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'The Core of the City': Public Parks, Respectability and Civic Regulation in Sydney

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Abstract *City parks and gardens were public places where popular and official interpretations of respectability and civic identity were negotiated. In Sydney, increasingly comprehensive regulations governing behaviour in the Botanic Gardens, the Domain and Hyde Park were introduced from the 1850s to the early 1900s. They evinced hostility towards many aspects of existing urban culture. These regulations were not always welcomed by park users. The culture of Sydney's public parks and gardens continued to demonstrate a strong popular sense of civic rights and respectability.*

Australia became a nation in a park. Within an ornate plaster pavilion in Sydney's Centennial Park on 1 January 1901, Governor General Lord Hopetoun took his oath of office and the six Australian colonies were federated. The population of the capital had swelled for the week-long festivities, and on that day alone the park hosted up to 250,000 people gathering to watch a ceremony intended to give expression to the meaning of nationhood. Sydney's prominence in the celebrations stood in contrast to the developing association between a unique national 'type' typified by rural workers such as shearers and stockmen, and the landscape — the Australian bush. It did accord, however, with the reality that by 1901 Sydney was home to over one-third of the population of New South Wales. Indeed at the moment of Federation, the majority of Australians were living in urban, or at least suburban, environments.

Despite the appeal of the bush mythology, many recognised the inevitability of this urbanism, and town planning and urban reform were becoming major issues by the time of Federation. Concern with 'the stamina of the race' and the need to create 'decent living conditions for the masses' led prominent town planning enthusiast, Labour politician and city councillor, J.D. Fitzgerald to declare that if 'the destiny of a progressive race is fixed as that of town-dwellers in the future, then country conditions must, so far as possible, be combined with city conveniences'.[1]

Creating and maintaining parks was the key to this combination. They were, therefore, important spaces for the formation of national identity. They were the arenas in which the minds and bodies of 'the people' or the citizenry were cultivated and the spaces in which elaborate and defining civic rituals took place. Yet they were also places for everyday civic interaction and discourse. Recalling the classical and renaissance connection between the city, the citizen and the public arena, Fitzgerald saw these places as formative arenas for the consolidation of social democracy:

> The principal park is the core of a city. It should be the centre of communal life; its attractions should draw the varied ranks of a civic democracy, till all are raised by the common ownership and the common enjoyment of the air,

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> the scenery, the flowers, the music, the attractions of a modern park, to a plane superior to class divisions, and above the distinctions of a bank account.[2]

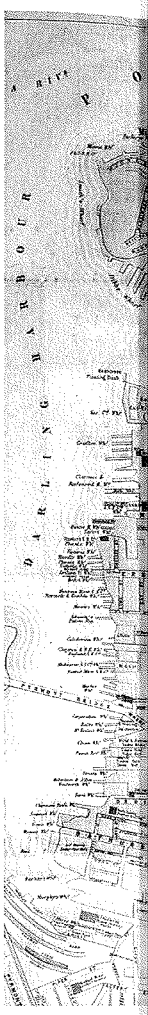
My interest here is in exploring this ideal of the park as democratic civic core.

Sydney's central area was comparatively well endowed with green space. These parklands and gardens were particularly interesting sites for the cultural contest between reformers, administrators and the everyday users of the public parks. Where the relatively new and capacious Centennial Park sat at the city's periphery surrounded by the well-to-do, accommodating their passion for golf, cricket and carriage rides, the central parks hosted a much more heterogenous usership. The Botanic Gardens, the Domain and Hyde Park sat amidst the commercial bustle of the city with its mixture of people — the middle classes who had not fled to the commuter suburbs, city workers, the working families of the nearby inner suburbs, bohemians and radical intellectuals, the homeless, the destitute, the urban gangs of larrikins. The years leading up to and immediately following Federation saw the development of a culture of respectability that frequently opposed patterns of urban culture rooted both in traditional and new working-class activities.[3] Where the cricket grounds and tennis courts of Centennial Park testified to the passion for rational sport — albeit for those who could afford the club membership — the regulation in Sydney's city parks and gardens evinced a desire to shape popular urban culture through the creation of regulated passive recreational spaces for a 'respectable citizenry' (Figure 1).

Citizenship in Federation-era Australia was less a legal construct than a cultural one. As Australians remained subjects of the Queen after the creation of the Commonwealth, a constitutional definition of citizen was problematic. The ability to vote was rarely a criterion in itself. Women in the suffrage movement claimed the status while they were still disenfranchised.[4] Citizenship was, however, intimately entwined with cultural presumptions. Race was important as few white Australians welcomed the idea that Asians or blacks could be citizens. So was respectability. As Helen Irving has noted, the framers of Australia's new constitution could hardly agree upon a definition of the citizen extending beyond a general implication of 'responsible, respectable, sober enough to participate'.[5]

The depth of this association was evident in the illustration that accompanied Fitzgerald's description of civic park space in the popular political and literary journal *Lone Hand*. Lionel Lindsay, one of Australia's foremost illustrators, depicted an 'open air restaurant' in the Domain at which well-dressed adults and children enjoyed alfresco dining and views of the Harbour. This remarkably passive vision of respectability was far removed from the vibrant, assertive culture that had developed in those parks. There is an extraordinary disjunction between this image and the 'varied ranks' of civic democracy referred to by Fitzgerald in his text. That the imagined Parisian-style eatery was located in the park that had long been the site of Sydney's public oratory and popular civic action, highlights the omission. On the one hand, it reflects the rejection of urban working-class culture as something 'pestilential', to use in Fitzgerald's own term.[6] On the other hand, it reflects broadly both the transition from a 'culture-debating' to 'culture-consuming' public identified by Jurgen Habermas, and the general Australian middle-class abandonment of the ideal of public space and the public meeting as arenas for civil discourse[7] (Figure 2).

What follows is an exploration of the intersection of the reformist vision of civic order and respectability in the Domain, Hyde Park and the Botanic Gardens with the realities



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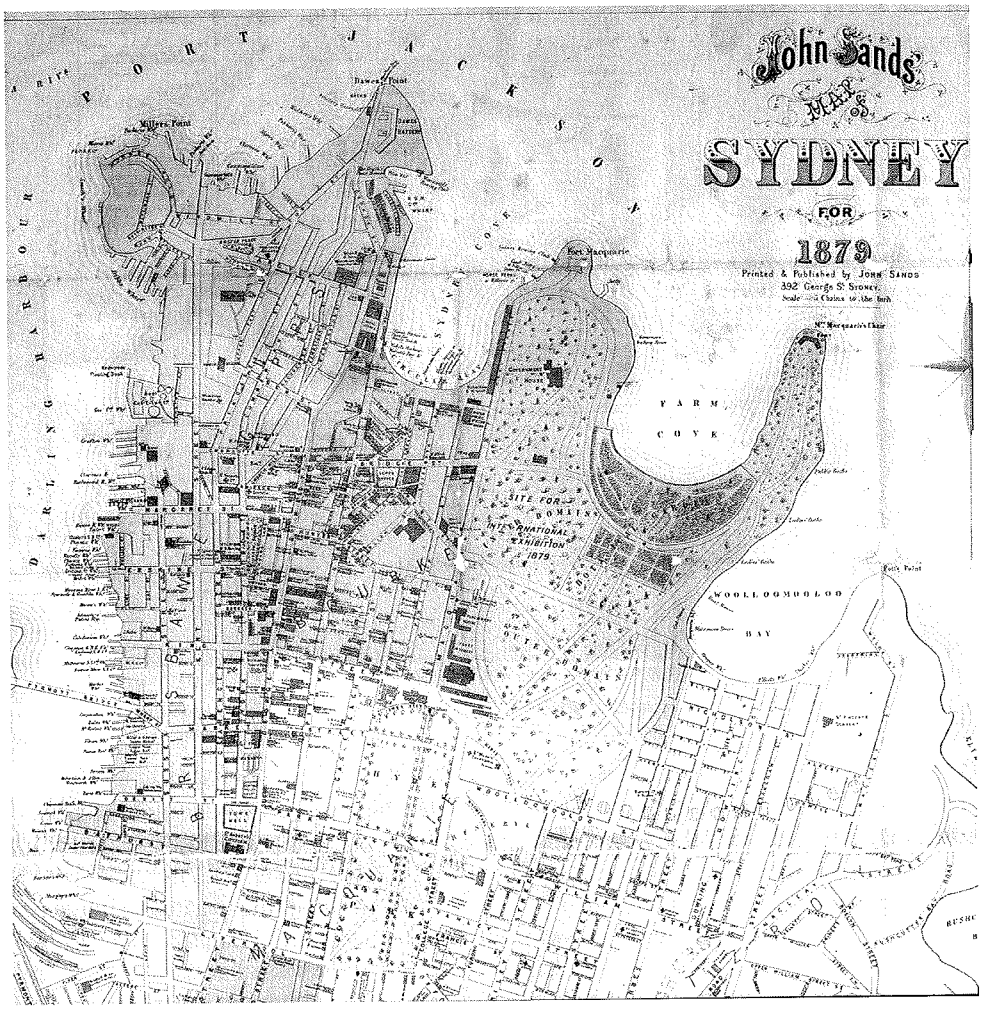

FIGURE 1. This map detail shows clearly the centrality of Sydney's public parks and gardens. The Botanic Gardens are surrounded by the Domain, with Hyde Park to the southwest. (Reproduced courtesy of the State Library of New South Wales.)

of everyday expressions of citizenship. It is not a simple juxtaposition of the official and the popular, although as in the case of J.D. Fitzgerald, the line drawn between these was often stark. Occasionally, there was negotiation on the side of the regulators and a desire for order on the part of the regulated. Where Fitzgerald chose to ignore the reality of an organic civic culture, fellow reformer J.H. Maiden, who managed the Domain and the Botanic Gardens, recognised the significance of the former space for the local working-class communities. The Domain, he declared, was a space that was 'bound up with the life and welfare of the people ... with certain aspects of social life: open air games, but above all, the development of the political instinct'. It was 'the open-air platform of the democracy'.[8]

Regulation in Sydney's civic spaces was rationalised with reference to its democratic ends — of maintaining parks for the citizenry. Nonetheless, in the course of regulation, parks became terrains in which various legitimate and illegitimate constituencies were

MRS. MACQUARIE'S CHAIR—IF THERE WERE AN OPEN-AIR RESTAURANT.

FIGURE 2. From *Lone Hand*, June 1907.

defined and constructed. Within this outwardly democratic representation of public space there was an ongoing tension between who and who was not to be regarded as the legitimate users of public space: of who would constitute the citizens in the parks.

The ideal of a homogeneous civic culture held within it the desire to eradicate 'hybrid' space where various types of people co-existed and mingled. Those who conformed to the dominant ideal of respectability encompassed in regulations and didactic displays were recognised as citizens. Those who did not were rhetorically excluded from the body corporate and, as such, also ran the risk of physical exclusion from the public spaces dedicated to 'the people'. Some, with their own expectations of right of access to public parks, challenged official representations of civility through the articulation of civic rights. Others, in particular, the homeless, prostitutes and urban gangs, laid claim to the parks through simple occupation.

Anxiety

Sydney's parks and common grounds had provoked anxiety and disgust among a variety of residents and commentators for decades. They were places of potential and realised disorder. By their very definition as public places, they facilitated the mingling of people and, therefore, the exposure of the self-consciously respectable to the offensive sights, sounds and smells associated with the lower orders. Of course, parks shared this function with the street, but their very spaciousness made them difficult to police. Disorderly crowds could gather while vegetation provided cover to those seeking to avoid surveillance for their nefarious activities. Promenading or resting in public parks brought with them the ever-present risk of danger, or at least affront.

The dedication of Hyde Park by Governor Macquarie in 1810 was part of a broad-ranging set of regulations intended to improve and promote order in the port town that was both a commercial and administrative centre for the colony of convicts, emancipated convicts and free settlers. Having initially been cleared of its vegetation and turned into a common for grazing and horse racing, Hyde Park continued to serve a variety of uses which, in turn, facilitated considerable mixing among the classes in the first half of the century. Fronted by some of Sydney's finest houses, the Park also provided a convenient pitch for members of the Australian Club to play cricket. Gigs and broughams of the wealthy passed through the Park on southbound excursions and couples promenaded. Yet these genteel recreations existed alongside violence, noise, smells and disorderly crowds. The Hyde Park trough, around which water carters and the urban poor gathered to collect water, was a regular site of fighting.[9] Military drills, riotous horse races, organised prize fighting, cock fights and stormy political meetings were also commonplace. That officers and gentleman frequently attended and enjoyed the disorderly gatherings suggested the existence of a shared urban culture.[10]

From 1854, Hyde Park was managed by a body of trustees who ruled until 1903 with the power of 'absolute owners (except for the purposes of alienation)'.[11] Despite plantings, well-defined pathways and eventually the erection of a cast iron fence and sandstone pillars, Hyde Park continued to host both passionate crowds and what one journal referred to as 'social wrecks'.[12] In 1878 it was the venue of a 'very large anti-Chinese meeting' which resulted in 2,000 'larrikins' departing the park to terrorise Chinese residents in Lower George Street. In that same year a 'riot' erupted amid a crowd of 5,000 people when, during a Sunday open air sermon, Pastor Daniel Allen used 'violent language' to attack Catholicism.[13]

Macquarie had set aside Hyde Park after sequestering the area that had originally been the government farm to ensure 'Seclusion from the public Gaze' for himself and Mrs Macquarie. The Governor's 'Desmene', as it was known, was shortly after made available for the leisurely use of Sydney's 'respectable class of Inhabitants' — a term in the penal colony which meant officers, administrators and wealthier merchants. In 1816, the Governor's garden within the Domain became the colony's Botanic Garden. Macquarie was an enlightened Governor who believed in the rehabilitation of convicts, but he guarded his exclusive Domain carefully with edicts, punishments and the construction of a wall. Nonetheless the area was still 'frequented by lewd, disorderly Men and Women for the most indecent improper purposes'.[14] Macquarie's harsh treatment of 'trespassers' was condemned by many. After his departure, the Domain fell into disrepair. By the late 1820s, wooded and rocky areas of the Domain were the recognised 'haunt' of 'runaway prisoners of the Crown', of smugglers and carousing members of the lower classes.[15]

Twenty years later, with a new Governor's mansion and grounds securely set behind a fence, the Domain had been given over to the public. The popular presence was still enough to stigmatise parts of the reserve in the minds of the class-conscious elite. While the increasingly exclusive 'respectable classes' could still venture into the open space of the Inner Domain to watch inter-colonial cricket matches or promenade around the Botanic Garden within, the Outer Domain where Mrs Macquarie once enjoyed her private carriage drives was being abandoned to the lower orders. In 1840, Louisa Meredith, recently arrived from Britain, noted with some sarcasm the preference of the 'fair wives and daughters of the "citizens" ' for promenading on George Street as opposed to 'the beautiful Domain':

> It was unfashionable, in fact, not the proper thing at all either to walk or drive in the Domain. It was a notorious fact, that maid-servants and their sweethearts resorted thither on Sundays, and of course that shocking circumstance ruined its character as a place for their mistresses to visit.[16]

Two decades later, after the arrival of thousands more immigrants in search of gold, it was the presence of 'women of disreputable character' and the 'impropriety carried on at night' that caused concern. For Charles Moore, who managed the space as Government Botanist, the area regularly became a den of vice after dark when 'immorality ... of the most monstrous description' was enacted. The Bailiff of the Domain, noted disapprovingly that 'decrepit old shepherds' frequently slept in the reserve on periodic visits from the country.[17]

The reputation of the Domain had hardly improved by the end of the nineteenth century. The reserve was so much associated with the unemployed and homeless that the term 'Domain Loafer' passed into vernacular usage. By the end of the century, Sydney's transient working and unemployed population had increased and public parks such as the Domain and Hyde Park augmented cheap lodging houses as sleeping spaces. On the morning of 31 December 1897, the Domain overseer counted 'no less than 186 men sleeping or reposing on the grass' in the Upper Domain.[18]

At best, these people were regarded as an annoyance and dismissed as 'work shy', but for many their presence was more threatening. Popular writer Harry Furniss presented a gothic image of nocturnal transformation and the transfer of ownership:

> In the daytime, like bats and owls, they vanish and keep in hiding, and then respectable people may enjoy the beautiful walks in the park. ... As the sun sets and the better class of visitors to the Domain retire, the park becomes the undisputed property of the sundowners and loafers ... [19]

Night provided cover for other activities. On 22 December 1884, a young boy found a bag containing the remains of two infants. Police gazettes indicate that dead babies — probably the results of difficult labours, backyard abortions or early infant mortality — were regularly dumped in the Domain.[20]

Ironically, the very physical characteristics that gave an area such as the Domain its outward picturesque appeal as the site for a daytime walk or picnic, also facilitated nefarious activities. Steep slopes, rocky outcrops, shrubs and trees down to Mrs Macquarie's old carriage drive hindered surveillance and policing, while adding to a sense of threat and the unknown. Introduced plant species added to the cover provided by the indigenous brush. Shortly after taking up his directorship in 1896, J.H. Maiden noted the need for the 'practical extermination' of the South American lantana that had infested this area, 'forming dense scrubs, which served as a screen for ill-behaved persons'.[21]

By the 1890s, trees and shrubs were growing abundantly in Hyde Park as well, albeit along geometric pathways. So established was this vegetation that in 1904 the *Sydney Morning Herald* declared that Hyde Park at night offered:

> the garrotter, the sneak-thief, and the black-mailing prowler similar opportunities that make the wooded parts of the Bois de Boulogne the haunts of many of the criminals of Paris.[22]

The cover of trees reflected something of the long-held sense of wilderness or forest as the traditional antithesis or 'shadow' of civilisation – a place beyond accepted law.[23]

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Regulation was the obvious response to disorder. The Hyde Park trustees introduced their clearest set of rules and regulations governing behaviour after the 'riots' that accompanied Pastor Allen's provocative sermons of March 1878. With an obvious focus on public assembly and order, the new codes outlawed 'creating or taking part in a disturbance ... using insulting words or gestures towards any person' or holding an unauthorised public meeting of twelve or more people.[24]

Other activities were also targeted. Alongside the prohibition of vandalism and littering, tree climbing, the posting of bills and engaging in racing or games were rules forbidding intoxication and behaviour deemed by the constables or park-keepers to be indecent or 'disorderly'. Hyde Park was to be a place of passive recreation and orderly transit. Transgressions of public order attracted substantial fines of between twenty shillings and five pounds.

Not all agreed with the need for regulation or the authority vested in the trustees. The *Australian* magazine described them as an anachronistic throwback to a pre-democratic age: 'old and stately gentlemen of gentle traits, and measured pace, well-gloved, hatted, and with gold-headed cane, a l'ancien regime'. They were 'a very different thing' to the 'real public' and the rules they put forward were, the magazine contended, unsuitable for the needs and wants of that public. Instead the magazine urged the regulators to 'throw down all fencing and let the public form its own tracks'.[25]

By the early 1900s, trust control of Hyde Park was more generally being criticised as both ineffective and anachronistic — something akin to the private ownership of public space.[26] Municipal control was the democratic and effective answer. Yet though they may have been nominally elected, the City Council's response was to introduce yet more comprehensive regulations pertaining to vandalism and the theft of plants and equipment from the park, and others forbidding unauthorised commercial activities, public oratory and assembly and the use of 'indecent or obscene language'. It was forbidden to lie on the grass — a measure designed specifically to discourage 'loafers' and to improve the civic appearance of the park. Bathing, washing, beating carpets and hanging out clothes also became unacceptable public activities. Other regulations prohibited snaring birds, climbing trees, betting and playing casual games. The new regime even extended to creative expression such as playing a musical instrument or singing – activities deemed likely to impinge on the quiet enjoyment of the park by others or possibly to compete with the organised entertainments provided by Council.[27]

The specificity of these rules provides an insight into the culture of the park. Clearly it was a space in which washing was sometimes hung out to dry, music played and birds caught for pleasure or profit. This regime impacted particularly upon the communal and private practices of lower-class residents of the inner city who, for reasons that related to both culture and the inadequacy of living space, had traditionally used the city's streets and parks for a variety of political, recreational and work-related activities.

However, the Council was sure of its constituency and they justified the regulatory regime using the language of differentiation — legitimate citizens and illegitimate others. Town Clerk Thomas Nesbitt noted that it was 'a matter of common knowledge' that the park had:

> for many years been lost to the city after nightfall, having borne a police reputation of the most unattractive kind, being a haven of undesirables and a standing menace to security, owing to it being a resort of questionable characters of all descriptions.[28]

The recent completion of a new coal-fired power station in the inner suburb of Pyrmont provided the means to deal with problem. Electric lights were an expensive measure but they were nonetheless an 'essential and indispensable condition to proper enjoyment of some the most important places of the public estate, which the citizens of Sydney very properly claim as their own.'[29] In November 1905, a year after the city's streets were electrically illuminated, the Lady Mayoress ceremonially turned on the lights of Hyde Park. The ' "people's heritage" ', reported Nesbitt, 'is rapidly reverting to its legitimate purpose'.[30]

The opportunity afforded by electric lighting to illuminate Sydney's parks was received with enthusiasm by administrators and reformers. Such sustained and bright light extended the parameters of spatial control, thereby opening up more space for legitimate users. Light was a means of banishing the threat of an unseen 'other' that lurked at night to transform the beautiful park of the day into a zone of nocturnal impasse. Light was a means of returning public park space to 'respectable citizens'.

The illumination of Hyde Park had been recommended by the respected Director of the Botanic Gardens and Government Botanist, J.H. Maiden, in an 'interim report' written when the Council took control of the reserve in 1903.[31] He had been an enthusiast for electric lights for some years, optimistically predicting the effects of replacing the few gas lamps in the Domain:

> When in the near future the electric light will be shining during fine evenings, and fresh water laid on to the vicinity, this will be an excellent rendezvous for respectable citizens.[32]

Funding for the project was not, however, forthcoming and Maiden was therefore compelled to reiterate the need a decade later:

> I look upon lighting as the key of almost all reforms in the public parks. Light is the best policeman we can have. I hope to live to see the time when a promenade in the evening around Mrs Macquarie's Chair will be as fashionable as 'doing the block'.[33]

Two years later, the whole of the Domain was lit.

Users of the Domain were by then subject to a similar set of rules introduced in 1885 by Maiden's predecessor Charles Moore. The similarity between these and the Hyde Park regulations should not be surprising given Moore's position as a trustee of Hyde Park. Drunkenness, disorderly behaviour and lying on seats were specifically banned. Authorisation was required for selling goods, de-pasturing livestock or conducting any form of performance. As with the other parks, the emphasis was on passive recreation. Casual games were forbidden and sport restricted to the cricket matches played by the Associated Cricket Clubs who maintained — some thought monopolized — a section of the reserve at their own expense. Local children were not welcome on their pitch.

Specific acts of vandalism and littering such as the defacing of trees or the depositing of 'broken glass, fruit skins, bones, paper or cast-off clothing' were clearly articulated, but there appears also to have been some discretionary policing of behaviour. The Domain drinking fountain was not mentioned in the gazetted rules. Yet in 1888, Alice Frazer, a 40 year-old unemployed woman, was commanded to pay a fine of twenty shillings or spend fourteen days in gaol in default for polluting, in an unspecified manner, that facility.[34] The broad emphasis on prohibiting 'intoxication ... disorderly or offensive behaviour ... bad language [and] acts of indecency' in the Domain and Hyde Park particularly were more than attempts to maintain general order, they often

related specifically to the policing of prostitution which had still to be outlawed as a specific offence.[35]

These laws particularly affected women like Mary McCarthy who, in July 1883, spent four months in goal in default of a ten pound fine received for 'offending against decency' in the Domain. Similarly, in February 1888, Mary McGrath was found guilty of drunkenness and using 'bad language' in the Domain and nearby Woolloomooloo Street and given the option of a three pound fine or two months in gaol.[36] Whereas in 1883 the Hyde Park trustees had declared the exclusion of people merely 'suspected to be improper characters' to be 'obviously impractical', Moore included just such a pre-emptive criterion in his 1885 Domain regulations.[37] The subjectiveness of these regulations was not lost on the iconoclastic popular journal the *Bulletin*. The criteria of entry raised some 'nice questions as to the precise amount of immorality of which one can be guilty without being liable to exclusion by an immaculate policeman or ranger. ... Would one lapse from virtue necessitate your walking outside?'[38]

Even those of 'reputed bad character' could be removed from the Gardens, the Domain and later Centennial Park. Possibly Moore convinced his fellow Hyde Park trustees of the efficacy of this for, in January 1888, 'two well known bad characters', Thomas Bidden and John Thompson, were removed from Hyde Park and charged by Detective O'Sullivan with 'being suspected persons frequenting Hyde Park with intent to commit a felony'.[39] By the end of the 1890s, Maiden had secured the services of 'uniformed police constables' to assist less empowered rangers in patrolling the Domain. The extra policing meant that 'Suspicious, or apparently immoral persons' could be 'quickly expelled'. By 1903, the Director reported triumphantly that, 'Card-sharpers, confidence men, or betting characters' were 'rarely, if ever, now found in the Domain'.[40]

None of Sydney's reserves reflected the desire to remove the 'dirty' and disorderly in the interests of civic reputation and rationalised recreation more than the Botanic Gardens which, by the middle of the nineteenth century, was a scientific institution and recreational resort in its own right. In 1883, the English visitor R.E.N. Twopeny described the reserve as 'the most charming public garden I have ever seen'.[41]

With meandering paths, ornate stairways, white classical statuary and garden beds tended by a ground staff of no less than 28 gardeners, the Gardens were also a secure space. Rules had been posted for the recreational use of this space as early as 1848, the first year of Charles Moore's reign as Director. These were expanded in 1885 alongside the new codes for the Domain.[42] However, three measures set the Gardens apart from the surrounding parks. First, there was a curfew at night. Unlike the Domain, Hyde Park and Centennial Park, the Gardens were closed at night to all, except the patrolling rangers, from 7 pm to 6.30 am in Summer and 5 pm to 7 am in Winter. The issue of undesirable nocturnal users was thereby solved by total exclusion. Just as significant was the dress code. Only those who were 'cleanly and decently dressed' were allowed to remain within its boundaries. Finally, it was only in the Gardens that visitors were forbidden to smoke. That prohibition was introduced by Moore in 1848 but it was his successor, J.H. Maiden, who explained the tactic of differentiation underpinning the smoking ban. His distinction between the users of the Domain and the Gardens starkly illustrates the extent to which the symbolism of dirt and the social signifiers of space operated to classify park users:

> it has been found in practice that the fact that we prohibit smoking in the Gardens keeps away what are known as 'Domain Loafers'. If the submerged

> tenth cannot smoke they are very unhappy. We keep these men in the Domain; they are verminous. You will find that the Botanic Gardens visitors are clean people, and those in the park which surrounds the Botanic Gardens are dirty people.[43]

Indeed this last policy was seen to be so effective that, in 1904, the *Sydney Morning Herald* argued for the adoption of a similar policy by the Council. Should such a rule be implemented in Hyde Park 'the lazy, unclean loafer element would largely slink elsewhere' and there would be 'a great clearance of the worst specimen of the derelict' because the 'bright cleanliness of the Botanic Gardens [was] due largely to smoking being prohibited'.[44]

Education and Inclusion

Throughout the later decades of the nineteenth century the images of fear attached to Sydney's parks had their counter in the civic boosterism which lauded the beauty of Sydney, its harbour and parks. Shortly before the 1879 Select Committee on Venereal Disease heard damning evidence about the 'immoral' condition of Sydney's parks, the *Sydney Morning Herald* noted that 'the most pleasing feature of the city is the number of its beautiful parks ... affording healthful recreation grounds for the people ... reserves doubtless contribute to the good health of the citizens'.[45]

Parks were not only healthful resorts, they contributed to the 'moral enlightenment' of the population. Like museums and expositions, which indeed they often accommodated, parks were public spaces that operated as 'exhibitionary complexes' communicating social codes and gaining popular acquiescence to those codes.[46] Self-regulation and surveillance was an important part of this process. The regulations passed down for the Botanic Gardens, the Domain and the Centennial Park by 1889 included the specific request that visitors 'bring under the notice of the director any breach of the same coming under their observation'. The citizenry was being asked to watch and differentiate among themselves.

There is evidence to indicate that members of the public did just that. In August 1887, one such person, adopting the telling pseudonym 'A Sitizen' [sic], wrote to the Inspector General of Police Edmund Fosbery to 'draw attention' to a George Kerry who was at that time obtaining money by making 'collections' in the Domain on Sundays. 'I think these scandelous [sic] proceedings ought to put a stop to [sic]', declared Sitizen. Apparently Kerry was also given to using bad language and slandering public figures such as Henry Parkes and the late Sir A. Stuart. The former had been described by Kerry as a 'most immoral man', while the latter was apparently seen 'coming out of a house of ill-fame'. With a sense of deference to the reputation of these men and moral outrage at Kerry's conduct, A. Sitizen appealed to Fosebery to intervene: 'You ought in the interest of justice — stop this man from deceiving the public, his language is something disgraceful before children.'[47]

As regulated 'democratic' public spaces, Sydney's parks facilitated the intermingling of social classes and consequently the constitution, at least rhetorically, of an 'undifferentiated' and suggestively empowered citizenry. Knowledge was made visible to this audience via the didactic representation of science, nature and culture. As the 'subjects of knowledge', this population could come to view power 'as their own'.[48] Horticultural and botanical lectures were held by Moore in the Botanic Gardens from 1851, a practice that J.H. Maiden continued with added zeal from 1896. As cultural and

natural menageries – the Botanic Gardens also had a zoo and aviary – Sydney's parks educated the urban public in the wonders of natural science, familiarised them with symbolic, aesthetic and commercial value of native and exotic flora, and uplifted their sensibilities with didactic statues.[49]

Evening concerts in Hyde Park were a means of both reclaiming space and educating the people. Coinciding with both the new regulations and the installation of lighting in 1905, military and civilian bands were paid by the Council to entertain park goers with 'high class' music. Such a service was, according to the Town Clerk, 'now looked upon in the municipal centres of the old world as a function of higher municipalism'. Alderman O'Sullivan noted that the 'delightful songs and music of the Philharmonic Society, the Liedertafel and the Orchestral Society have mainly been heard by the well-to-do; but it is desirable that the glorious songs and instrumental pieces be heard by the industrial classes'. Thomas Nesbitt reported that as many as 10,000 people were attending the performances on fine evenings. He went on to note that:

> when it is remembered that only a year ago Hyde Park was a place to be avoided after dark, the contrast is indeed striking ... the park is [now] literally ablaze with electric light from end to end, and filled with crowds of orderly, law abiding people.[50]

That the evening concerts in Hyde Park were intended as a bridgehead of respectability into contested territory otherwise dominated by roughs and larrikins is clearly suggested by Nesbitt's salutory remarks that 'a great deal of annoyance, inconvenience and interruption' was being caused by the 'rough and rowdy behaviour of organised gangs of lads and young men'. These men, noted the Town Clerk, had a 'special mission' to disrupt the evening's proceedings, and perhaps to reclaim public space that they had previously dominated.[51]

Nonetheless, for J.D. Fitzgerald, the 'democratic' regime of the City Council was finally forging an ideal civic space:

> Under private trust control [Hyde Park] was a danger zone, the haunt of thieves and night-prowlers — of awful yahoos; dark and dank, and neglected. To-day it is beautiful, well cared for, well lighted. Its habitues are well-dressed; its seats are no longer verminous; women and children frequent it; flowers are commencing to bloom; bands play, and the glamour of the music adds romance to the languorous night in a climate which calls for outdoor pleasures.[52]

This description laid out clearly the lexicon of the signifiers of respectability. A well-lit park with organised entertainment, clean seats and flowerbeds encouraged the presence of neat, well-behaved men, women and children. Here the signifiers of ordered space and a 'functional' citizenry stood in clear contrast to the 'plague-ridden' reserve with the unwelcome bands of larrikins, prostitutes and unsupervised urchins who had featured in previous accounts of the park's culture.

J.H. Maiden, too, recognised the need for a built infrastructure that would facilitate respectable and rational recreation. Although the Gardens had accommodated a bandstand for some years, Maiden built another in the Domain within the first year of his Directorship. A third was erected in Centennial Park in 1901. A tea-room was operating in the Botanic Gardens by the early 1890s and a kiosk opened in the Domain in 1897. The shrubbery that provided cover for illicit activities was cleared in the hope of encouraging 'respectable citizens' to frequent 'Mrs Macquarie's Chair', the site of Fitzgerald and Lindsay's imagined outdoor restaurant. More seats were provided, a

drinking fountain built, pathways improved and steps constructed to make accessible the escarpment that had previously 'been mostly given up to loafers'.

Encouraging the presence of respectable women was both part of Maiden's sense of inclusiveness and his strategy to improve the reputation of the Domain in particular. Providing women's toilets was an obvious step in this direction. In his first annual report, Maiden noted that latrines had been provided for men but none existed for women. '[S]urely, in these days of granting justice to the other sex', he argued, 'it is only necessary to point out that latrines for women and children who visit the Domain are an imperative necessity.'[53] The absence of women's latrines reflected the ambiguous relationship of women to public space in the Victorian city, which had for many years been regarded as male terrain. Respectable women negotiated this within, what the most comprehensive etiquette guide of the era referred to as, a 'mantle of proper reserve' — and, it seems, with considerable self-control.[54] That the Director had to wait till 1910 before a women's lavatory and 'ladies reserve' was finally completed indicates that those who controlled the budget for the Domain did not share his sense of equity.

The People in the Park

There is no doubt that women benefited when Fitzgerald, Maiden and Nesbitt attacked the culture of the urban gangs, argued for the installation of lighting and installed toilets. Yet they were already asserting their civic identity in these public spaces as orators and audience debating a range of issues from socialism to temperance (Figure 3.). The use of the Domain as a civic forum for oratory and demonstration was complex, and it tells us much about accommodation and intervention in the interaction between the users of park space and those charged with ordering it. Not only was it the playground for local communities and a place for leisurely strolls, but since the 1880s the Domain had replaced Hyde Park as the recognised place of public speaking in Sydney — one that was symbolically sited behind the New South Wales Parliament House. The development of public oratory in Hyde Park and then the Domain seems to have been largely customary. Unlike Speakers Corner in London's Hyde Park, a venue and institution sanctioned by the 1872 Royal Parks and Gardens Regulation Act as a result of a series of violent meetings and reformist pressure, Sydneysiders assumed the oratorical use of public space as something of a right. When regulation made Hyde Park less attractive as a venue for public speaking, the Sydney Domain came to function in a similar way.

As Bruce Scates has noted, oratorical spaces such as the Sydney Domain, the Yarra Bank in Melbourne and the Botanic Gardens in Adelaide were acknowledged as ' "people's reserves", where the right to speak and be heard went largely unchallenged by authorities'.[55] When regulations were introduced that banned 'violent or unseemly language, calculated to inflame the minds of the hearers or cause a breach of the peace', they were attacked as 'censorship'. In the words of one newspaper correspondent, too much power had been given to the Director in determining what expression was permissible in that park: 'I venture to think that this censorship is very undesirable ... is the director, who presumably is a good gardener, but not necessarily a good censor or critic, the right person to exercise an opinion?'[56] An active citizenry was educating itself and asserting its right of free speech in the park. As I indicated at the outset, Moore's successor J.H. Maiden embraced the public right to free speech, describing the Domain as 'the platform of democracy'. In 1899 he noted, 'on the whole the crowds are well behaved and the intervention of the bailiffs or police is very seldom necessary'.[57] By the

FIGURE 3. In this pre-war Domain meeting, women gather in support of local option polls that would allow communities to ban public houses in their area. Their agency stands in contrast to Lionel Lindsay's illustration of the Domain. (Unknown photographer, Tyrrell Collection, Powerhouse Museum.)

time of Federation, eight churches, 'a few anti-Christian debaters', temperance lecturers, health theorists, phrenologists, politicians, 'black-board artists [and] lightning calculators' and several Labour and socialist speakers were attracting crowds of up to 15,000 on Sundays.[58]

Domain oratory was embraced contingently by others with a mixture of tolerance, fascination and condescension. Accordingly, in its centennial overview of the colony in January 1888, the *Sydney Morning Herald* recommended that 'all visitors to Sydney should spend a Sunday afternoon in the Outer Domain', witnessing and listening to the diverse range of speakers and the huge crowds that assembled there weekly.[59] In providing one of the most comprehensive descriptions of the nineteenth-century Speakers Corner, the social commentator and writer Nat Gould adopted the tone of the *flaneur*. He described nursemaids taking out their young middle-class wards and flirting with 'would be admirers'. The proximity of the space to the Sydney's docks added to the fascination as soldiers and sailors wandered through the crowd while 'the dark skinned, turbaned coolies in their white, flimsy garments and gaudy Indian silk sashes [afforded] a striking contrast to the folk in more civilised garb'.[60]

There is little doubt that Sunday afternoons in the Domain were times of entertainment and raucous exchange, but they were also a means of emotional release. For the nursemaid, it provided a space and opportunity to interact with those of her own class away from the confinement and work regime of the bourgeois household. In this sense, Sunday oratory provided the focal point of a larger opportunity for meeting and social

interaction among the working-class population of the inner suburbs. Still, there was more to these afternoons than having fun. Domain gatherings were overtly political events that affirmed a working-class identity and culture while facilitating the explicit expression of social, often radical, views. Throughout the 1890s and 1900s these gatherings were one means for collectively examining and articulating the relationship between groups within a self-defined working class and the nation as a whole.

In recognition of the potentially radical outcome of this ideological exchange, a note of disquiet and caution entered Gould's otherwise humorous and condescending account of the Sunday assemblies when he introduced the socialist speakers:

> These men are much bigger fools even than the misguided folk who believe in their utterances: they burst with self-importance all the time they are preaching humility and the rights of man. There is no more conceited ass than a Domain Socialist.[61]

That the 'ass', however, could also wield power was a source of concern. 'I have often wandered from group to group, and watched the men and their audiences', he remarked:

> It is an instructive sight as well as amusing: it shows the power a man possessed of a free flow of language has over the masses. This power may not be lasting, but it influences people for the moment, and, if exercised at the proper time, may cause a great deal of harm.[62]

Among the socialists Nat Gould was routinely branding as 'fools' were a future New South Wales Premier and an Australian Prime Minister. In 1894, W.A Holman and one-time Domain resident William Morris Hughes were among the speakers seated beneath a red banner bearing the motto 'Socialism in our time' to address the 4,000 strong crowd who had gathered to celebrate May Day in the Domain to hear how 'labour is robbed of the wealth which it alone produces'.[63] Hughes actually lived as a vagrant in the Domain. As a newly arrived immigrant, the Domain was an important site for him to connect with the 'radical sub-cultures' of Sydney, and eventually to the Labour Party.[64]

As Lucy Taksa has pointed out, the social function of the Domain was intensified during times of 'labour crisis' such as the strikes of the 1890s, the anti-conscription campaign of 1916, the General Strike of 1917 and the returned soldier 'riots' of 1918. At various moments during these crises, the tolerance extended to the practice of Domain oratory and assembly by authorities was withdrawn and arrests were made for 'riotous' behaviour or the utterance and sale of 'seditious' ideas.[65] Suppression during the First World War occurred at specific times and with specific groups and individuals, but the right of the majority to assemble was never withdrawn.[66]

During the General Strike of August and September 1917, the Domain acted as the focal point for the dissemination of news, the expression of opinion, the debating of tactics and, just as important, the display of solidarity and support. In terms of tradition and practicality, it was the obvious meeting place. Throughout the week, men and women from various unions with banners and placards held high made their way through the city streets to the Domain. There the assembly was addressed by strike leaders, money collected for strike funds and pamphlets distributed. On Sundays, the park became the meeting place for tens of thousands of working-class people from all over Sydney. In the absence of public transport, which had been paralysed as a result of the strike, many walking several kilometres from industrial suburbs that ringed the

city. Women participated alongside men and the wives of strikers brought their children with them and addressed the gatherings.

Respectability was a feature of the demonstrations. In an effort to counter drunkenness, hotels were declared out of bounds and some were picketed. 'With arms folded, heads clear, stomachs free from beer, you will beat the bosses every time', declared Luke Jones of the Strike Defence Committee [SDC].[67] In keeping with these exhortations, the Domain processions and assemblies were consistently conducted in an orderly fashion. It was an impression reinforced by the appearance of both men and women. The photographs appearing regularly in the *Telegraph* and the *Sydney Mail* showed crowds of people dressed neatly, the men in suits, the women in coats and hats.[68] Equally important was the need to distance the aims of the strikers from revolutionary ideology and anti-patriotic sentiment. At various times during Domain gatherings, IWW banners were forcibly removed by strikers. 'This is not an IWW meeting', declared the member for Surry Hills, A.W. Buckley, at one of the first strike gatherings: 'We have no connection with them at all. ... It is the aristocracy of Labor which has led the progress and lighted the way to solidarity.'[69]

These were all elements of a strategy of compliance which suggests, to quote Taksa, 'a belief that conformity to bourgeois norms would legitimise their own moral assumptions'.[70] In effect, the strikers were presenting themselves to a conservative state government and the broader community as a respectable, and therefore legitimate, representative group of citizens by renouncing unrespectable behaviour and defining themselves against the IWW. Yet they were also defending their right to protest. On 7 August, they headed their Domain procession with a band playing the popular tune 'Britons never shall be Slaves'.[71] This choice of music was at once a declaration of patriotism, sobriety and an assertion in traditional civic rights to use public space.

It possibly also evinced the 'moral consensus' in the rights of 'free-born Englishmen' that dominated earlier English radical thought and remained prescient in working-class ideology.[72] Certainly others took these rights seriously in their claim to use public space. When Josiah Cutler was arbitrarily denied access to the Botanic Gardens in 1888 (apparently because his wheelchair left ruts in the carefully tended pathways), he contested the nature of his eviction by recourse to an appeal to civic rights. In a letter to the *Herald*, he condemned the 'high-handed authority of those who have charge of the Botanic Gardens', and challenging the denial of his rights as a 'free' man which occurred because of his physical disability:

> Have I no rights as a citizen to enter the gardens when I please as do others? Because I cannot walk am I to be treated as a pauper ... to go cap in hand to beg permission from a servant of the people to use what is our own as free men in New South Wales?

Cutler then bluntly equated Moore's management of the Park with the rule of a tyrant: 'Are we not all free men so long as we are law abiding, or are we serfs to be ruled and "ordered" by a despot?'[73]

In 1905, park user Fred Muir responded to the City Council's newly posted by-laws for Hyde Park with a similar rejection of authority and privilege. In a newspaper letter, he juxtaposed the interests of 'the people' with those of the 'aristocracy' while challenging the 'somewhat drastic rules' that would, among other things, deny him the simple pleasure of fully reclining on the grass:

> Now this park (and all the other reserves set apart for the use of the people) is set apart for the use of the people as a whole, not for the aristocracy or the

> wealthy alone, and the idea that people desiring to lie and enjoy themselves upon the grass are to be denied that privilege, seems to me to be preposterous and absurd.[74]

Fred Muir was clearly arguing for more than a place to lie down. He was challenging the dominant notion of respectability. For a great many of his fellow park users these were more than spaces for decorous recreation. Parks were functional places — places to meet and relax, places to debate and exchange ideas, places to live and places to withdraw and hide. Drawing upon tradition and more recent democratic developments, they regarded access to public space as a civic right and contested this right variously by means of occupation and by rhetoric. Ultimately, it was the contests that took place within and about Sydney's parks, rather than any ideal of passive respectability, that underpinned their function as civic spaces.

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Notes

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