

## **Pissed On Another Planet: The Perth Sound of the 1970s and 1980s**

In this chapter I want to discuss the specificity of the Perth sound as it developed in the 1970s and 1980s. In order to do this I need also to say something about the particularity of Perth as compared to other major Australian capital cities, most importantly Sydney and Melbourne. As I have discussed in chapter two, the development of the inner-city sound was dependent on the gradual formation in Australia, since around the mid-1960s, of a bohemian segment of the population, mostly middle class, that was outward-looking and cosmopolitan. Many of these people moved out of the suburbs and into the inner cities. Often this group was followed by a more conservative, but still cosmopolitan, element of the middle class which gentrified the inner city.

Perth is frequently characterised as the most isolated state capital in Australia. Adelaide, which is smaller than Perth, is the closest city at 2,712 kilometres distant. Melbourne is 3,438 kilometres away and Sydney 4,127 kilometres. Perth is two hours behind Melbourne and Sydney which means that, even with a networked, standardised television system across much of Australia, a system not present in the 1970s, Perth still gets even many 'live' broadcasts pre-recorded. In the 1970s, before email and the internet, before satellite and cable technologies improved remote communication for television and radio, before airbuses and wide-bodied jets brought down the cost of air-travel, Perth was culturally a much more remote place than it had become by the 1990s. Kim Salmon, who we shall meet again as one of the pioneers of the Perth sound and founder of the Scientists, writes in the booklet accompanying the re-release of the Scientists' first album, known on release in 1981 as the *Pink Album*, that:

Perth, being the most isolated capital city in the world, does harbour some parochialism. My main memory of it features a huge inferiority complex about what was referred to as the 'Eastern States', i.e. not some hierarchy of levels of enlightenment but all that was to the east—in fact everywhere in Australia! Getting to the Eastern States meant a three day drive across the desert or forking out for an airfare comparable to an overseas flight—and that was just to get to Adelaide!<sup>1</sup>

Salmon is describing the experience of living in the only major city on the west coast of Australia in the 1970s.

Nevertheless, or perhaps because of this, Perth was home to a clutch of major Australian bands in the 1970s and 1980s, bands which made it out of the Perth scene and into the Australian scene, and even internationally. There was Dave Warner's band, From the Suburbs, whose album, *Mug's Game*, recorded in Melbourne in 1978 and released the same year, went gold within a month of release. There was Kim Salmon's band, the Scientists, whose second incarnation, after the band moved to inner city Sydney, released the mini-album *Blood Red River* in 1983, helping to provide the foundation for what, in the late 1980s, became known as grunge. This will be discussed in the next chapter. The Hoodoo Gurus, formed in Sydney on New Year's Eve 1981 by Dave Faulkner and two other Perth musicians, James Baker and Rod Radalj, both of whom had played in the first incarnation of the Scientists, and Kimble Rendell, released their first album, *Stoneage Romeos*, with a rather different line-up, in 1983. The band's first two albums topped the American Alternative/College chart. Internationally hugely successful, INXS's three Farris brothers grew up in Perth. We need to include the Triffids, in this list. Perhaps the

most idiosyncratic, or maybe most alternative, of the nationally, and internationally, successful Perth bands of the era, the Triffids first album, *Treeless Plain*, was released in 1983. The relationship of the Triffids to Perth will be discussed in chapter six.

The purpose of this chapter can be reduced to a question: what has been so particular about Dave Warner that his music has given him a huge cult following in Perth and yet, in histories of Alternative Rock in Australia such as Clinton Walker's *Stranded: The Secret History of Australia's Independent Music 1977–1991*, he gets no mention? Warner comes over as an anomalous figure, the pioneer of Alternative Rock in Perth and yet, at the same time, the, albeit sometimes ambivalent, champion of the suburbs. More, Warner sees himself as a precursor of punk and the founder of punk in Perth. On his website Warner writes in the third person: "In 1973 he formed Australia's first punk band, Pus."<sup>2</sup> Yet, in the reminiscences of Perth punk pioneers such as Kim Salmon and Dave Faulkner, Warner doesn't get mentioned. The answer that I will be giving has two parts. One is the lack of an inner city in Perth in which Alternative Rock could develop—as we shall see in the next chapter, Kim Salmon felt he had to move to Sydney to find a congenial working environment for his deconstruction of the roots of rock music. The consequence of this lack was the production of an artist, Warner, who espoused the values of both Alternative Rock and suburbia. The other part of the answer is the much greater importance of the English cultural influence in Perth as compared to the cities of the Eastern States, though not, it should be said, as compared with Adelaide. This influence was very important where Warner, and also Salmon, was concerned even though Warner's stimulus for forming Pus was American.

Quoting from Sara Cohen's *Rock Culture in Liverpool*, John Connell and Chris Gibson argue that: "Studies of local 'scenes' in Europe and North America have

shown how musical forms and practices ‘originate within, interact with, and are inevitably affected by, the physical, social, political and economic factors which surround them.’”<sup>3</sup> Focussing principally on Dave Warner and to a limited extent on the first incarnation of the Scientists, this chapter will argue that a combination of influences and circumstances in Perth formed the basis for what we could call the Perth sound, a sound that was hard-edged while having a lighter, poppier element than that which characterised the Alternative Rock bands of the eastern inner cities. Central to this sound was an English influence, a sing-a-long pop tradition from music hall to Ian Dury and, in the 1990s, Robbie Williams—Salmon describes the music of the Scientists as “like a collision between the Stooges and Herman’s Hermits”.<sup>4</sup>

Thinking of Herman’s Hermits, that quintessential English pop band of the 1960s who had hits like *I’m Into Something Good* (1965) and the revival of the 1911 music hall song ‘I’m Henry VIII, I Am’ (1965), we can remember Michael Bracewell’s comment that “suburbia is the spiritual home of English pop”.<sup>5</sup> Writing of the ideology of English suburbia, Bracewell describes:

the basic conservatism of suburbia, and of suburbia’s enduring reputation for xenophobia, small-mindedness and self-congratulatory moderation. In suburbia ... it is perceived that the local becomes the universal, returning the language of Life to a reduced vocabulary of domesticity and parish politics.<sup>6</sup>

Central to the development of the Perth sound was a musical form that challenged the apparent superficiality of those suburban values while, in the end, accepting the worth of the suburban and the values it embodies. I will talk about this ambivalence as the foundation for Dave Warner’s work by way of that work’s similarity to that of Ian Dury, and, more generally, I will discuss the influence of that quintessential English suburban punk band, the Troggs, on the development of the Perth sound.

## **Perth: the Most Suburban of Australian Cities**

We need to begin by thinking about Perth. The city was officially founded by Captain James Stirling in 1829. By 1853 Perth had a population of 1,940 and Fremantle a similar figure of 1,859.<sup>7</sup> By 1901, Appleyard tells us, “36 percent of Western Australia’s 184,125 persons lived in the metropolitan area”,<sup>8</sup> which suggests a figure of around 44,280 for Perth’s population. The purpose of these figures here is to make a point about Perth’s built environment. Renate Howe writes that:

The period of prosperity [in Australia] 1870 to 1890 was a period of growth and suburban expansion and the cities echoed with the rhetoric of progress. Between 1881 and 1891, Melbourne almost doubled its population and Sydney grew almost as fast, while the population of Brisbane trebled. The areas of spectacular growth were in the suburbs opened up by the building or extension of public transport systems.<sup>9</sup>

This is the time, Howe tells us, that a distinction arose between the ‘villa suburbs’ of suburbia and the ‘inner suburbs’. Howe goes on: “From the 1870s, parts of the inner areas of Sydney and Melbourne were increasingly identified as ‘slums’.”<sup>10</sup> At the same time, while the beginning of the move to the new suburbs was taking place, Howe notes that, “almost 60 per cent of the population increase in Sydney between 1871 and 1891 was in the city and the older suburbs with the continuing subdivision of areas like Newtown and Redfern.”<sup>11</sup> By 1901, the year of federation, Sydney had a population of 496,990 and Melbourne’s population was 501,580. Brisbane’s population was 120,650.<sup>12</sup> My point here is that, by the turn of the twentieth century, when the building of the new, detached suburbs was getting under way in earnest, and the old, comparatively cramped, working-class inner-city areas were already beginning to be described as slums, Perth’s population was still so small, as compared

even with Brisbane's, that the number of inner city suburbs, or, indeed more generally, the existence of an inhabited inner-city was almost negligible. Thus, by the 1960s and 1970s there was little movement towards a bohemianised or gentrified inner city because there was hardly any inner city to gentrify.

In her history of Perth since the Second World War, *City of Light*, Jenny Gregory identifies the 1920s as a time of major population expansion for Perth. She writes that, in 1929, Perth had a population of just over 206,000 and that:

Residential construction rose steadily after 1922 and peaked in early 1929. Perth's suburbs developed rapidly in the 1920s fed by immigration from Britain and natural population growth.<sup>13</sup>

Perth developed as a suburban city.<sup>14</sup> There were, perhaps, three inner city suburbs that can be identified, four if Leederville, split in two by the north-south freeway in 1950s, is included. Subiaco was rapidly gentrified into one of Perth's more expensive and desirable suburbs,<sup>15</sup> though 'rapid' here is a relative term and this gentrification was not finally completed until the mid-1980s when it was no longer possible for people outside of the higher income brackets to find affordable accommodation to rent. East Perth remained an area inhabited by the lower-working class, indigent non-English-speaking migrants, the lumpenproletariat and Indigenous Australians until the 1980s. Gregory describes the area:

The homeless, the down and out, derelict buildings, shattered windows, industrial wasteland—such was the image of East Perth in the early 1980s. It displayed all the characteristics of an urban ghetto, and many of its people had the characteristics of an urban underclass—chronically poor, dependent on welfare, dysfunctional, lawless and socially excluded.<sup>16</sup>

Most of the area was finally knocked down in a major urban renewal scheme during the 1990s.

The third suburb is the most interesting for my purposes here. Known now as Northbridge, it only was given this name in 1981. Previously, this area of the city was simply described as ‘north of the railway’ or, more usually, ‘north of the line’. One feature of this area was The Governor Broome, a pub which, from around the mid-1960s to the late 1970s, was one of the most important Perth venues for Alternative Rock bands. Indeed along with the Shenton Park Hotel and Hernando’s Hideaway, the Governor Broome was one of the few venues that could be described as inner city in Perth, offering performance space to Dave Warner’s bands, both Pus, his first band, and From the Suburbs, and to the first incarnation of the Scientists as well as to the Victims, the three piece punk band that contained both James Baker and Dave Faulkner, and other alternative bands like the Manikins.

North of the line was an old working class area which, in the time of post-Second World War European migration, became the home for numbers of non-English-speaking migrants. Gregory writes that:

the area north of the line had been noted for early twentieth century housing stock that had seen better days and provided cheap rental accommodation. Wave after wave of immigrants had been housed there as they travelled the well-trodden route from the migrant camp to a cheap rented house on their way towards the great Australian dream—a home of their own in the suburbs.<sup>17</sup>

Most the immigrants who found their way to north of the line were non-English speaking, predominantly Jews, Italians and Greeks. By the 1950s and 1960s the area 'was often referred to as 'Little Italy.''<sup>18</sup>

Gregory also tells us that Roe Street, 'had been the centre of prostitution since World War 1, when, in order to prevent the spread of disease among the troops, the police initiated a containment policy, systematically removing brothels from other parts of Perth and using both the Police and Health Acts to regulate the industry.'<sup>19</sup> By 1958 Roe Street, along by the edge of the railway line with north of the line to the north of it, had eleven brothels. These were tolerated as part of Western Australia's semi-official containment policy.<sup>20</sup> In August 1958 the brothels were closed and the prostitutes dispersed across the north of the line area, which also contained a number of unlicensed gambling clubs. North of the line, then, looked very much like inner city Sydney and Melbourne in the late 1960s, except for its size and that the housing stock was newer. Indeed, while the Victims 'all moved into a squalid fleapit of a house in East Perth,' Salmon lived 'in the 'loft', [his] 'apartment' in the part of Perth now gentrified and called as Northbridge.'<sup>21</sup> Salmon tells us that this was where the Scientists' 'first demo was recorded'.<sup>22</sup> His description suggests the relative difference between north of the line and East Perth.

What, then, happened to the north of the line, this non-respectable area of working class, non-English speaking migrants and prostitutes, and increasingly home to Perth's 'deviants' and the bohemians? In 1975 there was a further purge of the area's brothels and clubs following the murder of brothel madam Shirley Finn, killed that June. Finn owned a house in the highly respectable middle class, river-side suburb of South Perth and her body was found in her Dodge Phoenix near the suburb's Royal Perth golf course.<sup>23</sup> As Torrance Mendez puts it:

Speculation raced over the motive and identity of her killer. There was talk of a corrupt police and their connections to high public office. A disbelieving public was shocked by Perth's hard core of sex, secrets and sleaze.<sup>24</sup>

In short, north of the line was cleaned up, made respectable. Gregory describes how, '[i]n the late sixties there were only about thirty restaurants in the whole of the [metropolitan] Perth.' She goes on to write that: 'A decade later a survey showed that, as well as a proliferation of restaurants in the city centre, there were thirty five restaurants north of the line.'<sup>25</sup> Rather than being gentrified the way Subiaco was, north of the line shifted from being an inhabited, increasingly bohemian inner city suburb to being the city's entertainment area for suburbia. As north of line became Northbridge so it lost its inner city qualities. The Governor Broome was knocked down.

Howe has described the way the slum abolition movement of the 1930s and 1940s, which sought to rebuild the inner city areas, still had force in the 1960s and 1970s. She writes about how, in Melbourne for example, "images of the inner city as an unruly, unhealthy place gave power to the statutory authorities: the Housing Commission, the Melbourne Metropolitan Board of Works and the Country Roads Board."<sup>26</sup> In Brisbane and Perth, strong right-wing state governments set about reining in the transformations that were taking place in the inner city.

### **The Attack on the Inner City**

In Queensland, the conservative National-Liberal party coalition, led by the National party, had been in power since 1957. Frank Nicklin was succeeded by Jack Pizzey and when he died in office in 1968 Joh Bjelke-Petersen became Premier.

Bjelke-Petersen was a Christian fundamentalist farmer. His values were rooted in the Church and in family. His authoritarian government cracked down hard on what Bjelke-Petersen saw as the new troublemakers, the left-leaning new urban, middle-class bohemians and cosmopolitans—and their music. In 1977, for example, he banned all street marches by the simple expedient of ordering the police to refuse all applications to march. In 1982, during strikes as part of a union campaign for a thirty-eight hour week, Bjelke-Petersen declared a State of Emergency, suspended 3,500 railway workers and moved to deregister eleven unions.

In his biography of the Go-Betweens, David Nichols suggests that: “Unlike elsewhere in Australia...the Brisbane rock scene became inseparable from the local political scene from the late 1960s onwards.”<sup>27</sup> The Saints, influenced, as Clinton Walker suggests in his liner booklet for the retrospective *Wild About You* compilation, by the MC5, the Stooges and the New York Dolls, began playing in 1974. The music, fast, loud, angry and on the edge of being out of control, epitomised many of the inner city values that Bjelke-Petersen’s government wanted to stamp out. As Nichols writes:

To follow the kind of lifestyle that people in other Australian cities took for granted—going out for the night, hearing a few rock bands who played music relevant to your world, drinking—was infused, in Brisbane, with a special kind of danger. The police could arrest you at any time, and effectively they could do what they wanted with you.<sup>28</sup>

As Ed Kuepper, guitarist with the Saints, has remarked: “In Brisbane, we didn’t play until we started putting on shows of our own, and then the cops would break them up anyway, as they did any sort of gathering.”<sup>29</sup> Nichols sums up the situation well:

to call oneself “punk” in Brisbane was to be part of a small renegade movement. It was a choice fraught with greater risks than elsewhere in Australia—which is perhaps the main reason why Brisbane punk music always seemed to have that extra edge.<sup>30</sup>

Bjelke-Petersen’s solution to the new, bohemian inner city was to attempt to destroy the culture by a combination of legislation and extreme policing. Brisbane’s inner-city environment, encompassing areas such as Petrie Terrace and Fortitude Valley, was too large a built environment to eradicate.

The situation in Perth was remarkably similar, the solution different. The Liberal party, under David Brand, came to power in Western Australia in 1959. It lost power to Labor for a mere four years between 1971 and 1974 when the Liberal Party under Charles Court was returned to power until 1983. Court’s government championed conservative, suburban values. Like Bjelke-Petersen, Court supported family values and law and order. Court, too, saw himself in a war against disruptive left-wingers. In 1976, a year before Bjelke-Petersen, Court cracked down on the right to protest publicly. He instituted Section 54B of the Police Act which, like the law in Queensland, ordered that, “all public assemblies of more than three people who wished to gather to discuss a matter of public interest must first be approved by the Police Commissioner.”<sup>31</sup> This law was finally repealed in 1983 by Brian Burke’s Labor government. In 1979, in the face of increasing numbers of strikes, Court’s government passed the Essential Foodstuffs and Commodities Bill, provoking a union—State confrontation which almost led to a national strike. It is within this context that we need to understand the Northbridge transformation. At the same time, through the 1960s and into the 1970s the city itself was transformed. With no heritage legislation much of the city was knocked down to make way for new high-rise office

blocks. As Gregory writes: “The surge of investment in the sixties brought new money to the city and again it reinvented itself—this time in the image of modernism.”<sup>32</sup>

In Perth, Court’s government took a different tack from Bjelke-Petersen’s in dealing with the ‘punk’ manifestation of inner city life. While it did closely police punk gigs, the government was in the position to more or less destroy what little inner city Perth had under the guise of slum clearance and urban renewal, an extension of the rebuilding of Perth city. Post-1980s Northbridge is the result of this.

### **The British Influence**

If Perth was unique in having a small and diminishing inner city habitus, it was also unique among Australian capital cities for its high levels of British migration. Starting in the 1920s, until the 1980s Western Australia’s population has consistently grown more rapidly than that of Australia as a whole. By 1947 the Western Australian population was 502,480. By 1971 it had doubled to 1,030,469 people. Between 1961 and 1966 Western Australia’s population increased by 15.13 per cent and between 1966 and 1971 the population increased by 21.50 per cent as compared to an Australian increase of 9.97 per cent.<sup>33</sup> This was the decade of the mineral boom that transformed Perth’s urbanscape.

Gregory tells that:

In 1954 [Perth] was still largely a British place. Although the vast majority of the people of Perth had been born in Australia (75.6 per cent of the metropolitan population of 349,000) this percentage was slightly lower than in other Australian cities. Perth was notable for its markedly higher percentage of people born in the United Kingdom and

Ireland – 14.1 per cent – almost double the percentage of most other capital cities.<sup>34</sup>

Ghosh writes that:

According to the Census of 1954, 88.8 per cent of Western Australia's population had their birthplace in Australia and the United Kingdom.

This percentage actually increased to 89.15 per cent in 1966, but then slowly declined to 88.5 per cent in 1971, and further to 85.5 per cent in 1976.<sup>35</sup>

It is clear, then, that not only did Perth have a very significant British influence in the 1950s but that this was reinforced through a high rate of British migration through the 1960s and early 1970s when Western Australia had a much higher rate of population increase than Australia as a whole. We can say with certainty that Perth had a much greater British cultural influence, and indeed a cultural influence drawing not only on British culture of the 1950s and earlier, but also on British culture from the so-called 'Swinging Sixties.'

Given this background it is no wonder that the Perth sound of the 1970s and 1980s drew significantly on British, in particular English, cultural elements. Perhaps the artist who was most clearly a product of these two idiosyncratic features of Perth is Dave Warner. This may also go some way to explaining why Warner's very considerable popularity in Perth never fully translated into a national popularity across the other major capital cities. Indeed, in histories of Australian popular music in the 1970s and 1980s—I have already mentioned Walker's admittedly partially autobiographical *Stranded* (1996)—Warner doesn't rate a mention. In these histories

Perth music begins with Kim Salmon, Dave Faulkner and their punk bands the Cheap Nasties and the Victims.

### **Dave Warner and the Suburbs**

Writing from a cultural studies perspective, Graeme Turner acknowledges the importance of Warner as the voice of suburbia:

What Warner offered was a new fantasy, one that allowed the fans to stay in suburbia, instead of projecting themselves into some mythologised subcultural location – the New York ghetto, the LA street gang, or even inner Sydney. But it was a fantasy that was perilously close to reality, which is perhaps why its moment was a brief one and why Warner soon went on to other things, other fantasies.<sup>36</sup>

Turner is referring here to the ‘murder weekends’ that Warner ran where people could pay to take part in the detection of an acted-out murder. After Turner’s chapter was published Warner produced what may well have been the first detective novel set in Perth and Fremantle, *City of Light*, in 1995. This book won the West Australian Premier’s award in 1996 for best fiction work.

Turner’s point is a good one, that Warner’s albeit rather ambivalent celebration of suburbia and its way of life was, quite literally, a little too close to home for Warner’s audience. However, as I have suggested, I think the reasons for Warner’s lack of ongoing success outside of Perth lie elsewhere, and are connected to the lack of acknowledgement that Warner receives in histories of Australian popular music written by authors based in the eastern capitals. A part of the problem, as we

shall see, is that Warner does not fit into the tripartite structure of Australian popular music in the '70s and '80s.

Warner was born in Bicton in 1953. Bicton is a suburb roughly mid-way between Perth and Fremantle, the two cities now forming one conurbation joined by the suburbs which envelop each of them. Warner's father was a butcher and he, himself, went to the Catholic Aquinas College and from there to the University of Western Australia where he completed an Honours degree in Psychology—a background that suggests a certain degree of upward social mobility.

In 1981 Alan Howard published a book about Warner entitled *Dave Warner: Suburban Boy*. The narrative actually finishes in late 1976 as Warner returns from his first visit to London and two years before the release of *Mug's Game*. It has only a Postscript referring to Warner's *From the Suburbs*. The book covers Warner's youth and his early bands, especially Pus, the band he formed, according to his website in 1973 (Howard says 1972). On that website, Warner refers to Pus as "Australia's first punk band",<sup>37</sup> a problematic description because Warner's influences were not those characteristically associated with the music identified as punk in the mid-to-late 1970s, most importantly the Stooges and the MC5 (both of whom, as we have already noted, were important to the development of the Saints and for Sydney's Radio Birdman).<sup>38</sup>

Howard identifies the major influence on Warner and the inception of Pus as the Fugs' live album, *Golden Filth*.<sup>39</sup> Formed in 1964 in New York the Fugs came out of the Beat tradition intending to mix poetry and rock music. *Golden Filth* was released in 1969. A part of the counterculture; the Fugs took their name from the novelist Norman Mailer's 'polite' corruption of 'fuck.' The group's members were peace activists and, in the way of the counterculture's rebellion against American

puritanism, campaigners for a more direct appreciation of sex and desire. Howard describes how, “Warner listened and laughed as the Fugs’ ‘Slum Goddess’, the first song on *Golden Filth*, burst out of the speakers of his portable stereo and filled his ears with the most offensive, tasteless, witty and fantastic lyrics he had ever heard.”<sup>40</sup> Deciding to play these songs live, Warner felt his band needed a name change from Opus West. As Howard writes, the new name “had to be offensive”, and “it had to be short and attention grabbing”.<sup>41</sup> Pus was the consequence. While the name fits the criteria identified by Howard, it doesn’t have the humour or the sexual politics inherent in the Fugs name. Pus sounds more like suburban rebellion, an attack on suburban ‘niceness’ rather in the mould of the name of the later English punk band Slaughter and the Dogs, a point to which I will return.

Similarly, to understand ‘Slum Goddess’ simply in terms of its sexual directness is to miss the referentiality in the protagonist being from the Lower East Side. As the Fugs sing:

Slum Goddess from the Lower East Side

Slum Goddess, gonna make her my bride

The Lower East Side had been the migrant area of Manhattan in the early part of the century. For a long time it was predominantly Jewish. However, by 1965, according to Christopher Mele:

the popular media referred to the Lower East Side streets and avenues above Houston Street as the East Village. East Village applied to the area’s hippie community and not to the older white ethnic and Puerto Rican residents.<sup>42</sup>

Assuming that she would not have been a member of the area's older community, the presence of the Slum Goddess would have been a consequence of the bohemianisation of this working class, migrant neighbourhood. As it happens, an article about Suze Rotolo, who had been Dylan's girlfriend (they broke up in March, 1964) and who worked in the East Village as an artist, appeared in Andy Warhol's one off *The Plastic Exploding Inevitable* broadsheet, sold with the avant-garde magazine *Aspen* in number 3, in 1966. It was headlined 'Slum Goddess'.<sup>43</sup> This piece appears to have been previously published in *The East Village Other*. Either the Rotolo article was the inspiration for the Fugs song which was first available on the Fugs first album, entitled *The Fugs First Album*, in 1965 or the article headline identifies Rotolo as the sort of person that the Fugs were singing about. The point, here, is that, while for Warner, 'Slum Goddess' was a witty and transgressive song, speaking about sex in a suburban context where sex was talked about in respectable company only euphemistically in terms of love and where it was supposed to take place only in the marriage bed, for the Fugs and their New York audience the song had this impact but also rather more, coming out of the city's avant-garde left and referring to the inner city bohemianisation that put people like Rotolo in what had been a slum environment. Ironically, of course, it was this very inner city milieu that was being eradicated in Perth.

Formed around two years earlier than the Saints, Pus's influences, coming from its founder, Warner, were, in addition to the Fugs, Frank Zappa and the very English humorous rock group, the Bonzo Dog Doo Dah Band. If we think of Australian Alternative Rock as founded in what Clinton Walker has called the 'Detroit Sound',<sup>44</sup> that is the Stooges and the MC5, then little of this is present in Warner's music—though it should be said that after Warner returns from London and

forms From the Suburbs, there is, on the live *Suburbs in the '70s* CD recorded in 1977, a quite remarkable version of the Velvet Underground's 'Sweet Jane'. Howard tells how Pus also used to play this song.<sup>45</sup> The Velvet Underground are commonly regarded as the founders of the punk tradition and one of the most important inspirations for the Detroit bands. As it happens, both the Velvet Underground and the Fugs came from New York and were working during the same period in the mid-to-late 1960s. While the Velvets were influential in what became punk circles because of their lyrical attention to 'deviant' issues like masochism and drug use as well as their tendency to sonic aggression, the Fugs are now often regarded as punk for their celebration of sex and drugs. However, the Fugs invoked a folk and jug-band sonic history more than pop and rock and, therefore, as I have already indicated, were not a reference point for the punk renovation of rock in the mid-to-late 1970s. With this knowledge we can begin to understand how Warner, with his quite different influences from those usually cited, including his English inflection, is an anomaly for the conventional histories of Australian Alternative Rock. Indeed, while Warner was developing his music at roughly the same time as the Saints in Brisbane, his influences, with their San Francisco and 'hippie' inflections, give the impression that Warner is of a previous generation.<sup>46</sup>

We can now take a further step and think through Warner's attitude to suburbia. To start off, we need to understand that Warner's music is in no way categorisable as OzRock. It does not have the hard-edged blues/rock musical base of groups like the Angels or Cold Chisel nor the folk inflection of artists like Richard Clapton and Paul Kelly who have, at times, been linked with OzRock.<sup>47</sup> Musically, Warner's songs often have a rock-a-billy feel to them while working within a pop-style, three minute format.

Lyricaly, as Turner indicates, Warner's preoccupation with the ordinary in suburban life is also uncharacteristic of Aus Rock—though there are exceptions, especially in the work of the folk artists. Howard writes that, when Warner was in London in 1976:

[he] noticed he was writing more and more songs about home and the little things he had taken for granted in Western Australia—beaches, Aussie Rules football, beer gardens, Rottnest Island and just plain old sunshine. England had given perspective to his song-writing and he came to the startling realization that all his songs seemed to relate back to one thing—the experience of growing up in the suburbs of Perth.<sup>48</sup>

In the most suburban city in Australia, a city to all intents and purposes without an inner city, it is understandable that the first Alternative Rock artist should come out of the suburbs embedded in suburban values, conservative values of family, localism and parochialism, and patriotism as expressed in and through the attitude towards the 'little things' Howard identifies.

In Pus, Warner had taken these values for granted. This doesn't mean that he was a political supporter of everything the Court government did. Howard relates how Warner used to perform a version of Country Joe and the Fish's song 'Superbird'.<sup>49</sup> Where the original was an attack on President Richard Nixon, Warner's version was about Premier Charles Court:

Charlie Court would like to be

The king of WA

But I'm telling you people

He's nothing but a kid at play.<sup>50</sup>

In 'Phantom', written, Warner says on his website, in 1976 after his return from England, Warner makes a more direct attack on Court's acceptance, if not encouragement, of the destruction and rebuilding of Perth and on police corruption. Warner imagines suggesting to the Phantom, the comic book hero, that he comes to Perth:

...I know you'd just love Garden City  
Though Devil might have to stay outside  
Still Hero can become a police horse  
Provided you teach him how to take a bribe

At the same time however, 'Phantom' has a chorus which criticises both the political left and the right.

The capitalists are ripping out our jungle  
The communists ripping out our brain

while the end of the song asserts that the Phantom is the only hope we have. Warner describes the song as, "a plea for common sense in the wake of WA's 'progress at all costs' philosophy".<sup>51</sup> It sounds very much like an attempt to assert suburban reasonableness, a sensible and moderate middle way, between two political extremes.

Warner's first clear expression of suburban life was a song he wrote in 1974 and performed first with Pus. 'Suburban Boy' describes the experience of being a teenage boy in suburbia being moaned at by his mother, letting out his excess energy screaming at the football, drinking at the lunchtime 'Sunday Session' in the pub and failing to pick up girls. The song is a manifesto for the upper-working class and middling class suburban life that Warner would go on to document in many of his

songs with From the Suburbs. Along with ‘Campus Days’ another song from 1974, ‘Suburban Boy’ presages Warner’s later ambivalent embracing of the suburbs. In ‘Suburban Boy’ the singer is ‘*just* a suburban boy’ (my italics) as if being suburban is not enough. The suburban boy, it seems, is not a leader, not a success. The suburban emphasis on moderation is here reproduced in a sense of personal averageness. This idea is made more explicit in the chorus:

I’m just a Suburban Boy, just a Suburban Boy

And I know what its like

To be rejected every night

And I’m sure that it must be

Easier for boys from the city.

Suburban boys, here, never succeed with girls but, more, there is an envy of those, presumably smoother and more worldly, boys from the inner city who, the singer is sure, must have a more successful life, get more girls.

This simultaneous assertion of suburban life but negativity towards the experience of it is even more obvious in ‘Mug’s Game’, the title track of the first album positioned as the album’s final, climactic accounting of suburban life.

Recorded live in Melbourne, this version of the song runs just over thirteen minutes because of a lengthy spoken section. The singer characterises himself as too ordinary, his parents never took him aside and told him that he had to learn to play the game. Consequently, because he’s a straightforward (suburban) guy, who likes beer and Aussie rules, he’s been mugged ‘too many times in too many places’, taken advantage of by girls and failed to get a root—in the song’s vernacular. The singer asserts that,

not having learnt to play the game, he fails to 'fit in,' his 'jeans weren't tight enough', he couldn't do the Disco Duck.

In the spoken section, the singer once more invokes the failure of suburban ordinariness by comparing it first to Zongo the surfer, clearly totally stupid, who lives only for surfing and getting out of his head, but, with his bleached blond hair and earring, able to pull the girls. The singer then asks why he couldn't be more like Robert. Robert lives in the gentrified, rather than the bohemian inner city, we are told Carlton for Melbourne, Paddington for Sydney, Subiaco for Perth. His father is an American consul and his mother a French novelist. Robert spends six months of the year in Bali getting his head together. Robert is denouncing capitalism yet buys expensive paintings and sells dope. Implicit in Warner's critical description is also a class component. It is, one suspects, these well-off, middle-class boys of the gentrified inner city that are the boys in 'Suburban Boy' that Warner thinks have an easier time pulling girls.

The third character invoked is Derek, the upwardly mobile sales rep who next year will be trading in his Toyota Celica for a BMW. We are given a description of Derek out at a nightclub picking up Sandra, who thinks he's a spunk, while dancing to the Little River Band. The climax, in a move structurally reminiscent of the long spoken section in the Doors' song 'The End' off their 1967 self-titled first album, is Derek and Sandra both imagining the expected conclusion to the night in their having sex back at Derek's bachelor apartment.<sup>52</sup> Given that in the Doors song the singer is describing murdering his father and having sex with his mother, the intertextual reference gives a very suburban bathos to this description for knowledgeable listeners.

Similar to 'Suburban Boy', the singer of 'Mug's Game' is both envious of the successful men he describes and dismissive of them because of their falseness. The

song sets a real, if ordinary, suburban life where the singer fails to pull a girl, here a metonym again for the broader failure of suburban life, against the success of Zongo, Robert and Derek who are, nevertheless, dislikeable because they rely on what the singer believes to be false images.

### **Dave Warner and Ian Dury**

In his preoccupation with suburbia and his use of characters set in narratives, Warner bears a strong similarity to England's Ian Dury. This is not to say that Warner was influenced by Dury. Dury's first album, *Handsome*, as the singer for Kilburn and the Highroads, came out in June 1975 but Dury didn't reach his full potential until the highly acclaimed *New Boots and Panties* album of 1977 when recording as Ian Dury and the Blockheads. Certainly it is possible that Warner saw Dury playing in the London pub rock venues when Warner was there in 1976, however the extent to which there was any direct influence misses the point. Both Dury and Warner have a similar ambivalence towards suburbia, and suburban values, and both have a strong liking for the kind of character-based, sing-a-long songs so common in English music hall, songs like 'Don't Dilly Dally (My Old Man Said Follow The Van)' (written by Charles Collins and Fred W. Leigh in 1919).

It is worth noting here that Pus used to involve the audience by photocopying the lyrics to some of their songs. They started a "'Sing-a-long (sic) a Pus Song' series".<sup>53</sup> More, like the comedy acts in music hall, there was at the Governor Broome an:

old guy [Les, whom the manager] Stevens had dressed up in a tuxedo and hired to serve drinks in the lounge while the band was playing. Les had become quite a fixture at the Broome on Saturdays, occasionally neglecting

his duties to saunter up front to a microphone during one of the group's breaks to tell some corny joke.<sup>54</sup>

Howard writes that the audience would break into mock applause. Again, very music hall. The point here is the extent to which the English cultural inflection in Perth influenced Warner, and for that matter, his audience.

Dury was born in the upper-middle class north London suburb of Harrow though he liked everybody to think that he came from the Essex dormitory suburb of Upminster, a much more middling town and last stop on the District tube line. Dury certainly spent most of his formative years in Upminster. In the autobiographical 'Upminster Kid' on *Handsome*, Dury recounts with nostalgic pleasure dressing up in the style of Gene Vincent and going to the Romford Gaumont, having a rum and black at the Bell Hotel and throwing up in the park. Born in 1942, Dury was partially crippled by polio when he was seven. He went to the Royal College of Art and taught art for a while in Canterbury before deciding to focus on music.<sup>55</sup> To go with his upper-working class/lower-middle class persona, Dury cultivated a strong cockney accent.

Dury wrote many character songs. In 'Billericay Dickie', on *New Boots and Panties*, he describes an English version of Warner's Derek:

Good evening, I'm from Essex

In case you couldn't tell.

My given name is Dickie, I come from Billericay

And I'm doing very well.

Had a love affair with Nina

In the back of my Cortina

A seasoned up hyena could not have been more obscener.

She took me to the cleaners

And other misdemeanours

But I got right up between her

Rum and her Ribena.

Culturally speaking, Dickie's Ford Cortina is the English equivalent of Warner's Derek's Celica—solid, dependable and naff; a car for the suburban middling class. Sung in the persona of Dickie, the audience finds itself caught between Dickie's obvious relish at his sexual conquests and a repugnance at the sexism, superficiality and lack of self-knowledge so apparent from the lyrics.

Both Warner and Dury have songs which exhibit the patriotic nationalism that lies at the heart of suburban security, something that Barry Humphries has captured so well in his characterisations of Sandy Stone and Edna Everage.<sup>56</sup> In 'Convict Streak', also on *Mug's Game*, Warner sings that:

Maybe it's because of our Convict Streak

We wanna fight everyone we meet

Anzac Day is our day of the year

We march our march, we drink our beer.

He goes on to assert that "We don't like Slopes, we don't like Yanks" and proceeds to denigrate the Poms, the French and the Germans. The tone of the song is highly ambivalent. It is clearly strongly patriotic and it is very hard to tell if there is irony in the catalogue of disliked groups (which now, a quarter of a century on, would be

considered racist), and if so how much. In a similar vein, Dury's 'England's Glory', sung in live shows for some years but only finally appearing on *Apples* in 1989, celebrates an England defined by a catalogue of English characters from Frankie Howard and Neil Coward to Billy Bunter and Jane Austen, "All", Dury sings, "the jewels in the crown of England's glory". However, unsettling this list are included Jack the Ripper and Christine Keeler, both now remembered in England through a nostalgic glow but neither really adding to the lustre of England's glory. The point, again though, is about the deep similarity in suburban world-view between Humphries, Dury and Warner.

### **The Troggs in Perth**

We now need to discuss the Troggs. This English group were one of the most important influences on Perth music in the late 1970s and early 1980s—they had no impact on the Alternative Rock bands of the Eastern States. To some extent the Troggs' importance in Perth is because of the profound significance the group's music had for James Baker. Baker drummed with the Victims, the first version of Scientists and the Hoodoo Gurus in that order.<sup>57</sup> After his acrimonious split with the latter band he formed the James Baker Experiences in 1985 and released a remake of the Troggs' 1966 hit, "I Can't Control Myself". As Greg Brooker writes in a web-article on Kim Salmon, "'In My Heart, There's a Place Called Swampland": Songs that Kim Salmon Taught Us', James Baker was 'a huge Troggs fan'.<sup>58</sup> Baker is reputed to have seen the Ramones and the Heartbreakers as well as the Damned and the Sex Pistols. He was a man of considerable musical knowledge when it came to punk music so we need to tease out why he might have been so fascinated by the Troggs. Not only did Baker's predilection influence the music of the Scientists *mrk1*—he cowrote over half of their album including the single 'Frantic Romantic'—but the very name of the band, a

name Salmon was happy to keep in later incarnations, came from a play on the Troggs name. As Salmon writes:

With a song under our belts we convened on the verandah of Victim Manor [where the members of the Victims lived] and brainstormed to find a moniker that would capture our caveman existence. ‘The Troggs’ was already taken so we opted for irony and came up with ‘The Scientists’.<sup>59</sup>

Baker took his Troggs preoccupation into the Hoodoo Gurus. As the anonymous author of the Howlspace biography of that band notes: “The music echoed all the cartoon rock from the Troggs through the Ramones to the Cramps”.<sup>60</sup>

However, we should not tie this influence to one man, Dave Warner also used to sing at least one Troggs song. On the live *Suburbs in the '70s* CD there is a version of the B-side of the Troggs first, little-known single, a track written by Reg Ball, Presley’s name before it was changed, called ‘The Yella In Me’. Interestingly, in *City of Light*, Warner has the Farris Brothers band, prior to the formation of INXS, performing a version of ‘Wild Thing’, the Troggs second single and most famous hit, at a party in 1979.<sup>61</sup>

What was it about the Troggs that made Perth bands so receptive to them? The Troggs came from Andover in Hampshire, a county just outside of the London-related ‘Home Counties’. The band was formed in 1964 and Larry Page, who had managed the Kinks, became their manager in 1966. It was Page who changed Ball’s name to the more resonant Presley. ‘Wild Thing’, the Troggs break-through hit was written by the American country-rock composer Chip Taylor.<sup>62</sup> In the hands of the Troggs the song gained a heavy down-beat to go with the catchy riff and ‘Wild Thing’ became a

cross between pop and proto-hard rock. 'Wild Thing' was followed by two mid-tempo pop-rock songs, 'With A Girl Like You' and 'I Can't Control Myself', also both hits in 1966. The lyrics of the latter song included lines like:

I can't stand still 'cause you got me goin'

Your slacks are low and your hips are showin'

and

I've got this feeling that's inside of me

It makes me think of how things used to be

It makes me feel alright

When I'm with you at night

And we love

And we love

These got the track banned by the BBC in England, the ABC in Australia and many radio stations in the United States for being too sexually suggestive.

Musically, in England, the Troggs were related neither to the pop tradition of Mersey Beat nor the rhythm 'n' blues tradition of bands like the Rolling Stones and the Animals, though Troggs songs did sometimes use rhythms and riffs from Bo Diddley and Chuck Berry. In general, however, the Troggs' music was very 'white' combining melody with a driving beat in a conventional verse-and-chorus structure, or, as with slow songs like, 'Anyway That You Want Me' (1966) and 'Love Is All Around' (1967), melody coupled with romantic lyrics.

Increasingly, the Troggs are identified as a proto-punk band—though this begs the question of what is meant by punk. Well before the use of the term to describe the

mid-to-late-1970s bands in New York and London, the eminent American rock critic Lester Bangs wrote an article in 1971 describing the Troggs as punk. It is worth quoting Bangs at some length:

[The Troggs] music was strong, deep as La Brea without sucking you straight down into the currentless bass depths like many of their successors, and so insanely alive and fiercely aggressive that it could easily begin to resemble a form of total assault which was when the lily-livered lovers of pretty-pomp adored la-di-da buddy-duddy Beat groups would turn tail just like the tourists before them and make for that Ferry Cross the Mersey. ‘Cause this was a no-jive, take-care-of-business band...churning out rock ‘n’ roll that thundered right back to the very first grungy chords and straight ahead to the fuzztone subways of the future.<sup>63</sup>

Bangs is very clear that the Troggs are a part of a punk tradition that leads to the MC5 and the Stooges. Going on to reference the Doors he writes that unlike all these bands, “The Troggs eschewed all trendy gimmicks and kinky theatrics...and came out...the most powerfully lust-driven outfit in white rock ‘n’ roll then or now”.<sup>64</sup> As an aside we can note that the MC5 acknowledged this heritage, playing the Troggs song ‘I Want You’, the B-side of ‘With A Girl Like You’, on their live first album, *Kick Out the Jams* (released in 1969)—though the MC5 renamed the song ‘I Want You Right Now’ and claimed to have composed it themselves.

For Bangs in this article it is the straight-forward expression of white, male, teen lust which is the defining quality of punk music. He writes:

If you happened to be a sixteen or seventeen-year old male sagging in the rubberband scrotum of suburban America [I Can't Control Myself] braced you, each hearing injected new confidence for however brief a time almost as if some Little Doll had in all phantasmal actuality come pouting up and reached and grabbed yer cock for just a minute like you always dreamed of 'em doing.<sup>65</sup>

And here, for us, we reach the crux of Bangs' argument: the Troggs make music for suburban (male) teenagers. Indeed, hailing from suburban Andover, unlike the Mersey bands, or the majority of r'n'b bands, who came from major cities, the Troggs were a suburban band.

If their preoccupation with straight down the line white male, teen lust is what the Troggs and the Stooges have in common, we also need to understand what distinguishes the two bands. Here, we can begin by thinking about what Michel Foucault has to say about transgression. Foucault writes that:

The limit and transgression depend on each other for whatever density of being they possess: a limit could exist if it were absolutely uncrossable and, reciprocally, transgression would be pointless if it merely crossed a limit composed of illusions and shadows.<sup>66</sup>

However, while the limit and transgression need each other, '[t]ransgression carries the limit right to the limit of its being; transgression forces the limit to face the fact of its imminent disappearance, to find itself in what it excludes.'<sup>67</sup> What we need to do here is distinguish two kinds of transgression, the radical, absolute transgression, about which Foucault is writing, which challenges the very existence of what is transgressed and, as a consequence, its own existence as transgression, and a relative

transgression which depends on what is transgressed to give meaning to the transgression. It is in this distinction that we can find a way to differentiate the Troggs from the Stooges.

In a 1977 article Bangs has a rather different take on Iggy Pop's work with the Stooges. In 'Iggy Pop: blowtorch in bondage', Bangs criticises what was then Iggy's new album, *The Idiot*, remembering how 'normal standards' could not be applied to the Stooges, how Iggy had "an intensity that comes from a murderous drivenness that has in the past made him the most dangerous performer alive".<sup>68</sup> Bangs goes on to write about Iggy's work with the Stooges in terms of "apocalypse" and of a "holocaust at its most nihilistically out of control".<sup>69</sup> What Bangs is offering here is a definition of punk as a form of music that threatens the foundation of social order, and more specifically the genre of rock music, by its complete loss of control. This loss conjures the moment of absolute (self)destruction.

While this transgression may be what is fascinating, powerful, and threatening in the work of the Stooges and, for that matter, the Sex Pistols, it is not what we find in the Troggs. Rather, the Troggs delve beneath the veneer of suburban, bourgeois respectability to show us the gothic desires kept hidden. Fred Botting argues that:

The terrors and horrors of transgression in Gothic writing become a powerful means to reassert the values of society, virtue and propriety: transgression, by crossing the social and aesthetic limits, serves to reinforce or underline their value and necessity, restoring or defining limits.<sup>70</sup>

This is, in the end, a more reassuring form of transgression than that described by Foucault and acted out by the Stooges. While appearing to threaten, in the end the Troggs work reinforces the bourgeois values of suburbia. They sing about lust rather

than love as most obviously in ‘I Can’t Control Myself’, in ‘Cousin Jane’ they offer the fantasy of illicit sex with one’s cousin when she stays in your parents’ home, in ‘Little Girl’ they gave us the story of a young, unmarried father who is forbidden to see his daughter by his girlfriend’s parents. And all this expressed within a tightly controlled musical form. While the singer tells us that “I Can’t Control Myself”, we know that his loss of control is likely to lead to no more than masturbation—this is not an apocalyptic end of the world. The Troggs may challenge suburban values but they are not going to destroy them. In this way, the band were the forerunners of the power-pop end of English punk: the Buzzcocks with Pete Shelley singing about being an “Orgasm Addict” not the Sex Pistols with Johnny Rotten screaming that “Belsen Was A Gas”.<sup>71</sup> In their own way the Troggs were just as suburban as Ian Dury.

In the terms of this distinction, Dave Warner’s music was more Troggs than Stooges. With Pus he developed a one chord, rhythmic chant which used to close the set called ‘Throbbing Knob’. Howard, who contributed to its creation, writes that:

We...realis[ed] that the time taken to learn the ‘dirty’ Fugs songs had prompted us to write one of our own. We finished the jam secure in the knowledge that we had created a song which could out-Fug the Fugs.<sup>72</sup>

However, on the evidence the chant seems to have lacked the sexual politics of the New York band but had, instead, the directness of a male sexual statement of desire more analogous in intent to the Troggs—and, indeed, similar to a slightly later song that Warner and Howard wrote called ‘Hot Crotch’ which Warner continued to perform with From the Suburbs. In Howard’s description:

Throbbing Knob evolved into a spectacular finale to which the audience often contributed, for example by making animal noises when the 'Knob' was reworked as 'Animal Knob'.<sup>73</sup>

Certainly this suggests something more like the Troggs meet music hall (the two were not a great distance apart anyway) than the Stooges attempts to alienate their audience and produce chaos.

To continue with this distinction between the Troggs and the Stooges, the Scientists were more Troggs also. This is in spite of Salmon's assertion, quoted earlier, that the band "was like a collision between the Stooges and Herman's Hermits", and in spite of Salmon name-checking the New York Dolls in 'Teenage Dreamer':

Had no fun before I was twenty-one,

All I could do was think about the New York Dolls,

This track, like many on the album, has guitar work influenced by the Dolls' basic guitar style. Nevertheless, suggesting the song's poppy qualities, the Scientists even managed to get an appearance on *Countdown* singing 'Frantic Romantic', perhaps the most obviously Troggs influenced track on the first album and, as I have already mentioned, the single. Even so, the Scientists failed to make an impact in a city with hardly any cosmopolitan bohemia.

When Kim Salmon formed the second version of the Scientists, he did so in inner city Sydney in 1981/82. It was this band, influenced as Salmon has said, by Alex Chilton's remarkable *Like Flies on Sherbet* album<sup>74</sup> made when Chilton was on the verge of a mental breakdown,<sup>75</sup> which produced the foundational *Blood Red River* mini-album in 1983. It is *Blood Red River* which justifies the claim that Salmon was

one of the inventors of grunge. This will be discussed in chapter six. The point here is that it happened in Sydney's inner city where the Scientists found themselves in an environment which enabled them to experiment musically in ways not appreciated in suburban Perth, ways closer to Foucault's, and the Stooges', understanding of transgression. When Salmon writes about the *Blood Red River* period, in language that echoes the English Romantic poet William Blake, that: "**The path of riotousness was the path of righteousness** and only we [the band] were on it" [sic],<sup>76</sup> he is signalling his move towards the Stooges and New York Dolls apocalyptic punk.

### **Suburban Perth and the Troggs' Continuing Influence**

The story that links the Troggs, a relative transgression that strips away bourgeois nicety, Perth as the ultimate suburban city, and the good time rock that starts with Dave Warner, restarts in the power-pop punk of the second-half of the 1970s, in the music of the Victims, the Cheap Nasties, and the Manikins, and then reaches outside of Perth first with Dave Warner's *From the Suburbs*, then with the Scientists and the Hoodoo Gurus, does not stop at this point.<sup>77</sup> In the 1980s Perth produced the Stems, then the Chevelles.<sup>78</sup> Reviewing a 2001 Chevelles single on the web, John McPharlin writes that:

During the dark ages, the light of learning was kept burning in isolated monasteries at the periphery of the failed civilisation. Perth seems to have fulfilled a similar roll for power pop, which has remained a fundamental feature of the music scene there.<sup>79</sup>

In a review of the Chevelles second album, *Girl God*, released in 2002, Luke Torn suggests that the album's closer, 'Sunshine', is "reminiscent of a punched-up Troggs circa 'Love Is All Around'".<sup>80</sup>

However, the place where all these elements come together most strongly is in Jebediah's music.<sup>81</sup> Started in 1995, the guiding force of the band is singer and lyricist, Kevin Mitchell who comes from Bullcreek, another suburb like Bicton, though newer, between Perth and Fremantle. The band's name comes from Jebediah Springfield, the founder of Springfield, that quintessential American suburban town in the cartoon series, *The Simpsons*. In reviews, the band are, themselves, often described as power-pop or, more specifically, as "punk-pop perfectly suited to the post-grunge alternative generation".<sup>82</sup> On the band's first album, *Slightly Odway*, released in 1997, is a track called 'Invaders'. Towards the end the rhythm of the track changes and the band go into the 'ba-ba-ba' Troggs chorus off 'With A Girl Like You'. Presley gets a composing credit. The band are acknowledging Perth's musical history.<sup>83</sup>

In 2003, taking a break from Jebediah, Kevin Mitchell recorded an album under the pseudonym Bob Evans. It was called *Suburban Kid*. On the Bob Evans website Mitchell/Evans writes that as Mitchell got older Evans' personality was harder to ignore, "until by the age of twenty, he was beginning to compile a short list of songs based around an acoustic guitar, a pop melody and simple lyrics inspired by the simple life of a suburban kid brought up in Bullcreek, Perth, Western Australia, 6149".<sup>84</sup> Mitchell could be read as talking about how he had tried to deny the importance of suburbia in his teenage years, or to criticise it, maybe using Jebediah to try to escape from his suburban origins. Mitchell/Evans tells us that *Suburban Kid* contains:

twelve songs, incorporating country, pop, soul and folk influences and subject matter involving falling in love, broken down cars, falling out of love, coming off drugs on a Christmas morning, falling in love

again, going out on a Friday night, and the wonder of being loved whilst being totally unworthy.

These are simple songs about life's simple pleasures written by a guy who lives for the simplicities of life. Few of us have grown up on the streets, been to jail and live a tortured life filled with pain, just as few of us have lived privileged lives, attending private schools before obtaining art degrees.<sup>85</sup>

Mitchell/Evans is rejecting the inner city—you can't live on the streets in suburbia—and asserting the legitimacy of the ordinariness of suburban life. He sounds like a young Sandy Stone. Twenty-two years on and another generation, he also sounds like Dave Warner, realising that what he valued in Perth was the suburban life against which he had previously rebelled.

When Alternative Rock evolved in Australia in the decade from the mid-1970s, it did so in the inner city areas offered by the major cities. However, because of its recent settlement, Perth was quite unique. It had little in the way of a built environment that could be appropriated as inner city and what there was was rapidly transformed either by gentrification, in the case of Subiaco, or by a more radical urban renewal, in the case of north of the line's transformation into the restaurant suburb of Northbridge. Dave Warner came out of the suburbs. While his first important band, Pus, critiqued suburban values, his second, and more well-known band, Dave Warner's From the Suburbs, acknowledged and ambivalently celebrated these same values.

Warner sees Pus as a pioneering punk band and his justification for this would be that his influences at that time were, among others, the New York bands the Velvet

Underground and the Fugs. While the Velvet Underground are commonly considered to be one of the formative influences on the development of the punk sound and the punk attitude, as found in their lyrics about drug use, sado-masochism and the like, the Fugs are usually left out of conventional punk histories. However, as a New York, inner city band that challenged the values of middle-class, suburban life, Warner is right to think of them as a punk band. As we have seen, a part of the problem lies with the definition of punk. Alternative Rock in Australia, which is a term that unifies punk and post-punk bands into a single genre, tended to mine a similar musical vein to the Stooges, the MC5, and the New York Dolls. Here we can think of the Saints in Brisbane, Radio Birdman in Sydney and the Birthday Party in Melbourne. This understanding of punk is of a radical transgression, of an absolute, and nihilistic, critique of middle-class, and suburban, values.

Like many Perth artists who came from the suburbs and remained attached to suburbia, Warner espoused the punk of relative transgression, the punk of English bands like the Troggs and the power-pop end of the late 1970s flowering of English punk such as the Buzzcocks, and, also, the punk of the American garage band tradition of groups such as the Electric Prunes and the Seeds, groups to be found on the double album collection, *Nuggets* mentioned elsewhere. Where Salmon's first version of the Scientists, especially with Baker's liking for the Troggs, was predominantly in this vein, Salmon moved to Sydney when he wanted to take his music further into the more radical, more problematic and problematising, musical arenas. Warner, though, moved from the relatively transgressive Pus to the ambivalent acceptance of suburbia in *From the Suburbs*.

In addition, as we have also seen, the English pop tradition, with its roots in music hall and sing-a-longs, has played a much larger part in popular musical

development in Perth than elsewhere in Australia. As well as the Fugs, as I have mentioned, another band that influenced Warner, though to a more minor degree, was the Bonzo Dog Doo Dah Band. This English group released songs that were an affectionately humorous take on English suburban life such as 'My Pink Half Of The Drainpipe' (on the album *The Doughnut in Granny's Greenhouse* (1968)) and 'I'm The Urban Spaceman' (1968), a critique of the fantasy of male urban, for which read inner city, life. The Bonzos were also steeped in the English popular music tradition and music hall was central to their musical sensibility. With an understanding of these influences and attitudes we can appreciate why Warner is written out of histories of Alternative Rock which privilege those bands whose work lifts off from American groups such as the Stooges and the MC5 and have little, if any English influence.

The situation of Perth, geographically remote from other Australian capital cities, and, at least until the impact of new communications and transport technologies, culturally remote as well, has been very important in the evolution of a 'Perth sound.' Equally important has been the overwhelmingly suburban nature of Perth's built environment. As we have seen, this importance remains and has contributed to the continued prominence of power-pop in Perth and the sympathetic lyrical acknowledgement in the songs of bands such as Jebediah and Eskimo Joe, whose second album, *A Song is a City* (2004), is in part about Fremantle, of the importance of suburbia.

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<sup>1</sup> K. Salmon, Liner Booklet for reissued *Pissed on Another Planet*, Citadel, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> D. Warner, *Dave Warner Online*, 2004,  
<<http://www.davewarner.com.au/biography.html>>, 13 July 2006.

<sup>3</sup> S. Cohen, *Rock Culture in Liverpool*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1991, quoted in J. Connell & C. Gibson, *Sound Tracks: Popular Music, Identity and Place*, Routledge, London, 2003, p. 13.

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- <sup>4</sup> K. Salmon, Liner Booklet for reissued *Pissed on Another Planet*.
- <sup>5</sup> M. Bracewell, *England Is Mine: Pop Life in Albion from Wilde to Goldie*, Flamingo, London, 1997, p. 24.
- <sup>6</sup> Bracewell, *England Is Mine: Pop Life in Albion from Wilde to Goldie*, p. 111.
- <sup>7</sup> R. T., Appleyard, 'Western Australia: Economic and Demographic Growth, 1850–1914', in C. T. Stannage (ed) *A New History of Western Australia*, University of Western Australia Press, Perth, 1981, p. 215.
- <sup>8</sup> R. T., Appleyard, 'Western Australia: Economic and Demographic Growth, 1850–1914', pp. 221–2.
- <sup>9</sup> R. Howe, 'Inner suburbs: from slums to gentrification', in L. C. Johnson (ed) *Suburban Dreaming: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Australian Cities*, Deakin UP, Geelong, VIC, 1994, p. 145.
- <sup>10</sup> R. Howe, 'Inner suburbs: from slums to gentrification', p. 145.
- <sup>11</sup> R. Howe, 'Inner suburbs: from slums to gentrification', p. 148.
- <sup>12</sup> G. Woods, '1901: A Socio-Economic Profile of Australia at Federation', *Parliament of Australia: Parliamentary Library*, 2001, <<http://www.aph.gov.au/library/pubs/rn/2000-01/01RN23.htm>>, 13 July 2006.
- <sup>13</sup> J. Gregory, *City of Light: A History of Perth since the 1950s*, City of Perth, Perth, 2003, p. 7.
- <sup>14</sup> Jenny Gregory has published an article which includes a discussion of the development of the suburb of Nedlands in the period between the first and second World Wars. Nedlands is a middle class suburb close to the city and this article illustrates well the development of suburban Perth. See J. Gregory, 'Protecting Middle-Class Suburbia: An Ideal Space for the Citizens of Interwar Perth', *Studies in Western Australian History*, no. 17, 1997, pp. 77–91. Also available on line at <<http://search.informit.com.au/fullText;res=APAFT;dn=980303144>>.
- <sup>15</sup> For a history of Subiaco see Ken Spillman, *Identity Prized: A History of Subiaco*, University of Western Australia Press, Perth, 1985. Spillman writes that: 'While during the early and mid-seventies [during the time of Perth city's urban renewal] Subiaco had fought to remain intact, its population had become more and more a population of 'Subiacophiles', and the passions of these people had been reflected...in an unprecedented interest in the renovation of old houses and in the formation of community-interested groups.' (p. 339).
- <sup>16</sup> Gregory, *City of Light*, pp. 318–9.
- <sup>17</sup> Gregory, *City of Light*, p. 249.
- <sup>18</sup> Gregory, *City of Light*, p. 249.
- <sup>19</sup> Gregory, *City of Light*, pp. 243–4.
- <sup>20</sup> This information is from *The West Australian's 175<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Souvenir*, WA's Defining Moments, part four 1958–1970.
- <sup>21</sup> Salmon, Liner Booklet for reissued *Pissed on Another Planet*.
- <sup>22</sup> Salmon, Liner Booklet for reissued *Pissed on Another Planet*.
- <sup>23</sup> Gregory, *City of Light*, p. 245.
- <sup>24</sup> *The West Australian's 175<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Souvenir*, WA's Defining Moments.
- <sup>25</sup> Gregory, *City of Light*, p. 251.
- <sup>26</sup> R. Howe, 'Inner suburbs: from slums to gentrification', p. 157.
- <sup>27</sup> D. Nichols, *The Go-Betweens*, rev. edn, Verse Chorus, Portland, Oregon, 2003, p. 27.

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- <sup>28</sup> Nichols, *The Go-Betweens*, p. 31.
- <sup>29</sup> Kuepper quoted in C. Walker, *Stranded: The Secret History of Australian Independent Music, 1977–1991*, Pan Macmillan, Sydney, 1996, p. 14.
- <sup>30</sup> Nichols, *The Go-Betweens*, p. 31.
- <sup>31</sup> Gregory, *City of Light*, p. 192.
- <sup>32</sup> Gregory, *City of Light*, p. 71.
- <sup>33</sup> R. N. Ghosh, 'Economic Development and Population Growth in Western Australia since 1945', in C. T. Stannage (ed) *A New History of Western Australia*, University of Western Australia Press, Perth, 1981, p. 287.
- <sup>34</sup> Gregory, *City of Light*, p. 58.
- <sup>35</sup> Ghosh, 'Economic Development and Population Growth in Western Australia since 1945', p. 289.
- <sup>36</sup> G. Turner, 'Australian popular music and its contexts', in P Hayward (ed) *From Pop to Punk to Postmodernism: Popular Music and Australian Culture from the 1960s to the 1990s*, Allen and Unwin, North Sydney, 1992, p. 23.
- <sup>37</sup> D. Warner, *Dave Warner Online*.
- <sup>38</sup> On Radio Birdman see Vivien Johnson, *Radio Birdman*, Sheldon Booth, Melbourne, 1990.
- <sup>39</sup> A. Howard, *Dave Warner: Suburban Boy*, Creative Research, Perth, 1981, pp. 43–4.
- <sup>40</sup> Howard, *Dave Warner: Suburban Boy*, p. 52.
- <sup>41</sup> Howard, *Dave Warner: Suburban Boy*, p. 55.
- <sup>42</sup> C. Mele, *Selling the Lower East Side: Culture, Real Estate, and Resistance in New York City*, University of Minnesota Press, 2000, <<http://www.upress.umn.edu/sles/chapter5/ch5-1.html>>, 13 July 2006.
- <sup>43</sup> 'Slum Goddess', *The Plastic Exploding Inevitable*, in *Aspen*, no. 3, <[://www.ubu.com/aspen/aspen3/plastic.html#ginsberg](http://www.ubu.com/aspen/aspen3/plastic.html#ginsberg)>, 13 July 2006.
- <sup>44</sup> C. Walker, *Stranded: The Secret History of Australian Independent Music, 1977–1991*, Pan Macmillan, Sydney, 1996, p. 27.
- <sup>45</sup> Howard, *Dave Warner: Suburban Boy*, p. 127.
- <sup>46</sup> In the liner notes for *Suburbs in the '70s*, Warner writes that, during the time this live collection was being recorded: "The Hoodoo Gurus' Dave Faulkner was cutting his teeth on punk band The Victims and was a regular visitor to our gigs along with alternative music legend James Baker."
- <sup>47</sup> Homan suggests the evolution of OzRock out of the Australian blues-rock bands of the early 1970s. (S. Homan, *The Mayor's a Square: Live Music and Law and Order in Sydney*, Local Consumption Publications, Newtown, NSW, 2003, p. 88.)
- <sup>48</sup> Howard, *Dave Warner: Suburban Boy*, p. 149.
- <sup>49</sup> The original is to be found on Country Joe and the Fish's first album *Electric Music for the Mind and Body*, released in 1967.
- <sup>50</sup> D. Warner, quoted in Howard, *Dave Warner: Suburban Boy*, p. 129.
- <sup>51</sup> D. Warner, *Dave Warner Online*.
- <sup>52</sup> Howard mentions the Doors as another band in Warner's extensive musical knowledge. (Howard, *Dave Warner: Suburban Boy*).
- <sup>53</sup> Howard, *Dave Warner: Suburban Boy*, p. 93.
- <sup>54</sup> Howard, *Dave Warner: Suburban Boy*, p. 94.
- <sup>55</sup> For a biography of Ian Dury see R. Balls, *Sex and Drugs and Rock'n'Roll: The Life of Ian Dury*, Omnibus Press, London, 2000.

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<sup>56</sup> See, for example, John Lahr, *Dame Edna Everage and the Rise of Western Civilisation: Backstage with Barry Humphries*, Bloomsbury, London, 1991. Humphries developed the personas of Edna Everage and Sandy Stone in the late 1950s. Lahr describes Stone as “the sad, childless, credulous Australian Mr Pooter” (p. 90). Everage as “an amalgam of the suburban Australian 1950s, as well as an embodiment of a nascent spirit of critical self-awareness” (pp. 90–1). It is important to see Warner’s ambivalence about suburbia in the tradition of Humphries’.

<sup>57</sup> It should also be noted that Baker drummed with that important Australian grunge/rock band, the Beasts of Bourbon, formed in 1983, in which Salmon played as well. At different times other members of the Scientists—Boris Sujdovic, Tony Thewlis, Rixon Brett—also played in the Beasts.

<sup>58</sup> G. Brooker, ‘Under Your Mushroom: A Brief History of The Stems’, in *Let Them Eat Lead*, <<http://letthemetlead.com/article.php?a=archives/issue3/stems.htm>>, 5 May 2002.

<sup>59</sup> Salmon, Liner Booklet for reissued *Pissed on Another Planet*.

<sup>60</sup> ‘Hoodoo Gurus’, *Howlspace: Music from Australia and NZ*, <<http://www.howlspace.com.au/en2/hoodoogurus/hoodoogurus.htm>>, 13 July 2006.

<sup>61</sup> D. Warner, *City of Light*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, South Fremantle, WA, 1995, p. 71.

<sup>62</sup> Chip Taylor, who happens to be actor Jon Voight’s brother, also wrote *Angel Of The Morning*.

<sup>63</sup> L. Bangs, *Psychotic Reactions and Carburetor Dung*, G. Marcus (ed), Serpent’s Tail, London, 2001, p. 55.

<sup>64</sup> L. Bangs, *Psychotic Reactions and Carburetor Dung*, p. 55.

<sup>65</sup> L. Bangs, *Psychotic Reactions and Carburetor Dung*, p. 58.

<sup>66</sup> M. Foucault, ‘Preface to Transgression’, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1977, p. 34.

<sup>67</sup> Foucault ‘Preface to Transgression’, p. 34.

<sup>68</sup> L. Bangs, *Psychotic Reactions and Carburetor Dung*, p. 205.

<sup>69</sup> L. Bangs, *Psychotic Reactions and Carburetor Dung*, p. 206.

<sup>70</sup> Botting, F., *Gothic*, Routledge, London, 1996, p. 7.

<sup>71</sup> Those American arch-power popsters, the Ramones, covered *I Can’t Control Myself* on an album of psychedelic and early rock classics they released in 1993/4 called *Acid Eaters*.

<sup>72</sup> Howard, *Dave Warner: Suburban Boy*, p. 58.

<sup>73</sup> Howard, *Dave Warner: Suburban Boy*, pp. 127–8.

<sup>74</sup> In an interview with online *Mod Magazine* Salmon says, referring to left-field Memphis producer Jim Dickinson, “the record he produced for Alex Chilton, *Like Flies on Sherbet*, really informed my musical direction for a good decade” (quoted in ‘Kim’s in the Kitchen’, *Mod Magazine*, <[www.silvergirl.com/ModKSalmonInterview.html](http://www.silvergirl.com/ModKSalmonInterview.html)>, 13 July 2006). In the liner booklet for the Citadel reissue of *Blood Red River*, Salmon describes how, when he asked Tony Thewlis to join the Scientists mrkII, Thewlis understood what he was being asked to play after listening to *Like Flies on Sherbet* (K. Salmon, Liner Booklet for reissued *Blood Red River*, Citadel, 2000). Thewlis had previously played in Perth new wave band, Helicopters.

<sup>75</sup> Alex Chilton first found fame in 1967 with the Boxtops. He subsequently co-led Big Star, one of the most influential rock bands of the early 1970s, a band that helped invent power-pop.

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- <sup>76</sup> Salmon, Liner Booklet for reissued *Blood Red River*.
- <sup>77</sup> After the break-up of the Cheap Nasties, Neil Fernandez (guitar) and Mark Betts (drums) were founding members of the Manikins in 1978.
- <sup>78</sup> Brooker, 'Under Your Mushroom: A Brief History of The Stems'.
- <sup>79</sup> J. McPharlin, 'Review - Cmon Everybody', *The Chevelles Website*, <[www.thechevelles.com/reviews.htm](http://www.thechevelles.com/reviews.htm)>, 11 May 2002.
- <sup>80</sup> L. Torn, 'The Chevelles: Girl God (Zip Records)', *The Chevelles Website*: <[www.thechevelles.com](http://www.thechevelles.com)>, 13 July 2006.
- <sup>81</sup> I would like to thank Kristen Phillips for pointing out to me the Jebediah connection with the Troggs and for telling me about the Bob Evans album.
- <sup>82</sup> 'Jebediah', *Whammo: The Worldwide Home of Australasian Music and More Online*, <<http://www.whammo.com.au/encyclopedia.asp?articleid=1049>>, 15 May 2002.
- <sup>83</sup> As it happens the Invaders was the name of the short-lived band of which Salmon was a member between the Cheap Nasties and the Scientists.
- <sup>84</sup> B. Evans, 'Biography', *Bob Evans: Suburban Kid*, <<http://bobevans.entertainmentit.com/bio.htm>>, 9 May 2002.
- <sup>85</sup> Evans, 'Biography'.

## Discography

Alex Chilton *Like Flies on Sherbet* Peabody, 1979

Bob Evans *Suburban Kid* Redline, 2003

The Bonzo Dog Band *The Doughnut in Granny's Greenhouse* liberty, 1968

Charles Collins and Fred W. Leigh *Don't Dilly Dally (My Old Man Said Follow The Van)* 1919

Chevelles *Girl God Zip*, 2002

Country Joe and the Fish *Electric Music for the Mind and Body* Vanguard, 1967

Dave Warner's From the Suburbs, *Mug's Game* Mushroom, 1978

Dave Warner's From the Suburbs *Suburbs in the '70s* Draw Music, 1999

The Doors *The Doors* Elektra, 1967

Eskimo Joe *A Song is a City* Festival, 2004

The Fugs *The Fugs First Album* Fantasy, 1965

The Fugs *Golden Filth* Reprise, 1969

Herman's Hermits *Their Greatest Hits* Abko, 1973

Hoodoo Gurus *Stoneage Romeos* Big Time, 1983

Ian Dury, Kilburn and the Highroads *Handsome Dawn*, 1975

Ian Dury *New Boots and Panties* Stiff, 1977

Ian Dury *Apples* WEA, 1989

Iggy Pop *The Idiot* Atlantic, 1977

Jebediah *Slightly Odway* Murmur, 1997

MC5 *Kick Out the Jams* Elektra, 1969

The Ramones *Acid Eaters* Radioactive, 1993

The Saints *Wild About You 1976-1978* Raven, 2000

The Scientists *Pissed on Another Planet / The Pink Album* Citadel, 2004

The Scientists *Blood Red River* AuGoGo, 1983

The Triffids *Treeless Plain* Hot, 1983

The Troggs *Archeology 1966-1976* Fontana, 1992

Various Artists *Nuggets* Sire, 1972