ANCHORS AWAY: CONTESTED SPACE AND LOCAL RESISTANCE ON AUSTRALIA’S GOLD COAST

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Abstract

The neoliberal ascendancy has exacerbated social conflict around urban growth in emergent cities, demonstrating how contested space is a signifier of late modernity. Government officials and elected agents with limited funding for public infrastructure and public services may be forced to choose between retaining public open space or divesting public land to property developers able to access global funding streams. The resultant spatially determined risk generates community debate in which local residents choose between promises of economic security or maintaining publicly accessible sites for recreation and the delivery of public services. In such cases, the collective identity of a particular place may be at stake. This thesis, in two components, explores via a case study of Australia’s largest regional city, how contested space gives rise to local resistance in a battle over the development of public space for private gain.

Place is more than lines on a map, buildings and other tangible attributes, it is a multi dimensional process of social spatialization in which ideas, memories and experiences coexist with physical representations generating beliefs and understandings of what a place means or should mean, so that the being of a place, as it were, with ongoing particular geometries of power, is mythological, incorporating imaginative and experiential views and concepts. An exegetical analysis of the Gold Coast, in southern Queensland, applies such an ontological framework to explain the public debate surrounding a narrow, four kilometre beachfront site, known as The Spit, mostly undeveloped public parkland, proposed for a high rise casino resort and a cruise ship terminal. The multi-billion dollar development was marketed as an economic saviour for a mature tourism destination, supported by a pro-development dominant ideology alliance of local government, the local property development industry and the local newspaper. The development plan was reflexively opposed by residents no longer
willing to accept that high rise property development catering for tourists was an ideal strategy to sustain the local economy. The local resistance created an identity crisis in which the equilibrium of the Gold Coast collective identity is disturbed.

The theoretical spatial concepts explored critically in the exegesis are exemplified creatively in a narrative journalism inquiry into The Spit development debate, drawing on semi-structured interviews, personal experiences as a long time Gold Coast resident, attendance at public meetings and rallies, examination of local newspaper coverage and reflections on an extensive topological exploration of The Spit, a walking trip. Such an approach provides in-depth elaboration in which place and space become story, providing complementary ways of seeing to enhance engagement and meaning, enriching the contested space discourse of The Spit and in a broader context providing a local iteration of the disruption of the social contract in the first quarter of the new millennium.
Statement of Originality

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

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Exegesis: Introduction

The Gold Coast is Australia’s best-known tourist destination and largest regional city with a growing population (Gold Coast City et al. 2014, Australian Bureau of Statistics 2015). A pro-development ideology, in which a business and local government alliance favours tourism-related high-rise construction, signified by ubiquitous beachfront towers, has until recently been unchallenged. A push by Gold Coast Mayor Tom Tate after his election in 2012 to encourage intense property development, including a cruise ship terminal, a casino and high-rise towers on and around The Spit, the last undeveloped coastal land on the Gold Coast, ignited passions for and against high-rise towers, especially on the beachfront. Many residents believed Mayor Tate’s agenda would destroy the natural character of The Spit, a much-loved public recreation and relaxation place with a three-storey building height limit. The debate about the future of The Spit exposed a variety of competing beliefs and ideas about what kind of a place the Gold Coast should become, signalling a waning of the dominant influence of the pro-development ideology.

My experience as a newspaper journalist over thirty years, including ten years reporting on the Gold Coast, and twenty years residing on the Gold Coast, provides an insider perspective on how the Gold Coast is portrayed and understood. The Gold Coast has been frequently represented, stereotyped and sensationalised in Australian journalism, locally and nationally, and in Australian film, television and literature, as a holiday town fixated on leisure activities with an economy based around tourism. However, the Gold Coast is a more complex space than these portrayals generally allow, with a conflicted set of aspirations as they relate to the extent of high-rise development, exemplified and intensified in the debate about the future of The Spit. Further, the Gold Coast is subject to some of the same social and political forces existing elsewhere in
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Australia and globally, notably risk, neoliberalism and threats from climate change. My thesis is a two-part project, an exegesis and a creative work. Its aim therefore is two-fold: to unpack in the exegesis the complex issues facing the Gold Coast in critical terms, in particular as they relate to The Spit, and to explore through narrative journalism in the creative work how these issues play out at The Spit. My research thus contributes to The Spit debate through creative inquiry framed by a scholarly examination. Together the two components of my thesis will show how and why Gold Coast power relationships have shifted.

No single conceptual argument can encompass the dynamic and varied natures of the Gold Coast as place and space. My critical examination is framed by Shields’ (1992) and Massey’s (1993, 2005) ideas of social spatialization and power geometries, Beck’s (1992) and Giddens’ (1992) analyses of the risk society and reflexivity, and notions of identity crisis deriving from Erikson (Cote and Levine 2002, p. 95). I also utilise Hall’s theory of ideological encoding and decoding (in During ed. 2007), in my exploration of contested space on the Gold Coast, as well as examining and extending analyses by the Griffith University Urban Research Program (see Bosman, Dedekorkut-Howes and Leach 2016). I provide a complex exploration allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the inter-relationships of the Gold Coast’s discrete social groupings.

The cruise ship terminal proposed for The Spit became a catalyst for the contestation of socially constructed space and can be recognised as a challenging moment in the evolutionary process of an emergent city. It can be argued that The Spit saga is a socio-cultural watershed, where the Gold Coast is no longer controlled by a pro-development ideology favouring tourism related property development creating an over abundance of high density accommodation towers and a boom and bust economy vulnerable to downturns in the tourist trade. As the residential population has grown, a new paradigm
of local resistance has emerged. The collective identity of the Gold Coast, as far as such a concept can be understood, is no longer in equilibrium. Significant proportions of residents with increasing demands on available public open space have decided the Gold Coast in some places is no longer suitable for development-at-all-costs and that some coastal land sites are not negotiable for development or redevelopment. As such, local resistance groups have emerged. The extent to which the pro-development ideology will curtail its activities, and the extent to which resistance will endure, remains to be seen as public consultation processes become more meaningful.

**Popular commentary and creative representation**

Media identities from mainstream media based in Australia’s southern states have stigmatised the Gold Coast as a culturally peripheral place (see Shields 1992, p. 3). They are an influential outsider group muddying the waters of Gold Coast perceptions upon which float rafts of competing social groupings, generally aligned to pro- and anti-development factions aiming intentionally or otherwise to influence the Gold Coast’s unresolved collective identity. The southern media identities who shape public opinion thus are actors within the Gold Coast power geometries network (see Massey 1995), involved in the complex manipulation of status relations among social groups. Their influence mostly serves to reinforce prejudices, determined by their own status as public commentators, their level of knowledge about the Gold Coast and the range and focus of their messaging. These cultural critics of the Gold Coast operate spatially, signifying a relationship between place and space, as most are not physically present on the Gold Coast. They support the pro-development ideology, even if they are not explicitly pro-development, because their pronouncements generally imply The Spit is not worth saving or protecting. Because their opining is ongoing and fluid, determined by events
and activities, they show how ‘social interactions are not static (but) processes’ (Massey 1995, p. 66). It is therefore useful to examine some relevant media commentary, although it must be noted that the north – south socio-geographic divide expressed as hostile snobbery, or an antithetical place myth (Shields 1992, p. 61), is not unique to Australia.

Media criticism of the Gold Coast, mostly from the southern states, sees the Gold Coast as no more than the well known suburb of Surfers Paradise, evolved from a small holiday village in the 1950s into a tourist trap packed with high rise buildings where domestic and international tourists mingle in soulless nightclubs, strip clubs, restaurants and souvenir shops, alongside aggressively partying youths and the nouveau riche. Surfers Paradise in this way has a Promethean quality. It introduced Australians to affordable, mass scale tourism but then became corrupted and stigmatised.

The Australian Broadcasting Corporation’s weekly television talk show host, comedian Charlie Pickering, delivered a vicious put down of the Gold Coast two days after the official mascot for the 2018 Gold Coast Commonwealth Games was lowered by helicopter on to the beach at Burleigh Heads on the central Gold Coast. The public debut of the surfing koala mascot, whose name Borobi is derived from the local Yugambeh Aboriginal dialect, was broadcast live across Australia by Channel Seven’s popular Sunrise free-to-air breakfast television program. The mascot’s surfer identity chosen by the Commonwealth Games organising committee from a public design competition confirmed surfing is among the most recognisable Gold Coast activities, widely accepted as a mainstream sport and lifestyle intricately tied to the Gold Coast’s competing identities. In the closing segment of The Weekly’s 6 April 2016 episode, Pickering dismissed the surfing incarnation. ‘When I think of the Gold Coast, I don’t think of a blue fleece surfing koala. I think Meter Maids, I think Schoolies, I think drug
crimes,’ Pickering told 590,000 viewers (TV Tonight 2016). ‘So that’s why we’ve created the . . . alternative Games mascot. Look kids, it’s Hacksaw, the Meth Koala,’ Pickering said. Schoolies refers to the notorious annual end of year celebration for high school leavers at Surfers Paradise. Meter Maids are bikini models who place coins in Surfers Paradise parking meters to assist motorists. After Pickering’s introduction of the Meth Koala, a person in a koala suit rode a Harley Davidson motorcycle onto The Weekly set, circling Pickering seated at the host desk. ‘The markings on his arm signify the gangs he’s been part of in prison. His ear is semi detached from a recent knife fight. Say hi to the kids, Hacksaw,’ Pickering said. The rider raised a middle finger to the camera. The Weekly satirised whatever current affairs topics were trending in the media sphere. Australian comedians have previously found fun ridiculing Olympic Games mascots, so sensitivity to Pickering’s Gold Coast portrayal would be an overreaction. Nevertheless, Hacksaw the Meth Kola illustrates the default, stereotypical identity given to the Gold Coast by southern media types.

Although he is from the Queensland state capital Brisbane, not the south, political blogger Mark Bahnisch is dismissive of the Gold Coast in his book, Queensland: Everything You Ever Wanted to Know But Were Afraid to Ask (2015). Bahnisch name checks a short list of discredited Gold Coast pro-development identities and declares the Gold Coast’s ‘1970s hotels and “attractions” ’ have fallen into ‘decay and disorder’, the ‘social structure’ is ‘formless and pliable’ and ‘the road to advancement runs through smarts and quick deals’ (2015, pp. 42-43). Bahnisch ignores the construction boom underway on the Gold Coast over the past decade. He writes: ‘The Goldie, a promised land in one sense, has always been a nowhere land, home to people from elsewhere. It feels simultaneously like not-Queensland and hyper-Queensland. That’s its utopic and dystopic quality’ (2015, p. 43). The Gold Coast does have multiple identities and arguably the best and worst of Australian beachside living. However, it is a flimsy
argument to suggest the Gold Coast is characterised and sustained by new arrivals. The same can be said for much of the rest of Australia since white settlement in 1788. Bahnisch allocates just three pages to the Gold Coast in his 164-page text claiming to be a tell-all book about Queensland, even though the Gold Coast is the second largest urban centre in Queensland after Brisbane.

Peter Fitzsimmons AM, the *Sydney Morning Herald* newspaper columnist, popular histories author and chairman of the Australian Republican Movement, featured a nasty anti-Gold Coast jibe from Twitter commentator John Johnsonson in his 2015 Quotes of the Year column: ‘Shocked that Dawn Fraser told (Bernard) Tomic to go back where he came from. No matter what his behaviour, NOBODY should have to go to the Gold Coast’ (Johnsonson in Fitzsimmons 2016, p. 51). Fitzsimmons added: ‘I wish I had said that’ (Fitzsimmons 2016, p. 51). Fraser was an Olympic Games swimmer, a multiple Gold medallist and world record holder, from Sydney. Tomic is a Gold Coast-born professional tennis player with a “bad boy” reputation. The assumption from Johnsonson and Fitzsimmons is that the Gold Coast is beyond redemption, entirely unworthy. Of course, millions of people do visit the Gold Coast. The number of passengers at Gold Coast Airport more than tripled over the 20 years to 2016, from 1.8 million to 6.4 million passengers per year (Queensland Airports 2017).

Young adult novelist Steph Bowe, a Gold Coast resident since 2011, challenges the labelling of the Gold Coast as a crime centre in her blog: ‘There is this very weird widespread idea (I hear it from Brisbanites all the time) that the Gold Coast is very, very dangerous . . . that the town is overrun with bikies and armed robbers and organised crime. If you look at Queensland police statistics, you'll find the crime is actually significantly down in the last ten years’ (Bowe 2013). Stockwell notes the Gold Coast
has ‘long been considered in the public imaginary as a centre for criminal activity but this has not been confirmed by statistical analysis’, even if a spate of murders from 2009 to 2011 was ‘particularly disconcerting’ (Stockwell 2011, pp. 281-282).

According to Stockwell, the Gold Coast has double the murders and robberies compared to the state average, but less assaults and sexual offences. Total offences against persons on the Gold Coast are less overall than the state average and the Gold Coast has half as many murders and armed robberies per capita than Brisbane (Stockwell 2011, pp. 281-282). Nevertheless, Gold Coast major crimes are often newsworthy, conforming to Masterton’s news values (Lamble 2013, pp. 46-52). Outlaw motorcycle gang brawls and shootings in public places, gruesome drug-related violence, a young man charged with murder after his Tinder date plunged from a high rise unit and a father shot in the street by a sniper on a high rise balcony are typical news stories fuelling the Gold Coast crime capital myth. Bowe maintains the local media ‘likes to . . . make us all fearful’ in order to sell newspapers and attract viewers (Bowe 2013). Bowe also challenges the stereotype of the Gold Coast as a cultural desert:

When I tell people that I lived near Melbourne growing up, and I moved to the Gold Coast . . . they usually ask: "Why on Earth would you do that?" To be honest, folks, it's a bit offensive to tell people they've moved to a rubbish place. I love the Gold Coast. Which is not to say that I didn't love Melbourne, and the town outside of Melbourne where I lived, but I don't long for it . . . People are always telling me about Melbourne's wonderful culture, and about how Queensland is devoid of it. Yes, there are bogans in Queensland. There are bogans everywhere . . . But you can't compare a city to a regional area if you're talking about culture . . . I don't think Melbourne is inherently superior to the Gold Coast. There can be no comparison. Are people imagining that I'm living in a high-rise in Surfers Paradise and going out clubbing every night? That my
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life is year-round Schoolies? Living on the Gold Coast and holidaying on the Gold Coast are two very different things. The majority of the Gold Coast is suburban. You can lead a nice, quiet life in a holiday destination (Bowe 2013).

Culture of course is far more encompassing than the arts, it is ‘involved in all forms of social activity’ (Williams 1981, p. 13), with distinct structuralist, postmodern and post-Marxist interpretations, i.e., as a framework of social groups and beliefs, a lens through which modernism is critiqued and a way of understanding consumption and leisure as processes of production, so to suggest that Queensland is devoid of culture is not only elitist but also indicates a very narrow view.

Brendan Shanahan’s creative non-fiction “gonzo” account (2004) of his quest to understand the Gold Coast’s ‘tacky’ lifestyle (2004, p. 265) is cloaked in a shroud of nasty, black humour deepening the negative stereotyping of the Gold Coast as morally and physically decayed. Shanahan labels the ageing, unremarkable Australia Fair shopping mall at Southport on the northern Gold Coast ‘a giant complex of the undead’ (2004, p. 53), incorrectly claims the Gold Coast water supply can hardly cope with the influx of summer visitors (2004, p. 110), asserts ‘no one [on the Gold Coast] was ever just an accountant, unless they were wanted for questioning by the National Crime Authority’ (2004, p. 170) and implies that Gold Coast fathers who are ‘old hippies’ obtain drugs from their children (2004, p. 246). Shanahan describes the beach as a symbol like ‘everything else in this town . . . an idea of beach in the same way that fake snow in a shop window is an idea of Christmas’ (2004, p. 215). Shanahan’s story focuses on drug dealers and other bottom feeders of marginal social groups. He could be describing any city’s underbelly. His book’s title, The Secret Life of the Gold Coast, is a misnomer. He finds no secret life at all and does not attempt at differentiating Surfers Paradise from the rest of the Gold Coast.
Shanahan does provide a nuanced interpretation of Surfers Paradise. He examines the conventional wisdom that Surfers Paradise is nothing more than fake and inauthentic, a ‘fundamental cheapening of the travel experience (like) Tijuana, Kuta Beach, Sun City [and] Ibiza’, arguing that such a view is ‘not merely a rather touching statement of the obvious, but an exoneration of all those travellers who have hacked their way into the jungle, full of atavistic enthusiasm for the “primitive”, the “simple”, the “other”, and found only their own egos’ (Shanahan 2004, pp. 2-3). According to Shanahan, these authenticity seekers regard tourist cities as ‘an inconvenient hallucination on the way to something more sustaining’, offering only external rewards, ‘something that might be pointed to or eaten or photographed . . . rather than something that came from within, as though the man selling T-shirts outside Planet Hollywood in Kuta Beach had less right to be Balinese than the Hindu priest at the volcano shrine’ (2004, p. 3). These observations reveal tackiness has its own inherent value in terms of Massey’s power geometries (1993), or constellations of relations imagined in complex, socially evaluative ways that do not privilege any one way above another. Tourist-centric places like Surfers Paradise and so-called lost tribes in the desert or the jungle each may be represented by their own intrinsic place myth.

Shanahan decides lifestyle on the Gold Coast refers to a ‘mode of living’ in which activities as diverse as heroin addiction and enjoying ocean views have equal status in a ‘series of choices’ without any moral dimension (2004, p. 95). This assessment is blind to the more obvious reality that the Gold Coast lifestyle is nothing more than a situation in which the working environment and leisure time may be more enjoyable than elsewhere. It is reasonable to assume that Shanahan, who confesses a ‘love of the grotesque’ (2004, p. 3), excoriated the Gold Coast because Surfers Paradise provided for him an irresistible menagerie of grotesqueries, real and imagined.
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Crime novelist Garry Disher’s *The Heat* (2015) refers to the Gold Coast but is set mostly in Melbourne and on the Sunshine Coast, north of Brisbane. Nevertheless, a Sydney-based reviewer highlighted disdain for the Gold Coast:

*The Heat* is beautifully crafted . . . lean, spare and trenchant. Here’s [the hero character] Wyatt’s take on the “brash and hungry” Gold Coast: “People settled here to worship sunshine and quick profits, and desiccated into stringy middle age or corpulence within a few years. . . There was no need of thought here. No one expected it and the sun burned off any mental process as it lit up the perfect white teeth, the perfect tanned flesh. Politicians called it God’s own country, but Wyatt thought God was pretty much away on business most of the time” (Turnbull 2016, p. 28).

The Gold Coast has long been known as God’s waiting room for retirees (Jones 1986, p. 71), not God’s own country. The reviewer’s prejudicing of beach culture on the Gold Coast is an example of how southern media identities influence public opinion. Such absolute negativity is overstated. These concerns aside, the reviewer chose to prioritise in her single excerpt for a short review in a quality, influential newspaper a hateful description of the Gold Coast from a novel in which the Gold Coast is not prominent, an example of negative stereotyping to create a particular meaning within the Gold Coast place myth.

Creative representations are significant elements of place making. Creative representations of the Gold Coast, a tourism place visited by at least three generations of Australians, enrich collective memories sustained by ritual performance, for example, family holidays at Christmas, Schoolies celebrations, honeymoons and anniversaries, in which nostalgic decodings may conflict or resonate with negative or clichéd stereotyping not only from southern commentators but also film-makers and writers.
Creative representations of the Gold Coast chime differently among Australian residents and international tourists because some representations are produced primarily for domestic consumption, whereas others produced for international tourists are more likely to have a strict commercial purpose, for example, marketing videos and brochures from travel agents. Stockwell argues the Gold Coast is an ‘imagined city created, to a large degree, by a multiplicity of moving image artefacts produced by visitors’ via home movies, feature films, tourism documentaries, surfing films and television series (2011, p. 281). This seems to privilege screen representations ahead of literary and other representations and actual, personal ritual performance in creating the Gold Coast place myth, although mythologising any place in such ways may well be a chicken and egg situation, as creative representation embellishes collective memory. Stockwell recognises the Gold Coast as a desirable place with at the very least a double identity, angel or whore. He notes that the feature films Goodbye Paradise and Gettin’ Square and the television series The Strip glamorise crime on the Gold Coast, whereas Muriel’s Wedding, one of the most fondly regarded Australian movies, positions the Gold Coast as a kind of Australian national joke whose residents exude a regional backwardness.

Two substantial fictional portrayals (Condon 2007, Breen 2013) reinforce the Gold Coast as a carnivalesque, immoral place where identity is made and unmade, displayed, exchanged and faked. A Night at the Pink Poodle (Condon 2007) is an examination of identity crisis, seemingly superficial light entertainment, yet conveying deeper meanings, connecting desire and identity, exploring how outward appearance contradicts the inner soul when longing for fulfilment is overtaken or sidetracked by a more easily attainable or immediately profitable, ultimately unsatisfying, mask or disguise. Condon’s anti-hero Ick is vulnerable, a flashy real estate agent who loses faith in his salesman image, with a lazy eye, suggesting he cannot fathom what is really going on, squatting in high-rise penthouses he is trying to sell for absentee owners,
masquerading as a corporate high flyer. *Atomic City* (Breen 2013) is noir fiction exploring hidden identities and identity theft among gamblers and thieves, perpetuating, like Shanahan, the pejorative myth of the Gold Coast as a morally corrupt place where residents are scammers and tourists targets to be fleeced. A self-destructive femme fatale, Jade, appears as a mysterious stranger, captivating a Broadbeach casino croupier addicted to hustling, the Dealer. They cannot properly trust each other but recognise they are kindred spirits, grifters chasing the thrill of dangerous, quick money. They aim to fleece Harvey, a telemarketing boss, and PJ, a crime lord. Jade steals the identity of a dead baby. As she accumulates money, relying on prostitution, losing more of herself, she becomes so compromised that her hidden, original identity is irrecoverable. The Dealer recognises he has ‘created a monster’, imagining Jade evolving like the ‘metamorphosis of a butterfly in reverse’ (Breen 2013, p. 194). The creation of a butterfly is nature’s most explicitly beautiful example of identity change but Breen subverts this ideal, conjuring a horror genre image.

Persistent interstate migration and media focus on new infrastructure and other preparations for the 2018 Commonwealth Games on the Gold Coast has led to a partial reassessment of the Gold Coast by southern commentators. *The Australian* newspaper’s Review magazine declared that the Gold Coast is ‘suddenly . . . in the company of substantial cities such as Edinburgh, New Delhi, Kuala Lumpur and Auckland’ as a Commonwealth Games host city, in a feature report about the Gold Coast’s ‘cultural revolution’ (Kidd Fraser 2017). *The Australian* declared the Gold Coast ‘isn’t what it used to be’, highlighting the Bleach festival’s roots in the Gold Coast surfing community and a $150 million redevelopment of the Gold Coast Arts Centre (Kidd Fraser 2017).
Australian Traveller magazine has made up its mind, revealing on a glossy front cover: ‘IT’S OFFICIAL: the Gold Coast IS SERIOUSLY COOL’ (Australian Traveller 2016). Australian Traveller’s editor, Lara Picone, visited Burleigh Heads where she was impressed by ‘hip’ cafes, James Street shopping ‘as chic as any Bondi boutique’ and elegant beachfront restaurants. She also ventured to Surfers Paradise, finding ‘stylish’ bars and ‘hip’ delis (Picone 2016, pp. 123-124). Picone discovered the Gold Coast is ‘completely comfortable with itself’ (2016, p. 120). She does not distinguish between residents’ unconcern about what critics might think about the Gold Coast and concern about what the Gold Coast might become. Picone describes the Gold Coast’s ‘quasi-Californian vibe’ with ‘Steven Seagal’ types in floral print shirts and gold chains while ‘for others’ it is ‘simply the place of theme parks, buffet dinners and crimes against architecture. In reality, the Gold Coast is none of the above’ (Picone 2016, p. 123). This is a misjudgement. The Gold Coast is a place of multiple identities, where Venice Beach-style promenading, theme park tourism and a garish postmodern skyline coexist with quiet residential suburbs and locals who rarely visit Surfers Paradise. Picone argues the Gold Coast’s natural assets attract tourists and property investors. Even so, Surfers Paradise remains predominantly a cheap and easy party town and the natural environment is not a priority for investors. Picone describes Borobi, the Commonwealth Games koala mascot, as ‘misconceived’ (2016, p. 123). She offers a confused, superficial analysis. ‘The Gold Coast is cool precisely because it’s no longer pretending to be something it’s not. It’s embracing its past reputation in a way that builds on the future . . . It loves being the Gold Coast and it understands that Australia wants it to be itself. The revitalised culture cheekily references its previous incarnations, but gives a serious injection of casual beachside cool. Yes, there are still women so heavily made up they could be wearing a kabuki mask . . .’ (Picone 2016, p. 124). The undisguised contempt of the southern critics for the Gold Coast has been partly displaced by a
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colonial condescension, exhibited by Picone, offering a reassessment of the Gold Coast as being not so bad anymore, while many residents believe it might become worse.

**The Spit background**

Spatial conflict has flared across the Gold Coast over the past decade. Most recently, on the southern Gold Coast, residents have been angered by a high rise building boom at Palm Beach (Payne 2019, p. 10). At Burleigh Heads, on the central Gold Coast, a rooftop bar redevelopment of a public swimming pool and dining complex adjacent to a national park and a proposal to demolish an historic theatre building for a high-rise tower have triggered local anger (Huxley 2020; Eley 2019, p. 8). The spatial conflict at The Spit encompasses an approx. 4km-long x 500m-wide strip of sand extending from the Main Beach residential high-rise suburb, immediately north of Surfers Paradise, to the Nerang River mouth, bounded by the Broadwater estuary on the west side and the Pacific Ocean on the east. The Spit is almost entirely publicly owned, under Queensland state government jurisdiction. Tenants pay lease fees to the state government. The southern half of The Spit contains the Southport Yacht Club, the Marina Mirage upmarket shopping and dining complex, the Mariners Cove jetty and retail complex, the Sheraton Grand Mirage, Palazzo Versace and Sea World Nara resort hotels, the Sea World theme park, a fishing trawlers jetty and seafood sales shed. The northern half of The Spit is mostly public reserve open space, with the Federation Walk pathway and forest behind the ocean dunes and the Doug Jennings Park recreation and relaxation ground and Muriel Henchman Park boat launching and car parking space facing the Broadwater. At the tip of The Spit is the Nerang River sand bypass pumping station with an ocean jetty and a kiosk. On the northern, undeveloped half of The Spit, Gold Coast and some Brisbane residents picnic, walk their dogs on the beach or go surfing,
swimming, diving, fishing and bushwalking. The Spit is accessible via a single bitumen road and not advertised as a tourist attraction. The northern half therefore is visited by relatively few interstate or international tourists. Spatial conflict at The Spit refers specifically to the proposals for a cruise ship terminal, high-rise residential and tourist accommodation and a casino challenged by local resistance groups Save Our Spit, Save Our Broadwater and the Main Beach Association. In this context, the social functions of public space are threatened by the social functions of privately controlled space.

The Spit was first considered as a site for a cruise ship terminal in the 1970s when entrepreneur Keith Williams developed Sea World (Sorensen 2016). In 2006, the Queensland Labor state government withdrew an offer to assist establishment of a cruise ship terminal at The Spit, bowing to local and regional community opposition, citing environmental and public expenditure concerns, after five years of lobbying for a terminal from local business interests (Potts 2015b). In 2012, a civil engineer and property investor, Tom Tate, then owner of a prominent backpacker hotel in Surfers Paradise, was elected as the Gold Coast Mayor, promising to reignite the push for a cruise ship terminal. In 2013, the Queensland Liberal-National conservative state government invited terminal proposals. The Chinese government-backed ASF Consortium was chosen in February 2014 to build a $5 billion resort with a 50-storey accommodation tower and cruise ship terminal on and around Wavebreak Island in the Broadwater with bridges to the established suburb of Southport and a casino licence contingent on the successful operation of the terminal (Willoughby and Ardern 2014). Wavebreak Island is man-made, formed by sand dredged from the Nerang River mouth when rock walls were installed to stabilise the mouth in the 1980s. The small island protects the Broadwater western shore from erosion by tidal flows and wave action generated by marine craft.
Labor won the Queensland state election in 2015 after campaigning to protect the Broadwater and Wavebreak Island from development. The new state government withdrew support for the cruise ship terminal and invited the ASF Consortium to submit a proposal for a casino and resort at The Spit on vacant public land on the south side of Sea World. Despite the new state government ruling out a cruise ship terminal on the northern half of The Spit, Mayor Tate declared in December 2015 that he would seek private funding for a terminal with an offshore pontoon berth in the ocean at the end of a 1km-long jetty, extending from the eastern foreshore opposite Sea World, and an offshore breakwall alongside the pontoon (Potts 2015c). Soon after Mayor Tate’s intervention, the Breakwater Group of Queensland property developers and investors proposed a $4.4 billion project with five resort hotels, a tunnel and a bridge linking Wavebreak Island to The Spit and to Labrador on the western shore of the Broadwater. The Breakwater Group also wanted to dredge a cruise ship terminal harbour inside the Broadwater near the northern end of The Spit (Weston and Potts 2015, pp. 6-7). In the six months after the Labor state government had ruled out a cruise ship terminal on the Gold Coast, The Spit had become the site for two terminal proposals. As well, in 2015 the Queensland-based developer Sunland proposed a 44-storey, $600 million twin towers residential and tourist development near the Marina Mirage shopping complex on the southern end of The Spit (Potts 2015a, pp. 1, 6-7). The Sunland proposal was withdrawn in 2016 after Gold Coast City Council planning officers recommended refusal because the twin towers would breach the city’s town plan, which has a three-storey height limit for The Spit, and after a campaign by the resistance groups. The ASF Consortium released concept plans for a $3 billion ‘integrated resort development’ on The Spit in 2016, proposing five high-rise towers including a casino and hotels (Marszalek 2016). The Queensland state government in 2017 rejected the ASF proposal and promised to prepare a master plan limiting development on The Spit, shortly before
a state election returned Labor to power. The Queensland conservatives have not ruled out reassessment of what might allowed to be built on The Spit, if they are returned to government, and it remains to be seen if the master plan process will deliver a degree of equilibrium among the competing interests. Queensland conservative forces operate as a single political party, the Liberal National Party, a merger of the Liberal and National parties which in other Australian states and in the Australian federal parliament exist separately within a coalition.

Altered spatial meanings applied to place consequential of population growth show how spatiality relates to emotional geography (see Davidson, Bondi and Smith eds. 2007), that is, the understandings and feelings of individuals and social groups about place. For example, place values at The Spit have changed in line with Gold Coast population growth. Surveys by the *Gold Coast Bulletin* local daily newspaper indicate an almost even divide of residents for and against or not supporting further exploitation of The Spit (Potts 2016, p. 2; Potts 2015d, p. 5; Skene 2014, p. 4). Another survey by the *Bulletin* showed 70 per cent opposed a cruise ship terminal at The Spit (Potts 2014, p. 16). A survey commissioned by Save Our Broadwater found 75 percent of residents opposed high-rise on The Spit or would only support development under three storeys (Reachtel 2016). A survey commissioned by the Queensland State Development Department found 51 percent of residents and tourists believed towers more than seven storeys high were acceptable for the Broadwater and The Spit and 78 per cent supported high-rise on the southern end of The Spit (Weston 2017). The divide in public opinion suggests the Gold Coast resident population has reached a critical mass. For the first time on the Gold Coast, a significant proportion of the local population has questioned the pro-development, tourism-focused, growth-at-all-costs pro-development ideology. Public opposition to beachside high-rise property development on the Gold Coast in the decades before the new millennium was almost non-existent. Between 2009 and 2013,
the number of visitors to the Gold Coast and the residential population each grew by
similar rates, around 10 per cent (Gold Coast City et al. 2014). However, 2009 was
arguably a watershed year, when the Gold Coast population passed the half million
mark (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2015), which may be considered a tipping point
for reclassification from a small urban centre to a secondary city (Brillembourg and
Klumpner 2014). On any given day, the Gold Coast has about 80,900 tourists (Becken
et al. 2015), day-trippers, overnighters or those staying longer, and about seven times as
many residents, although visitor numbers increase substantially in peak holiday periods.
The ratio of tourists to residents shows the weight of numbers is clearly with the
residents. Indeed, the Gold Coast has been a residential growth centre since the inland
satellite town of Robina was created in the 1980s. It took another thirty years, until the
emergence of the Gold Coast as a secondary city coincided with the push for property
development on and around The Spit, before significant numbers of residents decided
they wanted a say in determining the destiny of the city they call home.

The precise iteration of the reflexivity of the Gold Coast citizenry in response to a
specific hazard of modernization, viz. perceived over-development threatening
environmental and community values, was apparent at public protest rallies in 2012 and
2014. A rally at the Broadwater Parklands in 2014 against Mayor Tate’s cruise ship
terminal plan for The Spit drew a noisy crowd estimated at between 1,200 and 3,000
people (Potts 2014, p. 16). Similar numbers attended a protest rally at Doug Jennings
Park on the northern end of The Spit in 2012. A petition opposing the Sunland twin-
towers had more than 1,100 signatures in 2015 (Gold Coast Sun 2015, p. 5). A protest
meeting at Main Beach in 2016 against development on The Spit was attended by more
than 300 people (McElroy 2016, p. 2). The Save Our Spit Facebook page had 12,400
likes in 2016 (‘Save Our Spit’) and the Save Our Broadwater Facebook page had 5,500
likes (‘Save Our Broadwater’). All the mayoral candidates who opposed Tom Tate in
the 2016 Gold Coast City Council election campaigned for strict development controls, including a three-storey height limit and no cruise ship terminal on The Spit. Nevertheless, Tate has twice been elected mayor with the cruise ship terminal his signature campaign promise.

**Spatial challenges in emergent cities**

The emergence of the Gold Coast as a secondary city with growth related challenges is not an isolated phenomenon. Similar patterns of urban emergence can be traced globally. Since the 1980s, dozens of newer, medium sized cities have grown faster than larger, established cities, partly due to trade globalization disrupting traditional growth patterns (Markusen and DiGiovanna 1999, p. 3). These second tier cities are widely spread, in developing and developed countries, and variously defined (Storey 2014). They are described as ‘spatially distinct areas of economic activity where a specialized set of trade-oriented industries takes root and flourishes, establishing employment and population-growth trajectories that are the envy of many other places’ (Markusen and DiGiovanna 1999, p. 3). Or they can be regional cities with economies ‘sufficiently important to affect the economic performance of the national economy’ (Parkinson et al 2012, p. 8). They ‘vary enormously’, are not ‘second class’ and not necessarily the second largest city in a country (Parkinson et al. 2012, p. 8). Applying the criteria of Markusen and DiGiovanna, the Gold Coast is spatially distinct, in physical and social terms, as Australia’s longest established tourist city with a beach-focused culture, near to but not a satellite of the Queensland state capital, Brisbane. The Gold Coast has a specialized set of trade-oriented industries, in which trade is predominantly but not exclusively international, interstate and intrastate tourism, with residential and visitor growth rates among the highest in Australia and a growing economy transitioning away
from a reliance on boom and bust cycles in tourism and construction. Second tier cities can exhibit one or more of four specific types of economic structure (Markusen and DiGiovanna 1999, pp. 21-41). All four types acknowledge the roles of the state, multinational corporations and local economic actors, with relationships outside the region and ‘spatial implications’ related to global integration and digital technology (Markusen and DiGiovanna 1999, pp. 5-6, 8). On the Gold Coast, the Queensland state government and the Gold Coast City Council have key roles in regulating and encouraging development, for better or worse, internationally active property development companies and theme park operators are prominent, and local politicians and real estate agents liaise with investors and tourists across the world. The Gold Coast can be considered as a blend of two of the four economic structural types for second tier cities: a Marshallian industrial district, partly dominated by small locally-owned firms with flexible labour markets and substantial intra-district trade, and a hub-and-spoke district, partly dominated by a few large, vertically integrated firms and their suppliers, with links overseas (Markusen and DiGiovanna 1999, pp. 22-23).

Contested space in emergent cities, as it relates to residents and property development, can apply to disputes over planned development or ownership of greenfield sites or disputes over planned redevelopment or ownership of brownfield sites. In each case, there may be debate over whether or not a site should be developed or redeveloped, or acquired, and the extent of public and private control. Debate can be about who benefits from or is disadvantaged by standards of living tied to a particular site, who gets access to particular sites, who gets to financially exploit sites, and whether a site ought to be preserved or protected.

Miami, Florida, is an emergent, second tier city with strong trade and financial links to Latin America confronted by growth related issues not unlike the Gold Coast (Mayere
et al 2010; Nijman 1997). The Gold Coast and Miami share historical antecedents tied up with the property development industry and residential canal estates, retirement and tourism, residential and holiday accommodation along high-rise dominated beachfronts and warm climates. Both cities have reached significant watershed moments with challenges linked to identity and globalization. Miami’s challenge is common to many emergent cities, i.e., ensuring particular marginalized social groups, in this case poorer Latinos and poorer African-Americans, can better share the benefits of economic growth (Nijman 1997, p. 172). The Gold Coast’s challenge is to determine how and precisely where economic growth should proceed and to what extent residents and others opposed to the pro-growth dominant ideology are accommodated. A prescient comparison for the Gold Coast is Barcelona. Although its population is not increasing, Barcelona like the Gold Coast is experiencing spatially distinct tourism growth challenged by residents (Russo and Scarnato 2016). In Barcelona, overcrowding, accommodation shortages and rising living costs led to a pushback, in the wake of boosterism and global mobilities, against the negative impacts of international tourism culminating in the successful Barcelona en Comu political campaign at the 2015 municipal elections (Russo and Scarnato 2016). The Barcelona en Comu representatives aim to mitigate the impacts of tourism on local living conditions. However, Barcelona’s challenges are confined to increasing numbers of tourists drawn to long-established attractions like Gaudi’s Sagrada Familia, wheras on the Gold Coast the spatial challenge may be characterised by the proposed development of entirely new attractions like the cruise ship terminal and integrated resort with a casino sought for The Spit. Political instability due to the push for a separate Catalanian state is Barcelona’s most pressing social issue, while the lack of built infrastructure to support population growth across the Gold Coast complicates the land use dispute at The Spit.
Dedekorkut-Howes and Bosman’s analysis (Dedekorkut-Howes and Bosman 2015) of the Gold Coast as an emergent city suggests spatial practices, meanings and values on the Gold Coast are increasingly diverse. Dedekorkut-Howes and Bosman show the Gold Coast economy is no longer simply dependent on tourism, construction and retirees. They note that tourism-based economies have relatively low incomes with high unemployment and while Gold Coast median incomes are below national and state averages, Gold Coast unemployment fluctuates above and below the national average (Dedekorkut-Howes and Bosman 2015, pp. 82-83). Dedekorkut-Howes and Bosman show the Gold Coast’s age profile ‘largely mirrors the Australian average’ (Dedekorkut-Howes and Bosman 2015, p. 81), debunking a late twentieth century popular myth of the Gold Coast as God’s waiting room for elderly retirees. Dedekorkut-Howes and Bosman conclude the Gold Coast has passed the tourism urbanisation stage defined by Mullins (Mullins 1992) and is evolving into a ‘diverse city in its own right’ (Dedekorkut-Howes and Bosman 2015, p. 83). However, they do not consider the consequences of unchecked, chaotic growth or following the Las Vegas growth model, extending the existing built landscape, as contemplated by Brillembourg and Klumpner (Brillembourg and Klumpner 2014). Nevertheless, the Gold Coast City Council economic development strategy for the ten years from 2013 confirms the economic tide has turned. An ‘over reliance on the property, tourism and retail sectors . . . left the city vulnerable to boom and bust cycles’ (Gold Coast City 2013, p. 28). The manufacturing, construction and hospitality sectors are decreasing as a proportion of the Gold Coast economy while the health, education and professional services sectors are increasing (Gold Coast City 2013, p. 28). Thus, property developers and their supporters seeking to exploit The Spit are not the only solution for local economic prosperity.

Brillembourg and Klumpner (Brillembourg and Klumpner 2014) suggest the influential critique of Las Vegas architecture by Venturi, Scott Brown and Izenour (Venturi, Scott
Brown and Izenour 1977), arguing for urban growth to enhance the existing vernacular built environment, does not enhance quality of life in fast growing Asian cities where growth is relatively unchecked. Nevertheless, the march of vernacular high-rise accommodation along the Gold Coast since the 1970s is at the heart of the contested space debate at The Spit. Venturi, Scott Brown and Izenour raise important issues related to contested space and which remain relevant for the Gold Coast. Like Las Vegas, the Gold Coast evolved as a highway strip community with landmark motels constructed from the mid-1950s to the late 1970s. As well, Gold Coast Mayor Tom Tate has been a regular visitor to Las Vegas and has expressed a desire for the Gold Coast to emulate the Las Vegas casino culture, arguing that he would like to see five casinos on the Gold Coast (Dorset 2012). ASF Consortium’s $3 billion, five-tower, integrated resort proposal for The Spit had as its centrepiece a casino, which would have been the Gold Coast’s second casino. The operator of The Star casino at Broadbeach near Surfers Paradise, Star Entertainment, purchased the Sheraton Grand Mirage resort on The Spit in February 2017, although Star has indicated it does not intend to establish a casino on the Sheraton site, rather use it as resort accommodation for high roller patrons.

Venturi, Scott Brown and Izenour are interested in architectural symbolism, particularly how the ‘commercial vernacular’ architecture of Las Vegas, typified by motels with cheerful signage, functions for the masses (Venturi, Scott Brown and Izenour 1977, pp. xv, 6). They believe too many architects and developers design and build self-reflective monuments when they ought to be considering ‘critical social issues’, sympathetic to current needs, learning from popular culture (Venturi, Scott Brown and Izenour 1977, p. 161), so as to create spatial relationships with people. Architecture should be ‘symbol in space rather than form in space’ (Venturi, Scott Brown and Izenour 1977, p. 161), signifier rather than signified, serving its users rather than its creators. The analysis by Venturi, Scott Brown and Izenour helps explain the
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Gold Coast property developer class, whose business model is predominantly the sale of luxury high-rise apartments to wealthy investors and retirees, maximising profit per square metre of ground. This implies that the Gold Coast identity crisis is partly about a reassessment of Australian egalitarianism, and what the Gold Coast used to stand for, which holds that everyone should be able to afford a relaxing holiday at the beach on more or less equal terms. The commensurate sense of loss is not unique to the Gold Coast. It is another symptom of globalization, evident also in the Sydney and Melbourne housing markets, where property prices are beyond the reach of many young families. Venturi, Scott Brown and Izenour want a reinvigoration of space, complemented not dominated by buildings which reflect popular culture and the existing landscape, with accommodation that is people oriented, not developer oriented. In contested spaces like The Spit, resistance groups Save Our Spit and Save Our Broadwater are seeking socially responsible development that respects the environment, referring people to the beach, rather than sequestering them above the beach.

**Locality in the mythscape**

If The Spit is a nowhere place ripe for exploitation, as the pro development group assert, it is also somewhere, a place to relax, to commune with nature away from the mundane grind of daily life. And so The Spit is both a place sought for construction and a place to escape construction, as well as a place of narrative construction, where residents and others impose conflicting narratives of space and place. In this contested realm, understanding and imagining notions of the local is complexly relevant. Bennett explains the local as effectively referring to:

   a space which is crossed by a variety of different collective sensibilities each of which imposes a different set of expectations and cultural needs upon that space.
In doing so, such sensibilities also construct the local in particular ways, a process which ensures that terms such as locality and local identity are always, in part at least, subjective elements which begin by utilising the same basic knowledges about the local, its social and spatial organisation, but supplement such knowledges with their own collectively held values to create particular narratives of locality (Bennett 2000, p. 66).

The Spit can be further understood as a localised mythscape, described by Bennett as incorporating ‘new ways of thinking about and imagining places’ in which ‘space is mythologized’ via ‘subjective discourses’ (Bennett 2002, pp. 89, 98), whereby ‘individuals routinely conceptualize places and the cultural practices connected with those places, using mythscapes as a primary form of reference’ (Bennett 2002, p. 95). Moreover, mythscapes recall the function of myth as an explaining narrative for beliefs, attitudes and behaviours. Jones (1986) illuminates the Gold Coast mythscape by exploring the Gold Coast foundation myths of mass tourism and entrepreneurism aligned to globalisation and property development and to place, aiding understanding of the evolution of the Gold Coast pro-development ideology and therefore assisting new ways of thinking about The Spit as contested space.

Jones (1986) focuses on the Gold Coast high-rise property bubble of the late 1970s/early 1980s. During that time, the Gold Coast high rise market boomed, assisted by limited town planning controls, a favourable taxation system, tax avoidance schemes, the abolition of death duties and aggressive and imaginative lending and selling strategies, allowing speculators to gamble with property assets which had become as liquid as stocks and shares (Jones 1986, pp. 33-61). Forty years ago, Jones outlined concerns about the Surfers Paradise high rise ‘concrete jungle’, traffic congestion, overcrowding, crime, the ‘destruction of the beaches’ and the ‘dollar-
worshipping ethic that places development above any other considerations’ (Jones 1986, p. 1). These concerns are echoed today by approximately half of the Gold Coast population, assuming that findings of public opinion surveys about development on The Spit reflect the views of residents generally about development on the Gold Coast. Negative mythologising of the Gold Coast gained momentum in the wake of the Gold Coast high rise market crash of 1982, when apartment sales tumbled due to unsustainable prices, oversupply and rising interest rates (Jones 1986, pp. 33-61).

Nevertheless, Jones enthuses that the Gold Coast ‘combines California’s free life for young people, Miami’s aged population, Venice’s houses built within a canal system and . . . Monaco or Las Vegas, because of the casino’ (Jones 1986, p. 1). By embracing these elsewhere identities, the Gold Coast place myth in this context perpetuates stereotyping by implying superficiality and a lack of authenticity.

Locality, as contested space or otherwise, relates to the broader spatial concept of marginal places considered by Shields, in which ‘places are ranked relative to each other’, in particular those places ‘“left behind” in the race for progress, [in] out of the way’ geographic locations (Shields 1992, p. 3). The Gold Coast in this sense is left behind because it persists with high density, high-rise accommodation no longer as popular as it was in the 1960s and 1970s, partly because Australian and international tourists are seeking more experiential holidays. Marginal status may refer specifically to a ‘site of illicit or disdained social activities’ (Shields 1992, p. 3). At The Spit, marginality has derived partly from the loitering of homosexuals and illegal squatting in camper vans and tents. The Spit as a marginal place is also the ‘Other pole to a great cultural centre’ (Shields 1992, p. 3), in this case Surfers Paradise, where intense and extreme social behaviour occurs, well known nostalgically and in the present by many Australians as a holiday party place, although southern states’ observers often note that
the Gold Coast is not at all a place of culture in the elite, essentialist understanding, like Melbourne or Sydney.

Shields’s case study of the cultural/spatial relationships between the north and south of Canada is a relevant comparison for the Gold Coast in the Australian context, where north/south dichotomies are prevalent, influencing notions of the local as a place ranked relative to another. Shields argues the ‘True North Strong and Free’ myth of the Canadian north has been appropriated as a ‘symbol of Canadian nationalistic discourse’ (1992, p.162) in which southerners see the north as a ‘counter balance’ of nature to culture and as Canada’s ‘mythic heartland’ (1992, p. 163), valuing nature as good and pure even if northern Canadians are often characterised unfavourably. Australians persevere with a nationalistic discourse in which the ‘deep north’ (Wells 1979), deriving from negative connotations of the American deep south, is a spatial counter balance to the cultural south, and where nature in the deep north is not necessarily good and pure but often seen as uncivilised. Indeed, Queensland was represented during World War 2 as separated from the rest of Australia by the Brisbane Line, signifying that part of the country north of the line was expendable, not to be defended, in the event of an enemy invasion by the Japanese. Although the Brisbane Line differentiation is based on military considerations, and the existence of such a strategy asserted during a 1942 election campaign was always denied (Hasluck 1970, pp. 711-717), it remains a well known cultural expression. Furthermore, the Gold Coast is a distinct zone within the ‘oppositional spatialisation’ (Shields 1992, p. 163) of the Australian deep north signifying to some southern writers an exaggerated lack of culture (see Shanahan 2004), where culture refers not to ways of living but a kind of allegiance to institutional valorisations of elite civilisation. The Australian myth of the deep north is part of the larger myth of the outback, which refers to among other things isolation, self-reliance, resilience, mateship, drought, floods and other natural threats. The hot desert of the
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Australian outback myth can be considered an oppositional spatialisation to the Canadian true north myth incorporating a cold, desert-like cosmos on the edge of and incorporating the Arctic. A north-south dichotomy can also be applied within the Gold Coast to recognise The Spit, a mostly undeveloped place, spatially opposite Surfers Paradise, an overdeveloped place.

Like Australia’s deep north and the Gold Coast in particular, Canada’s true north is subject to a ‘plethora of stereotypes’ perpetuated by southern commentators and writers, providing ‘readily understood metaphors, jokes, images and allegorical narratives’ involving ‘trivialisation’ and ‘cliché’ such as ‘beer drinking bumpkins’ (Shields 1992, pp. 171-172). This stereotyping influences notions of the local in which ‘secondary images and narratives’ (Shields 1992, p. 167) have ‘entered the realm of the commonplace and the banal as a set of slogans’ (Shields 1992, p. 172). However, Shields questions the extent to which the Canadian novelist Margaret Atwood and others speak for ‘average’ Canadians, or to them, when mythologising the north (Shields 1992, p. 167). Similar understandings and questions apply for the Gold Coast as stereotyped by Disher, Fitzsimmons and Pickering discussed above.

Bosman (2016) effectively identifies the place images and discrete meanings of the Gold Coast understood by local residents and by tourists as existing in separate realms. Bosman cites Cartier and Lew (Cartier and Lew 2005) in arguing that the segregation of resident and tourist landscapes on the Gold Coast has ‘significant effects on residents’ experience of home and place’ and failure to take into account ‘local everyday significance and values’ can result in ‘alienation’ of residents from each other and from their own places (Bosman 2016, pp. 75-76). This helps to explain why many Gold Coast residents are angry about proposals to exploit The Spit, because the pro-development ideology has ignored a place of local everyday significance where generations of
families have gone to relax with nature. According to Bosman, ‘the result is a “risky” place that holds little meaning for local people and . . . can consequently fail to capture and hold the interest of tourists’ (2016, pp. 75-76). Such a fate may await The Spit, although it is less convincing to say that a place alienated from locals may also be of little interest to tourists. Bosman asserts that ‘values and meanings maintained by local people are pivotal in ensuring viable places . . . are economically, socially and ecologically sustainable (2016, p. 76). She notes that ‘planners, urban designers and developers . . . often overlook everyday attachments to place and perceive place meaning in accordance with pre-conceived notions and pre-determined outcomes’ (2016, p. 77). This is the pro-development ideology attitude, that The Spit should only be a place of profitable exploitation.

The Gold Coast may be unique in Australia but its local qualities are derivative. Mayere et al. explain how Gold Coast developers created residential canal estates at the commencement of the Gold Coast property boom in the 1960s using land reclamation techniques first implemented at Fort Lauderdale (Mayere et al 2010, p. 5). As well, following behaviours in South Florida, entrepreneurial investors and developers on the Gold Coast ‘infiltrated the political structures to which they were accountable. State politicians and . . . [local government] councillors were, at the same time, land owners and developers. The boundaries between the roles became blurry and conflicts of interest were not questioned’ (Mayere et al. 2010, p. 6). A similar situation characterises the Gold Coast today. Gold Coast developers used American names for their initial real estate projects, such as Miami Keys and Florida Gardens, and adopted American booster strategies used to sell Florida land to promote Gold Coast property investment, including large colour advertisements in interstate newspapers and free flights for prospective interstate buyers (Mayere et al. 2010, p. 8).
South Florida and the Gold Coast share beach-focused lifestyles, but not the surfing tribe prominent among the Gold Coast’s competing identities. Although the Los Angeles economy is not sustained by tourism and the city is not readily identified by coastal high-rise, Los Angeles and the Gold Coast have significant cultural similarities, especially including the prominence of surfing. Almost fifty years ago, Banham recognised surfing as a defining element of Los Angeles’ collective identity, describing Los Angeles’ beachside suburbs as surfurbia (1971). Banham declares the ‘surfboard is the prime symbolic and functional artefact’ of Los Angeles’ beaches (1971, p. 49), as it has been and still is on the Gold Coast where the pro-development ideology appropriates surfing imagery in property and tourism marketing. Banham notes that Los Angeles, like the Gold Coast, ‘is not a seaside city in the classical mould. It was not entered or conquered from the sea . . . Angelenos and others hurried down to the beach for health and recreation, then decided to stay’ (1971, p. 38). A spatial mobility of the southern Gold Coast surfurbia is evident in the early mornings whenever a small easterly swell hits the Palm Beach sandbanks, drawing surfers across the Gold Coast Highway, running and weaving with their boards among the traffic, one group heading to work, the other to surf. Banham argues that ‘the beaches are what other metropolises should envy in Los Angeles, more than any other aspect of the city’ (1971, p. 37). This also applies to the Gold Coast, where the beach rates as the most popular attraction in tourist surveys. Hawaiian surfing pioneer George Freeth introduced surfing to the American mainland at Redondo Beach, Los Angeles, in 1907, in a demonstration to promote the Pacific Electric Railroad (Banham 1971, p. 49). Competitive surfing pioneer, Gold Coaster Peter Drouyn, devised the so-called man-on-man judging format for professional surfing contests, introduced at Burleigh Heads on the Gold Coast in 1977 (Warshaw 2004, p. 166). The World Surf League governing body for professional surfing is based in Santa Monica, Los Angeles County, and was previously based on the
Gold Coast. A corporate restructuring of the professional surfing world tour precipitated the move to California.

As well, Los Angeles and the Gold Coast were both built on real estate booms and speculation sustained by pro-development ideologies. Davis explains how Los Angeles became America’s ‘most permanent boomtown’ (1990, p. 104) due to ‘the anarchy of [property] market forces’ (1990, p. 23) without an industrial base. Despite an enduring slow growth [anti-development] sub-culture, Los Angeles is ‘above all the creature of real estate capitalism’ (Davis 1990, p. 35), much like the Gold Coast. Davis also explains how Japanese investors pulled out of Tokyo’s expensive commercial property market and invested in Los Angeles (1990, p. 136), just as they did on the Gold Coast (Hajdu 2005). Whereas Los Angeles ‘ate the desert’ as it spread out (Davis 1990, p. 12), Surfers Paradise, the Gold Coast’s emblematic town, ate the sand as it grew upwards and along the coast, a reminder that The Spit is indeed a rare natural asset. Los Angeles exists on the edge of a desert where there is hardly any water. The Gold Coast exists beside a lush hinterland with an abundance of water fed by a river and creeks from a caldera mountain range. Los Angeles needed the piped delivery of potable water before it could spread and prosper. The Gold Coast needed the channelling of salty water from coastal swamps to create residential canal estates.

Davis declares Los Angeles is a place ‘American intellectuals love to hate . . . the ultimate city of capital, lustrous and superficial, negating every classical value of European urbanity’ (1990, p. 21). According to Davis, a conventional elitist wisdom asserts that ‘to move to Lotusland [Los Angeles] is to sever connection with national reality, to lose historical and experiential footing, to surrender critical distance, and to submerge oneself in spectacle and fraud’ (1990, p. 18). This reflects north-south
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dichotomies and southern commentators’ stereotyping of the Gold Coast. Yet Davis also notes Los Angeles was a refuge for European intellectuals including Brecht, Adorno and Einstein, is home to Hollywood, by many measures the world’s largest, most pervasive culture industry, spawned the influential noir crime writing genre and is a centre for the aerospace and aviation industries. The Gold Coast’s cultural life is far less significant and rarely acknowledged outside Queensland but nonetheless also substantial. The Gold Coast has a film production industry worth more than $100 million a year, three university campuses, a regional art gallery and concert hall, a convention and exhibition centre, regular visits by the Bell Shakespeare Company and other leading global and national performers, film, blues and jazz music festivals, an outdoor performing arts festival, a sculpture festival, independent live music venues attracting international acts, a burgeoning hipster cafe scene, national rugby league and Australian rules football teams, a surfing museum and a World Surf League annual pro-surfing contest. The Gold Coast City Council is driving an ambitious redevelopment of the civic centre precinct directly behind Surfers Paradise, with a new cultural centre. For Davis, Los Angeles is the mysterious Great Gatsby of American cities (1990, p. 105) where the ‘paramount axis of cultural conflict . . . has always been about the construction/interpretation of the city myth’ (1990, p. 23). The Gold Coast is also an axis of cultural conflict where southern commentary, the boom and bust cycles of property development, nostalgic holiday memories, a party-focused youth culture, the beach-focused lifestyle emblematic of the Australian collective identity and larger-than-life neoliberal politicians and business identities all jostle in the mythscape.

Social spatialization and power geometries

My doctoral project explores via narrative journalism how the cruise ship terminal proposed for The Spit became a catalyst for the contestation of socially constructed
space, seeking a comprehensive understanding of the inter-relationships of the Gold Coast’s discrete social groupings. In this context, Shields’s social spatialization theory enables consideration of The Spit as a physical place in relation to the competing ideas about its status and identity. According to Shields, social spacialization is an ‘all pervasive logic’ in which ‘places, views and scenes are linked to feelings, ideas and political and cultural ideologies’ (1992, p. 26). In the social spacialization cosmos, the cultural meanings of places are ‘dependant on (their) relation to an entire system of meanings rather than . . . their own essence’ (Shields 1992, p. 22). For example, at The Spit, the sand pumping jetty is a symbol of economic function, as a shifter of sand to keep the river mouth clear, which is a mediated extension of The Spit’s ancient meaning as a place of naturally shifting sand. The sand pumping jetty is also a symbol of ignorance, acceptance or defiance of that same economic function, when used as a platform boardwalk by fishers, surfers and sightseers.

Social spacialization is therefore a heuristic aid, a kind of ‘rubric under which . . . separated objects of investigation (are) brought together to demonstrate their interconnectedness and coordinated nature . . . (so that) anomalies and paradoxes . . . can be made intelligible’ (Shields 1992, p. 31) and ‘contradictions and schisms’ accommodated (Shields 1992, p. 63). This strategy accepts an optimum solution to the Gold Coast identity crisis, or a realignment of the Gold Coast’s competing identities in disequilibrium, may or may not be possible. It also acknowledges how the Gold Coast’s pro-development ideology can argue high-rise is good for the economy because it attracts investment and tourists, regardless of the benefits of a more diversified economy beyond construction and tourism.

Recognising that perceptions of The Spit are just as real as its material existence, we can deduce that the visible and the invisible have equal status. Shields refers to Lefebvre
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(Shields 1992 pp. 50-58) in explaining this ideation. Lefebvre sees space as combining private property or other systems of territorialisation with the built environment and human interaction. The dialectical conjoining of these three fronts is a ‘rhetorical device which regroups fields of thought and action artificially separated at the Enlightenment origins of contemporary thought . . . It is only the habit of unexamined prejudices which makes the Westerner mistake land and spatiality as separate topics for analysis’ (Shields 1992, pp. 51-52). Applying the lens of social spacialization adds another layer of meaning to the Gold Coast’s competing identities by not accepting any inherent or class superiority for the pro-development ideology but instead giving equal status to all identity groups and competing factions whose only difference is their ways of seeing

The Spit, none elevated above the other. In Lefebvreian terms, The Spit is a site of spatial practice, with demarcated locales for tourists and residents, for example, Sea World, Doug Jennings Park, Federation Walk, the resort hotels, the ocean beach and the Broadwater. It is also a representation of space, via the Gold Coast City Council and state government land use instruments setting out what property development and other activities are permitted, including the three storey height limit, and it is a space of representation, with functionality delineated and argued by how it is understood, either as a wasteland ripe for exploitation by a cruise ship terminal and high rise towers or a natural asset to be preserved or perhaps something else partially or even entirely (see Shields 1992, pp. 54-58).

Shields refers to ‘place images’ as ‘discrete meanings’ which can be exaggerated, understated, accurate or inaccurate, resulting from stereotyping or prejudice, comprised of core images, widely disseminated and commonly held, and ephemeral and transitory peripheral images. Place images create an identity distinct from physical appearance. They collectively form a place myth mediated within the heuristic rubric over time as some images lose their connotative power while others are invented (Shields 1992, pp.
60-61). The pro-development group chooses its preferred place images and propagandises them in hegemonic discourse (Shields 1992, p. 62), principally via the *Gold Coast Bulletin* newspaper, suggesting that development will “save” The Spit and rescue its reputation. In this sense, the Spit was once a place to be sand-mined but is now desired to be built upon, stereotyped and prejudiced as an underutilised wasted place where campers avoiding site fees and the homeless loiter.

Discussing reconfigurations of public space, Shields (2017) has referred to Lyotard’s adaptation of the Roman mancipes (Lyotard 1993, pp. 148-149) in positing that emancipation ought not necessarily refer only to political freedoms or personal rights. Shields has suggested that understanding of the mancipes, i.e. one who possesses or appropriates control in the public realm via bidding for or acquiring by some other means ownership or leasehold of property or people, can be applied to the notion of emancipation from control of public places by civic authorities or their agents, so that the mancipium gesture of taking hold is undone or subverted. In this sense, Mayor Tate’s bid to exert control over The Spit in order to facilitate its private development, and to use public funds to advance his proposed cruise ship terminal plan, is a mancipium gesture. In the same way, local resistance to private development of The Spit by Save Our Spit, Save Our Broadwater and the Main Beach Association can be understood as actively seeking emancipation from civic authorities intervening to control public space.

In the broad context of Lefebvre’s formulations of the social construction of space (1976, 1991), from which the idea of social spatialization is at least partly derived, Harvey’s argument that capitalism annihilates space to ensure its reproduction (2009) also relates to The Spit. Places like The Spit are targeted for private development to satisfy capitalism’s ‘perpetual need to find profitable terrains’ (Harvey 2008, p. 24).
This need is prosecuted via a ‘process of displacement and . . . accumulation by dispossession’ (2008, p. 34). Harvey’s perspective envisions The Spit as one of those ‘porous spaces of uneven geographical development under the hegemonic command of capital and the state’ (2008, p. 36). The Spit development proposals fit within Harvey’s view of the ‘neoliberal project’ oriented to privatizing state control of urban deployment to benefit the desires of a ‘small political and economic elite’ (2008, pp. 37-38).

Harvey’s extension (2008) of Lefebvre’s right to the city concept provides a philosophical basis for social movements of which the groups resisting development at The Spit are a subset, as well as an echo of the social reaction to the ‘invading “high-rise giants” [that] helped animate the larger dynamics’ of the 1968 uprising in Paris (Harvey 2008, p. 28). Soja, exploring spatial justice (2010), also examines Lefebvre’s right to the city concept, noting subordination to the primacy of property rights created a ‘perpetual tension between private and public ownership and between private and public space’ (2010, p. 45). A starting point for seeking spatial justice therefore involves the ‘vigilant defence of public space against the forces of commodification, privatization and state interference’ (2010, p. 45). Soja notes that beaches are public space ‘zones of contention . . . and focal points for social action aimed at ensuring residents’ rights’ (2010, p. 46). Arguing for a theory of spatial justice, Soja asserts human spatiality is socially produced, socially produced geographies can be transformed through human agency, the right to the city involves the right to inhabit space and that spatial justice is more likely to be achieved via diverse coalitions of spatial movements (2010, pp. 103-109). Spatial justice is pursued at The Spit by separate groupings of surfers, self-funded retirees, recreational sailors, dog walkers and picnickers, among others, forming a loose coalition in defence of public space.

Complementing and enhancing the social spatialization framework, Massey’s idea of power geometries allows a spatial understanding of social relations in a particular place
(Massey in Bird et al, 1993). Power geometries illuminate the theoretical lens for considering the contested relationships among key individuals and institutions of the pro-development and anti-development groups and the broader resident and visitor communities on the Gold Coast and The Spit. Massey extends Harvey’s idea of time-space compression, in which understanding of a place requires acknowledgment of globalisation and ‘movement and communication across space’ (Massey 1993, p. 59), to include the ‘geographical stretching-out of social relations’ (Massey 1993, p. 59) and how power waxes and wanes and is complexly manipulated among social groups. The Spit is a prime site for consideration of time-space compression because of its international connections. Tourists visiting Sea World and the resort hotels travel across the world, contributing to The Spit’s multiple identities, separate from those mostly local residents and visitors from nearby Brisbane and Logan City who otherwise mostly use the Spit’s public open space. Clearly, these overseas visitors are examples of how spatial and global mobility relates to understanding of a specific place. Massey notes that time-space compression analysis ‘often remains without much social content, or with only a very restricted, one-sided social content’, usually characterised by a Western colonizer view (Massey 1993, p. 59). In The Spit’s case, such a view can refer to the pro-development ideology and how it relates to tourism, at the expense of any attempt to empathise with or accept the deeper history and heritage of The Spit.

According to Massey, our experience of space and society in terms of social relations and the exercise of power is determined not only by capital but also by gender and ethnicity among other factors. At The Spit, social relations are partly determined by physical boundaries controlling free access to public open space zones, paid access to the Sea World theme park and accommodation at the resort hotels. These spatial practices are more than a one-sided capitalistic power play because the pro-development ideology historically has had no or little control over social relations within those
majority parts of The Spit reserved for free public use and moves towards an effective extension of privatisation of public space are being resisted. The power geometries of The Spit do not necessarily involve the direct influence of capital. At The Spit, an experience of space and society also refers to nature and to the recreators and conservators who enjoy the fruits of capitalism and participate in capitalistic processes but seek to escape from the negative influences of capitalism, such as encroachment on valued public space by property development. Moreover, while the pro-development side brandishes its economic power, the resistance responds with an anti-hegemonic stance based on power drawn from popular support, so the power geometries may be loaded both ways, that is, the exercise of power among social groups does not necessarily refer to economic power and does not exclusively favour one group.

Massey nevertheless recognises that a ‘politics of mobility and access’ in relation to place both reflects and reinforces power (Massey 1993, p. 62). On the Gold Coast, political power leveraged by the Queensland state government and the Gold Coast City Council to favour developers, and the reciprocal exchange of power from developers back to elected representatives, has historically sustained the pro-development ideology. If the pro-development group gains control of the public reserve, parkland or vacant or so-called underutilised leasehold land on The Spit, mobility and access will be restricted, social relations changed, natural places modified and The Spit’s natural identity altered or undermined. Massey argues for the need to understand ‘place-based political struggles’ and notes that ‘competitive localisms’ can create a ‘problematical sense of place’ (1993, p. 64). At The Spit, competing identities are manifested as competitive localisms and played out as political struggles.

The power geometries notion allows for place and space to be ‘imagined in a more socially formed, socially evaluative’ way, involving a ‘highly complex social
differentiation’ between the ‘degree of movement and communication (and) the dimensions of control’, which can be ‘highly complicated and extremely varied’ (Massey 1993, p. 62). This enables another substantial and nuanced perspective of The Spit, not as one or more of wasteland, resort, theme park, recreation place and development site, but a place/pace of social relations. Like Massey’s Kilburn High Road example, The Spit is ‘not a seamless coherent identity, a single sense of place which everyone shares’ (Massey 1993, p. 65). Massey is also unambiguous in linking human identity with place identity. ‘If it is now recognised that people have multiple identities, then the same point can be made in relation to places . . . such multiple identities can be either, or both, a source of richness or a source of conflict’ (1993, p. 65). ‘Clearly places do not have single unique “identities”; they are full of internal differences’ (1993, p. 67). The power geometries perspective provides theoretical acknowledgment assisting understanding of the Gold Coast’s competing identities.

For Massey, therefore, place is ‘constructed out of a particular constellation of relations, articulated together at a particular locus’ (1993, p. 66). In this way, despite globalisation, places are not homogenous but can be understood as specific, so that a ‘progressive sense of place’ explains the ‘relationship between place and space’ (Massey 1993, p. 68) and so The Spit with its numerous identities becomes a kind of conjunction. Power geometries, in which ‘social interactions . . . are not static [but] processes’ (Massey 1993, p. 66), is thus useful for elaborating spacialization in the context of The Spit, highlighting the filaments of the cultural web, encompassing Lefebvre’s triangular conceptualisation of place (see Shields 1992, pp. 54-58) and Marcia’s identity formation paradigm (Marcia 1966), linking identity theory with space and place theory.
Massey also interrogates philosophical and political notions of spatiality (2005), which provide further insights and implications for the Gold Coast and The Spit. Like Lefebvre, she offers three key propositions about space. It is the ‘product of interrelations’, from global to local; it allows for ‘contemporaneous multiplicity’ in which ‘distinct trajectories coexist’, and; it is always under construction (2005, p. 9).

The Spit can be seen to refer directly to these three propositions. It is about relations between ideologies, those ideologies are coexisting problematically and its identity/identities is/are an ongoing construct.

By questioning the centrality of representation in spatial discourse, in which The Spit is seen more simply as a kind of playspace for both the pro- and anti-development factions, Massey shows how spatial understanding recognises places like The Spit as processes of exchange, and of change, around issues of power but not subservient to power. As such, in order to come to grips with the Gold Coast’s competing identities, we ought to consider ‘practices of engagement’ which appreciate the shortcomings of a ‘hegemonic imagination of globalisation’ (Massey 2005, p. 100).

Massey reveals how globalisation aims to turn space into time, with countries all on the same, single linear path, some further advanced than others, and those not so advanced set to develop more or less like the rest. Massey argues differently, that space allows for a ‘multiplicity of trajectories’ (Massey 2005, p. 5) and this is the way the world really is, not versions of the same, certainly also not ‘dead’ or ‘fixed’ in Foucauldian terms (2005, p. 49). The Spit’s competing identities can be seen as local evidence that globalisation’s rhetoric is flawed because not everyone accepts the notion of compulsory progress as defined by the pro-development ideology. The anti-development group would not accept The Spit is a ‘closed system’ where the future can only ever be about the maintenance of progress (Massey 2005, p. 11). Massey wants less
discussion of the ‘local as the product of the global’ and more of the ‘local construction of the global’, so that local places and spaces have their own agency and are not victims of globalisation (Massey 2005, p. 101). This is happening at The Spit, although it is a dynamic process. In other words, recalling also Shields’s ideas of marginal places and north-south dichotomies, the global shapes the local while the local shapes the global. Arabic and Asian tourists visit Sea World, owned by an Australian media company, photograph performing dolphins on Korean-made mobile phones, sleep at the Palazzo Versace resort hotel, named for an Italian fashion designer, built by an Iranian-Australian property developer and owned by a Chinese consortium, where they dine on Tasmanian salmon in restaurants staffed by South Americans and Indians, opposite tracts of undeveloped sand planted with trees by volunteers. These heterogeneous multiplicities exemplify spatiality as ‘constantly being produced new geometries of power, the shifting geographies of power relations’ (Massey 2005, p. 85), without reference to the pro-development ideology demand for homogenous high rise towers. While globalisation is in some ways contradictory, even hypocritical, as it demands borderless trade yet draws the line at free flows of people (Massey 2005, pp. 86-87), at The Spit its reach is particularly temporal and finite. Overseas visitors are enticed to holiday and work but only while they have money to spend and only as long as their tourist and employment visas permit.

The ‘potentially disruptive characteristics’ of spatiality (Massey 2005, p. 39), seemingly unconnected narratives, can only be fully understood together. At The Spit, conflicting ideologies are juxtaposed so that the pro-development ideology is disrupted. Furthermore, Massey implies that despite concerns about the ‘commercial privatisation of space’ (2005, p. 152), contestation effectively makes any place a public place. ‘The argument is not that these places are not public. The very fact that they are necessarily negotiated, sometimes riven with antagonism, always contoured through the playing out
of unequal social relations, is what renders them genuinely public’ (Massey 2005, p. 153). In this way, The Spit is a public place regardless of its public/private representations of space. No matter that the public/private status is being debated, the fact that the debate is occurring is evidence enough that The Spit has been claimed publicly.

Massey accepts the ‘ongoing forging of identities’ (2005, p. 191) involves integrating past and present, individuality and sociability. This awareness of identity ‘can contribute to the practised making of the identity of place . . . and the construction of a place-based politics’ (Massey 2005, p. 192). Massey concludes that space and place are intimately linked to identity formation and to political processes. All these notions are actively heightened at The Spit. Massey argues that space and time are intimately inter-related, with place the ‘distinctive character of processes’ at a particular time, so there can be ‘no assumption of pre-given coherence, or of community or collective identity. Rather, the throwntogetherness of place demands negotiation’ (2005, p. 141). This is the only way forward for The Spit. Places ‘necessitate invention’ and ‘pose a challenge’, they ‘implicate us . . . in the lives of human others, and in our relations with non-humans they ask how we shall respond to our . . . meeting up with these particular rocks and stones and trees. They require that, in one way or another, we confront the challenge of the negotiation of multiplicities. The sheer fact of having to get on together’ (Massey 2005, pp. 141-42).

Appreciating that social spatialization explains culture as systems of meanings within a heuristic rubric, Hall’s theory of ideological encoding and decoding of media messages (Hall in During ed. 2007) enables analysis of the competing identities in The Spit’s contested space as the dominant ideology, oppositional ideology and negotiated ideology. The dominant ideology refers to the pro-development group. The oppositional
and negotiated ideologies refer to anti-development groups or those residents and others who have reservations about the extent of development proposed. Hall examines how message interpretation is contingent upon ideology, linking mainstream media with the dominant ideology, yet also showing how the oppositional and negotiated ideologies retain power to decode messages on their own terms. Hall’s conceptualising of hegemonic discourses via the media is relevant to The Spit because the dominant, oppositional and negotiated ideologies are represented in the *Gold Coast Bulletin* by discrete social groupings.

The media is understood by Hall as an ideological institution, to which the dominant ideology has easy access, often privileged or exclusive (Hall 2007, p. 102). On the Gold Coast, the pro-development group has easy access to the *Gold Coast Bulletin* because the newspaper mostly accepts the pro-development ideology, i.e. development on The Spit is economically necessary, partly at least because the property development industry traditionally pays substantially for newspaper advertising. Some readers may decode *Gold Coast Bulletin* reports about The Spit in line with the dominant ideology, other readers may decode the same reports in terms of a negotiated ideology, accepting the hegemony of the dominant ideology but nevertheless insisting on their own interpretation. For example, development on The Spit ought to have height restrictions or a limited footprint, while others may decode the reports in terms of an oppositional ideology, rejecting the dominant ideology hegemony because they believe The Spit should not be further developed. Moreover, the process of encoding and decoding involves cognitive consequences in which messages may become part of social practice (Hall 2007, p. 93). *Gold Coast Bulletin* reports may encode the anti-development group as unreasonable or extreme, leading to contempt or ridicule of anti-development campaigners, while developers may be decoded not as deliverers of economic growth but greedy wreckers of the environment, leading to protest rallies.
Although Hall’s model is applied to television, it can also be applied to newspapers as both have institutional structures of production, that is, technical and professional capabilities, as well as professional news values and assumptions about audiences (Hall 2007, p. 92). They are also usually both agents of the dominant ideology, although they can challenge such dominance. Hall infers that newspapers do not have the complexity of television, as they do not possess some of the properties of the thing represented, as does television, where, for example, the dog is seen and heard but does not bite (Hall 2007, p. 95). However, newspapers can be more complex than television in the depth of their news analysis. Newspapers do present, literally, a flat, two-dimensional world and so often require exaggeration to amplify their message. The *Gold Coast Bulletin* is a typical tabloid in that its front page news treatments are flashy and sensational. Hall’s encoding / decoding concept can be considered in relation to digital news platforms, although the impact of social media on digital news production and consumption suggests more complex, added layers of interpretation (see Bodker 2016).

Analysing the local impacts of globalization, Featherstone (1993) sees the local in spatial and temporal terms. Arguing that the local retains its own identity despite assumptions that globalisation creates homogenised cultures, Featherstone refers to Connerton (1989) in noting that a ‘sense of home is sustained by collective memory, which itself depends upon ritual performances, bodily practices and commemorative ceremonies’ (Featherstone 1993, p. 177). Our sense of the local past may involve ‘participation or involved spectatorship’ at rituals such as weddings, funerals, national days, Christmas and the New Year (Featherstone 1993, p. 177). At The Spit, these rituals include fishing and surfing trips, bushwalking and dog walking, occurring regularly over time. These kinds of rituals ‘can be seen as the batteries which charge up the emotional bonds between people and renew the sense of the sacred’ (Featherstone 1993, p. 177). Featherstone argues that national, regional or local place-based
sacredness has not ‘evaporated completely’ due to globalization but rather the sacred in this sense has dissipated, operating in a ‘variety of ways amongst a wide range of groups of people’ (1993, p. 177). The Spit is a site for ritualistic recreation, providing a sense of home ‘sustained by collective memory’ (Featherstone 1993, p. 177), helping to create social capital, as well is a Holy Grail site for development sought by the pro-development group. Much of the intensity of The Spit debate, explored in my narrative journalism account, is due to the long-term use of The Spit as a recreational site as well as repeated unsuccessful attempts to develop The Spit, since at least the 1960s, thus creating deep collective memories. According to Featherstone, it is important to note that ‘our sense of the past does not primarily depend upon written sources, but rather on enacted ritual performances and the formalism of ritual language’ and so a sense of home is linked to a sense of the past (1993, p. 177). This absence of written sources is relevant for The Spit, which has little formally acknowledged written history, prior to the debate about its future, much beyond brief, dismissive wasteland critiques. However, regular visitors to The Spit over time evoke ritual performance and language, especially surfers, fishers and dog walkers, establishing The Spit as a powerful place myth.

Featherstone summarises that ‘notions of global and local cultures are relational’ and it is ‘possible to refer to a range of different responses’ to the processes of globalization (1993, p. 181). These responses can be heightened or diminished, including an ‘attitude of immersion in a local culture’, or withdrawal from global influences, ‘remaining in a long established locality . . . ignoring the efforts to be drawn into wider collectivities and [erecting] barriers to cultural flows’ (Featherstone 1993, p. 181). At The Spit, immersion can take the form of refusing to support tourism-driven development but such immersion is ‘difficult to achieve . . . without economic power’ (1993, p. 181). The Spit defenders cannot simply buy and preserve The Spit. They cannot afford it and it is
not entirely for sale. Resisting globalisation therefore creates the ‘problem of being left alone, of remaining undiscovered, or of controlling and regulating the flow of interchanges even when geographical reasons . . . facilitate isolation’ (Featherstone 1993, p. 181). The Spit is geographically separate, relatively isolated at the tip of the Gold Coast, but it is desired by a pro-development ideology with access to global finance.

Bosman and Dredge acknowledge spatiality in the construction of place meanings for The Spit, accepting that place is not just a location but produced by social processes (2011, p. 3). They provide an historical albeit problematic analysis of the evolution of The Spit debate up until 2011, focusing on the first proposals for a cruise ship terminal rejected by Queensland Premier Peter Beattie in 2007. While noting ongoing interest in The Spit as a contested site, their analysis does not consider Mayor Tom Tate’s campaign for a cruise ship terminal. Bosman and Dredge refer to Booth (2006) in linking Gold Coast tourism urbanisation to hyperneoliberalism, defining hyperneoliberalism as a ‘sustained downsizing of government in many areas of traditional involvement and an increasing reliance on private enterprise and not for profit organizations to deliver goods and services once provided by government’ (2011, p. 1). Bosman and Dredge imply that not for profit organisations have played a significant part in delivering goods and services on the Gold Coast, yet there is little evidence to support this. They make a valid point in identifying the impact of hyperneoliberalism in ‘locking out’ local people from the placemaking of tourist cities (Bosman and Dredge 2011, p. 1), but this needs qualification in the sense that local people in some cases are beneficially impacted by such placemaking, for example, via ongoing employment on Gold Coast high rise construction sites that would not have existed without hyperneoliberalism.
Bosman and Dredge argue that local and global behaviours and identities are ‘often irreconcilable but this does not mean that one is more important, nor necessarily excludes, nor has to be dominant over the other’ (2011, p. 11). This needs clarifying in the context of the Gold Coast, where the pro-development ideology does exclude some residents’ place values, particularly at The Spit where place values have been defended by a collective resistance via the Save Our Spit, Save Our Broadwater and Main Beach Association community activist groups, otherwise they remain excluded. As well, the Gold Coast pro-development ideology has never really accepted restraints on its profit-making activities, rather it meets resistance by contestation, behind the scenes influence of government agents and agencies and/or refocusing its activities on less conflicted sites and projects. Bosman and Dredge suggest that resistance at The Spit can be considered in terms of Stratford’s analysis (Stratford 2009) of ‘democratic participation in the local politics of place, contestations over ecological space, and decisions about land use’ (Bosman and Dredge 2011, p. 11). Bosman and Dredge argue that ‘local placemaking practices and local communities [can] succeed in achieving a local outcome [with a] global tourist value [accentuating] undeveloped, accessible, free, urban, beachside public open space’ (Bosman and Dredge 2011, p. 11). Subsequent events at The Spit showed such optimism was premature, although the oppositional ideology remained an effective resistance force while the future of The Spit was unresolved.

Bosman and Dredge call for a more engaged and inclusive planning process that ‘reaches across communities of interests, in mediating placemaking processes and practices in tourist cities’ (2011, p. 11). This does not acknowledge that planning processes on the Gold Coast to a large extent, although not always, remain an instrument of the pro-development ideology, for example, bureaucrats’ significant role in preparing the Gold Coast City Council application for support from the Australian
federal government’s environment department for a cruise ship terminal. Bosman and Dredge claim that The Spit debate shows how ‘minor placemaking processes’ can occur within the neoliberal realm (2011, p. 12). This seems to contradict their earlier argument that irreconcilable local and global behaviours and identities are not necessarily dominant of each other. Differentiating placemaking resistance with minor status exposes an argument which has of itself been co-opted into neoliberal discourse, whereas spatial acknowledgement of placemaking resistance does not accept inherent or class superiority for the pro-development ideology but instead gives equal status to all identity groups and competing factions whose only difference is their ways of seeing.

Bosman and Strickland’s (2014) analysis of the property development debate at The Spit adopts a social constructionist approach in order to understand how ‘place values and meanings are generated [and] interpreted . . . in development discourses’ (2014, p. 47). They argue that ‘donning the social constructionist goggles’ allows observation of the ‘built and natural landscape as a social spatial framework’ in which people from different social groups can ‘create a shared sense of place’ (2014, p. 50). This description implies a spatial perspective may in some ways be unnatural or fundamentally filtered. The main concern for Bosman and Strickland is how to achieve sensitive urban planning outcomes for The Spit, or how to foster new development to provide for urban growth without losing the heritage and character of the ‘existing urban realm’ (Bosman and Strickland 2014, p. 50). Such an outcome would not necessarily address The Spit’s central dilemma, which is precisely the opposite of a shared sense of place. ‘The challenge many planners face is to go beyond the role of mediator . . . [to] ensure . . . the balance of power between different players does not sway decision makers . . . [and to] acknowledge the interests and place values of all stakeholders in decisions to develop significant public green spaces like . . . The Spit’ (Bosman and Strickland 2014, p. 50). This challenge has been particularly difficult
given the influence of the Gold Coast’s pro-development ideology, although the
decision in 2016 by a majority of Gold Coast City councillors to refuse the Sunland
application for high-rise twin towers on The Spit, accepting recommendations from city
council planners, outlined in my narrative journalism account (see Part 2 of this thesis),
shows it is possible to uphold the interests of stakeholders via a legislated town plan.
Bosman and Strickland’s analysis does not extend beyond October 2013, so it does not
cover the 2014 protest rally against over-development on The Spit, at the Broadwater
Parklands, south of The Spit, nor does it cover the withdrawal by the Queensland state
government of the Wavebreak Island site for the ASF cruise ship terminal proposal,
Mayor Tom Tate’s subsequent offshore terminal proposal and the city council’s refusal
to endorse Sunland’s twin towers. Bosman and Strickland argue the development debate
at The Spit proceeded between 2005 and 2013 without a sense of crisis. However, a
protest rally at Doug Jennings Park in 2012 was attended by an angry crowd opposing
the cruise ship terminal. This rally was a significant moment in the power geometries of
The Spit debate, when opposition to the cruise ship terminal in the wake of Mayor
Tate’s election may well have coalesced and intensified.

Bosman and Strickland show the Save Our Spit community pressure group has been an
active opponent of over-development in the contested space of The Spit since 2006 and
that SOS’s five key reasons for opposing the cruise ship terminal in 2006 mostly remain
relevant (Bosman and Strickland 2014, p. 54). The five reasons are: a terminal would be
of only marginal economic benefit to the local community; it would result in a loss of
public open space; it raises safety concerns for the heavily trafficked waters between the
Nerang River mouth and the Broadwater, known as the Seaway; it would have a
negative impact on existing tourism operators; and negative environmental impacts
overall (Bosman and Strickland 2014, p. 54). A survey by Bosman and Strickland to
determine ‘place values, meanings and attachments’ held by ‘users of the Spit’ is useful
in confirming the ‘four primary everyday activities’ at The Spit (Bosman and Strickland 2014, p. 52). These are, according to the survey, ‘surfing, diving, fishing and dog walking’ (Bosman and Strickland 2014, p. 52). It is not clear if any of those surveyed came to The Spit only to visit Sea World or to go shopping, nor is there discussion of the proportion of residents and tourists surveyed, indicating some methodological problems with the survey and the data it presents.

Bosman and Strickland make some problematic claims about the Gold Coast, indicating their interpretation of place values at The Spit may be somewhat confused. They claim that frontier conflict between settlers and Aborigines on the Gold Coast ‘resulted in the region’s most horrific and infamous development conflict’ (2014, p. 51). This interpretation of what constitutes development is too much of a stretch. Frontier conflict was not about development. It was about dispossession and possession of undeveloped land. Conflict between whites and Aborigines in south-east Queensland while substantial, horrific and deserving of harsh condemnation, was not particularly infamous in the context of frontier conflict across Queensland and throughout Australia. Bosman and Strickland describe the Gold Coast as a ‘hyper neoliberal touristed city’ where ‘rapid growth and neoliberal agendas . . . have dominated the city’s development’ (2014, p. 48). This assertion is undermined by their claim that the ‘natural environment, more so than the built landscape . . . establishes the Gold Coast’s essential value as a place or genius loci’ (2014, p. 48). Indeed, such a contradiction by Bosman and Strickland is another way of seeing the Gold Coast identity crisis. Bosman and Strickland argue that conflict at The Spit is due to disagreement between ‘old’ and ‘new’ players (2014, pp. 51-57), in which old players are those who value The Spit’s historic public amenity and new players are development focused, wanting to ‘disrupt existing norms’ (2014, p. 56). However, debate about the future of The Spit is really about the extent of development. Developers on the Gold Coast are not interested in
disruption, they want with a minimum of fuss to maintain and extend their dominance, which has been pervasive since the first high-rise development boom on the Gold Coast in the 1960s and ’70s financed mostly by domestic investors. Subsequently, a Japanese investment boom in the 1980s and more recently Chinese investment has maintained the Gold Coast growth trajectory. The Spit as an undeveloped place is an aberration in this context, an outpost. There is nothing normal about The Spit in relation to the rest of the Gold Coast. An old versus new dichotomy implies large-scale development at The Spit is a new idea, whereas Sea World founder Keith Williams was interested in a cruise ship terminal at The Spit fifty years ago (Sorensen 2016). Nevertheless, Bosman and Strickland point out that the Queensland state government and Mayor Tate ‘exacerbated’ conflict at The Spit by ignoring long-standing practices and land uses (2014, p. 57). Bosman and Strickland call for a ‘more engaged and critical planning process that reaches across communities of interest, in mediating placemaking processes . . . [with] a structured and rigorous approach to . . . managing the tensions and differences that may exist between players’ (2014, p. 57).

Analysis of The Spit as contested space requires some consideration of concepts relating to tourism practice. Butler’s Destination Life Cycle model (Butler 1980; Hundloe & Page 2015, pp. 5-6; Saarinen, Rogerson & Hall 2017, p. 308) recognises holiday places like the Gold Coast as economically dynamic with a trajectory from emergence through growth, consolidation and plateau status, then rejuvenation or decline. The property development dispute at The Spit can be recognised as a debate about the type and extent of such rejuvenation. Russell and Faulkner interpret the historical evolution of the Gold Coast tourism industry as an example of ‘Chaos / Complexity Theory’ (1999, p. 411), whereby a ‘relatively benign regulatory environment’ attracted entrepreneurial business leaders with capacity for disruptive creativity (1999, p. 422). Globalisation of the tourism industry and tightening of
development regulations on the Gold Coast, even though development is still prioritised, led to constraints on the mover and shaker archetype (1999, pp. 422-423). Contested space at The Spit can also be understood in terms of risk invoked by the prospect of casino gambling aligned with tourism. The social and economic impacts of casinos are explored in Hannigan’s assessment (2007) of Atlantic City, like the Gold Coast an ageing tourism destination, on the American east coast. Hannigan identifies a global ‘upsurge’ in ‘themed gambling emporiums’ creating ‘casino cities’ designed to be powered by international tourism, the luxury goods and services trade and ‘corporatised’ gambling (2007, p. 959). However, Hannigan notes that gambling in casinos is more likely to be ‘convenience gambling’ by local residents with relatively low levels of education, income and employment, rather than ‘destination gambling’ by out of town tourists (2007, pp. 966-967). Hannigan explains how casino resorts are ‘mono communities’ (2007, p. 968), designed to keep gamblers gambling. This is a kind of ‘de-differentiation of consumption’ (2007, p. 963), when otherwise separate forms of consumption, like restaurant dining and boutique shopping, are available together, a recreation of the shopping mall environment constructed around gambling. Atlantic City encouraged new casino resorts in the late 1970s, trying to cauterize economic decline by recreating the luxury hotel era of the 1920s. The gamblers visiting Atlantic City stayed mostly in the casinos and the ‘promised revitalization’ (2007, p. 968) of the district economy did not eventuate. The decline of local business worsened, restaurants and other small traders outside the casinos closed and homes were abandoned (2007, p. 969). The Gold Coast is more socially and economically diverse than Atlantic City in the 1970s, but Hannigan’s analysis indicates luxury casinos may not guarantee economic benefit. Hannigan’s observation that casino development justified as a catalyst for ‘local regeneration’ via ‘short-term construction jobs . . . increased tourist
flows and larger tax revenues’ is not ‘universally popular’ with local communities (2007, p. 968) certainly applies for the Gold Coast.

The analyses of Butler, Russell and Faulkner and Hannigan may be seen as precursors to more recent research perspectives on the geopolitics and geographies of tourism. Mostafanezhad and Norum (2016) articulate the geopolitical turn in tourism studies via four complementary themes, in which geopolitics describes how the world is represented via the ‘discursive framing of space’ (2016, p. 226). The four themes are popular geopolitics, embodied geopolitics, environmental geopolitics and geopolitical imaginaries (2016, p. 226). They refer respectively to tourism destinations highlighted by popular culture, especially novels and feature films; tourism as assemblages of ‘actors and materials’ involved in socially constructed, experiential encounters; tourism practice and anthropogenic environmental change; and framing of tourism places as geopolitical imaginaries ‘e.g. safe, dangerous, exotic or mundane’ (2016, pp. 226-227). The Gold Coast can be recognised in each of these themes: it is mythologised in novels like Atomic City (Breen 2013) and movies like Gettin’ Square (2003); surfers’ value experiential relationships with particular wave breaks; proposals to build accommodation towers and other tourism infrastructure on The Spit threaten the coastal environment; and The Spit is labelled in positive or negative terms by groups with opposing views on property development. Extending discussion of the geopolitical turn relating to tourism, Gillen and Mostafanezhad (2019) examine three further dimensions of the ‘geopolitical tourism encounter’ (2019, p. 70): temporal encounters foregrounding heritage places and traditional practices; bodily encounters motivated by volunteering in humanitarian, development or conservation projects; and identity encounters related to behaviours by particular groups of tourists which may be characterised as disrespectful (2019, pp. 70-78). The Spit as contested space intersects

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with the temporal encounters dimension in the sense that surfing, fishing, bushwalking and picnicking may arguably be seen as traditional practices.

Dallen notes that geographers were among the earliest researchers to examine the ‘socio spatial manifestations of tourism’ and are ‘now assuming a broader role in understanding . . . behavioural patterns, socio-economic impacts, sense of place and place bound identities’ (2018, p. 166). Analysis of The Spit as contested space fits within such a broader role. Nevertheless, Muller argues that tourism research is too often confined to studies of the tourism industry (2018, p. 172). Muller support’s Hall’s call (2005) for tourism to be understood as the ‘social science of mobility’ and thus argues for tourism to be considered an ‘agent and outcome’ of ‘societal and environmental change’ (2018, p. 173). It is the extent of such tourism-related change proposed for The Spit that gives rise to its contestation of space. Saarinen, Rogerson and Hall (2017) distinguish development in the tourism context as requiring qualitative analysis of social and economic processes ‘such as quality of life and well being’ in which development is both a ‘concrete material process and . . . a discourse’ (2017, p. 308). They agree that ‘core-periphery / global-local relations’ within the tourism industry are ‘often characterized by inequalities and uneven power structures’ (2017, p. 310), noting the emergence of the ‘neo liberal project’ has coincided with public planning approaches ‘barely distinguishable from those of the private sector’, so that tourism sustainability remains generally elusive (2017, p. 309). The contested space of The Spit confirms such a view. Saarinen, Rogerson and Hall call for a greater focus on historical research in tourism scholarship including ‘pre-tourism issues and relations’ and ‘past and inherited geographies’ at particular sites (2017, p. 311). They note the importance of ‘political trust’ for sustainable tourism (2017, p. 312) and point to the fact that ‘enclavic tourism spaces with all-inclusive products can turn out to be highly all-exclusive for local communities with marginal benefits but potentially substantive
costs’ (2017, p. 313). Saarinen, Rogerson and Hall conclude there are ‘increasing research needs to emphasize moral and ethical aspects in tourism development . . . and how to incorporate them into planning’ (2017, p. 313). The moral and ethical aspects of tourism development proposed for The Spit is a key emphasis of my thesis.

**Identity: competition, crisis and reflexivity**

If we accept that identity means how we see ourselves and how we are seen in terms of our beliefs and the roles we play in society, that a community’s collective identity may be determined by a significant number of community members and outsiders reflecting compatible personal identities, then it is arguable that the polarised debate focused on development at The Spit is a catalyst for an identity crisis. In such a case, the crisis encompasses a conflicted community with competing identities unable to resolve an equilibrium of identities. The cruise ship terminal debate is catalytic because it has intensified the identity crisis which may or may not lead to a resolution or a partial resolution. And so contested space at the Spit is tied to issues around the Gold Coast’s competing identities, as elaborated in my narrative journalism account. However, it is important to clarify how identity crisis is not confined to the individual.

The idea of an identity crisis was proposed by Erikson to describe ‘shell shocked’ war victims (Cote and Levine 2002, p. 95). Erikson also referred to identity crisis as a period of conflicted adolescence when a previous identity is ‘no longer experienced as suitable’ and a ‘new identity is not yet established’ (Cote and Levine 2002, p. 95). Cote and Levine foreground Erikson’s work in their review of the identity literature. According to Cote and Levine, Erikson argued that identity crises are a kind of ‘identity confusion’ (2002, p. 95) and can vary in severity, prolongation and aggravation (2002, p. 95). The severity of an identity crisis depends on the ‘degree of imbalance’, a prolonged crisis is
when the disruption remains for a long period of time and aggravation occurs when repeated attempts to resolve the crisis are unsuccessful (Cote and Levine 2002, p. 95). Applying Erikson’s terminology, we can argue the Gold Coast identity crisis was aggravated by the cruise ship terminal debate, it became severe when the terminal debate triggered an ideological polarisation of the views of the pro- and anti-development groups, and it is prolonged because nagging, unresolved disagreement between the two groups has existed since the high-rise boom of the late 1970s, even if it has become extreme only in the past decade. Until the Gold Coast community has a clearer understanding of ‘who they are and should be in relation to others’ (Cote and Levine 2002, p. 176), the crisis will likely continue.

The Gold Coast’s growth pains can also be understood as part of a much broader identity paradigm enveloping late modernity, in which personal choice has replaced social obligation as the basis for self-definition, so that we are ‘continually confronted with high levels of choice over fundamental matters of personal meaning’ (Cote and Levine 2002, p. 1). Cote and Levine explain how increasing opportunities for choice coincided with the breaking down of traditional social structures and conventions since the 1960s, along with growing individualization (2002, p. 58) and tolerance of other identities. The internet and social media has spoilt us for choice, allowing the freedom to adopt varying algorithmic identities, to be virtually anyone, in terms of how we present ourselves to society. The downside of unlimited freedom of choice is uncertainty, instability and an increase in opposing identities, within and between individuals in an anomic mass culture (Cote and Levine 2002, pp. 6, 63, 127). Identity formation and maintenance are therefore increasingly problematic as identity is no longer limited or fixed. On the upside, as the ‘old cultural norms and conventions [that] served best those with power’ are dismantled, ‘new norms are being constructed that serve wider interests’ and ‘more people can engage in the collective process of social
construction’ (Cote and Levine 2002, p. 133). In this context, Gold Coast policy makers and residents are no longer obliged to accept the needs and wants of developers regardless of the needs and wants of residents as an unchallenged priority.

The extent to which the idea of an identity crisis relates to the competing identities of the Gold Coast is complex. Identity crisis as envisioned by Erikson is a step along the path of identity formation. This implies that identity, personal or collective, is a goal to be achieved, rather than an ongoing, ever-evolving process which is clearly a more preferred explanation given the characteristic disruptions of late modernity. As the Gold Coast grows into a more diverse place culturally and demographically, it is unlikely that a single, collective identity will emerge. However, identity crisis may not necessarily imply a temporary stop or delay in the process of identity formation, but that the crisis has become something of a stasis or stalemate. As such, the idea of an identity crisis in which an encompassing, collective identity remains mercurial enlarges Erikson’s conceptualising of the identity formation process. In this way, the crisis becomes a state of disequilibrium among competing identities, which may or may not be permanent, and rather than an ultimate goal of a settled identity, competing identities at best can achieve equilibrium, a kind of agreement to disagree. Even so, identity crisis as stasis does not sufficiently acknowledge the unequal power relationships which have partially defined modernity and remain a fundamental characteristic of globalisation. More elaborate frameworks for analysis of the competing identities and identity crisis on the Gold Coast and at The Spit are provided by Beck (1992) and Giddens (1992), whose considerations of risk and reflexivity in relation to identity and the emergence of globalisation reflect late modernity’s complexities and uncertainties.

Beck’s comprehensive notion of the risk society is effectively a spatial way of understanding identity, suggesting how individual and group identities deriving from
reflexive responses to the risks and hazards of modernization are able to coalesce around place. Reflexivity then can be a key part of the process by which identity evolves. Beck explains (1992, pp. 49-50) how social dynamics have changed, with the class society ideal of equality replaced by the risk society ideal of safety, so that the driving social force is no longer hunger but fear and whereby anxiety replaces need. Beck considers how groups organise in the risk society and to what extent compromise is possible. As different individuals and social groups on the Gold Coast think and act reflexively, in relation to The Spit and to each other, competing identities emerge. When this contestation prevents a satisfactory settlement of ways of getting along with each other, an unsatisfactory disequilibrium of identities or identity crisis becomes the norm.

According to Beck, ‘in advanced modernity the social production of wealth is systematically accompanied by the social production of risks’ (1992, p. 19). This conjoining of risk occurred when human and technological productivity reduced ‘genuine material need’ while simultaneously unleashing ‘hazards and potential threats . . . to an extent previously unknown’. This ‘new paradigm of risk society’ is concerned with how the ‘risks and hazards systematically produced’ by modernisation can be ‘prevented, minimized, dramatized or channelled’, so that the modernization process does not ‘exceed the limits of that which is tolerable . . . ecologically, medically, psychologically and socially’ (Beck 1992, p. 19). These are some of the key issues raised by The Spit debate. How much more development, if any, is tolerable at The Spit? To what extent and by what means can development at The Spit be foregone or limited? Beck argues that modernization is reflexive in that the ‘development and employment of technologies . . . are being eclipsed by questions of the political and economic management’ of the risks and hazards of such employment. It therefore follows that individual and group identities may evolve and become contested in response to risk. At The Spit, the political and economic management of nature is a key

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issue, reflecting Beck’s focus, including avoidance or concealment (Beck 1992, p. 20) by the pro-development group of risks and hazards arising from exploitation. For example, restricted public access, pollution and related environmental damage, as well as other risks and hazards related to the casino and cruise ship terminal proposals, such as gambling addiction, criminal activities associated with gambling and the expenditure of public money in assisting property development. Opposition to exploitation of nature by the pro-development group is motivated by social concerns as well as environmental concerns varying within the different social groups who value and use The Spit. This is another way of understanding The Spit as a space in which competing identities process social relations, recognising that in late modernity the idea of ‘what was considered unpolygonal becomes political’ (Beck 1992, p. 24). On the Gold Coast, property development, previously mostly unconstrained, is treated politically, that is, its prosecution has become negotiable, a small step forward in terms of reconciling competing interests.

Beckian analysis acknowledges fundamental questions of a risk society: ‘How do we wish to live? What is the human quality of humankind, the natural quality of nature which is to be preserved?’ (Beck 1992, p. 28). These questions, taking account of ‘agonistic definitions and definitional struggles’ (Beck 1992, p. 29), are crucial for the Gold Coast’s competing identities. The Spit debate is an exemplar of risk society in that there are ‘always competing and conflicting claims, interests and viewpoints’ (Beck 1992, p. 29). These competing ideas give rise to expectations and values in relation to what is acceptable and susceptible to compromise. They can lead to another crucial question: ‘Should . . . an ecological catastrophe be accepted . . . in order to satisfy economic interests?’ (Beck 1992, p. 29). Beck is focused here on nuclear disaster but his point is relevant for the competing identities focused on the contentious, environmentally risky property development proposed for The Spit.
A pro-development ideology encompassing concealment may go some way towards scapegoating or demonising as ‘alarmists’ those who point out risks, dismissing their claims as ‘unproven’ or ‘outrageously exaggerated’ or needing more research, and insisting that hazards are a necessary consequence of progress. Yet only a ‘Pyrrhic’ victory can be achieved, as opponents in the risk society are not easily silenced and reflexive actions may even grow (Beck 1992, pp. 45-46, 75). This is precisely what is happening at The Spit, where opponents of over-development are portrayed by the Gold Coast Bulletin, a hegemonic agent, as troublemaking greenies holding back economic growth (see Skene 2016, p. 1). Beck notes that as destructive hazards become more starkly apparent, ‘members of divergent classes, parties, occupational groups and age groups organise into citizens’ movements’ (1992, p. 47). At The Spit, a former Queensland Labor state government minister, small business people, artists, environmental activists, students, aged pensioners and other welfare recipients, self funded retirees and tradespeople have coalesced in a ‘community of the endangered’ (Beck 1992, p. 47) represented by the Save Our Spit, Save Our Broadwater and Main Beach Association resistance groups. However, at the same time, according to Beck, the risks and hazards prominent in late modernity often ‘collide with national-state egoisms and the prevailing intrasocial party, industrial and interest organisations’ creating ‘almost insoluble problems’ (1992, p. 48). In The Spit debate in 2017, the political and corporate neoliberal alliance fractured when the Labor state government’s narrow electoral success followed its rejection of a proposed integrated resort high-rise casino complex for The Spit. The state government acceded to resistance groups’ calls for a master plan, with building height limits and density controls, to guide development on The Spit, separate from planning instruments for the rest of the Gold Coast. At the same time, Mayor Tate continued to push for a cruise ship terminal at The Spit and the conservative state opposition party suggested it may revise development restrictions in
the master plan when next elected. This particular local context of uncertainty reflects Beck’s argument that the ‘mutually worked out and well worn compromise routines’ which characterised the power relations of modernity are confused in the risk society by a ‘vacuum of institutional political competence’ (1992, p. 48). For The Spit, this means the hazards of the risk society are very much alive, as the opposing views of individuals and social groups who value The Spit highlight the Gold Coast competing identities and perpetuate the Gold Coast identity crisis.

The institutional political vacuum contributes to a politicisation of reflexivity and the pursuit of an ‘ecological morality’ (Beck 1992, p. 77) which can enhance individual and group identity and competitiveness among identities. Critics of over-development at The Spit scrutinise the operations of developers, particularly the extent to which developers have or have not adhered to community standards and environmental safeguards, even if the safeguards applied by a deficient political system are inadequate. For example, Beck argues the concept of ‘acceptable levels’ of hazard (1992, pp. 64-65) is effectively a ploy to accommodate hazards up to a maximum allowable. On the Gold Coast, acceptable levels of hazard can refer to apartment tower height limits so high as to be effectively unlimited, especially as the Gold Coast town plan provides for developers to seek exemptions to and removals of height and density limits. As a result, risks and hazards become ‘challenges to action’ (Beck 1992, p. 77) leading to individuals and groups organising resistance such as legal intervention or public protest campaigns to stop or limit development. The forces of modernization often respond to the risks and hazards they have created by tackling the consequences for themselves ahead of acknowledging impacts on the ‘life of plants, animals and people’ (Beck 1992, p. 77).

On the Gold Coast, the pro-development ideology is quite obviously more concerned about lost profits and lost economic growth opportunities due to community activism against development proposals than the likely environmental and public amenity
damage from over-development. Real Estate Institute of Queensland Gold Coast chairman John Newlands has dismissed The Spit’s ocean side as ‘all trees and unusable’ (Newlands 2016, p. 13), implying The Spit can be made usable by removing trees and that usable refers to suitable for development. The Gold Coast Bulletin has called The Spit a ‘scrubby wasteland’ (Gold Coast Bulletin 2011, p. 24) and described Wavebreak Island in the Broadwater, on The Spit’s western side, as ‘covered in feral scrub and rubbish and . . . used as a handy toilet by many boaties. It has no inherent value so why not build something remarkable on it?’(Gold Coast Bulletin 2011, p. 50). Wavebreak Island is not covered with rubbish, feral suggests offensive, scrub is not waste or worthless and in terms of property development on the Gold Coast what is remarkable to one social group may be abominable to another.

The recognition of modernization risks can result in a ‘silent revolution’ due to a change in public consciousness, but it is a revolution ‘without an exchange of elites and while the old order is maintained’ (Beck 1992, p. 78). This helps explain the Gold Coast identity crisis as a disruption of equilibrium among various identity groups with varying degrees of support or empathy for the pro- and anti-development groups. Within the silent revolution, individualization, in which individuals regardless of class make decisions for their own future, nevertheless creates ‘new socio-cultural movements and citizens groups . . . formed in relation to modernization risks’ (Beck 1992, p. 90), such as Save Our Spit and Save Our Broadwater. Individualization is therefore a process of modernization, involving removal from historically prescribed social forms, loss of traditional security and re-embedding in a community (Beck 1992, p. 128), as well as on the Gold Coast an identity crisis element. Inequalities in late modernity are redefined away from issues of class to encompass the ‘individualization of social risks’ in which modernisation hazards give rise to anxiety-based psychological responses (Beck 1992, p. 100). In the case of The Spit debate, which illustrates how Beck’s focus on risk and
the individual is able to be modified to encompass a more collective manifestation of action, such responses can appear as impassioned commentary posted on social media or attendance at protest rallies. The modernization hazards can indeed be heterogeneous giving rise to the formation and dissolution of ‘temporary coalitions’ (Beck 1992, p. 100). Because The Spit saga has continued for some years, Save Our Spit and Save Our Broadwater have endured, although they are pressure groups whose meaning for existence may well disappear if The Spit debate is resolved.

Nevertheless, Beck argues the creation of heterogeneous ‘centres of sub politics’ linked to risk-induced individualization gives rise to a ‘new political culture’ influencing the ‘process of politically forming and enforcing decisions’ (1992, 194). On the Gold Coast, Save Our Spit, Save Our Broadwater and the Main Beach Association are influential to an extent that they have succeeded thus far in holding back the push for development on The Spit. The rise of activist groups creates pressures for legitimization ‘to a degree previously unknown’ by the forces of modernization, resulting in a ‘moralization of industrial production’ determined by the ‘intensity and effectiveness with which opposing interests have organized themselves [and] on their skill in presenting their interests to a public that is becoming more sensitive to hazards . . . ’ (Beck 1992, p. 222). In this way, the Gold Coast property development industry is forced to justify its interests.

Giddens (1992) applies the risk society concept envisioned by Beck, providing a complex understanding of identity as it relates to the forces of modernization. Giddens defines risk society as ‘living with a calculative attitude to the open possibilities of action, positive and negative, with which . . . we are confronted’ continuously (1992, p. 28). On the Gold Coast, this calculative attitude is applied by the pro-development group seeking to exploit among other things Chinese tourists’ interest in the Gold Coast
and Chinese investors’ interest in overseas infrastructure, and by the anti-development group seeking via community activism to lessen the local impact of such interest, showing how the reflexive project can refer to both the agents of the abstract systems of late modernity and the individuals and groups disadvantaged or threatened by those systems. Giddens describes reflexivity as a response to change that ‘does not consistently conform either to human expectations or to human control’ (1992, p. 28), so that reflexivity is primarily a response from those impacted negatively by change.

High-rise accommodation and cruise ship terminal developments proposed for The Spit reflect the unrestrained ambition of the pro-development ideology contradicting many people’s expectations of what The Spit should be or how it should evolve.

A key element of Giddens’ argument is that ‘transformations in self identity and globalisation are the two poles of the dialectic of the local and the global’ (1992, p. 32). This conjoining of identity with globalisation reaffirms the spatial links between identity and place in late modernity, understanding that identity is a reflexive process which includes transformation influenced by the grand scale of globalisation in which identity crisis may involve a disruption to transformation. For example, on the Gold Coast, a large grouping of residents has decided it is no longer socially acceptable to allow property development at all costs. However, because similar numbers of residents choose to support a continuation of the development at all costs modernist rhetoric, resisting resistance as it were, the collective identity can be seen as neither transformed nor evolved but rather caught in a reflexive loop in which social groups are just as concerned with responding to each other as they are with responding to globalisation, albeit at a subconscious level. Thus, on the Gold Coast, identity crisis is arguably a process of reflexivity, a fundamentally social consequence.
According to Giddens, the ‘notion of lifestyle’ takes on a ‘particular significance’ in late modernity (1992, p. 5). ‘The more tradition loses its hold, the more daily life is reconstituted in terms of the dialectical interplay of the local and the global, the more individuals are forced to negotiate lifestyle choices among a variety of options’ (1992, p. 5). On the Gold Coast, lifestyle meanings carry weight attached to notions of identity due to the rich mix of work and leisure in a warm, coastal climate providing attractive outdoor leisure options, even though lifestyle can also refer to decisions and actions determined by ‘material constraint’ (Giddens 1992, p. 6). The rise of global tourism and investment by global partners in tourism infrastructure means Gold Coast residents are confronted with the possibility of lifestyle choices involving change to spatial practices at The Spit, which may lead to curtailment of outdoor and beach activities popular since the 1960s. Seeking to retain ritualistic bush, park and beach walking, dog walking, surfing, fishing, picnicking and diving at The Spit involves resistance in the process of identity making, or ‘reflexively organised life-planning’ which ‘presumes consideration of risks’ (Giddens 1992, p. 5). Thus, such life planning also extends to resistance and protest in order to achieve collective aims.

Lifestyle notions are connected to the idea of ‘pure relationships’ as being ‘prototypical of the new spheres of personal life’, part of the ‘interaction between the local and the global’, in which the ‘relationship exists solely for whatever rewards’ it can deliver, and whereby ‘trust can be mobilised only by a process of mutual disclosure’ presupposing commitment (Giddens 1992, p. 6). This ‘transformation of intimacy’ (Giddens 1992, p. 6) can be considered at The Spit as a pure relationship between place, nature and those who value the natural amenity. In this case, the status of place and nature enabling mobilisation of trust via mutual disclosure can also be recognised via actor network theory (see Whatmore 1999). From this perspective, trust becomes a commitment to place and mutual rewards include personal relaxation and recreation alongside
environmental protection and preservation. A pure relationship at The Spit therefore is possible for the anti-development group but not the property development industry, because the industry is interested only in its own rewards without a commitment that ensures the maintenance of place. The property development industry can only provide such commitment if The Spit becomes a transgressive place. However, Giddens also argues that life experience in late modernity is sequestered, so that it becomes ‘separated from the externalities of place, while place itself is undermined by the expansion of disemboding mechanisms’ (1992, p. 146). In other words, social life is no longer predominantly localised due to the ‘ever widening scope’ of ‘time space relations’ in which place no longer ‘forms the parameter of experience’ (Giddens 1992, p. 146). This spatial sensibility recognises too that modern institutions create ‘settings of actions ordered in terms of modernity’s own dynamics’ (Giddens 1992, p. 8), allowing for an understanding of the Gold Coast pro-development ideology as a social institution creating dynamics in which citizens exist as objects for material consumption and of other corporate relationships. Interaction with nature, visiting the northern half of The Spit to surf, fish or walk the dog, in this sense becomes an escape or an act of resistance tied to identity, whereas tourists staying in resort hotels on the southern half of The Spit are part of the process tied to material consumption.

The Spit is a space of moral refuge and fulfilment, assisting identity maintenance even though polarisation and disequilibrium of competing identities may remain. Giddens contends that ‘feelings of restlessness, foreboding and desperation may mingle in individual experience with faith in the reliability of certain forms of social and technical framework’ (Giddens 1992, p. 181). Such anxieties about the negative consequences of over-development at The Spit coexist with some degree of faith, cynical or not, in the democratic process to provide opportunities to influence public opinion, stand up to the pro-development group and replace at the ballot box politicians who would acquiesce to
over development. Notwithstanding this kind of faith, Giddens considers the idea of crisis has ‘particular application’ in late modernity ‘replete with risks and dangers . . . as a more or less continuous state of affairs’ (Giddens 1992, p. 12), so that crisis is ‘more or less endemic . . . on an individual and collective level’. Because crises occur ‘whenever activities concerned with important goals in the life of an individual or a collectivity suddenly appear inadequate’, crisis is categorised by Giddens via inadequacy rather than upheaval (Giddens 1992, p. 184). It is also possible to consider inadequacy and upheaval in this context in a slightly different way. The Gold Coast identity crisis was triggered by an upheaval in the existing state of affairs, when proposals to exploit The Spit gained institutional political support, leading to the realisation by individual residents and groups of residents that the pro-development ideology was inadequate.

Giddens quotes Roszak (1979) in arguing the process of discovery of personal identity in late modernity is a ‘subversive political force’ (Giddens 1992, p. 209). Giddens notes that political engagement is part of the reflexive project as ‘systems of incremental control have become more nakedly exposed than ever before’ (1992, p. 9). The Spit defenders and protectors are involved in a kind of ‘emancipatory politics’ of ‘overcoming the illegitimate domination of some individuals or groups by others’ (Giddens 1992, p. 211). Illegitimacy in this case refers to development proposals contrary to the wishes and practices of significant proportions of the Gold Coast community concerned about over-development at The Spit. Giddens describes exploitation as ‘one group . . . illegitimately [monopolising] resources or desired goods to which the exploited group is denied access’ (Giddens 1992, p. 212). The pro-development group’s proposed usurping of public space at The Spit would exploit the anti-development group, as well The Spit itself, by denying or limiting access to a natural amenity visited by Gold Coast families for generations. Emancipatory politics
implies the ‘adoption of moral values’ with ‘imperatives of justice, equality and participation’ (Giddens 1992, p. 212). These imperatives are articulated by the activist groups Save Our Spit and Save Our Broadwater and mostly ignored by the pro-development ideology. Giddens extends consideration of personal identity beyond emancipatory politics to encompass what he calls ‘life politics’, which assumes ‘some degree of emancipation from . . . hierarchical domination’, as a ‘politics of choice [and] lifestyle’ tied to a reflexively sustained ‘narrative of self identity’ (1992, p. 214). At The Spit, simple acts based around going to the beach make ‘the personal political’ (Giddens 1992, p. 216), as these acts can be interpreted as decisions, or acts of resistance, challenging the pro-development ideology’s proposals. The Spit users reinforce their identities, “who they want to be”, by such simple acts of reflexive awareness.

Life politics involves ‘both senses’ of the idea of politics, i.e. decision making within the ‘governmental sphere of the state’ and decision making where ‘opposing interests or values clash’, so that ‘rights and obligations’ are settled in state laws and life-political issues are prosecuted by ‘individual action and organisational involvement’ including but not confined to social movements (Giddens 1992, p. 226). This is what is happening in the politics of The Spit, where reflexivity of the self, manifesting as community activism, has influenced the Queensland state government to intervene to rule out the ASF integrated resort casino proposal and continues to resist the push for a cruise ship terminal. Giddens recognises that life politics involves tensions and dilemmas of great difficulty, such as competing priorities, personal prejudice, moral disagreements, lifestyle changes and ongoing disputation, among other things, requiring a ‘major reconstruction of emancipatory politics as well as the pursuit of life-political endeavours’ (1992, p. 231). Even so, Giddens suggests the ‘reflexive project of the self might . . . be the very hinge of a transition to a global order’ which substitutes ‘personal growth’ for ‘unfettered economic growth’ (1992, p. 223). The extent to which personal
growth substitutes economic growth is limited specifically by globalisation and at the very least by the embeddedness of modernist forces in general. However, Giddens’ argument shows how life politics in late modernity ‘brings back to prominence precisely those moral and existential questions . . . [relating to] how we should live our lives’ (Giddens 1992, p. 224). In other words, the extreme forces of modernity have created an environment in which they are themselves critiqued with the potential to bring about significant mitigating change to both their agency and structure. The excesses of the pro-development group in seeking to exploit The Spit are the sole reason for the resistance to such exploitation. The Gold Coast pro-development ideology is not only contested by opposing identities, it creates space for them.

Hajdu’s review (2005) of the extraordinary Japanese investment boom on the Gold Coast from the mid 1980s to the early 1990s explains an earlier, original Gold Coast identity crisis, when the irresistible force of a real estate boom unlike no other in Australian history was confronted by the immovable object of xenophobia. ‘The arrival of the Japanese on the Gold Coast brought to a crisis questions of Australian national identity in a rapidly changing world’ (Hajdu 2005, p. 218). A near hysterical debate, fuelled initially by the Gold Coast Bulletin, created fears of an economic takeover by a powerful Asian neighbour. The crisis signalled the arrival of globalisation in Australia and forced Australians to contemplate their collective identity. The Japanese obsession with golf created a loose ring of hinterland golf courses surrounding the Gold Coast coastal strip. These clipped and manicured landscapes copied the integrated golf course resorts and up-market housing estates of southern California and Hawaii admired by the Japanese as symbols of affluent prestige (Hajdu 2005, p. 139). The golf course resort landscapes reflect the tradition of Japanese gardens where stylised beauty aims to suggest a garden has evolved ‘in an organic manner without the intervention of human hands’ (Hajdu 2005, p. 139), adding another layer of identity to the Gold Coast in which
the fertile beauty of the hinterland has been channelled to represent a “better” version of nature, the garden park.

The Japanese did not fail to notice The Spit. Seaworld’s then-owner, Australian Peter Lawrence, partnered with Japanese developer Tadanori Nara to build a resort hotel adjoining the theme park halfway along The Spit (Hajdu 2005, p. 79). The three storey hotel was modestly planned, marketed to attract both Japanese and Australian tourists and was an ‘immediate financial success’ (Hajdu 2005, p. 80), only a few kilometres from soaring Japanese-developed high-rise at Main Beach, Surfers Paradise and Broadbeach, and Japanese-owned cleared sites at Surfers Paradise, some of which were costly, unwise investments and unviable. The Spit survived the Japanese investment binge otherwise untouched, confirming that it has long had sufficient status in legislation and within the Gold Coast community, as well as a unique geography, enabling resistance to exploitation.

Gold Coast residents unwilling to embrace the sudden Japanese presence in this first Gold Coast identity crisis included retirees who had vivid memories of the Japanese wartime enemy and were alarmed by shop and street signs written in Japanese, retail staff who spoke only Japanese and Asian faces filling the streets of Surfers Paradise. Bruce Whiteside, a New Zealand-born painter and decorator whose uncles had died in World War 2, led the Gold Coast anti-Japanese campaign via residents’ public hall protest meetings and street marches not unlike the Save Our Spit protests against the cruise ship terminal. Whiteside and his thousands of supporters believed the Japanese investment binge was a kind of Japanese invasion (Hajdu 2005, pp. 145-174). Whiteside galvanised conservative voices in the capital cities, including eminent historian Geoffrey Blainey (Hajdu 2005, p. 155). Whiteside’s Heart of the Nation movement was the first time Gold Coast residents challenged the Gold Coast pro-development
ideology, which had embraced the Japanese investment binge. The challenge lasted only as long as the binge lasted, until the early 1990s. The Gold Coast pro-development group believed the Japanese were delivering the progress necessary to sustain the district economy and maintain the Gold Coast as a premier tourist destination. Whiteside and his followers became foot soldiers for Pauline Hanson’s divisive, anti-immigration One Nation political party.

The first Gold Coast identity crisis was resolved not by compromise or capitulation but economics, when the Japanese government decided property prices in Japan had rocketed too high and imposed a credit squeeze (Hajdu 2005, pp. 198-222). Japanese investors who had been too often willing to pay the asking price for Gold Coast mega-projects like the Sanctuary Cove gated resort and residential subdivision and privately-owned Bond University found they no longer had access to funds. The original Gold Coast identity crisis triggered by the Japanese investment binge asked the same reflexive questions as the current, second Gold Coast identity crisis: what are the values which define the Gold Coast, can the Gold Coast community evolve a shared, collective identity and what might be that collective identity? The two identity crises were both sustained by residents’ opposition to threats to their lifestyles. The anti-Japanese campaigners resisted the Japanese investment binge because they feared it would change the Gold Coast’s white European-derived, ethno-cultural identity, and so were essentially conservative, while the anti-development residents challenging the dominant ideology of the Gold Coast by opposing the cruise ship terminal and other large projects on The Spit are transgressive. Forty years after the Japanese investment wave, Chinese investment has become a significant economic driver of the Gold Coast economy. Resistance to the non-white, non-European presence eased as the local population became more ethnically diverse and as white European-derived residents grew more familiar with globalisation.
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Burton posits five characteristics of adolescence in arguing that the Gold Coast has an adolescent identity: rapid growth, identity exploration including ‘occasional crises of identity’, emerging sexual awareness, self-absorption and ego-centrism, and development of analytical capacity (Burton 2009, p. 8). He argues the Gold Coast has an adolescent sexuality because it is focused on the allure of bikini models rather than embracing ‘more challenging’ bohemian and gay friendly lifestyles which help define mature cities (2009, p. 14). This seems to be a shallow view, implying that relatively more sophisticated, older holiday destinations like Nice, where bikinis also are signifiers, also have an adolescent status. Burton declares the oft-stated claim by civic and business leaders and boosters, that the Gold Coast is one of the best places on Earth, to be evidence of self-absorption and ego-centrism (2009, pp. 16-17), even though it could be seen as a straightforward repetition of what many other civic and business leaders say about their cities. Burton suggests there is scope to manage the ‘prodigious (growth) rate’ of property development by ‘selective infill (of built-up zones) at higher density than normal without building Q1 [high rise] equivalents everywhere’ (2009, p. 11), but he notes that it remains to be seen if the Gold Coast becomes more sensitive to the natural environment (2009, p. 13). From an urban studies perspective, Burton optimistically suggests the Gold Coast is moving away from a long period of poorly regulated town planning and property development, via Gold Coast City Council’s Our Bold Future strategic planning exercise (2009, p. 15). Our Bold Future surveyed thousands of residents to confirm a collective desire to preserve a relaxed lifestyle and make the economy less dependent on tourism and construction (Burton 2012). Bitter public debate with public opinion polarised over Gold Coast City Council’s support for massive property development on The Spit, despite the intentions of Our Bold Future, shows that Burton’s optimism was misplaced or premature.
Bosman, Dedekorkut-Howes and Leach (2016) gather together and expand upon research focusing on the Gold Coast from the urban studies perspective, recognising the Gold Coast as a place of multiple identities. Dedekorkut-Howes, Bosman and Leach (2016) cite Holmes (2006) and Stimson and Minnery (1998) who suggest respectively that the Gold Coast is ‘looking for . . . balance within the dual identity of a city and a destination’ and that the Gold Coast ‘presents at least four different images to the world . . . a city of leisure; a city of enterprise; a city of tourism; and a city in its own right within the South East Queensland “sun-belt” growth metropolis’ (Dedekorkut-Howes et al 2016, p. 2). Stimson and Minnery’s quadrupling does not of itself imply a Gold Coast identity crisis. It is the disruption of the uneasy equilibrium between a residents’ city and a tourism city by too much development, completed and proposed, that gives rise to the crisis. Potts, Gardiner and Scott (Dedekorkut-Howes et al 2016, p. 132) acknowledge the ‘complexity’ of the Gold Coast being both a mature tourism destination as described by Faulkner and Tideswell (2006) and an adolescent city ‘still in the process of defining itself’ as understood by Burton (2009). This grappling with conflicting interpretations of identity formation can be interpreted in terms of the Gold Coast identity crisis, but again it is a relatively shallow approach implying adolescence is a stage of identity formation on the way to a collective identity resolution, ignoring the richer analyses of reflexivity in the risk society in which identity as a process of social relations is constantly evolving.

The debate about the future of The Spit can also be theorised as an example of the creation of identity capital among the thousands of anti-development residents. Identity capital ‘denotes investments individuals make and have in who they are’ in order to ‘reap future dividends’ that will assist in their identity formation (Cote and Levine 2002, p. 147). Such investments are not necessarily financial. In other words, participating in groups such as Save Our Spit or Friends of Federation Walk at The Spit,
attending public meetings to debate the future of The Spit and discussing concerns about over-development on the Gold Coast with friends and family are personal investments in a social process that leads to the formation of new or revised personal identities, renewing a ‘sense of purpose in life’ (Cote and Levine 2002, p. 144), challenging the development-at-all-costs ideology. A renewed sense of purpose on the Gold Coast has thus been brought about by reflexive growth in critical awareness of what is at stake in maintaining a desired lifestyle.

Callahan’s investigation (Callahan 2012) of how social identity relates to social capital on the Gold Coast concludes that sub-groups of Gold Coast residents are more interested in bonding among themselves within their neighbourhood sub-group than bridging between sub-groups. This is not an analysis within the reflexivity frame, although social capital is influenced by reflexive responses to change in the risk society. Callahan finds that ‘collective identity at a city-scale . . . is not optimally active in residents of the Gold Coast’ (2012, p. 41), which may be due to the Gold Coast evolving from small settlements along the coastline into a single administrative municipality and to the beach lifestyle attracting a range of different social groups. Callahan’s finding supports the contention that the Gold Coast is comprised of numerous, often competing, identities negating any single, collective identity. Callahan states social identity is determined by participation in groups with a ‘uniformity of awareness and activity’ (2012, p. 7). Callahan argues that positive levels of social capital, referring to levels of trust and networking between individuals and groups, can lead to ‘more efficient political function and an increase in public participation in a community’s care and maintenance’ (2012, pp. 4-5), whereas imbalance between bonding capital within groups and bridging capital among groups leads to an unhealthy social network (2012, p. 6). The argument over the future of The Spit suggests the Gold Coast has negative levels of social capital due to poor relationships between social
groups whose members have very different views about property development. At the same time, it is important to recognise a majority of Gold Coasters do not have higher education qualifications and many have populist, right leaning political views.

Callahan’s focus is on how residents feel about quality of life and social interaction within their particular suburbs and across the Gold Coast. He does not explicitly consider specific identity sub-groups in terms of shared interests, social status or employment. Sub-groups on the Gold Coast based on such categories include welfare recipients, aged pensioners, self-funded retirees, small business owners, health service providers, education service providers, retail employees, hospitality employees, tradespeople, surfers, paddlers, volunteer support groups, service clubs, protest groups, sporting groups, school parent clusters and university students. The extent of bonding within and bridging between these sub-groups is complex and varies widely, although it is likely that each sub-group has differing levels of support for, or opposition to, the pro-development ideology in relation to the future of The Spit.

Potts, Dedekorkut and Bosman enunciate a Gold Coast identity crisis but with a narrow focus confined to an analysis of marketing strategies (Potts et al. 2011). They argue the Gold Coast is promoted without marketers taking into account residents’ experiences and interests and that differing perceptions of the Gold Coast by residents and outsiders requires a more effective approach from marketing agencies rather than ‘trying to sell the Gold Coast’ simply as a tourism product. ‘What works to attract tourists might not work for investment or prospective residents’ (Potts et al. 2011, 7.0). Accepting that place marketing and branding influences urban planning policy and decision making, Potts et al. suggest that better focused marketing can help to attract more residents and maximise financial investment on the Gold Coast. They are concerned with ‘exploring the tension between (the) marketed or imposed identity of the Gold Coast and the self-
identified social, cultural, physical and aesthetic identities of the Gold Coast assumed by . . . residents’ (Potts et al 2011, 3.0). Potts et al do not consider that established and prospective residents may well have differing perceptions of the Gold Coast. Such an approach challenges the property development industry focused on marketing campaigns to attain quick sales of luxury accommodation units. Potts et al do not try to reconcile crowding and traffic problems on the Gold Coast with marketing which may attract more residents. Although they refer prominently to the Gold Coast identity crisis, they do not attempt to specifically define it, rather they call for further research to ‘better understand the role of branding processes in forming the image of the city for outsiders’ (Potts et al 2011, 7.0). Product marketing of the Gold Coast was reconceptualised in 2017 by the Gold Coast Tourism Corporation, funded by the Gold Coast tourism industry. In this case, residents contributed their local experiences of life on the Gold Coast via social media in order to promote the Gold Coast as an authentic lived-in destination of desirable neighbourhoods, rather than a place exclusively for conventional tourism experiences, such as going to theme parks. This reconceptualising of Gold Coast marketing as no longer an exclusive agent of the pro-development ideology attracted criticism from some theme park operators. The changed marketing perspective, the first time theme parks and high-rise accommodation have not been the main focus of tourism promotion on the Gold Coast since the 1970s, can be seen as a reflexive-related response to the development at all costs extreme modernist force. It is also indicative of the disequilibrium of the Gold Coast’s competing identities and the shifting hegemonic order on the Gold Coast.

Potts et al cite Griffin (1998) in acknowledging that the Gold Coast has ‘multiple, competing and at times contradicting identities [and] from these competing identities emerges a “strong sense of space and place” ’ (Potts et al 2011, 7.0), but they do not consider how such an emergence occurs. Neither does Griffin (1998), in his assessment
of two Gold Coast City Council urban planning analyses, the *Gold Coast Urban Heritage and Character Study* and *Building Sustainable Communities*. Griffin argues these two analyses are encouraging signs that the Gold Coast City Council is ‘taking some early steps towards a more inclusive and culturally aware understanding’ (1998, p. 290). The heritage and character study’s primary recommendation is for the Gold Coast City Council to conserve and promote among residents and visitors the Gold Coast’s diverse heritage, character and lifestyle (Allom Lovell Marquis-Kyle et al. 2000, p. 4).

‘A more detailed understanding of the cultural significance of the natural environment and its relationship with the more developed areas of the city is also recommended’ (Allom Lovell Marquis-Kyle et al. 2000, p. 4). These recommendations reflect the Gold Coast’s multiple identities, indicate they have existed for some time and invite acknowledgment of The Spit as a valued natural asset. The recommendations remain mostly unimplemented, in any demonstrable way, by the Gold Coast City Council almost two decades after they were made, despite changes to the political and cultural landscape across Australia during that time enabling degrees of acceptance beyond the Gold Coast of the sentiment espoused in the recommendations, indicating the influence of the Gold Coast pro-development ideology, even if it is under challenge. However, the *Gold Coast Urban Heritage and Character Study* notes ‘there is an increasing awareness amongst the public and planners that the essential qualities of the Gold Coast . . . are being eroded as a result of the (property) development that inevitably accompanies’ sustained population growth (Allom Lovell Marquis-Kyle et al. 2000, p. 6). Strategies to retain these qualities are ‘matters for debate and judgment that will change and develop according to the perceptions and expectations of the community in all its forms’ (Allom Lovell Marquis-Kyle et al. 2000, p. 6). This is an indication that reflexive challenges to the pro-development dominant ideology were nevertheless beginning or underway in the 1990s and an acknowledgment that identity formation,
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including collective identity, is an ongoing and problematic process. Symes, in his essay reproduced in the *Gold Coast Urban Heritage and Character Study*, foregrounds the Gold Coast’s multiple identities:

There are plainly two populations on the Gold Coast: those who migrated there and who call the place home and those, like the tourists, who would like to call the place home. It is a city . . . that exists by virtue of the fact that people have chosen to be there, and have moved from elsewhere to be there. And there is not one Gold Coast but several. There is, for instance, the Gold Coast of the beach; the Gold Coast as resort, that of the hotels and theme parks and designer label boutiques and the shopping complexes; then there is the Gold Coast where people live, the apartment blocks and canal estates and the caravan sites; finally, there are the green parts of the Gold Coast, the rainforest backdrop that provides a natural contrast to the built-up coast (Symes 1997, p. 25).

Symes describes the Gold Coast as a ‘realm of the hyperbole’ (1997, p. 24), a zone of excess, the spectacular and the utopian and a product of the permissive 1960s when youthful hedonism, affordable air travel and a favourable, warm climate combined to create a destination of escape with a carnival atmosphere, where pleasure is the dominant imperative (1997, p. 28). According to Symes, the Gold Coast is ‘Australia’s postmodern city par excellence’, a pastiche of architectural styles derived from other places and times where ‘style and vulgarity are never far from one another’ (1997, p. 27), although any city is arguably postmodern as varying architectural styles derived from throughout history have become commonplace without diminution of the forces of modernism. As well, Symes’s analysis is Surfers Paradise-centric and does not represent all of the Gold Coast, for example, the southern half of the Gold Coast,
between Nobby Beach and Tugun, and the newer northern suburbs around Coomera, are not the pleasure domes of excess described by Symes. He argues that ‘manufactured attractions [on the Gold Coast] . . . contrast [with] the natural environment’ (1997, p. 24). The Gold Coast is a ‘disposable city which destroys its past through development . . . always renewing and reproducing itself’ (Symes 1997, p. 26). By revealing property development as a physical symbol of a culture of excess and exaggeration, Symes gives context to the pro-development ideology. He concludes the Gold Coast has more in common with Las Vegas and Disneyland than any European or Australian cities but it is also a place with a ‘strong interface between nature and culture’ where residents ‘can choose their environments, and indeed this might be part of the overriding attraction of the Gold Coast, that there is not one single (Gold Coast) but many, and . . . residents and tourists can select the particular coast that represents for them the best of all possible worlds’ (Symes 1997, pp. 25, 29). Symes seems optimistic that the Gold Coast’s multiple identities can coexist without too much disagreement. The debate over the future of The Spit, amid the polarisation of public opinion over development issues generally on the Gold Coast, shows such optimism was again misplaced.

Wise (2006) notes that the Gold Coast is ‘characterized in the national media as a “cultural desert” ’ (2006, p. 185), even though creative industries employment as a proportion of total employment on the Gold Coast was in 2006 second only to Sydney nationally, due to the prevalence of live entertainment and film and media production. According to Wise, ‘in the Australian cultural imaginary the Gold Coast’s total identification with leisure . . . is taken to signify a sort of perpetual adolescence’ (2006, p. 185). This analysis implies that any hopes for the Gold Coast to evolve a collective identity or identity equilibrium are constrained by outsider perceptions that may not acknowledge broader understandings of culture. Wise does not consider the Gold Coast
as having a temporally progressive life cycle in an Eriksonian sense, she sees it in more postmodern terms, as a place ‘refusing to settle as an idea’, a ‘volatile assemblage of urban practices’ (2006, p. 177) and an ‘assemblage of multiplicities’ (2006, p. 183) unsuited to conventional strategies of managing growth around clusters of operational compatibility. Wise argues that because the Gold Coast strives to offer visitors a ‘sense of dislocation’ from normal life (2006, p. 181), it is an unrestrained place, driven by ‘radical entrepreneurial activity’ (2006, p. 185), and that planning authorities need therefore to recognise the Gold Coast is evolving in essentially disorderly, rhizomatic ways. Wise’s reading of the Gold Coast as an assemblage of unrestrained, volatile multiplicities is compatible with the idea of multiple identities competing for influence in determining the extent of property development on The Spit and across the Gold Coast.

Baker, Bennett and Wise extend the idea of identity as volatile multiplicities (Baker et al. 2012), referring to spacialization in noting that individuals ‘draw upon the physical and discursive properties of space and place as means of socially and culturally situating themselves’ and that these ‘articulations of space’ on the Gold Coast are contested by ‘groups . . . who often pursue radically different lifestyles, both socioeconomically and culturally’ (Baker et al. 2012, p. 99). The Spit is one such space, with competing articulations as natural, public resource to be preserved, and valuable vacant real estate to be exploited. Baker et al view the Gold Coast as ‘acutely difficult to quantify in terms of any singular notion of community (or) neighbourhood’ (2012, p. 100). Baker et al argue that the ‘multiple, dispersed (and) fragmented’ qualities of the Gold Coast may remain unsettled in terms of a collective identity, as residents assert and re-assert expressions and rituals of neighbourhood, community and identity ‘stylistically, contingently or strategically’ in an ongoing cycle (2012, p. 98). Baker et al also suggest that while residents may have very different understandings of what the Gold Coast
means to them, an emerging sense of an all-inclusive Gold Coast lifestyle, partly driven by ‘mediated representations’ of the Gold Coast, in which the Gold Coast is accepted as being all of holiday wonderland, party paradise, high rise heaven, great place to live and natural asset, different things to different people, uniquely valuable, offers ‘potential for something of a shared understanding’ (2012, p. 101). Baker et al argue that while most residents accept property development may be necessary for the Gold Coast’s economic well-being and understand that the Gold Coast ‘sells nature alongside glamour, leisure and high rise living’, many residents will only accept ‘extreme and everyday kinds of development up to a point’ (2012, p. 108). Crucially, for The Spit, Baker et al argue that the environment is considered a ‘precious amenity’ and therefore ‘a point can be reached when treasured local beaches, wave breaks, coastal heath or hinterland forest are at stake’ (2012, p. 108). This analysis not only acknowledges the status and influence of the Gold Coast surfing tribe, it explains by inference how the cruise ship terminal proposal became a catalyst, the point at which residents said enough is enough. So, the possibility of competing identities perpetually negotiating in an eternal coexistence is on the Gold Coast contingent upon limits to development.

The Gold Coast identity crisis is not about identity politics, which represents the failure to provide sufficiently for all social groups in advanced democracies, where increasingly desperate politicians pitch ineffective policies designed to appeal as vote winners to the disadvantaged and the marginalised left behind by progress and globalization, including unemployed and under-employed manufacturing and retail workers, victims of workplace technology and indigenous welfare recipients, among others, made or kept poor over the past forty years. On the Gold Coast, Mayor Tate, supported by the property development industry and the hegemonic Gold Coast Bulletin, has confronted reflexive challenges to the pro-development ideology not by
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appeasement but by persistently pushing on with large-scale development proposals and projects.

Neoliberalism and resistance

Contested space and identity have an ideological dimension informed by politics, a common enough situation which quite clearly exists on the Gold Coast where the mythscape of The Spit has long been identified by the relationship between the Gold Coast City Council and the pro-development group of property developers and their supporters among real estate agents and investors. This political relationship is articulated via the hegemonic agency of the *Gold Coast Bulletin*. The Gold Coast pro-development ideology was well entrenched by the 1980s, when the Gold Coast became a global tourism destination. The pro-development ideology was represented at this time by Mullin’s ‘petty bourgeoisie class of Gold Coast public and private sector leaders’, known locally as the ‘White Shoe Brigade’, along with development-focused investors, a ‘pro-growth working class who benefited from employment in construction’ and ‘pro-development local and state governments’ (Prideaux 2004, p. 46). In the second decade of the second millennium, the Gold Coast pro-development ideology is similarly represented, comprising fellow travellers and flag wavers for the pro-development group, led by Mayor Tate and Sunland development company founder Soheil Abedian. Other pro-development ideology fellow travellers are other property industry and business leaders including Real Estate Institute of Queensland Gold Coast chairman John Newlands, CBRE Commercial Real Estate Gold Coast managing director Jonathan O’Brien, Southern Cross Austereo general manager Nick Scott and ASF Consortium director Louis Chien, who is a new player on the Gold Coast. Small business operators including construction trades sub-contractors are also significant among the fellow
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travellers. Self funded retirees and letters-to-the-editor writers are often flag wavers. The Gold Coast Bulletin, dependent on revenue from property industry advertising, is both fellow traveller and flag waver.

Applying Mayer’s (2007) analysis, the Gold Coast pro-development ideology can be understood as an example of active neoliberalism, where the ‘most important goal of urban policy has become to mobilize city space as an arena for market-oriented economic growth’ (2007, p. 91). The ‘central mechanism’ for achieving this goal is ‘privatizing public space’ (2007, pp. 94-95). In this context, the high-rise proposals for The Spit rely on the emerging Chinese holiday market to provide investment returns at the expense of the financially less profitable social values of public space. The Spit is among those spaces targeted by neoliberal politicians and developers where entrepreneurial marketing seeking to attract tourists by rebuilding downtown areas has resulted in social displacement (Mayer 2007, pp. 92-93). At The Spit, displacement of natural asset users is feared while neoliberal governing agents competing for global capital offer as an investment incentive (Mayer 2007, p. 94) access to waterfront public land.

Miller (2007) recognises that neoliberalism is linked to three general trends: the ‘downloading’ of state responsibility functions so that local governments are placed ‘in competition with one another for capital investment’; the increasing privatisation of ‘formerly public functions’ so that ‘democratic deliberation’ is replaced by ‘market-based models of social action coordination’ leading to the allocation of public resources to promote economic growth; and market ideology triumphing over democratic ideology (2007, p. 225). These trends are clearly evident at The Spit, where the Queensland state government has been reluctant to intervene, the Gold Coast City Council has allocated public funds for a privately-run cruise ship terminal feasibility
study and economic market considerations are prioritised over the preferences of ordinary people wanting to preserve a public recreation space. Miller also notes that neoliberalism is both conservative and radical, reasserting the primacy of market values and applying those values to new spaces (2007, p. 227), like The Spit.

Burton seeks to qualify the claim by Bosman and Dredge (2011) that the Gold Coast is the ‘epitome of Australian neoliberal urbanisation’ (Burton 2014, p. 3234). As a relatively new city ‘preoccupied with the provision of physical infrastructure and new development’, Burton argues the Gold Coast has ‘proceeded along a broadly neoliberal path’ (2014, pp. 3245, 3233). However, successive Gold Coast councils have ‘internalised the fundamental principles of neoliberalism and see no need to proclaim them’ (2014, p. 3246). According to Burton, this ‘minimalist position’ is not especially different to other local councils in Australia (2014, p. 3246). As well, the Gold Coast ‘will face growing pressures in the future to develop programmes of social as well as economic significance’ partly due to an ageing population (2014, pp. 3233, 3246).

Nevertheless, Burton observes that the Gold Coast exemplifies the ‘growth coalition model’ outlined by Molotch (1976) and Logan and Molotch (1987) in which ‘interests of property developers are taken to represent the interests of all residents and supported by a coalition led by local government’ (Burton 2016, p. 114). As a result, ‘growth becomes an end in itself rather than a means to another end connected with . . . an equilibrium or optimal state. In other words, not only does the pursuit of growth become the dominant yardstick for judging all policy proposals and assessing the impact of any regulatory regimes, but there is no logical end to the process’ (Burton 2016, p. 114). Despite this, Burton argues against the assumption that the Gold Coast City Council has been an enthusiastic participant in the neoliberal project. He claims the council has remained preoccupied with keeping rates down and rarely been pressured to adopt a Keynesian approach, although he concludes that the Gold Coast may well need some
‘nanny local state’ guidance as it continues to grow (2016, pp. 119-120). Burton’s arguments in terms of articulating a view about neoliberalism and the Gold Coast do not recognise the influential, staunch ideological alliance between Mayor Tom Tate and pro-development interests.

The initial success of the Gold Coast pro-development ideology was primarily due to ‘entrepreneurial skills, close and important links to major investors and . . . maverick politics’ (Prideaux 2004, p. 46). These qualities also apply today, particularly for Mayor Tate, the Gold Coast public sector leader, although the accumulation of wealth from property development and other investments situates Mayor Tate and some other prominent fellow travellers beyond the petite bourgeoisie. Mayor Tate’s persona and modus operandi fit with the criteria for Gold Coast entrepreneurial ‘movers and shakers’ outlined by Russell and Faulkner (Russell and Faulkner 1999). These criteria include ‘outspoken non-conformists unbound by traditional wisdom. . . (who) do things in their own non-linear ways . . . cause disquiet if not alarm among regulators . . . live comfortably with disequilibrium, uncertainty, tension and dissonance . . . (are) broadly approved, even popular, at least ostensibly . . . (and) impatient with anyone unwilling or unable to move at their pace’ (Russell and Faulkner 1999, p. 20).

However, Massey cautions against overestimating the ‘coherence of the powerful’ (Massey 2005, p. 45). Mayor Tate’s sometimes clumsy, ungrammatical expression in his spoken messaging can at times seem to be approaching incoherence, while his contradictory arguments in relation to The Spit can undermine the persuasiveness of his message. For example, he unequivocally criticised an offshore cruise ship terminal, citing cost and engineering problems, yet later campaigned and sought private funding for an offshore terminal after the Queensland state government withdrew approval for a Broadwater terminal. The need to be wary of the coherence of the powerful is also
explained via Massey’s account of Derrida’s notion of differance (Massey 2005, pp. 53-54). Derrida sees words and signs only ever incompletely expressing meaning because they are defined in relation to each other, or subject to spacing, i.e., they are differentiated via binary oppositions that limit the search for meaning. Furthermore, because perceptions are constantly in flux, influenced by mood and social environment, meaning remains forever out of reach. Massey sees differance and spacing/espacement preventing closure of meaning as a kind of correspondence to her imagination of the process of discrete multiplicities of space, although she believes Derrida’s conceptualisation is too limiting as it is fundamentally aligned to textual analysis. Nevertheless, differance is a way of seeing Mayor Tate’s engagement with social media to progress his arguments, in which his meaning of what The Spit can become is unable to be always or completely understood because it is often designed in response to the arguments of his critics and opponents.

Cohen (2002) reinforces Massey’s coherence warning in the context of message manipulation strategies and tactics by powerful groups seeking to create moral panics. On the Gold Coast, these strategies and tactics are less effective than they might be, apart from the unreliable hegemonic agency of the Gold Coast Bulletin. Mayor Tate’s portrayal of the anti-development group oppositional ideology as little more than greenie troublemakers anticipates a ‘ready susceptibility to simple explanations’ (2002, p. ix) which cannot be extended to a significant proportion of Gold Coast residents who may not be environmental activists or politically motivated but remain opposed to further exploitation of The Spit. Many of these people are self-funded retirees, aged pensioners, career professionals and young families, desiring not to have The Spit diminished as a public recreation place and sufficiently well informed so as not to be vulnerable to simple explanations. The greenie troublemaker narrative in this context is
arguably ‘so exaggerated and . . . tendentious’ it engenders a ‘palpable audience denial’ (Cohen 2002, p. xxxiv), resulting in a moral panic that may not be actually working.

At the same time, it would be mistaken to perceive Mayor Tate as a linguistic bumbler whose arguments are faulty and unsophisticated, without appreciating his abilities and achievements. He is a successful business player and successful politician. Simplistic explanations may not always be as simple as they seem. They might not assume a susceptibility to persuasion, rather they can serve as a delaying tactic to keep debate alive, a distracting challenge to opponents to prove they are not greenie troublemakers.

In this way, Mayor Tate can be considered among those who ‘denounce deviance’ while at the same time having a ‘vested interest in seeing deviance perpetuated’ (Cohen 2002, p. 117). Mayor Tate gains politically from the denunciation, or ‘ideological exploitation’, of his opponents, yet loses traction whenever they turn out to be less of a problem than he claims (Cohen 2002, p. 117). For politicians, an election is always on the horizon. Mayor Tate’s public profile remains prominent while the future of The Spit is debated. His supporters are assured of his convictions and the repetition of simplistic explanations might ultimately persuade some of the undecided. It really is an old political trick. For Mayor Tate, the Gold Coast identity crisis may well be politically advantageous.

McRobbie’s (1982) and Burchill’s (2005) descriptions of the evolution of the Gold Coast pro-development ideology contribute to the popular mythologising of the Gold Coast as a haven for neoliberalism. They also chronicle the historical process creating the reflexive space for a local crisis of late modernity in which the forces of modernization have been relatively unchecked. McRobbie provides a booster’s lexicon of Gold Coast archetypal characters focusing on the 1960s to the 1980s, although he is sometimes critical of the Surfers Paradise high-rise density and acknowledges friction
between competing social identities (1982, p. 245). McRobbie cites architect Robin Boyd whose negative critique of suburbia (Boyd 1960) became a landmark in Australian social commentary. McRobbie quotes from a 1957 newspaper article in which Boyd declared Surfers Paradise was ‘attracting much of the drive and development instinct of this country. . . providing an outlet for the type of entrepreneur who is stifled by the plodding, restrictive ways of the southern cities’ (Boyd in McRobbie 1982, p. 133). It is unlikely Boyd could have imagined the extent to which some Gold Coast developers have been contemptuous of urban planning and other legislative restrictions. McRobbie reprinted his book twice with revisions, additions and new titles. The Gold Coast Arts Centre Press released an updated version of McRobbie’s local character portraits in 2000, remaining for the most part squarely focused on Surfers Paradise (McRobbie 2000). McRobbie did not much turn his gaze north of Surfers Paradise or south of Broadbeach. He envisioned The Spit’s place myth like many other Gold Coasters of his generation, more a wasteland than anything else.

Burchill’s neoliberal manifesto for the Gold Coast development industry is significant because he is the only major player in the Gold Coast property sector who has attempted a lengthy written account of the Gold Coast pro-development ideology, covering the 1960s to the 2000s. Burchill argues the presence of the sand bypass shed and jetty on the north-east edge of The Spit is a precedent in favour of development and so preservation of the remainder of The Spit cannot be justified. He believes the Queensland state government and the Gold Coast City Council should favour developers who take personal risks with their own capital in cases where legislation might inhibit major tourism projects (Burchill 2005, pp. 25-30). Burchill does not appreciate the conflict of interest concept which holds that elected officials should not accept donations from those who may seek some benefit in return (2005, p. 60). In 1974, Burchill led a successful development industry revolt against a plan by then
mayor Robert Neumann to limit building heights on the Gold Coast beachfront to two or three storeys (Burchill 2005, p. 155).

Burchill claims prime sites for resort hotels are being ‘alienated’ by development for residents (2005, p. 513). He believes residents’ concerns should not be allowed to hold back tourism growth and that accommodation, attractions and amenities for tourism should ‘occupy the most choice beach and environmental sites’ (2005, p. 37). Burchill acknowledges in a roundabout way that the ‘most important areas of the [Gold Coast] region in environmental value terms’ need to be looked at for ‘community benefits in the long term’ (2005, p. 67), but his focus is on developers giving up land for public use, not the setting aside of land for public use or conservation in the first place.

Burchill as a town planner clearly is an agent of the pro-development ideology. He suggests absentee landlords, whose focus is on maintaining rental income, often from tourists, should be able to vote in council elections in order for the Gold Coast to ‘maximise its potential’ (2005, p. 45). This would dilute the influence of resident voters concerned about unfettered tourism development. Burchill is critical of the Gold Coast City Council led by Mayor Ron Clarke, before Tom Tate took over the mayoralty in 2012, for ‘trying to frustrate’ a cruise ship terminal ‘at the already industrialized end of The Spit’ (2005, p. 26), assuming a single, large shed for the sand pumping jetty, and the jetty, amounts to industrialisation. Burchill recognises new development projects on the Gold Coast will not be easy to achieve. ‘Who would bother after recent experiences? The State Government’s work on assessing the viability of [a cruise ship terminal] activated objectors, supposedly just Main Beach residents’ (2005, p. 510). Burchill is suggesting that in 2005 the only opponents to a cruise ship terminal at The Spit were those who would live close by. He warns of ‘future shock’ on the Gold Coast with a housing and infrastructure crisis unless higher density development is allowed, including high-rise in the hinterland (2005, p. 498). Despite his brazen neoliberal
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views, Burchill in his concluding remarks acknowledges the competing identities that shape the Gold Coast and even calls for a reconciliation:

There seems to be a real battle to reposition the Gold Coast’s image. It will call for the very best of intelligence and creative thinking about where the city is to go for its future strengths. A case must be made for a clever compromise between the sophisticated needs for the image of a world class tourist destination and the competing needs of a growing urban city population (2005, p. 566).

Burchill and McRobbie, writing twenty years apart, are both pro-development insiders. Their self-published books romanticising and seeking to justify the Gold Coast pro-development ideology are out of print but available in Gold Coast public libraries. Their comprehensive messaging is historically significant nationally, well informed and known locally. In their prime, Burchill and McRobbie’s local influence in the public discourse about what is good for the Gold Coast was powerful. McRobbie was for many years the Gold Coast’s leading local journalist and Burchill held senior planning approval roles for the Gold Coast City Council. McRobbie, in the spirit of entrepreneurism he admires, rejoiced in self-publishing. The failure of Burchill to attract a mainstream publisher for an important Australian story, while Shanahan (2004), a freelance southern commentator whose stereotyping of the Gold Coast is extreme, was provided a platform by Australia’s leading establishment publisher, confirms the enduring quasi-colonial nature of Australian myth-making, in which powerful elites mostly decide how local cultures are mythologised.

Three resident-controlled, volunteer resistance groups oppose any further large-scale development of The Spit. Save Our Spit (Save Our Spit) has existed since about 2005, with a voluminous online archive of The Spit debate, representing recreational users of The Spit, especially a large surfing population, from across the Gold Coast, as well as
from Logan City, immediately north of the Gold Coast, and from Brisbane. Save Our Broadwater (Save Our Broadwater) has been active since Tom Tate was elected Gold Coast Mayor in 2012, also representing recreational users of The Spit and of the Broadwater, including “boaties” and scuba divers. The Main Beach Association (Main Beach Association) represents the interests of mostly middle-aged and elderly residents in the upmarket suburb adjacent to the Spit. SOS and SOB are single-issue, semi-temporary pressure groups. The MBA is a multiple-issue, permanent group. All three are non-sectional, mutually cooperative, drawing support across the social spectrum, from professionals and tradespeople, wage earners, the unemployed, students and retirees. The Friends of Federation Walk (Friends of Federation Walk), another voluntary group, coordinating tree planting at The Spit, lends support to SOS and SOB as a less active campaigner against further large-scale development, although it draws support from SOS, SOB and the MBA. Together, these groups have thousands of supporters, able to be quantified as Facebook followers and those who attend information meetings and protest rallies. They are prominent in The Spit mythscape and enhance the discrete multiplicities of the Gold Coast identity crisis.

The resistance groups seeking to protect The Spit as a publicly owned natural asset fear topocide, or the annihilation of place. They are opposed to over-development exceeding the limits of the Gold Coast town plan, especially buildings above three stories, but they have stated they are willing to negotiate a productive relationship with developers and the Gold Coast City Council. It may be possible to argue theirs is a negotiated ideology, partially accepting the pro-development group’s messages pushing for The Spit to be further exploited, although their willingness to negotiate is within the narrow constraints of acceptable height limits for The Spit and does not imply readiness to concede. SOS is less inclined to negotiate with developers. These resistance groups share deep emotional feelings about protecting The Spit and wide connections with their community of
supporters. Massey argues (2005, p. 94) that cyberspace has made our immediate neighbours less significant, or rather it broadens our social networks. We can find community, a sense of shared identity, with many others elsewhere. At the Spit, this spatial reach resists pressures to compromise, as the oppositional or negotiated ideology does not feel any relative urgency to give in, to accept a new community identity for The Spit, because it already has a shared community in the digital realm, which is both somewhere else and right here. In this way, spatial reach contributes to identity strength.

The Gold Coast pro-development ideology persists in portraying the resistance groups and other individuals it sees as enemies of progress at The Spit, as if they are folk devils, defined by Cohen as a sub-cultural ‘threat to societal values and interests’ (Cohen 2002, p. 1). However, SOS, SOB and the MBA are unsuitable folk devils because they have the ‘power to deny, downplay or bypass’ accusations about their alleged culpability, extremism or unreasonableness (Cohen 2002, p. xi) via their unmediated social media reach and eloquent leadership. The SOB, SOS and MBA leaders are capable and careful negotiators and communicators with access to town planning and legal advice. Overall, the campaigning against over-development on the Gold Coast is not extreme or dramatic enough to induce moral panic. The Gold Coast resistance groups have achieved substantial gains at The Spit by the marshalling of public opinion and other social forces resistant to the pro-development ideology.

Complementary to the realisation of the Gold Coast resistance groups as a reflexive response to the forces of modernization in a risk society, Miller notes that resistance movements are responses to Habermas’s ‘colonization of the lifeworld’ and the ‘hollowing out of institutions of democratic deliberation’ (2007, p. 231). They are ‘struggles for recognition . . . to gain a meaningful voice in social discourse and public policy’ (2007, p. 233). The Spit’s community groups resisting the pro-development ideology’s hegemonic influence via the Gold Coast City Council and the Gold Coast
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*Bulletin* argue their voices are a meaningful part of democratic deliberation. As such, they ought to be heard in defending a public policy which has a three-storey height limit and, in broader terms, in defending ‘assaults on communal ways of life . . . (and) lifeworld traditions’ (2007, p. 233), such as easy, universal access to public open space, especially the beach. Leitner et al apply this kind of spatial awareness to contestation analysis, noting that ‘multiplicities of imaginaries’ may generate complexity within single, specific contestation campaigns (2007, p. 13). A variety of contesting groups with ‘distinct imaginaries’ may unite in common cause but may also find themselves contesting one another due to inter-group contradictions and power struggles (Leitner et al 2007, pp. 13-14). At The Spit, where the common cause among resistance groups and their allies and sympathisers is concern about over-development and distinct imaginaries range from conservative to liberal perspectives, among other things, SOB, SOS and the MBA each run their own race. Leaders of the three groups acknowledge they do not wish to work closely together but they have managed to disguise any peripheral disagreement or animosity, if it exists. Leitner et al recognise four ‘realms’ of contestation practice: direct action protests, lobbying and legislative action, alternative knowledge production and alternative economic and social practices (2007, p. 15). At The Spit, contestation exists within each of the four realms as protest rallies and public meetings, letter writing to parliamentarians and to the local press, support for and against and possible fielding of political candidates, extensive website archives containing relevant documentation and research and a broad reach across digital and social media. In terms of alternative economic and social practices, arguing for preservation of The Spit is of course a contestation of the pro-development ideology.

SOB, SOS and the MBA reinforce ‘local identities and practices as alternatives to a neoliberal borderless world’ (Leitner et al 2007, p. 12) where economic growth is prioritised ahead of the preservation of local space. This reinforcement is prosecuted by
engaging in ‘strategies of localisation’ drawing on ‘attachments to place in reaffirming the importance of local . . . cultural and ecological visions and practices’ (Leitner et al 2007, p. 21), although at The Spit such engagement is not so much a strategy as the reason for contestation in the first place. However, contesting neoliberalism is not necessarily simply a ‘power struggle for hegemony among mutual opposites’, rather the interaction between the Gold Coast pro-development group and SOB and SOS means each can be ‘potentially reshaped’ (Leitner et al 2007, p. 8), recognising that all ideologies may be negotiable. For example, SOS, SOB and the MBA ‘take advantage of technologies shaped under neoliberal auspices’ (Leitner et al 2007, p. 9), i.e., the internet and social media, even if the internet which has become an instrument of globalization also disrupts the hegemony of ideological elites. Contestation and neoliberalism are therefore ‘co-implicated’, sharing a ‘spatiality of mutual articulation’ (2007, pp. 10-11). In arguing against the notion that contestation generally does not succeed against neoliberalism, Leitner et al assert that such a notion downplays the ‘complex articulations of sociospatial struggles through which negotiations and reworkings of neoliberalism . . . take shape across space and time’ (Leitner et al 2007, p. 22). This speaks to The Spit saga in which contestation led by SOS, SOB and the MBA has succeeded in seeing off a cruise ship terminal planned for the Broadwater, continues to stymie an offshore terminal and largely contributed to the rejection of Sunland’s proposed twin towers and of the ASF Consortium’s multi-towers and casino.

Burton argues that Gold Coast growth has been framed conventionally in agency/structure terms, where the actions of ‘great men’, mostly entrepreneurs, developers and politicians, seeking to ‘bolster a narrative of growth and development as . . . unequivocally good for all’ have always been met by a ‘political undercurrent of resistance, not always strong or effective but always there’ (Burton 2016, p. 116). Resistance has been to specific development projects or a ‘broader campaign’ to retain
ambience and built form, via ‘avowedly environmental groups’ like SOS and the Gold Coast and Hinterland Environment Council, which supports the anti-development campaign for The Spit, and sectors of the business and development communities (Burton 2016, p. 116). Burton claims that ‘somewhat nostalgic attempts to preserve or recreate a mythic past exist across the political spectrum’ (2016, p. 116) and that managing the ‘sometimes conflicting and contradictory pressures’ arising from a ‘fragmented development industry’ will be necessary to head off ‘substantial crises of legitimacy’ for local government (2016, p. 118). Veteran developer Norm Rix, an acknowledged leader in the Gold Coast property industry, is opposed to much of the development sought for The Spit. Rix maintains The Spit is too physically confined for large scale development and recognises its value as public open space (Weston 2016d, p.10). However, apart from Rix, there is little contemporary evidence of a fragmented property development industry on the Gold Coast in terms of support for growth through development. Arguing that policy intervention is not always a part of the neoliberal project, Burton asserts that political responses to resistance to The Spit proposals show that interventions sometimes serve the interests of groups ‘other than a dominant group’, for example, Queensland deputy premier Jeff Seeney’s announcement in August 2014 that Doug Jennings Park on the northern end of The Spit would not be made available for development because of community opposition (2016, pp. 116-118). This is a moot point. Numerous examples throughout Australia attest to governments intervening to protect places and lifestyles threatened by property development in one form or another, such as forest protection extended across large areas of New South Wales. Such interventions usually follow politicians sniffing the wind, fearful of losing power. It is arguable that political intervention when it contradicts a powerful ideology is only to prevent an oppositional ideology gaining an electoral advantage and so
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intervention against the powerful ideology is sometimes paradoxically an act broadly and philosophically in favour of it.

Teo and Loosemore (2014), from the pro-development perspective, urge genuine engagement with protest group leaders in order to minimise disruption of contentious, major construction projects. Framing their case study of a housing development dispute at Sandon Point, New South Wales, with theories of crowd behaviour, collective action, mobilisation and social contagion, and considering the impact of media reporting (2014, pp. 42), Teo and Loosemore show that protest group leaders have significant community respect, active and sustained participation, relevant knowledge and skill sets (2014, p. 46), and are able to form bridges between ‘protest cliques’, yet too often they are ignored by developers struggling to cope with contestation (2014, p. 42). This has occurred at The Spit, where Mayor Tom Tate and Sunland’s Soheil Abedian have been contemptuous of SOS and SOB, whose leaders Judy Spence, Alan Rickard, Steve Gration and Luke Sorensen have relevant experience respectively in state politics, local government, academia and the media and surfing industries, and have succeeded in maintaining a united front against over-development. Teo and Loosemore refer to Stekelenburg and Klandermans (2013) in noting the ‘emergence of community action against a construction project [rests] on the presence of shared grievances, emotions and identity within a community about . . . potential risks’ (Teo and Loosemore 2014, p. 42). ‘It is critically important . . . to identify and communicate with the core protest group to prevent the escalation of community action’ (2014, p. 42). Any ‘attempts to consult . . . must be . . . open, trusting, non-legalistic . . . and not meant to manipulate or disport perceptions in favour of the developer. This would be quickly noticed and undermine trust rapidly’ (2014, p. 48). The Sandon Point dispute escalated to court battles, picket lines and violence (2014, p. 43) which has not occurred for The Spit but cannot be ruled out, given the intensity of feelings on both sides of The Spit debate,
even though the Queensland state government’s rejection of the ASF Consortium casino project has made such actions less likely.

Resolution strategies

Strategies for resolving contested space disputes depend in the end on local conditions. Beck envisages specific regulations to facilitate the embedding of self-criticism within an organisation and its processes, a reforming of ideological practices so that hazards are negotiated in advance, not after they are brought to life (1992, p. 234). In relation to The Spit, this might mean community representation on boards of directors of development companies, environmental impact assessments that genuinely analyse worst case scenarios identified by independent experts and development projects reflecting the concerns of public opinion surveys constituted independently. It may mean legislated height limits may or may not prevail and strategies to enable the private sector to have a role in both protecting and profiting from public space, so that ‘new forms of living in the course of industrialization processes’ (Beck 1992, p. 234) can evolve. The morality of Beck’s solution cannot be denied, but the pervasion and perversion of neoliberalism has become so absolute that his suggestions now seem at best tantalisingly out of reach, despite The Spit master plan consultation process.

Rather than accepting a model of more property development relying on global investment, via construction and occupancy, The Spit is under pressure by many of those who use it to continue to construct an own destiny within a global space, in which property development is not the exclusive natural, next order of existence. This allows us to anticipate the ‘possibility of surprise’ (Massey 2005, p. 105) which is an essential part of social relations and may well be a way to restore equilibrium among the Gold Coast’s competing identities by approaching new or different solutions. The spatial
possibility of ‘new relations to each other of previously disparate trajectories’ (Massey 2005, p. 41) is precisely what is at stake at The Spit, allowing us to look forward, and to see how the Gold Coast identity crisis might be resolved or how it might relate to the social structures of which it is a part, which it has influence on and is influenced by. Massey refers to the idea of radical democracy espoused by Laclau and Mouffe (1985), dependent upon difference and dissent, as ‘most productive’ in terms of post structuralism acknowledging the ‘existence of other voices’ (Massey 2005, p. 42). Genuine acknowledgment of other, different voices by competing interests on the Gold Coast may well be a step towards finding a way through The Spit debate.

Considering the growth challenges and solutions for emergent cities, Markusen and DiGiovanna (1999) note that decentralisation of ‘responsibility for economic development’ from national to state and local governments has led to reluctance to control ‘speculative regional development’ and resulted in ‘uneven’ development (1999, p. 15). This applies to the Gold Coast, in particular The Spit, where the Gold Coast City Council acts as a hegemonic agent of the pro-development ideology and where the Queensland state government’s awareness of a polarised electorate has made it reluctant to play a decisive role in regulating development. Markusen and DiGiovanna identify a need for national governments to provide to emergent cities financial and other aid for capacity building, and to ensure effective codes of conduct to clarify what constitutes corruption (1999, p. 16). On the Gold Coast, beyond The Spit master plan consultation process, aid is required to improve road access, public parks and native forest at The Spit, a mostly state-controlled place, and penalties for breaches of election campaign donation laws need to be a genuine deterrent. Markusen and DiGiovanna also identify a need for national standards in environmental care to protect emergent cities from despoliation (1999, p. 16). This is particularly relevant for The Spit, which has significant populations of threatened bar-tailed godwits and other at-risk species.
Markusen and DiGiovanna’s analysis while useful in considering how to approach some of the complex challenges of contested space at The Spit, nevertheless requires a reasoned and imaginative approach, including ways to separately acknowledge and integrate the deep seated concerns of the pro-development and resistance groups.

Noting the decline of national environmental protection powers in the United States, Ozawa and Yeakley (2004) refer to the tragedy of the commons, i.e. without strong, central control common resources are depleted because gains from exploitation outweigh ‘rational understanding’ of the need for restraint (2004, pp. 260-61). The absence of clear, consistent guidance from the Queensland state government in terms of the process and extent of developing and/or protecting The Spit public lands has been a major consideration in The Spit saga. The eventual implementation of The Spit master plan process occurred after more than two decades of indecision. However, Ostrom (1990) rejects the tragedy of the commons notion as being unnecessarily negative, a kind of cop out or abrogation of community responsibility. Ostrom’s comprehensive investigation of common pool resources applies an economic perspective to social science considerations of contested space and is therefore particularly useful in analysing The Spit’s land use dilemma. Rather than relying on governments to step in when the market fails, Ostrom wants ways of thinking about common pool resources to include flexible frameworks for working through complex resource use disputes, so that individuals are acknowledged as being able to solve collective problems themselves.

Ostrom’s reasoning indicates competing factions at The Spit should avoid acting independently and pay attention to the impact of one’s actions and to the costs involved in changing spatial practices (Ostrom 1990, p. 183). If individuals, or individual groups, choose their own ‘dominant strategy’, giving the best possible gain to the chooser and defecting from what might be the common good, without engaging in a contract or
communication with other stakeholders, the result is likely to be an inferior equilibrium or failure to profit, when ‘individual rational strategies lead to collectively irrational outcomes’ (1990, pp. 4-5). This highlights possible problems associated with The Spit master plan process, whereby the resistance ideology has achieved some priority. The pro-development ideology of course argues that development proposals for The Spit offer benefits to the wider community of more jobs and increased economic activity, even though a casino and high rises built elsewhere on the Gold Coast could achieve the same outcome. Ostrom cites Olson (1965) in noting that rational, self-interested people will often not act to achieve common or group interests because actual profit and benefit in the short term is preferred to anticipated profit and benefit in the long term (Ostrom 1990, pp. 5-6). The failure of individuals to act for the common good, or to work to achieve collective benefits, is to a large extent also due to ‘free riders’ who cannot be excluded from collective benefits (1990, p. 6). Free riders are apparent at The Spit. They are developers who will always seek to exploit leasehold sites set aside for possible commercial use and preservationists who will always have access to public places even if that access is limited and the social value of the public places diminished. The free rider phenomenon can involve riders pulling in different directions, which is yet another way of explaining the Gold Coast identity crisis, whereby free riding contributes to disequilibrium among social groups.

A ‘Leviathan’ model of centralised control of common pool resources ignores the costs of creating and maintaining centralised agencies (Ostrom 1990, pp. 9-10). At The Spit, the Gold Coast Waterways Authority, a state government agency, has incurred costs to upgrade a loop side road, erect signs and install gates preventing illegal camping, while police patrol the gated areas at night. On the other hand, a privatisation model for common pool resources may result in the development of smaller resource chunks with individuals or individual groups playing a ‘game against nature’ (1990, p. 12). At The
Spit, property developers would diminish nature with high-rise buildings and high-density activity. According to Ostrom, the ‘commons dilemma’ (1990, p. 16) overall involves a lack of mutual trust, powerful individuals exerting influence, authorities preventing constructive change and external impacts overriding common concerns (1990, pp. 16-21). On the Gold Coast, Mayor Tom Tate has the political platform to continue prosecuting his cruise ship terminal agenda, the Queensland state government has intervened via The Spit master plan to impose land use privileges and restrictions and the increasing frequency of cyclones and storms due to climate change has damaged infrastructure and caused beach erosion.

The commons dilemma is also explained by a ‘discount rate’ whereby individuals give less value to expected benefits in the future than to benefits anticipated in the short term. At The Spit, this relates to discounting the intangible value of preserving nature for future generations against exploiting nature now so that present generations can profit (Ostrom 1990, pp. 34-35). Analysing the benefits of a common pool resource involves the predicted values of resource units now and in the future, how variable those values are likely to be, what ‘quality differences’ will occur if change is pursued, the life of the resource and which option for use is more likely to reduce conflict (1990, p. 196). At The Spit, different values are measured differently, from the land values of the sites sought by the ASF Consortium and Sunland, before and after possible exploitation, to the social values of parkland and the beach, with and without the ASF and Sunland development proposals. Ostrom notes that individuals weigh perceived harms ahead of perceived gains (1990, p. 208). At The Spit, where public opinion is polarised for and against development, some people would rate diminishing the natural asset higher than gains to the district economy while others would rate loss of economic benefit higher than gains in retaining the natural asset.
Ostrom argues the commons dilemma can be overcome if individuals understand norms of behaviour in a community and how behaviour patterns may change if resource use rules change (1990, pp. 55-56). At The Spit, any property developer’s consideration of public open space values is constrained by the profit motive. Ostrom explains the challenge is to deliver a process where the long term expected net benefits for all are greater than the long term expected net benefits for individuals pursuing short term dominant strategies (1990, p. 186). This is the crux of The Spit dilemma. Why save The Spit for all when there is little or no monetary profit derived or such profit is foregone? How is it possible to offset this loss of profit by preserving the natural resource? Monetising the natural resource by, for example, a paid-for campground has limited profit making potential, may exacerbate overcrowding and could lead to conflict with other users of The Spit. The Queensland state government’s rejection of the ASF Consortium proposal for a casino and high rise towers on The Spit resulted in significant compensation costs in lieu of expenses already incurred and committed.

Ostrom suggests that effective use of a common pool resource may be achieved if users adopt incremental changes to improve joint welfare, with a common judgment that they will be disadvantaged if they do nothing, provided they have low discount rates, low transformation costs, and sufficient mutual trust that can be shared as social capital (1990, p. 211). These variables show why it is has been so difficult for developers to exploit The Spit. Different stakeholders at The Spit do not agree they will be disadvantaged if nothing is done, the pro-development ideology wants major not incremental change, discount rates vary widely because access to public parks and jobs in a casino are valued differently, arguably low public financial transformation costs are offset by relatively high social transformation costs and mutual trust is in short supply. Ostrom’s insistence on a flexible framework approach (1990, p. 214) recognises that one common pool resource can be significantly different from another, just as the
contested space dispute at The Spit is, for example, different from the contested space dispute over shark attacks on surfers in nearby northern New South Wales, where environmentalists oppose the use of ocean nets and drum lines to protect surfers from sharks while business owners argue for the protection measures to help restore tourism trade. Ostrom’s analysis does not necessarily provide a solution to The Spit dilemma, nor to the Gold Coast identity crisis, but it does increase understanding of what is at stake in constructively processing contested space.

Appreciating that space is socially constructed, via the cultural turn shifting emphasis from the ‘political economy, acknowledging that there are social processes involved’, Morrissey and Gaffikin distinguish two forms of contested space in cities (2006, p. 874). The first refers to pluralism, or disputes about power imbalances between rival groups. The second refers to sovereignty, where pluralist disputes are bound up with conflict about state legitimacy. On the Gold Coast, these two forms of contested space are somewhat coexistent. The pro-and anti-development factions accuse each other of exercising power and influence irresponsibly while a statutory inquiry into the funding of the election campaigns of successful candidates in the 2016 city council election to some extent questioned the legitimacy of the state’s local government election process. Morrissey and Gaffikin consider conceptual frameworks for intervention in resolving contested space disputes, which is in line with Ostrom’s argument for frameworks rather than rigid models (1990, p. 214). Morrissey and Gaffikin identify difficulties with Bollens’ four models of planning and policy (1999) and Healey’s (1997) communication and collaboration approach. They tentatively endorse the peace-building elements of Lederach’s (1995) transformative processes in conflict resolution theory, in line with their Belfast case study (Morrissey and Gaffikin 2006, pp. 876-77). Morrissey and Gaffikin argue that contested space disputes in cities are not always ‘subject to consensus resolution through engagement . . . But systematic discursive encounters
between adversaries that promote mutual understanding and cultural crossing can help to replace . . . antagonist politics . . . with a new agnostic politics’ (2006, p. 886). Their conclusion that a ‘smart pluralism’ (2006, p. 887) approach recognising the co-relation of identity and territory, that fundamental disagreement may never be resolved and finalising consensus may not be possible, but rather, as Ostrom indicates, that strategic objectives can be achieved by incremental political negotiation, is relevant for The Spit. ‘Instead of always looking for consensus and stability, protagonists would learn to live with the ambivalences and volatilities of an uneasy peace’ (Morrissey and Gaffikin 2006, p. 886). Recognising that agnostic politics and uneasy peace have entirely different meanings in Belfast and on the Gold Coast, both cities nevertheless have contested spaces defined by deep ideological divisions. Morrissey and Gaffikin believe that state and/or local council intervention therefore ought to be ‘multidimensional’ (2006, p. 887), acknowledging disagreement yet challenging entrenched positions in the search for acceptable results. This is a modification of the suggestion by Markusen and DiGiovanna for national government intervention and compatible with Ostrom’s call for commons users to develop flexible frameworks. In terms of The Spit debate, any lasting resolution arguably depends upon the extent to which opposing interests acknowledge disagreement, can dislodge from entrenched positions and consider how government intervention might assist to restore equilibrium.

**Methodology**

This doctoral project consists of a spatial analysis of The Spit land use debate (as explicated in the foregoing exegetical analysis) and a creative work of narrative journalism about the debate arranged thematically and chronologically. The creative work as it relates to the exegesis attaches a local, specific project to canonical
theoretical texts providing an ontological framework (Denzin and Lincoln 2008, pp. 27-28). It possesses an internal mobility, as it is an interaction of elements of critical, political and narrative thinking, thus becoming an interdisciplinary inquiry aware of the workings of power and the storytelling tradition (Denzin and Lincoln 2008, pp. 8-9). In other words, I narrate a more nuanced and extensive picture of what has been a very heated public debate, principally in the local daily newspaper. This debate has focused on point scoring about particular property development proposals, without revealing underlying motives, beliefs and experiences of the characters involved whose actions have a significant impact on the future of Australia’s best-known holiday place. My background as a newspaper journalist together with an MPhil in Creative Writing (Southorn 2008) allows me to elaborate the cut and thrust of The Spit debate in storytelling terms more engaging and meaningful than a relatively simple reportorial chronology of events. As such, I was a limited-participant observer of competing cultural practices in a contested space drawing on semi-structured interviews as primary sources and on secondary texts and personal experience.

I approached the creative work guided by Kramer’s ‘breakable rules’ criteria, developed for the Nieman Foundation for Journalism at Harvard University, a refinement of Wolfe’s New Journalism that acknowledges Defoe, Twain, Mailer, Capote and Didion, among others, breakable in the sense that guidelines for making art will ‘surely be stretched and reinvented again and again’ (Kramer 1995). Kramer’s criteria can be paraphrased as:

- immersion in subjects’ worlds and background research; implicit covenants about accuracy and candor with readers and sources; mostly about routine events; intimate voice, i.e. informal, frank, human and ironic; plain and spare style; disengaged and mobile stance from which stories are told and readers
addressed directly; structure built on primary narrative mixed with tales and digressions that amplify and reframe events; meaning developed by building on readers’ sequential reactions (Kramer 1995).

My creative work also draws on themes of nature and power exemplified in Orlean’s The Orchid Thief (1998), Savva’s The Road to Ruin (2016), Casey’s The Wave (2010) and McPhee’s The Control of Nature (1989), as narrative journalism structured around powerful, dynamic and idiosyncratic characters challenged by nature, or in Savva’s case as they relate to the vicissitudes of political power. In my creative work, these character traits apply to the Gold Coast Mayor, Tom Tate, as he confronts opportunities and challenges at The Spit. My telling of the story of The Spit begins in 2012 with Tate’s election as mayor and his promise to deliver a cruise ship terminal. The events I describe and interpret conclude in 2017, when the Queensland state government decided to reject the ASF Consortium’s proposed high rise resort and casino on The Spit, to restrict all property development on The Spit to three storeys or less and to commence a master plan public consultation process for The Spit which allows for consideration of a cruise ship terminal but does not imply a terminal will be built. The Queensland state government in 2017 effectively postponed the heated debate about large-scale development on The Spit. Given the political influence of the Queensland property development industry and the shortage of undeveloped beachfront land on the Gold Coast, a new state government would likely face renewed pressure to develop The Spit. My personal perspective reflects the Gold Coast oppositional ideology, with pro-nature sympathies, as a Gold Coast local resident and a newspaper journalist on the Gold Coast and in the adjacent Tweed Shire and the Queensland state capital, Brisbane, from 1989 to 2007. During this time, I reported on property development and real estate sales activities on the Gold Coast, the influence of the pro development ideology on the Gold Coast and the emergence of local resistance groups and individuals. Drawing on this
experience, the narrative journalism approach accommodates my knowledge of the Gold Coast property development industry and the events and individuals in The Spit debate. In terms of Kramer’s disengaged stance criterion, I am disengaged to the extent that I do not participate in resistance activities and I apply journalistic principles of accuracy and balance, without hiding my own beliefs.

My quest therefore is to narrate a synthesis of my own experience investigating the Gold Coast’s competing identity groups, and their relationships with Mayor Tate, in order to facilitate understanding of the Gold Coast identity crisis and the concomitant fate of The Spit. However, it is a pursuit fraught with hermeneutic potholes. In this sense, I am drawing on the work of Geertz, who noted that what he was really doing was making meaning from ‘our own constructions of other people’s constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to’, showing the complexity of his notion of any person’s culture being a web of significance spun by themselves (Geertz in Shields 1992, p. 20; Geertz in Back et al 2012, p. 27). At the same time, I am aware of the problematic nature of insider knowledge, the complexities of status ambiguity and the social and intellectual barriers between researcher and researched, despite the obvious advantages of ready access and awareness of local history and social context, as explained by Bennett (2002a). My role as insider researcher achieves a degree of ‘critical distance’ (2002a, p. 457) determined by my non-participation in resistance activities and journalistic engagement with the competing sides of The Spit debate.

In relation to sociological understandings of spatiality, contested space, risk and neo liberalism explored in the exegesis, the creative work reflects an awareness of the processes of social experience and a socially-constructed, value-laden reality, with postmodern sensibilities welcoming many voices and with the ‘politics of research . . . [that is] who has the power to legislate correct solutions to social problems’ (Denzin
and Lincoln 2008, p. 14), even though correctness is contestable. As well, a journalistic approach in which events and research are contemporaneous exemplifies Chaney’s ‘writing a history of the present day’, that is, an interpretation of social process and cultural change as it is unfolding (Chaney 2012, p. 12). In this sense, I acknowledge Lefebvre’s interest in the ‘process of the production of cultural notions and practices of space, not space itself’ (Shields 1992, p. 56). This enables recognition of my creative work as a process part of the ongoing discourse about The Spit, within The Spit’s space of representation, connecting imaginatively, politically and textually with place.

My creative work allows for negotiated and oppositional ideologies to be understood as equal partners in the democratic discourse, not the ‘painted out’ victims of neoliberal hegemony (Denzin and Lincoln 2008, p. 6), thus illustrating the precept that social science is ‘committed up front’ to social justice and equity (2008, p. 18). Although writing from a pro-nature perspective aware of the hegemony of the pro-development ideology, my broadsheet journalistic experience enables me to evaluate self-evident arguments and insistent pleadings of the resistance campaigners, however valid and essential they may be, without succumbing to ideological seduction, as well as reveal with fair consideration discrete meanings of the high-rise spruikers. My creative work adheres to the Australian Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance Code of Ethics (MEAA 2015), employing journalistic principles of accuracy first. I apply quantitative research, for example, statistical data on economic and demographic trends, alongside a qualitative process of interviewing and interpreting.

In terms of structuring the creative work narrative trajectory, my account of The Spit debate is interwoven with episodic descriptions of my walking the length of The Spit, introduced by acknowledging Rousseau’s *Reveries of the Solitary Walker* (1770), a reflection on a place shaped physically similar to The Spit, Ile de Saint-Pierre, in Lac de
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Bienne in Switzerland, and by discussing Rousseau in Reveries as he considers criticism of The Social Contract (1762), his foundation text of liberalism, which has been usurped by neo liberalism, the identifiable philosophy of the Gold Coast pro-development ideology. The connections to Rousseau enhance in my creative work historical and political depth and context, as well as serving as narrative markers signalling one chronological phase or thematic element of the story is over and another about to begin. I was also guided in writing about my walking of The Spit by Robinson’s Stones of Aran: Pilgrimage (1986) and Solnit’s Wanderlust (2014), respectively a forensic account of a circumambulation physically and spatially in the Aran Islands and an examination of writings about walking.

I conducted for the creative work semi-structured interviews and conversations and attended public meetings and gatherings with representatives of the resistance and pro-development groups, aiming to ensure as far as possible a balanced exploration of opposing views. These interviews and public events took place over four years, from 2016 to 2019. I wrote notes by shorthand and longhand into notebooks during my interviews and at the public meetings and gatherings I attended. This was the most effective technique I used during my thirty years as a newspaper reporter. So long as the interviewer has the capacity to take notes that accurately keep up with the speaker, I have found that notebooks may be least intimidating for an interview subject who can physically see their words on paper. I have found written note taking can assist in building trust with the interview subject, providing an opportunity to promptly read back notes during or immediately after the interview, without searching digitally for particular passages, which can lead to some awkward minutes of silence or few words. Discussing written notes can easily allow the subject a chance to restate their position so that what they have said is precisely what they want to say. Rather than trying for a “gotcha” moment, catching the subject out saying something unintendedly revealing, I
was aiming for the most considered statements accurately and fully reflecting the subject’s point of view. In concurrence with Talese, who writes into a notebook when interviewing, ‘I espouse patience in listening, trying to capture what the other person is thinking, trying to see the world from that person’s view’ (Talese quoted in Kramer 2007, p.30).

The interview subjects were approached via telephone, email and at public events in person. I made hand written notes during interviews of about two hours each with Judy Spence, the Save Our Broadwater leader, at her Main Beach home near The Spit; with David Hutley, the Main Beach Association president, in his high rise apartment overlooking The Spit; with Anthony Pols, an ex-professional surfer and South Stradbroke Island surfer at his surfboard repair shop at Miami on the central Gold Coast; with Lyn Wright, the Friends of Federation Walk founder, at her Main Beach home; with Lois Levy, the Gold Coast Hinterland and Environment Council leader, at her group’s headquarters at Currumbin on the southern Gold Coast; with Luke Sorensen, a prominent Save Our Spit committee member, at the Nerang McDonalds restaurant in the Gold Coast hinterland; and with Graham Dillon, the Kombumerri senior elder, at the Gold Coast campus of Griffith University. The interview locations were selected as the most convenient and comfortable for the subjects, in order to assist cooperation by maximising comfort. I made hand written notes immediately after a half hour conversation with David Fang, an ASF Consortium director, at a public information night at the Gold Coast Turf Club on the central Gold Coast. I conducted one digitally recorded interview, with Steve Gration, the Save Our Spit founder, at my home at Miami. I digitally recorded Gration’s interview, and later obtained a transcript from a transcription service provider, because this was his preference and because it was a long interview, over three hours. I have found that after about two hours my capacity for hand written note taking is diminished.
I made notes as a limited-participant observer for the creative work at Save Our Spit and Save Our Broadwater rallies and information nights at The Spit, outside the Gold Coast City Council offices on the central Gold Coast and at a public hall in Southport on the northern Gold Coast. I made notes while attending a Queensland Labor Party election campaign rally acknowledging the rejection of the ASF Consortium casino proposal for The Spit, at the Currumbin RSL club; during a Gold Coast City Council meeting on the Sunland twin-towers proposal for The Spit, at the council meeting chambers on the central Gold Coast; at an ASF Consortium information night at the Gold Coast Turf Club, on the central Gold Coast; at a Gold Coast Business Chamber breakfast meeting at the Gold Coast Convention Centre on the central Gold Coast, where Queensland Premier Annastascia Palaszczuk was the guest speaker; at a Chartered Accountants breakfast meeting at Bond University on the central Gold Coast, where I questioned Mayor Tate; at coastal management and climate change seminars at Griffith University on the northern Gold Coast; at a Friends of Federation Walk annual general meeting at the Southport Surf Life Saving Club near The Spit; and at a Queensland Crime and Misconduct Commission public hearing at the CCC offices in Brisbane. I visited the Marina Bay Sands casino in Singapore (the model for the ASF integrated resort proposed for The Spit) and made notes about my observations of the casino building and the responses of local residents and tourists during conversations with me.

As well, in the creative work, I analyse and discuss Gold Coast Bulletin news reports from 2012 to 2019 about The Spit saga, focusing on comment from significant politicians and developers, including Mayor Tate and Sunland founder Soheil Abedian, and from development opponents. I explore the newspaper’s hegemonic coverage of The Spit debate, alongside my personal reflections on nature, property development, my journalistic career and my surfing activities.
Conclusion

The Gold Coast place myth has evolved beyond a hedonistic holiday playground where property developers made easy money building high-rise towers on the beachfront sold to investors as accommodation for tourists, while retirees lived out their final days comfortably on canal estates. The Gold Coast’s growing resident population embracing young and middle-aged families has reached a critical mass demanding better infrastructure, services and quality of life in an emergent city no longer principally dependent on the tourism and construction industries. In this context of resistance to a pro-development ideology, a case study of the land use dispute at The Spit shows that contested space can be linked to identity crisis in the process of collective identity formation and to various competing understandings of place values that inform the local mythscape (Bennett 2002). Social spatialization frames consideration of these varied ideas and meanings, allowing a pervasive logic to link place and space with ideology, so that The Spit can be understood in Lefebvreian terms of spatial practices, representation of space and spaces of representation. Identity crisis on the Gold Coast can be seen as severe, prolonged and aggravated, or in a more nuanced way explained spatially by the extent of property development, underway and proposed, triggering disequilibrium among social groups with competing identities derived from different place values.

The Gold Coast neoliberal agenda is nominally and effectively led by the Gold Coast Mayor conforming to the Gold Coast local government leader archetype of entrepreneurial maverick and outspoken nonconformist, although this leadership trope on the Gold Coast is no longer unchallenged. The nature of neoliberal practice on the Gold Coast prosecuted by the pro-development ideology is recognised variously as hyperneoliberalism giving rise to placemaking resistance or active neoliberalism
privatising public space or a qualified minimalist neoliberalism asserting that property
developers’ interests are widely accepted. Despite this embeddedness of neoliberalism,
three non-sectional resistance groups have grown influential on the Gold Coast
representing oppositional or negotiated ideologies, as agents of reflexivity responding to
contemporary forces of modernization and to globalization, reinforcing local identities
by campaigning for the preservation of public space, opposed to excessive property
development on The Spit. Save Our Spit, Save Our Broadwater and the Main Beach
Association are involved to varying degrees in relationships with place and nature,
mutually beneficial rather than exploitative, demonstrating local iterations of
contestation practice including rallies and public meetings, letter writing and related
social media activity, research and divulging of relevant public documents and support
for and opposition to political figures.

The Queensland state government has intervened in The Spit debate to coordinate a
master plan public consultation process, after two decades of indecision about what to
do with The Spit. Contestation of space at The Spit has effectively challenged neo-
liberalism on the Gold Coast, realising a socio-cultural watershed. The pro-development
ideology no longer has effectively carte blanche rights to pursue property development
at all costs. Other spatial disputes on the Gold Coast suggest the Gold Coast pro-
development ideology will remain dominant and powerful into the immediate future,
even if its activities are resisted. These other disputes are at Palm Beach, where a
beachside high-rise building boom since 2018 has angered residents anxious about
overcrowding and the effectiveness of city planning instruments, and at Burleigh
Heads, where a large and noisy rooftop bar opened in 2018 in a landmark beachfront
building, coinciding with the closure by the bar owner of a learn to swim pool in the
building, has led to protest signs erected on nearby private property and angry criticism
on social media and in the Gold Coast Bulletin. As well, plans to extend the light rail
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network from Broadbeach to Burleigh Heads and on to Palm Beach have made residents angry about traffic congestion anticipated during and after the rail extension construction. In each case, such anger may or may not lead to the formation of local resistance groups like those at The Spit.

Examining The Spit as a contested space enhances understanding of the circumstances in which a politics of smart pluralism might influence or alleviate ideological disputes around common pool resources and approach or restore an equilibrium of competing identities. Such research may also assist analysis of the extent to which arguments can or cannot be made for state or local agency intervention in one form or another to support local capacity building and encourage environmental protection, suggesting possible approaches to contested space in other emergent cities. The following narrative journalism creative work serves as a complement to the exegesis, demonstrating how concepts of social spatialization, place making as process, risk society, reflexivity and identity crisis can underpin storytelling to illuminate a place myth.

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PROLOGUE

I was standing in the headland car park up above the Burleigh cove with Dwayne, the Burleigh Sheriff. A crowd of surfers below sat patiently on their boards, out in the glassy early morning ocean, a few sliding and styling on the peeling waves.

‘This is my backyard, you understand? Would you dump that in your backyard? Hey, would you?’

Dwayne looked about ready for a fight but he had one eye on the seductive surf and I knew he would be out there soon enough, patrolling the line-up, taking whatever waves he wanted. Dwayne’s reputation was earned over decades of being among the best at Burleigh whenever the swell is running.

The target of Dwayne’s threatening contempt, a reedy guy with a wispy beard and a concave chest, in dirty jeans cut off at the knees, crouching on a canvas stool behind a gas cooker, smiled nervously then looked down at his noodles in a bubbling pot. His flaxen haired, tanned girlfriend in a tiny bikini was perched on the front passenger seat of their hand painted hire van, all the doors open, knees tucked under her chin. She was expressionless, possibly stoned. A mess of empty beer stubbies, fast food wrappers and food scraps lay in the gutter against the front wheel.

A trio of Burleigh surfers scurried past, heading out to the waves, not a moment to waste, glaring at the blow-ins without breaking stride. One spat impressively under the cooker and glanced across at me. What could I do? I was angry, too, about the careless, provocative dumping of rubbish at this special place where we spend so many of our days sacrificing a conventional life. It seemed as if now there was always rubbish, every day. But of course I really wanted to be in the water.
Dwayne shrugged his shoulders and was off, trotting down the path to the jump off rocks, salt and pepper head bobbing, board held loosely under his arm. The reedy guy and the blank faced girl ate their breakfast noodles in the painted van. You Can’t Always Get What You Want swirling around grotesque Jagger lips, red and green and purple, on a great fat Buddha. Want nothing and you have it all. Try telling that to those who do the pulling down and the building up, the ones the critics and the haters from down south still call the White Shoe Brigade, the development-at-all costs property speculators and their agents, known since the first Gold Coast construction boom in the 1960s for flashy resort clothes with shiny white shoes.

We paddled out and sat among the waves. Dwayne started mouthing off. Usually, it was about kooks blocking his way, dropping in, falling off, but not this time.

‘Bloody idiots, dumping their shit everywhere. We should go visit their fucked up country and do the same to them.’

Sitting on his board behind us, Rat Man piped up. A long-nosed, fly-in fly-out electrician with a thin moustache that was cool in the seventies and cool again now, although he didn’t know that and wouldn’t care anyway. Rat Man felt smug he had landed back home for this four foot session.

‘Who’d want to be anywhere else? Not many places with waves and weather this good. It’s hard to go past paradise. Once you get away, you realise what you’ve left behind.’

This is what we always say. It dispels any suggestion that maybe we could move someplace else, do something else with our lives. Dwayne sneered.

‘Dunno about paradise, that’s up the road, isn’t it? Haven’t been there.’

Of course he meant Surfers Paradise. None of us old fart surfers go to Surfers.
That same week they tore down Miami Ice, our most recognised landmark since Australia’s best known motel, the Pink Poodle at Surfers Paradise, was demolished in 2004. The Miami Ice fibro factory, where everyone went to buy bagged ice for the esky, was two vintage army huts with a sandy floor, so dark inside you couldn’t see much beyond the doorway, only shadows of worn tin and iron and wooden tanks under a few bare light bulbs, musty and quiet like an old barn. It had been the heart of Miami for almost seventy years, with the unmissable Miami Ice sun face sign painted on the front, fronting the Gold Coast Highway, while old Mr Grevis fussed about inside. The city councillors, supposedly responsible for looking after local places of cultural significance, stood around wringing their hands, waiting for the demolition crew to destroy a public monument. Maybe they reckoned Miami Ice was a drug house. Yes, it was lined with asbestos but that is no excuse for knocking it down.

It wasn’t a spiv developer who took away Miami Ice, it was the Neumann family, a genuine local business, in sand mining, quarries, concrete and construction since 1948, one year after Miami Ice opened. The Grevises ran their ice works for four generations. They sold to the Neumanns for $1.5 million. The Neumanns have been generous donors to charities and worthy local organisations. Nevertheless, some might say two of the oldest families on the Gold Coast got together to destroy a piece of their own souls. A few days after the demolition, Burleigh Councillor Greg Betts admitted there was no city council policy to protect heritage buildings and the council had been too slow to act (Ardern 2013), failing to support a public push for the old ice palace to be relocated to a park and converted to a community centre. Miami Ice was so well known that John Farnham filmed a music video in front of it, when Farnsy was the biggest pop star in Australia.
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The Save Miami Ice Facebook page had gathered 3,600 likes in a week. Everyone was stunned and angered by what had happened. How could they do that? Why not keep at least the famous front wall with the painted sun face for the homogenous high-rise apartment block that will inevitably appear. Or show some spirit and generosity, it’s not as if the Neumanns need a dollar. Renovate it as a place where people will gather, a restaurant or cafe. The tourists would love it. An authentic local experience, isn’t that what we’re all looking for? Miami Ice rebooted might have pushed up high rise occupancy rates, made the towers all along too much of the beachfront, spiking into the clear blue sky like omniscient cathedrals, a bit less marginal in the off season. Too late now.

Miami Ice was demolished in 2013. A year earlier, Gold Coast voters elected the wealthy owner of a backpackers resort in the heart of Surfers Paradise as mayor. Tom Tate campaigned on a dream to bring to town the biggest property development project he could imagine, the biggest in living memory. For a place like the Gold Coast, that’s quite a claim. Tate wanted a cruise ship terminal at The Spit, a long stretch of mostly coastal bush between the Pacific Ocean and the Broadwater at the Nerang River mouth. The Mayor’s grandiose dream soon morphed into a ship terminal, a casino, a massive holiday resort and a new suburb on a reclaimed sand island in the middle of the Broadwater. Half a dozen high rise towers where the town plan has a three storey height limit. Tate reckoned he had a consortium of Asian financiers and savvy property developers lined up, ready to spend billions.

Public consultation, construction approvals and marine engineering for a monstrosity this size was not going to be easy. But I sensed there was another problem for the cruise ship terminal and high rise casino boosters. Locals had begun to say enough is enough. Those empty beer stubbies and fast food wrappers piling up on the Burleigh headland...
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had got me thinking about what the Gold Coast really stands for. After the Miami Ice
debacle many other people were thinking the same. Where will the cruise ships dump
their rubbish and leak their fuel waste? Over the side, out the door, like the Wicked van
stoners? Can we trust them to look after our backyard? What happens to the many
thousands of people every year who stroll The Spit forest and parks, sail and dive in the
Broadwater and swim and surf along the ocean beaches of The Spit and South
Stradbroke Island across the river if a parade of cruise ships come charging in? Have
you seen those ships up close? They’re like a pair of skyscrapers stuck together and laid
on one side. Do we really want our kids working in casinos? We already have a casino
at Broadbeach. Would Tate’s cruise ship terminal dream and the casino push secure the
Gold Coast economy for years to come, or was a battle about to begin for the collective
identity of the Gold Coast?

I decided it was time to chase the whole story, or as much of it as I might uncover. I
embarked on a quest of sorts to reveal everything I could about this gargantuan fantasy
dreamed up by property developers and their mates for the last remaining undeveloped
beachfront on the Gold Coast, and what it means to the people who might have to live
with it.

Along the way, I revisited the technicolour history of the Gold Coast, paradise for the
development gang as well as surfers, for those nearing the end of their lives and for
those starting out, and a forgotten paradise of the Yugambeh and Kombumerri people. I
realised The Spit could be a metaphor, a representation of the battleground of late
modernity, neoliberalism versus the rest. At the heart of this Spit debate stood a
cartoonish city mayor so outrageously provocative, so full of bluster and self-
confidence and anti-environment rhetoric he recalled none other than Donald Trump. I
recognised The Spit was a space to understand how place is contested and how ordinary
citizens can challenge authority and vast wealth. The Spit raised questions about society and nature. What does nature give to us? What do we want from it? How can we live with nature? How can we not destroy it?

PAVING PARADISE

Engineering nature

A short trip north from the lurid chaos of Surfers Paradise, at the end of a lonely road fringed by unspectacular scrub, before a testing paddle or boat ride across the channel between the Broadwater and the Nerang River mouth, a freak of nature unfolds, hidden from those who don’t surf. A fast peeling wave so perfectly symmetrical it is revered by surfers around the world. TOS, The Other Side, aka Straddie, the beach at the southern tip of South Stradbroke Island, manna from heaven. Every pro surfer who has been to Australia, which is just about all of them, and the countless thousands of local and tourist surfers, ride or want to ride TOS, where 500 cubic metres of sand is discharged every hour via undersea pipes from a pumping station across the river in the world’s first permanent sand bypass system (Gold Coast City Council & Griffith University Centre for Coastal Management n.d.). Pumping the sand, naturally sweeping northwards and otherwise blocking the river entrance, keeps the offshore waters accessible for the swarm of boats and yachts zipping around the Broadwater, many with berths at private moorings alongside mansions in the upriver canals.

TOS is an accidental by-product of human ingenuity, an unintentionally engineered wave directly across the river from The Spit. Dredging and enlarging the river mouth to accommodate cruise ships inside the Broadwater would dramatically alter sand flows and change the sea floor, jeopardising the magic of TOS. Blocking or redirecting the
ocean swell with a jetty and pontoons and a breakwall for an offshore cruise ship terminal would also stuff up the surf.

It is impossible to see The Other Side from The Spit. The rock wall on the northern bank of the river mouth is too high. To check how these special waves are breaking, surfers walk out along the top of the southern rock wall and stand on their toes, trying to catch a glimpse across the river, but all you can see is the very top of the peak as it crests, before it breaks. The peeling wave hidden behind the northern wall can only be imagined. You need to know enough about the tide, the swell, the sand and the wind to be sure it is worth rolling the dice. There are three ways to make the crossing. You can run a tinny or jet ski out of the river mouth, anchoring behind the waves or pulling up on the sand. In the summer, you can pay the ferryman who runs a boat with racks stowing twenty or more boards, picking up from a small jetty on the southern rock wall. He will drop you in the flat water near the peak. Or you can jump in the river with your board and paddle across.

All the angst over the fate of The Spit is about more than protecting the environs of a great surfing spot. Locals are protective of The Spit because it is a place to walk the dog, take the kids, go swimming, diving, fishing, bushwalking, eat fish and chips on a rug, drink beer and wine on the sand at sundown. In other words, The Spit is a place where Gold Coasters do what Australians have done for a long time to get away from it all – hang out at the beach, a world beyond the high rise towers back down the road at Surfers Paradise throwing spooky shadows across the sand, an ominous crowding presence making the act of being at the beach unnatural.

The voracious development sharks were circling but no towers or cruise ship terminal infrastructure had come out of the sand or the water in The Spit zone since Tom Tate was elected mayor of the Gold Coast in 2012, despite support for a cruise ship terminal
from Queensland’s then Liberal-National coalition state government. The low-rise Sea World Nara resort, facing the Broadwater, alongside the performing dolphins theme park halfway along The Spit, was as far north as development extended. There had been no construction on The Spit’s public reserve parkland stretching up to the river mouth, except for the sand pumping sheds and a kiosk.

**Burning down the house**

In November 2015, on a blistering hot Saturday afternoon, Terry “Tappa” Teece, the Burleigh Boardriders club stalwart, was enjoying a few beers at the Broadbeach Surf Life Saving Club. Teece photographed smoke billowing away to the north, above the Surfers Paradise towers. He posted the photo to his 2,200 Facebook followers, commenting: ‘Surfers on fire for Schoolies’ and ‘bye, bye, Gotham City . . . if only’ (Teece 2015). The fire was at The Spit, destroying fifteen hectares of ocean side bushland near Sea World. Police declared a state of emergency. Sea World was evacuated. Hundreds of people were stranded when the only access road for The Spit was closed. Two water bombing helicopters and thirteen fire trucks battled the flames. Witnesses said the blaze started with a bang and a single plume of smoke. They could smell diesel or marine fuel. Investigating authorities declared the fire suspicious (Weston 2016a, p. 9).

This was not the first time The Spit had been alight. The heritage-listed Humphreys Boatshed and slipway marine workshop were burnt to the ground in suspicious circumstances at night in 2004. A figure was seen running from the boatshed shortly before the flames appeared. The boatshed site had been under consideration back then for a cruise ship terminal. Numerous bushfires swept across The Spit throughout 2004. Some terminal opponents at that time suspected the fires were a deliberate strategy to show up The Spit as an unkempt, wild place, not worth preserving. ‘With each
successive fire, those pushing for development lined up to lament the undeveloped bits of The Spit, nearly all of it, was a “wasteland” that needed to be built upon to save it from itself” (Stapleton 2016).

Two days after the November 2015 fire, Tate appeared on the front page of the local daily newspaper, Rupert Murdoch’s *Gold Coast Bulletin*, photographed amid the ashes at The Spit (Potts 2015a, p. 1), announcing he was still hot for a cruise ship terminal. Tate was seeking re-election in the local government poll due in March 2016. He declared ratepayers could back his terminal dream, the dream he promised to make come true almost four years ago, or kick him out. The *Bulletin*’s front page headline indulged a Phoenix metaphor: “CRUISE PLAN RISES FROM ASHES” (Potts 2015a, p. 1). Others called it a ‘zombie proposal’ (Stapleton 2016).

The [cruise ship terminal] plan, in its various mutations, has been killed and dismembered time and time again, if not by . . . community uproar, then by the pure technical constraints and idiocy of the idea. . . It keeps rising from its grave (Stapleton 2016).

Tate was spruiking a revised terminal proposal, without identifying a developer or any funding sources, and without Queensland state government support, for an offshore pontoon berth way out in the ocean, at the end of a one kilometre long jetty, extending from The Spit’s eastern foreshore opposite Sea World, with a breakwall alongside the pontoon.

The Spit saga is like the Rolling Stones or the Jarndyce affair in *Bleak House*, never say die. Two weeks after Tate’s Phoenix-rising front page splash, in December 2015, another ambitious proposal to exploit The Spit and its marine environs was floated. The Breakwater Group of Queensland investors announced they wanted to build a $4.4 billion project with five resort hotels, a tunnel and a bridge connecting Wavebreak
Anchors Away / Southorn

Island, The Spit and Labrador on the western shore of the Broadwater. The Breakwater gang wanted to dredge a cruise ship terminal harbour on the Broadwater on the northern end of The Spit (Weston 2015, pp. 6-7). In the six months since Queensland’s new Labor state government had ruled out a cruise ship terminal on the Gold Coast, The Spit had become the site for not one but two terminal proposals.

Even the Gold Coast Bulletin, forever a staunch supporter of property development, although it had begun to modify its contempt for The Spit’s natural assets in line with recent public opinion, found the Breakwater scheme grossly overdone, dismissing it as ‘madcap concept drawings’. The Bulletin editorial preferred Tate’s ‘more reasonable’ offshore terminal dream:

No sooner than the hubbub over northern Spit development dies down . . . these new proposals whip it into a frenzy again, playing straight into the hands of those who oppose Spit development in any form. Then, the ultra-greens start spruiking notions the entire Spit is about to be turned into another Surfers Paradise with 24/7 gridlock and a bridge to South Stradbroke Island the next logical step (Gold Coast Bulletin 2015, p. 26).

Public opinion was split. Opponents of high-rise development and a cruise ship terminal on the Spit were making a noise. Locals wanted their space protected. The cruise ship terminal never-ending dream was a lot more than it seemed. Cynical observers believed it might be a ruse, beyond the Mayor’s unforgiving determination to remake The Spit into a symbol of triumph over nature. Was the Gold Coast cruise ship terminal push really a decoy for an outrageous land grab to secure private control of four kilometres of publicly-owned coastline, some of the best beaches in Australia?
Contesting ideology

A thousand years ago a Danish king commanded his flunkeys to wrestle his throne down to the beach and drop it in the sand at the shore. As the sea lapped at the feet of the great chair, the king strode barefoot into the shallows, lifted his robes above his knees, took his seat, raised his arm, lifted his palm and in a loud voice commanded the sea to retreat, go back. And we know what happened to King Canute. A wave broke in front of him. He was knocked from his throne and had to be dragged spluttering from the water. He managed to jump to his feet and sprinted up the sand. He nearly drowned. He enjoyed the drenching so much he stayed laughing in the sea for hours. He was infuriated and began screeching at the sea to obey. He caught a severe cold. However we imagine Canute, the moral of the story is unchanged: we cannot command the forces of nature. Canute represents power and authority confronting nature. He is a signifier of the foolish futility of trying to hold back the tide. Well, that’s one way of putting it.

The Canute story has been differently interpreted (Hay 2009). According to the English historian Henry of Huntingdon, in his Historia Anglorum (1129), Cnut the Great (c.995-1035), King of the North Sea Empire of Denmark, England and Norway, was trying to demonstrate that he had no control over the elements and his fallible, secular power was in no way superior to God’s. To emphasise his message, Cnut hung his gold crown on a crucifix and never wore it again. The kind of thing Leonardo De Caprio might do in a Shakespeare film. However, this compelling story of the king and the waves is not mentioned in the Encomium Emmae (1041), a family history in honour of Queen Emma of Normandy, whose son by Cnut was King of England after his father. The Canute story is apocryphal, a mysterious myth. If we accept it as proverbially understood, a reminder not to foolishly challenge nature, we can see how myth acts as a guide for cultural understanding, while the truth remains unknown, slippery or in some cases
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contested. Of course, politicians abuse truth every day. Truth depends on your point of view, it is a servant of ideology, whereas myth does not have to be true, that is not its function. Tom Tate reckons The Spit is ripe for exploitation. A cruise ship terminal, high rise towers and a casino on The Spit would give new life to the Gold Coast economy. Tate believes this to be true. His opponents argue the truth is different. Exploiting The Spit would destroy a natural oasis which ought to remain the Gold Coast’s biggest and best public space. And an offshore cruise ship terminal would be smashed by the next cyclone. It is tempting to imagine Tate puffed up in his shiny suit at The Spit fire zone on the Gold Coast Bulletin front page, waving his drawings for a cruise ship terminal, morphing into a kind of Canute, on the sand at the shoreline, mayoral robes and gold chain soaked by the waves. For Tate, time would tell, if he could build the offshore terminal and then, if it would survive the big blows that create epic surf on the Gold Coast every cyclone season.

Why might Cnut have wanted his throne carried to the beach? Such a dramatic gesture. Was it born of frustration amid intense debate, related to an episode of human intervention, an effort to alter or change a natural place? Even if Henry of Huntingdon did not recount the story of the king and the waves as fable or parable, even if he made up the story entirely, he was thinking about nature as contested space. And so it is, still. Exploring the debate about the future of the last remaining undeveloped coastal land on the Gold Coast, an unfolding ideological battle between pro- and anti-development forces, I was interested in the process of contestation. It was unlikely one side would prevail absolutely. I imagined each may well be changed by the contest. The evolution of a Gold Coast collective identity will never be settled, it will at best move from crisis state to a state of equilibrium or disequilibrium, made dynamic by social forces. Mayors come and go. Property developers rise and fall. Resistance groups persevere, or change personnel, or gain or lose momentum and influence, or disappear. My exploration of
The Spit as a process of contestation considered place as more than a coordinate location on a map. A physical place exists in our minds, as we imagine it, remember it and want it to be, with all of its varying histories and all of our biases, and with the intersections and transactions of power at and around that place. Tom Tate functions within this space, along with all of the other actors and their iterations past and present in The Spit saga.

The Canute myth shows how waves have symbolic power. To what extent do we flow with nature or try to dominate? The absolutes are made stark in two fundamental, opposing styles of surfing. The surfing media uses its own hackneyed phrases to describe style. Go with the flow. Rip, tear and lacerate. In the pantheon of Australian surfing, proto-stylist Midget Farrelly, the first world champion surfer, went with the flow, elegantly graceful with a minimum of fuss, while his nemesis Nat Young harnessed the flow, among the first surfers to go vertical on the wave face. Nat was dubbed The Animal yet he rode seemingly in defiance of nature. That was in the 1960s. More recently, supreme stylist Dave Rastovich, who began refining his surfing at Burleigh Heads, is explicitly contrasted with the late, great Andy Irons, from Hawaii’s Kauai island, one of the greatest power surfers, in the documentary film, Blue Horizon (2004). No one flows like Rasta. No one ripped like AI.

Mandate man

Tate’s political mantra is all about the Gold Coast economy. How to make it bigger by building and building again. Despite the evidence of surfing’s economic benefits, Tate has an on again, off again relationship with surfing, mostly off. He says in the ‘Surf Industry Support’ report that he is ‘committed to protecting the culture of surfing in our
city’ (City of Gold Coast n.d., p. 3) and he was keen enough to be photographed for the Gold Coast Bulletin at the launch of the Gold Coast World Surfing Reserve, giving the southern point breaks formal recognition as natural, social and economic assets and endorsing a consultative committee of surfers to advise on surf protection, even if that means enabling opposition to coastal development, because when push comes to shove on the Gold Coast, developers in the past have nearly always won. Tate’s support for the surfing sub-culture underpinning the Gold Coast lifestyle and to a considerable extent the local economy is strategically limited. As soon as surfing threatens his pro-development policy agenda, he puffs out his hefty chest and starts talking tough.

Tate likes to say that English is not his first language. He does not mean English is not the language he mostly uses or is not comfortable using, he means English is not the language he spoke as a child. Tate was born in Laos. His mother is Thai. He lived in Thailand until he was twelve. But this is a poor explanation for habitually garbling his message. Tate lets it all hang out. He doesn’t always make clear sense because what he says publicly is often a hasty first draft. No rehearsed answers. That’s his shtick. He is not airbrushed, not boring. He says what he thinks and backs himself, loud and proud. He can afford to do this because in politics, money usually delivers power, and Tate has lots of money. The sprawling trophy house, the massive boat, the Ferrari. He boasts that he does not accept election campaign donations, he spends his own money to remain visible. Posters, signs, ads, you cannot miss him. Everyone on the Gold Coast knows what Tate stands for, more than you can say about many politicians. His strategy is simple. If you’re not with me, you’re against me. And if you’re against me, I may confront you. Like Trump, Tate talks tough as a power strategy. So when surfing world champion Mick Fanning spoke out against the cruise ship terminal in 2012, Tate hit right back. No matter that Fanning is one of the Gold Coast’s most popular characters,
loved by surfers and non-surfers, an ideal Aussie bloke. Fanning has risen above personal tragedies with a generosity of spirit, like a kind of surfing saint. He accepts his prominence sometimes requires he speak up on behalf of the tribe. Fanning criticised the cruise ship terminal push on his blog: ‘Tom Tate the mayor for the Gold Coast is proposing the construction of a cruise ship terminal that would gut The Spit causing mass impact to the marine life, waves and lifestyle on the Gold Coast’ (Save Our Spit 2012). Tate lashed out at Fanning in the Bulletin, threatening to dump a promise to enhance wave quality at Kirra by extending the Kirra rock groyne:

Mick Fanning can do it. Let's see if he can get that (Kirra) project up. Let him lobby. I will leave it to him. He's putting his hand up saying things, he can get the groyne going for surfers. . . He's a good surfer, but I tend to listen to people with qualifications and information to add. . . For every Mick Fanning that comes out I can find a high-profile surfer to say it's a fantastic idea. You can be the best surfer, diver, artist - I'm happy for you - but I will be listening to the people that matter. It's more of an issue for high-profile people like the CEO of a cruise ship company and route managers doing bookings for the cruise ship terminal - they're the high-profile people I'm worried about. It's not a battle of what high-profile surfer is in what camp, it's about what's best for the Coast (Killoran 2012, p. 7).

By Tate’s standards, this was a good effort, a kind of coherent outburst. But really it made little sense. Failing to acknowledge that a professional surfer is qualified to comment publicly on threats to a surfing break invites ridicule. Implying that surfers do not matter on the Gold Coast and that Tate decides what is best is not at all persuasive. Besides, no cruise industry representatives had backed Tate’s terminal dream, nor had any high profile surfer. Tate’s tongue lashing did not cower Fanning. The champ was
critical again in 2017, after the Gold Coast City Council sought approval for the terminal from the federal government’s environment department. Fanning called the terminal a ‘huge pollution construction’ and an eyesore. ‘I hope we can band together as a city and stop this terrible thing. . . It’s extremely sad that the Gold Coast City Council is looking at destroying one of our amazing beaches for a cruise ship terminal. . . We shouldn’t mess with mother nature’ (Skene 2017a, p. 1).

Tate was more measured this time, responding on Facebook. He uses Facebook nearly every day, although his posts in 2017 were often curated by his chief of staff, Wayne Moran, a long-time, backroom operator for the conservatives. So while retaining the belligerence, Tate’s words online have sometimes been filtered by a different brain.

It’s OK for you Mick, you’ve got a job. A pretty sweet job at that. But what about all the younger generation here on the Gold Coast who want to work, to live and to bring up a family, what about them? You say the jetty will be ugly? Well, it’s funny how you haven’t mentioned the existing sand pumping jetty that’s been on The Spit for the last 30 years (Tate 2017).

As if a cruise ship terminal would be the answer to the Gold Coast’s employment problems, when advisors and experts had been saying for years the local boom and bust economy needed to diversify beyond tourism and construction. Comparing The Spit’s sand pumping jetty, which is like any pier extending about a hundred metres off the beach and publicly accessible, a favourite haunt for fishers, with an offshore terminal for docking and unloading cruise ships one kilometre out to sea, off limits to the public, was like comparing a possum to a giraffe. In a further response to Fanning in the *Bulletin*, Tate argued three of the best Gold Coast surf breaks were ‘created by man-made structures’ (Skene 2017, p. 4): TOS and Duranbah partly via river mouth rock
walls, Kirra via the rock groyne. This would be relevant only if anyone was claiming a cruise ship terminal would create a new surf break. Tate failed to mention it is the delicately balanced human-engineered sand pumping that tweaks TOS to perfection. Nor did he include in his list of human engineered surf breaks list the very best example, the Superbank, a perfect tube running for hundreds of metres from Snapper Rocks to Greenmount, formed by sand piped under the sea bed from the south side of the Tweed River mouth, keeping the Tweed Bar navigable, mimicking The Spit sand pumping system. The Superbank was the site for an annual World Surf League tour event and the main reason why many thousands of surfers every year make a pilgrimage to the Gold Coast.

Tate reminded Mick Fanning that ‘more than 70 percent of voters re-elected me’, the only mayoral candidate pushing for an offshore cruise ship terminal (Skene 2017, p. 4). This does not mean everyone who voted for Tate supported the terminal. Many might, some might not, others might not care either way. It is fair to assume many of Tate’s supporters did want a cruise ship terminal at The Spit, as he was so vocal in promising one, but less convincing was Tate’s assertion that he had a mandate to deliver a terminal. He received 64 per cent of first preference votes at the 2016 mayoral poll, 73 per cent after the distribution of preferences (Electoral Commission Queensland 2016). The five other mayoral candidates were all publicly opposed to the terminal. So it is equally fair to assume that many of the 98,000 voters, 36 per cent of all the Gold Coast mayoral voters, who did not choose Tate as their first preference, did not want a terminal. Whichever way you looked at the numbers, claiming a mandate was pointless because thousands of Gold Coasters will never give up the fight against a cruise ship terminal anywhere near The Spit. I had no idea when I began my investigation how hard
and desperate this hot fight would turn out. It would be some time before the fire on The
Spit was doused. Tempers were flaring, opposing forces threatening to explode.

NEOLIBERALISM AND THE BEACH

Walking with Rousseau

The thickest, oldest forest on The Spit, spared from the 2015 blaze, is at Philip Park on
the ocean side southern end, extending north for about one kilometre, part of the
Federation Walk track. Here are many of the Horsetail Sheoaks (*casuarina equietifolia
subspecies incana*) planted by the Queensland Beach Protection Authority in the 1970s
and ’80s, shortly before and after the Seaway rock walls were piled up and the sand
bypass pipes dug under the Nerang River mouth. These casuarinas are up to six metres
tall, about halfway through their life cycle, the high up fronds more grey than green.
The generic casuarina name derives from the Malay word *kasuari* for the cassowary
bird whose feathers hang and shake like a grass skirt.

The forest understory at Philip Park, named in the bicentenary year for Prince Philip, is
filling up with macarangas (*Macaranga tanarius*), wide spreading tropical trees with
large, shield shaped shiny green leaves. The macarangas are recolonizers of this sandy
landscape where one day in the second half of the twenty first century they may
outnumber the casuarinas, if they are not ripped out. The macarangas along Federation
Walk crowd and loom in a faintly menacing way, lecherous Nosferatus in flickering
light, their long, thin drooping branches like bony arms weighed down with the leaves
like large raised hands, palms turned inwards, waving slowly in the wind.

The macaranga forest begins on the edge of the Philip Park car park. A sign on a brick
toilet block in the middle of the car park warns of boa constrictors. The macaranga
Anchors Away / Southorn

forest is where Tom Tate’s cruise ship passengers would be on and off loaded from the long jetty out to the offshore terminal. The forest would be destroyed, replaced by sheds supporting the ships, and the car park taken over by buses carting cruisers in Panama hats, Bermuda shorts, polo shirts, boat shoes, tent smocks, sunglasses wider than windows, earrings on some of them hanging bigger than the mayoral chains. The macarangas would be powerless to resist. Walking slowly along the sand and gravel track, into the dappled light tunnel of the shape shifting trees, I wonder if the gestural sense of expressionistic doom is a foreboding of what is to come.

Jean Jacques Rousseau is with me but he does not walk beside me. He waits patiently back at the car park, his Reveries of the Solitary Walker (1782) on the front seat. Rousseau painted on the cover of my Oxford Classics edition wears an unpretentious wig, blue frock coat casually open, brown unbuttoned vest, white ruffled shirt, brown leather breeches trimmed and laced, white stockings and brown buckle shoes. He leans against a tree trunk, walking stick tucked between his legs, arms crossed, grasping a small bunch of flowers. He has a high forehead and a piercing gaze, a kindly but troubled expression, wise and quizzical. This is a French School painting, the artist unknown. Rousseau transported thus would have excited the few anxious men loitering along the Philip Park track although Rousseau was an admirer and seducer of women. I have my notebook and pen to save my reveries as I walk, not my phone because I am too slow finger tapping with no patience for corrective text. I am wearing board shorts, tee shirt and trusty Asics, the best calf protection. I find deeper understanding of The Spit beyond my experience of a surfing place by walking, tracing an outline of The Spit one step and one word at a time.

If you dig and dig some more as I did you arrive eventually at Rousseau’s The Social Contract (1762), a doctrine of political legitimacy and until the French Revolution a
subversive threat to the divine right of kings and the power and privilege of the church. Rousseau was harassed and hunted. He sought peace near the end of his life walking, collecting specimens for his herbarium and writing about his walking, recollecting his fate. The Social Contract is a tenet of liberalism, the philosophy of liberty and equality, articulating an essence of modern politics, mutually beneficial compromise. The sovereign people trade some of their natural rights, degrees of freedom, in return for the state guaranteeing legal rights, safety and shelter. If the compromise fails, the people can dismiss the leaders of the state. Rousseau’s grand idea underpinned western civilisation for 250 years until the political and business classes defaulted and the contract was progressively undermined and ultimately torn up, screwed up, shredded and dropped in the oil drum to be set alight and burned by the radical marauders who are the new normal, on the Gold Coast developing real estate wherever it might be possible to turn a profit, erecting new castles in the sky, the bigger the better in spite of town planning regulations and what locals want. All the claims about jobs and securing an economic future are convenient rhetoric, not necessarily accurate.

Neoliberalism in effect believes those with money and influence owe little or no ethical or moral allegiance and ought not be hindered from doing as they please to create more wealth for themselves. In the neoliberal ascendancy, the losers have nowhere to turn. They hear the siren call of extremists. The neoliberals are like the French monarchy in Rousseau’s time, they accept no obligation to maintain a set of common living standards, they have no discernible interest in recreational space or the preservation of cultural heritage and what is special in nature, unless it is for their own glory, benefit or use, or otherwise strategically useful. Resistance groups on the Gold Coast like Save Our Spit exercise their right to withdraw support for those in power who do not act in our best interests, although in late modernity the great difficulty is that too often best interests cannot be agreed. Neoliberalism has failed to deliver a better society, its end
game may well have begun, but it is not dead (Denniss 2018, p. 77), not on the Gold Coast. Here it is a dead hand laid over and suffocating what is underneath, but not the high-rise towers, the dead hand is a foundation for the towers rising up between splayed fingers.

If Australia is the most over governed democracy, more politicians per capita than anywhere else, our third tier of government is where most of the governing occurs. Local councillors are our most numerous political species, a direct, regular interface between neoliberalism and politics. Local government is stereotyped as a petri dish for mediocrity and eccentricity and patronised for petty squabbling grassroots politicking, but it is certainly no less important than federal and state governments because consequences are felt immediately and acutely if services provided by local government go wrong. Our lives are disrupted in fundamental ways if clean drinking water is not delivered to our taps, toilet waste not taken away and treated without discernible trace, bins not emptied, roads not maintained, sports grounds and facilities not provided and lifeguards not paid.

Running the Gold Coast really is a Herculean task. The Gold Coast is the second largest local government area in Australia, after Brisbane. Tom Tate is responsible for managing the Gold Coast City Council annual operating budget of more than one billion dollars and more than 2,000 employees. Tate’s mayoral salary approaches a quarter of a million dollars (Skene 2017b, p. 18). He does not seem to need this money, boasting in 2016 that ‘Ruth and I have got more cash in our bank’ than the Queensland Liberal National Party (Robson 2016), although this may also be a reflection on the parlous state of LNP finances. Local government relies on tightly controlled federal and state funding grants, revenue from property and water rates and property development fees and other charges is not enough, but it is an unequal relationship in which local
government is increasingly the victim of cost shedding by the states, asked to do more (Brianton 2019, pp. 143-158). Local government has a frequently closer relationship with property developers than federal and state governments because local councils determine and administer town planning regulations that can make or break multi-million dollar property deals. Local councils striving in a neoliberal environment to be entrepreneurial by necessity are therefore vulnerable to temptation and influence by developers.

**First Mate of the Resistance**

Luke Sorensen is a photographer and publisher who looks like a pirate skateboarder, a video collaborator with Californian crossover thrash band *Suicidal Tendencies* and a coach at the Nerang Soccer Club. When I met Sorensen, he was in his forties and had been going to The Spit since he was an infant. His pictures of the forest at Philip Park in glowing shafts of sunlight are glorious. He grew up nearby, not far from the Nerang River. He is a big unit with a ponytail and a close cropped beard. He wears a bandana around his head or a baseball cap, shorts and sneakers. Sorensen’s mother’s family have been on the Gold Coast for more than 100 years. His grandfather ran a boat hire and bait shop on the Broadwater. His father came to the Gold Coast from Denmark in the 1970s, after a spur of the moment pledge in a bar. ‘They saw an Australian settlement offer on the TV, two weeks later his mate turns up at his door, says “let’s go” ’ (Sorensen 2016). Sorensen’s dad slept on couches in party houses at Main Beach near The Spit and walked to Surfers Paradise picking up bottles to recycle for cash. He became a Mercedes spare parts salesman and ran pubs.

Sorensen was vice president of Save Our Spit for four years and remains a board member. Save Our Spit was formed a decade ago, an offshoot of the Main Beach
Progress Association, to resist the cruise ship terminal push. The association is a small business group representing the dining and retail precinct of Tedder Avenue, the chicest spot to be seen on the Gold Coast in the 1990s until it degenerated into a haunt for spivs and drug dealers. The Main Beach Progress Association launched a strategic vision for Main Beach and The Spit in December 2018, in favour of the terminal.

I met Sorensen at the Nerang McDonalds on a weekday morning after he had taken his kids to school. He described Save Our Spit as a ‘research group dealing with social and environmental issues . . . we do campaigns and protests’ (Sorensen 2016). Sorensen despises Tate and is proud of the resistance groups on the Gold Coast ‘standing up for social issues, we are a mighty force’ (Sorensen 2016). He insisted Save Our Spit did not start the civil war with Tate. ‘We are reacting, he continually attacks us. We did not throw the first stone’ (Sorensen 2016).

Sorensen’s relationship with the Gold Coast pro-development dominant ideology is complex. His freelance journalist partner was writing a biography of Sir Bruce Small, the pocket rocket godfather of the White Shoe Brigade, the original Gold Coast property developers. Sorensen acknowledged the biography funded by the Small family helped ‘pay the bills the past few years’ (Sorensen 2016). He argued that Sir Bruce Small ‘had a social conscience, a moral compass. I’ve come to admire him, even though he was a developer. He wondered before he died, have we done too much?’ (Sorensen 2016). Sorensen published an online local magazine, Liquify, with articles on surfing, music and The Spit. The January 2016 issue featured an account of the cruise ship terminal debate headlined “Spitfire and the Dawn of the Developers: Tate’s Terminal That Won’t Die” (Stapleton 2016). Tate was photo-shopped for the article as a shovel-wielding zombie with a bloody gash on his forehead and blood drooling from his mouth.

Sorensen told me he did not personally dislike the ‘very shrewd’ chiefs of the ASF
Anchors Away / Southorn

Consortium wanting to build The Spit casino, Louis Chien and David Fang (Sorensen 2016). They were similar ages to Sorensen with young children.

Save Our Spit was an effective campaigner partly because it did not see Gold Coast development in black and white terms, it was not uncompromising, rather interested in a relatively inclusive solution, what might be fair and reasonable. Sorensen described the Gold Coast as a ‘two speed culture’ (Sorensen 2016). Some new settlers and the development lobby consider the Gold Coast as a ‘cow to be milked. Sure there are great opportunities here for developers to make money, [but] it is also an old part of Australia with a families culture. I think we need both. The question is, what is the right mix to be beneficial for the future?’ (Sorensen 2016). Sorensen mocked Soheil Abedian, the boss of the Gold Coast-based, publicly listed Sunland property development company. Sunland was seeking approval for two 44-storey towers on The Spit. Abedian had been talking up a public art space in the twin towers. Sorensen reckoned Abedian ‘sees culture as paintings on a wall’ (Sorensen 2016).

Save Our Spit insisted on adherence to the three storey height limit for The Spit as determined in the Gold Coast City Council town plan (Sorensen 2016). The planning guidance was drawn up by the council’s senior planning staff and councillors and approved by the Queensland state government after formal consultation with residents. This is the legislated procedure for local government town plans across Australia. But the pro-development crowd on the Gold Coast, and in more than a few other Australian cities, simply take it or leave it, depending on what they want and what they can get away with, refusing to acknowledge the Gold Coast families culture is incompatible with excessive development.

Sorensen suggested the cruise ship terminal was really just a pawn, a bargaining chip in a high stakes strategy to carve up The Spit. Tate wanted a terminal, he had staked his
political reputation on it, but the construction cost was too expensive politically for the federal and state governments because many thousands of Gold Coasters did not want a terminal. The Gold Coast City Council could not afford to build a terminal. One way a terminal might be built, according to Sorensen, was via private funding with strings attached.

It’s easy to say Tom is mad. It’s too expensive, it will be infrequently visited, why would anybody push so hard? It makes you wonder. The bigger the subsidy needed to maintain it, the better it is for a private developer. As soon as we need private subsidies from a developer, they will want something in return. The only way out is to offer public land. It doesn’t matter if no ships come, if it enables access to public land and a casino licence. So the Gold Coast gets the terminal and the developer gets land. We need to understand the big picture. This was never about cruise passengers benefiting our city, this is about developers getting public land. There are precedents, this is how they do it. These are legacy sites [at The Spit] that will define the Gold Coast for the next hundred years. Developers want to get their hands on the best sites (Sorensen 2016).

Sorensen outlined a business plan for the Gold Coast cruise ship terminal and then tore it apart. There are few offshore ship terminals, the one most resembling what Tate wanted was at Costa Azul on the Baha peninsula on Mexico’s Pacific coast, for tankers with liquid natural gas to be piped to California. Costa Azul’s 650 metre-long breakwall docking section, 300 metres from shore, cost $AUD226 million. It was designed to accommodate rolling swells but not hundreds of cruise passengers. The stormy weather arriving regularly on the Gold Coast would require ticketing and other service facilities for cruise passengers to be located on shore, in the Philip Park forest.
Sorensen compared the Gold Coast cruise ship terminal to the Townsville cruise ship terminal, 1,400 kilometres north of the Gold Coast. Townsville is a transit port. The Gold Coast would also be a transit port, able to charge port fees but otherwise not generating income from refuelling, long stay passenger visits and other costs charged at larger, longer stay and home ports. At Townsville, according to Sorensen, port fees amounted to $11,000 per cruise ship. Eleven ships were booked at Townsville for 2017. If the Gold Coast cruise ship terminal break wall cost the same as Costa Azul’s, the Gold Coast would need 20,000 ships to arrive before the break wall cost was recovered. ‘It would have to be the worst infrastructure investment in history,’ Sorensen said (Sorensen 2016).

**Shifting sand**

I cannot write a *flora peninsula* as Rousseau did, walking each day on Ile de Saint-Pierre in Switzerland, collecting and cataloguing plant specimens. I appreciate his approach as I walk The Spit, the same shape and size as Saint-Pierre stretching into Lac de Bienne, like The Spit into the Broadwater. I find Rousseau’s simple methodology, dividing the island into segments for his botanical examinations, can be applied to The Spit. The ocean beach, the Broadwater, Wavebreak Island, the Seaway, Doug Jennings Park, Sea World, the boat harbour, Bum Bay, the sand pumping jetty, are each their own distinct cosmos, or, according to Walter Benjamin, the *flaneur* transcribing in the 1930s his reveries from the Paris arcades, ‘now a landscape, now a room’ (Benjamin 2007, p. 156). I have wandered across America, in Europe and around Australia. I concur with Rousseau when he writes the spectacle of nature is ‘the only spectacle in the world of which [the] eyes and heart never tire’ (Rousseau 1782, p. 71). I make my reveries at The Spit not in consolation for a life struggle against unreason, like
Rousseau, but to make sense of a place subjected to unreasonable pressures, that would if its oppressors had their way be forever condemned as good for nothing but exploitation and denied its natural role, to nourish.

The Federation Walk track heading north from Philip Park twists and turns and rises and falls among the dunes. The sand is packed and sprinkled with enough stabilising gravel to provide a satisfying crunch from each step. Cars rumble and roar back and forth behind the macarangas along the black top road just fifty metres away. Helicopters giving tourists a bird’s eye view circle overhead. I cannot see the cars shooting past and need to look up above the trees and scan the sky to spot the joyriders. The Sea World monorail across the road runs parallel to Federation Walk, behind a security fence topped with barbed wire and clad with purple, red and orange bougainvillea vines.

After a few hundred metres, I arrive at a sign posted Learning Place, a clearing among the trees with four semi circular concrete block seats shaded by two old banksias, where resters or questers among themselves or with guides might be invited to talk story about The Spit. The cement seats are painted light blue, arranged in a circle. In the middle of the circle on the ground is a round cement mat with leaf patterns cut out like stencils. These sculptural arrangements are a mysterious, abstract presence in the forest, maybe markers of a lost civilisation, Stonehenge toppled, although indigenous society in Australia was differently demonstrative. The only signs of ancient gathering places surviving on the Gold Coast are ceremonial bora rings, faint circular ground depressions, at Broadbeach and Burleigh, or shell middens on the Burleigh headland and lost among the dunes if not dug up by extensive sand mining.

Federation Walk is not the only track along The Spit. Closer to the beach, up on top of the dunes above the high tide, a wide cement path for joggers and cyclists, the Oceanway, has been laid by the Gold Coast City Council. The council provides minimal
financial assistance for Federation Walk, mostly for tree planting by volunteers along the northern end, beyond the established forest. The Oceanway cement strip at The Spit was a one-off expense, part of a beachside walking track stretching all the way to Coolangatta in the south. The two paths on The Spit, one soft, the other hard, run parallel for about one kilometre until the Oceanway merges with Federation Walk opposite Muriel Henchman Park, another car park with boat launching ramps and a pontoon, where I watch a young family about to launch kayaks into the Broadwater strap a lifejacket on their worried dog. Muriel Henchman was a champion volunteer. She was communications officer for the Southport Air Sea Rescue, founder of the Surfers Paradise Arts Theatre and an activist with the Miami Progress Association. She owned a lingerie salon and staged the first lingerie parade on the Gold Coast (Wright 2019).

Federation Walk and the Oceanway are quite different spaces. Along the Oceanway, joggers and cyclists pound and spin, wrapped in headphones, digitally connected. Rather than solitary reverie, the Oceanway users are engaged with other people far away, other places, other times. Federation Walk is traversed by more contemplative folk with fewer headphones. It lies behind the sand dunes and is not fixed in place. If the dunes move, Federation Walk is not disrupted, or its gravel and sand move, it is by nature adaptive. The Oceanway caps the top of the dunes, no mind for future risk. The Gold Coast has been lucky for the past forty years, no cyclone has landed a sucker punch, but sooner or later the Gold Coast probably will be struck hard and the Oceanway concrete might crack or dislodge.

Beaches are powerful forces of nature. The hundreds of buildings on top of or in place of or in front of the dunes all along the Gold Coast would be threatened by the shifting sands, tumbling or washing away, if they were not protected by an immense usually
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invisible rock barrier under the dunes. The very wealthy wanting to build homes along
the beachfront are required to pay tens of thousands of dollars for their section of the
buried wall. Along Jefferson Lane at Palm Beach, on the southern Gold Coast, the rocks
extend a dozen metres and more down into the sand. Sand does indeed have a life of its
own. Surfing is all about sand. If you hang around a stretch of coastline long enough,
the sandbanks and the sand always shifting over the reefs and around the rocky points
and off and on to the beach will eventually and repeatedly coordinate with the ocean
currents, the tides and the wind, so that when the incoming swells line up the waves
might be good.

I walk out of Muriel Henchman Park, past a grounded flotilla of empty boat trailers,
cross the busy road running the length of The Spit like a black vein, and rejoin
Federation Walk. Here the track widens and the forest disappears. I am surrounded by
dense scrub, woodland and open grassland two or three metres high. Tiny coloured
flowers appear among waxy leaves. The track rises higher. The day is overcast and hot.
I can see glowering towers to the south and mountains to the west. I feel elated amid
this seventy hectares of wild vegetation. Despite everything that has gone down on the
Gold Coast, so much dug up, built up, burned, knocked over and built up again and
again, this great swathe of sandy nature has endured, managed to survive it all, so far
anyway.

The ocean is churning not far off, it sounds like the wind. I arrive at the junction of the
Biddy Gear Pathway. Edith “Biddy” Gear was the Gold Coast and Hinterland Wildlife
Preservation Society secretary in the 1980s, an early campaigner to preserve The Spit as
open space. A pair of macarangas are signalling on each side of the pathway entrance,
bending and waving in the wind, come along now. The path here is covered with a kind
of road base, grey stones and gravel. I spot the ocean up ahead and suck in the
magnificent salty air, that familiar head clearing stimulation of inestimable value. The wind is blowing hard south easterly, the ocean a tumult of white crests, appearing and disappearing aqua smooth wave faces, foam, water churning sand, a real mess. The near shore bank is shallow. The waves rear up hollow and close down hard. Paddling out today on a board is not the thing to do, an arduous mission with little or no riding reward, at best a cardio and strength workout. It is half tide going out. The high water mark is a straggly line of sticks, grass strands and other sea debris, about five metres from the largest surviving intact dune system on the Gold Coast.

The strong wind, about thirty knots, is blowing up what will be early the following morning a decent swell for surfers. It is not a storm swell but in this wind it would make landing or leaving or mooring a cruise ship at an offshore terminal unpleasant and dangerous. The beach walkers and their dogs grind along the hard sand, heads down. Most of the dogs are having a ball but some are subdued, it is too windy for them. Away to the south, Surfers Paradise is grey and menacing under the oyster sky, the tower bases obscured by swirling sand and spray. The joy riding choppers swirl around the towers like giant insects or drones. A doom scene in *Blade Runner*. The sand pumping jetty to the north looks insecure as the waves surge underneath in a rise and fall crash loop of angry white caps. The top of the lifeguard tower near the jetty is a speck of yellow, the only bright colour today on this beach. I grip my notebook so the pages won’t flap.

A liminal space
A name may carry great power. Acknowledging American ethnographer Keith Basso’s account of living with the Apache, the British nature writer Robert Macfarlane notes that ‘language constructs the human relation to place’ (Macfarlane 2015, p. 21). Place names are referential but they are ‘used and valued for other reasons as well: aesthetically, ethically, musically’ (Macfarlane 2015, p. 21). The Spit is a descriptor referring to a long, narrow, ultra slow motion ejaculation of sand, but it is also something more visceral. Spitting is generally considered unhygienic, uncivilised, disgusting and so The Spit is not only derided by the pro-development gang, it is tainted by its own name. The act of spitting is an unmistakable sign of disrespect towards another, demonstrated by the contemptuous surfer spitting at the painted van squatters in the Burleigh car park. Spitting is associated with chewing tobacco or it is done to remove phlegm. Saliva can carry transmittable disease.


The Spit is more than a marginal place, like most beaches near holiday resorts it is a generally free, public liminal zone, a threshold space, where the normative social structure of going to work ‘loses its grip’ (Shields 1992, p. 84) and other mundane daily behaviours are left behind or blend with lifestyle and leisure rituals like bush walking,
dog walking, jogging, fishing, diving, sailing, sunbathing, swimming and surfing. This less controlled space makes The Spit an unspoken provocation for the property development industry seeking to apply access restrictions and behavioural codes in privately operated for-profit towers, not a new challenge for the high rise marketers. In the past, the odds were set in their favour. But not any longer, The Spit had become a resistance space, the site for a contest to decide the destiny of the Gold Coast. Allowing a casino, more towers and a cruise ship terminal at The Spit would destroy its cherished public status and mean after sixty years of Gold Coast exploitation, still there would be no limit to how far the developers can go, up or along the sand, no limit to their impact.

Liminal spaces have a ‘carnivalesque’ dimension (Shields 1992, p. 6). The beach at the Gold Coast has been a promiscuous zone since the rail line was extended from Southport to Coolangatta and Tweed Heads in 1903. Packed trains from Brisbane delivered thousands of revellers to these beaches near the state border. Young men and women mixed in the new sport of surf bathing with Tweed Valley cane cutters known as unsavoury characters. In summer, hundreds on holidays slept in tents behind the dunes (Longhurst 1996, pp. 94-99). Beach parties at Coolangatta and Surfers Paradise in the 1960s, when the hokey pokey was performed *en masse*, and the Surfers Paradise schoolies’ festival since the 1990s, have maintained a Gold Coast tradition of moderate or extreme debauchery at the beach. Occasionally, it is possible to inadvertently notice or accidentally disturb young couples among the dunes.

The Spit is also sadly the site of a crime so brutal and disturbing it is the single event marking the loss of innocence of the Gold Coast, after which the Gold Coast was no longer Australia’s playground but like any other urban place where terrible violence might occur (Stolz 2016). Miles Buisson was sitting with his girlfriend in the dunes at The Spit on a warm evening in January 1990, near the heart of the Philip Park forest.
They had enjoyed a few drinks at the Fisherman’s Wharf tavern on the Broadwater. Buisson was eighteen, a local apprentice sign writer and a regular surfer. He had the long, sun bleached hair and fresh face of so many Gold Coast youths. He was an only child. He could have been any of our sons. An English unemployed landscape gardener, Colin Florey, appeared out of the darkness carrying a branch broken from a tree. Buisson was bashed and kicked in the head. His girlfriend tried to run but Florey grabbed and struck her, shoved sand in her mouth to stop her screaming, gripped her around the neck and laughed as he raped her. She was found staggering along the beach, bleeding, with a broken jaw and leg fractures. One of her eyes was so swollen it had closed completely. Florey was arrested two weeks later at Coffs Harbour on the New South Wales north coast. He remains in prison twenty years later. At Broadbeach, where Miles Buisson liked to surf, a memorial surfing contest was held and a memorial park named.

The pro-development crowd has not recalled the murder of Miles Buisson when denouncing The Spit, but they have called The Spit a place for ‘perverts’ (McRobbie 2000, p. 112). The implication is that when the ugly stretches of scrub and sand dunes are ripped out and replaced with a high rise casino, the cruise ship terminal jetty, sheds and other tourism infrastructure, the perverts will be driven away. This ignores the ugly truth that casinos are honey pots for gambling addicts and havens for organised crime. Despite labelling of The Spit as bad wasteland, serious crime since Colin Florey’s heinous act has not occurred at The Spit, except for the suspicious bush fires. Thousands of residents and visitors who enjoy The Spit every week are not deterred by any perverts, whoever they might be.

The murder and rape in 1990 makes The Spit sacred to the memory of those two young lovers, a place of sacrifice where the surfing tribe lost a young one and another was
brutally scarred for life. These losses mean too much to stand by and do nothing, let the developers pour concrete over the forest and the dunes, disturb memory and disregard respect, better to let nature embrace that place, grow around it and reaffirm the resilient cycle of life.

Natural contestation

Climate change has never been on the radar for Gold Coast developers. They push as close as they can to the ocean, refusing to recognise the ocean has begun to push back, because their frame of reference is only as wide as their current financing, until the latest tower construction is completed and enough apartments are sold. They are flogging an accessory that for a few months might look like a Rolex but is not so weather proof and may not last as long.

Cyclones in 1967 and 1974 thrashed and gouged much of the Gold Coast’s developed foreshore, pushed waves up against the towers, washed beachfront roads away and damaged countless buildings. Since then, the Gold Coast has endured regular poundings from the edges of cyclones centred further north, and from East Coast Lows or “weather bombs”, cyclonic like conditions that form too far south to be called cyclones but with similar heavy impact. The Gold Coast City Council spends millions of dollars every year maintaining and restoring beaches but the sand in the hour glass is running out.

No one of course can be too confident about the impact of likely sea level rises. Australian planning scenarios are loosely based on a one metre sea level rise by 2100, but it may be two metres or in a worst case five metres (Cooper & Lemckert 2012). The uncertainty is due to imprecise forecasts of future carbon emissions, the extent to which emissions will increase global temperatures and drive ‘thermal expansion’ of the oceans
and the rate of increase in meltwater from the ice sheets (Cooper & Lemckert 2012, p. 6). In 2012, the year Tom Tate became Gold Coast Mayor, the first analysis of ‘adaptation options’ for coastal resort cities threatened by rising sea levels due to climate change was published in the *Ocean and Coastal Management* journal (Cooper & Lemckert 2012). The analysis by Professor Andrew Cooper of the School of Environmental Sciences at the University of Ulster and Charles Lemckert, Adjunct Professor at the Griffith Centre for Coastal Management at Griffith University, focused exclusively on the Gold Coast. It is not just atolls like the Maldives or the low lying Pacific islands that may be engulfed by higher sea levels. The warning by Cooper and Lemckert of the risk of coastal inundation along the Gold Coast was based on all the available relevant data, much of it from the Gold Coast City Council. Since Cooper and Lemckert’s analysis was published eight years ago, the Gold Coast has undergone a coastal building boom on a scale to rival any of the booms in its short history.

Cooper and Lemckert were not optimistic about the long term prospects for preventing climate change damage to Gold Coast beaches, waterways and coastal buildings, partly because the urgent and substantial adaptation procedures required over the next 100 years depend on the ‘credibility of the decision makers’ and the ‘decision criteria’, including how to deal with property rights and the practical availability of money, rocks and sand (Cooper & Lemckert 2012, pp. 2 & 11). The Gold Coast already has a ‘coastal defence structure’, the buried rock seawall with sand heaped on top, known as the A-Line, extending along much but not all of the beach (Cooper & Lemckert 2012, p. 3). The A-Line is funded by the owners of beachfront private property or, where it extends in front of parks and other public land, by the Gold Coast City Council. The A-Line has gaps at Palm Beach, where new beachside residential towers are on the march, exceeding the town plan height restrictions, replacing older single, double and triple storey houses and flats. The A-Line artificial dune tops are 4.9 metres above mean sea
level. This is the coastal defence, designed to protect high-rise buildings and other infrastructure from a 1-in-100 year storm. Trouble is, cyclonic or near-cyclonic intensity weather events are occurring more frequently, regularly sweeping away long stretches of sand on the ocean side of the A-Line and exposing the buried rocks, making access to the beach steep and dangerous and in parts at times inaccessible.

Without the capacity to shift within a natural ebb and flow dune system, due to the beachfront buildings and the A-Line, Gold Coast beaches require ongoing ‘artificial nourishment’ with sand dredged fromCurrumbin and Tallebudgera creeks, pumped from south of the Tweed River and dumped from new building sites (Cooper & Lemckert 2012, p. 3). The growing frequency of severe storms means the artificial nourishment program is already stretched. According to Cooper and Lemckert, the A-Line height will need to be increased in line with the rise in sea levels (Cooper and Lemckert 2012, p. 8). We are right now under siege, most of us ignorant the Gold Coast is to a large extent a fake beach, maintained by sand delivered from elsewhere and protected by an invisible wall, except it is not invisible when the sand is washed away.

The Gold Coast City Council contracted a dredge floating on a barge for four months in 2017 to shift three million cubic metres of offshore sand. The sand between The Spit and Palm Beach was dumped on banks closer to shore where wave action would, hopefully, wash it on to the beach (McElroy 2017, p. 8). The council was planning to fill in the A-Line gaps and build offshore artificial reefs to minimise erosion (McElroy 2018, p. 10). Maintaining the current beach profile with a one metre rise in sea levels would require the use of ‘all known local sand sources’ to protect at least 4,000 and as many as 8,000 residential buildings at ‘risk of inundation’, according to Cooper and Lemckert (Cooper & Lemckert 2012, pp. 10, 7). They calculated that if too many storms occur in close succession, the A-Line may well be breached with ‘major marine
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flooding’ (Cooper & Lemckert 2012, p. 10). The situation is most dire for residents in the Gold Coast canal estates. Cooper and Lemckert concluded some of the canal dwellers as well as some beachfront residents may have to accept regular inundation or abandon their homes (Cooper & Lemckert 2012, pp. 9-13), especially if the sea level rise approaches two metres. And they would most likely be slugged with property protection taxes (Cooper & Lemckert 2012, p. 11).

Sea level rises beyond two metres would probably mean the end of the Gold Coast as a coastal resort (Cooper and Lemckert 2012, p. 11). A two metre rise is ‘beyond current visioning exercises’ and necessary flood mitigation would be of such a scale it would be difficult to gain ‘political buy in’ (Cooper and Lemckert 2012, p. 11), especially as Sydney and Melbourne would require massive flood prevention expenditure. A five metre sea level rise could require a giant dyke installed from South Stradbroke Island across Moreton Bay, to stop the waters from the bay flooding the Gold Coast canal estates (Cooper and Lemckert 2012, p. 12). Or, in this case, abandonment of the Gold Coast coastal zone ‘might be the only viable option’ (Cooper and Lemckert 2012, p. 12). As the sea levels rise, The Spit would be at risk of detaching from the sand pumping jetty (Cooper and Lemckert 2012, p. 8). In a worst case scenario, The Spit and South Stradbroke Island could partly or even completely disappear under water, in which case the Broadwater would cease to exist. The Spit took about 100 years to evolve to its present size and shape, within another 100 years it might be almost gone.

The likely impacts of climate change provide a sobering perspective to The Spit debate, but not for the pro-development gang. Raising the height of the A-Line to prevent flooding could cost between $30 million and $150 million over the next 100 years, depending on how high the ocean rises (Cooper and Lemckert 2012, p. 8). This is not much money compared to the billions of dollars developers wanted to spend on The
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Spit. But the developers and their supporters are not sobered by what the future might hold. No developer was volunteering to stump up any money to pay for protection against rising sea levels.

**Change v. variability**

The Gold Coast Ocean Beaches Strategy 2013-2023 was approved by the Gold Coast City Council one year after Andrew Cooper and Charles Lemckert’s climate change analysis. The strategy is ostensibly a statement of reassurance but really it is a political document marked with the fingerprints of the pro-development boosters. It aims to provide four outcomes: a beach experience for everyone, clean and healthy beaches, infrastructure protected from ocean hazards and joint stewardship (City of Gold Coast 2013, p. 7). In other words, access for all, clean water and clean sand, protection from erosion, funded by all levels of government and by private property owners. Fair enough, unless you own a beachfront mansion or beachfront tower apartment and do not believe you should pay to keep the ocean away. The strategy refers to but does not clarify ‘implications’ and ‘opportunities’ arising from ‘increased erosion due to frequency of storms, sea level rise [and] climate variability’ (City of Gold Coast 2013, p. 11). Instead of an urgent call to arms the climate crisis demands, the Gold Coast Ocean Beaches Strategy 2013-2023 deploys weasel words, implications and opportunities, lest it alarm the tourists or, even worse, sends the wrong signal to developers. The strategy requires efficient allocation of ‘existing resources, an increase in funding and improved data collection and sharing . . . to support coastal management in a way that balances variable climate patterns with adequate protection of people and property’ (City of Gold Coast 2013, p. 11). This would be an entirely reasonable approach, if not also for a vague reference to ‘misinformation about beach management
issues’ (City of Gold Coast 2013, p. 11). Such loaded commentary, even briefly mentioned, risks encouraging the cranky reactionaries who accuse climate scientists of self-serving, alarmist predictions.

The foreword for the Gold Coast Ocean Beaches Strategy 2013-2023, with Tate’s photo and byline, contains an example of his sometimes unintentionally cryptic messaging. Not in this instance mangling grammar or wrong words, it combines words in a Trumpian way, trying to extract a particular meaning from an unsuitable idea. ‘The extent of beachfront development is a testament to the value of our ocean beaches’, according to Tate (Tate 2013, p. 3). To the extent that it can be understood, this declaration seems to argue that Gold Coast beaches are valued for their capacity to support property development, which is only half or less than half the story, implying at best a misunderstanding of the impact of property development on beach values, if we recognise an ocean beach is a natural, sensitive place at risk from human impacts. The 28-page strategy prefers to consider ‘climate variability’ (City of Gold Coast 2013, p. 11), it does not once mention climate change. This is an Orwellian miscast, beyond weasel words, ignoring the negative notions of worse than ever and no going back, suggesting the situation is more innocent, the climate is only variable, changing perhaps one way and then another. As Donald Trump likes to say, we’ll see what happens.

The deviously careful choice of innocuous words in the Gold Coast Ocean Beaches Strategy 2013-2023 reveals that Gold Coast City Council politicians and administrators have discussed how not to discuss climate change. As the years pass, ideological euphemisms for climate change are exposed as woefully ill advised or delusional and certainly may be dangerous to our children’s future. Any strategy for protecting ocean beaches that considers climate in terms of variables in a benign equation is like
designing a drug to ease indigestion and then prescribing it for a patient with heart disease.

The Gold Coast Ocean Beaches Strategy 2013-2023 notes that ‘expectations for beach use’ should be ‘complementary to natural coastal processes’ (City of Gold Coast 2013, p. 7) and that beach management should be based on ‘best practice measures to protect public and private infrastructure from . . . erosion, storm surge and other climatic variability’ (City of Gold Coast 2013, p. 13). Best practice is an obvious adaptation tactic but natural coastal processes on the Gold Coast have long been mediated by human intervention. Too much beachfront development causing erosion has been a problem on the Gold Coast for at least forty years.

The Gold Coast Ocean Beaches Strategy 2013-2023 wants sand volumes adjusted to maintain the erosion buffer, the A-Line maintained and extended along urban sections of the coast and new property development set back from the beachfront (City of Gold Coast 2013, p. 20). These aims reflect Cooper and Lemckert’s analysis. However, the strategy does not appear to consider sea level rise estimates and confirms the doubts about who pays, requiring ‘investment from all levels of government as well as close collaboration with stakeholders’ (City of Gold Coast 2013, p. 7). Private property owners will need to ‘understand their responsibilities in protecting their properties’ (City of Gold Coast 2013, p. 20). In other words, the Gold Coast City Council is not willing to pay by itself to maintain and upgrade beach protection over the long term and if current performance is any guide will continue business as usual, supporting the short term agenda of the property development crowd anxious to exploit The Spit. Already, the Queensland state government has failed to provide $15 million sought for beach protection work on the Gold Coast (Bourke 2015). The odds of protracted hand
wringing about spending money to save Gold Coast beaches for the future are short, not variable.

**SETTING SAIL**

**Central Park, Antipodes**

Waiting for Tom Tate to appear at a media conference or give an interview generates a frisson of anticipation among journalists and his staff and colleagues. Roll up, roll up. The circus is about to start. During his 2016 re-election campaign, Tate held court at the gym, strapped in a weight lifting belt, big gut spilling out of a sweaty loose singlet.

‘You want a safe pair of hands, a willing pair of hands, hands prepared to have a go . . . not these fuckers who just bring up bullshit . . . You get these guys who have been in politics twenty or thirty years, what the fuck have they done? It’s not about time served. It’s about what have you got for your city’ (Keen 2016a, p. 4). Yes, that’s right. Tate has been talking up the non-existent cruise ship terminal since 2012. And if he was not mayor, he would probably be on holiday, aboard a cruise ship: ‘The coast has been good to us. We’ve been blessed with our investment so if I go ahead and make another two or three million, five million, whatever the fuck, it’s not going to change anything. It’s not going to change the car I drive. I’m not going to change my friends. My clothes? No. Maybe we’ll cruise more . . .’ (Keen 2016a, p. 4).

Anyone who criticises or even questions Tate risks copping abuse, no matter how reasonable they might be. When Gold Coast City Council’s former finance committee chairman Eddy Saroff spoke out against the sale for development of a Surfers Paradise car park bequeathed eighty years ago on the proviso it be kept as a public space, Tate called Saroff a ‘bum looking for a seat’ (“Mayor takes shot” 2017, p. 8). After a *Four*
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*Four Corners* investigation into property developer links to Gold Coast councillors, Tate banned the ABC from the council chambers: ‘For the stupid *Four Corners* who asked me the question about one of the items that, why . . . declare my perceived conflict of interest and remain in the room, it’s because I have firmly the opinion I could participate in debate and vote on this matter in the public interest. Right? Quote me on that, you idiots’ (Burke 2017). Tate told veteran journalist Frank Robson that young journalists are too inexperienced to know what’s going on. ‘I just go, “gimme the question, here’s your answer, fuck off” ’ (Robson 2016, p. 17). Donald Trump has dumped on the liberal media for years but not even Trump displays Tate’s uncouth viciousness. Tate does not swear too much in public before an audience, but he has not held back during on-the-record interviews. However, he is a devoted family man. When his wife Ruth suffered a heart attack at Changi airport in Singapore in 2017, Tate performed CPR, helping paramedics save her life. The Tates were about to board a flight to Rome, for a Mediterranean cruise. They stayed in hospital in Singapore until Ruth was well enough to fly back to the Gold Coast.

Tate has a convenient regard for the pre-eminent green space in New York. Arguing in 2017 for half of The Spit to be given up for high-rise development, Tate spruiked that he wanted to preserve The Spit north of Sea World as a Gold Coast public park, like New York’s Central Park (Potts & Muir 2017). The Spit already is a public park, but unlike Central Park it is run down and sparsely treed because the Gold Coast City Council and the Queensland state government have failed to provide basic amenities. The Spit needs properly funded dune and forest care, more shade shelters and walking tracks, more public barbecues and public toilets, at least. Tate’s line in the sand was really an offer to be allowed to pack up to half of The Spit with high rise towers in return for leaving the other half alone. That’s a hard sell. No wonder he stole the Central
Park aspiration from Save Our Spit, whose members have visited New York to examine how well Central Park functions as a green space supported by civic authorities.

**Becoming mayor**

Tate became mayor at his second attempt, losing in 2008 to Ron Clarke, a phenomenal athlete in the pantheon of Australian sporting legends, an Olympic distance runner who became a very successful businessman. Tate can be tetchy about Clarke, his predecessor. Clarke did not contest the 2012 mayoral election. Tate never beat him.

A few weeks after the Gold Coast Commonwealth Games were locked in for 2018, Clarke quit as mayor to contest the Broadwater electorate as an independent in the 2012 Queensland state election. Labor’s margin in Broadwater was just 500 votes. The Liberal-National opposition was struggling to endorse a candidate. Clarke thought he had a chance, even if he was into his eighth decade. He offered tentative support for a cruise ship terminal, uncharacteristically trying to be all things to all people. He suggested a glass topped tunnel to carry tourists under the Broadwater. But 2012 was the year Queenslanders decided it was time for political change. The Liberal-National Party won the state election in a massive landslide for Campbell Newman, even their third choice candidate won Broadwater. Clarke’s political career was over.

One month later, two days before Gold Coast City Council polling day, Tate turned his cruise ship terminal golden ticket into a lightning rod. He promised to deliver the terminal, without explaining how, showing he understood the first rule of politics: you must stand for something. No matter if some people disagree. No matter if in this case a cruise ship terminal threatens the coastal lifestyle of generations of Gold Coasters and would destroy the Gold Coast’s last remaining undeveloped beachfront public land.
terminal promise galvanised the pro-development lobby and enraged Tate’s opponents, making him look inspiring and resilient. A mayoral vote on the Gold Coast is across the entire city. Many voters further away from The Spit, and many of those who do not go there, like the idea of a cruise ship terminal. With Clarke out of the race, Tate was the best recognised, best prepared and best funded mayoral candidate, signalling a return to the pro-growth policies that had apparently made the Gold Coast great. Tate’s idea of greatness resonates with the Trumpian version. When voters feel their politics has lost its way, nostalgia is a natural inclination. Tate and Trump promise a return to the good old days. But they are constrained because the pro-development ideology they promote faces more complex, insistent and effective challenges than ever before.

Ron Clarke died in 2015, after falling while walking near the Broadwater. He had been ill with a heart condition linked to his collapse at the Mexico City Olympics. Griffith University urban planning expert Paul Burton compares Ron Clarke and Tom Tate in terms of ‘managed growth’ and ‘unrestrained growth’ (Burton 2016, p. 118). It is ironic that Clarke was not a pro-development mayor yet was involved in triggering the biggest construction spree the Gold Coast has ever seen, for the Commonwealth Games. No matter how loudly Tate blusters about attracting property development, whatever he does will probably never surpass what happened on Ron Clarke’s watch. This is a hard truth for Tate to swallow. It might explain his snarky remarks when boasting at a photo shoot to promote Ferrari’s seventieth anniversary in 2017. Tate drives a Ferrari, among the least fuel efficient cars in the world. Clarke drove a low-emission Toyota Prius, like Malcolm Turnbull until he became prime minister. ‘I had four Ferraris before my mayoralty, so I just assumed everyone knew I like Ferraris,’ Tate said. ‘I like drinking beautiful whiskey, I like wearing a bit out there clothes. My attitude is work hard, play hard. For those politicians, mate, if you’re happy with a hybrid Toyota Prius, go with that’ (McElroy 2017a, p. 3).
Tate claims to speak five languages, even though his chief of staff Wayne Moran acknowledges he ‘doesn’t have the gift of the gab’ (Keen 2016a, p. 4). Well, yes and no. Tate appreciates that voters will not support you if they suspect you’re not being yourself. With Tate, what you see and hear is the real thing. ‘Genuineness is what you should do,’ he says (Keen 2016a, p. 4). However, what Tate says and what others say about him can sometimes be open to interpretation. He likes to refer to himself as the have-a-go mayor. Having a go at carving up The Spit? A mayoral staffer calls him Tornado Tom. Tornadoes of course are very destructive. Tate says he likes to surround himself with smart people. ‘I’m the first to admit I’m not the brightest kid in the room’ (Keen 2016a, p. 5). He is well aware he is mocked for his articulation. Perhaps this is why Tate admires one of the least admired American presidents renowned for syntactic faux pas. ‘George W. Bush, he ain’t the sharpest tool in the shed but he became the president. I like him, he has a go’ (Keen 2016a, p. 5).

Tate’s father Warwick left Asia in the 1970s, returning to Sydney to start his own engineering business. His mother Prapai stayed in Thailand, running a restaurant. The parents asked their son, due to start high school, what he wanted to do. ‘I said I’d stay one more year with Mum, then come to Australia and study. I had one condition: every year, I had to come back and spend my holidays with Mum’ (Robson 2016, p. 18). Tate boarded at Sydney’s Scots College. He met his wife Ruth at the University of New South Wales. They have four children. Ruth Tate says her husband was a ‘very confident young man who knew what he wanted’ (Robson 2016, p. 18).

Tate worked as a civil engineer in Sydney and England and had his own Sydney construction business before joining his father’s property development company. Arriving on the Gold Coast in 1996, he renovated the Islander Resort in Surfers Paradise, part of the family portfolio. He paid $3.3 million in 2015 for a waterfront
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mansion in the exclusive Sorrento canal estate. The home had belonged to the Small family, whose diminutive patriarch Sir Bruce Small was Gold Coast mayor in the 1970s and is credited for promoting the Meter Maid gold bikini models who pump coins into parking meters and pose for photos with tourists. ‘Sir Bruce Small bought the house for his son and they had a lot of stately dinners there. . . the era of the 1970s on the Gold Coast, it was all about the have-a-go spirit’ (Utting 2015, p. 3). Tate may be referring simply to the palatial grandness of the home or he might believe Small behaved like a head of state entertaining dignitaries around the dining table. The idea of a head of state conflated with the have-a-go enterprise spirit perhaps sums up Tate’s idea of himself.

Whatever it takes

The Gold Coast cruise ship terminal saga is intricately woven with large scale property development speculation, dealing and controversy. Like all wealthy developers, Tate enjoys such a space, although he is constrained by his mayoral responsibilities. Large scale property development speculation is where deals are floated, made and unmade in an exchange cycle designed to generate ongoing profits. Deal making in the megabucks property sector is a long game. Opportunities arise or disappear, involving investors, financers, lawyers, brokers, town planners, bureaucrats, politicians, architects, engineers, builders, managers, sub-contractors, sellers and buyers, coming in and out of focus as funds and sites are made available or unavailable, merged together or broken down. The Gold Coast cruise ship terminal has been a pawn, a decoy and a red flag in this Grand Guignol game played out on The Spit for more than a decade. Tate had promised to make the terminal happen, but really it was not his promise to make. Many voters who backed Tate understood his cruise ship terminal promise was ambitious. They wanted him to have a go anyway.
On the other hand, opponents of the terminal constituted a formidable opposition. Deep-dredging a shallow, heavily trafficked river mouth and estuary, a fragile natural environment where human overuse is already close to tipping point, to provide access for cruise ships. Are you out of your mind? This was the response from many Gold Coasters outraged the Newman government had given approval for the ASF Consortium to build a cruise ship terminal at The Spit. In March 2014, Tate suddenly announced the Gold Coast City Council would hold a local referendum or plebiscite on the terminal. If a big majority voted no, Tate would ditch his signature campaign promise. No doubt anticipating those who voted for him in 2012 would vote yes, it was nevertheless a back flip even if presented as calling the resisters’ bluff, but it also showed Tate did seem to believe he was the main player in delivering the terminal. The Queensland state government had the final say because The Spit is state controlled sand. But there was no referendum or plebiscite. After a front page report in the Gold Coast Bulletin dutifully announcing a cruise ship terminal vote was going ahead (Potts 2014, p. 4), nothing more was said about it, not the first time a Tate thought bubble has popped, vanishing without trace.

Tate is certainly erratic but he is also persistent and like most politicians who stick around, learns on the job. A year after the Palaszczuk government ruled out the Wavebreak Island terminal proposal, offering the ASF Consortium the site on the western shore of The Spit, without a terminal, and one month before the 2016 council election, Tate unveiled his Plan B: an offshore terminal one kilometre out to sea, opposite Philip Park. No matter that an ocean terminal was about as rare as the white whale, there was the small matter of Tate’s previously unqualified rejection of such a beast, back when council technical experts had investigated cruise ship terminal options in 2012 and decided an offshore terminal estimated to cost $200 million was far too
expensive (Weston & Potts 2015, p. 4). But that was then. Tate had moved on, now costing his offshore terminal at $70 million.

The offshore terminal would deliver an extra 140,000 tourists a year and boost the district economy by $30 million. This was Tate’s 2016 election manifesto. Again, he was promising stuff he could not deliver, not without private investor guarantees, cruise ship company commitments and state and federal government approval. But Tate did not appear concerned about those details. This was a political play. He was asking for trust and a mandate. Give me another term. I am confident I can bring this off. ‘It is fair that I take it to the people of the Gold Coast at this election and, should I be returned, I think it would be fair that the state government would respect this mandate as I respected Premier Palaszczuk’s when she came to power’ (Potts 2016b, pp. 1 & 6). He was referring to Anastascia Palaszczuk’s promise of no development on the northern half of The Spit. Tate was inflating his power as mayor, putting himself in the ring with the premier. Issuing a challenge makes you look tough, not afraid to go to battle to fight for what you believe, even if the challenge is directed at someone who is not your opponent.

The day after Tate announced his Plan B offshore terminal, the Queensland state government reiterated there would be no development on The Spit north of the Sheraton Mirage resort hotel. Tate hit back: ‘If I get re-elected with a good mandate, I would ask them to respect this’ (Weston & Potts 2016, p. 8). Playing the mandate card is an old political furphy, appealing to democratic instincts. The only way to enable development on The Spit is to convince the Queensland state government to change its policies. Tate’s promise to prioritise a terminal gave false hope to those who want a terminal and false alarm to those who do not. Tate also declared the Gold Coast City Council would be willing to own and operate the terminal, if private operators were not interested. No
one had any idea at this point who would be elected to the new council, nor how the new councillors might vote on the cruise ship terminal, but this did not stop Tate from committing $70 million of public funds to make his terminal dream come true.

You might think Tate would have persevered with his mandate argument. No, he had yet another idea. One month after his re-election, ignoring his offshore terminal plan and in defiance of the Queensland state government’s stated intention not to develop the northern half of The Spit, Tate suggested a terminal could be built on the end of the sand pumping jetty, extended to accommodate a wastewater outfall pipe, at the northern tip of The Spit. The council had estimated $300 million was needed to upgrade the Gold Coast’s wastewater treatment infrastructure, but technological advances had halved the cost, according to Tate. He reckoned the left over money could be used to not only put the terminal on the sand pumping jetty, but also a tunnel under the Broadwater to Wavebreak Island and a bridge from the island to Labrador, eliminating traffic problems on The Spit. This recalls the Breakwater Group terminal plan, and Clarke’s tunnel idea, the sort of solution you might pronounce when drunk on Friday night and laugh about on Saturday morning. The Gold Coast Bulletin reported a feasibility study was underway into what was now effectively Plan C. The front page headline was ‘Pong Voyage’ (Weston 2016c, p. 1). Like the promised referendum that never happened, nothing more was heard about the cruise ship terminal next to the pooh pipe.

Despite the Queensland state government supporting an upgrade of the Brisbane cruise ship terminal and showing no interest in any of Tate’s terminal ideas or relaxing development controls at The Spit, Tate had enough support among councillors to put Plan B for the offshore terminal back on the table. The Gold Coast City Council in October 2016 voted to spend $860,000 for consultants Price Waterhouse Coopers to prepare a feasibility study into a Gold Coast cruise ship terminal. In the week of the
vote to pay for the study, Tate intervened to stop correspondence between the council’s major projects director, Darren Scott, a cruise ship terminal supporter, and Councillor Peter Young, a cruise ship terminal critic. Young had emailed Scott seeking a response after Carnival Australia executive chair Ann Sherry revealed Carnival cruise ships would not stop at a Gold Coast terminal overnight, only in transit. Sherry was responding to questions from a failed mayoral candidate, solicitor Jim Wilson. Tate fired off an email to Young questioning why Scott’s time should be wasted answering Wilson’s ‘endless diatribes, conspiracy theories and inane questions’ (“Tate sinks the offshore debate” 2016, p. 6). Wilson is known as a hot head but his advice from Carnival’s Sherry raised valid questions about the viability of Plan B. Transit calls do not generate the same revenue for cruise ship terminal operators and local on-shore businesses as overnight stops. Tate declared he would fly to Sydney to talk personally to Sherry about the terminal. Despite subsequent questions asking if the meeting took place, and if it did, what happened, Tate has said nothing about it.

Tornado Tom bravely pushed on. While Price Waterhouse Coopers was hard at work spending ratepayers’ $860,000, the Gold Coast City Council advised the federal government’s environment department that an offshore terminal would have no significant impact on protected species, of which The Spit zone has five critically endangered, four endangered, ten vulnerable and fifty-seven threatened (Skene 2017, p. 4). Notwithstanding that Carnival, the largest cruise ship operator in Australia, would not be overnighting and therefore not refuelling at the Gold Coast, the council submitted to the federal environment department that fuel barges for cruise ships at The Spit could be safely floated from Brisbane through the Moreton Bay Marine Park. It is hard to know if this is more or less risky than oil tankers barrelling over the Great Barrier Reef.
The assessments and governance branch of the federal environment department found that the Gold Coast offshore cruise ship terminal would not be a ‘controlled action under federal laws’ (Emery & Skene 2017) but whales, turtles, dugongs and other significant species would need to be protected during construction. ‘Potential impacts can be managed, subject to certain requirements to protect nationally significant listed species’ (Emery & Skene 2017, p. 6). Tate needed the federal government to sign off on the offshore terminal’s compliance with federal legislation. He seized on the federal environment department response, arguing the terminal had cleared ‘the biggest hurdle’ (Emery & Skene 2017, p. 6). This was nonsense. The environment department’s hurdles, more than one, were identified not cleared, among other hurdles in the way of an offshore terminal. The biggest hurdles are a positive feasibility study, a convincing business plan, a favourable environmental impact study, political support from the state and federal governments and finding someone to invest in building the terminal. Premier Palaszczuk reminded Tate of the plans for an upgraded Brisbane cruise ship terminal supported by the state government. She acknowledged only that Gold Coast City Council’s terminal proposal would be considered on its merits (Emery & Skene 2017, p. 6).

A redacted version of the Price Waterhouse Coopers study was released in June 2017, showing that feasibility for a Gold Coast cruise ship terminal was a problem. The study found the Gold Coast could receive a significant boost in tourism related employment and spending from an offshore cruise ship terminal. But no one wanted to build it. The consultants revealed there was ‘very little appetite’ from private investors because it would take more than thirty years to generate returns on a $460 million investment (Emery 2017b, p.6). That’s right, Price Waterhouse Coopers advised almost a quarter of a billion dollars was needed to bring to life Tate’s recurring dream. On those figures, private investors will not get involved unless they obtain sweeteners or guarantees. This
confirmed The Spit could be at risk of being carved up for development, if the cruise ship terminal was to proceed. So much for the $70 million terminal price tag Tate took to the 2016 election. Even with a public-private partnership, in which the council or the state or Canberra has a financial stake, how much of $460 million is any public agency going to cough up for Tate’s terminal dream? The PWC consultants found a transit port was not viable. And they noted prevailing south easterly winds could push ships preparing to dock offshore on to the beach (Willacy et al 2017). No need for an $860,000 invoice to tell you that. Surfers and other beach goers with an understanding of Gold Coast weather have long said an offshore cruise ship terminal at The Spit would be blasted by the first cyclone that blows up. Like Monty Python’s black knight, hacked to pieces, Tate was undeterred.

The PWC feasibility study contained enough information to excite the terminal boosters: sixty-five ships in the first year, up to 360 metres long, bigger than the cruise ships tying up in Brisbane. A majority of Gold Coast councillors, joy riders in Tate’s cruise ship cult or do-nothing bystanders, were happy enough. They voted to spend another $2 million on the non-existent terminal, this time to prepare a business case to send to the disinterested Palaszczuk government. ‘It will be illogical for [the state government] to say no . . . I’m not doing it for an exercise,’ Tate said (Weston 2017a, p. 4). He noted he had been talking with Chinese investors about building and operating the terminal, but offered no details. Asked what he had to say about Carnival preferring Brisbane as a home port for cruise ships, Tate replied: ‘They can get stuffed’ (Emery 2017a, p. 5). The $2 million business case payment was agreed a few days after Tate repeated his promise that ratepayers would not bear the cost of the terminal. When the mayoral candidate Wilson had claimed Tate’s $70 million terminal price tag was about half the real cost, Tate responded: ‘He’s getting that out of his arse’ (Keen 2016a, p. 4).
VIEW FROM ABOVE

Godwits

The Birdman of the Gold Coast, Bob Westerman, agreed that shorebirds at beach and estuarine zones are ‘practically invisible. They blend into the environment, they don’t frequent the places we do, they are incredibly shy’ (Westerman 2016). From his radio operator perch since 2012 at the Volunteer Marine Rescue tower on the southern rock wall of the Nerang River mouth, the northern tip of The Spit, Westerman had closely observed the birds on a Broadwater sandbank south of Wavebreak Island. The VMR logs vessels into and out of the river mouth, providing a radio service and rescue assistance. Few people notice the resident terns, oystercatchers, lapwings and cormorants or many of the other bird species on the Broadwater and The Spit. We know the silver gulls, or seagulls, because they are not intimidated by humans or dogs. Bob Westerman sees and knows them all. He had counted hundreds of migratory waders in the southern Broadwater, including the curlews and bar-tailed godwits on the Curlew Island sandbank, a high tide roost. The island was given its name in 2015 after Westerman’s lobbying (Weston 2016).

Migratory waders have open toed feet enabling them to walk across tidal flats where they feed on sand worms and small crustaceans. They cannot swim but are the supreme travellers of the sky, each year flying to the near-Arctic to breed and then back to Australia and New Zealand. Bar-tailed godwits, *Limosa lapponica*, make the longest non-stop journeys of any living creature. They are among eight near-threatened, threatened or endangered bird species on the Broadwater and The Spit (Weston 2016, Gold Coast City et al n.d.). A female bar-tailed godwit fitted with a transmitter flew 11,000 kilometres in eight days in 2007, from Alaska to the Piako River on New Zealand’s North Island, at an average speed of 50 kilometres an hour (Gill et al 2009).
Westerman hoped the naming of Curlew Island would increase awareness of the
shorebird population and encourage Broadwater users, particularly jet-ski riders and
boaties with dogs, to keep their distance. I didn’t think so. A former Gold Coast mayor,
fisherman Dennis O’Connell, told the Gold Coast Bulletin he hoped naming the
sandbank would not restrict families going there to play, swim and fish (Weston 2016d).

Tom Tate’s most ridiculous pronouncement was probably that birds at The Spit would
not exist if not for man (‘Mayor Tom Tate Exposed’ 2012). You cannot really be sure of
superlatives with Tate because his capacity to outdo himself never fails to impress. He
was trying to assert The Spit is man-made, which is only a half-truth and in Tate’s mind
somehow excuses exploiting The Spit for property development. His assertion
suggested he does recognise the birds at The Spit, but only to the extent they may be an
impediment to property exploitation. Tate’s logic argues that construction of the rock
walls at the mouth of the Nerang River created The Spit and therefore without the rock
walls there would be no birds at The Spit because there would be no Spit. Not forgetting
the inconvenient truth that beach, ocean, river and birds would exist in one formation or
another at the coordinates of The Spit’s present position even if the Nerang River rock
walls had not halted longshore drift of sand to the north, in which case The Spit would
exist, just not at its present location, Tate’s reasoning reminded me of Gertrude Stein’s
observation, “there is no there, there” in Oakland, California. I saw Bruce Springsteen at
the Oakland Coliseum and apart from the Boss’s memorable performance I do agree,
there was not much to see in Oakland compared to San Francisco across the bay,
although it is argued by Oaklanders that Stein was referring to her childhood
neighbourhood, not all of Oakland (Ward 2010).

Birds whose status is defined by legislation can restrict property development, as human
activity may be prohibited from disturbing them. In this way, birds’ vulnerability can be
their strength. Their presence on the Broadwater and at The Spit effectively decided their opposition to the development gang. The migratory birds of the Broadwater environs are ostensibly protected by the Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act, designed to administer international migratory wader agreements to which Australia is a signatory. The Act is binding on the Queensland state government and the Gold Coast City Council and could require federal ministerial approval for any major property development on The Spit (Westerman 2014). Westerman’s detailed bird counts have been cited by the Gold Coast resistance as evidence of an important habitat for migratory waders (Westerman 2014). The Queensland state government raised unspecified environmental concerns for refusing to allow the cruise ship terminal proposed for the Broadwater. However, protected status is in effect too often manipulated. There was certainly no indication that birds by themselves would inhibit any of the plans for development on The Spit, despite the recognition of Curlew Island.

**Tree power**

The Friends of Federation Walk have been tree planting along The Spit for two decades. The southern end of the walk, beginning at Phillip Park opposite Sea World, where Tate wanted passengers to arrive from his offshore cruise ship terminal, is densely vegetated with a variety of native species. As the track winds north towards the river mouth, only the casuarinas appear in large numbers, mostly to the right of the path, close to the ocean.

The two dozen volunteers I observed at Federation Walk in the autumn of 2016, mostly seniors and young adults, were planting swamp grass and a sub-canopy of red ash and *Banksia serrata* among bladey grass regrowth after the suspicious fire six months
earlier. The unburned forest at Phillip Park was lush but where I met the planters, halfway along the track, the undulating, sandy ground was exposed and the open landscape relatively unattractive, not really a site for the romantic gaze. The volunteers were weeding out the bladey grass, digging in the new plantings and hand watering with recycled, treated water delivered from a wastewater plant via a plastic pipe under the Broadwater. I was impressed by their cheerful determination despite the vandalism unleashed around them.

To wilfully burn a young forest planted by volunteers, which appears to be what happened on The Spit in December 2015, is a nasty, heartless act. I was angered to see up close the extent of the fire damage. Was this the work of development gang sympathisers? The fires are a reminder of the danger of single-road access to The Spit. If the 2015 fire had been worse, hundreds of people would have needed emergency evacuation by air or sea. A Gold Coast City Council environment officer liaising with the Federation Walk volunteers, Laura Richards, told me (Richards 2016) the latest planting strategy was not to replicate the diverse forest near Phillip Park, but a more measured approach, aiming to assist the forest to regenerate itself, creating a kind of natural resistance to bushfires and recognising the role of birds flying back and forth across the Broadwater and the river mouth, excreting seed material from plants on South Stradbroke Island. Richards believes Shepherd’s crook pink-flowering orchids arrived at The Spit regrowth zone with birds from the island. The fire starters had forced the tree planters to rethink their efforts, which may well result in a hardy, enduring forest.

Few people had been around longer in The Spit saga than Lyn Wright, the president of the Friends of Federation Walk. Wright has been fighting to stop exploitation of The Spit for thirty years. Her family ran the Nerang saw mill and agricultural shows at
Casino, two hours west of their 1960s cream brick and tile home in Main Beach, the upmarket suburb filled with swanky residential towers next to The Spit. The Wright place was one of the last of Main Beach’s single storey dwellings, with a brick chimney, rare on the Gold Coast, and a small door in the base of the chimney wall outside for loading fuel. Sitting at Wright’s dining table, piled with ring-binder folders documenting the whole sorry ordeal of The Spit, she told me Tate could be stringing us all along. The cruise ship terminal might be an elaborate talking point to keep his supporters happy, a big bone for the base. ‘It’s just so he can say, “well, we tried, we did our best” ’ (Wright 2016).

A Queensland archetype

I have to accept some responsibility for the creation of Tate as a public figure. In 1996 I bailed out of the Courier Mail in Brisbane, alarmed by the emerging right-wing agenda of the editor, Chris Mitchell. I went for a spell to England. Returning home, I wrote to Lachlan Murdoch, hoping for a job at the Gold Coast Bulletin. After a bleak English winter I wanted to recharge in the sun. On the Gold Coast, I could sip beer bare-chested outside at sundown and surf flawless waves in board shorts in the hour after dawn. I hardly knew the Murdochs and was soon pinching myself, hired at the Bulletin.

The Gold Coast economy was at a low ebb. Tate was the new president of the Surfers Paradise Chamber of Commerce. The Bulletin editor, Bob Gordon, directed me to interview Tate. They wanted the Bulletin to push an offer from Tate of $2 a night rooms at Tate’s Islander Resort high rise hotel. Aimed ostensibly at weekend trippers from Brisbane and interstate, the offer required a minimum of three people each buying a $20 drinks voucher from the Islander bar. Gordon knew of course that newspaper advertising would not lift with the local economy stalled. Tate’s cheap rooms might
help turn things around. Maybe Gordon also knew Tate was keen to run for mayor. I spoke to Tate for half an hour by phone. He was not confrontational or rude, not yet the reactive combatant. He was amiable and humorous, the typical mood for businessmen and politicians anticipating a favourable news story. My front page splash (“$2 bed battle”, 1999) announcing Tate’s cheeky rooms deal was really the beginning of his political career.

Tate is anthropocentric, behaving as if humans are the supreme beings in the universe who need to control and develop the Earth. To some, this may seem innocent enough but beliefs are about matters of degree. The supremacy assumption of anthropocentrism is the basis of Tate’s political strategy. He prosecutes his agenda completely, without regard to the wants of those who voted for someone else. It is a simple contest, winner takes all, losers get nothing. Trouble is, losers are not always invisible, they do not go away. Exhibit A: The Spit, where Tate’s refusal to accommodate divergent points of view had led to nothing but angst. Tate’s anthropocentrism is a formula for conflict, reflecting United States Army Corps of Engineers Brigadier General Thomas Sands’ view: ‘Man against nature. That’s what life’s all about’ (McPhee 1989, p. 20). Sands was responsible for levees and other fortifications constructed along the Mississippi River to prevent flooding and enable irrigation. An Army Corps of Engineers’ instructional video says ‘Mother Nature’ is an enemy of the state ‘we have to fight day by day . . . the health of our economy depends on victory’ (McPhee 1989, p. 7). The Corps has an impossible task protecting the American south from raging floods. At The Spit, Cruise Captain Tate is provoked by nature’s passivity, as if he almost cannot bear to leave it alone.

Tate wanted every visitor to the Gold Coast to feel like they are somewhere everyone else wants to be. And he had only one strategy: keep changing it all, a new offering, a
new experience, a new landscape. Knock it down, build it up, more here and more there, bigger and newer. Fewer locals were buying this propaganda, not anymore. They wanted trees and parks, fewer traffic jams, street level cafes and galleries and night spots for relaxing, places to enjoy in relative peace and quiet, a sense of lived in community, not piling up rubbish on the headland every Sunday morning, and they wanted job security, not waiting around until they can push a barrow for a month on the next high rise building site. A career with a secure future, what does that mean for young adults on the Gold Coast? Bricklaying until your back gives out? Casual shifts in hospitality? Cleaning rooms in a casino?

Tate’s anthropocentrism and belligerence are remarkable but he is one of many notable conservative politicians from Queensland. The godfather of this group is Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen, premier from 1968 to 1987. Bjelke-Petersen’s bumbling, intolerant ramblings made comedians rich. He measured success by the number of cranes visible from his Brisbane CBD tower window, allowed favours to developers, condoned demolition of historic buildings, banned protests and turned a blind eye to police corruption until a commission of inquiry blew the whistle. Bjelke-Petersen was lucky to escape jail. His most belligerent offsider, Russ Hinze, died before he could be tried on charges of corruptly receiving payments from developers. It was Hinze who called The Spit a haunt for ‘poofers, perverts and flashers’ (McRobbie 1982, p. 112).

Insisting that The Spit is better off in the hands of property developers assumes The Spit is not a good place. According to Gary Snyder, the idea of ‘good land’ derives historically from agriculture opposed to whatever is wild (Snyder 1990, pp. 78-79). Snyder is a Pulitzer Prize winning poet of the wild, the inspiration for Kerouac’s *Dharma Bums* (1958) and an icon of the “deep ecology” movement. I interviewed Snyder during his 1981 Australian tour, when he visited activists battling to save the
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Terania Creek rainforest from logging, met with Aboriginal leaders in central Australia and gave readings at the Australian National University. We spoke for a couple of hours at the Montsalvat artists’ colony at Eltham. Our conversation for Ziriu magazine was a challenging intellectual journey as Snyder wove a complex tapestry of ideas about the inter-relationships of humans, animals, mountains, deserts, rivers, trees and much of the rest of nature, recognising all living things have value in the global ecosystem, regardless of their value or otherwise to humans, a biocentric view. According to Snyder, an anthropocentric view is that good land in the first instance implies soil productive for cropping and grazing (Snyder 1990, pp. 78-79). Wild creatures “threaten” good, cultivated land. Cultivated implies civilised. But wild land is not unproductive, its plants and animals sustain each other, they are never ‘out of place’ (Snyder 1990, p. 79). Animals like cattle and pigs made un-wild are ‘sluggish meat making machines’ (Snyder 1990, p. 79). Hunters and gatherers, human and non-human, range far wider on wild land than farmers on good land yet hunters and gatherers also have a systematic land management approach. The difference between hunter gatherer societies like the Kombumerri before the 1850s and the white settlers who came later is the hunter gatherers really are a part of the land, not dominating the land, which is how so-called good land becomes private property. Appreciating these distinctions exposes the hypocrisy of the pro- development gang who would carve up The Spit for profit. On the one hand, they argue The Spit is not good land, little more than an overgrown rubbish tip, or ‘all trees and unusable’ (Newlands 2016, p. 13). On the other hand, they claim The Spit is valuable real estate. The idea of good land has evolved on the Gold Coast to mean land good for building on, while the pro-development narrative of the “no good” Spit is a cynical propagandising tactic.
Creation mythologies

The senior indigenous elder for the Nerang River district, Graham Dillon, was born at Southport in 1931 and schooled at the Sisters of Mercy convent on the western bank of the Broadwater (Dillon G, 2016). Dillon’s mother was born on the river bank opposite the southern end of The Spit, now known as James Overell Park, named for a Southport retailer in the 1950s. The park is an off leash dog walking area in the shadow of the monumental Rivage Royale high rise complex, a legacy of the Japanese investment boom of the 1980s. The Rivage Royale’s monstrous curvilinear shape signifies the winding river subsumed by the development at all costs ideology. Graham Dillon worked for some years in the mineral sands extraction industry digging up Gold Coast beaches, including The Spit. His father was a maintenance worker on a drawbridge across the Broadwater, connecting Main Beach to Southport.

Graham Dillon’s grandmother had married a white Irishman, Andrew Graham, the “keeper of the channels”, responsible for the lamps and beacons guiding boats taking supplies upstream to the Nerang port and bringing cedar back down for delivery to Brisbane. The lamps and beacons were vital to prevent the cedar boats running aground in the Broadwater, full of shifting sandbanks until large scale dredging for the first canal-front residential estates in the 1950s and ’60s. Graham Dillon remembers diving as a child on a natural oyster reef in the Broadwater opposite The Southport School. ‘It was crystal clear, clean water. We had buckets and buckets of oysters’ (Dillon 2016). The oyster reef was dug out for the Paradise Waters canal estate. ‘Away it went, and the mangroves, they all went, and the crabs, the prawns, the fish, they all bred in the mangroves, and the sea birds, they roosted there. It’s a tragedy, a cultural obscenity. The canal developments disembowelled the river’ (Dillon 2016).
The Nerang River and the Broadwater provide cultural meaning as mythic space, transport corridor, wildlife habitat, recreation zone, objects of romantic and acquisitive gaze and residential zones. Like many river systems in heavily populated zones, the Nerang is a place of cultural conflict. Power boat races on the Broadwater anger conservationists seeking to protect marine life and recreational boat owners whose activities are restricted. Jet skiers, motorised dinghy hoons and speeding cruisers cause turbulence and erosion, angering other boat riders and waterfront home owners. Speculative investors push up canal estate property values, creating financial pressure for aged pensioner neighbours forced to pay higher council rates. The boosters’ boast that the Gold Coast has ‘more canals than Venice’ (Hundloe 2015, p. 23) is not only an attempt to attach cultural value to the development gang legacy, it is an example of the Australian cultural cringe, as if the Gold Coast requires validation from an acknowledged great elsewhere. The boast also recalls the Australian idiomatic humour, as in “more front than Myers”, referring to the ubiquitous Myer department stores with enormous window displays in most Australian cities, and it is a suitable epitaph for Tom Tate’s antecedents, the shameless White Shoe Brigade, destroyers of nearly all of the Nerang River mangroves and swamp forests.

A spit is a ‘long narrow accumulation of sediment, sand or pebbles, with one end attached to the land and the other projecting into the sea or across the mouth of an estuary’ (Whitlow 2005). The Spit marking the furthest natural extremity of the Gold Coast did not exist before the late nineteenth century. Then, for about the next 100 years, it was an active, shifting place, as if the landscape was alive, evidence perhaps as Annie Dillard suggests of a divine power in nature (Dillard 1974), hastened by the phenomenon of longshore or littoral drift, in which ocean currents drive sand in this case north along the southern Queensland coast. In the 1850s, Harper’s wharf and Duncan’s sawmill were close to the Nerang River mouth, at what is now Surfers
Paradise. As the sand on the ocean beach drifted northwards, so did the river mouth. By the late 1880s, the river entered the ocean at Main Beach, opposite Southport, when a cyclone caused the sea further north to break through the largest sand island in southern Moreton Bay, creating the siblings, South Stradbroke Island and North Stradbroke Island. The narrow gap between the two islands, Jumpinpin Passage, changed the tidal flows into and out of the southern bay and the Broadwater. When the tide rushed out of the gap between the islands, it dragged sand along the Broadwater basin and around the southern tip of South Stradbroke Island, towards the Broadwater’s western shore at Southport. The tiny village of Moondarewa on the South Stradbroke tip, just a few shacks, became vulnerable to the sea and was abandoned. While the island tip was washing away, longshore drift continued to push sand north along Main Beach, and so The Spit was born, emerging to extend the south eastern shore of the Broadwater, reaching out towards the receding island. In the late 1880s, The Spit was only a small sand extension near the old Jubilee Bridge at Queen Street, Southport. Historical maps, aerial photos and ground observations (Whitlow 2005) show that from the late 1880s until the construction of the Seaway rock walls in the mid 1980s, The Spit grew about three kilometres, pushing the river mouth north along with it, like a dolphin balancing a ball on its nose. The rock walls and associated dredging at the river mouth, with the sand bypass pumping, ended the show. The Spit would grow no further, the river mouth and the island would be stabilised. The sand still continues its relentless trek towards the tropics, piped underneath the river mouth, reappearing on the beach at South Stradbroke, among the ghosts of Moondarewa, to create the magical surfing waves of TOS, as if the energy of the mobile land spit has been transformed, manifesting as unique surfing waves.

The creation of The Spit is linked to a violent germinating event. Two years before the separation of North and South Stradbroke islands in an 1896 cyclone, the narrow
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isthmus which became Jumpinpin Passage was severely destabilised by a shipwreck explosion. The steel barque *Cambus Wallace* ran aground at the isthmus and broke up in heavy seas. Six men drowned. Graham Dillon told me it was his grandfather, Andrew Graham, the “keeper of the channels”, who was charged with making the wreck site safe. Among the cargo washed ashore was a quantity of explosives for road making, detonated by Andrew Graham in a pile above the high tide mark. The blasts created large craters in the sand (Howells 2003, pp. 26-27). The isthmus was ‘very fragile, only a couple of pandanus trees and buffalo grass’ held it together (Dillon 2016). The explosions made the isthmus so vulnerable that when the cyclone hit it washed away. The *Cambus Wallace* name was taken 120 years later for a popular Nobby Beach bar.

Without the Jumpinpin tidal flows, The Spit would not have grown as it did, presaged by human triggered violence, an explosion, and naturally generated violence, a cyclone. The prominent white identity who blew up the sand played both socially cohesive and disruptive roles in partnering an indigenous woman.

The Spit’s creation mythology involves a network of identities, non-human and human, black and white, interacting with nature. Longshore drift made The Spit a dynamic and fluid place in space and time. The Seaway rock walls at the river mouth signify containment, but sand is still moving around The Spit, artificially and naturally, so The Spit has a mobile, shape-shifting identity. Tidal flows on the ocean side and in the Broadwater create physical friction along The Spit, paralleling the emotional friction about its future. Despite its containment, The Spit is a reminder of the past, when much of the Gold Coast was a shifting sand zone, connected intimately to the sea, as the sea and its estuary carried it along and ran through it. The Spit evokes a kind of nostalgia for a lost or endangered way of life, recalling different meanings for the pro- and anti-development forces, making its destiny elusive. In environmental science, The Spit and the Broadwater are an ecotone, a transition zone between biomasses, and between
nature and development, where species intermingle. Such a mixing of humans, non-humans, beliefs and ideologies can lead to dynamism, variety and fecundity, but it can also result in conflict, in which some may be diminished by others.

**Heroic representations**

The name Tom Tate sounds made-up, like an alter ego. Tate has explained his nickname ‘Lukkhrung’, a Thai word for ‘half caste’ (Robson 2016, p. 18). He reckons Thai humour is more self-deprecating than Western humour (Robson 2016, p. 18). ‘They think it’s funny when something happens to them. And everybody’s nickname reflects something. If you’re short, you’re Shorty, if you have a mole, you’re The Mole . . . a lot of Thais call me Lukkhrung which means half caste. Westerners might think that’s rude but to Thais it’s just what it is’ (Robson 2016, p. 18). In this spirit of Thai directness, as understood by Tate, and in the tradition of observational journalism where what is in plain sight can be most revealing, I would offer another appellation. Tate’s large grinning mouth extending all the way across his face, like Beattie’s, can appear shark-like which does indicate belligerence, and Tornado Tom implies having-a-go dynamism. The provocative, arch-conservative commentator, Milo Yiannopoulos, angered that Tate had banned him from speaking at council owned venues, reckoned Tate has a ‘Mall Cop physique, Mount Fuji eyebrows and a dirt moustache’ (“Firebrand Milo lays into mayor”, 2017). For mine, Tate as the leader of the Gold Coast pro-development class recalls the ubiquitous Queensland cane toad, the poisonous *Bufo marinus* or *Rhinella marina*. Like cane toads, the developers’ high rise towers are overwhelmingly ugly, they have spread like vermin, they cannot be eradicated and they march across the landscape with regimental efficiency. They were introduced to create
wealth for developers and provide affordable, spectacular ocean front holidays, but they have become a terror, blotting out the sun by casting shadows on the beach.

But if we cannot allow him as a cane toad, Tate might be just another angry god, the same as Bjelke-Petersen and Hinze. They are all the same defiant leader, the cut through, no nonsense, elite larrikin, the enlarged anti-authoritarian, because Queenslanders like to think we are rough and tough in a tough, hot land. We get things done our way. We don’t take no for an answer. However, Tate is bound in his mayoral chains and occasionally by spluttering frustration, stalking among the high rises like the Minotaur in the labyrinth, and yet he is smarter than that, possessed by an engineer’s obsession to build a cruise ship terminal in the middle of the ocean, as unlikely a caper as Klaus Kinski trying to drag a steamship across the Andes in *Fitzcarraldo*.

Sitting out on his grand deck on a quiet evening, sipping a fine drink, looking across the canal, Tate might have thought he was like his hero, Sir Bruce Small, but he cannot fit the template for Joseph Campbell’s hero archetype (Campbell 1993), the troubled son who ventures into the unknown, endures life-changing trials, reconciles with his father, understands his new self and triumphantly returns home an agent of change for the common good. Tate conforms partly to this venerable mono-myth, but what he can offer beyond encouraging more high-rise towers is, well, questionable. No, Tate is incomplete, a man who has risen like a hero but does not fulfil the hero’s destiny, despite his wealth and his mayoral lustre. His grand plan is stuck on the drawing board, and because of that, by his own yardstick, he has not achieved greatness. He remains cartoonish, stuffed into tight clothes, choosing the wrong words, egotistical, wildly ambitious, a trickster sending our story off in all directions, chasing a deadly stonefish trapped in a council lake one day (Westthorp & Amery 2017), a Chinese billionaire the next, resistant to disappointment and setback, resilient but in danger of spinning out of
control. Tate might be understood as an incarnation of Kenneth Grahame’s Toad in *Wind in the Willows* (2017, 1908), absurdly superior, but with ebullience replaced by gibberish, argumentative and, just as Grahame’s Toad is unable to resist an infatuation with motor cars, landing himself in hot water, the Ferrari driving Tate is unable to resist cruise ships.

**DOING DEALS**

**The White Shoe Brigade**

The tawdry lineage of Queensland conservative politicians keen to support property development extends back to the 1970s and ’80s when neoliberalism was called economic rationalism and Gold Coast developers were known as the White Shoe Brigade, scheming alongside the local council, spending millions of dollars in the sand. In the 1970s and ’80s, despite the influence of greedy developers in local government on the Gold Coast, there was public interest and public benefit in the creation of Australia’s first mass tourism town. A flash point igniting this mass tourism was at The Spit.

The White Shoe Brigade is a sub-set of a conspicuous social type enduring for almost 200 years in another sun-belt destination, the American west coast. *Los Angeles Times* columnist Lee Shippey has described extraordinary conduct, remarkably similar to the behaviour of the Gold Coast White Shoe Brigade, from California’s Rancho period in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when prominent Americans were granted land by Spain and then Mexico for cattle and sheep grazing. The ‘Rancho period encouraged a tendency to “speak in superlatives, to live out of doors, to tell tall tales, to deal in real estate, to believe what isn’t true, to throw dignity out the window, to dress dramatically...
and, last but not least, to tackle the impossible”’ (Banham 1971, p. 57). Architecture historian Rayner Banham observed the manners and practices listed by Shippey were evident as the Los Angeles real estate boom powered into the mid-twentieth century (Banham 1971, p. 57). Banham suggests these behaviours may be due partly to a warm climate encouraging outdoors living. The sun and the beach might not make you wild and crazy but in developed western societies if the economic climate is right the sun and the beach do attract people wanting to live under the sun at the beach, where colourful leisure garb is de rigour, and in those circumstances colourful property developers and salesmen can flourish.

Thirty years after Banham’s ruminations, Roslyn Russell and Bill Faulkner examined the behavioural traits of the Gold Coast’s ‘movers and shakers’ (Russell & Faulkner 1999), identifying criteria which on reflection are startling if not alarming. According to Russell and Faulkner, Tom Tate’s soul mates are:

- outspoken non-conformists unbound by traditional wisdom. . . [who] do things in their own non-linear ways . . . cause disquiet if not alarm among regulators . . .
- live comfortably with disequilibrium, uncertainty, tension and dissonance . . .
- [are] broadly approved, even popular, at least ostensibly . . . [and] impatient with anyone unwilling or unable to move at their pace (Russell and Faulkner 1999, p. 420).

Russell and Faulkner’s assessment before Tate’s apotheosis into the public domain accurately describes Tate on a good day. It chimes with Shippey’s list of behaviours and so links Tate and the White Shoe Brigade to the American Wild West, reflecting Australia’s historical status as a frontier society. I do wonder how Tate might have fared in a Stetson on a horse, raising cattle and plotting land deals without the red Ferrari and the big boat.
The White Shoe Brigade etymology is uncertain. The name struck a sweet chord and stayed in the Australian lexicon, always comfortable skewering big noters. Wayne Goss, Queensland’s first Labor premier after 32 years of conservative state rule, referred to the White Shoe Brigade with punishing effect in his successful 1989 state election campaign, not long after a crazy, failed push for the prime ministership by Joh Bjelke-Petersen and just as the Fitzgerald corruption inquiry was beginning to probe Gold Coast developer links to National Party politicians.

But Wayne Goss did not invent the White Shoe Brigade. Alexander McRobbie, the Gold Coast’s pioneer local journalist and prolific local historian, claims it derives from property developers who owned boats and wore white canvas deck shoes (McRobbie 2000, p. 101). Geoff Burchill, a civil engineer, master planner, consultant and advisor to some of the most prominent Gold Coast developers, hints the White Shoe Brigade was coined by John Moore, a Brisbane Liberal and federal tourism minister when the Nationals and the Liberals were at daggers north of the Tweed for most of the 1980s. At that time, the Liberals polled so badly the Nationals no longer needed them as junior coalition partner in order to govern Queensland (Burchill 2005, p. 39).

The White Shoe Brigade has two iterations. The first is less discredited than the second. Before the Fitzgerald corruption inquiry in the 1980s, property developers and salesmen on the Gold Coast were widely renowned for their hyperbole, their innovative, irresistible deals and their flamboyant attire. The White Shoe Brigade prototype was Laurie Wall, the leading real estate agent at Surfers Paradise in the 1950s and ’60s. Wall was a masterful self promoter, a ‘force of nature’ who believed in the Gold Coast with a ‘fervour that [was] almost hypnotic’ (McRobbie 2000, p. 87). He persuaded Stanley Korman, founder of the Holeproof hosiery empire, to build the first resort hotels and the first riverfront housing subdivisions at Broadbeach and Surfers Paradise, kicking off the
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first Gold Coast property boom (McRobbie 2000, p. 87; Jones 1986, pp. 24-28).

Korman also built the first high-rise tower on the Gold Coast, ten-storey Kinkabool at Surfers Paradise in 1959. Gold Coast artist Scott Redford believes Kinkabool is ‘almost as important a building to Australian culture as the Sydney Opera House’ (‘The content of these paintings is secret’ 2005, p. 60). Redford may or may not be an agent provocateur. His retro neon sign installation is on permanent display at the entrance to the Queensland Gallery of Modern Art in Brisbane. Redford reckons the Gold Coast is a target of cultural snobbery. Kinkabool was added to the Queensland Heritage Register in 2009. Korman’s complex web of companies eventually collapsed, over-committed and poorly managed (Jones 1986, pp. 27-28). A photo at the official opening of the Chevron Island subdivision in 1960 shows ruddy-faced Korman in a white suit and white shoes (Jones 1986, p. 25), looking like Peter Lorre in *Casablanca*.

The first White Shoe Brigade luminary to exploit The Spit was Keith Williams, a blunt speaking, seminal entrepreneur who instinctively understood tourism marketing.

Williams built the Sea World theme park in 1971 on a state lease halfway along The Spit’s western shore. In 1979 he was appointed inaugural chairman of the Gold Coast Waterways Authority, set up by the Queensland state government after Williams had spent years agitating for dredging in the Broadwater and stabilising of the Nerang River mouth. It was Keith Williams’ persistence that led to the building of the Seaway rock walls and The Spit sand pumping system (Jones 1986, p. 63; Burchill 2005, p. 230). The natural athlete who taught himself to read and write after leaving school in Brisbane at age 13 (Russell & Faulkner 1999, p. 421) is responsible for physically fixing The Spit in its permanent location.

Williams had worked as a telegram delivery boy and made leather motorcycle seats underneath his parents’ Brisbane cottage. This early venture became Superide, a
motorcycle accessories business. Williams also sold Davy Crockett hats (Jones 1986, p. 131) and other Disney products under license. He was a keen water skier and made regular trips to the Nerang River, arranging to purchase riverfront land at Surfers Paradise to set up a stunt water skiing tourist attraction but, in a rare case of saying no to entrepreneurs, the Gold Coast local council at that time decided water skiing so close to the emerging holiday village would be too dangerous. Williams was left with seven swampy acres. He subdivided and sold the lots, driving a bulldozer until the site was filled and level (McRobbie 2000, p. 82). He found another site, a dairy farm on the river at Carrara, fifteen minutes drive from the coast, and in 1958 launched the Surfers Paradise Ski Gardens with a band of performing skiers. Williams won the Australian water ski championships in 1959 and staged the world water skiing championships at Carrara in 1966. He also built a motor racing circuit and drag strip at Carrara, hosting Australian touring car championship events, and ‘accumulated the world’s largest collection of restored motor bikes’ (Russell & Faulkner 1999, p. 421).

Angered by gatecrashers who anchored in the river to watch his water ski show for free, Williams was tipped to fail when he relocated to The Spit, a ‘remote and primitive area of sand dunes and swamp’ (McRobbie 2000, p.112). He dug out a lake for skiing but found tourists did not drive past the Marineland outdoor aquarium at The Spit’s southern end. He added his own dolphin show, then bought Marineland, closed it down and moved the Marineland dolphins to Sea World. He built his dolphin pools without council approval (Russell and Faulkner 1999, p. 421).

Williams wanted The Spit to become a port for luxury yachts and a casino site (Jones 1986, pp. 63-64). He was a partner in a bid for the Gold Coast casino licence in the 1980s and was furious when the Queensland state government gave the licence to a rival consortium led by the Jennings home building group. The casino would be at
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Broadbeach. Doug Jennings, son of the Jennings’ group founder, was the National Party MP for Southport. Jennings wanted The Spit protected from property development. The son of Australia’s biggest home builder was in his own way a conservationist. Williams had argued a Gold Coast casino should have a beach outlook. ‘I think it’s a bloody sin to see it sitting on a flood plain island in the middle of the Nerang River’ (Jones 1986, p. 131). The Gold Coast casino bidding in the 1980s shows The Spit has been a political red hot poker for thirty years. The National Party went from wanting The Spit protected in the 1980s to putting big chunks of it up for sale thirty years later.

The first developer on The Spit, Williams sold Sea World and the Carrara speedway in 1984, effectively stomping out of town after failing to obtain the casino licence.

Williams did not appreciate a casino at The Spit was politically unacceptable. Michael Jones, whose landmark 1986 account chronicling the Gold Coast, *A Sunny Place for Shady People*, takes its title from Noel Coward’s description of Monaco, observed that ‘developers would dearly love to gain control of The Spit [but] . . . even the National Party knew . . . [a Spit casino] would have triggered a riot among the locals’ (Jones 1986, pp. 64, 131). Williams went to the Whitsundays in north Queensland and completed a $100 million high-rise resort on Hamilton Island.

Williams was so driven by competition that he kept fronting up to Hawaii with a team in the annual Oahu to Molokai outrigger canoe race, the toughest paddling event anywhere, until he won (McRobbie 2000, p. 374). Alexander McRobbie admires Williams as a rarity, a Gold Coast entrepreneur who did not juggle paper assets to impress investors (McRobbie 2000, p. 112). According to McRobbie, Williams was ‘aggressive and pugnacious’, a ‘rugged individualist’ with a ‘certain charm’ (McRobbie 2000, p. 113). Williams tackled ‘greenies who hated me and governments who wanted to tax me out of business’ (‘Gold Coast pioneer Keith Williams dies’ 2011). Russell and
Faulkner describe Williams’ ‘bloody minded tenacity’ (Russell & Faulkner 1999, p. 421).

Williams was a giant of the White Shoe Brigade. Russ Hinze might have been the Colossus of Roads but Williams straddled The Spit like the real Rhodes Colossus, the Greek sun god, the tallest statue of the ancient world. Shakespeare’s Cassius imagined the masses passing between the giant’s legs. Millions have been to Sea World. Williams built the Gold Coast’s most recognisable and enduring tourist attraction. Instead of going up, building towers, he went down, digging pools. The dolphinarium era is passing. Dolphin pools are increasingly viewed as cetacean prisons, progressively closing around the world. Sea World is one of the last. You can be sure Tate and the pro-development movers and shakers who insist tourism is the answer to every question will fight to keep The Spit’s dolphin show open. Williams’ failed attempt to build a casino on The Spit showed a property developer with deep pockets is not necessarily a match for a public asset valued as a natural place of rest and recreation. The few large buildings on The Spit do not “cross the line” of what is publicly acceptable because the line is maintained by public resistance to developers circling like apex predators. The Colossus of Rhodes was toppled by an earthquake. Williams’ casino on The Spit dream was snuffed out by public opinion and local politics.

**White shoe shuffle**

The second iteration of the White Shoe Brigade coincided with the second Gold Coast property boom triggered by Japanese investment. It was a nadir of entrepreneurial excess with a pair of shonky developers so notorious they are reminisced as caricatures. Mike Gore and Christopher Skase’s escapades appalling at the time are now in retelling so outrageous they are almost forgiven, but not by the families of the investors who got
burned. Gore and Skase soared high but like Icarus they bombed spectacularly. Their legacies have been rebooted. The Sanctuary Cove “gated community” near the Coomera River mouth on the northern Gold Coast and the Sheraton Mirage resort hotel on the southern end of The Spit flicker and glow in the Gold Coast mythscape. Gore and Skase both wore white shoes.

Gore was a new car salesman who had failed selling holy soil from Lourdes (McRobbie 2000, p. 102). In the “greed is good” 1980s, when the Queensland state government decided ‘mega-resorts’ were needed to attract international tourists (Burchill 2005, p. 584) and borrowing money was child’s play, Gore decided to build an integrated residential estate and tourist resort with a luxury yachts marina, two golf courses, a shopping centre and a resort hotel on 400 hectares of remote swamps in the middle of nowhere that seemed to be halfway between the Gold Coast and Brisbane. He persuaded the state government to give him a $10 million loan (Burchill 2005, p. 53; Bartlett 2010). Sanctuary Cove was Australia’s first gated community. Locked gates gave access only to residents and other pass holders, an entirely new understanding of community for most Australians. Sanctuary Cove was a financial flop. Gore fled to Canada, avoiding loan repayments (McRobbie 2000, p. 103). He never returned to Australia. Sanctuary Cove was on-sold to Japanese interests who were bankrupted after the Crash of ’87 and then held by liquidators until 2002 when, rundown and unloved, it was taken on by Mulpha Australia, a big player in retirement living. Mulpha invested $50 million in refurbishments and expanding the available residential land (Bartlett 2010).

Christopher Skase put Gore in the shade. Few businessmen in Australia have been as wildly successful, ostentatious, reckless, criminal and cowardly as Skase, preening and
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bespoke, rarely a smooth hair out of place. He was for a while irresistible to investors, celebrities and the media.

Skase’s Sheraton Mirage resort hotel at The Spit was built on the former Marineland site. After Williams relocated the Marineland dolphins to Sea World, he turned Marineland into an avian attraction, Bird Life Park. The bird park was sold to a Spanish dancing horses show. Dolphins, birds and horses: The Spit was recognised as a place for non-humans, but only if contained and where the only use considered for the few available plots was tourism, but not excessive tourism, certainly not high-rise. The rest of The Spit, the publicly-held Crown land not up for lease, was scrubby and undeveloped in Williams’ time, criss-crossed by sandy tracks, much as it is today. Skase snapped up the dancing horses site and in 1987 opened his $75 million resort hotel, the ‘most glamorous’ accommodation on the Gold Coast (Shanahan 2004, p. 143; Sykes 1994, p. 300).

The Sheraton Mirage at The Spit was a sibling. Skase’s other, larger Sheraton Mirage was in north Queensland, at Port Douglas, a quiet coastal fishing village until Skase won a Queensland state government tender to develop 180 hectares fronting the beach. Port Douglas became the benchmark for Australian luxury holidays. The high standards were maintained at The Spit, where the vista from the Mirage lobby, through the floor-to-ceiling glass windows, across the giant swimming pool, above the trees and over the dunes to the sea quickly became legendary among tourists and Gold Coast residents. ‘Guests frequently halted in the middle of their arrival . . . to admire the view’ (Sykes 1994, p. 301). It was as if the Gold Coast for some had come of age, no longer just a cheap place where anyone could afford a beachfront holiday. Unlike Sanctuary Cove, the Sheraton Mirage at The Spit was from the outset a success, at three storeys. The ocean front, light-filled lobby, dining and pool precinct is still stunning. Skase’s Italian
marble fittings had been retained in the latest refurbishment. The scene is capped by nature, what can be seen outside, beyond the pool. Open skies, cresting waves, gently waving casuarinas. Skase was a strange cat but he knew how to build a stylish beach resort. He understood high-rise is offensive to the beach. At The Spit Mirage, the sea views are almost at sea level.

Skase was educated at Caulfield Grammar in Melbourne, chose not to go to university, worked first for a stockbroker and then as a newspaper journalist. Skase and his radio broadcaster father Charles before him had desks in the Herald and Weekly Times building on Flinders Street, where I kicked off in journalism. Christopher was determined to make millions, not perform as a cub reporter. By the late 1980s, Skase’s heavily indebted public company Qintex owned a luxury jewellery store chain, a shipbuilder, five luxury tourist resorts and the Seven television network while he was chasing control of Hollywood’s MGM movie studio. Skase was known for gross displays of wealth. He threw million dollar parties attended by Hollywood celebrities. His private jet flew from Port Douglas to Melbourne to pick up a dress for his wife Pixie. ‘He wore a blue pinstripe suit . . . usually with a pink shirt, white collar and a handkerchief spilling from the breast pocket . . . [He] developed a penchant for big fat cigars’ (Sykes 1994, p. 305). Skase was a dandy whiz kid from the Melbourne establishment, interested in only one thing, climbing the world’s rich list as quickly as possible. He collected and created trophies. The luxury yacht, the luxury jet and the palatial Brisbane mansion with the 2,000-year old life size Julius Caesar marble statue in the marble hallway (Van der Plaat 1996, p. 41).

Opposite The Spit Mirage resort hotel, Skase built the Marina Mirage boutique retail centre and boardwalk with marina berths and a visible roofline of striking sails, still the most familiar landmark on The Spit. And he built a sports stadium at Carrara for the
Brisbane Bears club in the expanding Australian football national competition. Naturally, Skase also owned the Bears although no one really understood why a Brisbane football team was based on the Gold Coast.

Skase made himself into a billionaire in fifteen years. Qintex’s expansion was powered by constant acquisitions with deferred payments and massive borrowings (Van der Plaat 1996, pp. 89, 131; Sykes 1994, p. 319). The Australian pilots’ strike in 1989 hit tourism and Skase’s cash flow very hard, coinciding with rising interest rates. Skase sold half of the Port Douglas and Gold Coast resorts to Japanese investors for ‘almost as much as they cost to build’ (Burchill 2005, p. 585) and then he sold the other halves. But it was not enough. The bid to buy MGM failed. Skase blamed meddling by Murdoch who made a counter offer for MGM at the eleventh hour. Skase was unable to manage his debt repayments. Qintex was forced to sell out of the Seven network. The Australian National Companies and Securities Commission was investigating excessive management fees paid by Qintex to Skase who had secretly shifted $20 million overseas (Van der Plaat 1996, p. 133, 166; Sykes 1994, pp. 317-318).

The banks wanted their money, the receivers took over. Skase was gone, to Majorca. He declared bankruptcy, returned to Australia briefly for court appearances and was jailed for a couple of hours in Brisbane while his lawyers negotiated bail. Eventually he just stayed away, refusing to return to face the cacophonous music. Hundreds of millions of dollars in debt, he tried to hide in his Majorca mansion. Skase fought extradition by claiming he had a life-threatening pneumothorax condition, a collapsed lung (Sykes 1994, p. 324). Or was it emphysema? (Van der Plaat 1996, p. 225) He was filmed on Majorca strolling comfortably along the beach and then with an oxygen mask in court as the extradition case rolled on. Celebrity interviewer Andrew Denton raised $250,000 in a public campaign to hire a bounty hunter to bring Skase home. Skase’s Australian
passport was cancelled. He promptly became a citizen of Dominica in the West Indies, staying put on Majorca. The Australian authorities were weary of the chase, costing creditors a fortune in legal fees, when Skase died of stomach cancer still on Majorca in 2001.

Skase spent his last free, unhunted days at The Spit, hunkered down in the grandest apartment at The Spit Mirage. The Spit was where he plotted his flight. In his final days on Majorca, he was deluded, painfully trying to do deals, disgraced beyond redemption. Rumours about his hidden sexuality completed the picture. He left a jewel on The Spit.

The Spit Mirage hotel resort struggled to find an owner who was solvent and could stay out of trouble. It was purchased in 2009 from the receivers for Gold Coast developer Jim “Lazarus” Raptis, who on more than one occasion had risen from corporate defeat. The buyer was an Indian company linked to over ambitious Tweed developers Paul Brinsmead and Peter Madrers, busy on the Tweed Coast when I was running the *Tweed Daily News*. Brinsmead and Madrers possessed many of the attributes of the White Shoe Brigade. Their Resort Corp went bust on the Tweed but they managed to hook up with the Pearls Group to buy The Spit Mirage for $62 million. Pearls ran India’s biggest investment scam. Thousands of pitifully poor, hard labour workers making regular, small savings contributions were fleeced. Brinsmead and Madrers offloaded the Mirage in 2017. The buyer was Star Entertainment, operator of the Broadbeach casino, paying with Hong Kong investors $140 million despite a class action seeking to recover the Pearls assets (Kim 2016; Wilmot & Barrett 2017, p. 21). Star has been a success story, running casinos, or “integrated resorts”, in Sydney and Brisbane as well as on the Gold Coast, but Star had no plans turn The Spit Mirage into a casino. The Star balance sheet was well regarded, even with net debt of $787.5 million (Star 2017; Knight 2017). Debt is never far from property investors but it need not be a burden. Well, tell that to Skase.
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In the thirty years since Skase was on top, national debt ceilings keep going up while corporate common practice recognises debt is good. Sooner or later, something gives. In 2013, South Australian retail property investor billionaire Con Makris bought the Marina Mirage shopping centre from receivers for $52 million and the adjacent luxury cruiser marina for $7 million (Tod 2016, p. 9).

The White Shoe Brigade manifested the development-at-all-costs ideology on the Gold Coast. The flash brigadiers worked hard to attract attention, infuriating southern elites who still dismiss Queensland as uncivilised while holidaymakers from the south rush north. Aim high, don’t look down. All publicity is good publicity when you are selling the most fun in the sun. Not really, but the White Shoe Brigade sure got their hands on a lot of money. They were unscrupulous schemers who wanted it all and promised everything, for better or worse. Williams and Skase introduced theme parks and luxury holiday accommodation to the Gold Coast. They did this at The Spit.

GOING UP

Ugly, ordinary

The tallest high rise on the Gold Coast is the glass and metal clad, 90-storey, silver Q1 in Surfers Paradise. The Q1 is a crude monument to greatness, the world’s tallest residential tower for six years until 2011, still the tallest building in Australia. Six years might be a short reign for a $255 million investment. The Q1’s outdated size obsessed identity is a culmination of the Gold Coast ideology which sees space at the service of property developers. The Q1 design by the Buchan architects group, creators of the vast, exhausting Robina Town Centre shopping mall west of Burleigh Heads, was inspired apparently by the Sydney Olympic torch but it looks more like a syringe, and it is
mediocre, plagued initially by claims of corrosion and other building defects (Bartsch 2011). The Q1’s top level Skypoint observation deck and bar was purchased from the failed MFS tourism and finance group by Ardent Leisure in 2009. Ardent owns the Dreamworld theme park on the northern Gold Coast, scene of the Thunder River Rapids ride accident in 2016 when four people died. Ardent added an outside climb and walk around the top of the Q1. Brendan Shanahan describes the Q1 as ‘absurd . . . almost double the height of the surrounding buildings . . . like a child in a yearbook photograph who had gone through puberty at the age of ten’ (Shanahan 2004, p. 7).

In their indictment of modernist architecture, *Learning from Las Vegas*, Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour critique developers who build self-reflective monuments that might look ‘heroic and original’ but really are ‘ugly and ordinary’ (Venturi et al 1977, p. 101), not user-friendly and ignore ‘critical social issues’ (Venturi et al 1977, p. 161). This contradiction adds a deeper perspective to the Gold Coast, exposing an aesthetic sterility haunting the high-rise strip. The monumental Q1 has a cold, grey, unwelcoming aura. The street entry looks like the doors of a giant bank vault. The shops around the tower base are often deserted and sometimes unleased. The Q1 apartments are of course worth less now than when they were new. The Surfers Paradise real estate agents never bothered to retract their claims of Q1 greatness, they just moved on, as they always do, selling space in the next new tower and the next and the next, always offering the best.

The Q1 monster was fathered by Soheil Abedian, the debonair Iranian-born, Austrian-educated founder of the Sunland Group, a stable, profitable, publicly listed company with a national footprint, the biggest property developer on the Gold Coast. High-rise, low-rise, resorts, houses, whole suburbs, urban villages, a philanthropic foundation, Sunland has done it all over almost forty years, the good, the bad and the ugly. Abedian
exudes charm and restraint, impeccably dressed in fine suits or designer jeans. Amid the outrage over the 2014 horror Budget of the Australian federal government led by Tony Abbott, Abedian called for tax increases for the wealthy, up to 75 per cent for incomes above $1 million, company taxes to be lifted to 45 per cent and no tax at all for incomes below $50,000 (Khadem 2015). Abedian is an antithesis of the White Shoe Brigade, genuinely successful, generous and gently persuasive, although his tax plan was not as beneficent as it seems, confined to taxable incomes when minimisation strategies to keep taxable income down are common practice in the corporate sector. For the 2017 financial year, Sunland’s after tax profit was $35 million with property sales revenue of almost $400 million and debt of $218 million (Tan 2017; Sunland Group Limited 2017). In relation to the company’s assets, including land held for future development, Sunland’s debt is not excessive. For wage earning individuals, the bigger the debt, the heavier the burden. For large companies like Sunland, debt lightens the load, enabling the acquisition or development of income producing assets and so debt itself functions as a kind of asset, provided greed, ego or foolishness do not prevail.

What next after you build the biggest tower in the world? You go where no tower developer had gone before. For Abedian, the most successful Gold Coast high-riser of the post-White Shoe Brigade era, The Spit was the last frontier. In July 2015, Abedian launched Sunland’s plan for a $600 million redevelopment of the Mariner’s Cove water-focused tourism precinct on the southern end of the Spit, next to the Marina Mirage retail complex. Mariner’s Cove is the base for dozens of small businesses employing hundreds of people and turning over millions of dollars. An upmarket marina, booking agents for tours to South Stradbroke Island, luxury cabin cruiser brokers, whale watching tours, charter boat party trips, helicopter rides, fishing charters, jet ski safaris, jet boating, small boat hire, parasailing, even Venetian gondolas for hire and a floating wooden church, Our Lady on the Sea available for “celebrations afloat”,
as well as the Fisherman’s Wharf pub and a Hog’s Breath steakhouse. Few if any of these operations, well known on the Gold Coast for many years, could expect to be retained in the Sunland redevelopment. Jetty leases elsewhere suitable for water-based tourism close to Surfers Paradise are not easy to find.

Sunland used the familiar argument of the development-at-all costs, scorched earth marauders to justify why two 44-storey towers should be erected on a publicly owned leasehold site with a three-storey height limit: 1,652 construction jobs, 1,019 permanent jobs after completion, a $56.8 million boost every year to the regional economy as well as a ‘cultural precinct’ with an aquarium, museum, boardwalk and plaza (Potts 2015, pp. 1, 6-7). Not to mention the substantial profits for Sunland from the sale of hundreds of apartments and a resort hotel. Abedian was not spending $600 million just to give jobs to tradies, cooks and cleaners, or to attract an extra 500,000 visitors a year to The Spit (Potts 2015, p. 6), already overcrowded with day trippers. He wanted a fistful of dollars after repaying his lenders. Abedian’s Spit adventure would be his ‘final flourish’ and ‘last legacy’ (Potts 2015, pp. 1 & 6). He was dreaming big for The Spit: ‘We want to do for the Gold Coast what the Sydney Opera House has done for Sydney’ (Potts 2015, p. 1).

The assertion that a pair of straight-up towers could be in any way comparable to Jorn Utzon’s masterpiece, the most recognisable built symbol of Australia, was a reversion to property developer type, a throwback to the Californian Ranchers and the White Shoe Brigadiers peddling superlatives. Abedian even came ready with a Plan B allusion. He offered that the impact of The Spit twin towers might also be comparable to the Guggenheim Museum (Potts 2015, p. 6). Presumably he meant the famous New York Guggenheim, although he would have done better to clarify if he was referring to the lesser known but far more spectacular, curved titanium nautical fantasy that is the
Bilbao Guggenheim, a vision of a boat wrapped in foil, shining all over like the Chrysler building crown. The Bilbao Guggenheim certainly does rival the Sydney Opera House for audacious brilliance. The architect Frank Gehry created a very successful tourist attraction for Bilbao and revitalised the Spanish port city’s economy with outrageous, organic shapes so alluring they appear as high art sculpture. Gehry’s next oversized gobsmacking fantasy museum is set for the riverfront at ancient Arles, sure to reap an economic bonanza for southern France. Shock and awe. Cultural tourism. Who would have thought such a thing existed?

A Frank Gehry museum might be a good fit for the Gold Coast, a genuinely new attraction for a different type of tourist, but not on The Spit where recreational space encompasses an experiential relationship with nature. Despite his willingness to pay more tax, Abedian may or may not have been willing to pay for Gehry. At any rate, Abedian opted for twin towers that looked like plastic champagne flutes from a two-dollar shop, designed by Zaha Hadid, the prominent Iraqi-British architect whose London Olympics aquatic centre squats like a woman’s shoe or a self-standing taco.

Hadid died in 2016. Her obituary in *The Washington Post* noted that she embodied the ‘worst impulses . . . of architectural exuberance . . . [with] designs that indulged sculptural excess over logic and efficiency’ (Kennicott 2016). Hadid cultivated celebrity with branded candles, tableware and neckties and worked ‘regularly and enthusiastically’ with authoritarian governments (Kennicott 2016).

According to Abedian, Hadid’s twin towers on The Spit would be ‘a landmark that people will come just to look at the structure and will put us on the map with a type of engineering that nobody has ever done’ (Potts 2015, p. 6). This breathless hyperbole echoed Tate-speak and strangely implied the Gold Coast is not well known. I don’t think so. Anonymity is not among the many accusations levelled at the Glitter Strip. But
there was nothing unique or even architecturally exuberant about Hadid’s ugly champagne flutes. They were an off-the-shelf range, with varieties reproduced in Florida, Singapore, Baghdad, Milan, New York and as decorative vases. A widely publicised Sunland redevelopment proposed for the Brisbane River front at Toowong, one hour’s drive from the Gold Coast, would have three Hadid champagne flute towers, almost exactly the same as The Spit pair.

The ridiculous claim of Sydney Opera House-like greatness was in defiance of the freshly updated Gold Coast town plan confirming the three-storey limit for all of the publicly-owned leasehold sites at The Spit. Soheil Abedian’s contempt for The Spit height restrictions extends the tradition of Gold Coast property developers operating with impunity, ignoring planning instruments when it suits them, even though town plans on the Gold Coast historically have clearly favoured developers. In 1982, the Southport MP Doug Jennings, who resisted Keith Williams’ push for a casino on The Spit, complained in the Queensland Parliament about the ‘wide discretionary powers’ in the Gold Coast town plan, allowing the local council to ‘change anything overnight. It is not really a town plan, it is simply a convenience document’ (Jones 1986, p. 62). The Australian Financial Review observed that a lack of planning controls had allowed the Gold Coast to be ‘ravaged’ in a ‘reckless rush’ to seize control of its ‘delightful foreshores’ (Dedekorkut-Howes & Mayere 2016, p. 135).

The absence of modern town planning in the Gold Coast’s formative years is easily explained. The entrepreneurial Gold Coast business community was determined to keep the isolated local economy growing, driven by in-demand, tourism-related property development at or near the beach. The Queensland state government and the Gold Coast local council were most of the time controlled by rabidly pro-development, radical conservatives. In this heady context, it was inevitable that property developers would
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become influential in local politics. The last thing developers want is local planning constraints on where and what they can build. The unrestrained, pro-development ideology led the Gold Coast to provide Australia’s first canal estates, first theme park, first gated community and first purpose-built factory outlet store, all surrounding Australia’s first beachfront high rise armada, and to pioneer timeshare and strata titled apartment sales (Dedekorkut-Howes, Bosman & Leach 2016, p. 15). The Gold Coast also has the largest retail area and the most car parking spaces of any Australian city (Holmes in Dedekorkut-Howes, Bosman & Leach 2016, p. 15). So yes, for property developers in this Anything Goes Land there was such a thing as a free lunch.

The Gold Coast town plan in the new millennium allowed the Gold Coast City Council to override height limits for specific locations, if a majority of councillors believed a development proposal had intrinsic merit and was in the public interest, according to Greg Betts, a Gold Coast City councillor from 2004 to 2016 (Betts 2018). An urban planning consultant, Betts was a member of the council’s planning committee. Merit and public interest are slippery, arbitrary terms, depending on councillors’ own perspectives, the particular site sought for exploitation, the local political climate and local economic conditions. On the Gold Coast, merit and public interest were at the mercy of the pro-development spruikers, rather than more complex considerations balancing what the community wants with what the economy needs. Tate’s idea of merit and public interest did not chime with the thousands of residents who were fed up with too much high rise and keen to preserve The Spit. If the city council decided to override a height limit, it had to publish a list of reasons explaining why (Betts 2018).

The “willing to oblige” considerations for developers showed the Gold Coast town plan was still the convenience document critiqued by Jennings, although residents did have genuine legal rights of appeal against contentious approvals. However, the smooth ride
for Gold Coast developers was not unique, it applied under the Queensland Planning Act 2016 for all local government authorities in the state (Betts 2018). The people’s wishes expressed in town planning regulations, arrived at after extensive consultation, are expendable all over Queensland. The influence of the pro-development lobby has always been most excessive on the Gold Coast where property development constraints have in effect become so flexible they are almost meaningless, so that the Gold Coast town plan was seen by many as good as useless. Abedian’s outrageous twin towers proposal for The Spit was a moment of truth for everyone with a stake in the future of the Gold Coast. Given the emerging forces of resistance against too much high rise and the entrenched power of the property development gang, Abedian’s chances at the outset of the approvals process were probably better than even money.

The Gold Coast Bulletin needed no convincing about more high rise on The Spit, dutifully falling into line as a willing spruiker, calling Abedian’s final flourish a ‘Spit masterpiece’ and gushing about the associated ‘superyacht berths, an infinity pool open to the public and a floating waterfront park’ (Potts 2015, p. 6) whatever that might be, all paid for via Abedian the beneficent. The Bulletin acknowledged merely in passing the excessive breach of the town plan’s height limit for The Spit as a ‘major point of contention’ but noted unnamed councillors supported the project, an anonymous council spokesman had declared the twin towers were likely to gain approval and, anyway, an online poll revealed 66 percent of people were in favour (Potts 2015, p. 6).

Of course, Tate was impressed by Abedian’s final flourish. A $600 million pair of 44-storey towers with a resort hotel next to his cruise ship terminal would be win-win on a grand scale. A year after Sunland’s big Spit announcement, as the approvals process dragged on despite the Bulletin’s boast of a fait accompli, Tate was spouting the Sydney Opera House analogy:
Wind back the clock. And you look at the Sydney Opera House and what was there before. But you had environmentalists saying, “No, no, no, we don’t want anything that looks a bit oddball and it’s a bit high. We shouldn’t go ahead with it”. Fast forward to now and the Sydney Opera House is one of the wonders of the world. And it is very iconic for Sydney. I say to the people of the Gold Coast, look at the architectural merit first (Moore 2016).

Apart from failing to justify how a pair of unoriginal champagne flute towers compares favourably to the Sydney Opera House, Tate did not explain why a 44-storey development was suitable for a site with a three-storey limit. He revealed again his ideological prejudice by implying everyone who opposes high-rise does so for irrational reasons simply because they are environmentalists. Tate is one of those old school conservatives who use the word environmentalist as a smear, as if environmentalists are like poisonous followers of a dangerous cult or mad scientists or religious extremists. Tate did not seem to understand the thousands of residents and visitors who opposed further high rise on the Gold Coast may have held competing views about property development and what should be allowed on The Spit. They were certainly not all environmentalists. And it was not environmentalists who complained about the Sydney Opera House project. Most of the trouble around the opera house development was triggered by NSW state government political interference leading to Utzon’s departure and estrangement. The architect was reluctant to give much ground in modifying the complex design process to enable construction to progress smoothly, but it was the politicians in charge, people like Tate, whose diminishing support threatened to crack the opera house diamond.

It did not have to be this way. Abedian might have chosen to stick to the three-storey limit on The Spit. After all, he had done so with aplomb once already. Sunland spent
$200 million to build the world’s first fashion branded luxury hotel, the Palazzo Versace, at the southern end of The Spit, completed in 2000 (Simonot 2015, Ma 2013). Like the Sheraton Grand Mirage reclining sedately on the other side of The Spit’s access road, the Palazzo Versace was spared no expense in construction and fittings, with a semblance of classical proportions recalling an ancient villa, far removed from the piercing Q1 hypodermic. The Palazzo Versace is nothing if not kitsch. Abedian convinced the Versace family to allow Sunland to recreate the ostentatious ‘splashy baroque’ (Brown 2018) of the Versace 1990s couture range in the hotel fit-out. The Palazzo Versace lobby is dominated by an enormous 750kg chandelier, like a glittering UFO hovering at eye level, from the collection of the founder of the Italian high fashion house, Gianni Versace, sensationnally shot dead on the steps of his Florida mansion in 1997. The hotel interiors are splashed with Versace’s Medusa head logo among other ancient Greek and Roman imagery, Italian marble flooring and a 13 metre-long, figurative, line-drawing mural covering a restaurant wall depicting Gianni Versace’s life, similar to Jean Cocteau’s French Riviera mural narrating episodes from the life of Christ, in which Jesus’ face looks like Cocteau’s and Pilate’s face like Picasso’s, in the Chapelle Saint Pierre at Villefranche sur Mur. The Palazzo Versace mural is far less accomplished than Cocteau’s stunner but it is an arresting work. Abedian’s Versace deal brought the world’s most flamboyant fashion label, ‘overtly sexy [with] migrainous colours . . . brash to the point of vulgarity’ (Brown 2018), to Australia’s hedonistic holiday Mecca, almost a perfect match.

The Palazzo Versace hotel at The Spit remains a favourite for celebrities. Ownership of the hotel’s 72 private condominiums with marina berths, separate from the 200 guest rooms, is via shares in a private company (Simonot 2015), ensuring relative anonymity for investors and residents, resulting in that strange social conjunction where a luxury hotel enables privacy for wealthy condo owners, who for a variety of reasons usually try
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to avoid being photographed, sharing space with celebrity guests finding refuge from their own public spectacle. Sunland sold the Palazzo Versace in 2012 to Chinese investors for $68.5 million (Calligeros 2012). Abedian’s brilliant deal at the outset ended up a loss maker in terms of initial capital investment and the sale price, although Sunland also collected millions of dollars from the hotel’s condominium sales and other fees.

The Palazzo Versace and the Sheraton Grand Mirage are the twin sentinels of The Spit, crouching opposite each other like Chinese temple guard dogs, one a symbol of extravagant excess, the other of cool restraint, both exuding wealth and power. But they are not guardians, more like fugitives hiding out from the phalanx of towers in Surfers Paradise, lasting proof that tourism on the Gold Coast can succeed without high rise.

Zombie towers

On the Gold Coast, Abedian is regarded as another Colossus, draped in Ermenegildo Zegna. However, Abedian’s twin towers vision for The Spit was diminished by the presumptive shadows of the $3 billion Gold Coast Integrated Resort, five hideous, lurching towers promised by the mysterious Chinese ASF consortium for the vacant public site between Sea World and the Gold Coast Fisherman’s Co-operative on the Broadwater’s eastern shore. When high rise cost estimates spiral into billions of dollars, scale and proportion enter an illusory space, a dream or a nightmare that can only be imagined.

And yet ASF’s $3 billion monstrosity was a remnant, a scaled back version of a $7 billion multi-tower casino and resort proposal with the original, pre-Tate cruise ship terminal. For a while, until the Campbell Newman government was thrown out, it
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seemed as if Coruscant, the sci-fi city in *Revenge of the Sith*, was about to erupt in the Broadwater. The Newman government in 2014 offered the Chinese consortium preliminary approval to build the second Gold Coast casino, a deal done on a promise from an obscure operator no one knew much about at a time when China was Australia’s saviour, buying Australian mineral resources for the biggest construction boom in history. ASF settled on Wavebreak Island, a stone’s throw from The Spit, as the casino site.

Wavebreak Island is the sand bank built up to protect the western shore of the Broadwater from the intensified tidal flows funneled by the rock walls at the Nerang River mouth, part of the sand pumping operation to keep the river entrance navigable, inadvertently creating the miracle of TOS at South Stradbroke Island. Developers have eyed off Wavebreak Island for decades. A cavalcade of outrageous proposals has come and gone, each one so grossly over-sized on such a small site it is hard to believe architects and financiers would even contemplate them. All that ASF achieved at Wavebreak was unprecedented local outrage, until the incoming Palaszczuk government acted on its campaign promise to protect the Broadwater and The Spit parklands.

Annastacia Palaszczuk looked to be caught between a rock and a hard place. ASF had already committed a small fortune on preliminary work for Wavebreak. Giving away public money as compensation to developers to stop development is a hard sell, especially in Queensland where many voters support development at all costs, so ASF was offered a chance to exploit another location nearby, five hectares on the southern end of The Spit, without the allowance for a cruise ship terminal. Palaszczuk would not have to explain paying millions of dollars to a developer to do nothing, not yet anyway. If the Chinese did manage to raise up a casino on The Spit, gambling taxes would flow to state revenue, but Palaszczuk knew resistance to large scale development on The Spit...
would not dissipate. Many people believed allowing ASF to build on a southern chunk of The Spit would lead to digging up The Spit’s northern parklands and tearing down the ocean side trees for a high-rise forest. ASF would therefore have to succeed in one of the toughest public consultation exercises in Australian history. The Palaszczuk government’s hand was not looking so bad after all. The only other player had nothing but an invitation to stay in the game.

The concept drawings and cost-benefit estimates for the Gold Coast Integrated Resort were revealed in the week before Christmas 2016 (Marszalek 2016, pp. 1, 4-5), a few days after ASF’s rival Star Entertainment, the Broadbeach casino operator, announced it had gained approval for a new $600 million tower at Broadbeach. ASF’s five towers would range from 20 to 45 stories, containing the new casino, three luxury hotels, apartment complexes, a conference centre, restaurants, live entertainment, boutique retailers and with a waterfront precinct, attracting 1.5 million tourists a year to The Spit and creating 10,000 jobs in construction and ongoing operations (Marszalek 2016, pp. 1, 4-5; Potts 2016e, p. 4). Unlike the cruise ship terminal, this was the real deal, a tangible seismic threat to The Spit, apparently ready to go as soon as the government approvals were given. Like Abedian, ASF was reading from the well thumbed scorched earth marauders public playbook in which property developers are cast as economic and social saviours and the profits to be made from property exploitation are mentioned only in the fine print footnotes, if at all.

The unveiling of ASF’s proposed five-tower monster was on a Saturday at the start of the summer holidays, a slow news time, guaranteeing the Gold Coast Integrated Resort the front page splash in Queensland’s Sunday Mail, another of the Murdoch pro-development spruikers. The Sunday Mail’s editorial was triumphant about ASF’s prospects: ‘Forget what the greenies say about The Spit. It’s a haven for vagrants and is
in desperate need of repair. . . Forget the doomsayers. It will happen’ (‘Spit in the eye for greenies’ 2016, p. 70). No acknowledgement that jobs “created” in construction and hospitality can be jobs lost or foregone elsewhere, or short term or unskilled. And no mention of the credentials of the mysterious ASF invited to carve up the Gold Coast’s largest remaining waterfront public land site next to one of Queensland’s most heavily trafficked waterways. Who is to say how many of the 1.5 million promised visitors would visit the Gold Coast anyway, integrated resort or not? How were the 10,000 jobs and the 1.5 million visitors calculated?

ASF also promised to pay for a new bridge across the Broadwater to fix The Spit’s traffic problems, but no one explained if the necessary upgraded feeder roads would be paid for by ratepayers, nor if access to Doug Jennings Park at the far end of The Spit, and TOS, would be any more or less congested. ASF might even be willing to cough up an extra $100 million or more for a light rail spur line from Main Beach to Sea World, linking to a Broadwater ferry terminal (Potts 2016, p. 4). If you have to sell the car because you lost everything at the casino, you can catch a tram paid for by the casino developer. How much of The Spit would be gouged out and set aside for tram tracks and what the trams might do to the road traffic on such a narrow strip was anybody’s guess. The tourism bonanza was forecast to begin immediately after the 2018 Gold Coast Commonwealth Games and the financial benefits promised by the Games’ organisers would roll on for years (Marszalek 2016a, p. 4). The Gold Coast Bulletin demanded politicians get on with giving ASF the green light:

For more than a decade this city has been used as a political football over whether it should have an integrated resort. The backflipping and political pouting has cost taxpayers millions of dollars and far too much grief . . .
Politicians must get together and make it happen for the good of the city’ (‘City needs this resort’ 2016, p. 20).

In fact, the backflipping really had cost no one directly, certainly not Gold Coast property developers who always find sites. The Gold Coast economy was on a roll. House prices were rising, unemployment down (Corderoy 2016; ‘Gold Coast City Unemployment’ 2017), other less contentious major development projects approved or underway (‘Dual Jewels’ 2017, pp. 1, 4-5). The 

Bulletin was thumping the table as if we had all been crying out for an integrated resort. Until ASF came along, few people were talking about any such thing. Does integrated resort not mean a casino masquerading as a holiday venue, a deceptive pseudonym deployed in the shallow hope that no-one is reminded of home-wrecking gambling addiction and organised crime for which casinos are renowned? Are we resorting to the worst, the least best? An integrated resort is a proxy, a wolf in sheep’s clothing.

The ASF towers were designed by renowned Brisbane architect Michael Rayner, the remodeler of the 1960s vintage Southport Aquatic Centre, the 2018 Commonwealth Games swimming venue without a roof, fine for competition events so long as it does not rain. Rayner argued the push to trash The Spit’s three-storey height limit was simply continuing the high-rise footprint beyond Main Beach, an extension of the ‘city’s edge’ (Potts 2017, p. 3). This way of thinking assumes the Gold Coast beachfront towers will continue to march onward and upward without limit, as unstoppable as lava flow. The five towers on The Spit ‘would only be wrong if the buildings were incredibly crowded but with this site there is a lot of breathing space’ (Potts 2017, p. 3). And leaning space. The silver towers in the ASF artist impressions leant at random angles, as if unsteady in soft sand or precarious after an earthquake or like candles stuck in a birthday cake. Or lurching like zombies, because the ASF bid had been very much knocked around but
was so far still alive. As well, to compound the wonky aura, each tower was two vertical sheaths tilted away from each other, with a gap at the top of the sheaths containing hanging gardens. The gardens gave an overall impression of a souvlaki wrap with ingredients exposed where you take the first bite.

Tate declared the ‘fantastic’ ASF proposal would appeal to locals, the ‘drive market’ from Brisbane and international tourists (‘Civic leaders welcome plan’ 2016, p. 5). He was ‘delighted with the architectural merit’ of the concept designs (‘Civic leaders welcome plan’ 2016, p. 5). Tate’s delightful fantasy might as well have imagined the tilting towers to be hip thrusting catwalk models, teasing open the southern end of The Spit for unrestrained development, boosting the case for a cruise ship terminal. Rayner reckoned his design was all about ‘capturing the Gold Coast’s spirit and character to create a place of pleasure’ (Potts 2017, p.3). Depends whose version of the Gold Coast spirit and character you accept and how you get your kicks. Is the Gold Coast essentially a party town of staggering excess where pleasure is found at the gaming tables, or a place where the beach is valued for its natural qualities and for rest and recreation? This is the dilemma of the Gold Coast, where the marketing discourse is out of tune with the lives of many residents.

The Sydney Opera House was again invoked. A waterfront piazza at the base of ASF’s lurching zombie towers would be framed by a 1,200 seat amphitheatre overlooking the Broadwater. Michael Rayner claimed events like ‘outdoor water based opera’ staged by the Sydney Opera House could be held outside the Gold Coast Integrated Resort (Potts 2017 p.3). The Broadwater is smaller than Sydney Harbour and very heavily trafficked. If not opera on the water, how about dragon boat racing? A dozen fast and furious paddlers in deep canoes painted to look like dragons with poor hydrodynamics sprinting and splashing for line honours. Dragon boat racing is about the closest group activity
China has to an indigenous team sport, practised on rivers and lakes throughout the Middle Kingdom. ASF director Dean LaVigne was enthusiastic about dragon boat racing on the Broadwater. LaVigne even imagined the greatest boat race of all in front of the Gold Coast Integrated Resort. The amphitheatre would ‘have a step down, to watch performances on the Broadwater, watch dragon boat races, maybe America’s Cup’ (Keen 2016b, p. 4). Hosting the America’s Cup jumbo yacht match race is no easy feat, something Australia has done only once in 150 years. The Gold Coast has its own dragon boat racing clubs but you do not see them on the Broadwater. The bright canoes and their energetic paddlers would be run over by the much faster marine craft forever coming and going.

Another ASF director, Louis Chien, who would become ASF’s main public voice on the Gold Coast, imagined aquatic performances could be witnessed from the Broadwater Parklands on the Broadwater’s far western shore opposite The Spit (Keen 2016b, p. 4). Staging shows of any kind on the water outside the Gold Coast Integrated Resort on a scale large enough to be seen from the Broadwater Parklands, hundreds of metres away, would require exclusive use of a large swathe of the Broadwater or create nautical chaos. ASF’s dreaming revealed an incredible arrogance. Boating on the Broadwater would be swept aside for tediously curated, income generating activities with the sole motive of focusing attention on a giant casino.

The ASF team was anxious to get the circus underway. They had been told to wait on final approval, shunted from one site to another, and were still waiting after three years (Willoughby & Ardern 2014; ‘ASF’s road to The Spit’ 2016, p. 6). Chien called on the Queensland state government to finally decide what exactly would be allowed on The Spit. ‘We need the government to step forward and make a decision’ (Keen & Potts 2016, p. 1). Until then, ASF was unable, or unwilling, to provide detailed plans for the
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$3 billion zombie towers precinct. What is the point of drawing up detailed specifications for one of the biggest Gold Coast property development projects in living memory if you don’t know how high you can go and where exactly you can link with feeder roads, or if you can or cannot build a bridge? These are reasonable questions. An even more reasonable question is why should anyone be allowed to build anything fifteen times above the allowable height limit? Chien argued high-rise can be good for everyone. ‘We are trying to balance height with give back of community space. So you can imagine the lower the buildings the more spread out the ground floor has to be. We want to make sure we maximise community spaces underneath’ (Keen & Potts 2016b, p. 4). Since when did a developer ever seek to maximise community space? No, ASF was aiming to maximise profits by attracting high rollers to a spectacular casino, and as many other punters as possible, and to fill as many hotel rooms as possible, and the only way to do that when a site is confined is to go high. Chien wanted Palaszczuk to declare the ASF site a Priority Development Area, overriding the Gold Coast City Council’s town plan and speeding up the approvals process:

A number of investors are ready . . . as soon as we get a bit of clarity . . . Capital is fluid . . . It is like water, it has to flow in order to be effective. One of our Chinese investors wanted additional projects elsewhere because things were looking slow here . . . They are still backing this project, don’t get me wrong. But they want to apply their resources elsewhere as well (Keen & Potts 2016a, p. 4).

Chien was sounding perhaps a little impatient, understandably. But he needed to be careful not to appear to be threatening to walk away, because the Queensland state government would always hold the trump card. Chien also declared that ASF was ‘in serious and active discussions with Crown’ (Keen & Potts 2016a, p. 4). Crown at this
time was not an ideal bargaining chip. The Australian-based casino operator’s share price had crashed. A Crown marketing team, including three Australians, was in jail in China, arrested for promoting gambling to high rollers. That’s right, Chinese are arguably the world’s biggest gamblers, but gambling and its promotion is illegal in China.

A state election was due in Queensland in the next twelve months. A final decision either way, for or against the zombie towers and a casino at The Spit, would anger Gold Coast voters polarised about sensitive property development. Annastacia Palaszczuk promised only more walking tracks, more native plantings, better toilet facilities and a ban on illegal camping for the 140 hectares of coastal parkland and forest on The Spit (Marszalek 2016b, p. 5). But she was also careful not to explicitly rule out increasing height limits for ASF on The Spit’s southern end. The Palaszczuk government was going to take its time while ASF sweated. ASF at this stage was the likely possible developer for a second Gold Coast casino at The Spit, nothing more. If during the public consultation process ASF was unable to dissipate or at least moderate the public resistance to its hotly contested integrated resort, their favoured status could ultimately be withdrawn and compensation paid in the public interest because the long months of consultation would serve to justify the payment. If the ASF proposal failed in the end to gain the Palaszczuk government’s approval, the Premier could deflect blame from the development gang to the former Campbell Newman government for failing to properly consult in the first place.

What had emerged was a kind of ominous dance. Annastacia Palaszczuk and the Chinese developer were locked in a rigid, unblinking tango, ASF refusing to concede it might be on a hiding to nothing, the Premier refusing to yield, not saying yes, not saying no.
Public consultation

In the four years to 2016, Chinese investment in Australian tourism infrastructure grew from six per cent to thirty eight per cent, coinciding with more direct flights between China and Australia, easier visa access and targeted marketing of Australian tourist attractions (Williams 2017, p. 15). Chinese tourists visiting Australia were forecast to exceed three million per year by 2026. This equated to one quarter of all overseas tourists in Australia, making China the largest source of Australia’s foreign visitors (Dupont 2017, p. 20). The Gold Coast had already been voted China’s favourite western city and fourth favourite city in the world in a poll of Chinese tourists in 2017 (Potts 2017, p. 5). Almost 300,000 Chinese tourists came to the Gold Coast in 2017, one third of all Chinese visiting Australia (Potts 2017a, p. 5). More than a few of these would buy, or holiday in, rooms at the ASF Consortium’s Gold Coast Integrated Resort at The Spit and then lose money on the roulette tables or the poker machines.

ASF’s Louis Chien addressed a “local opportunities” public meeting attended by 200 tradesmen and women, and dozens of anti-casino campaigners incognito, at the Gold Coast Turf Club, ten minutes’ drive inland from Surfers Paradise, on an autumn evening in 2017. The gathering was called to advise “how you can become a supplier” for the Gold Coast Integrated Resort. Marketing brochures on every seat displayed Chinese classical opera and Brazilian Mardi Gras dancers posing among a crowd of strollers under a geodesic marquee next to the Broadwater, a digitally conjured taste of The Spit’s brave new world.

The marketing brochures carried an “80 per cent plus local jobs guarantee” stamp. ASF wanted us to believe at least 10,400 of the 13,000 construction, hospitality and other jobs claimed for the zombie towers would be filled by Gold Coasters. This is the kind of
logic used by politicians who treat voters like children, expecting us to believe a plumber shifting from one building site to another equals the “creation” of a new job. The Gold Coast was enjoying a construction and hospitality boom. Nearly everyone was renovating houses. The 2018 Commonwealth Games major venues building program was underway. Hipster cafes were sprouting up everywhere every day. If ASF got what it wanted, the Gold Coast economy would screech to a shuddering halt while everyone rushed to The Spit. The brochures also claimed the jobs to be provided at The Spit represented three quarters of the Gold Coast unemployed. So where were all these jobs coming from, the local workforce or the local unemployed? If it was the local unemployed, ASF was implying they possessed the skills needed to build and operate an exclusive holiday resort and run a luxury casino. Some might. It was going to be a strange night, one for the true believers.

Security guards with biceps so inflated their arms stuck out almost at right angles and fingers like chipolatas loitered in the shadows. We were checked to ensure we had registered our names and background details online. If your registration indicated you might not be a supporter of the Gold Coast Integrated Resort, entry to the public meeting would presumably have been refused, so all those opponents I recognised seated smirking on the plastic chairs had like me in a way pledged their loyalty, willing to be added to the ASF mailing list to keep up to date about the threats to The Spit. On the other hand, ASF now had a data base able to be used as evidence of public support, because this was the reason for the “local opportunities” public meeting, it was really an opportunity for ASF to show they had enough friends to convince the Queensland state government to give final approval for The Spit casino and the zombie towers.

The tradesmen and women who had turned up at the public meeting were offered nothing useful to examine, no specifications for tendering or calculating if indeed it
might be worth ditching or rescheduling other jobs for the ASF project, because ASF would not release detailed drawings or contracts until the Queensland state government pushed the go button. ‘Find out the facts, have your say, sign our online petition, like us on Facebook,’ the ASF marketing brochure said. And fill in the survey inside the brochure. The survey asked respondents to describe how an integrated resort could benefit the Gold Coast. A request to explain, if you do not support an integrated resort at The Spit, tell us why, was nowhere to be found. I had turned up to observe, listen and take notes, and to tackle the free banquet arriving on platters at the back of the room, next to the free drinks bar, delivered by wait staff in head to toe black like secret ninja co-opted to assist the security goons if things got out of hand.

We were ready for anything. Maybe ASF was about to deliver an impressive show. Laser lights, singers and dancers, costumes, the Chinese opera or Brazilian Mardi Gras, a dragon boat team in dragon regalia, surprise guests, big names. After all, this was the Gold Coast. Alas, no. Chien’s performance at the “local opportunities” public meeting was painful to watch. He wore the shiny, slick blue and grey uniform of the successors of the White Shoe Brigade and possessed the smug certainty of someone who has made a lot of money, but within a few minutes it was clear he was incapable of selling us his big idea. *Gold Coast Bulletin* photographers and local TV news cameras were focused on the slight, uncharismatic man telling us about the biggest spending project on the Gold Coast in decades, but alone on the meeting room stage Chien seemed strangely unaware of the historical gravitas, or what even was at stake for him, unable to disguise his arrogance. He was vague, reticent and evasive as he went through a slide show and then fielded questions. He did not seem to rate our capacity to understand or maybe he believed we were better off in the dark, as if ASF had decided the local community would be told only the bare minimum, or he was out of his depth. This was a very odd approach considering ASF needed to demonstrate public enthusiasm.
Chien opened trying to be folksy. ‘Cabbies are the barometer, they’ll give it to you straight. A cabbie told me, “mate, I’m sick of all the talking about it, just get on with it”.’ The cabbie stereotype, the ordinary bloke who apparently knows what the city really thinks, is really an endangered species, victim of the digital economy and the taxi industry taking passengers for granted. Taxi drivers these days in Australia are often recent arrivals from harsh times overseas battling to find their place in a new society, unwilling or unable to engage in conversation, disinterested in local arguments about property development. Chien might have done better with an Uber oracle. Uber drivers are mostly locals, often with views about property development. Chien’s flippant cabbie dismissing the zombie tower debate insulted all those who had turned up at the turf club wondering about ASF’s intentions. By the end of the night, any thinking person wanting to afford Chien a fair hearing could only conclude he was a man of impressive mediocrity.

Chien was a recent arrival on the Gold Coast. Hardly anyone one knew much about him. Most of the turf club audience had never seen him before yet he revealed nothing of himself, only the vaguest outline. Raised in America, worked there in the corporate world for a long time, joined ASF. He might have been a shampoo salesman. He briefly ticked off a residential subdivision at Hope Island, development approvals for two apartment towers at Southport and Surfers Paradise, redevelopment of the Royal Docks in London, and The Spit, this was the ASF portfolio. Asked about the convoluted, lengthy genesis of the zombie towers, Chien said: ‘We were kind of put to that piece of land south of Sea World, there was a lot of behind the scenes work and negotiations and so forth.’ So tell us something we don’t know. The new casino would be a ‘catalyst for urban renewal of the southern Spit’. This is meaningless marketing talk wrongly assuming The Spit needs urban renewal. The Spit ‘hasn’t seen any rejuvenation in a
while, it’s starting to go downhill a little bit’. Only because state and local authorities
failed to provide care and maintenance.

The explaining task was a lot harder of course than it looked, especially with an
elephant in the room. A small, almost frail, elderly woman sitting apparently alone
brought the elephant to life. A few days before the public meeting at the turf club, The
Australian newspaper had revealed the latest ASF group accounts filed with the
Australian Stock Exchange showed ASF had $6.25 million in the bank after raising
$102 million from investors. Auditors had advised of ‘material uncertainty’ about ASF
as a ‘going concern’ and ASF’s continuing operations were dependent on achieving
profitability and raising more funds (Klan 2017). The Queensland state government had
confirmed to The Australian that it would consider the ‘financial capacity’ of the ASF
Consortium before deciding if The Spit casino would go ahead (Klan 2017). ASF had
responded in a statement declaring it had a ‘lean and conservative balance sheet’ with a
’spotless record of raising capital from its networks’ (Klan 2017).

The elderly woman was seated a few rows away. She was unknown to me, as far as I
could tell not a leader of the anti-development push, not a dangerous renegade or a feral
greenie or any of the other stereotypes Tom Tate had used to willfully miscast the
thousands of Gold Coast residents opposed to exploitation of The Spit for private profit
and unwarranted mass tourism. She was typical of the very large number of Gold
Coasters who felt some kind of repulsion at what was being proposed. Her brief
question put in one quietly spoken, succinct but brimming with anger sentence was,
how can a company worth just $6 million build a $3 billion project? It is not uncommon
for small incubator companies to be involved with vastly expensive investments, this
happens frequently in the mining industry when geologists set up a major resource
development, but not everyone knows how big projects are funded and given the
community anger about the possible fate of The Spit, it was surprising the question had not been asked with more fervour by some of the more militant opponents in the crowd. The hired goons standing around with timber trunk arms folded across chests like Mr Incredible might have been a deterrent, even though there was no evidence anyone in the audience was a risk to public order.

Chien’s reply to the elderly woman was breathtaking in its inadequacy. He said: ‘We have partners to help with funding, it’s a consortium.’ We waited for more, but there was no more, that was all the answer we were getting, squeezed out through a hard set jaw. Surely this was the moment when Chien would explain how the ASF consortium had links to one of China’s strongest banks connected directly to China’s most powerful rulers and to a global giant Chinese construction company, when Chien would demonstrate how the Australia and China partnership could be spectacularly successful for mutual benefit here on the Gold Coast? This was Chien’s chance to create confidence in ASF’s ability to deliver a world class building project and pay the invoices and wages of the 13,000 workers it wanted. Surely, this was the reason we had been invited to the turf club. A frank explanation was needed. Everyone was so surprised that nobody challenged him to tell us more. Here was a property industry salesman unable or unwilling to effectively communicate. Chien may as well have shrugged his shoulders and tap danced into the wings.

Chien was more talkative a few months earlier, in December 2016, in a congratulatory interview in the *Gold Coast Bulletin*, but he still managed to stick his foot in his mouth. ‘Keep in mind the site right now is fenced off, not accessible to the public and it’s basically a vacant infill piece of land. It’s not like we are taking over a public park. It’s really an unused, unappreciated piece of land. We are going to make something special’ (Keen & Potts 2016b, p. 3). Unused and vacant because it was behind a temporary
fence, keeping people out until its future was sorted, certainly not unappreciated, and yes, ASF would be taking over, because the seismic impact of the zombie towers would irrevocably diminish The Spit’s public, natural values, make The Spit something else, something far less natural. Chien clearly did not understand the place he was dealing with, the passion of so many people to protect The Spit. Infill implies human intervention and reclamation. The Spit is naturally formed, mediated by rock walls at the river mouth.

Chien was born in Shanghai and educated in the United States. He trained as an architect, has an MBA and a management role with a Las Vegas real estate investment firm. He worked at Proctor and Gamble for fifteen years, in Cincinnati and Singapore (‘Li Chien’, Bloomberg; ‘Louis C.’, linkedin). Proctor and Gamble is a multi-national producer of home cleaning agents and personal care products, so for all intents and purposes, Chien was a shampoo salesman. He joined the ASF group in Sydney as an executive director in 2015. At this time, ASF announced an ‘alliance’ with the Hong Kong-listed China Communications Construction Company, the largest port builder in China, to ‘assist’ ASF’s ‘global integrated resort ambitions’ (‘ASF Group appoints Louis Chien’ 2015). The ASF Consortium partners, behind the zombie towers, were the ASF Group and the China State Construction Engineering Corporation, the largest construction company in the world by revenue (ASF Group; ‘Leading construction contractors’ 2016). CSCEC is state-owned, with links to the Export Import Bank of China, an agency of the State Council of the Chinese government. CSCEC has built airports, convention centres, universities, mosques, sports stadiums, hotels, hospitals and other huge infrastructure projects mostly in Africa and Asia, including the Trump International Golf Club in Dubai.
An American subsidiary company of CSCEC was blamed for the bankruptcy of the developer of the Caribbean’s largest luxury hotel and casino, the $US4 billion Baha Mar at Nassau, opened in 2017, four years behind schedule, after a messy legal row over sham invoices and shoddy construction by Chinese workers (Jett 2016; Rucinski 2017; Sweet 2018). Baha Mar was similar in type, scale and location to the proposed zombie towers. A company as large as CSCEC was bound to run into trouble with some of its projects. As well, CSCEC was a direct partner in the ASF Consortium, not a separate contractor. But claims about poorly trained Chinese workers and poor work quality at Baha Mar raised questions about what might eventuate at The Spit.

How could a knowledgeable business player like Chien, familiar with all sorts of complex deals, be such a dud at a local information night? Surely, the ASF “local opportunities” public meeting ought to have been a stroll on the beach. But it’s not like that. People like Chien circulate in their own atmosphere, talking to each other, not the ordinary folk who buy the gunk in the shampoo bottles. Chien spends his time running deals to ultimately take money off the ordinary folk. He does not talk to them, only about them, what they can be persuaded to buy. When he appeared at the Gold Coast Turf Club, it was as if he was confronted by the enemy. He reacted like an animal crossing the highway at night, lit up in the headlights. I wondered who had advised him, or did he assume he was dealing with nobodies in a regional holiday town, a place that urban sophisticates cannot take seriously? On the other hand, Chien was the most senior of the ASF directors with a career entrenched in western culture. He may have been the one considered best for the public song and dance. If that was the case, he ought to have stood at the back, waving hello and saying thanks for coming, leaving the explication, the inspiration and the tricky Q & A to a communications expert. ASF’s public meeting at the Gold Coast Turf Club showed getting the message out needs to be handled very carefully.
Chien was asked to discuss the application process for Gold Coast trades contractors who might be interested in building the zombie towers. Was it an open tender? Like his response to the elderly lady, the answer was again very brief, as brief as possible, as if to suggest we can talk about that later, this is not the time and place. Yes, it was an open tender. And this was the time and place. If you are trying to win public support via public consultation you need to provide nuts and bolts detail, especially as the turf club meeting was called to specifically advise “how you can become a supplier” for the Gold Coast Integrated Resort. An open tender allows any qualified contractor to bid for work. Tender specifications may be publicly scrutinised and contracts are awarded on the criteria of price and quality. A closed tender is for a select group of bidders invited to submit their best offers. Chien certainly needed to explain the “80 per cent plus local jobs” guarantee. Did it mean local contractors would be preferred even if interstate bidders were more competitive? If so, how exactly does a contractor qualify for local preference? What happens if most of the local contractors were engaged at the huge Jewel construction site in Surfers Paradise or elsewhere on the booming Gold Coast? And were there any circumstances in which the China State Construction Engineering Corporation would bring Chinese workers from overseas to build the zombie towers? The local jobs guarantee could not be taken seriously because the person offering it did not advise how it worked. The public meeting was by now a farce, an information night without information.

A shadowy figure behind the Jewel project, Chinese property developer Huang Xiangmo, had become the most notorious donor in the Australian political space. The formerly Sydney-based Chinese citizen was made persona non-grata in Australia in 2019 as a result of political party donations and links with Chinese government-backed influence peddlers. Huang Xiangmo’s son Huang Jiquan was the sole owner of the $1 billion glass clad, triple tower Jewel monstrosity, leaping out of the Surfers Paradise
dunes like a giant geological explosion of pointy ended crystal shafts, a brazen monument appealing to the base instinct of covetousness, with direct access to the beach, no road to cross. Jewel’s thrusting crystals were a stone’s throw from where I was first captivated by the Gold Coast surf, fifty years ago at the modest beachfront President tower, now run down and easily missed in the Jewel shadows.

Chien was not the only speaker for ASF at the Gold Coast Turf Club but the others also were unconvincing. Brian Haratsis, an economist who founded Macroplan Dimasi, a Gold Coast property industry consultancy, attempted to create a sense of urgency with a busy slide show of graphs and statistics. Haratsis argued that tourism forecasts for the Gold Coast were ‘bullish’. Tourism accommodation occupancy rates had plateaued at 70 per cent. Without new infrastructure, the better days might not eventuate. The Gold Coast Integrated Resort would provide the rooms for the extra tourists. But why would all of these extra tourists prefer to stay at a casino? How many were coming direct from China? How many from Australia or elsewhere? The breakdown of all the rooms proposed by ASF for The Spit was 300 at one six-star hotel tower, 500 at one five-star hotel tower, 380 at one hotel-with-residences tower and 700 in two serviced apartment towers, a total of 1,880 new rooms, all at The Spit. What about the tourist accommodation providers elsewhere on the Gold Coast struggling with seventy per cent occupancy in a diversifying local economy? How would they fare with this massive glut of new rooms? Adding so many extra rooms risked pushing occupancy rates overall down, not up. The simplest truth of economics is the one about supply and demand. Haratsis reckoned population growth on the Gold Coast was slowing due to a soft tourism market. But the population was still growing. And what is wrong with slow population growth when the Gold Coast road network was overcrowded, needing upgrades? Haratsis claimed the zombie towers would attract 2.2 million visitors each year to The Spit. The single road in and out of The Spit was already packed on
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weekends and the summer holidays, without the promised new bridge across the
Broadwater. No matter how much gloss ASF smeared on the traffic scenario, The Spit
has room for only one road.

John Shepherd, the construction manager for the zombie towers, reckoned more than
1,000 tradies would be in and out of The Spit building site each day at the peak of
construction beginning in 2018 and likely to run until 2022. This equated to five years
of traffic hell at The Spit, even before the promised new bridge pumped up the volume.
Haratsis and Shepherd provided more information than Chien, but it might have been
better for ASF’s chances of winning public support if they had not. Not enough
information, too much information. ASF was not doing well at the Gold Coast Turf
Club. I almost felt sorry for them.

Chien ended the “local opportunities” evening by reminding us all that we had ‘some
homework’. He tried at last to rally enthusiasm, hoping we might become miraculous
converts despite the hopeless charade we had just endured. He declared a ‘call to
action’:

Participate in the consultation. If you really want to make this happen and raise
the level of tourism in this city, find out what the facts are. There’s a lot of
opinions out there, including ours. Talk to people who understand the history,
the planning, the traffic, develop a level of understanding, not preconceived
notions. Let’s understand why we have differences.

Finally, Chien was having a crack at persuasion. I wondered if he might after all break
into a song and dance like The Simpsons’ monorail salesman. But it was a limp
performance, assuming we all wanted more tourism, alleging those who opposed the
giant casino did so because of ‘preconceived notions’ and implying ASF was supported
by ‘the facts’.
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The ASF “local opportunities” public meeting was another example of the failure of public consultation, when local anxieties are given space only to be let drift into the ether. Public consultation about property development is mostly to fulfill obligations for lodgement and approval of development applications, pretending to demonstrate interest in what the local community wants but really seeking to influence public opinion. It is play acting, when developers fail to suggest solutions to accommodate concerns, and do not or cannot communicate empathy, a precise failure of capitalism in late modernity, a function of the risk society. Even those being consulted know what is not happening.

Some ventured to the free food, others rushed the free bar. I approached Chien to request an interview. I wanted more specific information, to ask him about Baha Mar, the local jobs guarantee, the three-storey height limit and what message he might have for the large number of Gold Coast residents opposed to the zombie towers. I waited in a queue of half a dozen acolytes, friends and acquaintances. Chien sneered at my interview request. He was busy for the next week, then back in Sydney. He gave me his business card, suggested I try contacting his office. I should have realised by now that Chien was not keen to talk unless he was among supporters.

I hung around the drinks bar and spotted another of the ASF directors, David Fang. We spoke for about fifteen minutes. Like Chien, David Fang was born in Shanghai. He had been an ASF director since 2005, with a career in property acquisition, development and marketing (ASF Group; ‘Quan Fang’). Fang told me The Spit development would be best-practice construction and the local jobs guarantee was genuine. He was not giving much away, just the food and the booze. He said the Marina Bay Sands casino and luxury hotel in Singapore was the best comparison for ASF’s Spit project but the Singapore climate was less than ideal. ‘You can’t walk in Singapore, it’s too sweaty. The climate here is perfect. The Gold Coast does not realise its climate is better than
Asia’s.’ I remembered Chien’s commentary to his friends at the *Gold Coast Bulletin* a few months back: ‘The vision we have is . . . similar to Marina Bay Sands at Singapore, where the whole harbour is dragon boat races and light shows. It comes alive but allows for . . . recreational activities and it could become a focal point for New Year’s Eve’ (Potts 2016d, p. 6). Australia Day is a nightmare on the Broadwater and at The Spit, when police direct traffic choked along the access road. New Year’s Eve at the zombie towers would present a whole set of similar problems. Despite this, the Chinese investors behind The Spit takeover wanted to build an Australian version of Singapore’s enormous casino.

**Singapore**

Unlike Chien’s taxi driver, Singapore’s cabbies are not convinced by their giant casino. They shrug and screw up their faces when I ask if the Marina Bay Sands has been good for Singapore, then we discuss the social and personal damage created by gambling. One driver argued for the locals’ daily admission levy to be increased from $100 to $1000. In Singapore, to discourage locals from gambling, citizens and permanent residents must pay a government levy before they enter the gaming floor, guarded by armed security guards. In April 2019, the levy was increased to $150. Thousands of locals still cough up to gamble at the Marina Bay Sands and at Singapore’s second casino, the Sentosa, but my impression after three recent visits is many Singaporeans disprove the cliché that Chinese love to gamble.

The Marina Bay Sands high rise is crowned by a long rooftop bar and restaurant that resembles a flattened, squashed cruise ship, perched atop three towers, or viewed side on from the ground, the narrow profile outlines an old fashioned wooden clothes peg, an unintentional representation of laundering, perhaps a private joke from the architect.
The moral symbolism is exquisite. My first glimpse of this monstrous cousin to the Starship Enterprise or the Millennium Falcon, foreboding perhaps some kind of evil, made me think I might have been hallucinating but there it was, a cruise ship in the sky in Singapore.

Inside the base of the Marina Bay Sands triple towers the scene approaches Vegas chic. An atrium copying an old European railway station, all steel ribs, empty sampans bobbing in a grey water-filled trench offering indoor rides all of a hundred metres to a riverboat diner, Orient Express meets Far East meets Mississippi, a designer label shopping mall and rows of ATMs.

The fast lift up to the Marina Bay Sands sky bars and dining zone, the cruise ship deck, is no free ride. For those of us not paying to stay in the hotel rooms, the ride was $22 with a drink voucher. The cheapest drink was $23 plus tax. One sky bar looks over countless container ships queued to the horizon. Another sky bar has views of the city skyline, separated by a glass wall from the pool where the hotel guests preen and spread out like a privileged class but they are really marks being fleeced. We gaze at them wondering how it might feel lolling in the pool, but we have our dignity, we managed to make it to the top without gambling anything.

The Gold Coast privatises space in the sky, so does Singapore. And both places privatise public land, or wish to at The Spit. Singapore does so by reclamation, dumping millions of tonnes of sand into the sea to build a towering casino. Land reclamation on the Gold Coast dug sand out from swamps to create low rise housing estates fringed by canals. It is spatial acquisition in extremis, replacing one form of space with another, a kind of alchemy monetising space.
**Family values**

Tom Tate likes casinos. Too many casinos are never enough for him. On the Gold Coast, that means five. Yes, Tate reckoned the Gold Coast needed five casinos (Dorsett 2012). Soon after he became mayor, Tate was off to Vegas, one of his personal favourite holiday spots, seeking a city’s ‘partnership’ (Dorsett 2012). ‘They have forty million tourists coming in, we have ten million. They have 122 casinos, we have one’ (Dorsett 2012). Tate equates casinos with tourism. He does not acknowledge the locals stuck at the pokies, he just wants more tourists, but many tourists hate casinos, they are more likely to want experiential holidays, not gaming tables or floor shows. Tate argues five percent of visitors to Vegas go for the gambling, the rest are there for ‘the attractions, the conventions and all the things that excite families’ (Dorsett 2012). Tate’s idea of family excitement is different to mine. He was singing the same tuneless song when we met face to face at a Chartered Accountants Institute breakfast at Bond University in 2015.

Tate had recently delivered the Gold Coast City Council annual budget. He was soon up for re-election, so I was keen to hear his presentation. I arrived a few minutes late and slipped in to one of the few vacant seats, near the stage. I looked up and there he was, staring impassively right at me, directly across the table. We made small talk. I asked if he knew who was running against him. Probably no one, he crowed. Any decent candidate would need to be up and about by now. As it happened, Tate was challenged by five mayoral candidates at the 2016 Gold Coast City Council election. He ploughed through his slide show of graphs and charts, showing how the city’s operating costs had been cut, spending on services and infrastructure was up and rates increases at a minimum, an impressive record. His political philosophy, he kept saying, was all about ‘family values’. He wanted Gold Coasters to be able to raise families knowing their
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children would not have to relocate elsewhere to find rewarding work. He mentioned family values half a dozen times in his half hour speech. This is classic conservative rhetoric. The subtle implication is that progressives by their reckless desire for needless, extreme reform are threats to our loved ones. Without family values, social stability is at risk. Family values is a feel good medicinal, so we drift to the voting booths like somnambulists and unconsciously choose them who keep us relaxed and comfortable. The audience questions were not about any of this, they were about specific tower developments. I waited until the questioners were done, then rose to my feet.

    Thanks for your informative presentation, Mr Mayor. It’s reassuring to hear the Gold Coast is in safe hands. But I am curious to know, how do you reconcile these family values with your desire for more casinos?

I was immediately hated. Some of the accountants turned their heads like lizards, fixing me with contemptuous, threatening stares. Tate’s face twitched and creased, went blank. After an agonising passage of silent time, about thirty seconds, he replied: ‘Ruth and I go to Vegas for the shows. We chase the shows.’ And then service was restored, mantra resumed. The Gold Coast always has been and always will be about tourism. We need to keep developing, to provide a secure future. If we don’t constantly reinvent ourselves, we will no longer be Australia’s premier tourist destination.

RESISTANCE

Girl power

The male dominated property development gang on the Gold Coast has for a long time been baited by a steely eyed grandmother. Lois Levy is the campaign coordinator of the Gecko Environment Council, the peak body for pro-environment groups on the Gold
Coast, named for the small, transparent, tail dropping, skin shedding lizards with adhesive toes occupying many Gold Coast homes. Levy was a lead instigator of The Spit resistance, before the creation of Save Our Spit and Save Our Broadwater. She has been kicking the ankles of developers and their politician mates for more than forty years, one of Australia’s longest serving environmental campaigners, out fighting for nature before most of her present critics were born.

Levy arrived on the Gold Coast with her husband from Sydney in the 1970s. They ran the Tally Ho Motel at Tallebudgera Creek, in the shadow of the Burleigh headland, a stone’s throw from the beach. The motel was demolished a decade ago, replaced by an ugly, homogenous six pack apartment block. Levy was a social worker and a Technical and Further Education (TAFE) teacher. Her first campaign succeeded in preventing an oversized property development pushed by the construction giant Lend Lease for the north shore of the Currumbin estuary, just about the best loved small waterway on the Gold Coast, popular with riders of all kinds of boards. Lend Lease wanted to build apartments, shops, a marina, the whole shebang.

The Lend Lease campaign has folklore status among Gold Coast environmental activists but it was just a hiccup for the development gang. The 1970s was the twilight of the first golden age of Gold Coast high rise, built mostly by Australian developers, followed by the Japanese funded boom in the 1980s and then the Chinese big spenders. When all the privately owned beachfront sites had been stuffed, demolished and restuffed with towers and McMansions, the developers turned their gaze on The Spit, that moment when T-Rex notices new prey. The Gecko Environment Council has fought against the odds but is not a militant organisation, it runs Bushcare restoration days and kids education programs, hosts guest speaker information nights, participates in national and global environmental awareness campaigns and makes submissions on local
development projects. Gecko was a lone voice for nature on the Gold Coast, until The Spit campaign.

Levy remembers when The Spit was considered not too long ago by movie producers wanting to build a horizon tank and for a maritime simulation centre for training ships’ crews. These ideas never floated. Levy knows better than most that public space on the Gold Coast is ‘always at the mercy of developers and politicians’ (Levy 2018), although the opposition to Tom Tate’s cruise ship terminal and the ASF zombie towers extended across a far broader spectrum than the effort to save the Currumbin estuary. The battle for The Spit was the first time Gold Coasters had applied sustained resistance over long years to protect a single location. More than that, it was a battle for the soul of the Gold Coast. If the developers got their way, the only big, public, natural recreation place, The Spit, would disappear. If the resistance prevailed, the development gang would know their glory days were probably done.

Levy told me that since Tate’s election in 2012, the Gold Coast City Council had spent nothing from the environmental levy paid by ratepayers for acquiring private land with high natural values (Levy 2018). While Tate was focused on paying down debt, the previous council had borrowed for land acquisitions and part-funded the debt with the levy. Levy also noted the Mayor’s advisory committee for updating the Gold Coast town plan was stacked with developers. She did not believe any attempt to ban developers donating to political candidates would ever work because someone would always find a loophole. Levy is the most enduring environmental campaigner on the Gold Coast but she did not lead The Spit resistance. Fifteen years ago, she chose and then mentored The Spit campaign leader.
The SOS Captain

The Captain of Save Our Spit is a performance artist. Steve Gration taught drama in high schools in Melbourne’s western suburbs and at the Queensland University of Technology in Brisbane, ran youth theatre companies in Darwin and Adelaide, has a PhD in drama and wrote his own one-man touring show about Ian Fairweather, the Scottish-born modernist painter who lived alone in a camp on Bribie Island. Bribie is the fourth link in the chain of five sandy islands extending four hundred kilometres from the Gold Coast to Fraser Island. South of Bribie are Moreton, North Stradbroke and South Stradbroke islands.

Gration has analysed federal and state legislation, council by-laws, development applications, engineering and architectural reports, finding loopholes and contradictions. Save Our Spit’s website is a labyrinthine archive containing nearly all of the public documents, all the gossip, all the claims and counter claims, long exposes exploring the minutiae of The Spit. Gration can argue endlessly but he does not work alone. Save Our Spit’s leadership team includes lawyers and architects with a reservoir of local knowledge, mostly they stay out of sight, away from the relentless cycle of public discussion. Gration is the front man with the actor’s chiselled visage, the regular features, the model haircut, the big smile. He looks a bit like Frankie J. Holden, the retro rock star who made a career as a TV celebrity. No wonder Gration has been pushed to run for mayor against Tate.

Gration was living at Main Beach, teaching in Brisbane, surfing along The Spit, when he was spotted in 2003 by Levy at public meetings called by Gecko to fight an early incarnation of the cruise ship terminal. Fifteen years before the Palaszczuk Labor government grappled with a terminal proposal at The Spit, the Beattie Labor
government was actively seeking one. Gration was both fascinated and angered by the process:

They were calling for expressions of interest and what you would want as a commercial return, trying to get it under the radar. The State Development and Public Works Organisation Act 1971 means you can gazump most other legislation and environmental laws because it’s such a significant project for the economy that it doesn’t matter if it’s morally, ethically, environmentally unsound. They had about eight or nine [possible bidders]. I was asking questions like ‘why wouldn’t you want an environmental impact study’? Lois said, ‘well, they’re politicising it, they hire [consultant] companies that are gonna give them the answers they want, that fulfil the role of going yeah, there’s mitigating circumstances’. The more times you hear about mitigation, the more you know they’re gonna stuff the place up (Gration 2017).

In other words, despite supposed respect for the environment, an environmental impact statement is only as good as the people paid to assess the impact. Gration was recruited first to the Main Beach Progress Association, by Lyn Wright of the Friends of Federation Walk. At that time, the Main Beach Progress Association wanted to preserve The Spit for public recreation. Gration quit the association for Save Our Spit, established with mentoring from Levy. Gration was soon president. Save Our Spit is not a stand-alone group, its core team of campaigners is led by Gration but it is also an alliance of like-minded organisations with a very broad supporter base. Gecko, the Nerang Community Association . . . recreational fishing groups, fishing tourism, dive companies, Bicycle Queensland . . . anybody who uses The Spit for soft infrastructure tourism, passive tourism . . . snorkelling, sea kayaking . . . and the Struggleville people who can’t afford to take their kids to the
Versace [resort hotel] or the theme parks, they use The Spit. And from South Brisbane, the dog lovers, this is their closest leash free ocean beach. Logan, Beenleigh, Ipswich, Toowoomba. The Spit is their playground. Plus some of the millionaires in Main Beach, plus some quiet businesspeople who don’t want their lifestyle and amenity ruined through greed. The age range is from nine year olds to the women running wildlife preservation [groups] in their eighties (Gration 2017).

After the Beattie government walked away from the cruise ship terminal, Gration returned to Melbourne to live. Tate’s ascension led him back and forth to the Gold Coast. All the years of battling to protect The Spit had begun to wear him down. His partner was seriously ill. ‘None of us want this to be our life pursuit, we don’t want to necessarily go into politics and make a name for ourselves, or use it as a vehicle for our business, we all have our own lives,’ he said (Gration 2017). But the passion for The Spit endures. The determination not to give up is almost an obsession.

I was huddled with Gration around a table on the back deck at my home. We had been talking for nearly three hours. The sky had darkened. The conversation was so engrossing I had not thought to turn on the light over the table. Gration had strategy meetings to attend later in the evening before a public consultation session the next day in the Broadwater parklands for the zombie towers casino. He would arrange a contingent of the resistance to turn up en masse, maximum impact for the TV cameras.

Always the story circles back to Tate. Gration argued Tate was a mediocre businessman lucky to inherit wealth who became mayor only because too many candidates nominated. When Ron Clarke decided not to seek another term, three of the most capable Gold Coast City councillors, Peter Young, Susie Douglas and Eddie Sarroff,
each decided they wanted to be mayor. ‘He got in by default . . . these well known councillors split the vote,’ Gration said (Gration 2017).

A city as big as the Gold Coast can only be run by well funded, well organised, high profile politicians. For all his bumbling Tate-speak, infuriating divisiveness and pigs in the sky promises, Tate wins elections because he has the most money, is supported by the Liberal-National Party and has been smart enough to set up a communications team that enables him to sell himself. Infuriating divisiveness and pigs in the sky promises are a tell tale sign and black market currency of late modernity politics.

Gration explained how the Nationals in opposition had opposed the Beattie government’s push for a cruise ship terminal on The Spit, but when they won government ‘they flipped, the slippery eels that they are’ (Gration 2017). The Newman government agreed to support Tate’s terminal push but went one step further, offering a casino licence for the terminal builder. While the bidders for this gargantuan project were preparing their offers, Tate was in China, talking with investors who had access to enormous amounts of money. When the ASF Consortium emerged as the likely developer for The Spit, Tate’s lawyer, Tony Hickey, became the consortium’s legal representative in Australia.

Gration believed the decision by the Newman government to offer a second casino licence for the Gold Coast initially undermined Tate’s relationship with the Chinese. Only the state government can give out casino licences, not the local mayor. The politicians and bureaucrats were jockeying to be in charge when the big money came to town. But Tate was unstoppable. ‘When ASF joined the Integrated Resort Development process, in that year Tom Tate went to China almost on a monthly basis. He went to China more times in one year than Julie Bishop as the Foreign Affairs Minister has gone in her entire career,’ Gration said (Gration 2017). Then, after the Newman government
was kicked out, and the Palaszczuk government went lukewarm on the cruise ship terminal, Tate and the senior local and state public servants who had become the new best Aussie friends of the Chinese investors were left standing on the welcome mat.

Gration reckoned Tate’s lashing out at Mick Fanning when the world champion surfer criticised the cruise ship terminal on social media was a strategic miscalculation. Without Fanning’s intervention and Tate’s reaction, the campaign to protect The Spit might have needed another trigger for momentum. Tate did not anticipate the fallout from angering surfers. You make Gold Coast surfers angry, you make the whole Gold Coast angry.

You’ve got to have a trigger . . . when Mick Fanning spoke out . . . said no, it’s a stuffed idea. Tate came back and said if Mick Fanning is so smart . . . he can put his own money into fixing Kirra. Now Mick is from a single mum family. A hero. He brings more tourists to the Gold Coast than Gold Coast Tourism and Tate do, by bucket loads, because of his surfing. We said, Mick Fanning’s been insulted. And it’s time for us to speak up on behalf of Mick and others who have been bullied . . . So Tate bullied Mick Fanning. That was the trigger (Gration 2017).

After the Palaszczuk government dumped the cruise ship terminal from ASF’s development brief and directed the consortium to explore the site on the southern end of The Spit, and despite ASF’s attempts at public consultation, the precise terms of ASF’s relationship with the Queensland authorities were unclear. Gration could not unearth any documents spelling out what had in fact gone down. What exactly had the Newman government arranged with ASF? Was the consortium a possible proponent or the preferred proponent for a second casino on the Gold Coast? To what extent were Queenslanders exposed to a compensation claim if ASF was not granted the casino
licence? Gration confirmed my own inquiries suggesting the Palaszczuk government movers and shakers might not be in agreement about the future of The Spit. Labor’s left faction was opposed to further large scale development on The Spit but elements of the Right were in favour. In this scenario, Palaszczuk might have allowed ASF to bid for a casino on The Spit not only because she did not want to expose the state to sovereign risk, but also to appease the development supporters on her own side.

Despite ASF seeking to build, operate and profit from one of the biggest, most contentious private infrastructure projects in Queensland, much was hidden and ignored. Gration argued the Newman and Palaszczuk governments had both failed to deal with probity issues. Disputes at ASF related projects overseas, ASF’s questionable financial structure and due diligence performed for the Queensland state government by a firm with financial links to ASF raised questions about the process that led to ASF’s privileged status at The Spit. Gration was incredulous. ‘Did they not see these things, when we can just get it on the internet?’ (Gration 2017).

Gration outlined doubts about ASF’s capacity to sell the hundreds of high rise rooms as residential apartments in the zombie towers. Queensland state legislation prevents the freehold sale of residential property on The Spit, because The Spit is publicly owned, held in public trust. The Versace and Mirage resorts had been given perpetual leases for some rooms, allowing individual apartment holders to renew their leases, effectively creating a form of residency almost as good as private ownership. But those resorts are three storeys and their residency arrangements were signed off back when no one wanted to pack out The Spit with high rise, a casino and a cruise ship terminal. Sunland’s proposal for twin towers at Mariners Cove on the southern end of The Spit had been granted an exemption by the Newman government for residential...
accommodation with long term fixed leases. Not private ownership but good enough to sell to wealthy Chinese families looking for bolt holes in a haven like Australia.

By now it was dark around the backyard table. Gration pulled a small voice recorder out of his pocket and pressed play. We huddled forward in our canvas chairs, listening to a telephone exchange between Gration and Steve Keating, the executive director of stakeholder engagement in the special projects unit of the Queensland State Development Department. Keating had briefly addressed the ASF “local opportunities” public information evening, urging everyone to get involved in the consultation process. On the phone with Gration, Keating was playing a *Yes Minister* farce, revealing nothing at all. He would not confirm under which piece of legislation the ASF proposal was being assessed, saying the state government was working through a process. Gration argued the Integrated Resort Development Act 1987 may allow freehold ownership but without knowing the relevant legislation it was impossible to properly participate in public consultation.

Gration: ‘What is the legislative framework under which you are assessing it? Because then we can make informed comment about whether we are getting value for money. Or whether that fixed lease land should be granted as freehold.’

Keating: ‘I’ve noted your views on that.’

Gration: ‘It’s not a view. It’s a question that’s remained unanswered . . .’

(Gratoin 2017).

Gratoin asks Keating why Philip Park, where the support buildings and other infrastructure for the offshore terminal would be located, was not among those parts of The Spit identified for the public consultation process. Keating says the Philip Park car
Anchors Away / Southorn

park is an already developed area. He will not acknowledge that Philip Park contains a forest. The bureaucrat charged with stakeholder engagement was doing his best not to engage.

The Muriel Henchman Park car park with its busy boat launching ramps had also been excluded from the public consultation process. Gration suspected Muriel Henchman Park was to be handed over to Sea World, because the Sea World overflow car park would be lost to the zombie towers. Without a boat launching place on The Spit, boaties who are locals and visitors from Logan and Brisbane would be forced to launch elsewhere, unclogging the access road, making room for the casino gamblers. ‘That’s the hidden agenda,’ Gration said (Gration 2017).

On some weekends, Wavebreak [Island] has a couple of hundred boats around it where people picnic, stay overnight, the kids snorkel, they have barbeques . . . And when the surf is pumping, it can be gridlock. Just with the recreational users. Now Tate would argue, well let’s get rid of them because that’s not an economic base. Let’s have the casino and make it a clearway for casino people. But all that money goes offshore to a foreign casino owner. Every person who visits The Spit [now] is spending money locally . . . Two and a half thousand full time equivalent jobs and $4.16 billion per year it’s worth to just leave it as it is, of which over $2 billion is the open space and environmental values. But [the developers] go, oh, we can just piggyback that and add to it. No, once people can’t sail, fish, surf, there’s shadows most of the day, wind tunnelling, the water’s always choppy, you start to lose that economic benefit, because people go, well, I’m not going there anymore. It ends up like Surfers Paradise (Gration 2017).
Gratton was referring to the Gold Coast Broadwater Economic Assessment by the Urbis town planning and property consultancy (‘Gold Coast Broadwater Economic Assessment’ 2012). The Urbis assessment was released in 2012, calculating the total economic worth, based on earnings and property values, of the Broadwater precinct, including The Spit and the other foreshore sites around the Broadwater. The Urbis assessment is an endorsement of the Broadwater’s economic performance, contradicting the argument that The Spit is a wasteland. The Urbis assessment was commissioned by the Gold Coast City Council.

The SOB Captain

Save Our Spit represented the people on the ground and in the water, walking the dogs along the sand, barbecuing under the trees, hiking along the paths, surfing the waves, scuba diving at the river mouth, fishing from the sand pumping jetty. Not all of them live close to The Spit. They come from across the Gold Coast, Logan, Brisbane and further away. Another activist group looking for answers, speaking out, adding weight and momentum to the Gold Coast resistance, represented more of those who live within sight of or a short drive from The Spit, including older residents in the Main Beach towers and from the western shore of the Broadwater, in duplexes, houses and apartments at Labrador and Biggera Waters and in the expensive canal estates of Runaway Bay, worried their green, bushland views across the Broadwater to The Spit and South Stradbroke Island would be lost and the Broadwater become even more crowded if a phalanx of towers sprang up on the horizon. These are the supporters of Save Our Broadwater, the yin to Save Our Spit’s yang. Save Our Broadwater also had support from the regular users of The Spit.
Save Our Broadwater’s leader was one of Queensland’s most accomplished politicians, Judy Spence. Gration operates outside the political party system. Spence springs from deep within the Labor machine. She is the longest serving woman in the Queensland parliament, representing Brisbane suburban electorates for twenty-three years. She was a high school teacher at Woodridge in the Logan working class heartland, elected at the historic 1989 election when Wayne Goss led Labor to government in Queensland for the first time in thirty-two years, ending the Bjelke-Petersen era. Spence was Queensland’s first female police minister and a minister for families, disability services, indigenous affairs and fair trading, a leader of the House responsible for co-ordinating the government’s parliamentary business and a reformer of the construction and real estate industries. She retired from state politics in 2012. She has an MBA from Griffith University. Judy Spence, Lois Levy and Lyn Wright were a triumvirate of female warriors for the resistance. Along with the thespian Steve Gration, and a lot of mates, they were holding up billions of dollars of property development.

Spence understands the demands and compromises involved in political dealings with developers. But she did not know what the Palaszczuk government was planning for the ASF Consortium or what circumstances if any might lead to Tate gaining state government support for his cruise ship terminal. Or if she did, she had decided there was nothing to gain from publicly spilling the beans. Spence had no way of circuit breaking The Spit debate. A Labor star campaigning to save The Spit could not engineer any deals with the Labor state government because there was too much at stake, too much money and too much passion on all sides. The Palaszczuk government was not showing its hand, the development gang were not in control of their own action plan and the resistance fleet was always busy reacting to squalls.
Like most Brisbanites, Spence has nostalgic memories of the Gold Coast. She holidayed at Main Beach, the quiet suburb neighbouring Surfers Paradise, with her parents as a child. She moved with her husband to live at Main Beach five years ago. I chewed over The Spit saga with Spence at her impressively renovated home, a short drive from The Spit. A phone call came from the local radio reporter, wanting comment on latest opinion polling about The Spit. Spence reeled off a five minute interview, not a word out of place, calmly arguing a clear majority of Gold Coasters did not want a cruise ship terminal or high rise on The Spit. This was her strength, dealing with the media, honed over two decades in the spotlight. Market research on what to do with The Spit came thick and fast in 2016 and 2017. A survey of 1,134 residents across the Gold Coast by the Reachtel polling company commissioned by Save Our Broadwater in September 2016 found 58.1 per cent opposed high rise on The Spit (‘Reachtel, Final Results’ 2016). Another Reachtel poll commissioned by Save Our Broadwater in May 2017 found 70 per cent opposed giving public land to ASF for high rise and a casino (Donovan 2017, p. 16). But these were predicable findings. Market research paid for by the Gold Coast resistance was unlikely to discover a secret majority wanted to plunder The Spit.

Another Spit survey commissioned by the Queensland State Development Department had been keenly anticipated. Its findings would influence the Palaszczuk government’s decision for or against the zombie towers. The State Development Department was the home of Gration’s bureaucratic nemesis, Keating, the stakeholder engagement guy in the department’s special projects unit. The State Development Department was in effect a faction within the Palaszczuk government most likely to support carving up The Spit. Spence had called on the State Development Minister, Anthony Lynham, in September 2016 to ‘stop hiding the views of the people’ (Weston 2016e, p. 12). Lynham had been sitting on the department survey findings for nine months. If the Queensland state
government’s own survey showed enough people might accept further development on The Spit, the casino and the zombie towers might be a chance. How much is enough? Well, more than fifty per cent, the magic number needed to win and lose elections, that would be a start.

The findings of the Queensland State Development Department survey, by consultants Colmar Brunton, of 1,500 residents, 400 local business operators and 400 tourists in the district surrounding The Spit, from Benowa to Paradise Point, were finally released in July 2017. The survey was conducted in January 2016 with phone questionnaires and face to face interviews. The result was clear as mud. The survey found 43 per cent of tourists, 30 per cent of residents and 38 per cent of business operators would accept a relaxation of height limits on the southern end of The Spit to allow buildings up to six levels (Weston 2017b, p. 4). Hardly an endorsement for five zombie towers. However, if restrictions were applied to the number of new buildings on the southern end of The Spit, 65 per cent would accept up to ten stories and 78 per cent would support one or more ‘taller buildings’ (Weston 2017b, p. 4). But what exactly was meant by restricting the number of new buildings? How is a taller building defined? How many taller buildings are too many? Significantly, the State Development Department survey did not canvas support for a cruise ship terminal on The Spit. The Palaszczuk government was not interested in drawing attention to Tate’s dream. The survey findings were open to interpretation, able to assist the state government to justify whatever it decided for The Spit. This was public consultation as strategy, unsurprising as it is cynical.

Spence told me The Spit was ‘looking a bit derelict, it’s been loved to death . . . the Friends of Federation Walk are doing good work but they are hamstrung by lack of funds’ (Spence 2016). She admitted to fearing snakes claimed by the development gang to be crawling all over The Spit and she acknowledged Tate’s ‘energy’ and his
prominent public profile. She recognised Tate’s push for a cruise ship terminal was ‘politically good for him, people do like cruising’ (Spence 2016). She suggested anyone planning to run for mayor should have deep pockets. ‘If you wanted to really challenge him, you’d need $750,000,’ she said. ‘Who has that kind of money?’ (Spence 2016). Not Judy Spence, not to spend on a political campaign. She would be an ideal mayoral candidate to oppose Tate but was not interested in resurrecting her political career. Spence believed public funding for election campaigns might be an effective way to stop developers funding political candidates but she could not see an effective way to limit candidates spending their own money. She had a clear appreciation of what the Gold Coast resistance was up against.

The development lobby is out to make a quick buck, that’s all, they have always been able to do that by building high rise apartment blocks . . . They believe what they are doing is right. They are big and powerful and they don’t like to be beaten (Spence 2016).

Spence labelled the Gold Coast town plan a ‘meaningless document . . . people can’t have any faith in it, any development at all is considered seriously’ (Spence 2016). And then she articulated the point of difference that made Save Our Broadwater a kind of outlier in The Spit resistance. She said Save Our Broadwater was not against a casino on the site sought by ASF south of Sea World, so long as it complied with the town plan’s height limit. ‘If they were proposing a three storey casino we wouldn’t be opposed, we agree that site should be developed, the town plan has always said it’s for tourism and marine oriented development’ (Spence 2016). Casinos are not just about tourism and certainly not about marine oriented development. They suck in locals including many who cannot afford to lose money. Three months previously, Spence had called The Spit ‘the most valuable piece of public land on the [Australian] east coast’
Anchors Away / Southorn

(‘Waiting on Spit action’ 2016, p. 3). Apparently not valuable enough to protect from desperate gambling addicts, raucous party goers and the criminal and seedy types drawn to casinos. As a former state government minister, Spence knew all about the revenue geyser from taxes on gambling. Providing and administering public services and infrastructure in Queensland would be difficult without gambling taxes, another example of capitalism in late modernity hijacking democracy. Spence also said Save Our Broadwater could be willing to negotiate four or five storeys at Mariners Cove where Sunland was chasing approval for the forty-four storey twin towers.

This is the unity in diversity of Save Our Spit and Save Our Broadwater. Save Our Spit was far less likely to support any large scale development on The Spit. Save Our Broadwater was willing to consider some large scale development, even a casino. Save Our Spit appealed ideally and in the first instance, but not only, to the green left, Save Our Broadwater to the broad middle class who might vote conservative. Many residents anxious about too much development on the Gold Coast supported both groups. They agreed with the resistance campaign and may have said so online and directly to friends and work colleagues. Together, Save Our Spit and Save Our Broadwater appealed to nearly everyone worried about the future of The Spit. This kind of differentiated mutual relationship, an alliance across social groups, is formidable.

Save Our Broadwater was publicly seeking financial contributions to pay for ‘advertising, printing, corflutes etc’ (Save Our Broadwater). Spence told me Save Our Broadwater had about 350 paid up members. Subscriptions ranged from $10 to $50. All resistance campaigns cost money. Some are funded by public subscriptions, others by private donations. The Gold Coast resistance expenditure on trying to protect The Spit was a drop in the Broadwater compared to the sophisticated advertising and lobbying budgets deployed by the development gang.
The MBA Captain

A third activist group was fighting to protect The Spit, quite different people from those who responded to Save Our Spit and to a lesser extent Save Our Broadwater. The Main Beach Association represented the particular experiential interests of those who might otherwise have been the development gang’s natural constituency, the well off residents of some of the best built towers on the Gold Coast, self funded retirees, business owners and executives, canny investors, high flyers from the professions, society drakes and darlings, yacht owners who sailed regularly in and out of the Broadwater. Like the wealthy residents of Fifth Avenue, New York, with views across Central Park, hundreds of the denizens of the luxury towers at the northern end of Main Beach had jaw dropping views along The Spit. They did not want their green swathe perspective obliterated by high rise. They lived in towers but they did not want to look at towers.

The Main Beach Association is a breakaway group, formed after the Main Beach Progress Association backed the Sunland twin towers for Mariners Cove. The progress association might have imagined thousands more tourists coming and going from The Spit would rescue Main Beach’s struggling commercial hub, Tedder Avenue, but others in Main Beach were worried about Sunland’s towers on The Spit with pontoons pushing into the Broadwater, mooring hundreds of extra boats. The pontoons would extend close to heavily trafficked boating lanes. The traffic chaos on land at The Spit might be matched by traffic chaos on the Broadwater. The Main Beach Association had about 150 paid up members (Hutley 2019). The joining fee was $25 for the first year and then $20 annually. The association supporters soon joined the fight against the ASF zombie towers and casino, working closely with Save Our Broadwater. They could afford to be generous, contributing $80,000 for radio ads, billboards and bus signage urging “Stop
The Spit sell off”. The advertising blitz peaked during the 2017 Queensland state election campaign (Hutley 2019).

The president of the Main Beach Association, David Hutley, told me each of the donors mostly gave small amounts of money. An architect and an engineer donated advice for objections to the council (Hutley 2019). Hutley, a Kiwi, had been an IBM project manager, setting up corporate computer systems. He retired and sailed the Pacific with his wife in a custom built yacht. Hutley seemed to me a perfectionist who could afford to be a perfectionist. We sat in his large lounge room with floor to ceiling glass windows on the seventeenth floor of the Waratah tower. The Spit in its green scrubby glory was laid out below us like a Monopoly board. Masts bobbing at the Southport Yacht Club, the Sheraton and Versace resorts, the Marina Mirage sails, the Sea World roller coaster, the sand pumping jetty, I could spot most of The Spit’s playing tokens from Hutley’s big room but his apartment was not large enough. He needed space for a carer so he bought the apartment next door and knocked out a wall.

Hutley knew enough about boats to recognise a cruise ship terminal needs a harbor, something the Gold Coast lacks. He was worried about ‘6000 people getting on and off” each cruise ship at an offshore terminal. He could watch from his lounge chair the chaos erupt at dockings and departures. He approached Gold Coast Tourism, the agency responsible for supporting the regional tourism industry, suggesting tourists be whooshed to the Gold Coast from the Brisbane cruise ship terminal via hovercraft on Moreton Bay but he was told this would not be feasible. He wrote to Prince Philip about the threatened destruction of Philip Park. He did not receive a reply. Hutley was opposed to light rail on The Spit because the Gold Coast town plan allowed high rise alongside light rail corridors. He would support one or two more low-rise luxury hotels on the southern end of The Spit, delivering more tourists to the Marina Mirage retailers,
cafes and restaurants. He tried to choose his words carefully when describing how Tate operated. ‘He’s Machiavellian, very determined. His vision is directed towards the developers, they seem to be focused on taking public land away from the public’ (Hutley 2019). I wondered if Tate would have been flattered by the pejorative reference to the Renaissance political philosopher.

The Main Beach Association resistance efforts sailed into some crosswind. An association led petition opposing development on The Spit was mistaken to be a Save Our Spit petition. Save Our Spit supporters including some who wanted anonymity and thought they were donating to Save Our Spit ended up on the Main Beach Association data base. They had their names forwarded to Queensland state politicians and Gold Coast City councillors (Gratton 2017). Not good if your business relied on contracts from the Gold Coast City Council or for whatever other reason you did not want to be offside with councillors who supported high rise and the cruise ship terminal. The mix up was a rare misstep. The Spit resistance had three prongs, like Neptune’s trident, a very sharp instrument.

Reverie

The track along the northern half of Federation Walk, beyond Muriel Henchman Park and the Biddy Gear Pathway, rises and falls and twists and turns like a Mobius strip. I cannot see far ahead in this desolate curving landscape of small conical dunes. I am a little disoriented. I imagine I am in a dinghy tossed on a turbulent, windy sea hissing like faint applause, or I am wandering across an abandoned golf course or an old battlefield reclaimed imperceptibly by the inexorable force of nature.
Anchors Away / Southorn

The casuarina and macaranga forest has not grown up here, so there is no understorey, mostly hardy shrubs and long grass clumps in a terrain like semi desert. The few casuarinas are sickly grey stragglers with burned bark and leaves like old frayed mops. The macarangas are faring a little better, but they are stunted, spreading along the ground, not yet towering expressionistic figures, it is too hot and dry for them to rise up. Without care and attention they may remain cowed their whole lives.

The Friends of Federation Walk look to have made a start here but there is much work to do, many more sweaty days, more tree plantings and more watering. The Friends seem to be always without enough, on starvation rations, but they never give up, looking after some of the most valuable public land in Australia for more than three decades, holding off unwanted advances, breathing life into sand, making shade and a track where families, couples and friends replenish the soul and pump the heart.

A burned Banksia trunk with narrow black branches and black twigs with sparse black leaves and shrivelled black flowers like witch’s braids hovers into view. Everything is so hot and dry I realise how easy it is to accept the claim that fires on The Spit start spontaneously, flames leaping out of hot sand or flashing on brittle dry leaves. Naturally occurring wildfires are not uncommon in the outback but I am suspicious whenever The Spit burns.

I might as well be an explorer straggling across central Australia, yet the ocean beach and the Broadwater are close by, invisible behind the fore dunes. I arrive in a small forest of dead burnt trunks, maybe they are casuarinas, or spears or flagpoles left behind on the battlefield, as if the dunes here were thrown up by heavy explosives. The track takes me to the top of a large dune. I can see the Surfers Paradise towers, the Q1 syringe. In this landscape it is a dystopian vision. But of course there is life. Around the
corner a gathering of vigorous green and silver leaved coastal Banksias hold out their large candle flowers glowing yellow under the vivid light blue sky.

I pass by a wire fenced section with a “Sand Reserve” sign. Here is sand for replenishing eroded Gold Coast beaches, an ignominy. For generations The Spit was dismissed as not fit for anything until developers recognised it as the final frontier. In the meantime it has become in this spot a small sand mine. A public sand reserve inadequately protected from development is simultaneously a reserve supply of sand for protecting development elsewhere. A blue and yellow chopper swoops down nearby. I feel for a moment as if I am under surveillance. Three teenage boys hooning on yellow electric hire motor scooters shoot past me too close, legs splayed out wide, dumb smiles. Now I am confronted by half a shipping container next to a thick grove of young pines, incongruous in the heat, like a moment in a Jeffrey Smart painting.

I am startled by a large bird with striking brown banded stripes across its tail and wings, shooting out and up from inside a shrub. It is magnificent like a hawk or a falcon. Suddenly the familiar yellow square top of a lifeguard tower pops up above the dunes, labelled forty five in large numerals, the last lifeguard tower on the Gold Coast heading north. And then the sand pumping jetty appears, jutting out to sea on spider legs. I have arrived at the end of The Spit. The track here is closed for no obvious reason with a yellow plastic net temporary fence and police tape but the plastic net and the tape have been pushed down. I remember Miles Buisson. The sand pumping sheds are to my left, secure behind barbed wire. I turn right, walk down onto the beach and am surrounded by elated dogs.

The best time to experience the astonishing interactive drama of the surf beach at the far end of The Spit is Sunday afternoon in summer, when the day trippers from Logan and Brisbane lug their surfboards and walk their dogs. Logan is one of the most ethnically
diverse places in Australia. One quarter of its residents were born overseas. The surf beach at the end of The Spit is not Tamarama in New South Wales or Portsea in Victoria, sandy playgrounds of the well off. Only a few blue striped sailor shirts, white cotton pants and floppy straw hats. Great white round bellies smeared in dark tattoos, skinny tattooed skaters, distracted tattooed stoners, sculpted torsos in high cut fluoro bikinis, fathers and sons with fishing poles, a Muslim couple carrying a baby wrapped in a towel. And seemingly every dog breed in Australia. Slow stepping Danes, puffing Staffies with studded collars, Chihuahuas held like trophies, defiantly uncontrollable Terriers, ball fixated Kelpies, perplexed athletic Boxers, all whipped into a frenzy by the salty wind and the rushing waves. A bubbly long parade trudging and running back and forth to the beach along the cement access path, past the busy dog washing station with rubber hoses on taps.

At the southern end of this beach split in half by a jetty suspending a large pipe you swim with your dog between the lifeguard flags. If you keep walking south, you soon arrive at a three kilometre quiet stretch of sand where few people go because there is no car park access, just the Federation Walk track loping among the scrub behind the foredunes. The northern boundary of the beach at the far end of The Spit is the Nerang River mouth rock wall where surfers gather and climb on the rocks to catch a glimpse of The Other Side and walkers stroll out to the river mouth.

No one lives at The Spit. This may explain why possessive localism is not really a problem, unlike some other popular surf beaches in crowded urban centres. The Spit is the closest surf beach for hundreds of thousands of south east Queenslanders, where local Gold Coast surfers mingle with Polynesians, Asians and Muslims from Brisbane and Logan. In two decades of regular surfing at The Spit, I never saw any sign of alarming hostility. The tableau at this beach suggests an updated, multi-cultural sequel.
to Charles Meere’s painting, *Australian beach pattern* (1940), in which a surfer holds a heavy wooden board above his head surrounded by a crowd of white skinned athletic bathers frolicking in classical heroic poses.

The sand pumping jetty dominates, showing its age with rust on the metal parts, but it is still relentless, siphoning sand along the pipe running underneath the boardwalk, high above the water, like a conveyor belt from the silent movie, *Metropolis*. Here you walk on water, or above it, with a drone view of the action down below and the sound of the waves intensified, drowning out the barking.

In the late morning it is too hot and there are more birds than people with me on the jetty. I stop to ask a man with a Bunnings hardware store umbrella and a Bunnings straw hat, what are you trying to catch? Whatever gets on the hook. He is Croatian, has always fished. Seagulls sit still on the jetty rail, unmoved in the wind. Other sea birds drop straight down to pluck and eat small fish just below the water surface. Local surfers paddle out near the jetty pylons, catching the current, or they enter near the rock wall. I am up high but I cannot see over the wall. The Other Side remains as ever elusive. But I can see the cavalcade of marine craft coming in and out of the river mouth. The smell of burning jet ski fuel hangs in the wind.

Out among the waves, every type of surfer is struggling. The surf is not good today, the tide too low, the small swell uneven, too windy. The locals are making the best of it, milking a few seconds here and there, finding clean faces to dart along, turning and smashing the lip. The strugglers and the learners are mostly on boards not suited to their skill level or their fitness. But these waves can be ridden and I want to be out there. If you surf long enough, every beach you know has its own aura. At this beach, the day before we left Australia for England in 1997, I caught my last wave for thirteen months. It was a weekday early afternoon in winter, only three of us out, light north westerly
wind, high tide dropping, three-foot easterly swell. A long, reeling left, like I was winding down a reef on Bali’s Bukit peninsula. Surf beaches are like surfers. Every dog has his day.

The surfing tribe

Thousands of surfers support the resistance to over-development on The Spit, and elsewhere along the Gold Coast. Surfers are the largest single group using The Spit year round and, with fishers, the longest continuous users of The Spit. They have arguably the most at stake in the contest over The Spit’s future. The surfing tribe differs from Save Our Spit, Save Our Broadwater and the Main Beach Association because surfers are not defined by campaigning for a cause, rather by how they live in direct relation to the beach. This spatial relationship between surfers and the beach is closer to indigenous peoples’ connections to country, even though many Gold Coast surfers are supporters of Save Our Spit and Save Our Broadwater. A threat to a surfing break is a threat to the identity of local surfers. As well as The Other Side, the rideable breaks all the way along the four kilometre ocean side stretch of The Spit, regularly producing decent waves and spreading out the crowds, were also at risk from the proposed high rise and cruise ship terminal, stopping or limiting access, changing sand flows and blocking or disrupting swell.

Some surfers are more active than others. By late 2018, I had to accept my surfing days were over. After twenty years chasing waves, hardly ever missing out, I had succumbed to wear and tear. I was about to turn sixty. Disc, joint and tendon problems in my back and shoulders made sustained paddling on a board impossible, especially against the relentless Gold Coast current sweeping hard north in big swells. My atrophied calf meant turning any kind of board on any kind of decent wave risked landing me on
crutches or unable to walk up hills. Nothing lasts forever. I am now a slow swimmer in calm water. My tally was my tally, hard won in heaving crowds, a cherished harvest, never forgotten. Wide barrels lasting three or four seconds at Burleigh, peeling walls at Greenmount so long my legs were like jelly at the end of the ride, flying through pitching wedges at Duranbah and, when all the planets aligned, tucked inside ferocious tubes at TOS. I had unfinished business at Kirra. Such is life. I was capable of competently riding most waves up to six feet, but on a good day on the Gold Coast the crew on the peaks encompasses an elite A-list.

And it wasn’t always about those few elongated seconds of every ride. I had nearly come to blows with Adriano de Souza, the hard as nails Brazilian world champ, after he repeatedly took waves from me at Duranbah. I had been gifted waves by Stephanie Gilmore, the greatest female surfer in the world, and I had discussed competition heat strategy between sets with Mick Fanning. This is nothing special. It is what happens in the surf on the Gold Coast. As a newspaper reporter, I had quizzed Kathy Kohner-Zuckerman about her father sorting the dialogue for the original Gidget book by eavesdropping on her telephone chats with the notorious underground surfer Mickey Dora. I had tracked down the grandson of one of Australia’s first surfers, Sid Chapman, who claimed he had ridden with Duke Kahanamoku at Greenmount, and I had visited a backyard shed stacked with immaculate hollow wooden boards made by the first great board shaper on the Gold Coast, Joe Larkin, who gleefully confessed he had as a teenager taken and ridden Kahanamoku’s solid wooden board from a display case at the Freshwater surf club in Sydney. I had talked story with the instigators of the Shortboard Revolution, Dick Brewer in Hawaii and Bob McTavish at Byron Bay. Surfers were my stakeholder sources for reports about overcrowding, erosion, sand pumping and the surfing industry. I was a foundation member of the Gold Coast Surf World Museum, containing Carl Tanner’s priceless collection of old and rare boards. It hurt that I could
no longer ride waves. But I was not alone. On the good days, old surfers who can only
watch gather on the headlands at Burleigh and Kirra, chattering a cantankerous, satirical
chorus, like Statler and Waldorf on the *Muppets* balcony.

The Gold Coast World Surfing Reserve extending south from Burleigh to Snapper was
negotiated in 2016 by local surfing advocate Andrew McKinnon with the Queensland
state government and the Gold Coast City Council, part of a global network of officially
recognised surfing places. McKinnon was master of ceremonies at the Save Our Spit
rally at The Spit in 2014. Australia has two other world surfing reserves, at Maroubra in
Sydney’s Sutherland Shire and Angourie on the New South Wales north coast. The
Bells Beach Coastal Reserve listed on the Victorian Heritage Register is a protected
zone gazetted by the Victorian state government, encompassing Bells Beach, site of the
world’s longest running professional surfing contest. The Gold Coast World Surfing
Reserve cannot prevent beachfront development but it recognises surfing as a spatial
practice, giving surfers a seat at the negotiating table. The Gold Coast World Surfing
Reserve was declared after a compromise to exclude The Other Side (Sorensen 2016),
indicating the development gang and their mates will not risk disruption of plans to
exploit The Spit by endorsing protection of a place for surfing. However, Annastacia
Palaszczuk reckoned world surfing reserve status might exclude a cruise ship terminal
(Greenwood 2014, p. 6). Layne Beachley, the Surfing Australia chairwoman who lives
in Sydney but had a place on the Gold Coast, reckoned TOS was ‘sacred’ for surfers
and that South Stradbroke Island ought to be included in the Gold Coast World Surfing
Reserve (Weston & McElroy 2016, p. 8). Surfing Australia is a peak administrative
body for surfing, running competitions and licensing surf coaches and judges. Beachley
is the only surfer male or female to win six consecutive world titles.
The Gold Coast City Council Ocean Beaches Strategy 2013-2023 promised a plan would be drawn up to recognise the importance of surfing to the Gold Coast lifestyle and economy and to address overcrowding in the surf (City of Gold Coast 2013). The Gold Coast Surfing Management Plan was launched by Tate in 2015 (City of Gold Coast 2015). The objectives of the plan are to educate beach users about ‘surf etiquette’ and safety, ensure the management of the surf amenity is ‘best practice’ and provide ‘joint stewardship’ of beaches (City of Gold Coast 2015, p. 2). The plan defines surf amenity as surf breaks ‘affording exceptional experiences’ that ‘enhance the lifestyle’ of wave riders (City of Gold Coast 2015, p. 18). The plan provides a carefully considered ‘scientific definition’ of wave quality for surfing derived from breaking wave height, wave peel angle, wave breaking intensity and wave section length (City of Gold Coast 2015, p. 19). The plan calls for investment in artificial reefs, surf etiquette education, improved surf cameras and wave measuring buoys to facilitate the spreading out of crowds. The plan rules out charging people to surf and any policing of surf breaks. Of course it does. Despite frustrated demands for crowd management, trying to control behaviour and numbers of surfers in the water on the Gold Coast would be like herding cats.

However, the Gold Coast Surf Management Plan does not provide a genuine strategy for ‘joint stewardship’ of the surf amenity (City of Gold Coast 2015, p. 2). What does joint stewardship mean anyway? Again, these are weasel words. The plan says surf amenity will be considered in assessing future major coastal works but it is ‘not intended to prevent any future development or infrastructure’ (City of Gold Coast 2015, p. 3). No surprise there. The plan stresses that Gold Coast City Council endorsement of the Gold Coast World Surfing Reserve is ‘ceremonial’ only, the reserve status will not be used to lobby for changes to coastal legislation, the reserve committee members are determined by the council and the council retains the right to withdraw endorsement of
Anchors Away / Southorn

the reserve (City of Gold Coast 2015, p. 46). The plan ties itself in knots trying to appear interested in surfing but does not outline meaningful action to protect and support surfing. All it really does is acknowledge surf amenity is a thing.

Board rider clubs exist to provide camaraderie, run local contests and support junior and older surfers. They are partly why Australian surfers are so successful competitively. Board rider clubs do not run resistance campaigns like Save Our Spit and Save Our Broadwater but they do create social capital, connecting the surfing tribe across social classes and they can be prominent in resistance to coastal exploitation. At the protest rallies on The Spit, most of the crowd were committed surfers and each of the Gold Coast board rider clubs was represented. Board rider clubs are generally named for places where the club members surf. The North End club, whose members surf north of Surfers Paradise, celebrated their fortieth anniversary in 2016 (‘40th Anniversary Year’ 2016). North End is the surfing guardian of TOS and cannot be anything but involved in the debate about the future of The Spit. North End’s ranks include teachers, students and alumni from private and public schools, The Southport School and Aquinas College in Ashmore and Southport State High.

North End has not held back in speaking up for The Spit and The Other Side. Tate’s thought bubble to run a sewerage outlet pipe along The Spit sand pumping jetty might have popped and vanished but expanding the Gold Coast wastewater treatment system remained prominent on the Gold Coast City Council agenda. The old sewerage outfall had not been upgraded since the 1980s. A council engineering report in 2018 outlined a plan to spend $32 million running a new sewerage pipe under the Broadwater estuary, under the southern tip of South Stradbroke Island and under the TOS sand banks, extending three kilometres out to sea. The pipe was scheduled for completion in 2022
but needed approval under federal legislation, the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (Weston 2018c, p. 14; 2018f, p. 8).

In a rare appearance in the *Gold Coast Bulletin*, Save Our Spit called on the Gold Coast City Council to explain how tunnelling under the TOS sand banks would not damage the magical waves and to release data showing the impact on marine life of discharge from the old pipes near the river mouth. North End luminary Darren Crawford, an SOS lieutenant, told the *Bulletin* that economic impact studies showed TOS contributed $20 million a year to the district economy (Lazarow, Miller & Blackwell 2009, p. 152).

‘Surfing at South Stradbroke Island is one of this city’s great attractions . . . why would you want to destroy it?’ (Weston 2018d, p. 19). Tate hit back on Facebook:

> Funny how I’m copping it from the greenies for getting ahead of population growth with an infrastructure building project . . . Apparently a pipe buried twenty metres under the ground will somehow affect the sand and waves above . . . Blind Freddy can tell that’s more utter nonsense from the Save Our Spit crowd who seem to have no more engineering or scientific qualifications . . . greater than I’m a regular surfer (Tate in Weston 2018e, p. 8).

Well, yes. North End surfers riding TOS for decades know what they are talking about. They know what is at stake, they know what may well happen but they also know how hard it is to predict precisely what will happen, when sand is disturbed. Twenty metres might seem a long way under the sea floor but near shore sand is not fixed solid, it shifts constantly with the tides, swell, storms and other weather systems and at TOS mechanically. The ocean and its sand are more powerful and more enigmatic than any of us can imagine. Blind Freddy is not the only one who cannot see what’s happening to the sand during and after laying a 2.5 metre diameter pipe directly below TOS. That’s a
big pipe to dig into the TOS sand. Why not route it further up the beach? Why target TOS?

North End is the surfing custodian of The Other Side but surfers all along the Gold Coast are TOS regulars. One of the best surfers at TOS is Anthony Pols, a hard charging Burleigh local whose Ding Shop at Miami is the go to repair cave for damaged boards. Pols was a professional surfer for eight years in the 1990s on the satellite tour, a hard grind. Talented surfers chase contests offering enough prize money to pay for the next airfare, trying to accumulate points to join the top tier World Championship Tour. Pols recently turned forty. He did well as a professional surfer but not well enough to join the WCT. When The Other Side lights up, he can still dominate the pack.

Pols and I talked story about The Spit, sitting on plastic chairs on the footpath outside The Ding Shop, drinking coffee, interrupted whenever someone walked past. Pols is recognised by many surfers on the central Gold Coast. Most of them knew about his run of bad luck. He was using a walking frame with a knee cushion. A tube pumped antibiotics into his arm and another tube drained his ankle. He was laid up with a second serious leg injury in eighteen months, a smashed heel and a wrecked Achilles tendon from a Burleigh barrel wipeout. He was just out of hospital. The surgery wound had gone bad. He had only recently recovered from a traumatic Boxing Day accident, shattering his leg on the edge of a trampoline, playing with his young daughters. Pols is a large and powerful surfer, not the kind who looks like he might get into trouble. You never can tell. We were joined by Timmy, an old timer. Timmy had lost his right eye when his board speared him at North Burleigh. My bad back and chronic calf injury suddenly seemed inconsequential. The three of us might have appeared as a Renaissance painting, like Bassano the Venetian’s Christ Healing the Lame (1571), except we were still waiting for divine intervention.
Pols cast further light on why The Other Side is such a great wave. As well as the
freakish sand banks, the beach faces precisely the right direction to attract swell. The
long sweeping curve of coastline from Coolangatta to South Stradbroke Island is angled
so that south easterly swells wrapping around Cape Byron aim directly at The Other
Side. When a small to medium south east pulse arrives with light offshore winds at the
immaculately sculpted TOS sand banks, there are more tubes than the London
Underground and it is just as crowded. ‘From two feet to six feet, South Straddie is
consistently the best beach break on the eastern seaboard [of Australia],’ Pols declared,
although he added he had not surfed in Tasmania (Pols 2017). As well, about eight
hundred metres further out to sea, beyond the TOS inshore banks, bombies break over
old car bodies and other dumped debris. This is a realm which goes by a few names. On
6 June 2016, the Gold Coast Bulletin front page carried a dramatic photo shot from a
helicopter, by veteran photographer Glenn Hampson, of a surfer bottom turning on a
four metre ‘monster wave’ labelled Dead Man’s Bank (‘Dead Man’s Bank hero’ 2017),
a behemoth that takes no prisoners. Waves like these arrive half a dozen times a year
along The Spit ocean beaches. God knows what they might do to an offshore cruise ship
terminal.

Pols has been boating on the Broadwater since he was a child. He had a twenty-eight
foot cruiser, a tinnie and a jet ski. He camps on Wavebreak Island three times a year. He
likes The Spit the way it is. Yes, it needs some TLC, but only because of neglect by the
Gold Coast City Council and the Queensland state government. Pols recognised an
offshore cruise ship terminal would need an onshore exclusion zone for security,
customs and quarantine and related support services, restricting public access on The
Spit and in the Broadwater. According to Pols, a ferry on the Broadwater for cruise
passengers arriving and departing would struggle to consistently attract enough trade
every day to be properly viable. Or, a new bridge across the Broadwater for buses
carrying cruise passengers would increase traffic. Pols reckoned an offshore cruise ship terminal might end up like his legs.

The Gold Coast doesn’t need any more Gold Coast. The Spit doesn’t need to be a place for retail and gambling. There’s enough of that. The Spit needs more trees, better car parking, better toilets . . . no [more] major infrastructure. People go there for the beach experience, they bring their own food . . . A cruise ship terminal will get smashed (Pols 2017).

DEMOCRACY

Losing it

Soheil Abedian was the serene prince of Gold Coast property developers, the elegant one who delivered Versace to The Spit and then shot the highest residential tower in the world up over Surfers Paradise. Handing out patronage with aplomb. The Abedian School of Architecture at Bond University, scholarships at Bond and Griffith universities, donations for disadvantaged kids and to charities. If anyone could get away with trashing the town plan and planting the flag for beds in the sky on The Spit, busting down the door for the zombie towers and a second Gold Coast casino, it was Abedian and his development company Sunland.

The 44-storey, $600 million twin towers at Mariner’s Cove on the southern end of The Spit, Abedian’s ‘final flourish’ to rival the Sydney Opera House (Potts 2015, p. 1), would deliver for the Gold Coast a divine leisure refuge, a new golden age of prosperity and the respect of southerners and the world. That was the vision Abedian was selling. He had finagled private freehold rights on The Spit but he still needed Gold Coast City
Council planning approval and a final green light from the Gold Coast councillors. By late summer of 2016 he was starting to sweat.

Save Our Broadwater had been running a petition urging the Queensland state government to intervene to stop Abedian’s twin towers. Main Beach residents had lodged more than one hundred public comment submissions (Potts & Weston 2015, p. 33). Councillor Greg Betts, a member of the council’s town planning committee, had noted that it might not be a good idea to ‘have Surfers Paradise extend all the way up to The Spit’ (Potts & Weston 2015, p. 33). Another major Gold Coast developer, Norm Rix, had declared The Spit ‘sacrosanct’ and the twin towers a ‘catastrophe’ (Wuth 2015, p. 5). ‘If approved, it would basically mean other developments [on The Spit] would have the right to go to that same height’, Rix said (Wuth 2015, p. 5).

Senior planning staff at the Gold Coast City Council also had reservations. A preliminary planning assessment shortly after Sunland lodged its application for approval for the twin towers did not pull punches. Sunland’s proposal was, among other things, ‘incompatible with the existing and intended urban character of the local area and the broader image of The Spit’, particularly the ‘height, scale and intensity’ of the towers, and it would ‘impact the Broadwater through land reclamation [in an area of] high ecological significance’ (Wuth 2015, p. 5). In other words, almost everything Abedian wanted was out of whack. This was the first indication he was not going to be allowed to do whatever he liked on The Spit.

Abedian had been hoping the council planners would acknowledge the twin towers were so high and mighty, so much better than anything else envisaged for The Spit, but the Gold Coast town plan was in this case being taken seriously. Local government planning staff advise how development proposals relate to local and state planning laws. They can suggest arguments to support projects that might contravene those laws, in
cases where special merit trumps all other considerations, before recommending how
development applications ought to be treated. Councillors can dismiss the planning staff
advice and recommendations in deciding on approval or rejection or they can require
amendments to development applications as a condition of approval.

Abedian was not going to get a free ride to the forty-fourth floor. He would have to
persuade a majority of councillors to forget about the town plan, forget about the risk of
legal challenges if they did so, ignore the noise of public criticism and accept that he
knew best. For lesser mortals all this might be too much. For big players like Abedian,
it was time to shine. He had Tom Tate and the Gold Coast Bulletin onside but had he
over reached in asking for approval for a pair of towers fifteen times higher than the
allowable limit? Was this really his final flourish or was it hubris? After Norm Rix’s
condemnation and the negative assessment from the Gold Coast City Council planners,
Abedian ramped up the rhetoric, describing high rise as a kind of high art.

A central philosophy of the proposed design is the preservation of the
community’s relationship with the Broadwater and enriching the urban fabric. A
true consideration of its merits considers its beauty and contribution to the
betterment of the community such as the creation of unique cultural spaces for
learning, innovation and the arts, public parklands and unrestricted access to the
Broadwater . . . The traditional three-storey planning methodology leaves
developers with little option but to completely cover the site footprint, blocking
view corridors and public access between the beach and the Broadwater. This
proposal presents a design solution that opens up the majority of the site to the
community and tourists (Wuth 2015, p. 5).
Abedian was sounding like an architecture sophisticate only interested in what is best for the local community, but high rise on the Broadwater shore is only ever going to be ugly. Public access to the Broadwater already existed. Throwing up two huge towers for private use would only restrict public access. View corridors are by definition constrained by buildings blocking views. Mariner’s Cove was already freely open to locals and tourists, as a retail and marine services site. Vague promises of cultural space did not hide the fact that a developer aiming to make money out of public land wanted to decide how much and what kind of cultural space might be provided. Arguing that three stories is a traditional planning methodology suggested the Gold Coast town plan not even one year old was already old fashioned. There was another option for Sunland. Upgrade Mariner’s Cove without reducing public access or reducing public use facilities and without ignoring the height limits. Make less money.

The Gold Coast City Council assessment process had identified the twin towers’ ‘biggest obstacle’, bigger than excessive height and incompatibility with the character of The Spit (Potts & Weston 2015, p. 33). Road traffic. A new mega-resort on The Spit would severely aggravate the notorious traffic congestion. One road in, same road out for a place where thousands want to be is a very busy road. None of Soheil Abedian’s pseudo philosophising could reduce the number of motor vehicles during construction and operation of a resort with hundreds of rooms, dining and entertainment venues and a marina.

In January 2016, Sunland lodged amendments to its twin towers development application, to assist traffic flows at The Spit, including extra parking, ‘improving the capacity of the existing road network’ around The Spit and extending the Oceanway concrete path, as well as extra funding for public transport in Main Beach (Potts 2016, p. 8). The Sunland team up until this time had not paid enough attention to the traffic
problem. Abedian realised he needed to scramble, offer to spend money on public roads, transport and access, or the unthinkable could happen, the final flourish might not flourish at all. The development application amendments meant the Gold Coast City Council would not vote on the twin towers until after the Queensland local government elections in March 2016. Abedian could only hope the new Gold Coast City Council would not mind if Surfers Paradise extended onto The Spit, or he might have decided a new council was his best chance. He was cornered but not done yet.

Abedian was rattled. An extraordinary speech delivered to an audience of three hundred Gold Coast development gang luminaries and their mates at The Southport School in February 2016 showed that the fault finding had become a painful distraction. Like Donald Trump and many other corporate superstars, Abedian did not cope well with criticism or scrutiny. He was sounding desperate.

For many of the so called knowledgeable people, they have no clue about architecture, they have no clue about the future of the city, they do not understand how a new destination is going to emerge. They call me names and say “go back where you came from” but I cannot because they would hang me . . . Every single landmark development ever around the world has had people objecting to it, so I am genuinely grateful to those who are against it. So one day if this goes ahead I will put out a sign for these associations, these Save Our Spit associations and the so-called architects who say they know something but they don’t know shit . . . We are a tourist city . . . I am promising more tourist attractions and these people say they don’t want it . . . I don’t know if you remember 2001, there were a lot of people who said it was wrong to build Q1 and I was told it did not belong. Well, guess what? Now the Commonwealth Games is using it at the centre of its official logo and even Uber has used it.
When you go anywhere around the world now, the Q1 is the symbol of the Gold Coast (Potts 2016c, p. 5)

Abedian’s anger towards those who did not want The Spit turned into a forest of towers and an even worse traffic shambles was spiced with claims of persecution. The multi-millionaire was feeling sorry for himself. Insisting those who disagree with you are ignorant is arrogant. Every landmark development ever built has attracted objections? That’s the kind of misleading, post-factual rhetoric Donald Trump might use. If Abedian was genuinely grateful to his critics, why was he so annoyed? The Q1 is a symbol of the Gold Coast, not the only symbol. Anyway, comparing the soulless Q1 with the twin towers was not a wise move. The Q1 has been plagued by lack of interest. Apartment investors have lost money. The rooftop venue has struggled. The street level shops are often empty. Reminding everyone about the Q1 raised an important question. What if the twin towers were a spectacular dud? Like nearly all of the development gang, Abedian refused to accept the Gold Coast was no longer a servant of the hackneyed business model that seeks to profit from tourism by building more apartment towers.

Seeing a ghost

Three weeks out from the 2016 Gold Coast City Council election, Tom Tate was writing off his political opponents. Not good enough, too negative, no policies. Not as fierce a putdown as Trump might unleash but a similar neoliberal aura of superiority and lack of respect. Tate’s self confidence was so absolute it was almost re-assuring, to those voters willing to ignore the tower building and cruise ship terminal obsessions and
the consequent planned trashing of The Spit, because that is how strong leaders are meant to behave. Tate was egged on by his newspaper mouthpiece. Alongside Tate’s comments dismissing his challengers, the Gold Coast Bulletin presented a page three caricature of the mayor with his arms in the air, one hand clutching a bottle of champagne, the other making a V-for-victory salute, grinning ear to ear, opponents cowering poodles at his feet. ‘I haven’t seen a policy, their only policy is to oppose. I’m disappointed. They are not trying hard enough . . . When they are . . . pumping their chests, I’m going . . . you are not serious . . . you should have run six months out. You can’t just sign up, pay your $250 [nomination fee]. You have to produce a vision’ (Keen 2016, p. 3).

That’s easy for Tate to say. Not everyone can afford to run for mayor in the biggest regional city in Australia, bigger than Canberra, Hobart and Darwin, quit their job to shake hands and hit up the media for six months, or keep their job on hold for four or more years if elected. And when it is all over, when the voters decide your time is up, good luck restarting your career. Local government politicians generally do not have access to the generous superannuation schemes enjoyed by other politicians. There are no cushy corporate directorships reserved for ex councillors. Only one of the five other Gold Coast mayoral candidates in 2016 was working full time. One was retired, another was an impecunious writer, another a struggling small businessman. The two mayoral challengers with any chance of knocking off Tate were a medical scientist with a law degree and an ex corporate senior manager. Democracy in late modernity requires successful political candidates to have direct access to large sums of money. This is a fundamental, fraught connection between politics and capitalism. Anyway, Tate had not been paying attention. His two main challengers had web pages packed with policies.
Four days before the 2016 council election, Tate was still confident but he looked uncomfortable, perched on a chair at a trestle table up on the stage at the Nerang Bicentennial Hall. The six mayoral candidates were seated in a row staring down at a mostly cynical audience of one hundred and fifty Gold Coasters for the final mayoral debate before polling day. Tate was grimacing, a mix of impatience and arrogance. This was not the place he wanted to be, forced to argue his policies with people he considered inferior. He could buy and sell all of them and all of the audience.

The contenders shook hands. Tom Tate and Jim Wilson, the ex corporate manager who like Tate was an aggressive character, glared hard at each other, not disguising their hatred. Wilson appeared as if he might be tempted to do more than debate policy. He was aged sixty three but seemed about ready to roll up his sleeves and go toe to toe, taller than Tate with a longer reach but Tate like Mike Tyson had the upper body power. Wilson had some decent policies, including public consultation forums before any major project went to a council vote, but he was too volatile, an angry smart man, although an aggressive demeanour of course worked for Tate. Wilson had called Tate a ‘weight pumping bikie bovver boy on verbal steroids’ during the mayoral debate at Tugun (‘Put vision before vendetta’ 2016, p. 16). For a moment I imagined Wilson and Tate were World Wrestling Federation clowns about to smash chairs.

Each candidate outlined their policy platform and answered select questions submitted anonymously from the audience. All the candidates except Tate opposed a cruise ship terminal and all except Tate agreed the three-storey limit for The Spit should stay. ‘For me it is not a matter of height, it is about coming up with a transport solution,’ Tate said. ‘This could include bridges and extra traffic lanes’ (Weston & Potts 2016a, p. 7). Tate wished everyone ‘good evenings’. He said he had united councillors behind him, paid down debt, stopped annual rate rises and dumped the previous council’s plan to
build a new ‘Taj Mahal’ city administration centre. His next term would be ‘going back to basic’. Keeping rate rises below or tied to the Consumer Price Index, creating jobs. He had no new big idea or even a summary explanation of how a job creation agenda might work. The cruise ship terminal was presumably big enough to create the jobs Tate reckoned the Gold Coast needed. If the terminal did not pass an environmental impact assessment, he would be the ‘first to say no’. This was greeted by howls of laughter from the audience. Tate seemed impatient. He did not look to have prepared well, did not have a written speech. He said he supported a master plan for The Spit and promised the council would work with the Gold Coast Waterways Authority, a state agency with council representatives, to ease traffic at The Spit. He also said development applications had to conform to the town plan. What was that, had I misheard?

Tate’s speech as usual did not stand up to close examination. In the politicians’ stock phrase book, creating jobs is a hackneyed chant. The Gold Coast unemployment rate in 2016 was seven per cent, almost the same as the national average of 6.9 per cent (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016-17). Unemployment was too high and Tate was right to emphasise the need for more employment opportunities but he had no data quantifying how many jobs a cruise ship terminal would create. He might have dumped the Taj Mahal city administration centre but he wanted to spend tens of millions on his own folly. Replacing the Taj Mahal with a white elephant does take some imagination.

If Tate’s latest version of a cruise ship terminal failed to pass an environmental impact assessment, he would not give up. Tate was not one to walk away from a fight. He would no doubt unleash Plan C. A master plan for The Spit could only be designed by the Queensland state government, because The Spit is state land mostly set aside for public use. A master plan could only be as good as what was allowed and disallowed. Tate would be lobbying for a master plan to find room for his terminal.
Tate’s declaration that development applications had to conform to the town plan was not misspoken, nor an attempt at black humour. He was referring to a contentious bid to build a mosque at Currumbin, on the southern Gold Coast, not to the high rise forest planned for The Spit. Many people opposed the Currumbin mosque. It was too easy for Tate to imply that keeping Muslims under control was all right when restricting high rise was not.

Penny Toland and Tate were the only party aligned candidates. Toland was a pathology laboratory health practitioner and a Labor comrade, a union workplace representative. She was also a volunteer for the Gold Coast Legal Service, conducting client interviews. She had contested Gold Coast state electorates as an independent in 2012 and endorsed by Labor in 2015, receiving 2.9 per cent and 31 per cent of first preference votes (Electoral Commission Queensland 2012; Electoral Commission Queensland 2015). Her run for mayor in 2016 was not endorsed by Labor. She would probably get elected one day but not this time. The Gold Coast pro-development lobby was under threat but would not be usurped by a Labor woman, not yet.

Tate called himself a political conservative. He was a Liberal National Party member but not endorsed by the LNP. ‘People know that I don’t wear blue or red ties, I wear gold ties’ (Weston & Potts 2016b, p. 4). The major political parties’ reluctance to endorse their Gold Coast mayoral candidates in 2016 was farcical. What did they think, that Gold Coast voters would be turned off if they realised they were voting for a politician?

The Nerang mayoral debate provided some spirited discussion, one burst of laughter, a few chuckles and groans, nothing to get too excited about, until Tate was suddenly confronted with a ghost of his recent past, a ghost of himself. A written question from the audience drew attention to a video on the Save Our Spit website, an interview in
which Tate unequivocally ruled out an offshore cruise ship terminal, because it would be too expensive and too exposed to heavy weather. This was back when the Wavebreak Island terminal in the Broadwater was Tate’s preferred option, tacitly supported by the Newman government. In the video, Tate said:

The ocean side is two things. It’s cost prohibitive because you need to really build a massive structure, two hundred plus million dollars, to get return for that investment. The cruise ship industry, I don’t think there’ll be enough return for that kind of investment. The second thing to that, basically more important, it’s unpredictable, that the ship cannot dock. What happens is it brings the uncertainty into the itinerary and when they put it onto their route and you can’t dock there, it’s disappointing to the passenger and they have to make up to them, whether it’s in money or in kind, and just a lot of headaches . . . so no point building something and they don’t use it (Save Our Spit, ‘Gold Coast Mayor explains’).

This comprehensive rebuttal by Tate of his own current argument for the offshore terminal was filmed in September 2012 at the Gold Coast City Council offices for an independent documentary about The Spit development debate (Gratton 2019). The documentary was never screened, the revealing footage given to Save Our Spit (Gratton 2019).

The question now put to Tate on stage at the Nerang Bicentennial Hall: why he had changed his mind? He replied stony faced: ‘As far as my comment regarding that cruise ship being not viable on the ocean side, I reject that comment’. Cue gasps and raucous laughter. Toland responded. ‘I’m absolutely dumbfounded that you rejected those comments. Unless you have a secret, identical twin’. More laughter and applause. Tate’s expression did not change. He was defiant about rejecting his own words, a naked
politician unmoved in the chaos swirling around him. It was all he was able to do, his worst moment. When the Wavebreak Island cruise ship terminal was dumped by the Palaszczuk government, Tate did not hesitate to embrace the offshore option he had canned.

My head was spinning. The terminal was the development gang’s Avalon and would be their greatest recent achievement, manifesting a breathtaking arrogance only to have been exposed as delusional by none other than its staunchest supporter and sole crusader. The day after Tate curtly rejected his own ghostly words, he attempted a better explanation. He told the *Gold Coast Bulletin* his earlier dismissal of an offshore terminal referred to a ‘floating superstructure’ whereas his currently envisioned offshore terminal was a ‘pylon jetty . . . to compare the two is like chalk and cheese’ (Weston 2016b, p. 3).

The 2016 Gold Coast mayoral election results were unequivocal, nothing less than a decisive victory for Tate. He polled 63.86 per cent of first preference votes and 73.14 per cent after preferences were distributed (Electoral Commission Queensland 2016). Tate’s percentage of first preference votes was almost double his 2012 result (Electoral Commission Queensland 2012a). Toland ran second in 2016 with 19.62 per cent of first preferences and 26.86 per cent after distribution (Electoral Commission Queensland 2016). Tate was the best known, best funded, best organized and most capable of the mayoral candidates. However, it was too easy to conclude that a majority of Gold Coast voters were not concerned about the relentless, all consuming spread of high rise or the construction of a discredited offshore cruise ship terminal and did not believe The Spit needed saving, or were not paying attention to Tate’s illogical explanations, just liked his big picture approach. This is at best only half the story. The Gold Coast was not a benign society, it was an agitated, contested space. Tate was also the most disliked of
the mayoral candidates. A significant minority of Gold Coast residents remained passionately opposed to further large scale development in culturally sensitive locations, especially publicly owned land near the beach, and they were passionate defenders of The Spit as public space. If anything, Tate’s re-election stoked their passions. Tate had spent millions of ratepayer dollars over four years trying to build a cruise ship terminal, and he had pushed hard for development on The Spit, without any success. Now he had four more years to keep trying.

**Trying not to say no**

Soheil Abedian re-emerged six months after the 2016 Gold Coast City Council election with a desperate, spiteful threat. Despite his protestations of wanting to create a community asset on The Spit, Abedian was apparently willing to get nasty and deliberately build rubbish. He threatened to erect a ‘mediocre’ shopping centre at Mariner’s Cove, creating ‘significantly larger traffic volumes’, if his $600 million twin towers were rejected (Moore 2016).

The Gold Coast City Council was finally going to decide on the Sunland Spit application. Abedian was behaving like a spoiled child. First, at The Southport School business breakfast, he had abused those he blamed for his predicament. Now he was threatening retaliation via a ‘fall-back position’, a three-storey shopping centre he argued was automatically allowed on The Spit under the town plan (Moore 2016a). Abedian owned the redevelopment rights for Mariner’s Cove. If he was not allowed to have his final flourish, he would be giving the finger to those many others who valued The Spit differently.
This is a once in a lifetime opportunity to create an iconic and cultural landmark for the city. If the [twin towers] proposal is not approved, we must consider the implications of such a decision on withholding significant cultural amenity from the wider community for generations to come (Moore 2016a).

The Sunland amended application for the twin towers filed before the council election, to upgrade The Spit road network, was directed at the Gold Coast City Council’s senior planning staff. The shopping centre ultimatum was aimed at the councillors, trying to persuade them what might be lost, allegedly iconic architecture and ‘sorely needed cultural facilities’ (Moore 2016a). Abedian’s rationale was weak because the twin towers were ugly and an unexplained art gallery, museum and aquarium would not appeal to everyone, especially those who appreciate The Spit for its recreational and natural assets and would be stuck in traffic no matter what Sunland might end up building. The Gold Coast City Council was already set to spend a fortune on a new arts centre at Bundall. Restaurants, cafes and shops along a Broadwater boardwalk affiliated with the twin towers could be provided anyway, with or without towers. The threat to build a dud shopping centre and force surfers and other Spit users to sit in traffic was never going to happen because traffic criteria apply to all property development proposals, including projects that otherwise conform to town planning legislation and especially those where traffic is already a problem. Abedian had decades of experience negotiating with bureaucrats and politicians. He had claimed his detractors don’t know shit but the truth was times had changed and he could not shovel shit, not on The Spit.

One week before the Gold Coast City Council voted on the twin towers, the council’s senior planning staff delivered their negative verdict. Far above the building height limit, substantial land reclamation in the Broadwater, increased road traffic, residential accommodation in a tourist zone and impacts on ‘community wellbeing’ were reasons...
Anchors Away / Southorn

for the unequivocal no thanks (Weston & Emery 2016, p. 3). Abedian had offered to pay for road upgrades on The Spit but the planning staff advised that ratepayers would have to cough up at least $10 million to add an extra lane to the Gold Coast Highway bridge across the Nerang River at Southport, The Spit’s northern access route, to cope with the extra traffic to and from the twin towers (Emery & Weston 2016, p. 2). A thumbs down from the planning staff was no great surprise. The twin towers were a two fingered up yours to the town plan. But the council vote would be tight. The fourteen councillors were close to evenly split, there was a chance they might reject the bureaucrats’ advice (Weston & Emery 2016a, p. 2).

On the day of the twin towers vote, 15 September 2016, the *Gold Coast Bulletin* soared to peak hyperbole, gifting to Abedian the front page headline: ‘Our Eiffel Tower’ (Skene 2016, p. 1). Filling page four inside, the serene prince folded his adored architect Zaha Hadid, the Eiffel Tower, the Guggenheim museum in New York, the Sydney Opera House, the British Museum and the artist Claude Monet into a delusional rant. No one else was quoted.

What we are offering will be judged by future generations as the greatest artwork this city ever had the opportunity to receive . . . No other architect in the history of our field has created a new art form in architecture that no one else could even create. Had she started a new movement? The answer is yes, but could anyone compete with her in that regard? The answer is no. Having the last gallery museum designed by her, to turn our back towards that, could you believe that New York City would refuse the Guggenheim museum? It goes beyond the level of explanation, we have received the greatest work of the ultimate architect that has ever set foot on this planet . . . When you understand the spirit of the land and the environment, you cannot take one and build it
somewhere else, a Zaha is not a cut and paste . . . The Eiffel Tower in Paris, that was designed only for an exhibition but it then became the symbol of Paris. I have no doubt this building would become a new chapter in the development industry . . . I had a visit from a man just two weeks ago and he said it is like somebody offering a Monet painting to the British Museum and them saying, “you know what, we’re not going to accept this because we don’t have a wall to hang this incredible artwork”. We had a guest speaker at the [Bond University] architecture school, he said in Denmark if a private citizen came and said, “I want to build a museum by Zaha Hadid”, the issue would not be the permit, the issue would be how much the government would pay towards that. Here, somebody’s offering and the people start questioning it. Where are we, trying to chase a future when art and culture becomes secondary to anything else? (Skeen 2016a, p. 4).

Zaha Hadid will probably never be known by anyone except Abedian as the ultimate architect that has ever set foot on this planet. And her champagne flute towers were not her best work. What Abedian wanted to build on The Spit was indeed a cut and paste champagne flute variation. The twin towers were as ugly as dozens of other towers in Surfers Paradise and Broadbeach. Comparing the final flourish with the Eiffel Tower was outrageous, like ranking a McMansion alongside a Frank Lloyd Wright masterpiece. The Paris icon is a graceful symbol of the age of modernity in a city revered for high culture. The twin towers on The Spit would be an all too common ordinary monument to neoliberalism in a city too often derided for low culture. The Guggenheim in New York is a stand-alone museum. Abedian’s dream was two residential towers with a tacked on gallery, museum and aquarium. He had not explained what might be shown in the museum and the gallery. Monet’s water lilies? Junk for the tourist market? And what creatures might be imprisoned in the aquarium?
Abedian had either lost the plot or there was no limit to his exaggeration. He was like a courtly character in *Blackadder* paying homage to his queen.

Abedian’s rant was a last gasp plea to councillors’ egos, wanting them to think they were making history, but he was effectively arguing future generations should be the judge, not the council planners or the elected representatives. The Hadid invocation was a cultural cringe. We need this big name architect to secure our future. Abedian did not mention the hundreds of apartments he was planning to sell in the twin towers. He forgot to say these sales would make him a lot of money.

I had arrived early for the council meeting at the Gold Coast City Council administration centre. Judy Spence was talking into a microphone outside, for the news crews, flanked by supporters with placards. No High Rise on The Spit. Spence announced that Save Our Broadwater would appeal to the Queensland Planning and Environment Court if the twin towers were approved by ‘this inept and compromised council’.

We piled into the public gallery, separated from the meeting chamber by a floor to ceiling glass wall, hearing the debate through speakers, only a few metres from the councillors but like goldfish in a glass bowl they could not hear us, presumably because we were not trusted to behave, our voices not recognised, unlike the unscreened public galleries in the Queensland and national parliaments where noisy disrupters are occasionally removed.

Tate entered the chamber, swooshing into his high chair, draped in the ceremonial chains of office, next to the Gold Coast City chief executive Dale Dickson. They faced the councillors sitting in a row at a long semi-circular table. ‘Here he comes, he’s got his necklace on today, the crown jewels.’ I realised I was seated next to Sally Spain, perennial Greens candidate, agent provocateur. Spain had been a school teacher, a
former president of the Gold Coast branch of Wildlife Queensland and a Greens
candidate for the federal electorates of Moncrieff in 2010 and Forde in 2013. She had
polled 11.56 per cent of the primary vote in 2010 and 4.17 per cent in 2013 (Australian
Electoral Commission 2010; Australian Electoral Commission 2013), a lot more than
some of the minor party senators in the national parliament. She provided a stream of
witty, bitter and outraged interjections, audible to the gallery at large and, whispered to
me, observations, judgements and explanations. She sulked momentarily if I did not
respond or agree, then resumed, calling out, asides, cautions and reminders. Grace and
wariness prevented those sitting around us from responding to her. Even though most of
what Spain pronounced was accurate, the rest of The Spit supporters in the gallery had
not come along today to be browbeaten by one of their own, and they had their own
noise to make. The public gallery crowd was mostly elderly, a chorus of hissing,
booing, clapping, cheering, groaning and mumbling, swinging from cynicism to disgust
as the meeting ground on and on. Now I kind of understood the glass dome of silence.
In the gallery front row, four beefy, unshaven young men in tight suits, chinos and
scuffed boots, developer types, were annoyed at Sally Spain’s monologue. They were
Soheil Abedian’s son, Sahba, with his posse, muttering and grumbling.

The Deputy Mayor, Donna Gates, and a handful of other councillors declared they had
received election campaign donations from Sunland but would not be compromised
when voting on the twin towers. How reassuring. This is called failing the pub test. Tate
screened a Sunland video. The Eiffel Tower appeared. Groans from the gallery. Tate
then played his hand. He announced he wanted the council to defer any decision on the
twin towers until the council and the state government together developed a ‘joint
stewardship’ land use plan for The Spit. Tate was trying to find a set of rules to suit
Sunland. He had not acknowledged calls from the resistance for a Spit master plan, but
now he wanted one. The town plan covers the whole of the Gold Coast, including The
Spit. A master plan would be a separate planning instrument giving detailed, specific guidance with requirements and allowances for The Spit that may or may not differ from the town plan. Master plans are used for disputed zones, or for difficult or unique or large scale projects, often with a complex mix of public and private uses.

Earlier that day, Dickson, the city administration boss, had received a letter from the Queensland State Development Department project chief executive, David Edwards, replying to a request from Dickson for the state government to clarify the status of the ASF zombie towers and casino application, as it might relate to the Sunland twin towers. The council’s planning committee had directed Dickson to seek the clarification. Tate and his cronies were hoping the state government might be ready to approve the Spit casino and the zombie towers. If so, they would have ammunition, a precedent of sorts, to argue for Abedian’s twin towers. Edwards replied that the state government had not yet decided on the ASF application. ‘The government does not in any way want to diminish your responsibility to properly assess the development application [for the twin towers] . . . particularly against the Gold Coast city plan, a plan that only commenced in February 2016 and outlines the applicable planning framework for The Spit’ (Edwards 2016). Ouch. Edwards was not playing Tate’s game. His advice was in effect to stick to the three-storey limit. The eleventh hour letter from Edwards amounted to an own goal for the Gold Coast development gang. The Queensland state government was playing hardball on The Spit.

The meeting debated what might happen if the council decided not to decide on the final flourish. How might the serene prince respond, given the frustration he had struggled to endure? Could Abedian take the Gold Coast City Council to court for doing nothing? Or might he agree to allow the council more time to make a decision? Would the council have to change the town plan if it wanted to approve the twin towers?
The city solicitor, David Montgomery, was summoned to the meeting chamber. A large man, he came in hurrying and puffing, pulling on his suit jacket. The meeting went into private session, councillors and the senior city staff. We were all marched outside. The talk now was about the financial costs of possible legal strategies. The practice was not to publicly canvas such things so as not to alert other parties. Abedian was Tate’s ideological ally but he was also a potential adversary who could chase a payout, even though it was Abedian who wanted to subvert what was allowed on The Spit, another example of democracy beholden to neoliberalism.

We were called back to the public gallery. Councillor Peter Young attempted to summarise the ‘difficult situation’. If the council voted at this stage to do nothing, it would be up to Abedian to decide if he wanted to appeal, or the council could ask him for more time to decide. ‘None of us wants to throw away an opportunity for a world class development but our planning scheme makes it clear we should refuse,’ Young said. What was really happening? Sunland was holding the Gold Coast to ransom, give us what we want or risk losing our huge investment. Dickson confirmed that if the council changed the town plan within twelve months, presumably to allow for high rise on The Spit, councillors could bring the Sunland application back for decision, provided the developer had ‘done nothing’, that is, not withdrawn the application or launched a court challenge in the meantime. I was reminded of Laurel and Hardy, the lament about the fine mess.

So the vote was taken at last, quickly and kind of discreetly, almost as if they were embarrassed. A decision on the Sunland application was deferred. The Gold Coast City Council would ask the Queensland state government to help prepare a Spit master plan. And hope the serene prince might be all right with that. The Gold Coast City councillors had made the right decision. Do nothing. Common sense, acute awareness of the Gold
Coast resistance, varying degrees of respect for the town plan and a failure to sort out traffic trumped the serene prince. Tate and his whip, the planning committee chief Councillor Cameron Caldwell, were unable to persuade a majority. They had struggled to find a way not to reject the twin towers, a project they had championed, that represented everything they stood for. They could not say yes but would not say no, like the Fonz in *Happy Days* unable to say he was wrong. The best they could get was a delay, until a new planning document was devised for The Spit and the Queensland state government delivered its verdict on the zombie towers. If the ASF Consortium got their green light, a herd of developers would charge at The Spit, led by the serene prince or he might be carried along or away in the excitement. The Gold Coast City Council 2016 election had delivered a combination of councillors no longer guaranteed to simply follow the leader or ignore the town plan. The Gold Coast resistance was all over the councillors like a rash. Everyone knew any decision favouring big development by taking away public space would trigger a protest campaign with significant public support. The Gold Coast development gang was no longer invincible. It was a close call but The Spit for now was safe.

Two weeks after the council meeting, Abedian had regained his composure, announcing Sunland would withdraw the twin towers development application ‘to allow the master planning process . . . to occur’. There was no suggestion of a legal challenge, no threat of a dud shopping centre. ‘It is our ardent hope that the state government and council, upon completion of the master plan, allow projects such as the Mariner to have a place in the future of our city’ (Sunland 2016).
HOW TO KILL A ZOMBIE

The coup de grace

In the end, ASF Consortium’s enormous proposal for The Spit disappeared not with a bang but a whimper. After five years of angst, false dawns, hopes dashed and raised, the Queensland state government finally and unequivocally rejected the multi-tower casino bid for The Spit. Annastascia Palaszczuk delivered the coup de grace on 1 August 2017, declaring The Spit should be ‘preserved for future generations . . . this beautiful part of the Gold Coast . . . is unique to Queenslanders but it’s also unique to the world . . . there is development that happens right up and down the Coast in areas that are designated for high rise. Honestly, do you want to see 40 storeys of high rise impacting on what is a unique place in the world?’ (Skene 2017c, p. 4). No, thank you. The Spit’s three-storey height limit would remain. A new round of public consultation would commence to prepare a master plan to guide future land use on The Spit. Integrated resort development would be banned from The Spit, although a second casino licence for the Gold Coast was still in play.

The Gold Coast Bulletin front page was dripping with so much sarcasm it would have made some fingers sticky. ‘YAY! LABOR CELEBRATES AS COAST LOSES . . . S3 billion world-class Spit resort, Post-Games jobs bonanza, massive tourism generator’ (‘Yay, Labor celebrates’ 2017, p. 1). This was an alternative universe, a dominant ideology delusion, worlds away from the reality of saving the Gold Coast’s biggest, most popular, last remaining beachfront public open space from destruction for private gain, as well as avoiding the evils of yet another pokies palace. The Bulletin’s catalogue of losses was at best overly pessimistic, at worst dishonest. ASF’s inability to genuinely engage in the public consultation process was a reason to believe the opaque Chinese string pullers behind ASF may not have produced a world class development at The
Spit. And there was no guarantee a casino on The Spit would provide anything like a lasting jobs bonanza or massive increases in tourism revenue. The Atlantic City casino experience had shown casinos in holiday towns can kill jobs and do little for tourism (see Hannigan 2007). The *Bulletin* had succumbed to bitching about imaginary losses rather than cheering for a world-class natural environment, the kind of experience craved by tourists as much as locals.

The *Bulletin*’s derisive front page headline sneered at its own front page photo of an elated Steve Grotion hugging Infrastructure, Planning and Transport Minister Jackie Trad at The Spit with Palaszczuk looking on. The insertion of Trad, the leader of Queensland Labor’s parliamentary Left faction, into The Spit narrative was significant. The pro-development state and local bureaucrats and their politician mates in Brisbane and on the Gold Coast were all licking their wounds. The female-led Left had prevailed over the alpha males of the Right. The *Bulletin* claimed Palaszczuk herself supported the ASF bid but the Labor government feared losing too many votes in winnable electorates if the polarising zombie towers casino was approved following recent approval for the first stage of the contentious Adani coal mine in central Queensland. Labor also wanted to stymie support for the reactionary conservative One Nation party. One Nation had opportunistically promised to withdraw any approval for the zombie towers if it won the balance of power in the Queensland parliament (Potts 2017b, p. 4). The *Bulletin* as well claimed Labor had no Gold Coast seats and therefore nothing to lose by knocking back ASF in order to hold on to Green preferences in Brisbane (“Door slams on business” 2017, p. 16). These were all reasonable assumptions, even if they served only to demonise the pro-development gang’s ideological enemies for apparently denying the Gold Coast that most sacred cow, economic growth.
Anchors Away / Southorn

The *Bulletin* editorial claimed Palaszczuk had ‘blinked in a stare down with a vocal anti-Spit development lobby that has been shown time and time again not to have the support of Gold Coast residents and business’ (“Door slams on business” 2017, p. 16). Of course, the resistance had demonstrable support. In the same edition, the *Bulletin* reported its own latest phone poll found 900 residents were split 50-50 for and against the ASF project (Skene 2017c, p. 4). On the same day the *Bulletin* had claimed the anti-Spit development lobby was out of touch, the newspaper reported the findings of the Donaldson Consulting survey. This was the survey that failed to reveal the height of the zombie towers, how many rooms they would contain, did not mention a casino and had no option for respondents to specifically reject the ASF bid. It concluded 54 per cent backed high rise on The Spit, 42 per cent were opposed and four per cent unsure, from 4,550 submissions (Skene 2017c, p. 4). The Donaldson survey was by any reasonable analysis flawed, therefore unable to accurately reveal what people really wanted. Even with a survey seemingly weighted in favour of development on The Spit, the best result ASF had been able to achieve was a narrow majority, yet again close to an even split for and against.

Palaszczcuk’s State Development Minister Anthony Lynham, from the Right faction, declared the decision to reject the ASF bid showed the state government had ‘listened to the people’ (Skene 2017c, p. 4). If ASF had somehow managed to miraculously demonstrate a solid majority of support, perhaps 65 per cent or more, only then might the zombie towers have survived, unless other complications emerged. Instead, the government minister who oversaw the public consultation process saw enough to know too many voters were uncomfortable or unconvinced or not at all happy. The risk of ballot box revenge was too high.
ASF’s Louis Chien told his friends at the *Bulletin* he was ‘deeply disappointed’ when notified of the government’s decision ‘only minutes’ before the public announcement (Potts & Skene 2017, p. 5). Such calls are never advance notice. Telling someone their big project is not going to happen, then waiting a while before telling everyone else, only gives the rejected party time to stir up trouble. ‘This represents a loss to the Gold Coast . . . they miss out on a game changing development for the tourism industry which would have led to the renewal of age old tourism assets,’ Chien said (Potts & Skene 2017, p. 5). A second Gold Coast casino on The Spit would not have been game changing in any positive sense, although it may have sucked spending from elsewhere on the Gold Coast. On The Spit, Sea World, the Sheraton Grand Mirage and the Palazzo Versace were in no way run down. And how can anything really be lost if it wasn’t there in the first place? Just because a high rise casino was knocked back did not mean economic growth on the Gold Coast was finished. The zombie towers were not the only game in town. ‘There will be a ripple effect . . . this [rejection] brings into question any investment, foreign or domestic, or global brands to venture into the state of Queensland given the current climate’ (Potts & Skene 2017, p. 5). While Chien was spouting this nonsense, cranes were spiking up on building sites from Coolangatta to Southport, the length of the Gold Coast. A new northern satellite suburb, Coomera, was spreading across the landscape like a tsunami. The southern residential suburb of Palm Beach was embarking, unfortunately, on its biggest high rise development boom in decades. Anyway, ASF was invited to tender for the global tourism hub that would not be built on The Spit.

Steve Gration and Judy Spence promised they would pressure the Liberal National Party to retain the three story height limit in The Spit master plan, if the conservatives won the state election (Emery 2017c, p. 7). The LNP leader, Tim Nicholls, reckoned he would seek expressions of interest for a Gold Coast integrated resort in the first 100
days of an LNP government, but he did not clarify if the LNP would allow high rise on The Spit (Skene 2017c, p. 5). The LNP’s Surfers Paradise MP, John-Paul Langbroek, said an LNP government would have ‘no predetermined decision on height’ for The Spit (Keen & Skene 2017, p. 5). The drums never cease, the beat goes on.

Amid the fallout, a revelation and a dummy spit. The revelation: necessary transport upgrades if the $3 billion zombie towers casino was to have proceeded were in fact as good as impossible. The day after Palaszczuk’s coup de grace, the Bulletin reported a Queensland state government secret traffic study had decided a bridge across the Broadwater from the western shore entering an underwater tunnel via a sandbank in the middle of the Broadwater and surfacing on The Spit was the ‘only viable option’ (Potts 2017c, p. 4) to ensure access to the zombie towers. The ‘brunnel’ would cost $700 million (Potts 2017c, p. 4). Roads and tunnels are never cheap. This big, weird brunnel could not go on the taxpayer tab, not just for the Gold Coast, to support a casino. The brunnel would have to be financed as a toll road and with revenue derived from ‘at least 20 high rises up to 50 storeys’ on The Spit’s state leasehold land (Potts 2017c, p. 4). Cough up to drive to the casino, if you could find it in the forest of towers. What kind of world class resort is that? Too much traffic on The Spit had undone Sunland’s twin towers, now the same for ASF. An extraordinary road soaring above the water and then diving down into and below the water was Frankenstein engineering.

Chien admitted he had discussed the brunnel with Queensland state government representatives but argued it would not have been necessary because ASF’s traffic plan, a smaller bridge across the Broadwater, light rail spur along The Spit and road upgrades in Southport, was according to ASF more feasible (Potts 2017c, p. 4). ASF was willing to spend $3 billion but also drew the line at a brunnel. The state government had understood the zombie towers were an impossible dream even while encouraging the
public consultation process because no feasible traffic solution existed, not the brunnel and not ASF’s rough drawings. So even if Gold Coasters had wanted the zombie towers, the state government might not have given approval. Yes, the government had listened to the people, but it had already recognised the zombie towers was kind of a crazy idea for a place like The Spit. This may explain ASF’s uninspiring involvement in the public consultation process, as if Chien knew all along he was on a hiding to nothing. Trad said the Donaldson report had ‘raised significant community concerns around public transport, traffic, building heights and green space and these impacts were not able to be mitigated appropriately within the plan presented by ASF . . . ’ (Keen & Skene 2017, p. 5). ASF never produced any public documentation showing detailed engineering designs to bust the road chaos around the zombie towers.

The *Bulletin* tried to push the whole sorry mess back at Palaszczuk. ‘On Tuesday the Gold Coast was told the ASF resort was scrapped to save The Spit. Now the state government says it was to save the $700 million it would have cost to build this brunnel’, with a photo shopped imaginary brunnel spearing into the Broadwater (“A Bridge Too Far” 2017, p. 1). What tortuous logic. The *Bulletin* was suggesting it would be a good idea for Queenslanders to spend $700 million on a ludicrous folly to facilitate a casino.

The dummy spit: not from Chien, he had slunk off quietly, disappearing like he arrived, without anyone noticing. Chien was ultimately a type regularly coming and going on the Gold Coast, another would be big timer biting off more than he could chew. No, the dummy spit came from you know who. A few hours after Palaszczuk killed off the zombie towers, Soheil Abedian declared he felt sorry for ASF. ‘They have spent so much time and energy. I’ve been through it, spent millions and it didn’t happen. We’re big boys and can move on. Is it easy? No’ (Keen & Potts 2017, p. 6). Appropriate
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remarks from a corporate figure of Abedian’s stature. The next day, the serene prince was cutting loose.

We are happy to approve mining that destroyed our environment and not to approve hotels that is the cleanest industry in the world. Nobody believed this would happen. There was a level of understanding the government might come back and say not 40 storeys but maybe 20. If somebody wants to bring $3 billion in, is that viable for three levels, seriously? They want to invest that much into the economy and we don’t want it? (Keen & Skene 2017, p. 5).

Casino was the word here that dare not speak its name. But a casino was what Abedian and all the other spruikers were talking about. Casinos are not the cleanest industry in the world, they are sanctuaries for organised crime, prostitution and low wage jobs, not guaranteed to kick start or sustain local economies. The Spit is nothing like a remote mine site. The zombie towers would have destroyed a natural environment enjoyed by many thousands of people. Of course, three storeys is not viable for a $3 billion investment, that’s the point. The only reason ASF wanted five towers up to forty stories is because ASF was too ambitious, chasing the biggest possible profit, although the precise number of stories was never conceded. The development gang did not want to believe ASF would be knocked back because they refused to appreciate times had changed, the dominance of developers on the Gold Coast was no longer absolute. Abedian’s level of understanding was in fact a gross misunderstanding.

Finally, the thorn of financial compensation. Was ASF entitled to some kind of refund on outlays or was the $3 billion bid to wreck The Spit simply no more if the Queensland state government said so? No one was talking about what triggers for reimbursement, if any, had been agreed between the Newman government and ASF. ASF was the only bidder allowed so really there was no need for such secrecy, unless both parties, ASF
and the Queensland state government, reckoned they each stood a better chance in any renegotiations over The Spit by minimising public scrutiny. If so, no surprises there, corporates and politicians usually agree it can be a good thing to keep people in the dark. But not Gold Coast town planning consultant Ross Heatley, he wanted to shine a light. In March 2017, five months before Palaszczuk knocked out the zombie towers, Heatley claimed the China State Construction Engineering Corporation, the Chinese state owned enterprise member of the ASF Consortium, had advised him the Queensland state government was exposed to a possible $1.2 billion legal claim by ASF after Palaszczuk had shifted the casino site from the Broadwater to The Spit (Klan 2017a, p. 2). Heatley wanted to know if the Newman government had failed to include a standard contract clause voiding liability for costs incurred bidding on government projects (Klan 2017a, p. 2). Was the $1.2 billion figure an ambit claim to pressure the Queensland state government to approve the ASF bid? Or was it just background noise?

On the day of the coup de grace, Chien indicated ASF would consider chasing compensation while Lynham, the state development minister, claimed the state was entitled to back out of the ASF deal (Potts & Skene 2017, p. 5). Abedian argued ‘compensation needs to be paid to the future generations, not us developers. It is the youth that have lost their faith in the way we are managing our responsibilities’ (Keen & Skene 2017, p. 5). Rather than accepting developers themselves should be accountable for doing whatever they like, young people generally have lost faith in Abedian’s generation for trashing the planet.

A month after the coup de grace, ASF announced a $19.5 million annual loss. The Spit debacle had cost $12 million. ASF had also failed to win approval to redevelop a 10 hectare site at London’s Royal Docks. The ASF annual report said negotiations were proceeding with the Queensland state government to seek a ‘suitable and equitable
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conclusion’ to the zombie towers fiasco (Skene 2017d, p. 23). Chien had toughened up. ‘If negotiations do not progress in a timely and fair manner, ASF will be left with no alternative than to commence legal action’, he said (“ASF threat over Spit rejection” 2017, p. 3).

Six months later, Gold Coasters learned compensation for ASF had been settled. ASF’s public financial statements referred to $9 million paid by the Palaszczuk government after the integrated resort bid was knocked out, on top of $4 million previously paid when the Broadwater proposal was shifted to The Spit. ASF’s David Fang was doing the talking this time. ‘Obviously this is not our ideal outcome, it’s a reimbursement of some of our costs. Obviously it didn’t cover all of our costs’ (Skene 2018, p. 4). A Queensland state government statement said the ASF settlement was commercial in confidence (Skene 2018, p. 4). Well, not really in confidence because ASF had published it for all to see. The principle of commercial in confidence aims to prevent advantage or disadvantage accruing to parties or the general public as a result of financial contract information being publicly available. But commercial in confidence is so abused to keep government dealings secret it might as well be called tell you nothing and hope you don’t find out, move along now, because governments in late modernity are infiltrated and under so much scrutiny by greed and vested interests they jump at shadows around every corner. Best try to have everything under wraps. The Queensland state government statement said reimbursement was made for ‘some reasonable costs incurred during the procurement process’ (Skene 2018, p. 4). The compensation payments to ASF roughly equated to ASF’s spending on The Spit bid.

And so the public cost of not doing business with ASF at The Spit was $13 million, a whole lot of public money that could have been productively spent elsewhere. The $13 million had bought the status quo, no privatisation of public assets. In the neoliberal
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ascendancy, The Spit fiasco showed property developers may be publicly insured against failure. First world capitalism, of which neoliberalism may be the end game, does not discriminate against chancers like ASF, it invites anyone to roll the dice. All you need is a stake, which may be borrowed or promised. ASF was no different from the pokies addicts and high rollers it wanted to exploit at The Spit, except for one important distinction. ASF had its losses covered by people like me.

ASF ought to have been more than relieved with its $13 million go away payment, because three weeks after the zombie towers were knocked out the Chinese government pulled the pin on ‘irrational’ overseas property development, specifically banning spending on hotel casinos (Needham 2017, see also O’Keefe 2017, p. 22, Wilmot 2017, p. 25). Chinese deal makers financing high stakes property plays in Australia via Chinese-based corporations effectively had their credit cards cancelled. The Chinese government was instead prioritising the Belt and Road initiative (Needham 2017), financing new transport and military hubs across Asia and the Pacific to support China’s trade and geopolitical ambitions.

Chien’s vague claim that ASF had access to as much easy money as it wanted always sounded like a fanciful boast, now it was hogwash. Indeed, if the Palaszczuk government had given approval for the zombie towers, ASF would have been $3 billion short, hunting for a lender and probably a new consortium partner. Palaszczuk may have been forced to reassess the ASF project or even reopen the tendering process, triggering a back to the future you can’t be serious moment as Gold Coast residents, developers, politicians and bureaucrats yet again staggered on board The Spit roller coaster.

Annastascia Palaszczuk’s announcement to dump the zombie towers did more than save The Spit. Labor won the Queensland state election in November 2017 with its parliamentary majority almost unchanged and it picked up a seat in the Gold Coast
hinterland, Gaven, with a 3.5 per cent swing and a 0.7 per cent margin. The nearest ocean beach for Gaven voters is at The Spit. The Gaven margin was the second narrowest in Queensland but a win is a win. Gaven’s new Labor MP, Meaghan Scanlon, became the youngest ever woman in the Queensland parliament at age twenty-four. A new electorate near The Spit, Bonney, after a boundary redraw, was narrowly won by the Liberal National Party with a 2.2 per cent margin. Two other staunchly conservative electorates near The Spit, Broadwater and Southport, were retained by the LNP.

Killing the zombie towers therefore did not harm Labor electorally, not at all. Near The Spit, Labor picked up one seat and came within striking distance of a second. Of the ten Gold Coast electorates in the Queensland parliament, only Gaven and Bonney recorded significant Labor support at the 2017 election. Politically, Palaszczuk had made the right call, even though the zombie towers would have guaranteed increased gambling tax revenue for a state with huge public debt. Labor in south-east Queensland relies on Greens support. If Palaszczuk had not dumped the zombie towers, the resistance would have run hostile pro-environment candidates. Palaszczuk simply could not afford to trash The Spit. Meaghan Scanlon won Gaven with Greens preferences. The Greens candidate in Gaven was Sally Spain, whose loud commentary had so annoyed the Abedian pack when the Gold Coast City Council voted down Sunland’s twin towers.

The Palaszczuk government’s bold refusal to approve a $3 billion private bid for one of Australia’s most valuable urban beach zones demonstrated how imperfect democratic processes of public debate, public consultation and a free and fair poll of citizens can subvert an inflexible development at all costs dominant ideology. Reason enough for optimism.
A stiff wind

The zombie towers casino would have been a honey pot for the cruisers arriving across the road at Tom Tate’s cruise ship terminal, maybe the big deal that might have miraculously turned around Price Waterhouse Cooper’s very pessimistic terminal analysis. If Tate was hurting, he was refusing to be beaten, like a rugby forward crumpled by a shoulder charge, down on his haunches, sucking in air, then back up, good to go, flashing the big grin, more indestructible cyborg than Python black knight, something Promethean about him. For Tate, Palaszczuk’s coup de grace was only a flesh wound and the Chinese government pulling back finance for overseas casino resorts was not the end of the world. Big spenders from Singapore, Taiwan, Japan and the Middle East would be the ‘next bunch of people wanting to invest’ on the Gold Coast (“Tate: China drama won’t hurt Coast” 2017, p. 3).

Palaszczuk quickly moved on, her new message echoing have-a-go Tate. ASF was down and out at The Spit but the Gold Coast was still open for business, what developers and investors wanted to hear. Palaszczuk advised the Gold Coast City Council to ‘continue their work’ on the cruise ship terminal (“Cruise ship base ‘still viable’ ” 2017, p. 4). The Queensland state government looked forward to ‘seeing the results’ of the terminal business case (“Cruise ship base ‘still viable’ ” 2017, p. 4). Palaszczuk had reassured ASF, embrace the consultation process, demonstrate public support. Now she was reassuring Tate, tell us how your terminal might stack up. Saving The Spit from zombie towers and keeping economic sentiment buoyant are not mutually exclusive. This was the Premier’s job after all, to inspire confidence. At the same time, it was unlikely a Tate-led business case for a cruise ship terminal would disprove Price Waterhouse Cooper’s harsh assessment and who really believed Palaszczuk was going to approve a terminal on The Spit after declaring The Spit needed to be preserved?
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The uniquely speaking Mayor did not have a lot to say in the first days after the zombie towers were put to the sword but he made himself clear. The cruise ship terminal was still ‘smooth sailing’ and despite the inclusion of Philip Park in what would now become the public consultation process for a Spit master plan, Tate insisted the park remained the terminal’s onshore staging post (Skene, Emery & Keen 2017, p. 5). He reckoned Palaszczuk had made a ‘political decision’ to dump the zombie towers (Potts 2017b, p. 4), implying that he was prepared to wait for the Liberal National Party to return to government and presumably re-embrace high rise and a terminal on The Spit.

Trouble was, Tate’s allies seemed to be gently letting him down. A few weeks after Palaszczuk killed the zombie towers, one of the key terminal lieutenants, Darren Scott, the Gold Coast City Council economic development and major projects director, abruptly quit (Weston 2017c, p. 8). Politicians’ snouts are always in the air, sniffing the wind. During the 2017 Queensland state election campaign, Surfers Paradise MP John Paul Langbroek reckoned he supported a cruise ship terminal for the Gold Coast, ‘it’s just a matter of finding a place . . . it needs to stack up economically, environmentally and have community support’ (Muir 2017, p. 18). So, taken at his word, that was probably no from Langbroek to a terminal on The Spit. Langbroek is a former LNP Queensland Opposition leader. The LNP’s successful Broadwater candidate, David Crisafulli, accepted the Gold Coast deserved a cruise ship terminal, provided ‘the logistics . . . stack up, if it can be done financially . . . in the right place and overcome . . . planning hurdles’ (Weston 2017, p. 5). Again, probably no to a Spit terminal. A Gold Coast Bulletin online poll on the eve of the 2017 state election found only 6.8 per cent of 807 respondents prioritised a terminal (“What our readers want” 2017, p. 3). Online opinion polls are not always reliable, but this was a remarkable departure from most other polling, suggesting waning enthusiasm.
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A cruise ship terminal on The Spit might have missed the boat or, to put it another way, the window of opportunity for a Spit terminal, if there ever was one, seemed to be closing as the terminal’s political viability declined. Public policy analyst Joseph Overton has described the range of ideas tolerated in public discourse extending across a spectrum or window from popular to unacceptable (Denniss 2017, p. 188). Overton’s Window can open or close as public attitudes change. In Australia, the window is closing on cigarette smoking in public places and has opened for gay marriage. It may soon be open for legalising marijuana. A cruise ship terminal on The Spit might have been a good idea when the White Shoe Brigade was rampant, not when thousands of protesters rallied to save The Spit.

Tate always seemed to believe he would find a solution to getting the terminal done, exhibiting the confidence of someone able to buy whatever they want. Palaszczuk had signalled back in 2016, six months after Tate was re-elected, that a new $100 million cruise ship terminal planned by the Port of Brisbane could mean the end of Tate’s terminal dream. ‘I think you’ll find there may not be a need for that . . . cruise ship terminal on the Gold Coast,’ Palaszczuk said (Simonot 2016a, p. 4). The Queensland state government approved the new Brisbane terminal project in 2017. The following year, the Port of Brisbane and Carnival Australia reached agreement for Carnival to operate out of the new Brisbane terminal by mid-2020 (Wray 2018, p. 5).

Tate looked as if he might be last man standing, the only one taking a cruise ship terminal at The Spit seriously anymore. The whole sorry affair was curdling into something that might be humoured, a dinner party joke, except it was serious because millions of dollars administered for the people of the Gold Coast by their local government, to be spent on public infrastructure and public services, had been chewed up paying for advice trying to prove the Mayor’s personal indulgence was a great idea.
And yet, Tate had won two elections campaigning for a cruise ship terminal at The Spit, challenging people not to vote for him if they did not want a terminal. How does that reconcile? Gold Coasters know what Tate looks like. We notice him because he is loud, cartoonish and all over the local media. He stands out. No one else on the Gold Coast is as instantly recognisable. In some perverse way we are entertained by him. When genuine representative leadership has evaporated, it is enough to act like a leader because that is the only leadership we have.

By valuing less what is good for many, ignoring more than ever the right thing to do, political leaders have sunk so low we struggle harder to take them seriously, if we bother struggling at all, resigned to their worthless promises, so long as we are not personally hurt by their haphazard decision making. Thousands of Gold Coasters are passionate about preserving The Spit, others are interested in the perceived economic benefits of a cruise ship terminal. The Mayor is elected by all Gold Coasters and a great many of them are happy to vote for someone they recognise simply as a loud and proud Gold Coast advocate.

You can fool some of the people most of the time but not all the time. In May 2018, Tate’s messenger, the *Gold Coast Bulletin*, finally pulled the plug, withdrawing support for The Spit terminal after publishing redacted details from the damning Price Waterhouse Cooper feasibility study. Although still a hegemonic agent for the pro-development gang, the *Bulletin* at last agreed with Blind Freddy. The redacted information included the possibility that local community groups may seek an injunction to prevent terminal construction work on The Spit’s ocean beach and at Federation Walk. As well, cruise passengers would be stuck in road traffic snarls approaching and leaving the terminal, an exposed terminal jetty with no wind or wave...
protection had limited international precedent and cruise operators were concerned heavy weather could make the terminal unsafe (Weston 2018, pp. 4-5).

The *Bulletin* is a massive supporter of any project that promotes economic development and prosperity, but not at the expense of common sense. It is folly to keep pursuing this proposal. It has to be sunk (“Too many risks in terminal plan” 2018, p. 18).

Tate was sailing into a stiff wind. Nine days after the *Bulletin* withdrew support, the newspaper reported Tate insisting it was ‘wrong’ to say ratepayers would pay for construction of the terminal (Weston 2018b, p. 8). ‘We are currently getting the project design and business case finalised. That is what ratepayers are investing in,’ he said (Weston 2018b, p. 8). Tate was fine tuning his rhetoric, no longer saying ratepayers will not pay for the terminal, rather they will not pay to build it, but they will pay to try to convince the Queensland state government it should be built, even though building it was increasingly unlikely, like throwing cash out the window, not a great investment when you think about it for a few seconds. On the same day, the *Bulletin* revealed a Gold Coast City Council officers’ report had outlined a public-private partnership in which the council would fund the terminal design and construction from existing cash reserves, retain revenue from port charges and then sell or lease the terminal to a private operator (Weston 2018b, p. 8). So when are ratepayers’ funds not ratepayers’ funds? If the existing cash reserves of a local council do not belong to ratepayers, who do they belong to?

A month later, in June 2018, Tate signed a memorandum of understanding with the new Queensland State Development Minister, Cameron Dick, setting out how to assess the cruise ship terminal proposal within The Spit master plan process. The memorandum of understanding ensured the state team investigating the master plan would consider the
‘built form, access arrangements, servicing layout and infrastructure components’ of a terminal at Philip Park (Potts & Weston 2018, p. 22). Again, here was Palaszczuk’s strategy: give developers chasing access to public space a reasonable opportunity to make their case. Inviting a detailed development application, no matter how preposterous, enables a defensible response, rather than ruling something out with a wave of the hand.

The Spit master plan investigation and consultation dragged on. The Palaszczuk government could not be accused of unnecessary haste. In May 2019, the State Development Department asked Gold Coast City Council to explain how the removal of twenty-five hectares of public land at The Spit for a cruise ship terminal might impact on demand for other Gold Coast parks. The department also noted the removal of 317 public car parking spaces from Philip Park and large numbers of passengers coming and going from cruise ships might discourage beachgoers on The Spit (Weston 2019a, p. 12). More than discouraged, surfers, swimmers, fishers, hikers and dog walkers would be outraged.

**Appalling behaviour**

Tate’s flying out of tight corners approach to Gold Coast politics was not without personal risk. In April 2017, three months before Palaszczuk delivered the coup de grace on The Spit, Tate was subpoenaed and gave evidence under oath to the Queensland Crime and Corruption Commission.

The CCC was inquiring into campaign funding for candidates at the 2016 Queensland local government elections, focusing on the regional councils surrounding Brisbane: Gold Coast, Redlands, Moreton Bay, Ipswich and Logan. On the Gold Coast, the
commission examined if a group of candidates had campaigned together as a secret party-aligned bloc, passing themselves off to voters as independents, if campaign funding was transparent, without hiding the sources of funding, and if successful candidates funded by developers were able to avoid conflicts of interest. Tate’s personal wealth had quarantined him from allegations of being on the take from anyone. He paid himself for his re-election campaign, spending at least $180,000 (Weston 2017e, p. 6). But he was caught on a technicality, using a personal bank account, not the legally required stand alone campaign account, with no evidence of improper receipts, not so bad. Unusually, this time Tate turned out to be a bit player.

Tate told the commission counsel, Glenn Rice QC, he had been unaware until after the 2016 poll that he needed a separate campaign funding account, even though his campaign funding was transparent because it was his own money and it would not be any more transparent if he shifted his money from one account to another (Emery 2017, p. 4). This ignores the question: what stops developers seeking council support from depositing money via third parties into a candidate’s personal bank account? Tate suggested the best funding model for a local council election campaign was for candidates to fund themselves, with a cap on how much anyone could spend because not everyone could afford a big spending campaign (Emery 2017, p. 4). After giving his sworn evidence, Tate was asked by reporters outside the commission how ordinary citizens wanting to run for council might afford to fund their own campaigns. ‘If you’re on the dole on the Gold Coast, you should stop surfing and get a job,’ he replied. He then requested he not be filmed hurrying to his car because he did not want to look as if he was running away.

Six months later, the Crime and Corruption Commission announced no one would be prosecuted over developer donations to candidates and other related conduct in the 2016
Gold Coast City Council election campaign. The commission found Tate and two other candidates had not complied with electoral laws, but decided it was not in the public interest to pursue charges because a 12-month time period for prosecution had elapsed. As well, there was no evidence candidates had operated as part of a bloc, they had filed amended funding disclosures and the offences were of a systemic nature (McKenna 2017, p. 5), that is, they were probably not the only ones. The commission recommended developer donations be banned, election campaign spending capped, all donations be publicly declared within seven days, all candidates to declare political affiliations and the definition of illegal blocs of candidates include candidates using shared resources.

Tate fired off a ‘strongly worded submission’ to the Crime and Corruption Commission chairman, Alan MacSporran QC, arguing the donations ban should be extended to trade unions ‘given these organisations are frequently operating in the same industry sector as developers’ (Weston 2017d, p. 6). MacSporran was having none of that, pointing out union donations to candidates were routinely disclosed and there was no evidence they improperly influenced decision-making (Weston 2018a, pp. 4-5). The ‘corrupting risk’ of developers, on the other hand, was a ‘far greater evil’ than banning developer donations (O’Brien 2017). As for Tate, MacSporran said:

I don’t think it’s fair to say that we’ve given him a free pass. We have, in public, exposed his behaviour, which frankly . . . is appalling. We’ve proposed how it can be corrected and we lose nothing, in our view, by failing to recommend that he be prosecuted, bearing in mind that these offences carry modest fines and soak up huge resources in progressing them to a prosecution stage (O’Brien 2017).
Tate strutted away, but not the Labor mayoral candidate, Penny Toland, she was not so lucky. Toland was convicted of perjury with an 18-month suspended jail sentence after telling the Crime and Corruption Commission she had been unaware of a $38,000 campaign donation from the notorious Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union, until she saw her face supersized on the back of a bus (Barnsley 2019). Toland did not disclose the union payment to the Queensland Electoral Commission. She told the inquiry she had believed she needed only to disclose donations gifted in kind or paid directly to her, but the inquiry found her ignorance did ‘not seem credible’ and she had known about the paid advertising when submitting her disclosure forms after the election (Weston & Emery 2017, p. 7). The Palaszczuk government slowly but surely over the next two years went about adopting the Crime and Corruption Commission recommendations. No more developer donations, no more secret party affiliations, no more undeclared blocs. Don’t hold your breath.

Tate was nothing if not resilient. He had everything thrown at him but stayed on his feet. The sale of the city council owned Bruce Bishop Car Park in Surfers Paradise, in which Tate’s financial involvement with a property development company was publicly exposed, gave rise to Save Surfers Paradise, another resistance group. Save Surfers Paradise failed to stop the car park sale but complained to the CCC, asserting Tate had not properly disclosed his personal business interests. Save Black Swan Lake, with Greens candidate Spain in the vanguard, complained to the CCC about the transfer of a Gold Coast City Council owned urban run-off lake to the Gold Coast Turf Club for redevelopment as a car park and horse training facility, despite an objectors’ petition with 40,000 names. The CCC found nothing corrupt in the car park deal or the lake disposal (Kinsella 2019; Weston 2019, p. 4). Official corruption is precisely defined in legislation and requires proof that must stand up in court.
Tate had pushed a radical development agenda many people on the Gold Coast believed was dangerously wrong and he rubbed their noses in it, doubly infuriating because he remained the trash talking mayor, proving a majority of voters did not mind or pay much attention or these days are so conditioned by rubbish media they prefer their political leaders to behave like warring talent on reality TV.

Three months after Palaszczuk killed the zombie towers, Tate was in hospital for bowel cancer surgery. He was soon back at work. ‘I feel like I have been given a second chance,’ he said (“Tate beats his cancer” 2017). A desperate, defiant attempt to identify a casino site at Southport soon floundered (Kinsella 2017). On the eve of the Gold Coast Commonwealth Games, Tate appeared prone on the front page of the *Gold Coast Bulletin*, photographed as he was baptised in a lake near Surfers Paradise. Tate’s legacy will be more than a bad dream to build a cruise ship terminal and a casino at The Spit. He had overseen construction of Australia’s biggest regional arts complex, Home of the Arts, or HOTA, on a redeveloped civic centre site next to the lake.

The master plan process for The Spit dragged on, still unfinished in 2020, slowly moving towards state government approval for boardwalks, public pavilions, limited low-rise accommodation and a marina in the Broadwater. Property developers no longer view The Spit as ripe for exploitation. Instead, they gaze ruefully at what might have been or do not gaze at all. Local resistance to unfettered property development on the Gold Coast is unlikely to dissipate anytime soon. There is very little chance a cruise ship terminal or a casino resort will ever be built at The Spit. The single road in and out and the narrow shape of The Spit will always constrain development, no matter which political party is in power.
Thousands of residents and day trippers continue to picnic and walk dogs along The Spit, run small pleasure craft across the Broadwater and, if they are surfers, make their way to the exquisite barrelling waves of The Other Side.

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Pandanus Accounting

From: Rick Williams [rick.williams@griffith.edu.au]
Sent: 19 May 2016 4:00 PM
To: Ed Southorn
Cc: Andy Bennett
Subject: Re: Ed Southorn PhD

Mr Southorn

Thank you for the additional information.

Based on the information provided I believe your proposed research is exempt for human ethics review under section 4.5 (Journalistic Output) of Booklet 17 of the Griffith University Research Ethics Manual.

Please contact me again if any adverse events occur or if any concerns or complaints are received about the ethical conduct of this research, or if the project is suspended or discontinued for any reason.

Regards

On 19 May 2016 at 11:57, Ed Southorn <ed7gold@bigpond.com> wrote:

Dear Mr Williams,

Further to our phone discussion this morning about ethical issues, I am writing to confirm that my PhD is to be researched and written as journalism, i.e. long-form, narrative journalism underpinned by wide-ranging theoretical research and content but fundamentally journalism, taking into account the journalism code of ethics including my experience using that code in my previous 30-year career as a newspaper journalist. All interviews will be conducted by me with the recorded consent of the interview subject, including their consent for me to use quotations and other information provided by them as I would see fit for the purposes of the PhD in line with the journalism code of ethics. All other information in the public domain in relation to public figures to be used by me for the PhD also would take into account the journalism code of ethics.

Best regards,

Ed Southorn

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