselves. First there is the well-documented and discussed movement of population from the inland and the capital cities to coastal communities, although not all the drifters—the lifestyle changers, retirees and soon-to-retire baby boomers—are content with fishing villages or totally planned communities. Many want the sea plus a sophisticated urban lifestyle with the opportunity for more plebeian pleasures—a Gold Coast kind of lifestyle. Second, proximity to the sea—for the wealthier a sea view—heralds a return to a more 'natural' environment and lifestyle, nature being represented by that last 'true' wilderness, the sea. While soil degeneration, and uncertainty and ambivalence over land ownership or 'title' rule the real and imagined landscape, the seascape can be contemplated from a safe distance as relatively benign yet vast, deep and unfathomable, but above all empty—a virtual *mare nullius*.

These general cultural explanations—the desire for both an 'escape' or sea change and for proximity to natural wilderness—are reflected specifically in the Gold Coast high-rise apartment which can be similarly double-coded. First, it affords a distancing or escape, when required, from the street, the beach, the shopping mall, the theme park and other manifestations of popular and peopled places below, and provides the option of viewing the passing

parade from a position of elevated security. Second, it yields up a view seaward towards an infinity of natural, uncomplicated and relatively uncorrupted wilderness. And here there may be vestiges of the nineteenth-century romantic gaze which John Urry suggests is still discernible and in fact undergoing a nature-celebrating resurgence within contemporary tourism.⁷ The contemplative and/or transcendent seaward gaze has its roots in the Romantic movement and Burkean notions of the sublime and stretches to Paul Virilio lyrically describing his first sight of the sea on the Breton coast.⁸ Closer to home—right at home, in fact—Australian novelist David Malouf, who lives in a Gold Coast high-rise for part of the year, talks in a video documentary about the detachment and anonymity this affords him. The video shows him observing life on the beach from his balcony and gazing out to sea with an introspective air—a seemingly perfect practical and metaphorical location for this celebrated author and poet, and for other writers including Matthew Condon and Frank Moorhouse.⁹

— VIEWS, HIGH-RISES AND GENDER

Lest the sublime and romantic oceanic gaze be construed as a purely masculine pursuit, I refer you to Anne Mellor's study of nineteenth-century romantic women writers and their use of the 'feminine' or 'domestic' sublime which, unlike the male desire to transcend and control the natural world, attempts to connect with it.¹⁰ This is taken a step further by John Pipkin who identifies a 'material sublime' among nineteenth-century women writers whereby the contemplation of nature, including the sea, underscores the material suffering and endurance of their everyday lives.¹¹ A related but different set of issues is the subject of Lisa Tickner's research into the beach and sea paintings of Vanessa Bell, sister of Virginia Woolf. Tickner is interested in the ways in which the sea and the colour blue have been associated with the feminine and maternal. She quotes Julia Kristeva's study of Giotto's use of blue which because of its 'unfocussed' nature and peripheral perception has a 'decentering effect returning the subject to an archaic moment of maternal dependency'.¹² She also links the maternal associations of blue to the religious and spiritual sphere, drawing attention to the blue robes of the virgin in early Renaissance art.

How do those who have access to the ocean blue from their Gold Coast high-rises accumulate and mix their economic and cultural capital? It would have been convenient if Tony Bennett, Michael Emmison and John Frow in their survey of class and cultural capital in Australia had added attitudes to dwelling location, prospect and design to attitudes to interior furnishing and decoration as this would have delivered a little more 'grounded' comparative research.¹³ But even then, the only way to empirically gauge attitudes to sea views from Gold Coast high-rises would be to do the necessary research—a future project, perhaps. In the meantime, the only piece of empirical research I've come across regarding the value of the view in high-rise living—a survey of American college students—showed that women are

more likely to focus on the view as a high-rise positive, while men are more inclined simply to value the idea and experience of height.¹⁴ Bennett, Emmison and Frow do provide a measure of support for this kind of gender difference within a similar context in one of their findings: more women than men adopted the aesthetic term 'beautiful' when responding positively to landscape as a possible subject for a photograph. More men preferred the word 'interesting'.¹⁵

Such empirical research encourages the hypothesis that while women favour both height and a view for aesthetic reasons, men are more inclined to value height for the symbolic mastery it affords and a view for whatever of interest it can deliver.¹⁶ Indeed, within the context of cultural studies the topic of tall buildings, height and verticality is invariably linked to the vision thing—the lofty ocular authority and dominance of the male gaze.¹⁷ The most salient issue in any discussion of the gendered high-rise view is the symbolic association of high-rise (or skyscraper) with dominant masculinism mainly by virtue of its phallic shape. Some architectural historians and theoreticians have linked the vertical form itself—including towers, columns, ziggurats, pyramids—with masculinism, the horizontal form with the feminine.¹⁸ Others have been content to place a more specific emphasis on the symbolic relationship of the soaring office tower to the male business leader and masculinist business culture. And so dominating height, the capturing of expansive views of the city and phallic form all appeal symbolically to the corporate male, reinforcing his status, pride and power while upholding patriarchy in general.¹⁹ Such symbolism—or its revelation—is equally appealing to the critical intellectual for different reasons, although for Meaghan Morris the phallic connection is so obvious to everyone that it can be used as a kind of red herring to divert attention away from the real masculine wealth and power operating at the big end of town.²⁰

It is easier to apply the phallic connection to the city office tower than it is to the high-rise residential. With the former we are concerned with what has been conventionally designated as the masculine public sphere, with the latter the feminine private sphere—although the growing instability of such traditional dualisms has been widely discussed.²¹ Nevertheless, with the high-rise residential we are dealing with spaces occupied, and in many cases presumably enjoyed, by women as well as by men and family units. I am not arguing that the symbolic masculinity associated with the corporation skyscraper miraculously disappears with the residential or resort high-rise (and it could always be claimed that women who occupy such buildings are merely passively accepting masculinist architecture). I am, however, suggesting that the contemporary residential and resort high-rise may not need to be essentialised as masculinist and that it might be read as a little more symbolically diverse and complex and therefore a little more interesting.

I would hazard that nowhere is this heterogeneity more noticeable and interesting than among the high-rises of the Gold Coast, some of which could be read as decidedly feminine

or, if you prefer, the least masculine that it is possible for a high-rise to be. I'm referring to a number of residential and resort buildings constructed from the mid-eighties until recently, the design of which could be loosely described as architectural postmodernism. And so we have buildings such as: the Grand Mariner, true, a masculine name, but a structure feminised by its colours which change as the building rises from purple and pink at the base through to shades of mauve and blue as the eye scans upwards; Carmel by the Sea, resplendent in bridal white; Belle Maison, with its whimsical roofing of mansards and minarets in vaguely federationist domestic style; and, my favourite, the voluptuously rounded Rivage Royale, pretty in pink and pastel shades and with a fashionable bare midriff and exposed navel. My aim here is not just to offer a personal 'view' of a few Gold Coast high-rises—another desiring male gaze that has feminised the objects of that gaze—but rather to argue that buildings such as these don't have to be confined to a singular, symbolic universe of phallic masculinism.

And to further illustrate the mixed and mercurial gendering of the Gold Coast high-rise, a neo-modernist phallicism seems to be emerging with the 'elliptical and seamless' design of the new Liberty Panorama, an appearance 'evident in many year 2000 products ranging from new release motor vehicles to appliances and furnishings', as the promotional material puts it. According to Jeremy Gilbert-Rolf, seamless and 'blank' design is associated with the speed and instantaneity of electronic information technology.²² The 'wiring up' for high-tech appliances is a transpiring feature of high-rise development and publicity. Other features of the Liberty Panorama are 'the external blades running down the side of the building to help energy conservation and maximise privacy'. Determining the symbolic implications of these external blades could be an intriguing exercise. In the final analysis, though, one might have to conclude along with Diana Agrest that 'the skyscraper is an empty signifier that can assume and attract different meanings'.²³ Nevertheless, 'these buildings take their meanings in relation to their contexts'.²⁴ The Gold Coast, and particularly Surfers Paradise, is clearly a context which popular discourse has been constantly feminised.²⁵ Indeed, taking a step further, postmodern-era Gold Coast high-rises might be contextualised to the point of asking if they constitute a variety of 'critical regionalism'—a potential 'architecture of resistance'—at least when compared with the globally homogenised and masculinised metropolitan corporate skyscraper.²⁶

— ON MIRRORS AND WINDOWS

One whole wall of the living room in Aunty Enid's holiday apartment is a mirror—a common phenomenon in such apartment blocks and constituting (we might boldly conjecture) the mirror phase of Gold Coast high-rise development. The mirror is positioned so that it reflects the outside view and creates (for the uninitiated viewer) first, the rather uncanny fleeting

experience of mistaking the mirror image for the real view and second, not so much a double vision as a reverse angle virtual image that appears to double the horizontal expansion of the view to be had through the window or on the balcony. But more engrossing still is the effect when the mirror reflects an angled extension of the window and what lies beyond it (the view) plus what may be placed in front of it—a sofa, say. If you sit on a particular sofa and look towards the mirror you will have the strange experience of witnessing one of those Norman Ross furniture advertisements that feature in the glossy magazines but with you actually occupying a piece of the furniture. Even stranger, you will see yourself on the sofa looking into the room with the view behind you—the view that you would never behold were you sitting on the sofa without the benefit of the mirror. So the mirror gives you the sea view and a view of yourself in front of the view. Furthermore, the mirror image that you see can be imagined as the ‘real’ sight of yourself that others would have were they to enter the apartment. The mirror affords you the pleasure and knowledge of seeing yourself and the view you possess as you and it would be seen by others. The view is available but only in the context of your own presence inside the apartment. The point of view of yourself and imagined others is now internally focused. In his meditation on light and windows, Thomas Keenan re-examines the question of whether the window’s main function (both actual and metaphorical) is to let the gaze pass through (a framed view) or to let light in to illuminate but also to expose.²⁷ What happens when you insert a mirror—a Gold Coast mirror—into the picture? Here the mirror integrates (or desegregates) rather than balances the external and internal, providing an alternative configuration that accepts the external view, but only as a scene against which foreground figures and objects are arranged and recognised.

— A MOVE INDOORS?

Not all Gold Coast high-rises have internal wall mirrors, but those that do create images that have an uncanny resemblance to an increasing proportion of sales and promotional imagery of Gold Coast apartments. Or to put it the other way around: the promotional imagery seems to be repeating the kind of images produced by the mirrors. The classic Corbusian image of the lone individual looking out to the view is being replaced or supplemented by individuals (or more often couples or groups) either facing inwards or interacting socially with the view as backdrop to the conduct of social or personal relationships amidst the artefacts of internal, domestic life.²⁸ Take, for example, the prominent and continual advertising images created for the Deepwater Point Apartments and displayed every weekend in the *Gold Coast Bulletin*. One image employed is a ‘pure’ view of the Broadwater and the sea beyond and is encapsulated: ‘Your private view that will last forever’. As such it conforms to conventional values of privacy, ownership, and exclusiveness—a view to forever possess and command.

Other advertisements in the campaign provide images of couples or groups of couples (always heterosexual) enjoying an intimate breakfast or morning coffee in ‘veranda rooms’ equipped with fashionable furniture and designer accessories. In these ads, the view is still an important and necessary part of the message but the couples can somewhat insouciantly ignore it, concentrating on other pleasures, yet confident in the knowledge that the view is still ‘there’. In another advertisement a couple is seen disporting on a lounge with the view behind—a modern version of Gainsborough’s much analysed painting of Mr and Mrs Andrews except that these hip young moderns don’t own the combined land and seascape—just the vision of it. And yet they are more interested in each other and in reading a copy of *Vogue* than adopting the proprietorial air of the Andrews (or at least Mr Andrews).²⁹

The copy of *Vogue* has a deeper symbolic resonance in this context: high-rise sales ads are placing much more emphasis on luxury internal fittings such as imported tiles and European bathroom appliances as well as generally promoting ‘superior’ interior design features—part of a general surge, we are told by the *Australian Magazine*, of interest in interiors spurred on by the move to New York-style loft apartments in Sydney and Melbourne CBDs.³⁰ On the Gold Coast the move indoors is further characterised by the obligatory air-conditioning installed in recently constructed high-rises which further detaches the view so that it becomes a mere scenic backdrop to internal concerns.³¹ Even the beach has become internalised in the Chevron Renaissance Towers (under construction) which will incorporate ‘beaches in the sky’, a ‘podium of gardens, pools and beach lagoons’. Equally indicative of the growing significance of ‘inside’ is the heading of a full-page advertisement for Aria at Broadbeach: ‘Inside. You could be in Double Bay. Outside. Only Broadbeach.’ Most indicative of the incipient Gold Coast trend away from the dominance of the view is the just completed Palazzo Versace, a luxury five star low-rise hotel and apartment complex built on the Southport Spit and facing the Broadwater rather than the ocean. The rather nondescript view from the hotel is across the still water of the Broadwater towards the decidedly unfashionable Southport shopping centre. But in the Versace scheme of things this view is immaterial or a long way behind the other attractions of the Palazzo where the emphasis is exclusively on luxury, good taste, understated opulence, superior service—all internally positioned and practised. Palazzo Versace is the *dernier cri* of another tendency in Gold Coast resort accommodation—the abandonment of the high-rise model by some developers in favour of low-rise buildings. These low-rises encompass, and face inwards towards, totally designed ‘natural’ palm-treed courtyards of swimming pools, spas, tennis courts and children’s play areas where the panoramic sea view has given way to family-centred child surveillance and inspection of fellow guests at play or repose in their enclosed, protected and privatised setting.

Similarly, I think it is possible to detect a broader movement away from the sea and the beach. Up until the eighties it was acceptable for the fashion-conscious to be seen sunbathing

on the beach and venturing into the surf; now it is *de rigueur* to be seen in a café overlooking the beach or rather in sight of the passing parade on the promenade. These days the main attraction at Main Beach Gold Coast is not the main beach but rather the café society that has sprouted along Tedder Avenue which is not even in viewing distance of beach or sea. The same sensibility applies to Bondi—and perhaps even Cottesloe.

— CONCLUSION: OTHER VIEWS, OTHER VALUES

What these images and developments suggest in toto, then, is a tendency to shift prime focus away from the sea view as a dominating spectacle that attracts, holds and rewards the outward-directed, panoramic gaze. Focus has moved towards ensembles of internal configurations and interactions of bodies and objects in which identity and subjectivity are reflected and confirmed not through transcendental, detached and distantiated contemplation and aesthetic appreciation of nature, and not necessarily through possession of an abstract space, but rather through experienced social relationships in space and the ownership of, and sensual immersion with, objects occupying internal or enclosed space. Or, to quote Mike Featherstone in his exploration of the postmodern ‘aestheticization of everyday life’, the detached and elevated aesthetic appreciation of the ‘artist’ is giving way to the ‘impressions, sensations and images of the consumer culture’.³² Whether this tendency represents a move towards a feminine ‘immanence’ as distinct from a masculine ‘transcendence’ remains an open question. However, as Best has argued, for women ‘the capacity to move between immanence and transcendence could enable a kind of critical engagement/detachment that allows new modes of existence to take place’.³³ An ability to relate to and enjoy both external and internal aspects of the high-rise view may well be a reflection of that very capacity and a step towards breaking down the binaries of outside/inside and masculine/feminine.

The inward-looking tendency does not mean that the Gold Coast high-rise is on the skids. Far from it. Local boosterism aside, there has been a resurgence of interest in residential high-rises. And to top it off, what did the leading light behind the Palazzo Versace, developer and architect Soheil Abedian, do in the first flush of successful completion of that project? He claimed to the world that he was now planning the world’s tallest residential tower to be built in the heart of Surfers Paradise, the eighty-storey Q1 Supertower, thus undermining any trend-spotting claim that high-rises have had their day.³⁴ Construction began in July 2002 with 404 of a total of 527 apartments already sold—perhaps another form of ‘regional defiance’ (see note 34) in the face of September 11, which, come to think of it, provides a new link between terror and the sublime. Nevertheless, what was important to Abedian in selling the Q1, apart from the height, was that the tower would be the epitome of luxury living and state of the art design inspired by the Sydney Opera House and the Olympic torch—Abedian still

has the common touch. And like other new and planned towers it will be wired up for the e-commerce and e-entertainment era. Techno-sublime replacing natural sublime? Not a trivial question because an emerging body of social enquiry is contending that new communication technologies are transforming and deterritorialising private and domestic spaces³⁵ to the extent that access to communication and information technology is becoming as significant to households and communities as their physical location.³⁶ It's interesting, too, to note in this context that Norman Ross has become a major retailer of computers, as well as furniture, for the domestic market. Meanwhile no reference is made by Abedian to the spectacular view from his proposed tower. A given no doubt, but not worth a mention in the light of other wonders and advantages it will deliver.

And yet this essay has argued that the attractions of the sea view are not natural 'givens'. One can detect a cultural process—broad temporal shifts in tastes from a time when the sea view was subordinate to other water views to the present when a sea view is arguably the most valued of all views. But again one can observe that the contemporary value of the sea view is multi-faceted and contingent on a diversity of cultural influences—gender being one that requires further consideration. I have also argued that the outward-looking sea view from the high-rise is becoming increasingly complementary to a gaze that employs it as a scenic backdrop, or supplementary and perhaps subordinate to a gaze that is increasingly attracted to internal activities, objects and relationships. I also somewhat belatedly and briefly want to raise the spectre of internally positioned, screen-centred technologies affording limitless and instantaneous visual experiences unbounded by any horizon or wall. Belatedly and briefly because I believe it premature to pronounce the demise of the sea view in favour of a new era of viewing practices based on the screen. Nevertheless, I have identified signs of a broad shift of emphasis away from an external and perhaps introverted gaze towards a preoccupation with internal, more tactile 'surface' reflections which we noticed in the mirrors and may well notice further in the correspondence of seamless, smooth and 'blank' external and internal design with the equally smooth surface of the screen. And if this trend continues, then the most valued of all views will be the one afforded not by the wall-sized window or mirror but by the wall-sized screen, although whether Aunty Enid—and before her Aunty Marge, and even David Malouf—would agree with this proposition is another matter.

GRAHAME GRIFFIN teaches communication and media studies in the School of Arts, Griffith University Gold Coast Campus. His research interests include the cultural history of photography, urban and regional images and identities, and regional media and urban development.

1. John R. Stilgoe, *Alongshore*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1994.
2. Alain Corbin, *The Lure of the Sea: The Discovery of the Seaside in the Western World 1750-1840*, trans. J. Phelps, Polity Press, London, 1994.
3. Sydney Harbour beaches, swimming pools and resorts were more popular than the ocean beaches until the thirties when improvements in public transport followed by a growth in private car usage helped shift attention towards the eastern suburbs beaches. Peter Spearritt, *Sydney Since the Twenties*, Hale & Iremonger, Sydney, 1978, pp. 235–40. Jenkins also records this shift but her research shows that the harbour was culturally constructed as the pre-eminent symbol of Sydney—a place of beauty and leisure: Sascha Jenkins, 'Sydney Harbour: A Leisure Landscape', in Lynette Finch and Chris McConville (eds), *Gritty Cities: Images of the Urban*, Pluto Press, Annandale, NSW, 1999, pp. 201–16.
4. While historians and social geographers of Sydney agree on the higher social status of Vaucluse and Woollahra during the inter-war years of eastern suburbs development, they are less consensual in their social analysis of the beach-side suburbs. Kelly describes Randwick, Coogee and Clovelly as middle class: Max Kelly, 'Pleasure and Profit: The Eastern Suburbs Come of Age 1919–1929', in Jill Roe (ed.), *Twentieth Century Sydney: Studies in Urban and Social History*, Hale & Iremonger, Sydney, 1980, pp. 1–17. Murphy and Watson discuss the recent gentrification of Bondi and the occupation of flats previously rented by low-income earners: Peter Murphy and Sophie Watson, *Surface City: Sydney at the Millennium*, Pluto Press, Annandale, NSW, 1997. Taussig's reminiscence of Sydney's harbour and beaches describes Bondi and Coogee as solidly working class. Michael Taussig, 'The Beach (A Fantasy)', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 26, no. 2, 2000, pp. 248–69.
5. Those who have researched the 'waves' of Sydney flat and high-rise development have largely overlooked prospect or view as a factor to be reckoned with, although Spearritt does include in his book two press cartoons on high-rise views, or rather high-rises blocking views, which suggests that this topic had some salience among Sydneysiders. One, by George Molnar in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, shows a bunch of besuited Woollahra officials looking at a group of high-rises on which harbourscapes are being painted. The caption: 'Here's the solution for preserving the view. On every block we're going to paint the view they obscure.' Spearritt, pp. 235–40.
6. James R. Rinehart and Jeffrey J. Pompe, 'Estimating the Effects of a View on Undeveloped Property Values', *Appraisal Journal*, vol. 67, no.1, 1999, pp. 57–62.
7. John Urry, *Consuming Places*, Routledge, London, 1995, pp.137, 183.
8. 'The discovery of the sea is a precious experience that bears thought. Seeing the oceanic horizon is indeed anything but a secondary experience; it is in fact an event in consciousness of underestimated consequences'. Paul Virilio, *Bunker Archaeology*, trans. G. Collins, Princeton University Press, New York, 1994, p. 9.
9. Don Featherstone, 'An Imaginary Life. David Malouf: The Inner World of an Extraordinary Writer', Film Australia Videotape, Lindfield, NSW, 1996.
10. Anne K. Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender*, Routledge, London, 1993.
11. John G. Pipkin, 'The Material Sublime of Women Romantic Poets', *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900*, vol. 38, no. 4, 1998, pp. 597–608.
12. Lisa Tickner, 'Vanessa Bell: Studland Beach, Domesticity and "Significant Form"', *Representations*, winter, 1999, p. 72. Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. L. S. Roudiez, trans. T. Gora, A. Jardine, and L. S. Roudiez, Columbia University Press, New York, 1980.
13. Tony Bennett, Michael Emmison and John Frow, *Accounting for Tastes: Australian Everyday Cultures*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999.
14. Gilda Moss Haber, 'The Impact of Tall Buildings on Users and Neighbours', in Donald J. Conway (ed.), *Human Response to Tall Buildings*, Dowden, Hutchinson & Ross, Stroudsburg, Penn, 1977, pp. 45–57. There is, of course, a substantial research literature on the sociology of high-rise living, particularly in public housing estates.
15. Bennett, Emmison and Frow, pp. 52–3.
16. For an overview of this research see Gillian Rose, *Feminism and Geography*, Polity Press, London, 1993.
17. R. Deutsche, 'Boys Town', *Society and Space*, no. 9, 1991, pp. 5–30.
18. Aaron Betsky, *Building Sex: Men, Women, Architecture, and the Construction of Sexuality*, William Morrow, New York, 1995.
19. Kim Dovey, *Framing Places: Mediating Power in Built Form*, Routledge, London, 1999. Delores Hayden, 'Skyscraper Seduction, Skyscraper Rape', *Heresies* 2, May, 1977, pp.108–115. Leslie K. Weisman, *Discrimination by Design: A Feminist Critique of the Man-Made Environment*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago, 1992.
20. Meaghan Morris, 'Great Moments in Social Climbing: King Kong and the Human Fly', in Beatriz Colomina (ed.), *Sexuality and Space*, Princeton Architectural Press, New York, 1992, pp. 1–51.
21. Nancy Duncan, 'Renegotiating Gender and Sexuality in Public and Private Places', in Nancy

- Duncan (ed.), *Bodyspace: Destabilizing Geographies of Gender and Sexuality*, Routledge, London, 1996, pp. 127–45. Doreen Massey, 'Masculinity, Dualisms and High Technology' in Duncan, pp. 109–26. Joel Sanders (ed.), *Stud: Architectures of Masculinity*, Princeton Architectural Press, New York, 1996.
22. Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, 'Blankness as Signifier', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 24, no. 1, 1997, pp. 159–76.
 23. Diana I. Agrest, *Architecture from Without: Theoretical Framings for a Critical Practice*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass, 1991, p. 87.
 24. Agrest, p. 103.
 25. Local newspaper headlines such as 'Facelift Vital for Surfers' Aged Allure' are common. *Gold Coast Weekend Bulletin*, 2–3 September, 2000, p. 23. Nor is the national press exempt: 'Gold Coast woman wakes and smoothes her long blonde hair. The first rays of sunrise are streaming through the windows of her penthouse. Far below her, as far as the eye can see, the beaches and breakers curve away. Lovely, thinks Gold Coast woman: lovely and without point or purpose—just a bit, in fact, like me.' Nicolas Rothwell, 'Ladies who Launch', *The Weekend Australian*, 5–6 September, 1998, p. 21.
 26. Kenneth Frampton, 'Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance', in Hal Foster (ed.), *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, Bay Press, Seattle, 1983. Assigning the Gold Coast high-rise to a critical regionalism would mean placing these buildings firmly within a regional history and identity. Some attempts have already been made to do just that with the Gold Coast City Council's brochure 'Living High: An Architectural Guide to Tall Buildings on the Gold Coast' prepared by architects Allom Lovell Marquis-Kye. See also Philip Goad, 'All that Glitters can Sometimes Become Gold: The Case for Value in the Architecture and Urbanism of the Gold Coast', in Allom Lovell Marquis-Kye (ed.), *Gold Coast Urban Heritage and Character Study*, Gold Coast City Council, Gold Coast, 1997. Frampton regards critical regionalism as a form of resistance to the homogenising influence of universal modernism, which on the surface would hardly seem to apply to the Gold Coast. But a case can be made—and is being made—that the high-rise does have a unique, unifying and defining presence in Gold Coast history and heritage. The term 'defiant regionalism' might be more appropriate in this context, as illustrated particularly in local journalistic discourse: 'Unlike whingeing politicians and those who like to knock for the sake of it, Gold Coast architecture has a lot going for it. For one thing it's innovative. For another, it looks up. The same cannot be said for Canberra ... home of the flatline, the horizontal, like much of the pathetic criticism levelled at ... the Coast where the vertical reigns'. Brian Mossop, 'A Lifestyle Many Envy', *The Gold Coast Bulletin*, 25 June, 2002, p. 13.
 27. Thomas Keenan, 'Windows: of Vulnerability', in Bruce Robbins (ed.), *The Phantom Public Sphere*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis and London, 1993, pp. 121–41.
 28. Connecting the 'elliptical and seamless' design of the Liberty Panorama high-rise with similarly designed internal appliances and furnishings would appear to be a further example of this trend. The idea of the sea being turned into a backdrop is raised by Taussig, pp. 2482–69. The modernist architect Le Corbusier promoted high-rise living and expansive horizontal windows. Beatriz Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass, 1994, pp. 128–39.
 29. These advertising images are 'constructed' in more ways than one. The buildings are still on the drawing board; the 'occupants' are models digitally superimposed on the 'view' previously photographed from a helicopter or adjacent high-rise.
 30. James Elder, 'Penthouse Passions', *The Australian Magazine*, 30 September – 1 October, 2000, pp. 42–3.
 31. A similar observation is made by Pollan in describing the effect of double-glazed windows in his parents' beach house: 'You saw the waves break white out beyond the dunes but heard nothing; watched the sea grass bend and flash under the breeze but felt nothing. There was a deadness to it, a quality of having already happened. The view seemed far away, static and inaccessible, except of course to the eye'. Michael Pollan, 'A Room With Too Much View', *Harper's Magazine*, no. 294, March, 1997, pp. 28–30.
 32. Mike Featherstone, *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*, Sage, London, 1991, p. 72.
 33. S. Best, 'Driving Like a Boy: Sexual Difference, Embodiment and Space', in Ruth Barcan and Ian Buchanan (eds), *Imagining Australian Space: Cultural Studies and Spatial Inquiry*, University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, WA, 1999, pp. 93–101.
 34. Huxtable prophesied in 1984 that skyscrapers may be 'nearing the end of the line'. Ada Louise Huxtable, *The Tall Building Artistically Reconsidered: The Search for a Skyscraper Style*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1984. However, this has been contradicted by the boom in mammoth midtown landmark or signature skyscrapers, particularly in the western Pacific rim. Larry R. Ford, 'Midtowns, Megastructures and World Cities', *The Geographical Review*, vol. 88, no. 4, 1998, pp. 528–30. These towers 'designed by world-famous architects have played major roles in giving

instant identity and prestige to new districts that seek to compete successfully in the global economy'. Abedian and other developers appear to be jockeying for the privilege of creating the first 'monumental' high-rise for the Gold Coast, thus projecting local 'identity and prestige' to the global tourism economy regardless of any fallout from September 11.

35. Scott McQuire, *Visions of Modernity: Presentation,*

Memory, Time and Space in the Age of the Camera, Sage, London, 1998.

36. Elizabeth Grosz, 'Bodies-Cities', in Heidi J. Nast and Steve Pile (eds), *Places Through the Body*, Routledge, London, 1998, pp. 42–51. Stephen E. Little, 'Networks and Neighbourhoods: Household, Community and Sovereignty in the Global Economy', *Urban Studies*, vol. 37, no. 10, 2000, pp. 1813–25.