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Ideal Visions of Canberra

An exploration of the aspirations and assumptions behind the planning of Canberra during its two greatest periods of growth.

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Master of Arts of the Australian National University.

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Declaration

Except where otherwise indicated this thesis is my own work.

Mark Henry Haefele
14 June 1995
Acknowledgments

I came to Canberra on a United States Fulbright Post-Graduate Student Award in early 1994. It has been a rewarding and challenging opportunity to come to a place I had only read about, and, while coming to terms with the experience of living in a new and different city, simultaneously study its history. In many ways, this thesis is an exploration of the things I observed to be different and interesting about Canberra--things which long-time residents might take for granted. My position as an outsider to Canberra and Australia may be both the strength and the weakness of this thesis.

This thesis was funded by the Australian American Educational Foundation and the Australian National University. However, because I left family and friends and travelled to the other side of the world to live and research, monetary support alone would not have been enough to finish my task. I am deeply indebted to the people who helped make me feel at home in Australia and Canberra. These include: Stein Helgeby, Rory Henry, the O’Donnell Family, Sue Rickard, Steven Leslie, Missy Churchill, Kim Anderson, Duncan McIntyre, Eddie Vickery, the Stewart Family and the staff of the Australian National University Faculty of Arts History Department. In particular I would like to thank Dr. Anthea Hyslop for helping me secure a Fulbright award and for her helpful comments on my thesis. Most of all I would like to thank Dr. Nicholas Brown, for his informative guidance, thoughtful insight, and for reading many many drafts.
**Abbreviations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Australian Capital Territory</th>
<th>ACT</th>
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<td>Australian Archives</td>
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<td>Commonwealth of Australia Parliamentary Debates</td>
<td>CPD</td>
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<td>Federal Capital Advisory Committee</td>
<td>FCAC</td>
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<td>Federal Capital Commission</td>
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<td>National Capital Development Commission</td>
<td>NCDC</td>
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<tr>
<td>National Capital Planning Authority</td>
<td>NCPA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Contents

Abstract ................................................................................................................................. 1
Introduction ............................................................................................................................ 2
Chapter One: More than ‘the Seat of Government’ ................................................................. 17
1. A Capital City .................................................................................................................. 19
2. Eliminating the Problems of Existing Australian Cities .................................................... 22
3. Criteria for a Capital Site ............................................................................................... 24
   An area of not less than 1,000 square miles . . only to be let on
   building or other leases to utilisers ............................................................................. 25
   In a good healthy and fertile situation ....................................................................... 27
4. The Design of the Capital ............................................................................................. 31
   The Science of Town Planning .................................................................................. 32
   Recent Developments’ in Town Planning .................................................................. 40
Chapter Two: Griffin’s Canberra ......................................................................................... 53
1. Griffin’s Legacy ............................................................................................................ 53
2. Griffin’s Social Reform Agenda ................................................................................... 60
3. Spatial Defamiliarisation ............................................................................................ 66
4. Presenting a Vision ...................................................................................................... 72
   Griffin’s plan is frustrated ......................................................................................... 77
   Griffin’s spatial legacy ............................................................................................... 81
Chapter Three: The FCAC’s and the FCC’s Capital .............................................................. 85
1. Sulman’s Vision ............................................................................................................ 85
   Defamiliarisation of the City .................................................................................... 87
   Engineering a better society through the organisation of space ............................... 88
2. Populating the Idea ..................................................................................................... 98
   The Federal Capital Commission and Ideal Visions of the Capital ......................... 100
   Inversions of Utopia ................................................................................................. 104
Chapter Four: ‘Something that the Australian people would come to admire and respect’ ................................................................................................................................. 110
1. The Report of the Senate Select Committee ................................................................. 111
   A Garden City ........................................................................................................... 112
   National Pride ........................................................................................................... 113
   Administrative Recommendations ............................................................................ 115
2. Menzies’ Vision .......................................................................................................... 116
3. Holford’s Vision .......................................................................................................... 117
4. Structure of the NCDC ............................................................................................. 119
Chapter Five: The NCDC’s Capital ..................................................................................... 126
1. The Motorised Town .................................................................................................... 129
2. Key Structures ........................................................................................................... 132
3. Suburbia .................................................................................................................... 141
   Stability ..................................................................................................................... 145
   Development ............................................................................................................. 147
Conclusion ........................................................................................................................... 164
Postscript: The Canberra of Today .................................................................................... 166
Bibliography ....................................................................................................................... 170
This thesis seeks to contribute to the existing historiography of the Australian national capital city, Canberra. It explores the assumptions and aspirations that influenced the city's planning and construction during its two greatest periods of growth—the first period spanning from the turn of the century to the beginning of the great depression, the second from the 1955 Senate Select Committee Report on Canberra to the early 1970s. The emphasis is not on providing a narrative history of Canberra. It analyses how the city's design reflects attempts to create the ideal city.
Introduction

Canberra is interesting, both as a document of Australian life, and in itself; its story is worth telling at length.1

From Sydney or Melbourne, the two cities that had originally vied for the title of national capital, the road to Canberra travels from recognisable urban environments up through the mountains onto vast tablelands of small towns, farmlands, and bush. Hundreds of kilometres flash by, and all that lies on the other side of one paddock is another, until, on the other side of the next barbed wire fence, a forest of suburban homes on quarter-acre blocks stares back at the cows. Without warning, dark two-lane roads divide into sodium-vapour-illuminated freeways and roundabouts. At the ends of broad avenues, monumental government buildings are spotlighted against black nights in the bush. The border between the created city of Canberra and the rest of Australia remains seemingly abrupt.

How can we come to better understand and interpret the creation of this unique landscape? Unlike most urban environments, the national capital2 was not founded to meet the needs of the existing population of the surrounding tablelands. In 1911, when the federal government sponsored the capital design competition for a city of 25,000 people, the population of the entire Federal Capital Territory was 1,714 persons, 1,763 horses, 8,412 cattle, and 224,764 sheep.3 Only 80 years ago the national capital, now home to over one-quarter million people, was no more than a finger pointing into an empty valley symbolising the intent to build not just any city, but the ideal city, the city of the future, a representation of the nation’s future. In 1910, the Minister for Home Affairs King O’Malley declared that the national capital ‘must be the finest Capital City in the

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2I use the terms ‘national capital’ and ‘federal capital’ interchangeably. However, the sources generally called Canberra the federal capital before World War II and the national capital afterwards.
world! The pride of time!" The architect Walter Burley Griffin claimed that in Canberra he had 'planned an ideal city--a city that meets my ideal of the city of the future!'

This thesis is a history of the 'ideal city' that federal governments and planners aspired to create during the two greatest periods of Canberra's planning and construction --the first period spanning from the turn of the century to the beginning of the great depression, the second from the 1955 Senate Select Committee Report on Canberra to the early 1970s. Despite numerous published histories of Canberra, the story of the utopian visions of the capital that informed its planning and construction has not been told. It is the purpose of this thesis to show that, in both periods discussed, the design of the city was to embody the ideals of a State-sponsored vision of the future. Governments and planners were mistaken about the future they believed they could create through the planning and construction of Canberra, however, an elucidation of their ideals is crucial to understanding the unique way space has been organised in Australia's national capital.

It is well beyond the scope of this thesis to offer a comprehensive history of Canberra's planning. For many years to come, the recently published three-volume official history of Canberra will be the starting point for inquiries into what has happened in Canberra and when. Yet these three volumes and other histories take for granted the why of the national capital. In this thesis I explore the assumptions behind Canberra's perceived purpose as a national symbol, not to deny that the city is a national symbol, but to ask what mechanisms were to make Canberra a 'recognisable national capital' during its two most pronounced periods of growth. What aspects of Australia has the federal government tried to symbolise in Canberra? What techniques have its agents used to create this symbolic message? Whose interests are served by the message and how has it changed over time?

The national capital is a city of monuments and monumental buildings that are supposed to make it a monument to a people and nation. My central argument is,

4Wigmore, p. 49.
however, that Canberra has not been designed to embody or symbolise the Australia that existed outside the city's limits at any given time. Rather, the national capital has been shaped by governments and planners who have hoped it would be a symbol of a future Australia that they sought to create. In this sense, my interest is not simply in tracing and assessing the realisation or failure of an ideal on the Limestone Plains, but in connecting the ideals expressed in Canberra with concurrent national debates on how to improve Australian society--from national hygiene, for example, in the first period of growth, to social consensus in the second. In this thesis I propose that, to understand how space has come to be organised in Canberra, it is necessary to understand the premises underlying the planning and construction of the city. There were two basic premises:

1. That an Australian national identity can be defined, and should be cultivated--not least through the symbolism and reality of a national capital and all it represented.
2. Planners could not only design and build a city that represented 'that which is Australian', but their designs could make society adopt the values that the city symbolised.

1. Australian National Identity

In his book *Inventing Australia*, Richard White chronicles attempts to define Australian national identities. He believes that while most new nations invent national identities, in Australia they are 'a national obsession'. While the idea that the people of a nation are somehow bound together by an identifiable group of characteristics remains compelling, White shows how treatises on the Australian character are 'necessarily false. They have all been artificially imposed upon a diverse landscape and population, and a variety of untidy social relationships, attitudes and emotions'. White believes that the important question to ask is not whether constructions of identity 'are true or false, but what their function is, whose creation they are, and whose interests they serve'.

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8White, p. viii. In 1962, Ronald Taft, Reader in Psychology at the University of Western Australia wrote: 'There is a common and well preserved belief that the people who make up any particular nation have certain typical characteristics that arise by virtue of their national background, their cultural
Clearly, the expression of a national identity has been attempted in Canberra during the great periods of its growth. In 1930 the historian W. K. Hancock wrote that for the previous generation, 'It was part of the romantic make-believe of the time to pretend that Canberra was the spontaneous conception of aspiring national idealism'.9 The National Capital Development Commission, in charge of planning the capital during the 1960s, similarly described its mission as transforming 'nebulous ideals and ethos into brick and stone'.10 To answer White’s questions, in the national capital, the function of defining 'that which is Australian' was to help insure the progress, stability, and security of Australia. The identities to be represented were mostly the creation of the federal government which sponsored and funded the construction of Canberra (although members of the government were influenced by and sought to appeal to the Australian identities that intellectuals, artists and planners had 'uncovered'). The identities represented in Canberra ostensibly serve the interests of the Australian people (although individuals and interest groups have gained from them as well).

The Australian identities that federal governments sought to express in Canberra were somewhat different in the two periods I plan to examine. So were the means with which planners hoped to instil the national values in the city’s inhabitants. Despite these differences, one of the most important characteristics of the official representation of an Australian national identity throughout the century has been Australia’s desire for national development. By national development, I mean the process of creating a larger, more diversified and technologically advanced economy, which could increase the power of the nation and the material prosperity of its citizens.11 The desire for development manifested itself in a variety of images and actions. Australia’s first Commonwealth bank-notes had development as their theme. Printed in 1913, they illustrated irrigation and coal mining.12 White wrote,
Within the states, there was little debate about the direction society should take... their one great commitment was a bipartisan one: development. The development ethos became an integral part of Australian nationhood... 'Australia Unlimited' became a national slogan'.

In 1912, the year before construction began in Canberra, Australia's 'biggest single step towards industrialisation' was taken when the government aided the large-scale development of the B. H. P. steel works at Newcastle. After World War II, the commitment to development was expressed in the Snowy River Project, and Prime Minister Menzies' declaration, 'In every way this continent must be developed'. The commitment to building Canberra was not only a central component of this developmental ethos in each period, but—as this thesis will show—was also a revealing index of the ideals and assumptions this development expressed.

2. Planners

Even before a site was chosen, people creating designs for the national capital proposed an instrumental relationship between town planning and the society that would develop in the city. The relationship that planners proposed and the government accepted was that the people who inhabited their buildings or city would be compelled to adopt the new forms of social experience, personal habits, and morals that the architecture represented. By claiming that a well designed capital city would be able to create changes in social values and relations, members of government and Canberra's planners argued for the necessity of a new capital and its long-term funding. These officials and planners promoted the belief that by designing a total environment, planning experts could design fundamental features of society. According to this logic, the government could use the capital to encourage society to develop more quickly. As James Holston has argued in his study of Brasilia, the city was thought to be a model for change that would help propel the country as a whole into the planned future the city embodied. In this way the

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13White, p. 115.
14White, p. 115.
15White, p. 149.
planners could stimulate leaps in the development process itself, causing the nation to skip undesirable stages in its evolution.\textsuperscript{16}

3. Reflections on Canberra’s Existing Historiography

An elaboration of Canberra’s historiography underscores the need for alternative approaches to understanding Canberra’s past--approaches that can help us better understand how the city of today took shape. Paradoxically, the many Canberra histories that exist often help to obscure the city’s origins in myth rather than providing a better understanding of how the Canberra of today came about. By myth, I mean what Holston called ‘a genre of narrative characterized by its content, form, and social function’.\textsuperscript{17} According to the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski, ‘myths serve to cover certain inconsistencies created by historical events, rather than to record these events exactly’.\textsuperscript{18} The myths of Canberra’s origins function as an explanation and justification of why things are the way they are in the city.

In noting the attempts to dehistoricise the foundation of the city of Brasilia with myth, Holston wrote,

\begin{quote}
The search for origins is typically a subversive activity. Its usual purpose is to discover precedents that justify claims of one sort or another, inevitably at someone’s expense. One has the suspicion that if such justifications were not needed, the search for precedents in the form of pedigrees, genealogies, myths of origin, and the like would be of no great interest.\textsuperscript{19}
\end{quote}

One example of how Canberra’s history has been obscured by a subversive search for origins is the attempt by historians and others to establish the meaning of the word Canberra.

The area now known as Canberra was called the Limestone Plains by early visitors and some pioneer settlers, but it was ‘also variously called Kgamburry, Kembery, Nganbra, Gnabra, Chamberry, Canberry and Canbury’. By the 1860s the spelling ‘Canberra’ (first used in 1858) had largely become accepted, but it was not

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[17]{Holston, p. 66.}
\footnotetext[18]{Bronislaw Malinowski in Holston, p. 67.}
\footnotetext[19]{Holston, p.59.}
\end{footnotes}
officially recognised until 1913. On 12 March 1913, the federal capital of Australia was given its official name during a foundation day ceremony. After the ceremony, the Governor-General, Lord Denman, declared 'The choice of the government has fallen on “Canberra”', which ‘had the advantage of being the name of the locality already’ and was also ‘euphonious’. Denman did not specify the origin or meaning of the name, saying that ‘whatever its origins, it has been so long in use locally that it may fairly be described as an Australian name’.

The name, Canberra, did not immediately invest the site with meaning as the names White Haven, or London South would have--both of these being among the nearly 1000 alternative names that people had suggested for the capital. However, Canberra was soon invested with meanings that helped justify the site’s selection as a place for the capital. Various genealogies were invented for the word. The journalist Frederic Slater claimed, ‘Canberra is a good Aboriginal word. Whether it is spelt Canbury, Canberry or Canberra it has one and the same meaning “The Head”’. This meaning was considered to be one that was appropriate for the capital city. By linking the site of the capital to aboriginal use of the area as a ‘head town’ or ‘meeting place’, the myths obscure the capital’s origins in the politics and outdated scientific beliefs that are discussed in Chapter One.

Griffith Taylor, physiographer to the Commonwealth Weather Service, made a topographical survey of the Canberra region in 1910 and in 1914 wrote what was, by his own account, the first history of Canberra, The Evolution of the Capital: A Physiographic Study of the Foundation of Canberra. Taylor recognised the temptation to dehistoricise the foundations of the capital, but resisted it. For Taylor, the geographer, the best symbolic spot for the capital would have been the statistically determined centre of gravity

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20 Gillespie, p. xviii.
21 Lord Denman in King O'Malley, Concerning Canberra: The Christening and Dedication of Australia's National Capital, 12 March 1913.
22 Sydney Morning Herald, 21 May 1913.
of the Australian population. However this spot, in the county of Nicholson, in New South Wales, was ‘obviously unsuitable for a capital city’.  

Taylor noted that:

One might ‘prophesy after the event’ and imagine (what was certainly not the case!) that the authorities ruled a line from the population centre to the nearest good port (that of Jervis Bay). Where this line cut the largest river at a suitable elevation (such as 1800 feet), there was to be established the federal territory. For Canberra fulfils all these conditions!  

Taylor believed that Canberra was a good location for a capital, with a healthy climate, water and readily available building material. However, he did not create extra-historical reasons for its choice as the capital site. The inclusion of the following statement in his narrative may indicate a deliberate attempt to dispel the stories about Canberra’s meaning: ‘Canberra is, I think a real native name, though no one knows its meaning’.  

More recent histories have perpetuated myths about the meaning of the word Canberra. According to Gillespie’s 1988 official history:

John Gale, the veteran journalist who established the Queanbeyan Age newspaper, maintained that the word Canberra meant ‘woman’s breasts’, an idea suggested by the topography of the area, with the breasts represented by the two peaks now known as Mount Ainslie and Black Mountain. Gale considered this to be ‘singularly appropriate to the site chosen as the mother city of the Australian Commonwealth’. Perhaps more appropriate for a seat of government is its more generally accepted meaning, ‘meeting place’.  

Gillespie does not dismiss the ‘generally accepted’ meaning of Canberra, which seems to sanction extra-historical associations between the Canberra region and its designation as the site for the national capital. The supposed aboriginal meanings of the word: ‘Head Town’, ‘woman’s breasts’ and ‘meeting place’, imply that the foundations of ‘Canberra the national capital’ were not laid in 1911, but pre-date white settlement of the area. The National Capital Planning Authority (NCPA), the current governmental authority in charge of the planning of Canberra, found in a 1995 survey (taken to help plan the next phase of the capital’s growth) that ‘most people including Canberrans, know little of the history of the National Capital’, since, among other things, ‘none of the research

24 Taylor, p.384.  
26 Taylor, p. 385.  
participants was aware of the derivation of the word Canberra, which is generally attributed to the Aboriginal word for 'meeting place'. The report does not specify whether the NCPA intends to educate people about this origin of the name, but in accepting this derivation of Canberra as fact, the NCPA is perpetuating a myth that happens to meet its agenda of diversifying the origin of Canberra so that the city's perceived 'Anglo Saxon set up' will not be 'an inhibiting factor in Canberra's ability to be representative of all Australians'.

The stories of Canberra's genealogy are sympathetic to the NCPA's belief that 'The history of our multi-cultural heritage, beginning with Aboriginal settlement, not British colonisation, needs acknowledgment'. In the NCPA's survey, some participants felt that Canberra was too young to be an effective symbol of Australia. Rather than developing Canberra now, one woman said, 'maybe they should wait a while till [sic] we have a bit more history, so they know what being Australian means... that's the only way it (Canberra) will represent Australia--when it evolves'. Myths that find Canberra's origins in Aboriginal settlement will continue to be perpetuated because they serve the government's interests by making Canberra appear to be older, more secure, and more diverse in its foundations. While it is not my intention to show that Canberra's origins have been or will be completely obscured by myth, I believe that the inclination to use myths to explain and justify Canberra sounds a cautionary note about the agenda behind histories of the capital--particularly when the largest source of information about Canberra's past is the government that has a vested interest in Canberra's image.

Many books that are catalogued in the National Library of Australia under the subject heading 'Canberra--history', are narratives that attempt to legitimate the national

29 There was no one Aboriginal language. Canberra could not be derived from the Aboriginal word for 'meeting place'. While this may be a minor point, it shows that historical accuracy is not the primary concern of the NCPA's search for the origins of the word Canberra.
33 NCPA, Research Report, p. 38.
capital. That this was the purpose of the recently published three-volume official history is clear. The author of the third volume, Eric Sparke, wrote that his book was an attempt to:

trace the main themes in Canberra’s recent history to discover how, between 1954 and 1980, in what might be called ‘the transforming years’, a village of expedients and splintered control became a recognisable national capital which all Australians could visit with pride.34

This summed up the theme and methodology of all three volumes. They reported on the events that transform the relative chaos they saw at the beginning of their period to the relative order that existed at the end of their period. These histories recorded Canberra’s march towards its perceived destiny. For example in Volume Two of the Australian federal government’s official history, Canberra 1913-1953, chapters such as ‘Genesis’, ‘Anticlimax’, ‘Doldrums’, and ‘The End of the Beginning’, measured the success of Canberra’s progress towards a vision of a capital ‘all Australians could visit with pride’. These volumes employed what Paul Carter calls a panoramic view of history.

In The Road to Botany Bay: an Exploration of Landscape and History, Carter quoted Manning Clark’s account of the founding of Australia’s first settlement as an illustration of history written from this panoramic view point. Clark positioned the reader with a clear view of all that was taking place:

On 27 and 28 January the male convicts and the rest of the marines landed. Some cleared ground for the different encampments; some pitched tents; some landed the stores; a party of convicts erected the portable house brought from England for the governor on the east side of the cove. So, as Collins puts it, the spot which had so lately been the abode of silence and tranquillity was now changed to that of noise, clamour and confusion, though after a time order gradually prevailed everywhere.35

This account did not simply reproduce the events that occurred. Clark’s description narrated the events and ordered them in a way that helps us to see chaos yielding to order. Although Clark postured himself as an impartial cameraman assigned the task of recording events through a wide angle lens, he was the director of the stage who zoomed the camera onto specific activities: activities that were indispensable to the foundation of what would become the Australian Commonwealth.

34Sparke, p. xii.
In Jim Gibbney’s *Canberra 1913-1953*, the panoramic view sets the stage for the show that is about to begin.

Since the 1820s, the blue wall of the Brindabella Range had loomed over a landscape dotted with scattered European farms and hamlets of which the Limestone Plains or Canberry, in the valley of the Molonglo River, was one of the oldest. St. John’s Church of England with its tiny graveyard and English trees provided a nucleus for the settlement. A few hundred metres away in a clump of big elm trees, stood its English style rectory, the Glebe House. Nearby, along the river bands, a few farm cottages gave a settled appearance to the scene. To the south in the direction of Cooma, the hamlet of Tharwa served the pastoral properties of Lanyon, Tuggeranong and Cuppacumbalong, while up the long valley, the Campbell pastoral property at Duntroon, with its pleasant colonial mansion, was acquired by the federal government in July 1912. Cadets from the new military college established there were able to play a prominent part in the christening of the new city.36

Although Gibbney possibly hinted at the tentative nature of settlement when he wrote that the few farm cottages near the river gave the *appearance* that the area was settled, he lent authority to its foundation by noting that in all that we could see (actually, in all that he has shown us) the foundations laid here were some of the oldest. Lanyon, Tuggeranong, Cuppacumbalong, and Duntroon were no longer potential settlements in the bush. They had already become pastoral. Again, the scene was filled with activities indispensable to foundation. It was their future importance that brought into sharp focus a few elements of a landscape that stretched to the mountains. The cadets were of note here only because they were waiting in the wings ready to come on stage in the future and ‘play’ a role in the ‘christening’ of the new city.

Like Clark and Gibbney, Sparke employed the panoramic perspective in *Canberra 1954-1980*. This time the omniscient gaze of the narrator is positioned on top of Capital Hill. To maintain his appearance as an objective recorder of events, Sparke employed a literary device, taking the reader into the mind of the ghost of Walter Burley Griffin who was also on the hilltop.

If Griffin could have stood on Capital Hill in 1954 he would not have seen a single permanent government building enclosed in the arms of his Central Triangle. Even Parliament House, not built where he wanted it, was ‘provisional’, and East and West Blocks were not built to last. Certainly, to his right Griffin would have noticed a truly monumental edifice going up as the Administrative Building slowly lifted its monstrous head above ground after a gestation of thirty years, but it was still far from complete...
Should the ghost of Griffin, still atop what he knew as Kurrajong Hill, have then looked about him he would not have found his Capitol set in 'an extensive hill park' nor the official residences of the Governor-General and Prime Minister on the sites he had envisaged. Instead his eye would have lighted on a quarry, two temporary construction worker's hostels, and the commencement Column of 1913 still incomplete after forty-one years.37

Although Sparke used Griffin to express dismay that history had not come to pass as it was planned in Canberra, it had slowly moved forward from 'scattered European farms'38 to a ‘whirligig of streets”39 and by the end of Sparke’s account Canberra has moved much closer to the creation of the 'unifying elements which give meaning to it all'.40 By tracing a long history of order overcoming chaos to create the city of today, Sparke and other historians have created an epic story in which Australians can invest their pride. However, as Carter noted, histories with the purpose of legitimation are not primarily concerned with understanding and interpretation.41 Even when histories are not actively perpetuating myths about the city, the methodology they employ in an attempt to legitimate the capital can obscure aspects of Canberra’s history.

4. An Alternative Approach

Carter offered an alternative type of history that sought to understand Australian settlement through what he called spatial history. It was a history that did not go confidently forward, organising its subject matter into a nationalist enterprise:

It advances exploratively, even metaphorically, recognising that the future is invented . . . its objects are intentions and, suggesting the plurality of historical directions, it constantly risks escaping into poetry, biography or a form of immaterialism positivists might think nihilistic. After all, what can you do with a horizon?42

Developing an understanding of the organisation of space in Canberra through the intentions and hopes of planners and politicians is an exercise in spatial history. Such a history--scavenged from the ideal visions of what they hoped to create--cannot replace a

37Sparke, p. 5.
38Gibbney, p. 1.
40Sparke, p. 1.
41Carter, p. xvi.
42Carter, p. 294.
narrative of events that have occurred in Canberra, but it can give this history more meaning. For, to paraphrase Carter, our reality began as someone else’s fantasy.43

Plans for Canberra’s development were and still are fantasies about the future. These fantasies, or rather their dissemination, are the primary ‘events’ that this thesis examines. Some of these plans are gleaned from personal correspondence, parliamentary debates, Griffin’s plans for the capital, and the reports of the Federal Capital Advisory Committee, Federal Capital Commission, National Capital Development Commission and other planning and government organisations. These texts were ‘events’ because they constructed Canberra. That is, their production was the action that determined where the construction crews would dig and what they would build. Even those plans that were made, but not acted upon, were influential because they shaped the scope and subject of debate about what would later be constructed in the city.

The approach adopted in this thesis deepens an understanding of Canberra’s history by showing that Canberra’s urban form is not the result of one fixed plan marching towards its inevitable completion. Canberra’s urban form is the composite product of many designs, each reflecting contemporary national, as well as personal, ideals. My approach restores the agency of the people who mounted the stage of history and attempted to shape Canberra so that it reflected their different dreams about what a national capital should be and what it should represent. Yet this thesis is only an experiment in relating ideals to the plans and constructions carried out during Canberra’s first two great periods of growth. It demonstrates how this methodology might someday be usefully applied in a broader study of Canberra’s history from the turn of the century to the present. Even within the two periods I am studying, my purpose is not to provide a comprehensive account of what was planned for Canberra’s future. I have chosen examples of plans and constructions that illustrate the way ideals, aspirations and assumptions influenced the urban form of Canberra. I focus on the strategies planners and politicians used to create a better city and society, but do not attempt to discuss the

43Carter notes, ‘The viewpoints we take for granted as factual began in someone else’s fantasy . . . recovering this lost space may not change the official history but, proposing another place . . . it does represent a timely mutiny against imperial history’s methodological assumptions’. (Carter, pp. 294-295.)
way Canberra's inhabitants have developed their own tactics for making the provided space into a home for themselves and their families, a home where many people have made themselves comfortable and happy.\textsuperscript{44} I believe this thesis paves the way for a history of how people have used the spaces of Canberra, however, by outlining how the city's planners intended them to be used.

Other histories have sought to understand Canberra through its utopian visions and could be considered spatial histories. Most notable of these is K. F. Fischer's \textit{Canberra: Myths and Models}, which explains the Canberra of the 1980s through a history of past planning initiatives. Although I have drawn on Fischer's method of analysis in this thesis, Fischer specifically puts the attempt to analyse the urban form of Canberra in a cultural context outside the scope of his book.\textsuperscript{45} I believe that because of this, his book places an inordinate emphasis on the role international planning ideas played in the development of Canberra's urban form. In interpreting the planning influences on Canberra, this thesis looks more closely at the Australian ideas that have shaped the city. While international movements were very important to the ideas that influenced Canberra's development, these ideas were filtered through Australian perceptions and plans for other Australian cities. Canberra is more a product of an Australian dialogue on town planning than an international one. Although I agree with Fischer that ultimately Canberra's failure to become the ideal city cannot be blamed on the 'intermittent phases of stagnation in Canberra's growth', I do not share his view that any short coming in Canberra's design 'has little to do with any "technical planning mistakes" or . . . any basic intellectual or creative deficiency of the discipline'.\textsuperscript{46} I believe that planners were sometimes mistaken or misleading about the outcome they thought their plans would engender because they believed that altering the urban form could, in itself, create social change. In both periods I examine, their plans did not allow for the fact that people would develop their own uses and interpretations of Canberra's space, no matter how planners intended their designs to function.

\textsuperscript{46}Fischer, p. 1.
In Chapter One I explore aspects of the historical context surrounding the selection of the Canberra site for the national capital and the criteria with which entries to the 1911 design competition would be judged. Chapter Two explores some of the reasons why the Griffin design was selected as the winner of the design competition. I relate his success, in part, to the government’s predetermined vision of what the capital should become and how it should be designed. Chapter Three explores some of the problems that arose when the idea of Canberra began to be constructed and populated. Populating Canberra with real citizens instead of the envisioned ideal citizens showed that design alone could not prevent the new environment from reflecting the social values, assumptions and perceptions of the people who migrated to inhabit it.

Despite the inability of planners to transform society through the capital’s organisation of space in the early part of this century, in Chapter Four I examine how the government would once again attempted to modify people’s behaviour through urban design beginning in the 1950s. This chapter explores the historical context surrounding the renewed interest in developing the capital to gain an understanding of how ideal visions led to the creation of the National Capital Development Commission (NCDC). Chapter Five examines how the NCDC sought to design both national areas and suburban developments in a manner that created an image of a developing and socially stable society.
Between the federation of Australian states and the beginning of World War I, the value of Australian production increased almost two fold.\(^1\) Rapid economic growth helped to fuel optimism about the nation’s future. Looking back from 1930, W. K. Hancock noted,

> Men really did believe, a generation ago, that the old oligarchies had of their deliberate wickedness created all the evils which afflict society, and that Australia—'this virgin land unhandicapped land of social experiments, embryoning democracy, and the Coming Race, Australia!'—would quickly lead the world to a millennium.\(^2\)

Especially in the years before the First World War, the federal capital was envisioned as an important tool with which the new nation could bring about a millennium. In the minds of its creators and promoters, the capital was to become not only a symbol of the desired national future, but also an instrument through which Australia could help eliminate the perceived social problems left over from the colonial era and secure the nation’s destiny as a world power. The capital was to be a model society and social laboratory where ideas were tested and perfected before being applied throughout Australia. This agenda was an important force in determining both the location of the capital and the selection criteria for plans submitted to the 1911 design competition.

According to the National Capital Planning Authority’s (NCPA), ‘Fact Sheet 3: Selecting the Site for the Capital’:

> The Commonwealth of Australia came into existence on 1 January 1901 and at the first meeting of the Federal Cabinet the problem of finding a site for the National Capital was discussed. The Constitution provided that the ‘Seat of Government’ would be determined by the Parliament, and be within a Territory acquired by or granted to the Commonwealth, not closer than 100 miles (166 km) from Sydney.

> The reason for this was the failure of delegates to the Federal Convention in 1898 to agree on a site for the capital due to jealousy between Sydney and Melbourne. The compromise solution was to find a new site for an ideal city in New South Wales.

> In 1902 Senators and Members of the House of Representatives began tours of inspection of possible sites which were promoted by local

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Federal Capital Site Committees eager to have their area chosen for the new city.

In 1903 Federal Parliament discussed the question of a site but failed to agree: the Senate chose Bombala and the House of Representatives selected Tumut.

To break the deadlock a further tour of inspection was held and in 1904 the Parliament passed a Bill nominating a site close to Dalgety of not less than 2250 square kilometres, with access to the sea, as the seat of government. The New South Wales Parliament refused to cede the land and no further action was taken until 1906 when the State Government indicated its willingness to cede a site in the Yass-Canberra district for the capital and further inspections were held.

In 1908 the Federal Parliament again voted to select a site for the Federal Capital from the following nominations: Albury, Armidale, Bombala, Canberra, Dalgety, Lake George, Lyndhurst, Orange, Tooma, Tumut, and Yass-Canberra. On 8 October, on the ninth and last ballot in the House of Representatives, Yass-Canberra beat Dalgety by 39 votes to 33. The Senate voted 19 to 17 in favour of Yass-Canberra over Dalgety on 6 November.3 [Figure 1.1]

‘Fact Sheet 3’ is one of ten Fact Sheets produced by the National Capital Planning Authority and currently provided for visitors to the National Capital Planning Exhibition in Canberra. The purpose of the Fact Sheets is to provide visitors with a concise summary of Canberra’s history and interesting features. While ‘Fact Sheet 3’ does not attempt to be a detailed scholarly analysis of the capital’s history, it does reflect an interpretation of Canberra’s history that has been put forward in the majority of histories published about the capital. The ten year period that elapsed between the federal convention and the selection of the Yass-Canberra district is often referred to as the ‘battle of the sites’.4 This term was coined in 1927 by J. F. Watson in A Brief History of Canberra: the Capital of Australia. Other histories of Canberra, such as Wigmore’s The Long View, and K. F. Fischer’s Canberra: Myths and Models, also employ the term ‘battle of the sites’ as a means of summing up the story of the capital during the time when Parliament was trying to decide on the capital’s location. The ‘battle’ over choosing a site for the capital should be viewed in the larger context of the consensus about the ideal city that the Parliament reached during the same period. In effect, members of Parliament developed a sufficient consensus over at least four important

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3National Capital Planning Authority, ‘Fact Sheet 3: Selecting the Site for the Capital’, Canberra, not dated.
Figure 1.1 The location of Canberra. [Source: Fischer, K.F., *Canberra: Myths and Models*, Hamburg, 1984, p. 13.]
aspects of the capital to make several major decisions about the nature of the Seat of Government before the 1911 design competition:

1. The Seat of Government, as provided for in the Constitution, could have merely been a building in which Parliament debated and passed legislation. However, enough Parliamentarians came to envision the Seat of Government as a thriving capital city for that vision to be incorporated into government policy by 1908.5

2. While the Seat of Government was to be a city, it was also envisioned as a space where the perceived problems of existing Australian cities would not replicate themselves.

3. To help achieve the lofty aspirations of the capital envisioned, the capital site had to meet certain physical criteria set out by Parliament in 1903--in addition to those criteria stipulated in the Constitution.

4. To help create the kind of city envisioned, the design for the capital's buildings, streets and other features would make use of the latest town planning doctrines.

These four decisions about the nature of the Seat of Government are discussed below. The first two points discuss the consensus that was reached about the ideal city, while the second two points discuss the means with which the government hoped to achieve the creation of the capital it envisioned.

1. A Capital City

While a survey of the Premiers taken in 1898 showed that they were not particularly concerned where the Seat of Government was located, local groups were organising to promote their districts as the best location for a capital. When a Royal Commission charged with examining sites was appointed in 1899, it found over 40 sites

5By 'city' I mean a 'distinctive order of settlement, implying a whole different way of life', than other areas. Despite the governmental function of the capital, the term has connotations of also being a financial, commercial, and cultural centre. See Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A vocabulary of culture and society*, Glasgow, 1976, p. 56.
being offered. Some of the people involved in promotional campaigns would have wanted to see the capital built in their area out of local pride. However, visions of the Seat of Government becoming a thriving city helped to fuel the belief that wherever the federal capital was built, public and private investment would raise the value of local land and improve the local economy. The protracted political struggle over selecting a capital site was, in part, a response to speculation about the kind of capital Australia would build. While Prime Minister Alfred Deakin proposed in 1905 that the capital would merely be a place for a legislature to meet for a few months of the year, many people had come to believe the capital would be an important economic centre. The Sydney Morning Herald was concerned that a site too close to the border of Victoria would alter the ‘commercial centre of gravity’ away from Sydney. The paper envisioned a city of ‘professional intellect, political power, and even wealth and fashion of the country’. The Melbourne Argus saw ‘a harbour thronged with shipping, and the capital a great resort for the learned, the leisured and the fashionable’. The stridently nationalistic Bulletin advocated the creation of a city which would:

give Australia a national heart whose pulsing throbs will be felt through the six States of the Commonwealth, driving through all their veins and arteries, a strong and healthy current of vigorous Australian national sentiment and aspiration, potent for good within our borders and powerful without, to keep at bay the foes which threaten our gates.

The above quotations indicate that at least for some people, the term city did not just mean a high density mode of settlement at the turn of the century. The mechanistic, physical and biological metaphors only underscore the many attributes with which the city was invested. The term could stand for a larger set of ideas. For the Bulletin, the

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6Age, 9 October 1903.
7Age, 18 December 1905. Deakin believed, ‘The seat of government would certainly not be more than a mere township for many years . . . the cost should be small and need only be small . . . it seems preposterous to contemplate the erection of palatial buildings in any capital that we may choose. We ought not be above accepting the simplest accommodation. Without descending to the modesty of the wattle and daub, anything that will shelter honourable members from the inclemency of the weather ought to be good enough for us, and anything which will shelter our public servants during the three or four months of the year which they will be in the federal capital ought to be sufficient for them’. (Roger Pegrum, The Bush Capital, Sydney, 1983, p. 91.)
8Sydney Morning Herald, 12 February 1900.
9Sydney Morning Herald, 6 February 1899.
10Argus, 9 August 1904.
capital city envisioned could not only help the rest of the nation to develop; it was the derivative of the nation providing a strong indication of Australia's powers and capabilities. The *Bulletin* envisioned a capital to be, in some respects, like a strong navy or army which could provide a show of strength large enough to deter potential aggressors.

The conceptions of the capital as a thriving city were shared and fuelled by many parliamentarians. Senator Staniforth Smith, a moderately conservative Free Trader from Western Australia, wanted the seat of government to become a city like Chicago:

If we assume that it is to be a capital like Washington, that has practically no trade, no commerce, and no industries, we may assume that, like Washington, it will attain to a size of about a quarter of a million of inhabitants. But there is absolutely no reason why the capital should not be a great commercial centre like Chicago. Chicago, being in a position where there are great facilities for trade, has in a comparatively few years attained a population of over a million inhabitants. There are none of us here who will say that in Australia in time to come there will not be inland towns having at least a million inhabitants. There is no reason why our capital should not before many years have passed attain even to the magnitude of a city like Chicago.\(^{12}\)

Whether or not most parliamentarians agreed that the capital would become such a city, by the time the Yass-Canberra district was chosen for the federal site in 1908, the government had decided that the Seat of Government would become a city. That year, the New South Wales district surveyor, C. R. Scrivener, was charged by the Minister for Home Affairs, H. Mahon, with locating the site for the capital in the Yass-Canberra district. Scrivener was instructed to

bear in mind that the Federal Capital should be a beautiful city, occupying a commanding position, with extensive views, and embracing distinctive features which will lend themselves to the evolution of a design worthy of the object, not only for the present, but for all time.\(^{13}\)

Some indication of the early projections of the size of the city envisioned was given by the ‘Information Conditions and Particulars’ of the 1911 design competition, which

\(^{12}\)Staniforth Smith, Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates (CPD) 2:1785. Miles Staniforth Cater Smith (1869-1934) was a strong advocate of national development. He was to serve as Lieutenant Governor of Papua before World War I and advocated a ‘strenuous development policy’ for the territory. (Geoffrey Serle, ed. *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. II, 1891-1939, Melbourne, 1988, p. 657.)

instructed those entering the competition to plan for an initial population of 25,000 inhabitants, expected to grow at least proportionately with the rest of Australia.\textsuperscript{14}

Histories that have called the national capital’s early history a ‘battle of the sites’ are misdirected in their search for the origins of the national capital of today. The rivalries over the location of the capital that occurred around the turn of the century are relatively minor disagreements in comparison with the tacit agreement to authoritatively define the Seat of Government as a capital city. Politics may have altered the location of the capital within the New South Wales tablelands, but it appears that the government intended to construct a grand city no matter which of the sites was chosen.

2. Eliminating the Problems of Existing Australian Cities

The city that Parliament envisioned would not just be beautiful, it would also reform Australian society. Paradoxically, at the same time Parliament decided the Seat of Government should become a city, many people believed that cities were anathema to the realisation of Australia’s national destiny. According to Stuart Macintyre, in Australia, ‘the poet, the eugenicist and the immigration enthusiast were united in their preference for the country over the city. The concentration of the population in towns was blamed for the decline in the birth rate . . . the cities were “huge cancers” where health and strength were sapped’.\textsuperscript{15} The sense of unease created by urban growth in the Melbourne of the 1890s had prompted one observer to call big cities ‘a curse to modern times’.\textsuperscript{16} Cities were frequently prone to outbreaks of typhoid and dysentery in the summer months.\textsuperscript{17} Public health was a major concern at the turn of the century, when cities were vulnerable to these outbreaks of disease which were only partially understood. According to the \textit{Australian Herald}, in 1905, ‘health is the first thing to be looked at by a nation’.\textsuperscript{18}

Slum housing and inadequate recreation areas were believed to contribute to moral and physical degradation among the cities’ poor. They put Australia’s future in jeopardy.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{14}Department of Home Affairs, ‘Information, Conditions and Particulars’, p.27.
\item \textsuperscript{15}Macintyre, p. 35.
\item \textsuperscript{16}Age, 29 August 1891.
\item \textsuperscript{17}Macintyre, p. 39.
\end{itemize}
The Melbourne *Age* demanded that the city be enabled to function ‘without detriment to the physical well-being of future generations’.¹⁹ The paper expressed the opinion that ‘We want population; we want our youth to have laid in them the sound foundations which arise from fresh air, good food, and wholesome dwellings’.²⁰ These commodities were believed to be vital to national health and progress, but insufficiently available in Australian cities. Christopher Keating notes that, at the turn of the century the nation was seeking a fresh start and a safe distance from the horrors of the open class wars of the 1890’s, from the all-too visible underclass of casually employed slum dwellers and from the decaying and inefficient inner core of nineteenth century housing. The impending sense of urban crisis was starkly brought home to Sydneysiders in 1900 with the outbreak of the bubonic plague.²¹

The creation of a new city was to be a learning process which would help Australia redeem its existing cities and enhance the growth and well being of the entire nation. The process of creating the capital was to develop ideas which could be applied in the planning and government of the rest of the country. Senator Staniforth Smith believed the national capital should be a social laboratory ‘which will be of very great instruction more as experiments to guide us in future legislation’.²² The capital could put to practical test many of the social problems exercising the greatest brains of the world for many years past--the federal territory will fulfil very much the same function as a model farm fills in regard to an agricultural area. We can there test these various social problems--and if we find they are successful they can be planted out in the Commonwealth. Such questions as land nationalisation and the nationalisation of the liquor traffic can be tried in the capital and if it is proved that they are successful we have very good warrant for assuming that they will apply equally well throughout Australia.²³

If a capital could achieve Smith’s goals it would increase the efficiency of the nation, and the cost of the capital could be justified as a national security measure, like the newly created Australian navy and the national system of compulsory military training.

The perceived need for a fresh start was one of the reasons that Scrivener was sent out onto the New South Wales tablelands to find the location for a new city. His

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¹⁹ *Age*, 30 June 1906.
²⁰ *Age*, 30 August 1904.
²² S. Smith, CPD 1:774.
journey was in some ways a search for a promised land away from coastal cities, a colonial past and the problems they appeared to have created. Indeed, in 1909, the then Minister for Home Affairs, King O'Malley, turned to biblical allusions to describe the first time he saw the approved site. It seemed to O'Malley 'that Moses, thousands of years ago, as he gazed down on the promised land, saw no more panoramic view than I did'. The capital could be ‘a shining star for the world to behold . . . a new Jerusalem on Earth’. The Seat of Government that O’Malley envisioned was not just a city, but a new kind of city. The improvements on existing cities which were to be incorporated in the capital’s design are discussed below.

3. Criteria for a Capital Site

Well before Parliament had decided on the Yass-Canberra region as the location of the capital in 1908, it had decided on the essential features of the ideal capital site, and judged possible sites by this standard. The features of the ideal site reflected the goal of creating a capital that would prevent the problems of existing cities being replicated in the capital and help Australia realise its destiny as a world power. In 1903, parliamentarian King O’Malley summed up some of the essential features the capital site should possess. According to O’Malley, ‘In the opinion of this House, it is desirable in the interests of human progress that the Government’ secure a capital site with the following features: Firstly, it should be ‘an area of not less than 1,000 square miles . . . only to be let on building or other leases to utilisers’. Secondly, this area should be ‘in a good healthy and fertile situation’.

A capital site away from existing cities in a healthy and fertile area, where the land was owned by the Commonwealth, was believed to be the starting point for the creation of a new kind of city worthy of the new nation. The Yass-Canberra district may not have

24 O’Malley, in Brennan, p. 33.
25 Brennan, p. 42.
26 CPD 3:2807, Brennan, p. 26. This was seconded by Hume Cook, a moderate conservative from Victoria and an advocate of a brand of municipal socialism which would ‘present to the world a spectacle the world has not previously seen—an entire city, and all connected with the city owned and managed for the people of Australia’. CPD 3:2810, (Brennan, p. 24.)
been the first-choice site of many parliamentarians, but it did lend itself to the establishment of a capital that fulfilled the above conditions.

'An area of not less than 1,000 square miles . . . only to be let on building or other leases to utilisers'

Visions of the unique and beautiful Australian city to be created led some parliamentarians to advocate an undeveloped site for the new capital. King O'Malley believed:

We must never think of having the federal capital in Melbourne, Sydney, or any city, not on account of the influences which may be at work there, but because we must consider the millions of people yet unborn who will inhabit this great southern dominion. Suppose for a moment that Washington had never been built, but that the United States people had listened when there was great clamour for Philadelphia or New York to be made the capital. They would not have had to-day the most beautiful city on earth. Any honourable member who has been to Washington knows that there is no city in the world like it.27

Senator Staniforth Smith believed that no existing towns were constructed to a standard that would serve as a good base for the future capital. In Parliament, Smith declared that,

If any town is selected as the federal capital site, it may be necessary to absolutely destroy it before we can lay out the federal capital on the beautiful lines on which I believe it is the intention of the people of Australia that the capital city should be established.28

However, besides the desire to create a uniquely beautiful city, there were other reasons that an undeveloped site was considered the best choice for the capital. The federal capital came to be seen by some members of the government as an excellent place to experiment with land reform ideas and the resumption of privately held land was reasoned to be less expensive in an undeveloped area.

According to Frank Brennan, the issue of whether or not the government would pursue a policy of public ownership of all land in the capital area was effectively decided as early as 1901, when Prime Minister Barton favoured such a decision.29 Barton was in

27O’Malley, CPD 8:10241.
28Staniforth Smith, CPD 1:774.
29Brennan, p. 19. The public ownership of land in cities was an idea that had a great deal of support in Australia around the turn of the century, especially after the publication of Henry George’s Progress and Poverty. George’s ideas about a single tax on land were so popular in Australia that he toured the country in 1890. Ebenezer Howard, the influential founder of the Garden City movement, also advocated
favour of a large capital area in which ‘every square inch of private land, no matter how generous and how fair it may be’, should be purchased by the government. He claimed he was not in favour of experimentation, but believed the purchase would be a ‘mere business proposal’.

Barton placed the emphasis on the revenue to be obtained from renting the land, because ‘a system of leases with periodical re-appraisement, will be about the best manner in which we can set about the meeting of any expense which we may incur in connection with this project’. He believed it could produce a ‘handsome endowment for all time’. The government wanted the profit from public investment to be retained by the Commonwealth rather than fall into the hands of speculators who would reap the rewards of increased land values. To maintain control of the planning and to prevent the speculation of leases, the government planned to lease land with the provision that the area leased must be utilised by the leasee for building or other specified uses within a certain period of time.

Despite Barton’s claim that it was a mere business proposal, the government ownership of all the land in the capital was a socio-economic experiment which other politicians more freely admitted. O’Malley declared,

This is the first opportunity we have had of establishing a great city of our own, were we can experiment with our socialism, as it is called. Socialism is going to rule this earth, and to destroy the selfishness and the misery that has come into the world through the greed and avarice of humanity.

King O’Malley saw the state ownership of land as an opportunity to redistribute urban resources on the basis of factors other than wealth. Whether it was called a business proposal or a social experiment, the capital was the repository for ideas about the better organisation of society.

In addition to deciding that the area of the capital should be owned in perpetuity by the Commonwealth, there was also a consensus in Parliament that the area seceded by

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32 Lionel Wigmore, *The Long View*, Canberra, 1963, pp. 30-31. Frank Brennan notes, ‘What better escape from the dilemma [of cost] was there then to generate a belief, to make a claim, that the as yet unknown residents of the as yet unselected territory would meet part or even all of the expenditure involved’. (Brennan, p. 26.)
33 Pegrum, p. 96.
New South Wales should be approximately 1,000 square miles. This was to prevent the federal government from being held hostage by state or private interests. The small size of Washington D. C. (10 square miles) was seen as a problem from the point of view of planners and administrators because it meant the suburbs were outside of the district, and therefore, beyond the planning and control of the federal government. According to Senator Smith:

If we have an area of 10 miles square, directly we decide upon the site of the federal capital there will be a perfect eruption of land-grabbers, syndicates, and speculators, who will rush over to buy up land all round with the idea of forming suburbs for the people to dwell in. The consequence will be that the people of the capital, instead of living within federal territory, will reside in suburbs belonging to private people, and the immense revenue that the Commonwealth should receive as ground landlord will go into the pockets of these speculators.34

The motion that the federal capital should be on 'not less that 1,000 square miles' was amended in the Seat of Government Act of 1908 to be not less than 900 square miles and have access to the sea, but its idea remained the same.35

‘In a good healthy and fertile situation’

The importance that the government placed on improving national health and efficiency was reflected in the selection of the capital site. Sir William Lyne, Premier of New South Wales from 1899-1901, had, by 1904, presented 13 sites in his electorate as possible sites for the capital.36 He presented these sites for their beauty and the health of their climates. For example in Tooma, he claimed there was an abnormal number of centenarians and people over 6'1" tall.37 A fertile situation was believed to be important so that surrounding areas could supply the city with fresh food and milk. Another important criterion of a capital site was that it should provide a reliable and pure water supply to protect public health.38 According to Frank Brennan in *Canberra in Crisis*, in 1908 a Senator who had been a wheat farmer swung the vote in favour of Canberra because he thought wheat would grow better there.39 Brennan also claims that the

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34Staniforth Smith, CPD 2:1785.
36*Argus*, 22 July 1904.
37*Age*, 3 August 1904.
38Fischer, p. 13.
39Brennan, p. 42.
Sydney press selected Canberra as the site for the national capital in 1905, 'and declared its choice in such vigorous, if not threatening, terms that thereafter the issue was never in doubt'.\footnote{Brennan, p. 30.} According to Brennan, all that was left after this was for the Parliament to ratify the decision. Other histories have claimed concerns that the capital should be beyond the range of the guns on dreadnought battleships helped determine its location.\footnote{E. V. Davies, J. E. Hoffman, B. J. Price, Canberra: A History of Australia's Capital, Canberra, 1990, p. 38.} Whatever ultimately decided the selection of Yass-Canberra district, the area reflected ideal visions about what would be a 'good healthy and fertile situation' for the capital.

The selection of a 'good healthy and fertile situation' had other meanings for parliamentarians beyond the area's ability to provide food and water to the capital's population. The concern over location was related to environmentally deterministic, eugenic and social Darwinist theories of national development. For some parliamentarians, the mission of the capital would be nothing less than the perfection of the Australian racial type, and the capital site had to be chosen accordingly.

Race and racial improvement were important elements of the Australian national identity as expressed in concepts of an 'Australian Type'. In many illustrations for magazines and newspapers the new nation was personified in images of boys, girls, or young adults who were 'young, white, happy and wholesome'.\footnote{Richard White, Inventing Australia, Sydney, 1981, p. 110.} The importance of protecting the white race in the new Commonwealth was one aspect of creating a national unity that cut across state lines. According to White, 'The "White Australia" policy--the first real issue dealt with by the new parliament--attracted almost unanimous approval'.\footnote{White, p. 114.}

In 1902 the Bulletin declared:

Once a type has got a step up it must be jealous and 'selfish' in its scorn of lower types, or climb down again. This may not be good ethics. But it is Nature . . . the Caucasian race, as a race, has taken up the white man’s burden of struggling on towards 'the upward path', of striving at a higher stage of evolution . . . If he were to stop to dally with races which would enervate him, or infect him with servile submissiveness, the scheme of human evolution would be frustrated.\footnote{White, p. 81-82.}
For the writers of the *Bulletin*, the federal capital could and should be a breeding ground for the people and values that would keep the entire nation on the 'upward path' in a social Darwinist battle for 'the domination of the world' against 'bolder and stronger peoples'.

According to James Edmund of the *Bulletin*,

> The Commonwealth city . . . is going to practically create a million or more new Australians, and it wants to make them of a hardy race such as Australia may be proud of in the future . . . All the existing great cities of this continent lie low, in the hot, muggy, relaxing atmosphere of the coast . . . all the world over it is known that the man who comes of twenty generations of mountaineers is far more than a match for the representative of twenty generations of dwellers on a steaming coast.

Edmund was not the only person to link the climate of the capital with the health and efficiency of its citizens. Arguing against the selection of certain sites in 1903, Alexander Oliver, who was President of the Land Appeals Court and put in charge of a Royal Commission to find a suitable site wrote:

> Those who have been commissioned to find for the Seat of Government . . . a climate as suitable as the conditions of New South Wales permit, have not been sent out to discover a climate fit for Fuegians or a Black Republic, but one to which not only will the constitutions of Australians of British descent readily accommodate themselves, but by which their physique will be improved, their general health if impaired, be re-established, and their faculties and energies raised to a higher pitch of usefulness.

The parliamentarian John Forrest of Western Australia declared, 'I believe that a cool climate is the best for the health and for raising up a sturdy race--not a hot climate, which induces laziness, or, at any rate the desire not to exert oneself too much'.

At the turn of the century, many Australians shared the racist and social Darwinist ideas of the British Empire as expressed by Joseph Chamberlain Secretary of State for Colonies. Chamberlain believed 'in this race, the greatest governing race the world has ever seen; in this Anglo-Saxon race, so proud, so tenacious, self confident and determined, this race which neither climate nor change can degenerate'. However, well into the twentieth century, questions remained about whether the Australian climate was

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45 White, p. 82.
46 Wigmore, p. 34.
47 Wigmore, p. 40.
48 Davies, p. 38.
49 White, p. 71.
improving or degrading the Anglo-Saxon stock and whether whites would prevail against other races in a world where only the fit survive. At the turn of the century, Dr. Alexander Buttner noticed ‘the weakening effect of the climate in each succeeding generation’ of Anglo-Saxon immigrants to Australia. The result of the Burns-Johnson title fight that took place in Sydney in 1908—the first ever between a white and a black boxer—left one minister praying: ‘God grant that the defeat of Saturday may not be a sullen and solemn prophecy that Australia is to be outclassed and finally vanquished by these dark skinned people’.

Scientists of the time attempted to establish the relationship between climate and human progress. Their theories would generally support the idea that the capital site should be chosen with regard to climate. Griffith Taylor, mentioned in the introduction for his history of Canberra, was also one of Australia’s ‘eminent geologists’. He reported that the scientist Leonard Hill used a ‘wet bulb thermometer’ which ‘imitates the human body’ to test the comfort of the tropical coastlands of Australia. Based on this work, the geographer, Ellsworth Huntington, was able to graph ‘The Temperature Control of Mental and Physical Energy’. This graph showed ‘the best mental and physical work is done at temperatures between 30° and 70° F., and that there is a startling deterioration in all work done as the temperature rises above 70° F.’. Taylor concluded that tropical life could result in ‘tropical neurasthenia, which we learn is associated with depression, irritability, loss of mental activity and power of concentration’. Because Taylor believed the northern coasts might never be settled, the development of the interior of the continent became more important.

Taylor’s findings would have confirmed what many parliamentarians and journalists had believed to be important to the selection of the capital site. King O’Malley argued,

50White, p. 71.
51White, p. 81.
52Wigmore, p. 52.
54Taylor, Geography and Australian National Problems, p. 455. Despite the claim by a Dr. Breinl that residents of tropical Australia merely had a ‘hospital habit’, and were just as healthy as other Australians, Taylor remained unconvinced. (Taylor, p. 455).
Figure 1.2 Attempts to quantify the relationship between health and climate. [Source: Taylor, Griffith, *Geography and Australian National Problems*, Wellington, 1924, pp. 456-459.]
Fro. 9.—Mortality and Climate in U.S.A.

Based on three prominent insurance companies. Florida has the worst death-rate and Nebraska-Iowa the best. (After Huntington.)

GEOGRAPHY AND AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL PROBLEMS.

NUMBER OF MONTHS OF DISCOMFORT.

(Based on Average Monthly Wet-bulb Data).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A. Very Comfortable Climate (45° to 55° W.B.)</th>
<th>B. Sometimes Uncomfortable (55° to 65° W.B.)</th>
<th>C. Often Uncomfortable (65° to 75° W.B.)</th>
<th>D. Almost Continuously Uncomfortable (over 75° W.B.)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wellington (N.Z.) 8</td>
<td>Wellington (N.Z.) 4</td>
<td>Batavia . . 10</td>
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<td>Coolgardie . . 7</td>
<td>Coolgardie . . 5</td>
<td>Thursday Island . . 6</td>
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<td>Darwin . . 6</td>
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<td>Melbourne . . 6</td>
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<td>San Francisco . . 6</td>
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<td>Alice Springs 1</td>
<td>Siesta Leone 12</td>
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<td>Sydney . . 5</td>
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N.B.—Places with a large number of “uncomfortable” months (e.g., Batavia) have naturally a larger number of unpleasant days per month than those with few uncomfortable months (e.g., Alice Springs).
Look where we like, it will be found that wherever a hot climate prevails, the country is revolutionary. Take the sons of some of the greatest men in the world, and put them into a hot climate like Tumut or Albury, and in three generations their lineal descendants will be degenerate. I found them in San Domingo on a Sabbath morning going to a cock fight with a rooster under each arm and a sombrero on their heads. I want to have a cold climate chosen for the capital of this Commonwealth. I want to have a climate where men can hope. We cannot have hope in hot countries. When I go down the streets of this city on a hot summer’s day and see the people in a melting condition, I look upon them with sorrow and wish I were away in healthy Tasmania.

The capital site the government hoped to find was one which improved the individual citizen’s—and therefore the nation’s—efficiency. The coast had a ‘relaxing atmosphere’, and the atmosphere of the capital had to be one where people would not become idle or ‘revolutionary’. It would not be fair to say that the need to scrape the frost from their cars’ windshields on cold mornings in July necessarily prevents Canberrans from being more revolutionary, although it does prevent lingering a few more moments over the morning paper before heading off to work. Yet the consideration of climate and its effects upon the physical and mental ability of the capital’s inhabitants indicates the way that members of government and their advisers were trying to do everything they believed necessary for the creation of their vision of the perfect society.

4. The Design of the Capital

According to the NCPA’s ‘Fact Sheet 4: The Design Competition for the Capital’, the 1911 design competition is the origin of the spatial organisation of Canberra:

The Canberra you see today had its origins in the 1911 international design competition for the capital launched by the Federal Government. The competition had been suggested by David Miller, the Secretary of the Department of Home Affairs, who hoped the competition would produce ‘the very best design on the most modern lines for this city, which should be an example to the rest of the world’. His views were echoed by King O’Malley, the Minister for Home Affairs, who said, ‘This city must be the finest capital city in the world’.

Competition conditions, contour maps, rainfall records and a copy of a cycloramic painting of the site were made available to competitors. Prizes of 1750, 750 and 500 pounds for the best three entries were announced. A model of the site was put on display in all Australian capital

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55Pegrum, p. 97.
56Although Miller is recorded as having suggested the competition, there was a general consensus for it and it had been suggested by Deakin’s Government in 1910. (Australian Archives, Canberra, CRS-A206, Vol. II, 14 April 1910. Letter from Deakin to Premier of N. S. W.)
While the international design competition can be seen as a beginning for Canberra, it was also a culmination—the culmination of thinking about the way Australia could create the ideal city the government and others envisioned. The selection of the site was only one aspect of ensuring the success of this great social experiment. The ‘Information, Conditions and Particulars’ of the design competition informed potential competitors of Scrivener’s mission to find a site for a beautiful city and charged them with designing it. The government declared that, ‘it is expected that competitors will embody in their designs all recent developments in the science of town planning’. This section explores ‘the science of town planning’ and its ‘recent developments’ which the government believed should be incorporated into the city’s design. This section provides a background to the design competition which furthers an understanding of why the Griffin plan was selected for first prize.

The Science of Town Planning

For progressive reformers inside and outside of government, improving on existing cities was seen as an important step in increasing national health and efficiency because, ‘for Progressives, the city was the microcosm of the nation, where all the evils they decried were found’. In 1913, a leading Sydney politician and town planning advocate, John D. Fitzgerald called the city the ‘home of the race . . . no effort and no expenditure must be spared to make it beautiful’ and ‘a highly organised and splendidly

58By progressive reformers, I mean those identified by Michael Roe in his book, Nine Australian Progressives, as ‘active citizens—not in the first rank of power as prime ministers or tycoons, but nevertheless influential in the public service, the professions, law courts, universities, and opinion shaping. As both thinkers and doers, they were representative of widespread influences and dispositions, which had an important effect in twentieth-century Australia’. According to Roe, progressivism came to maturity between 1890 and 1914 in Australia, but its effects and influence would be felt for another ten years at least. Progressives were ‘conscious of broader aspects of the cultural revolution of the time’, but, ‘they cared most for social and political issues. Their aims, style, and policies echoed various reform movements throughout the world, but especially American progressivism as voiced by Theodore Roosevelt (who, late in 1905, halfway through his presidency, declared that “next to my own country, I am interested in the progress, success and safety of Australia, that great democratic island-continent”)’). (Michael Roe, Nine Australian Progressives, Melbourne, 1984, p. 1.)
efficient instrument of civilization'.

He defined town planning as the 'conscious ordering by cities of their social, economic, and civic growth, expressed in architectural form'.

If an ordering of the urban form could ameliorate the problems of disease, pollution, crime, class and industrial strife, Australia would become a stronger nation. Town planners proposed that their designs would accomplish this in the federal capital.

According to Donald Leslie Johnson,

The beginning of a new century saw a wave of enthusiasm for 'city plans' of almost epidemic proportion . . . Yet, a planning profession was not constituted. A number of men had synthesised some knowledge and practised the art and science of planning . . . but there were no professional bodies of consequence. Both architects and engineers claimed city planning as within their province.

In Australia, while town planning may not have been recognised as a distinct profession at the turn of the century, it was being vigorously promoted as a field for trained experts by practicing town planners such as John Sulman. With his help, Australian town planning would become 'another of the great progressive causes'. As the 'father of town planning in Australia', John Sulman not only helped shape Australian ideas about the use of town planning as a means of social reform before the federal capital competition, he also implemented some of his ideas as chairman of the Federal Capital Advisory Committee (1921-1924). Sulman had gained recognition as an architect in Britain before emigrating to Australia in the 1880s. According to Bolton, his address, 'The Laying Out of Towns,' to the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science in 1890, 'established town planning as a discipline worthy of serious attention'. Sulman served as the P. N. Russell Lecturer in Architecture at Sydney University from 1887 to 1912. Before the 1911 competition was announced, he wrote a series of articles on different aspects of developing a federal capital. Sulman believed,

"Such a chance as we now have of showing the world what we can do has rarely been vouchsafed to a young nation. My aim in writing these articles is primarily to direct public attention to our unequalled opportunity, and to"
arouse a patriotic interest and a justifiable pride in the future capital of our Commonwealth. To-day it may be ‘in the bush’, but what we settle tomorrow and the day after will decide for all time whether it is to be worthy of our branch of the great British race, which has made so big a mark on the history of the world. No people can live without ideals, and these ideals to be effective must find expression in action. It is surely well that we should enshrine all that we hold most dear in the preservation of our liberties and our rights in a fitting setting.66

The chance that developing a new capital would create was not only one for the nation but one for Australian town planning. Both could establish their identity in the new capital. Sulman entered semi-retirement in 1908 and from then on devoted most of his time to encouraging and supporting town planning.67 Sulman was, by 1914, what the editor of Building magazine George Taylor--another influential progressive--called ‘a recognised authority’ on ‘the new science’.68

Sulman worked to promote the idea that a professional course in town planning studies should be established at all Australian universities.69 Although the recognition of the town planning profession as a science came too slowly for Sulman, he remained optimistic that other sciences would ‘exhaust their capacity, and possibly as a reaction they would return to architecture’. He hoped this would push the science of town planning ahead more rapidly.70 J. D. Fitzgerald believed that, ‘when the expert sanitarian and the bacteriologist combine with the architect, the artist, and the scientific plumber to build for present health and future endurance’, the problems of older cities, built on imperfect knowledge, could be avoided.71 As a ‘science’, town planning joined

67 Johnson, p. 15.
68 George A. Taylor, Town Planning For Australia, Sydney, 1914, p. 35.
69 Australian Town Planning Conference and Exhibition, Volume of Proceedings of the Second Australian Town Planning and Housing Conference and Exhibition, Brisbane, 1918, Brisbane, 1918, p. 186. The meetings of the Australian Royal Institute of British Architects from this period reveal a concern to develop greater professionalism. President G. Sydney Jones said, ‘Like a wave the idea of the town plan is sweeping round the world, and is now touching our shores. We are at a disadvantage in Australia owing to the fact that we cannot readily see and examine the solutions of problems as carried out in Europe and America, and with our information gained only from books and periodicals. But little by little the information is being gained and absorbed, and soon those who are studying the subject will be able to assist our Australian individuality in the solution of the town planning problems which will early present themselves to the public eye’. (Building, October 11, 1913, pp. 50-55).
70 Town Planning and its Architectural Essentials: Being an address by Walter Burly Griffin before the Institute of Architects of N. S. W., Building, October 11, 1913, pp. 50-55.
impartially collected raw data with expert professionals who would use their skills to transform the data into the best solution for existing problems.

Besides referring to town planning as a 'science' in the 'Information, Conditions and Particulars', the amount of information the Department of Home Affairs deemed necessary to the creation of a plan for the capital is evidence that it, and therefore the Commonwealth Government it served, accepted the image town planners were cultivating for themselves--highly trained experts who would use science to alter the urban environment in a way that would promote social reform. The collection of physiographic data about the capital site was not a purely scholarly exercise. Characteristically of the progressive movement,

any and every aspect of scholarship and inquiry could only justify itself through [its] capacity for problem solving. The way to this was itself 'scientific': Progressives were ardent collectors of data concerning natural and human phenomena. Thence must come guides for effective action, to be pursued by bureaucratic and other elites.72

The reports carried out on the capital site included Griffith Taylor's physiographic study of 1910, 'Reports on the Geology of the Federal Capital Site'73 and 'On the Climate of the Yass-Canberra District'.74 The reports on geology listed the composition of soils and rocks from various places in the capital territory. The study of climate compared temperatures in Canberra to those of other national capitals. The 12-page list of conditions and particulars was accompanied, not only by documentation of the physiographic features of the site, but by a large number of maps and 'full-circle cycloramic paintings' over 7 feet long.75 While generating this voluminous information

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72Roe, p. 11.
75According to the 'Information Conditions and Particulars':
5. Applicants must establish their bona fides as intending competitors before being supplied with information.
6. The information comprises the following:—
   (a) Historical notes; conditions of competition; requirements; general information; descriptive matter; and statistics relating to meteorology and climatology.
   (b) Map of preliminary Contour Survey of Country about Canberra.
      Scale, 20 chains= 1 inch.
   (c) Map of Contour Survey of Site of Federal Capital at Canberra (2 copies).
      Scale, 400 feet= 1 inch.
      Contours, 5 feet vertical intervals.
      Note: The Trigonometrical Meridian may practically be regarded as the local true Meridian.
   (d) Topographical map of Federal Territory of about 900 square miles.
      Scale, 6,000 feet= 1 inch (approximately).
may have helped to determine aspects of the capital’s construction (such as the type of building materials that would be readily available), the scope of the data encompassed the total environment of the capital.

In placing his ‘faith in the power of an expert bureaucracy to apply technological and scientific skills for the betterment of all society’, Sulman was like many other progressive reformers.\(^{76}\) His faith was genuine, but his town planning technologies would, today, be considered pseudo-scientific. Both Sulman and Fitzgerald worked hard to champion the cause of town planning, and their character as civic minded citizens should not be doubted. In 1921, after devoting much of his adult life to architecture and town planning, Sulman was virtually ‘promised’ a knighthood for serving (without pay) as chairman of the National Capital Advisory Committee for approximately 18 months. Nearly three years later, he was 75 years of age, and still serving as chairman (without the knighthood), when he asked to be given what amounted to permanent travelling leave.\(^{77}\) J. D. Fitzgerald also worked at town planning with sincerity, and in many ways was the quintessential progressive.\(^{78}\) Fitzgerald was a lawyer and politician, who turned to town planning as a means of reforming society more effectively and efficiently than purely legislative channels would allow. Fitzgerald was a man of principle. Although he would become the President of the Labor Party in 1915, he had been formally expelled in 1893 for refusing to vote according to party directives.\(^{79}\) Fitzgerald’s commitment to his ideals makes it difficult to believe his faith in the science of town planning was insincere;

\(^{(e)}\) Map of the state of New South Wales.
\(^{(f)}\) Map of the south-eastern portion of the State of New South Wales.
\(^{(g)}\) Geological map of the City Site, Scale, 800 feet= 1 inch, and two reports by the Government Geologist of New South Wales.
\(^{(h)}\) Map showing rainfall and temperature statistics of the Site for the Federal Capital and surrounding district.
\(^{(j)}\) Report by the Commonwealth Meteorologist on the climate of the Yass-Canberra district.
\(^{(k)}\) Reproductions of landscape sketches taken from points within the City Site.

\(^{76}\) Petrow, p. 95.
\(^{77}\) Gibney, pp. 79-80. He was knighted in June of 1924.
\(^{78}\) Baron Haussmann, who remodelled Paris, could be seen as the model for planners of this period. He was a technocrat, engineer, ‘surgeon’, incorruptible and autocratic. (Holston, p. 48) According to Macintyre, ‘The progressives were administrators and publicists rather than politicians, and they liked to think that they transcended politics with their altruistic professional expertise’. (Stuart Macintyre, The Oxford History of Australia, V. 4, Melbourne, 1986, p. 108.)
\(^{79}\) Petrow, p. 94.
yet, despite the faith Fitzgerald, Sulman and others had in town planning, it was not an impartial science. The kind of environmental planning techniques developed by town planners were in many cases the product of conjecture, such as when the arrangement of buildings in the federal capital came to be based in part on the disinfectant quality of sunlight. Both Griffin’s first place plan and the second place design would position buildings in the manner recommended by John Sulman, who wrote, ‘The Italians have a proverb that “where the sun does not shine the doctor enters”’. While aspects of town planning did involve applying new ideas of sanitation and construction, its ‘science’ was based largely on the conventional wisdom of the time rather than ‘proven’ technology.

To win support for their profession (and contracts for themselves) town planners offered existing governments solutions to urban problems that were distinguished, not by their basis in impartial scientific analysis, but by their ability to maintain their sponsor’s (the government) control over society. Town planners were contracted by the government because they promised to eliminate social problems without upsetting the existing power structure. This point was made most succinctly by the architect and planner, Le Corbusier, in his 1923 manifesto: ‘Architecture or Revolution. Revolution can be avoided’. That town planning has become institutionalised as part of the government bureaucracy in this century indicates its acceptance as a necessary part of governing society. Holston claims that internationally, town planners’ ‘political affiliations were often mercurial and ambiguous as radical architects appeared at the door of whichever authority, on the Left or Right, seemed capable of implementing total planning... Hoping to find an omnipotent patron [Le Corbusier] wrote on the title page of his major publication, The Radiant City: ‘this work is dedicated to Authority’. Australian town planning has been criticised for not attempting to redress economic or social imbalances—only mitigate their effects. On this point Teather writes:

The failure of planners to place the issue of resources, and therefore politics and social reform, at the heart of their burgeoning ‘discipline’ around the turn of the century—despite the lead from Ebenezer Howard—has arguably,

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80 Sulman, The Federal Capital, Sydney, 1909, p. 14. Today houses in Canberra are more often designed to shade them from the summer sun.
81 Holston, p. 56.
82 Holston, p. 42.
aborted their attempts to establish an [sic] profession independent of sectarian politics and founded on a discrete philosophical integrity. As Sandercock puts it, 'the triumph [was] of the related view of planning as a technical, administrative task rather than as an essentially political process'.

Despite the highly political nature of town planning, the ‘Information, Conditions and Particulars’ given out to competitors in the federal capital competition is evidence that the government accepted town planning as a legitimate science.

In keeping with his beliefs about the technical skills needed to be a town planner, Sulman worried about the interference of amateurs in planning projects. He told the Royal Commission for the Improvement of the City of Sydney:

> You, gentlemen, can do and are doing most valuable work in obtaining the data on which the ideal conception of the Sydney of the future will be based. But, with all respect, I wish to point out that you can no more produce the conception than you could paint a fine picture, carve a noble statue, or design a federal capital. If the Sydney of the future is to be well planned, convenient, sightly to the eye, and is to realise our ideal, you will have to find a genius who has the capacity and the skill to harmonise conflicting practical needs, and to design our streets and building masses in such ways that they shall form one harmonious and well-ordered whole. It is only in Europe and America that such men at present are known, but it is my sincere hope that the opportunity will produce the man and that Sydney may owe its re-birth to one whose life has been spent under the Southern Cross.

Sulman held a similar view about the planning of the federal capital. He wanted a worldwide competition because he feared the capital 'might drift into the hands of permanent officials whose knowledge of city planning and its possibilities was conspicuous by its absence'. Sulman thought it would be unlikely that ‘the best result would be attained by local effort owing to lack of experience’. However, he did believe he had some experience. He told the Royal Commission in Sydney: ‘All modern American engineers prefer, as a better system for traffic, the spider-web system to the

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83Elizabeth Kenworthy Teather, 'The Taylors, Sir Charles Rosenthal and Protofascism in the 1920's', Freestone, p. 107. Because Howard advocated the public ownership of land in cities he has been perceived as addressing some of the real causes of urban problems, rather than treating the symptoms. Hugh Stretton noted that ‘A desire for scientific neutrality begets its very opposite: a strictly political preference for satisfying one type of demand at the expense of others’. (Hugh Stretton, Ideas for Australian Cities, Adelaide, 1970, p. 275.)


85Sulman in Fischer, p. 107.
chess-board system. And if I may speak personally on the matter, as far as I know, I was the first person to publicly suggest that plan--to put it into print--in 1888'.

As Sulman hoped, the competition for the capital was opened up to international planners. In the end however, Sulman was disappointed by the competition. He believed the premiums to be awarded (first place £1,750; second place £750; and third place £500) were too low to attract notable architects and planners to the competition. The competition also stipulated that the Government could use 'in whole or in part' any design submitted, and that the Design Board--consisting of an engineer, an architect and a licensed surveyor--would only be advisers. The final decision was left to the Minister for Home Affairs, O'Malley. This caused the Royal Institute of Architects of New South Wales to request that the government change the conditions of the competition. The Institute felt that since O'Malley was not a professional town planner, he was not in a position to judge the best design. O'Malley refused to change the competition rules and this led to a boycott of the competition by the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA). All members of the British Commonwealth architectural institutes were ethically barred from participating in the competition. This greatly upset members of the architectural profession, like John Sulman, who believed that, despite O'Malley's claim to want a capital that was the 'pride of time', the rules of the competition would prevent this. In Sulman's mind, the lack of professional approval or input would detract from the reputation of the capital and hinder its progress. The Melbourne Argus deplored the 'personal interference in professional matters of an inflated Minister, with no professional experience, but obsessed with grandiose and impracticable ideas'. Even after the competition had ended Sulman complained, 'I cannot but feel that a much better result would have been obtained if more liberal premiums had been offered, and the just request

86Royal Commission, Sydney, p. 69.
87There was an additional quarrel between various professional organisations who wanted to be involved in the judgment of the competition. The Victorian Institute of Engineers, for instance, insisted that the work of the competition would basically be an engineering problem. The capital was an important part of the development of professions going on at this time.
89The American Institute of Architects approved 'the act of the Royal Institute', but did not explicitly forbid American participation. Johnson, p. 17.
90Fischer, p. 19.
of the various Institutes of Architects as regards the conduct of the competition had been acceded to. As it is, none of the well known town-planners have entered the lists’.91 Sulman’s disappointment and the boycott by the RIBA were further indication of the way town planning was trying to establish itself as an expert profession which, in his mind, should have been given an important role in shaping society outside of the direct control of politicians.

Despite criticism, the competition rules were not altered, and King O’Malley remained optimistic about the competition. He believed, ‘While the aristocracy of the profession may not send designs, there are hundreds of young, progressive, and up-to-date professional men who will compete . . . They have reputations to make’.92 One such man was Walter Burley Griffin.

‘Recent Developments’ in Town Planning

The method by which the government planned to decide the winner in the capital design competition led George Taylor of *Building* magazine to make the accusation that Australian officials already had their own plans ‘cut and dried in the closet’ and that they would only pick the raisins from the plans submitted, ‘in order to cover up their own lack of town planning knowledge,’ so the winner would only have to ‘accept his award and to bow gratefully out of the picture’.93

The government did not have a plan waiting in the wings. However, Sulman’s town planning ideas, as well as ideas from town planners abroad, did shape the government’s expectations about what features a winning design should include.

The efforts of town planners appealed to Australian social reformers in the public and private sphere because planners promised to design an urban form that would improve the character of individual citizens to make them more closely resemble an authoritative version of the ideal citizen or ‘typical Australian’. J. D. Fitzgerald believed ‘a healthy citizen is the best workman, he is more contented, he creates more wealth and does it more continuously. He is no burden upon his fellow citizens’.94 Australian town

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91Johnson, p. 20.
92Johnson, p. 17.
93George Taylor, in Fischer, p. 19.
94Petrow, p. 97.
planners were promising that their designs could create such healthy citizens. According to Fitzgerald, 'When the people are better housed they become better citizens. The civic statesmen can, by practical effort, do more to improve morals, to empty gaols, to crush intemperance, to cure the folly of gambling, than all the sermons and the petty treatment of the problem as if it were a permanent condition and not curable by human effort'. The improvement of citizens was perceived to lead to an improvement in the national character and efficiency as well. Many reformers agreed with the sociologist and town planning pioneer, Professor Patrick Geddes who said, in a 1904 speech at the University of London, 'The improvement of the individuals of the community, which is the aim of eugenics, involves a corresponding civic progress'. In 1914, Fitzgerald wrote that the ideal of town planners is the highest which can animate the human mind. It is nothing less than to create conditions which will produce a higher type of human being—a superman—superior to the man of today in his physical, mental and moral attributes, in his capacity for creating wealth, and in his power to control his own destiny and enhance his own health and happiness.

This section explores important town planning doctrines around the time of the 1911 design competition and how they were to be applied in the creation of the ideal national capital. The ‘Information, Conditions and Particulars’ recommended that all planners entering the competition consult the papers of a conference held by the Royal Institute of British Architects the year before, ‘at which many authorities on the subject of town planning were present’. The ideas presented at this conference ‘must have a marked influence upon city Design from the utilitarian, the architectural, the scientific and the artistic stand-points’. The spokesman of the City Beautiful movement, Charles Mulford Robinson, founder of the Garden City movement, Ebenezer Howard, and John Sulman were among those who submitted papers to the conference. Ideas from all three men would be found in the winning competition entry.

96Patrick Geddes, 'Civics: As Applied Sociology', in Helen E. Meller, The Ideal City, Leicester, 1979, p. 76.
98Department of Home Affairs, 'Information, Conditions and Particulars', p. 28.
The City Beautiful movement originated in America around the turn of the century and drew on the transformation of Paris by Haussmann, and the French Ecole des Beaux Arts.\textsuperscript{99} City Beautiful planners tried to reflect 'the manifest destinies of imperial democracy and expanding capitalism'.\textsuperscript{100} Their language of grand and impressive architecture spoke to American imperial ambitions, and could also be appreciated by Australians who desired Australia to become something like an imperial democracy in its own right. Such people included King O'Malley who, again, was the final adjudicator in the design competition.\textsuperscript{101}

While the architecture of the City Beautiful movement would come to affect the plans for buildings in the capital, perhaps the most important aspect of this movement was that it posited an instrumental relation between architecture and behaviour. City Beautiful practitioners promised that beautifying the city would create better citizens. It intended to engender 'in every citizen, even the slum-dweller, a feeling of aesthetic appreciation and thereby civic pride, which would motivate him to recognise and fulfil his role as a useful member of society'.\textsuperscript{102} The spokesman for the City Beautiful movement, Charles Mulford Robinson, wrote:

Social problems are to a large degree problems of environment. This with increasing positiveness is the conclusion of modern scientific study in to the depths of sociology. Give the boy and girl a chance; make it possible for them to work off sheer animal energy in harmless amusements . . . let an abundance of fresh air and sunshine into living and sleeping rooms, and the slum will be ancient history and many of sociology's hardest problems will be solved. The Juvenile Court would not have enough business to keep it going; the saloon would have its vigour sapped by a substitute; there would be purer souls, for there would be less temptation; there would be saner minds because of stronger bodies.

And out of depressing social conditions grow political evils. In the city slum smoulders the fire which breaks forth in revolution.

It has been found that often there is no better way to redeem a slum district than by cutting into it a great highway that will be filled with the through travel of a city's industry. Like a stream of pure water cleansing what it touches, this tide of traffic, pulsing with the joyousness of the

\textsuperscript{99}The City Beautiful movement's planners also drew on other schools, and ideas from preindustrial cities.
\textsuperscript{100}Fischer, p. 10.
\textsuperscript{101}O'Malley believed the 'controlling destiny of the islands of the southern seas is sacredly vested in the Australian people'. R. C. Thompson, 'The Labor Party and Australian Imperialism in the Pacific, 1901-1919', Labour History, 23, November 1972, p. 28, in White, p. 81.
\textsuperscript{102}Fischer, p. 10.
city's life of toil and purpose, when flowing through an idle or suffering
district wakes it to larger interests and higher purpose.103

Robinson's beliefs indicate that the beautification of the city involved particular
alterations to the urban form, such as putting broad straight avenues through slum
districts or replacing slums with parks and gardens. While such measure were supposed
to rejuvenate slum areas, in practice they often merely replaced them and forced the
inhabitants to move further out of the city. Many city councils all over the western world
passed on their problems in this way. More recent critics of the City Beautiful movement
have accused it of being concerned 'exclusively with urban aesthetics and not with the
economic realities of urban functions and the social realities of poverty and class
stratifications which make the city "ugly"'.104 This is an example of how town planning
was more political than scientific.

The Garden City movement, initiated by the Englishman Ebenezer Howard, also
influenced Australian town planning before the federal capital competition. Like the City
Beautiful movement, Howard emphasised the need for a city to have parks and gardens
for the health of its inhabitants.105 After reading Howard's book, Garden Cities of
Tomorrow, J. D. Fitzgerald wrote that 'if a great city can be transformed into one vast
park without impairing the utility for business purposes . . . so much the better for the
health, comfort, and aesthetic enjoyment of the citizens'.106

The City Beautiful movement and the Garden City movement were influential in
Australia in at least two ways. They helped strengthen a belief that moral and physical
health were more closely related to environment and urban form than to economic
inequalities. They also helped establish techniques of spatial organisation that were
perceived to create social reform. In Melbourne, '[c]onvinced that the living conditions
of the people were vital to Australia for weal or woe, the advocates of town planning

103Charles Mulford Robinson, Modern Civic Art, 1901, pp. 245, 246, as quoted in Fischer, p. 10.
104Fischer, p. 11.
105'The one-sidedly aesthetic approach of the City Beautiful is restricted to the attempt to cover up the
problems of the disjointed city by the construction of a visually impressive, 'grandiose' facade, while the
Garden City model gets closer to the roots of the problem by opening up perspectives of social reform
and regional planning'. Fischer, p. 18.
106J. D. Fitzgerald in Petrow, p. 99.
insisted on the significance of environmental influences for national efficiency'.  

J. C. Morrell, a government architect, reported to the Minister of Public Works in Melbourne that, town planning had to banish the slum evil:

not only for the sake of economy, but for the health and betterment of our citizens and for the creation of housing conditions which will produce a virile and efficient race of ambitions and progressive inhabitants for the future government and welfare of our country.  

By 1911, the year the federal capital competition was announced, the Melbourne City Council had begun to enact slum clearance measures. However, Sydney’s municipal fathers had begun to think about a more comprehensive approach to urban problems in 1909 with the creation of the Royal Commission for the Improvement of the City of Sydney and its Suburbs. Sydney planners and their ideas for remodelling the city would influence ideas about the federal capital, including the definition of ‘beautiful’ that plans for the capital would be expected to embody.  

The association of Sydney architects with the planning of a national capital can be traced back to the turn of the century. Along with writing a series of articles about the federal capital and later becoming chairman of the Federal Capital Advisory Committee, John Sulman had contributed to the ‘Congress of Engineers, Architects, Surveyors and others interested in the building of the Federal Capital in Australia’ held in Melbourne on 1 May 1901. J. D. Fitzgerald offered commentary on the capital competition for the *Sydney Morning Herald*. Several other people who played an important role in the development of the federal capital were employed by the city of Sydney. Robert Coulter, who had illustrated a vision of the capital city for A. Evans’ 1901 article ‘A Waterside Capital,’ worked as an architectural draftsman for Sydney’s Department of Public Works.[Figure 1.3] Coulter, along with Charles Caswell, an Assistant Engineer in the Department of Public Works, and Walter Scott Griffiths, a draftsman and map publisher

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107 Hyslop, p. 377.
109 Melbourne would establish a Town Planning Commission in 1922.
111 Gibbney, p.28.
Figure 1.3 Robert Coulter’s illustration for A. Evans’ 1901 article ‘A Waterside Capital’. [Source: Pegrum, Roger, *The Bush Capital*, Sydney, 1983, p. 73.]
in private practice, submitted the federal capital design which was recommended for first prize by the chairman of the adjudicating board, J. M. Coane.

Caswell, Coulter, Fitzgerald and Sulman all gave extensive testimony before the Royal Commission for the Improvement of Sydney. These men developed plans to remodel central Sydney with broad straight avenues and monumental buildings. Sulman’s plan was to create new avenues stretching to the horizon. [Figures 1.4, 1.5] The new central avenue is lined on both sides with trees and monuments. The addition of such avenues would have cut large spaces into the existing city. The Commission asked Coulter, perhaps incredulously, if his proposal would not ‘wipe out the whole school of industry . . . block up the end of Forbes-Street . . . and throw in a public park’? To which he replied, ‘Yes’. Fitzgerald shared the belief that existing winding streets should be removed in the city:

I would straighten main avenues because otherwise you do not get the vista which is one of the fine points of every well planned city . . . I think as a general principle our streets should be made straight, and in the formation of new streets or avenues, either through old slum areas or through uninhabited areas . . . wherever possible, I should have the streets absolutely straight. Sulman believed such measures added ‘proper air, light, and space’ to the city, without which, ‘dwellers therein become sickly’. As Fitzgerald’s above testimony indicates, it was not lost on planners that such avenues could replace slum areas. According to Fitzgerald, where they existed, ‘slums should be abolished, and the inhabitants encouraged to go farther out where more light, air, and space are possible’. Many of the proposals that planners made to the Royal Commission were not put into practice. Unlike the land of the new capital, which was all owned by the government, in Sydney the cost of resuming privately held land—let alone the costs of construction—made the proposals of Sulman and the other planners prohibitively expensive. However, the Royal Commission agreed with many of the ideas planners

112 Gibbney, p. 28.
113 Royal Commission, Sydney, p. 112. The conception of beautiful that these architects put forward would have required enormous remodelling of the city and have kept the architects employed for many years.
114 Fitzgerald, Royal Commission, Sydney, p. 126.
Figure 1.4 John Sulman’s proposed central avenue and remodelling of Circular Quay. [Source: ‘Report of the Royal Commission for the Improvement of the City of Sydney and its Suburbs’, NSW Parliamentary Papers, Vol. 5, 1909.]
ROYAL COMMISSION ON SYDNEY IMPROVEMENT.
PLAN ILLUSTRATING MR. JOHN SULMAN'S PROPOSED CENTRAL AVENUE AND REMODELLING OF CIRCULAR QUAY.

Scale of Chains:

John Sulman,
In'th't Del. May 1909

PHOTO-Carrière BY M. J. BURGESS, GOVERNMENT PHOTO STATION, D.S.H.
Figure 1.5 Robert Coulter’s illustrations of Sulman’s plan for Circular Quay. [Source: ‘Report of the Royal Commission for the Improvement of the City of Sydney and its Suburbs’, NSW Parliamentary Papers, Vol. 5, 1909.]
SKETCH ILLUSTRATING MR. JOHN SULMAN'S PROPOSED CENTRAL AVENUE AND REMODELLING OF CIRCULAR QUAY.
presented, particularly the need to eliminate slums. The Commission recognised that slum clearance ‘only tends to the growth of the evil elsewhere’ however, it recommended that, ‘on social and hygienic grounds, workmen should be encouraged to live in separate houses in suburbs’. 117

In its traditional form, the city street formed a narrow corridor between the walls of multi-storey building facades. The building facades were boundaries between mostly privately owned interior space and the public area of the street. The public space of the street served many functions. It was a market place and meeting place where people carried out business or socialised. The street brought different classes into contact with each other. For Australian progressives, the city street became a symbol of a public space that was unregulated and unsupervised. The Royal Commission believed that the ‘street, with all its attendant dangers both to body and mind; [was] a most unpromising school for the production of good citizens’. 118 This same opinion was held by other Australian reformers. In 1906, Annie Westmoreland wrote that children who, ‘spend most of their time in the streets without supervision or control . . . are, therefore, subject to great mental, physical, and especially moral deterioration’. 119 Melbourne’s Spectator and Central Mission Gazette called for playgrounds in suburbs, ‘where house adjoined house, for the whole length of streets, with no front garden, and almost no backyard’. 120

Rykwert has written that the word street denotes a ‘delimited surface . . . an extended area lined with buildings on either side’. 121 It has been derived from the Latin sterere, to pave, and so relates to all Latin-derived words with the str root that are connected with building, with construction. It suggests that a surface is distinguished from its surroundings in some physical or at least notional way. 122 Figure 1.5 shows how, in the heart of Sydney, Sulman wanted to widened the streets to the point where

117 Royal Commission, Sydney, p. xxviii.
118 Royal Commission, Sydney, p. xxix.
122 Joseph Rykwert, p. 15.
they began to lose their delimitation among the open spaces and parks. As discussed in Chapter Two, the wide streets of Canberra would also lose their delimitation.

Sulman’s modifications to the urban street, which created the ‘vista’ that Fitzgerald believed important to well planned cities, can be seen as attempts to negate the multi-functional street that was being blamed for so many of society’s ills. Sulman believed that straightening and broadening streets into avenues could increase the volume and speed of traffic—especially with the increasing use of motor cars. The increased noise and danger to pedestrians, could make the street less susceptible to use as a playground or gathering place. Sulman advocated the use of the roundabout as another means of increasing the speed of traffic, but it can also be seen as a means of eliminating the street corner, a known haunt for idlers and vagrants. Increasing the speed of traffic was perceived to make the city healthier. In 1908 the *Sydney Morning Herald* commented on a relationship between increased motor traffic and lower death rates:

> Motors and the Death-rate--The death rate in London has dropped to the extraordinary low figure of 10 per 1000, which is lower than it has been for 50 years. ‘A well-known London doctor attributes this to the decrease in horse traffic and in [the] increase of motor traffic. He points out that the litter caused by horse traffic spreads disease and disseminates infection, while the fumes of the motor car are the finest disinfectant in the world’.

The fumes from the motor car might act as a social disinfectant as well, keeping people from loitering in streets which could be filled with speeding traffic.

After the New Year’s eve celebration of 1908, the *Sydney Morning Herald* had decried the ‘mob’ rule and ‘saturnalia’ of the crowds that took to the streets. ‘Eye witnesses’ (all men) wrote the paper to express outrage at the way respectable women had been harassed by the crowds. The outraged citizens called for the strengthening of police powers. Other problems in public spaces recorded at this time include ‘confidence men’ and ‘spielers,’ who preyed upon the unwary. In 1907 the *Herald* sounded the warning that

> The expert confidence trick man is as a rule well-dressed, intelligent, and well-educated individual, and to all outward appearances is a respectable

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123Ian Haskins, ‘Reclaiming the City: Spatial Regulation and Definition in the 1909 Royal Commission for the Improvement of Sydney and Suburbs’, Freestone, p. 251.
124*Sydney Morning Herald* 18 November 1908, p. 8.
125*Sydney Morning Herald*, January 2, 1908, in Haskins, p. 245.
member of society . . . He is entirely different from the average person’s conception of a criminal, and here in lies his success.\textsuperscript{126}

According to Haskins, the visible signs of respectability that were part of the middle and upper classes’ understanding of the social structure were breaking down, and some of the initiatives proposed to the Royal Commission for the remodelling of Sydney were attempts to remodel social structures and controls in public spaces.\textsuperscript{127}

Sulman’s plan for the Circular Quay created a broad and open space--the opposite of the crowded dock that it was to replace.[See Figure 1.5] This helped to isolate vagrants, confidence men, and prostitutes, loitering at the Quay, and made it more difficult for them to disappear into the crowded city.\textsuperscript{128} Sulman’s plan for Belmore Park and the Central Railway station created a self regulating space like Bentham’s panopticon.[Figure 1.6] The plan was illustrated by Coulter, and showed respectable whites promenading in the park while the Chinese and working classes of Wexford Street and Surry Hills were hidden.\textsuperscript{129} [Figure 1.7] The buildings formed a semicircle around the park. This created a panoptic amphitheatre where the gaze of individuals in the crowd was inevitably directed towards the rest of the crowd: ‘It was in this sense a self regulating space. The shape of the area itself meant that movement and vision converged on the centre of the formal garden where a didactic monument stood’.\textsuperscript{130}

For Sulman, the creation of ‘things of beauty’ in the city, ‘such as trees and shrubs, green grass, and flowers, fountains and lakes, tree-shaded drives to beauty spots, and monuments to the men and women who have served their country well’, were as ‘essential to health as food and entertainment’.\textsuperscript{131} However, while Sulman claimed that these elements were essential for health, it was not only the health of the individual that would benefit. He perceived his alterations to the city as measures to help reform society as a whole by inculcating proper values in citizens. In his beautiful city, people

\textsuperscript{126}Haskins, p. 246
\textsuperscript{127}Haskins, p. 247.
\textsuperscript{128}Haskins, p. 252.
\textsuperscript{129}Royal Commission, Sydney, p. 162.
\textsuperscript{130}Haskins, p. 251.
\textsuperscript{131}Sulman, \textit{Town Planning: A Sketch in Outline}, p. 30.
Figure 1.6 John Sulman’s proposed Belmore Park. [Source: ‘Report of the Royal Commission for the Improvement of the City of Sydney and its Suburbs’, *NSW Parliamentary Papers*, Vol. 5, 1909.]
PLAN AT LOWER ROAD LEVEL OF MR. JOHN SULMAN'S PROPOSAL FOR THE TREATMENT OF BELMORE PARK.

SUGGESTED TREATMENT OF BELMORE PARK.
Figure 1.7 Robert Coulter's illustrations of Sulman's plan for Belmore Park. [Source: 'Report of the Royal Commission for the Improvement of the City of Sydney and its Suburbs', NSW Parliamentary Papers, Vol. 5, 1909.]
ROYAL COMMISSION ON SYDNEY IMPROVEMENT.

PLAN NO. 18.

SKETCH ILLUSTRATING MR. JOHN SULMAN'S PROPOSAL FOR THE TREATMENT OF BELMORE PARK, FRONTING THE CENTRAL RAILWAY STATION.
could ‘engage in pastimes such as tennis and croquet, football and cricket’, rather than mulling about in the street.\textsuperscript{132}

Not everyone who testified before the Sydney Royal Commission agreed that the city should be beautified with the spatial reforms suggest by Sulman, Fitzgerald and others. The architect John Barlow disagreed with many of their proposals. Though he may have been putting himself and other planners out of a job, he believed that remodelling Sydney to resemble Haussmann’s Paris would be extremely expensive and an enormous mistake. While, ‘very few streets conform to the geometrical definition of a straight line’, this was a

picturesque failing that one willingly would not amend; for apart from the many beauties it owes to the superb site upon which it has grown, half our city’s charm lies in the crookedness of her streets, with their pleasing possibilities in the way of unexpected architectural effect.\textsuperscript{133} Barlow believed that, ‘broad, straight, level boulevards, running in unending prospective, like those in Chicago or like Le Notre’s avenues in the park at Versailles, may make for grandeur, but they soon become depressing . . . It merely emphasises the obvious, and eliminates altogether the pleasure we are entitled to expect from the occurrence of the unexpected’. He remarked that no one ‘would have the moral courage to lay out a crooked street . . . But having our crooked streets, and recognising their artistic value—as I hope we do—let us keep them as they are’.\textsuperscript{134}

Barlow rejected the idea of using city planning to create the future: ‘There never was, and never will be, an absolutely perfect city, for as the needs of one generation differ widely from those of the generation that preceded it, the best planned town must be for ever incomplete and subject to ceaseless change if it is adapted to meet the circumstances of its time’.\textsuperscript{135} Barlow claimed, ‘“Look to the future”, is the cry that everywhere assails us, and it is excellent advice; but it is neither necessary nor desirable that we should look to far. The gift of prophecy is not given to us; and we can no[t] . . . foresee what Sydney will be like in 100 years’.\textsuperscript{136}

\textsuperscript{132}Sulman, \textit{Town Planning: A Sketch in Outline}, p. 31.
\textsuperscript{133}John Barlow in Royal Commission, Sydney, p. 127.
\textsuperscript{134}John Barlow in Royal Commission, Sydney, p. 127.
\textsuperscript{135}John Barlow in Royal Commission, Sydney, p. 127.
\textsuperscript{136}John Barlow in Royal Commission, Sydney, p. 127.
Sulman understood the beauty of the picturesque that Barlow spoke about. Despite his desire to straighten the downtown streets of Sydney, Sulman argued that the drive around the foreshore should be left as it was because of its picturesque beauty. To straighten and flatten it would ‘create a monotonity of views’ which he contrasted to the New South Head Road, which rises and falls over the jutting spurs... all the varied play of light and shade and colour on boathouse and bath, private jetty and landing-place, and gardens sloping to the water’s edge, which is now so picturesque, would be neutralised by the artificial and formal line of roadway, for which no addition of seats, trees or statues would compensate.137

To prove his point Sulman went on to explain to the commissioners the features of some of the best known shore drives he had seen when travelling around the world. While Sulman’s fear that the beauty of this drive would be ‘neutralised’ by the artificial and formal lines of a roadway, he found the same lines beautiful in the city. This separation of what is beautiful in nature and in man-made forms is related to what the lines would be neutralising. Sulman found them beautiful if they neutralised potentially dangerous urban spaces.

J. D. Fitzgerald addressed the problems of the picturesque city in his Lone Hand article, ‘Sydney Slums: Picturesque and Pestilential’. However pleasing winding narrow streets may have appeared, the social ramifications of uncontrolled and unknown space made them ‘hideous’ to him. He explained to the ‘happy average citizen, in his comfortable suburban home’, how the inner city was not what it seemed. Capitalising on the same fears that called for increased police protection after what appeared to be a breakdown in the apparent signs of respectability in dress and behaviour, Sulman was claiming that the city, like the well dressed con man, had a dangerous hidden side. To those, who ‘will stare with incredulity at the notion of Sydney furnishing anything approximate to “Tom-all-alone’s”’, Fitzgerald advised,

Let him read on, or better still, look around him. The slum is often the most picturesque quarter of the city at a distance. It has usually the glamour of antiquity upon it. A slum cannot be manufactured in a day. But certain races can create slums in quicker time than others. Our Chinese--also picturesque, but dirty--have a fatal facility in evolving slums out of the newest and most promising material. They board out the air and light, and sedulously cultivate darkness and bad ventilations. The slum, however

137John Sulman in Royal Commission, Sydney, pp. 89-90.
picturesque from a distance, is on close scrutiny, hideous, pestilential. It is a danger to the rich, a prison for the poor. It breeds death and crime.

While Fitzgerald offered clues to spotting a slum, it could take many forms: 'A single house may be a slum; so may a quarter or a whole city'. Therefore the eradication of slums would have taken experts who could recognise them in their various and deceiving forms. This was important work because,

Each slum, single or multiplied, may become a menace to the moral and physical health of the whole community. Diseases bred in the slum often spread and carry death to the mansion. So every citizen is vitally affected; none is immune from danger. As we understand the problems of disease better to-day than at any previous stage of the world's history, we know that 'The wages of slums is death.'

Fitzgerald wondered why the 'City Council does not boldly sweep the whole pestilential areas away, and erect decent dwellings for the people who now live in such horrid surroundings'. For Fitzgerald the slum threatened the entire fabric of society. The environment of the slums gave people dangerously little to live for. He believed that

Compared with life in a slum, gaol is clean, hygienic, desirable . . . What hardship can there be in imprisonment to a youth born and brought up in the slum areas? It must be like a holiday to him, and the judge who sentences him must be regarded in the light of a benefactor.

Society's existing forms of discipline and punishment were becoming ineffective in Fitzgerald's eyes. He perceived the beautification of the city along certain aesthetic lines as a necessary part of maintaining social order.

At the same time that Sulman was purveying his ideas for beautifying Sydney, he was formulating ideas about what would make a beautiful federal capital. The paper he was to present at the Town Planning Conference of the Royal Institute of British Architects in 1910, later published in Art and Architecture magazine, tried to offer suggestions about the Australian national character and how it could best be symbolised in a city. Sulman's use of the avenue in plans for Sydney and the capital indicates how the vision of a utopian capital city was derived from eliminating the problems of the existing city. Sulman's diagrams of possible street plans for the capital feature the broad

139 J. D. Fitzgerald in Sulman, Town Planning: A Sketch in Outline, pp. 5-6.
avenues he used in his Sydney plans. [Figure 1.8] They converged on important public buildings such as the Parliament House. Sulman wanted roadways to be used not as playgrounds or markets, but solely as transportation routes; he told potential designers of the federal capital that in Australia using the street ‘as a public resort, with its numerous cafés, is unknown, and would be unappreciated’.  

For Sulman the design of the capital was to symbolise that the ‘Australian Government is one of the most democratic in the world’. Because of this, he believed there would be no need for the ‘special segregation of public buildings’ from the private. Despite a belief in representing Australia’s democratic ideals, Sulman’s opinion of the Governor General provides an insight into the way Sulman believed society actually worked:

In providing for the Governor-General, the representative of the Empire, the above considerations do not apply. He is naturally selected from the ruling and aristocratic class, and as our guest, as well as our ruler, he is, and should be provided for in a generous way, in harmony with his previous life and surroundings.

A man who believed in a social Darwinist ‘natural selection from a ruling and aristocratic class’ may have also believed in a natural selection or predisposition for slum dwelling among certain other members of society. His idea of planning for the greater good had a paternalistic quality. This seems to reveal itself not only in Sulman’s plans for Sydney but, as we shall see, in the way he organised the physical form of the capital as chairman of the Federal Capital Advisory Committee (Chapter Three).

In this chapter I have explored assumptions about what the federal capital was to look like and the role it could play in national development. These assumptions gave adjudicators in the design competition some idea about what they were looking for in a winning design. The winning design would have to give expression to aspirations of creating a beautiful city, which was a far cry from merely providing for a Seat of Government as the Constitution stipulated.

Figure 1.8 Sulman’s plans for the Federal Capital of Australia. [Source: Sulman, John, *Town Planning: A Sketch in Outline*, Sydney, 1919.]
This plan shows a system of radial, ring, and diagonal avenues, which gives the greatest facility for intercommunication between all the different parts of the city. In the centre portion only are the minor streets indicated, and in one section only are the building areas blacked in to show the relative areas covered by buildings and left open for streets and reserves.

This plan embodies the same general ideas as the one previously illustrated; but the Parliament House, instead of forming the central feature, is here the culminating point on one side, and would look best backed up by a range of hills. The railway station forms an important secondary feature.
Chapter Two: Griffin's Canberra

This chapter explores the Griffin plan for Australia's federal capital, not to reach a definite conclusion about its inspiration or content, but to point out four aspects of the Griffin vision that may help explain why his plan was selected for first prize in the design competition and what relationship his vision bears to the Canberra of today.

The four aspects of the Griffin plan I discuss in this chapter are:

1. Griffin's legacy.
2. The influence of Griffin's social reform agenda on the spatial organisation of his plan.
3. The technique of spatial defamiliarisation which Griffin employed to create his vision of a national capital.
4. The significance of the visual presentation of the Griffin plan.

1. Griffin's Legacy

In 1912 Walter Burley Griffin's plan was awarded first prize in the government sponsored capital design competition. Griffin's contribution to Canberra has been commemorated in the name of Canberra's largest lake, Lake Burley Griffin. Yet, defining Griffin's contribution to Canberra has been a subject of debate since 1912. He was eventually brought to Canberra and made the Federal Capital Director of Design. He served in this capacity from 1913 to 1920. During Griffin's tenure, the construction carried out was infrastructure that reflected relatively little on the appearance of the city.¹ In 1921 his position was abolished and replaced by the Federal Capital Advisory Committee which Griffin refused to serve on. Despite successive planners claims that they intended to preserve the Griffin vision, few of his actual designs have been constructed in Canberra.

Two problems in defining Griffin's contribution to Canberra are: 'What was Griffin's vision of the Capital'? and 'How much of this vision has been realised in the

¹Works completed under Griffin's tenure include the creation of a water supply and a powerhouse. For a more comprehensive survey of what was completed see Federal Capital Advisory Committee, Construction of Canberra: First General Report, Melbourne, 1921, pp. 23-24.
city of today'? The answer to both of these questions is a matter of interpretation that cannot be solved definitively here; however, the understanding that Griffin's plan is shrouded by myth may at least create a greater awareness of the complexity of the Griffin legacy.

Later in this chapter I argue that Griffin's plan for the physical form of the city was influenced by his desire to produce happier, healthier and more efficient citizens through urban design. Some of his ideas about the way urban design could improve society are based on what would now be considered outdated, environmentally-deterministic and eugenic notions such as those described in Chapter One. Perhaps not surprisingly, the Australian government and some historians have sought nobler origins for the design features of the Griffin plan. In these explanations of Canberra's past, Griffin's design becomes an almost divinely inspired vision. In Peter Proudfoot's *Secret Plan of Canberra*, the inspiration for Griffin's plan is found in the sacred symbols of 'specific esoteric and cosmological sources'.² Ironically, although the important social agenda of Griffin's designs would continue to come through in Griffin's interviews, speeches and writings after he came to Australia,³ Griffin was one of the first to suppress the social agenda behind his plan in an attempt to prevent the government from abandoning the design. The introduction to this thesis notes W. K. Hancock believed that around the time Griffin's plan won the capital competition it was part of the romantic make-believe of the time to pretend that Canberra was the spontaneous conception of aspiring national idealism. Griffin argued that his plan was this expression of national ideals and thus helped to perpetuate myths about his plan.

In 1912, when Minister for Home Affairs, King O'Malley, announced that Griffin had won the international capital design competition, he also made it clear that the government would not bind itself to carrying out Griffin's plan, and might combine elements of Griffin's plan with parts of other plans submitted by finalists. Colonel David Miller of Home Affairs, who was installed as resident administrator in Canberra in

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³For example, see 'Mr. W. B. Griffin's Views--Architect and Social Student', *The Salon*, Vol. 2, No. 2, September 1913, p. 112.
October of 1912, advised O’Malley in May that he should let a board develop a capital plan based on the winning designs. O’Malley suggested Miller chair the board, which announced in November of that year that it could not recommend any of the plans and came up with one of its own, claiming that it tried to combine the best features of the winning designs.[Figure 2.1] O’Malley supported the board plan when it came out. When Griffin received a copy of the plan in December, ‘he was shocked’. He quickly began to send letters to O’Malley defending his plan and requesting to see the site. In a letter to O’Malley dated January 21, 1913, Griffin wrote,

In a former letter, I expressed the feeling that the rank given my design for the Federal Capital was a recognition of advanced ideals which I had hardly dared expect of any country. As a matter of fact, however, I had entered this Australian event to be my first and last competition, solely because I have for many years greatly admired the bold radical steps in politics and economics which your country has dared to take and which must, for a long time, set ideals for Europe and America ahead of the possibility of their accomplishment.

In this letter, Griffin did not focus on defending the technical features of his plan or his town planning expertise. It would have been difficult for Griffin to claim that his engineering of the site was perfect, given that he had never seen it, and he said his plan might need to be altered if he was allowed to come to Australia. Griffin’s appeal to O’Malley was a statement of ideals. The principles of the design, ‘suggested themselves to me’, in an attempt to ‘treat architecture as a democratic language of everyday life, not a language of an aristocratic especially educated cult’. By claiming the city’s origins were the bold ideals which Australia stood for rather than his agenda for social change, Griffin made his plan less political and therefore it could appeal to a wider audience.

Defending his plan as an inspirational vision of Australian ideals rather than a design for social change may have been the deciding factor in Griffin’s invitation to come to Australia. Although O’Malley’s party lost the election early in 1913, he would support Griffin’s ideas again when he returned to government in 1915, become a business partner.

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6In fact Griffin made few alterations to his original plan once he came to Australia, although perhaps inspired on his arrival in Sydney, he changed the end of Sydney Avenue to resemble the Circular Quay and he changed the end of Hobart Avenue into a park that symbolised Tasmania.
7Walter Burley Griffin - Letter Dated Jan. 21 1913 to King O’Malley, Document FC 16/186, AA.
Figure 2.1 Departmental Board Plan. [Source: Pegrum, Roger, The Bush Capital, Sydney, 1983, p. 167.]
Ground plan for the city presented by the departmental board
of Griffin’s in 1920 and have Griffin design his house in 1922. Griffin impressed the new Minister in charge of the Federal Capital Territory under Cook, William H. Kelly, as well as O’Malley. Kelly decided to bring Griffin to Australia. When the departmental board in charge of the construction and administration of the capital continued to oppose Griffin, Kelly disbanded it, and made Griffin Federal Capital Director of Design.

Whether or not Griffin’s attempt to promote his plan as an inspired vision of national ideals was a deciding factor in bringing him to Australia, the social agenda behind his plan was largely overlooked, at least after he left Canberra. While successive governments and their planners have paid deference to aspects of Griffin’s design throughout the many stages of Canberra’s development and often trace the origins of Canberra back to Griffin’s vision, the essential features of his vision have been sharply proscribed in succeeding government interpretations. Testifying before a Senate Select Committee in 1955, Peter Harrison, the future Senior Town Planner of the National Capital Development Commission and student of Griffin’s work, claimed the ‘official Gazetted’ version of the Griffin plan which was passed down to planners after 1925, was ‘merely a pattern of roadways and water areas. It does not reflect all of Griffin’s ideas about the development of the National Capital’. However, according to an address by Deputy Prime Minister Brian Howe, on 1 February 1995, the government has made amends, and today the ‘main features’ of the Griffin plan have been incorporated into the city’s urban form:

Canberra’s success owes much to the vision of Walter Burley Griffin and the lesser recognised work of Marion Mahony Griffin. They were responsible for the original Canberra concept plan, which first took shape in 1912 and followed the outlines of their successful competition entry two years earlier.

The main features of that plan—the integration of land and water, the protection of the hilltops, the Parliamentary Triangle, the principal roads—are now permanently inscribed as parts of the Canberra cityscape.

Howe’s claim that the ‘main features’ of Griffin’s plan have been realised in the city of today, is an interpretation of Canberra’s urban form which implies Griffin’s plan has

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8 Johnson, p. 86.
10 Griffin’s original entry was made one year not two years before it was awarded first prize in the competition on 23 May 1912.
**Figure 2.2** The Gazetted plan of Canberra. [Source: Sparke, Eric, *Canberra 1954-1980*, Canberra, 1988, p. 2.]
To ensure that the Griffin Plan would be respected, the Seat of Government (Administration) Act 1924 required that the layout be published in the Commonwealth Gazette and that notice of intention to vary the layout be tabled in Parliament and open to a motion of disallowance in either house.
been followed closely. Yet Howe’s judgement about what the main features of the Griffin plan were corresponds neatly with the features of the city that the National Capital Planning Authority (NCPA), the organisation currently in charge of Canberra’s planning, believes to be most interesting to people today. According to the NCPA, ‘The carefully planned congruence of land, water and the built environment is a most apt symbol of today’s focus on sustainable development’. The NCPA believes that these aspects of the Griffin plan are ‘of particular relevance to today’s culture’. Because of a perceived relevance to today, Howe has emphasised a concern for nature in Griffin’s plan—the integration of land and water, and the lack of buildings on Canberra’s hilltops become some of its ‘main features’. Once derided as the ‘Bush Capital’, Canberra increasingly wears the title with pride. Nature was important to the Griffin plan, but creating a natural setting for the capital was only one aspect of his larger agenda of creating healthier urban residents. The government tends to focus on only those parts of the Griffin plan which are relevant today, and makes them the ‘main features’ of the Griffin vision. Howe has created a continuity between Griffin’s ‘main features’ and the city of today which is overdrawn. Later in this chapter I explore what Griffin may have considered the main features of his plan.

The federal government’s official opinion of Griffin’s legacy has changed several times for political purposes. The 1916 Royal Commission to inquire into the Administration of the Federal Capital found that officers of the Department of Home Affairs had seriously frustrated Griffin’s efforts to develop his capital plan. War-time budget constraints led to a halt on construction, and even after the war not much more than tree planting was accomplished before Griffin’s position was abolished. During the tenure of the Federal Capital Advisory Committee (FCAC) (1921-1924), it was erroneously claimed that Griffin wanted an initial city to be built on the south side of the lake. In its final report of 1924, the FCAC claimed that Griffin had envisaged two

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12NCPA, Research Report, p. 36.
13Royal Commission, Federal Capital Administration, Minutes of Evidence, Melbourne, 1917.
of the document as if you were reading it naturally.

main centres being built rather than three main centres in a parliamentary triangle. Despite Griffin being forced from his job as Federal Capital Director of Design, the National Capital Development Commission’s 1964 publication, ‘Birth of the National Capital’, stated that, ‘When Griffin’s appointment came to an end in 1921 he left knowing that his design was well-established on the ground and could not be set aside very easily . . . Today his vision of Canberra with the lake, the avenues and the bridges framing the parliamentary area is becoming a reality’. The NCPA claims Griffin’s vision has ‘scarcely been realised in the detail he envisaged’, but that the ‘essential elements—the great triangle of avenues, the Land Axis, the Lake and the use of the topography to dramatise the city’s development—have endured in the heart of Canberra’.

The current government would have people accept that it has preserved the essential elements of Griffin’s plan. Accepting this implies that, although there has been debate over how to adapt Griffin’s plan to the enormous growth of the city and nation, the government has been able to manage and control a long-term coherent plan for the city. If we accept that the government has successfully protected the Griffin plan in the past, we may be more likely to believe that its new plans will protect the Griffin vision into the future. Maintaining a clear link to the past lends legitimacy to the government’s new ideas for Canberra. An alternative to accepting that the essential features of the Griffin plan have been preserved is that the government has ‘lost the plot in Canberra’. This is something that Canberra’s detractors have always maintained, so it is possible to see why Canberra supporters do not want to give them fuel for their fires. By explaining the Griffin vision as a group of design features which can still be seen in Canberra today, the NCPA provides a neat explanation for prominent features of Canberra’s spatial and symbolic content. However, over time, the Griffin vision has become part of Canberra mythology because it has been pulled in so many directions to justify different claims.

15Fischer, p. 37.
16NCDC, ‘Birth of the National Capital’, Canberra, 1964. Griffin was invited to become part of the Federal Capital Advisory Committee that was to take over administration of the capital’s construction, but objected to the conditions and his name was not included when the Federal Capital Advisory Committee was appointed by the Executive Council on 22 January 1921. (Jim Gibney, Canberra 1913-1953, Canberra, 1988, pp. 41-42.)
This has led to a current situation where further construction in Canberra has simultaneously been described as an extension of, and anathema to, the Griffin vision.

During the first week of March, 1994, the *Canberra Times* ran two articles on a plan to build new offices at the Russell Military Complex northeast of Parliament House. The first article, entitled “‘Gateway’ to Complete Griffin Vision”, described the proposed first stage of a billion dollar National Capital Planning Authority project as ‘the final “leg” of Walter Burley Griffin’s vision of the Parliamentary Triangle’. The new plan calls for the demolition of eight buildings in the Russel Complex to make room for car parks and new offices. The second article, ‘Piece by Piece, Burley Griffin’s Triangle Vision is Crumbling,’ claimed ‘The plan for new offices at Russell could mean further erosion of Walter Burley Griffin’s grand plan for the national capital’. Both the NCPA, which was proposing the construction plan for the Russell Military Complex in the first article, and Crispin Hull, reporter for the *Canberra Times*, who was opposing this construction in the second article, sought to legitimise their opinions by claiming they were protecting the Griffin vision.

Crispin Hull argued in ‘Piece by Piece’ that the new plan would not offer a satisfactory completion for the Griffin vision of the area. Hull writes,

So what? Who cares? Plonk a few roads down. Assign some land uses. She’ll be right.

Great cities are not made like that. They require vision, geometry, artistic integrity and order. These attributes of the 1912 Burley Griffin plan have been slowly eroded in the past 82 years and unless we are careful there could be a further erosion with the proposal for Russell.

The articles mentioned above indicate the highly political nature of defining a Griffin vision. Griffin’s legacy is not merely the subject of debate for purely academic reasons—although it could be. Griffin’s plan was accepted by the government, then rejected, then accepted again. Despite a declared return to the Griffin plan, and Griffin’s appointment as Federal Capital Director of Design and Construction, little actual construction took place before Griffin’s position was terminated. On top of this

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20Hull, 5 March 1994.
confusing historical record, the continued use of Griffin’s vision to justify political agendas should be a warning to proceed with caution in an attempt to find out what the origins of today’s urban form actually are. The historical record of Canberra’s past has been intertwined with myths that help legitimate Canberra as a national capital but do not further a real understanding of the city’s origins. What follows is an attempt to further an understanding of the Griffin plan by relating it to the ideas Griffin believed his design expressed.

2. Griffin’s Social Reform Agenda

Many works analyse Griffin’s plan: of particular note are Donald Leslie Johnson’s, *The Architecture of Walter Burley Griffin*, Fischer’s *Myths and Models*, and Peter Muller’s 1976 W. B. Griffin Memorial Lecture. Johnson and Fischer helped to put Griffin’s plan in the context of American and European town planning movements of the day, while Mueller described the wealth of symbolic detail in the Griffin plan. It is well beyond the scope of this chapter to provide a comprehensive analysis of Griffin’s capital plan and the other plans submitted to the 1911 design competition. However, this chapter, and this section in particular, are concerned with establishing Griffin’s belief in using the reorganisation of the urban environment as a means of social reform, and how specific designs within his plan relate to this agenda. Chapter One discussed aspects of Canberra’s history leading up the 1911 design competition, in part to show that—although not overtly stated—a social reform agenda was contained in the planning criteria set out in the ‘Information, Conditions and Particulars’ of the design competition. This section attempts to show that, without specifically stating a social reform agenda in his submission to the competition, Griffin actively addressed a perceived need for a capital that could prevent the replication of existing social problems within itself, and be a social laboratory aiding the development of the entire nation. This aspect of Griffin’s plan, though often understated in recent histories, may have been what Griffin considered to be the most important feature of his design, and a significant factor in Griffin’s plan being selected in the design competition.
Griffin’s plan for the Australian capital showed due regard for the conception of beauty that Australian town planners were promoting at the time of the design competition (see Chapter One). This design made extensive use of broad avenues, monumental buildings, parks and lakes. Like the designs Sulman suggested for the remodelling of Sydney, Griffin’s designs can be related to a desire to produce a more ideal citizenry.

The replacement of the more traditional winding and narrow city street with the avenue is almost complete in the Griffin plan. Griffin wanted a minimum width of 100 feet for all ‘distribution ways’, to allow for proper, ‘light, air, and privacy’.21 His plan for avenues was, according to Griffin, ‘by no means an expression of the “gridiron”, because of its unusual vistas and innumerable street terminal sites’.22 In Griffin’s original design, he incorporated eight ‘axes’ with the broad avenues radiating outward from a central point in a pattern similar to the one recommended by Sulman in his paper, ‘The Federal Capital’.23 [Figures 2.3, 2.4] In the centre of his axes, Griffin created ‘terminal objectives’.24 For example, the terminal objective of the ‘Municipal Center’ was to be a ‘Civic Hall’ set in the centre of a park. The effect of this arrangement was that at the end of nearly every street in the city there would be a view down one of the avenues towards a didactic monument reminding the citizen of his or her relation to the larger community of the city.25 This spatial organisation could be seen as an attempt to inculcate civic-mindedness in the city’s population.

Griffin desired to create a stronger race through reforming the city. He believed that traditional cities were ‘ever drawing to [themselves] recruits from the country and killing them. Yes killing them. The young men crowd into the cities, and the effect of city life is not to make a strong race. On the contrary, it crushes life all the time’.26 According to Griffin, the existing urban form had to be eliminated because,

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22Griffin, p. 13.
23Griffin put 8 of Sulman’s spider web designs together.
24Griffin, p. 10.
25Sulman would also advocated the creation of didactic monuments in cities. (John Sulman, Town Planning: A Sketch in Outline, Sydney, 1919, p. 30.)
Figure 2.3 Griffin's plan for Canberra which combined numerous radial concentric centres. The plan emphasises the location of commercial and public buildings. [Source: Fischer, K.F., *Canberra: Myths and Models*, Hamburg, 1984, p. 31.]
Figure 2.4 Griffin’s Preliminary Plan submitted to the competition.
[Source: Fischer, K.F., Canberra: Myths and Models, Hamburg, 1984, p. 25.]
it must be admitted that the civilized nations of the world offer only pathologic examples for civic study, that modern cities everywhere are abnormal, cancerous growths on the landscape, intolerable community homes for a nature and liberty loving, to say nothing of art aspiring, people.27

In between the broad avenues that Griffin designed for the capital, he planned what he called ‘domestic communities’ which were to help create a better environment for raising healthy children.28 These were to have a ‘local playground, game fields, church, club, and social amenities accessible without crossing traffic tracks, or encountering the disturbing elements or temptations of business streets’.29 Griffin believed in creating many ‘playing grounds for the children, so that they can grow up healthy and vigorous under as nearly as possible natural open country conditions. Slums produce only weeds’.30 In the desire to open the city up to the health of the country he surrounded the city with botanical gardens, farmlands, and parks. He even split the city through the middle with a large lake to further open it up to air, light and space.31 If Canberra is, even today, often accused of being a country town, it may be because of Griffin’s attempt to balance the creation of a civic entity with the erasure of the urban form.

Griffin’s ideas about the debilitating effects of the existing layout of cities were formed in Chicago. Griffin reminisced in an interview, ‘When I was a boy I lived in a suburb of Chicago where there was plenty of open ground to play in--about ten allotments to each boy. To-day all that is changed. Now it is ten boys to each allotment. It is bad’.32 However, Griffin also learned the town planning techniques perceived to overcome these problems in Chicago. Chicago was, at that time, looked to even by Australians for its town planning ideas. The 1909 Daniel Burnham plan for Chicago was another design that ‘meant to drive huge thoroughfares through the congested city, broadening them out into gardens and parks, letting air and light into all the darkened canyons caused by skyscrapers and crowded tenements’.33 Burnham believed cities

27Griffin, Letter Dated Jan. 21 1913 to King O’Malley, Document FC 16/186, AA.
28Griffin in ‘Mr. W. B. Griffin’s Views’, p. 112.
30Griffin in ‘Mr. W. B. Griffin’s Views’, p. 112.
31To disperse germs and provide it with the most air, light and space possible, Griffin isolated the hospital on a spit of land jutting out into the lake.
32Griffin in ‘Mr. W. B. Griffin’s Views’, p. 112.
should eliminate the use of the skyscraper, which is also absent from Griffin’s plan of the capital. According to Wills, although his reputation was established with the skyscraper, Burnham deplored

‘the former days when each architect strove to build his cornice higher or more elaborate than the adjoining cornice,’ and recalled Chicago to the genius of its place--to the aesthetics of a flat lake and flat prairie, achieving sublimity by long uninterrupted views towards the horizon.34

The setting for the Australian federal capital

nostalgically and unmistakably recalls the mid-west American prairie. The air is clear and clouds execute majestic formations. The land, although not as flat, is an immense undulating field, never subjected to prairie blizzards and more sparsely vegetated with varieties of the ever present wattle and eucalyptus: still it is so very similar.35

Aesthetic relationships, both existing and hoped for, between Chicago and Canberra were not the only ways that the two cities were linked in the minds of Australians. Chapter One noted how Senator Staniforth Smith hoped the capital could become a thriving city like Chicago. Chicago had also developed a reputation as a social laboratory, and this was a profound influence on Griffin’s conception of the capital. Donald Leslie Johnson, a noted authority on Griffin, has recognised the remarkable cultural climate which existed in Chicago at the time Griffin was planning the capital; but Johnson does not establish an important link between the World’s Columbia Exposition, the University of Chicago and Canberra.36 Johnson states that,

To what extent Griffin was influenced by the site plan for that great fair is questionable. In his own words: ‘The Chicago Exhibition [sic] gave me my first lesson in town planning’. There is only verbal evidence of the influence of the exposition on the impressionable sixteen-year-old Griffin. His own plans bear little resemblance to either the philosophy or the geometry of the Exposition’s plan or the centre of the Great White City which it spawned.37

While Johnson may be right to point out there is no direct link between the architecture of the Great White City and Canberra, there is nevertheless a philosophical one. The Great White City of the Exposition was the inspiration for the Gray City, the University of Chicago, which Griffin emulated in his design of the Australian capital. The University

34Wills, p. 56.
35Johnson, p. 27.
36Johnson, p. 7.
37Johnson, p. 27.
of Chicago 'grew up simultaneously with the White City of the Exposition. Cobb, the university’s architect, was also a planner and executor of designs in the Exposition’.38

So close were the two in people’s minds that the university was called the Gray City, a term that lives on in the school’s official song.

The City White hath fled the earth,
But where the azure waters lie
A nobler city hath its birth--
The City Gray, that ne’er shall
die.39

Both the Gray City and the White City were symmetrically planned, and enclosed ideal communities. Both were landscaped by the Olmstead firm, which had a noted influence on Griffin.40

The University of Chicago self-consciously intended to mediate between the ideals of the White City and the realities of the Black City--Chicago’s downtown.41 The downtown was the Black City because the soft coal heating, factories, railroads, and steamboats created a ‘midday darkness’ over the city. Though the Gray City had a heating plant, it lacked manufacturing and other industry and ‘helped promote the ideal of planned suburban life, where islands of grass reduced the density of the population’.42

Griffin would have been intimately familiar with the design of the University and as an example of City Beautiful architecture it is worth mentioning as an influence on Griffin’s work. However, it is the University’s mission that may have inspired important aspects of Griffin’s Canberra plan.

The University of Chicago was created in 1892 with money donated by John D. Rockefeller. The Chicago of this period was ‘a perfect laboratory’ of the urban environment where different classes and ethnic groups mixed in narrow confines. This ‘laboratory of social dynamics seemed to call out for laboratory observers’, and the University was to be the ‘observation post . . . No other university in history has drawn

38 Wills, p. 56.
39 Wills, p. 56.
40 Johnson, p. 27.
41 Wills, p. 56.
42 Wills, p. 56.
so much of its mission from the study of its own surroundings'. The mission of all universities is, on some idyllic level, the production and dissemination of knowledge, but the University of Chicago was heavily influenced by the progressive movement's methodology and emphasis on the application of knowledge. The utopian planner Canon Barnett's message to his followers was: 'know your local community and you can understand society', to which Patrick Geddes, a noted influence on Griffin, added: 'know your region and you can understand the world'.

Along with housing government employees and providing parliamentary buildings, the Australian capital competition called for designs to include areas for a University, Technical Colleges, a Gaol, Hospitals, Military Barracks, Criminal and Police Courts, and Government Factories. By concentrating the important institutions of modern society in the capital, Griffin believed they could more easily be used to develop methods of improving the efficiency of their functions. The scientific method of producing knowledge requires the limitation of variables and the reproducibility of experiments. The proposed government ownership and control of the capital could, through standardisation and larger sample sizes, improve the efficiency and accuracy of social experimentation. Griffin expressed an institutional model of this in his design for the capital's university. Griffin noted of his university, 'The scheme of the Educational Group comprises the fields for higher education that may be taken up by a nation recognising the enormous advantages and economies in federating all the scientific, professional, technical, and practical branches for both teaching and research'. Griffin’s preliminary design elaborated a University that served as a microcosm of the laboratory of the city. The University was to be in a setting that reflected that of the entire capital.

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43 Wills, p. 56.
44 Michael Roe, Nine Australian Progressives, Melbourne, 1984, p. 11.
45 Geddes in Helen Meller, ed., The Ideal City, Leicester, 1979, p. 12.; Geddes' influence on Griffin, Johnson, p. 27.
46 Department of Home Affairs, 'Information, Conditions, and Particulars for Guidance in the Preparation of Competitive Designs for the Federal Capital City of the Commonwealth of Australia', Melbourne, 30 April, 1911, p. 27. While the desire to preserve Utopian visions of the capital may have over ridden the desire to place a Gaol within the National Capital Territory, the location of CSIRO, National Botanical Gardens, Australian National University, and the Australian Institute of Sport continue the tradition of the capital as a centre for the production of knowledge to be farmed out to other parts of Australia.
capital, which was surrounded by undeveloped land it was supposed to help develop. In the Griffin plan, the University was 'intersected by a little lagoon arm, bordered by the lowest lake, and at the same time overlooks the entire length of the other four of the chain. This site is also in a position to utilise the botanical gardens and mountains with its forestry service'.

Griffin’s university placed General Science at the centre and from pure academic disciplines the departments radiated out towards the workings of society. The design almost perfectly symbolised Smith’s idea of the capital as a ‘model farm’ to develop and disseminate new social technologies. Griffin wrote:

Fundamental sciences, descriptive of nature, lead directly to the theoretical sciences dependent upon them along lines of derivation and through these, in appropriate combination, into the lines along which they are applied to the work of civilization . . . Moreover, it is endeavored to direct these lines on the site to such openings for actual application as are most available to them. Thus from Physiology, the gymnasia give on to the broad flat athletic grounds and the water areas. And the hospital, of itself in a most suitably isolated location with the most equitable temperature and favorable atmospheric conditions, is adjoined by the Medical, Surgical, and Pharmaceutical Schools. Thus Agriculture adjoins the Botanical Gardens and the Forestry Reserve. Into the base of Black Mountain extends Mining, while Engineering lies between it and Architecture--both of which it serves--and has maximum of room for expansion; Pedagogy, Law, and Commerce approach the Civic centre of people, courts, and offices.

Griffin’s city was not merely to be a symbol of the nation, but a laboratory for the creation of social improvement. The symbolism of a circle disseminating knowledge and power is also employed in Griffin’s plan for Capital Hill where roads bearing the name of each state capital radiate out in the direction of that capital.

3. Spatial Defamiliarisation

After travelling to Australia, Griffin continued to elaborate his views on the way his design would influence the society that lived in the capital. The 1913 Salon article, ‘Mr. W. B. Griffin’s Views--Architect and Social Student,’ claimed ‘Sociology and architecture appear to be kindred subjects with Walter Burnley [sic] Griffin’. However, some of the very same design features that made Griffin believe he had planned a city that would engender social relationships based on what he called ‘the

50 Griffin in ‘Mr. W. B. Griffin’s Views’, p. 112.
radical movement toward a practical architecture “for the people, of the people, and by the people”, could also be used to serve other social agendas. Griffin was mistaken in his belief that the principles of design that he employed in his Canberra plan would necessarily ‘treat architecture as a democratic language of everyday life, not a language of an aristocratic especially educated cult’. Firstly, as we have seen in Sulman’s designs for Sydney, some of the planning principles used by Griffin could be related to the social control of the city’s inhabitants rather than their liberation in a more democratic and egalitarian formulation of society. Secondly, his design is not inherently democratic. Architectural forms can be used to symbolise different ways of governing society with equal alacrity. For example, classical columns have been employed in the official buildings of the Roman Empire, United States, and Nazi Germany as symbolic of their respective regimes. Despite Griffin’s belief in the inherent democratic symbolism of his design, the axial arrangement Griffin used in his plan had been employed in the design of Versailles, which was not a symbol of democracy. It did not necessarily follow that Griffin’s design would convey to people the message he originally intended.

Griffin used a strategy of spatial defamiliarisation to symbolise and create his ideal society. The strategy of defamiliarisation was employed by artists of all the avant-garde movements at the beginning of this century to help stimulate social reform. According to Holston, defamiliarisation in art can be defined as the technique of making objects strange so as to renew perceptions of them. The purpose of creating estrangement ‘is to show us that society is not a natural given but itself the result of historical change and therefore changeable’. Modernist architecture can, for the purpose of this thesis, be defined as architecture that adopts the technique of defamiliarisation to create social reform. It attempts to impose a new urban order through a set of transformations that negate previous expectations about urban life. Holston writes,

51 ‘Mr. Walter Burley Griffin’, *Advance Australia*, October 21, 1913, Vol. xvii, p. 274.
52 Griffin - Letter Dated Jan. 21 1913 to King O’Malley, Document FC 16/186, AA.
54 Holston, p. 55.
In this theory of architectural condensation and radiation, the assemblage of condensers produces a total environment for a future society. One of the most distinctive and original features of modernist architecture is that it refuses any accommodation whatsoever to existing urban and social conditions. The break with the past must be absolute. This total decontextualization is evident in any modernist building project.\(^55\)

Modernist architecture is 'not only or even most fundamentally an argument for a new technology in building construction'.\(^56\) Its response to the perceived problems of existing cities and society is to negate the organisation of space associated with them.

Griffin claimed that a total break with the past was a primary feature of his plan. He believed, 'I have planned a city no like any other city in the world. I have planned it not in a way that I expected any governmental authorities in the world would accept. I have planned the ideal city--a city that meets my ideal of the city of the future'.\(^57\) The alteration of the urban form was not merely symbolic for Griffin. He intended to make the city look unfamiliar so people disassociated it from existing society, conventions and mental attitudes. By discarding outdated ideas people would be on the path to creating a better society. Griffin believed that, 'Our education is carrying into a time of democracy with the outward cloaking of democracy, the real essential mental attitude of the Middle Ages, looking to Authority for our beliefs and thought'.\(^58\) If society was to leave the ideas of the past behind, planners would have to leave architectural forms of the past behind: 'Often in the lay-out of new cities we find that . . . the results we have grown familiar with in old cities are copied in plans for new ones. This is a waste of an opportunity'.\(^59\) Griffin's hope for a break with past traditions may have been over zealous. In 1913 he told an Australian audience, 'I hope that the insularity of Australia will be a factor in throwing off the shackles which confine her to Europe.'\(^60\) At a time when Australia was still closely tied to England both culturally and economically, this

\(^{55}\)Holston, p. 52.
\(^{56}\)Holston, p. 52.
\(^{57}\)Griffin in Johnson, p. 20.
\(^{59}\)Fischer, p. 20.
\(^{60}\)Johnson, p. 21.
would have been a reasonable utterance in America but in Australia in 1913 such words suggested severing the vital umbilical cord'.

Griffin's use of radiating avenues, lakes, and parks contributed to making the capital different from existing cities. The architecture of his city, as pictured in his submission to the design competition, was also different from that of other western cities. His plan had no skyscrapers and the tallest building was to be the Capitol located on Capitol Hill, now Capital Hill—the site of the new Parliament House. Griffin's Capitol was a monumental building 'representing the sentimental and spiritual head, if not the actual working mechanism of the Government'. The Capitol was to have a pyramid-shaped roof, consciously distancing the building from American capital designs with 'the inevitable dome'. [Figure 2.6] Griffin suggested that the 'stepped pinnacle treatment' was 'the last word of all the longest lived civilizations' including 'Egypt, Babylonia, Syria, India, Indo-China, China, East Indies, Mexico or Peru'. By implanting architectural forms of non-western societies into the urban form of the capital, Griffin drew attention to other forms of social organisation that theoretically would have induced people to question the traditions they took for granted.

In symbolising the creation of a new society, Griffin's strategy of defamiliarisation was very effective. Griffin's plan symbolised his vision of the Australian nation as one that was aspiring to break free from the past and create a better organisation of society. In 1912, before he came to Australia, Griffin wrote:

We can all be interested in the Australian Federal Capital City not so much for what it actually is now or will be necessarily, but because of what it stands for: as an opportunity the best, I believe, so far afforded for an expression of the democratic civic ideal and of all that means in accessibility, freedom, wealth, comfort, conveniences, scale and splendour ... With such a democracy already in the vanguard of political progress setting a standard for the entire world in its struggle against private monopoly and exploitation of the producers, possessing now and operating all its transportation and communication and monetary governmental functions and gradually turning its face toward eliminating the all pervading history-old land-withholding privilege.

61 Johnson, p. 21.
63 Griffin in Senate, 1955, p. 96.
64 Griffin in Senate, p. 96.
65 Griffin, 'Planning a Federal Capital City Complete,' The Improvement Bulletin, Minneapolis, Vol. xiv, No. 25, 16 November 1912, p. 16.
Figure 2.6 Griffin’s Parliamentary Triangle. [Source: Sparke, Eric, *Canberra 1954-1980*, Canberra, 1988, p. 321.]
Illustration of the Parliamentary Triangle as Griffin conceived it.
This passage reveals Griffin’s approval of the Australian reform agenda as he perceived it. Like elements of O’Malley’s Labor party, Griffin’s politics had been influenced by Henry George’s ideas about land reform. In a 1913 article about Griffin called ‘Single Taxer and Social Reformer’, Progress magazine wrote, ‘At the early age of 14 Mr. Griffin first read George’s “Social Problems”, and received a lasting impression’. Griffin ‘confirmed the news of the remarkable way in which the principles of Henry George’s philosophy are permeating American social and political thought, and being taken up by the public press. “Behind every radical movement you will find Single Taxers”, he said’. Griffin believed that Australia was destined to become a greater nation than the United States because of its more progressive government and wealth of resources. He believed Australia was backed by the economic advantages of a vast potentially productive undeveloped insular continent, larger than the United States with a homogenous people of a single race, cherishing the highest standards of human rights, with out dire poverty or political corruption, comprising a population equal to that of our country at the date of its independence, but already autonomous and spared the baneful effects of war.

Griffin’s strong belief in a bright future for Australia was not lost on the design competition’s Board of Assessors. After the winners of the capital design competition were announced, little was said about how the judges arrived at the decision. However, in 1927, the last living adjudicator, A. J. Smith, wrote an article for Table Talk magazine which discussed the concerns and problems the adjudicators faced in selecting a design. He stressed the need for the capital design to reflect Australia’s destiny:

In the East, of the East, Australia holds a place of dominance in the Asian Pacific. In that ocean it is the half-way house of the two great English-speaking peoples, it is the outpost of the civilisation of the West. Endowed with natural wealth, with the open spaces of a continent, with the markets of Asia at its gates, what student of the growth of peoples can doubt that the Commonwealth is to be the home of a dominant race, as numerous, as powerful, as the great nations of today?

In selecting a lay-out for Canberra, the problem was to provide adequately for that future, perhaps not remote as history measures time,

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66 See footnote 29 in Chapter One. O’Malley’s belief that the capital could be a ‘new Eden’ is reminiscent of William Lane’s attempt to found an Australian socialist community in Paraguay.

67 ‘Single Taxer and Social Reformer’, Progress, 1 July 1913, no. 113, p. 1.

68 Griffin, ‘Planning a Federal Capital City Complete’, p. 16.
when the city shall be the administrative and intellectual centre of an area of three millions of square miles of a continent.69

Thus Griffin’s ideas about the role of the Australian national capital meshed with visions of Australia’s national identity held by adjudicators such as Smith and O’Malley.

The strategy of creating a city that bore no resemblance to existing cities could express Australia’s identity as a new nation with an ambitious sense of its own destiny. Many people believed a clear break with the past was what an ex-colony needed before it could become a nation in its own right. Hancock wrote in 1930, that Griffin’s symbolism was of a sociological kind. It captured the sense that ‘Australian democracy has been proud to boast that it is “Product of the present only, Thinking nothing of the past”’.70 Hancock believed that the Australian ‘has inherited a ready-made civilisation’, and asked ‘How, then, can he discover and express a life of his own’?71 He sympathised with those who believed Australia would gain an identity as an independent nation by making a break with the past and turning towards a new area of settlement with a new spatial arrangement: ‘It is not without reason that those who wait impatiently “till we become ourselves, distinct, Australian”, should look beyond the marine ribbon of settlement out into the central plains where a new people will be made’.72 It was here, both physically and philosophically, that the capital was built.

Despite the strategy of defamiliarisation’s ability to symbolise a break with the past, it did not necessarily follow that the new society that emerged from the old would be a democratic one suitable to a ‘nature and liberty loving, to say nothing of art aspiring, people’, as Griffin believed. The defamiliarised city could, and has, symbolised the ideals of many societies at every point on the political spectrum.73 Griffin’s plan appealed to people of various social agendas. Along with O’Malley, who advocated

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69 J. A. Smith, ‘The Birth of a Continent’s Capital’, Table Talk, 21 April 1927, p. 55. Smith believed the design should create an unconscious reaction in citizens: ‘Much that has been referred to constitutes the roots, stem and branches, but the plant cannot flower, the city as a city cannot become manifest until the formation of the lake, afforestation, park-planting and architectural development have been accomplished. Not till then will be revealed the soul, the inspiration, the crystallised sentiment, to which the people will unconsciously react’. (Smith, p. 55.)

70 Hancock, Australia, London, 1930, p. 287.

71 Hancock, p. 285.

72 Hancock, p. 286.

73 Holston, p. 39.
many socialist ideals, George Taylor--associated with proto-fascism in Australia--praised Griffin’s design as visionary. In his magazine, *Building*, Taylor editorialised on how Griffin’s design created a break with the ‘mildew of medievalism [that] has already settled, is spreading and threatens to rot away our dearest aspirations as a democratic and progressive people’. For Taylor, ‘Griffin swung a blazing torch which illuminated a vista for Australia leading to the summit-objective of our nationhood. We welcome Walter Burley Griffin as an ally in our fight for a progressive spirit in Australian architecture’.

Perhaps one reason why Griffin’s design was selected for first prize in the competition was because, in a city that bore little relation to the forms of existing capitalist cities, many different groups could find their vision of the future. However, because the technique of defamiliarisation could be appropriated to any vision of the future, Griffin had no way of controlling the ideals his plan would serve after he left Canberra. This was the tragic flaw of Griffin’s design strategy. On the one hand his plan could inspire many people to see his city become the capital they envisioned, thus his design gained favour among a wide variety of people in the public and private sectors. Yet this very ability to appeal to a wide range of visions about Australia’s future, meant Griffin’s own vision of the society that would inhabit his city could be easily swept aside.

4. Presenting a Vision

According to Fact Sheet 4, ‘The Design Competition for the Capital’:

In the event 137 entries were received and put on display for judging in the ballroom of Government House, Melbourne. The assessors failed to agree on which entry should be awarded the first prize but the majority report was in favour of the entry by Walter Burley Griffin. Second prize was awarded to Eliel Saarinen of Finland and third prize to Professor Alfred Agache of France. A special prize was awarded to the Australian entry of Caswell, Coulter and Griffiths.

The way Griffin presented his design in the competition may have contributed to its selection for first prize. The other winning competitors had met the criteria of the

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75Roe, p. 191.
76Johnson p. 21.
competition and incorporated some of the aesthetic features of the City Beautiful school in their designs. Indeed the chairman of the Board of Assessors picked the Caswell, Coulter, and Griffith entry for first prize. Gibbney notes:

> It was later to be revealed that the voting had been divided mainly on the question of whether artistic merit should outweigh practicality in design; and there was more than a suggestion that, if the chairman had cared to switch his top rating to No. 29 [Griffin’s entry], the other two would have conceded second place to No. 10 [Caswell, Coulter, and Griffith’s entry].

The short answer for why the Griffin plan was awarded first prize may have been that it was ‘beautiful’—both in design and presentation. Patrick Abercrombie, writing in the *Town Planning Review*, was not without criticism of the Griffin plan when it came out. For example, he did not like the ornamental lakes: ‘A majestic river is a glory in the heart of a city, but a calm lagoon is the quintessence of repose in the retirement of a park’. He was, however, ‘struck by the beautiful though somewhat eccentric method of presentation [sic] which Mr. Griffin has adopted in his drawings. It is quite possible that the Board of Assessors may have been carried away with the mere charm of this display’. Even Sulman admitted that the Griffin plan had some artistic merit. He wrote, ‘Out of them all, however, the first premiated design struck me as being the only one in which the designer possessed an artistic grip of town planning’. King O’Malley declared, ‘It is a wonderful design and shall make the Federal City the finest in the world . . . What we wanted was the best the world can give us and we have got it. Designs came from everywhere and I am satisfied’.

The drawings for Griffin’s plan were, like the drawings for many of his other works, prepared by Marion Mahony, whom he had married in 1911. Cycloramic paintings of the capital site had been included in the information sent out to competitors

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77Gibbney, p. 27.
79Abercrombie, p. 167.
82Marion Mahony has begun to earn more credit for the Griffin design as evidenced by Deputy Prime Minister Howe’s public remark that ‘Canberra’s success owes much to the vision of Walter Burley Griffin and the lesser recognised work of Marion Mahony Griffin’. (Address to the National Press Club, Canberra, 1 February 1995.)
and these were echoed in the Griffin entry. Griffin’s city of panoramic views and tree lined avenues was illustrated on large rectangular stretchers which could be joined together to form perspectives of the city 6 metres in length.[Figure 2.7] While other entries also incorporated City Beautiful and Garden City planning ideas, Mahony’s illustrations of the Griffin plan had a beautiful realism about them that the other entries could not match. The other winning designs had illustrations that were not rendered with the same skill that Mahony’s were, and their panoramas were crude or contrived. Eliel Saarinen’s second place entry showed perspectives of the city from an unidentified point in space as did Coulter’s illustrations of the Caswell, Coulter and Griffith’s entry.[Figures 2.8, 2.9] D. A. Agache’s entry included such illustrations as a ‘Prospect View: taken on board an aeroplane flying at a height [sic] of 820 feet and at a distance of 6000 feet from the federal monument’. [Figure 2.10] Mahony on the other hand, revealed the beauty of Griffin’s design as the citizen would see it. She placed the viewer within Griffin’s city. Her perspectives from the top of Mount Ainslie and the lakefront show that the symmetrical plan of Griffin’s city would be legible from the ground; they provide a much more inspiring vision of what could be created on the site than the other entries.[Figures 2.7, 2.11] The Minister for Home Affairs, King O’Malley, was not a town planning ‘expert’. However, even without examining the details of the plan, O’Malley, the flamboyant politician, would have recognised the powerful visual impact of the Griffin presentation. Since the idea of the capital was still under attack by some politicians and members of the press, the beauty of Mahony’s illustrations had the power to inspire public support for the creation of a grand capital.

83Ironically, the cycloramic paintings of the site were painted by Robert Coulter who entered the competition with Griffith and Caswell. Their entry, illustrated by Coulter, was chosen for first prize over Griffin’s entry by Coane—Chairman of the Board of Assessors. Coulter had, already, in 1901, illustrated a vision of the capital city for the paper ‘A Waterside Capital’ written by A. Evans. He had also illustrated John Sulman’s plan to remodel Sydney in 1910. His distinctive style of illustration and his numerous works raise the question of whether his entry in the competition remained anonymous to the judges.


85O’Malley was a salesman during his colourful career. He had sold insurance and land in Wichita, Kansas, with a calico sign proclaiming ‘The Whole Earth for Sale by King O’Malley. Come Inside!’ (Wigmore, p. 36.)
Figure 2.7 Mahony’s panoramas. [Source: Gibbney, Jim, *Canberra 1913-1953*, Canberra, 1988.]
One of a series of panels submitted by Griffin which constitute, when assembled, a profile of the city's skyline. This panel is dominated by his capitol.

Perspective sketch of the view from Mount Ainslie along the land axis, submitted by Walter Burley Griffin.
Figure 2.8 Eliel Saarinen’s entry. Pegrum notes that it ignored the subtle slopes of the Canberra valley. [Source: Pegrum, Roger, *The Bush Capital*, Sydney, 1983, p. 164.]
Figure 2.9 Caswell, Coulter and Griffiths’ entry. [Source: Pegrum, Roger, *The Bush Capital*, Sydney, 1983, p. 166.]
Figure 2.10 Agache's 'Prospect View No. 11' Caption reads: 'Prospect View: taken on board an aeroplane flying at a height [sic] of 820 feet and at a distance of 6000 feet from the federal monument'. [Source: Gibbney, Jim, Canberra 1913-1953, Canberra, 1988.]
Figure 2.11 Mahony’s perspectives. [Source: Pegrum, Roger, *The Bush Capital*, Sydney, 1983, p. 162.]
SECTION B-A - SOUTHERLY SIDE OF WATER AXIS
- GOVERNMENT GROUP
Mahony’s paintings can be compared to other artistic expressions of national identity that were popular in Australia around the same time. Although conceived on opposite sides of the world, Mahony’s images of the capital strike resonances with a recognised icon of national identity from the period—Fredrick McCubbin’s 1904 painting The Pioneer.[Figure 2.12] This painting had been immediately recognised as an Australian allegory, and was purchased by the National Gallery of Victoria in 1906. One art critic of the day called it a ‘pictorial insight to three episodes in the life history of those strong spirits who opened up this continent’.86 Another wrote, ‘It will certainly be a cause of humiliation to Victoria if the trustees of the National Gallery do not secure this beautiful poetical landscape and deeply sympathetic historical picture’.87 The painting is a triptych, with the first panel depicting the arrival of a pioneer through trackless forest. The second panel portrays the pioneer establishing his family, with a cabin in a sun-lit clearing. The third panel shows the pioneer’s grave being rediscovered by a boy. Beyond the boy, off in the distance, is a thriving inland city, with iron bridges and steeples shining in the sun. The cross on the pioneer’s grave helps lead the eye to the city, and the triptych format gives religious significance to the inexorable march of progress that is depicted. Although each panel can be read as a separate moment in time, the continuity of the forest between the panels invites viewing the scene as a panorama—compressing the time between pioneering and thriving city in an idealised manner. The present is lost between the past and the future. The city shimmers as if it might be only a dream of the future. Griffin’s city also played with time, for if his city was ‘the city of the future’ that he claimed, a commitment to building it would mean that Australia’s future had begun.

In Mahony’s illustration of Canberra from Mount Ainslie, we are again looking down into a valley from the bush. Mahony carefully integrates the city with the surrounding landscape. The past and the future, the bush and the city, are somehow mingled by both McCubbin and Mahony into an Australian ideal. Commenting on the

87Age editorial quoted in Jane Clark and Bridget Whitelaw, Golden Summers: Heidelberg and Beyond, Australia, 1985, p. 149.
Figure 2.12 Fredrick McCubbin, *Pioneer.* [Source: Jane Clark and Bridget Whitelaw, *Golden Summers: Heidelberg and Beyond,* Australia, 1985.]
success of the Heidelberg school, whose paintings brought an image of the bush into suburban homes, Carter wrote that its symbolism ‘may have little to do with the choice of subject, much more to do with their particular worship of earth and sky, their assertion of a private traveller’s window on Arcady in suburbia.’\textsuperscript{88} Griffin’s city offered a seemingly irresistible promise of Arcadia combined with suburbia.

According to Carter, Australian pioneers often climbed hills and trees for the view. He writes that ‘the consequence of that increased height was not simply to enhance the viewer’s grasp of this world; in looking down, he felt a magnified sense of the cultural significance of his journey’.\textsuperscript{89} The pioneers could look back to where they had been and ahead to where they were going. Some travellers even recorded their dreams of what should lie ahead. In the 1840’s, the surveyor J. L. Stokes wrote: ‘[I] could not refrain from breathing a prayer that ere long the now level horizon would be broken by a succession of tapering spires rising from the many Christian hamlets that must ultimately stud this country’.\textsuperscript{90} As noted in Chapter One, O’Malley’s first views of the Canberra valley caused him to turn to biblical allusions. If the empty valley inspired him to see a new Jerusalem being created, then Mahony’s illustrations of a white city designed to be viewed from the surrounding hilltops might have led O’Malley and others to believe Griffin’s city would bring the Kingdom of God or Utopia closer to reality. The content of the Griffin plan aside, its presentation alone was a strong argument for its first prize in the competition.

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This chapter has selectively explored the history of Griffin’s plan to suggest at least two reasons why Griffin’s plan was chosen for first prize in the capital competition. Griffin’s plan would have appealed to those influential members of government--and the Minister for Home Affairs, King O’Malley was one of them--who envisioned the capital as a social laboratory which could be designed to help create better citizens and help develop Australia as a nation. The Griffin plan would also have appealed to those who

\textsuperscript{88} Carter, pp. 283-284.
\textsuperscript{89} Carter, p. 287.
saw the capital as an inspiring symbol of national idealism as it was conceived at that
time. There may have been other reasons that the Griffin plan was selected in the
competition; but these two reasons help to explain both what happened next in Canberra’s
history, and how space came to be organised in Canberra.

Griffin’s plan is frustrated

Griffin’s plan gave expression to an authoritative vision of Australian national
identity before World War I. According to the first Chief Town planner of the National
Capital Development Commission, ‘As Griffin saw it, the first and most essential
requirement of the design problem was to make a splendid city, worthy of the national
capital; a city which would look important and be impressive as a tangible expression of
nationhood’.91 Yet one of the reasons that the Griffin plan was not fully implemented in
the years that followed the competition was that, while Griffin gave expression to the
capital envisioned by the government at the time of the design competition, soon after
Griffin came to Canberra the Australian government’s vision of the capital and its
function changed. Particularly after World War I, fewer people considered it necessary
that the capital be the finest city in the world. What followed was a somewhat willing
abandonment of many aspects of the Griffin plan to meet a revised vision of the capital.

During his time as Federal Capital Director of Design, Griffin made relatively
small modifications to his plan and oversaw the beginning of some construction work.
Griffin bridged the Molonglo river by temporary railway and by Commonwealth Avenue
which was to connect Civic Centre north of the river with National Circuit south of the
river. Because Griffin believed the increasing use of ‘tramway and fast vehicle traffic’
would make it less important to have commerce take place solely within walking
distances and because he hoped to insure that his plan would be carried out, Griffin
wanted construction to be carried out on both sides of the river simultaneously. He
feared that if it wasn’t, an initial city would be built and ‘public opinion will be created in
favour of continuing the development on from that centre, and so everything on which
the proper future development of the city depends will be thrown out of its proper

91Peter Harrison in Fischer, p. 29.
place'. His fears were justified since, as Fischer points out, Griffin was unable to establish the planned railway line to market centre in the eastern corner of his triangle nor to establish any roads there. Subsequent planning generations ignored this centre and concentrated on developing the original south-eastern district. To this day Griffin's Market Centre has not been built.

Griffin clashed with Department of Home Affairs officials, whom Hancock described as 'terrible men who counted costs and knew a great deal about sewers'. In addition, the budget for the capital was sharply reduced during World War I and in 1917 reductions caused the suspension of construction altogether. However, by 1920, the government was coming under increasing pressure to do something about Canberra. A Labor Party rally in Sydney urged New South Wales to secede from the federation if the government did not honour the constitutional requirement of creating the national capital. The government decided to continue development under the leadership of a committee of experts and Griffin was asked to be an adviser. Griffin declined the offer and his contract ended on 31 December 1920. As previously mentioned, little actual construction of the city had taken place during Griffin's tenure.

The newly created Federal Capital Advisory Committee (FCAC) was composed of six members and chaired by John Sulman. Besides Sulman, most of the members came from the Department of Home Affairs and the Department of Works and Railways. The committee suggested that changes in the Griffin plan needed to be carried out because of reduced funding. However, the changes also indicated an alteration of the ideals behind the development of the capital.

The committee had been appointed 'with a view to enabling the Federal Parliament to meet . . . as early as practicable', while maintaining conditions 'of strictest economy'. Thus two lane roads were initially constructed to only half their intended

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92Fischer, p. 32.
93Fischer, p. 33.
94Hancock, p. 289.
95Fischer, p. 34. For a more complete account and analysis of Griffin's problems with the Department of Home Affairs, see Fischer, Gibney, and Wigmore.
96Federal Capital Advisory Committee, p. 7.
The committee recommended that a ‘provisional’ Parliament House be constructed leaving the expense of a larger and more impressive one to future generations. The idea of building a university was put off indefinitely. Sulman claimed at the committee’s first meeting that Griffin’s plan ‘was so extensive that it [could not] be realised for a century or more’. In its first report the committee moved away from the idea of creating a ‘city beautiful’ and toward the creation of a ‘garden town, with simple, pleasing but unpretentious buildings--mostly single story--planned, nevertheless, to afford adequate comfort and reasonable conveniences’. Sulman’s criticism of the scale of the Griffin plan may have been an expression of Sulman’s true feelings about Griffin’s design. Yet according to some students of the Griffin plan, Griffin realised it would take a long term commitment to build the capital he designed and allowed for growth in stages. J. A. Smith of the design selection board had believed that Griffin addressed both the long term and more immediate future in his plan. Smith believed the Griffin plan would suffice for contemporary needs at a cost that must not be excessive, but everywhere and always, each work accomplished for those present needs must, under this plan, continuously go, without waste or loss, to the building of a harmonious entity, growing in perfection and adequacy as the Commonwealth grows, until the city, with the passage of time, shall become a metropolis worthy of the ideals and power of a peopled continent.

Sulman’s criticism of the Griffin plan as too extensive, whether genuinely felt or not, facilitated his replacement of the Griffin vision of the capital with his own vision of how space and society should be organised in Canberra. Sulman’s vision is discussed in the next chapter.

Sulman was able to deviate from Griffin’s plan in part, because the government no longer supported Griffin’s plan as strongly in the 1920s. While a post-war economic

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97Fischer, p. 36.
98The Department of Postwar Reconstruction revived the idea of creating an Australian National University at Canberra which might grow into a centre of excellence for advanced research. (Bolton, Geoffrey, The Oxford History of Australia, V. 5, Melbourne, 1990, p. 33)
99Fischer, p. 37.
100Federal Capital Advisory Committee, p. 8.
101Peter Harrison in Australian Broadcasting Commission, No Fences, No Boundaries: Walter Burley Griffin, Sydney, 1976. (motion picture)
102J. A. Smith, p. 55.
slump would have made funding Griffin's plan difficult, the shift away from committing
money to the construction of a City Beautiful capital can be seen as part of a change in
governmental conceptions of the capital. For example, post-war anti-bolshevism would
have precluded many people from proposing that the capital should be a place to
experiment with 'our form of socialism' as O'Malley had done before the war. In the
1920s the issue of public ownership of land, which had been so important to the
foundation of Canberra 'had dwindled away'.

Land ownership was perceived to be a sign of success. In 1930 Hancock wrote,

The period of enthusiastic radicalism--the period, that is to say, of Syme,
Deakin, Higgins, Archibald's Bulletin, the youthful Labour party; the
period of 'fair and reasonable', of 'independent Australian Britons', of
Canberra--is already closed. It produced some excellent rhetoric and even
some noble utterance. It made the Commonwealth.

After the war, fewer people would have considered it a necessity that Australia should
have the finest capital in the world. The capital was not as important as a symbol and
means of achieving Australia's future as a great nation. The war had, for some people in
government, established an Australian identity and proven the strength of the Australian
race. Prime Minister Hughes said in 1916 that the Great War had 'saved us from
physical and moral degeneracy and decay'. It would not be as important to develop
Canberra as a symbol of national identity after the digger became a 'national legend'.

Confidence in Australia's future could be vested in 'The breed that stormed and held the
heights of Anzac. [It] will grow stronger and more self-reliant as their generations
follow. The home-land suns that browned their burly frames will not cease to shine from
out our blue Australian heavens'.

For Hancock, it was only 'twenty years ago (when it was still paddocked hill and
valley and there were no bills to pay)' that Canberra was intended to become "a world's
centre of civic beauty and health,' the 'City Beautiful', the 'City of the Future'. Since
that time, however, it had become 'a garden city, in which the garden is more emphasised

103 Frank Brennan, Canberra in Crisis, Canberra, 1971, p. 78.
104 Hancock p. 283.
105 White, p. 127.
106 White, p. 126.
107 White, p. 129.
than the city'.\textsuperscript{108} Hancock thought that there was 'something very attractive about garden cities' but 'after the City Beautiful and the Pride of Time, it seems rather an anti-climax'.\textsuperscript{109} He believed that the idea of creating a City Beautiful was part of the 'first experiment in a national "form". There will be many centuries of experiment'.\textsuperscript{110} For Hancock at least, Canberra had, by 1930, become a symbol of Australia—though perhaps not the one that Griffin, O'Malley, or anyone else had intended. Hancock related the change to the idea of a garden town to certain Australian traits: 'the "middling standard" asserted itself . . . Australians did not really want to make "a world's centre of civic beauty" . . . Democratic society aims, in its present stage of development, at average satisfactions for average people'.\textsuperscript{111} Hancock's astute observations about the relationship between early visions of the capital and experiments with the national 'form' provide a valuable insight into why the Griffin plan may have been chosen for the capital design during a period of nationalistic optimism and ambition, and why, after the war, much of his vision no longer seemed relevant to the then present needs of Australia as expressed by the government. I will suggest in Chapters Four and Five that the visions of the capital, and therefore, what was built in the capital, can be related to experiments in national form during the 1960s as well.

Griffin's spatial legacy

At the beginning of this chapter I proposed that politically motivated interpretations of Griffin's plan have helped obscure his vision of the capital. I have related his design to a desire to promote social reform and to create a break with Australia's colonial past. The recognition of a social agenda in both the vision of the capital expressed by the government in its criteria for the capital competition and the Griffin plan, helps to explain how a civic design that defamiliarised the urban form could be chosen as the basis for the Australian capital. Defamiliarisation was an integral part of Griffin's methodology for achieving his ideal city, and, despite changing conceptions of

\textsuperscript{108}Hancock, p. 280.
\textsuperscript{109}Hancock, p. 282.
\textsuperscript{110}Hancock, p. 284.
\textsuperscript{111}Hancock, p. 282.
the capital, this strategy has left a lasting impact on Canberra’s urban form. The urban form of Canberra is still unfamiliar and disorienting to many visitors. Even today, people standing in the nominal central business district of Canberra have been known to ask, ‘Which way to the city’? Even people who know where they are and can see where they want to go drive around in circles looking for the road that will take them there.

Perhaps the difficulty experienced while navigating is inevitable in a city as large as the Canberra of today. Although it has one fiftieth of the population, it is the size of the Ruhr valley. Yet even before the first high-rise was built in Canberra or roads extended beyond the initial plan of the city, people found navigating the city disorienting. Describing how Canberra’s avenues looked in 1930, Hancock wrote,

The curves of a street have no formal significance unless there is a just proportion between the width of the street and the height of the buildings which front it. If the houses stand up like a wall they will mark the line of the street no less distinctly than it is traced on paper. But in the vast open spaces of Canberra’s suburbs breadth has spread and height has shrunk till the houses have, from the point of view of general design, no more relevance than a kerb-stone. Perhaps the design may still be saved by ‘punctuation’ and the happy closing of vistas.¹¹²

Hancock described a place where the urban form is unfamiliar because the roads were not bounded by buildings in the traditional manner. As Griffin intended, the streets are not narrow canyons between tall buildings—instead the buildings themselves stand out no more prominently than the kerbstones of more traditional urban spaces. The defamiliarisation of the city caused by the use of broad avenues and low buildings was exacerbated by construction that proceeded more slowly than Griffin had expected. In a 1937 article, the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported that ‘about 100 visitors to Canberra each year become lost after entering the city’. According to a member of the Canberra Advisory Council, T. M. Shakespeare, ‘some motorists skirted the city and did not know that they had passed it till they were on the road to Queanbeyan’.¹¹³ Trying to describe Canberra in 1944, Warren Denning also wrote about an unfamiliar looking place that disoriented visitors:

What does Canberra look like? Every first visitor finds it a baffling place until he grasps some sense of its proportions . . . To start with, there is no

¹¹² Hancock, p. 281
'city' at all in the sense of solid blocks of buildings intersected by regular streets and pavements; the newcomer whose ideas of a 'city' is connoted by what he has seen in Sydney or Melbourne or Adelaide or elsewhere, looks in vain for the solid core of integrated and compacted activity which means 'city' in his scheme of thought. In the ordinary sense of the word, 'city' has no real meaning in Canberra; we use it to denote the general picture of a capital, and it is in that usage that the word means something.\textsuperscript{114}

Denning told the story of a war-time visitor who wondered why the city had so many statues of Robby Burns, ‘It turned out that he had passed one particular spot seven times and had thought in each instance the Robby Burns statue was yet another one’.\textsuperscript{115} It was the complaints of parliamentarians, who, after years of living in Canberra, still required maps to navigate the city that, in part, helped create a renewed emphasis on long-term planning in the late 1950s. In 1955, Senator I. A. C. Wood testified that although he had been in the Senate since 1949 he still found Canberra ‘a difficult place to find my way about’. Wood said that town planners confessed the city was difficult to navigate and:

If town planners cannot easily find their way about Canberra without the use of maps, then what chance has the ordinary Australian citizen visiting his own National Capital of doing so? I believe that a world class planner should be engaged to redesign and improve the Canberra town plan; three essential features being, to try and make it easier for the ordinary citizen to find his way about, to redesign the Government Triangle, and to make it more livable for the people of Canberra.\textsuperscript{116}

Despite the disorientation most people experience(d) in Canberra, some people who could ‘read’ the aesthetics of the capital for its social reform agenda were impressed by Canberra’s lack of ‘traditional streets’. In their 1949 book, \textit{On and Off the Platform Under the Southern Cross}, Lord William Beveridge and his wife who were visiting from England found Canberra ‘a very interesting town indeed’. They were pleased to find ‘never an ugly or noisy road’:

There are nowhere in Canberra traditional streets, composed of rows of houses facing one another across a dangerous and noisy thoroughfare with the apparently inevitable concomitant of a backage to the frontage, containing the dustbins and clothes-drying apparatus of the inmates. The

\begin{footnotes}
\item[114]Warren Denning, \textit{Capital City Canberra To-day and To-morrow, Canberra}, 1944, p. 111.
\item[115]Denning, p. 113.
\item[116]Senator Wood testified that, 'Canberra is a difficult place in which to find your way about... although I entered the Senate in 1949, I still find it a difficult place to find my way about. Mr. Gibson, the departmental Town Planner, admitted he found it difficult when he commenced to live in Canberra, but he said he didn't now as he has lived there five years. One of the world's recognised town planners, Dr. Karl Langer, formerly of Vienna and now of Brisbane, said he always has to use a map to find his way about Canberra'. (Senate, p. 79).
\end{footnotes}
houses large and small seem all to be separate and embowered each in its
garden.\textsuperscript{117}

For the Beveridges, who believed the denizens of the traditional urban form to be
‘inmates’, the urban form of Canberra made sense as a successful attempt at social
reform, but for most people who do not understand this important agenda behind
Canberra’s design, its streets and buildings are often criticised for being thoughtlessly
planned. Most histories of Canberra point to the budget cuts, political infighting, or lack
of will that has prevented Canberra from living up to its promise and potential as the
reason that the city can seem disorienting. Had construction been carried out more
rapidly, the city might have had more landmarks to aid in navigation. However, the
seemingly widespread comprehension of some general under-achievement in Canberra’s
construction, is irreconcilable with the fact that planning conditions in Canberra have
been some of the most favourable in the world.\textsuperscript{118} If Canberra seems disorienting and
unfamiliar, it is in part because it was, at one time, deliberately planned this way.

\textsuperscript{117}William and Janet Beveridge, \textit{On and Off the Platform Under the Southern Cross}, Wellington, 1949,
p. 145. The 1955 Senate Select Committee report would comment, ‘the city has grown, but its main
features are wide open spaces that serve to puzzle tourists and uniformed residents alike’. (Senate, p. 54).
\textsuperscript{118}Fischer, p.1. See also annual funding of the National Capital Development Commission in
Chapter Three: The FCAC’s and the FCC’s Capital

Corresponding with this thesis’ larger themes of understanding the capital through ideal visions of its design, and assumptions about town planning’s ability to create social change, in this chapter I argue that an understanding of the planning and construction carried out under the Federal Capital Advisory Committee (1921-1924) and its successor, the Federal Capital Commission (1925-1930) is furthered by examining the way both administrations maintained the idealistic belief that the organisation of space in the capital could be used to engineer a more perfect society within its borders. While the FCAC’s and the FCC’s visions of the capital may have retreated from City Beautiful ideals of a grand city, the planning and construction of Canberra carried out during the 1920s was still very strongly influenced by planners’ ideal visions about what a capital city should be. The desire to arrange the space of the capital in a way that would help produce a more ideal society contributed to the FCAC and FCC actively changing aspects of Griffin’s plan for the capital.

This chapter also examines how, as the planner’s idea of Canberra came to be populated, we see that despite a commitment to being a blueprint for social change, the capital’s arrangement of space would not fulfil its promised role of eliminating the perceived problems of the Australia beyond its borders. In fact, the planning of the capital city actually exacerbated existing social problems and inequalities as inhabitants brought the values and assumptions of Australian society into the new capital. The triumph of Canberra’s planning and construction must be weighed against the failure of planner’s claimed ability to create social reform through urban design.

1. Sulman’s Vision

As mentioned in Chapter Two, John Sulman envisioned the creation of a ‘garden town’ in Canberra, which emphasised suburban homes on tree-lined streets. In contrast, Griffin had envisioned a medium density city with three story terrace housing and shops
along the length of some main avenues.\(^1\) It is beyond the scope of this chapter to comprehensively survey the ways in which the construction of Canberra carried out under the FCAC and the FCC consciously deviated from the Griffin plan for Canberra. However, this section examines some of the ways that Sulman’s vision of the capital has been a lasting influence on Canberra’s urban form.

Sulman initiated the planning and construction of single story detached bungalows as the dominant housing style for Canberra. Sulman’s preferred form of housing has dominated all others in Canberra to the present day—particularly up until the late 1950s. The 1951 census found that ‘95 percent of residential development in Canberra was by way of houses and 5 percent was flats’\(^2\). According to Jim Gibbney, in *Canberra 1913–1953:*

> The profound influence of Sulman and his colleagues on the history of Canberra should not be underestimated. In their short term of office, they dispersed the idealistic penumbra which had hitherto surrounded the city’s future and set its course for the next thirty years. The misty grandeur of casinos, capitals and military forts which had dominated Marion Griffin’s delicate panels gave place to the hard practical realities of a provisional Parliament House, offices designed for secretariats rather than a complete public service, and a shopping centre described by some as reminiscent of a beach hotel. The political and financial situation left no room for grandeur and the structure of the [Federal Capital Advisory C]ommittee subordinated any ideas of grandeur.\(^3\)

While I agree with Gibbney’s assertion that Sulman had a profound impact on Canberra, I dispute two aspects of Sulman’s legacy as Gibbney describes it. Firstly, I do not concur with Gibbney’s claims that the Committee ‘dispersed the idealistic penumbra which had hitherto surrounded the city’s future’. Secondly, Gibbney claims that the Committee left the ‘Griffin plan still firmly in place as a long-term goal’ while it laid ‘the foundations for the workable city which was triumphantly completed by its successors’.\(^4\) Sulman’s vision of a garden town may have been a retreat from the grandeur of a City Beautiful design for the national capital, yet it should not be seen as the retreat from the

\(^1\)K. F. Fischer, *Canberra: Myths and Models*, Hamburg, 1984, p. 36.
\(^3\)Jim Gibbney, *Canberra 1913-1953*, Canberra, 1988, p. 82.
\(^4\)Gibbney, p. 83.
use of the urban form as a symbolic break with the past, nor as the retreat from the use of civic design to help produce better citizens and a better society.

Defamiliarisation of the City

Griffin had helped to create the belief that his city was marking the dawn of a new era for Australia by deliberately distancing the physical form of the city from that of existing western capitalist cities. While Sulman’s vision was influenced, in part, by budgetary restraints on the capital’s construction, his design sought to distance the form of Canberra from that of existing Australian cities to create the perception that Canberra was a ‘model city’. The committee wanted to eliminate ‘disorder and unsightliness’ because it would ‘be indefensible on aesthetic grounds, particularly as the avowed object of the Government is to set an example at the Federal Capital and make it a model city in all that pertains to health, convenience, and beauty’.5

Sulman desired to create uniformity in building facades, streets, and houses. Under tighter budget restrictions, the power to create uniformity in the capital was a principal means with which the FCAC tried to make the capital, as a whole, different from existing cities which were not subject to the same level of planning control. In traditional towns or cities, the most important function is often commerce. This is inscribed into the urban space by the ostentatiousness of commercial enterprises that we take for granted as part of their advertising. Besides making commercial buildings as prominent as possible in unregulated localities, billboards and shop signs are a familiar and ubiquitous part of the landscape. Yet in Canberra the FCAC established the capital’s separation and distinctiveness, in part, by de-emphasising the prominence of commerce and emphasising the residential component of the city.

The FCAC was very conscious of what it called the ‘public view’ in Canberra. Provisional and low-standard buildings were to be ‘sheltered from the public view’ with tree plantations.6 In the garden town the committee did not de-emphasise the importance

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of the visual aspect of the capital, but plans 'became less geared towards the self-confident application of any definite architectural style than towards the prevention of “unsightly developments”'. The committee wanted the 'unsightliness which is so often found in respect to the provision of retail shops in Australian towns' hidden 'by arched entrances to secure continuity of facade'. At the hearings of the Royal Commission for the improvement of Sydney in 1909, Sulman had determined that from an 'aesthetic standpoint', awnings should be removed from along the road. To this day many commercial signs and awnings are recessed under walkways or archways in Canberra and billboards are not allowed.[Figure 3.1] Sulman most probably designed the Sydney and Melbourne buildings (Canberra's original primary shopping facility) himself with 'a treatment' that would 'avoid the ugliness of side frontages and prominent back lanes'.

The uniformity of commercial areas helped separate Canberra from other cities. However, in creating the ideal city, both visibly distinctive, and socially improved, the aesthetics and design of residential areas contributed most to Sulman's vision. Sulman's vision of residential areas is discussed below.

Engineering a better society through the organisation of space

In Chapter One I noted how despite Sulman's claim that the capital should represent Australian democratic ideals, he simultaneously believed in the existence of a ruling and aristocratic class embodied by the Governor-General. Chapter One also discussed how Sulman's designs for the remodelling of Sydney could be seen as attempts at creating social regulation through the organisation of space. In this section I explore how Sulman's vision of Canberra as a garden town can also be seen as an

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7 Fischer, p. 36.
Figure 3.1 Retail signs recessed under archways in Sulman’s Sydney and Melbourne buildings. [Source: Sparke, Eric, Canberra 1954-1980, Canberra, 1988.]
attempt to better organise society through town planning. Sulman's plan for Canberra was in some ways a refinement of the techniques of spatial organisation he had proposed for Sydney ten years before. For while Sulman had developed City Beautiful plans to help reform and control the urban masses in Sydney, the garden town was a means of preventing urban masses in the first place. Sulman's use of a garden town model established a strategy for residential living that he believed would make more citizens healthy, happy and industrious representatives of the Australian type.

The suburban cottage on a quarter-acre block is today considered to be such an integral part of Australian architecture that it is often taken for granted. However, in the planned city of Canberra, with its tabula rasa beginning and Griffin's plan for more medium density housing, the growth of detached suburban homes cannot be seen as a 'natural' occurrence. It was a deliberate design feature introduced by Sulman's Committee, and this section explores some of the reasons Sulman may have chosen this mode of housing for his 'model city'.

The issue of cost and practicality alone does not explain the planning and construction of Canberra's residential form carried out in the 1920s. In 1915 Walter Burley Griffin gave an address to architectural students in which he elaborated on a scheme for housing people in economical homes. The interior of Griffin's house was to have one room with a central hearth. Movable screens would allow areas to be separated off within the room. This idea was attacked as un-Australian by the Sydney architect, F. Earnest Stowe, who believed that 'anyone who could suggest such ideas for Australia has failed to realise the ideas to which we have reached in democratic and social conditions, and how abhorrent would be such pernicious American methods of housing the poorer classes of our communities'. Stowe believed that single-room houses were used by poorer Japanese homes where the British idea of the sacredness of family privacy and modesty do not exist; this lack of modesty in Japan is illustrated by the common practice of the sexes bathing together in quite a nude state in common public baths. Australia is both unique and happy in her suburban cottage home system.11

It is unclear whether Stowe believed that immorality made the Japanese live in single-room houses or whether single-room houses made the Japanese immoral. However, John Sulman can be linked to the belief that the kind of housing people were provided with would influence their morality. Sulman helped J. D. Fitzgerald with the 1912 suburb of Sydney, Daceyville, which Fitzgerald called, 'a small experiment in eugenics'. Daceyville was to improve the health and the 'moral rectitude' of residents by housing them primarily in detached bungalows on individual plots of land with playing fields nearby.[Figure 3.2]

The 'suburban cottage home system' was perceived by planners to have many socially valuable attributes. Especially in post-war Australia, the suburban cottage development was becoming recognised by planners, politicians and business people as an effective way of organising society. According to Robert Freestone in his book, *Model Communities*, 'there was something of a breakthrough in garden city principles around 1917-1920, with community responsibilities of private companies emerging as a theme of post-war reconstruction and spokesmen for capitalism acknowledging that worker welfare could be good business'. This trend may have influenced the creation of a suburban atmosphere in Canberra, although Sulman had been interested in garden suburbs and single family homes before the war. In his 1910 paper on 'The Federal Capital of Australia', he emphasised that the bungalow or cottage was the preferred housing form in Australia.

The 1917 and 1918 Australian Town Planning Conferences held in Adelaide and Brisbane respectively, brought together the Governor-General, State Governors, politicians, planners and housewives to settle the aims of town planning before the soldiers came home. At the Adelaide conference, the Governor-General, Sir Ronald Munro-Ferguson, said he believed the good things about rural life had to be brought into

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12Petrow, in Freestone, p. 99.
Figure 3.2 Daceyville. [Source: Sulman, John, *Town Planning: A Sketch in Outline*, Sydney, 1919.]
the cities, and city life out into the country. J. D. Fitzgerald, who was the president of the first Conference and Exhibition, believed particular emphasis had to be placed on the housing style adopted in Australia. In 1919, when he was New South Wales’ Minister for Public Health and Local Government, Fitzgerald wrote in the introduction to John Sulman’s *Town Planning: A Sketch in Outline*:

> The future of the Australian nation will depend upon its homes. We must make the individual homes, and the city home, better than they ever were... the town planning movement will achieve this. It is the most useful work which lies before the statesman to-day, and it offers the biggest benefits to the nation. It is being pursued by every civilised nation to-day. We must not be behind.

The challenge of creating homes that would help Australia achieve its desired future was, in part, shaped by the perception that often those who were in greatest need of ‘better’ homes preferred ones that planners and politicians considered unsuitable. The Royal Commission on the remodelling of Sydney had found that inhabitants of the Rocks preferred terrace housing. Fitzgerald was disappointed that ‘they prefer the terrace, which eventually must become a slum’. The way space was divided in the home was considered to influence the morality of the individual and ultimately be reflected in the national character. Terraces and tenements were considered by reformers to have a negative impact on the production of morally and physically healthy citizens, in part, because they contributed to the breakdown of the family. The Sydney Royal Commission had been told by Catherine Dwyer, a delegate of the Trades Hall Council, that

> the flat system destroys family life, and is not conductive to morality. We think that when men come home from their work, they should be able to enjoy the company of their own family in peace and quietness. But in a

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17 J. D. Fitzgerald in Royal Commission, Sydney, p. 126. The report did not reveal why people seemed to prefer terrace housing, but planners apparently did not consider economics as an important factor in peoples choice of housing. A single family home would have been more comfortable than a crowded tenement or rented floor space, but taking on lodgers or renting part of a house may have been a function of economics.
tenement just separated by a staircase, with a narrow hall-way, we think that family life is destroyed.  

The Australian Town Planning Conferences decided that the “‘ideal’ home”, the home that people would be happy to live in, and would offer ‘the biggest benefits to the nation’, was the bungalow or cottage. [Figure 3.3] These were very similar in appearance and layout to the kinds of houses that would be available for public servants in Canberra. [Figure 3.4] The cover of the proceedings of the Second Australian Town Planning Conference provides a good indication of the kind of housing and environment Sulman wanted to create in Canberra. [Figure 3.5] Sulman believed that ‘the most comfortable and healthy home is a detached or semi-detached cottage on a fair-sized plot of ground’.  

Many people, including public servants that were to move to Canberra might not have challenged the notion that the ideal home described by the Town Planning Conference would have been comfortable to live in. Yet in Canberra, residents were not given a choice of housing, and the predicted popularity of cottage homes does not, in itself, explain the nearly exclusive use of cottage homes as permanent housing in Canberra for thirty years. Just as the use of the term beautiful, in City Beautiful, came to denote a certain set of aesthetic values with an implied social agenda, for Sulman, part of the beauty of Canberra’s garden town appearance would also be derived from its implied ability to help organise society.  

The tabula rasa conditions of Canberra provided the opportunity to realise a vision of Australian society as a group of nuclear families living in detached homes. Unlike the tenement, which separated families only by a staircase, the bungalow home physically organised people into family units recognisable from the public street. The cottage home provided a sharp focus for the states’ efforts to ‘construct the family in its modern form as “the basis of national life”’. Sulman’s intention to make the cottage home a

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18 Catherine Dwyer, Royal Commission, Sydney, p. 179.  
19 John Sulman, Town Planning, p. 28.  
Figure 3.3 The ideal home. [Source: Australian Town Planning Conference and Exhibition, *Volume of Proceedings of the Second Australian Town Planning and Housing Conference and Exhibition, Brisbane, 1918*, Brisbane, 1918.]
Figure 3.4 Sample of houses public servants could order constructed in Canberra under the Federal Capital Commission. (2 pages) [Source: Federal Capital Commission, *Canberra: General Notes for the Information of Public Servants*, Melbourne, 1926.]
TYPE
F.C.C. 13

GROUND PLAN
Area of Cottage ... 1,591 square feet
Area of Verandahs ... 406

FIRST FLOOR

TYPE
F.C.C. 21

Area of Cottage ... 1,162 square feet
Area of Verandahs ... 321

Total Area 1,483
THE FOLLOWING TYPES ARE TIMBER COTTAGES, AND WILL ONLY BE AVAILABLE TO OFFICERS HAVING SMALL SALARIES AND A FAMILY, AS ONLY A LIMITED NUMBER IS AVAILABLE.

FEDERAL CAPITAL COMMISSION

TYPE

F.C.C. 25  T.2

Area of Cottage ..  957 square feet
Area of Verandahs ..  217
Figure 3.5 The ideal home. [Source: Australian Town Planning Conference and Exhibition, Volume of Proceedings of the Second Australian Town Planning and Housing Conference and Exhibition, Brisbane, 1918, Brisbane, 1918.]
Second
Australian
Town Planning
Conference.

VOLUME
OF
PROCEEDINGS
of the
Second
Australian
Town Planning
Conference
& Exhibition.

Brisbane, Queensland.
30th July to 6th August 1918.
prominent feature of the capital can be seen as an attempt to reinforce this ideal. The creation of a capital where nearly everyone lived in suburban homes obviously did not reflect the existing conditions of society. Despite what was planned, not all Australians were part of a family where a husband/father worked outside the home and the wife/mother worked in the home raising the children.21

Sulman's 'model city' established the beachhead of a future society which the government hoped to create by proclaiming the values of that society in the capital's architecture. This strategy assumed that once people moved into the model environment they would have to adopt the values inherent in the design. On some levels this planning strategy may have worked. Political economists and social theorists have discussed some of the benefits that the state receives from promoting suburban single family homes as a housing option. According to some, suburban homes provide employers with a healthy and efficient work force.22 Manuel Castells has argued that the single family home in the suburbs is 'the perfect design for maximising capital consumption' since it makes public transportation inefficient and encourages privatised leisure and child care.23 Others have claimed it diffuses class struggle, weakens worker solidarity and reinforces individualism.24 The substantial debt that is incurred by those who purchase a house with a mortgage requires job stability to make repayments and maintain ownership. It has been argued that

debt encumbrance therefore reduces the desire for activism and replaces it with a willing and necessary accommodation to the demands of the workplace and owners of capital. Reinforcing the conservatising effect of debt encumbrance is the fact that ownership creates a concern with the value

21 According to Macintyre, There were two obstacles to the realisation of the nuclear family as the basis of national life. 'First, it was inapplicable to the circumstances of large sections of the population, either those who did not fall within the ambit of the nuclear family or those labouring, farming and Aboriginal families who were wedded to different habits. With eleven males for every ten females, with an illegitimacy rate of 6 per cent, with the death of a parent a common calamity and many men whose work took them far from home, some were simply unable to play their prescribed family role. The second impediment... was the presence of women in the workplace. Approximately one-third of all women worked and they accounted for more than 20 per cent of the national workforce at this time. Some worked by choice and some out of economic necessity'. (Macintyre, p. 58.)


24 Kilmartin, et al., p. 289.
of property so that owner occupiers will struggle against changes that threaten property values.\(^{25}\)

On a more basic level, the tenement and terrace housing which Sulman and others believed to be unhealthy in comparison with detached homes, may have allowed disease or fire to spread more easily because families and homes were not separated by physical space. From Koch and the isolation of the microbe as the first step in preventing the spread of disease, to Fredrick Winslow Taylor, the American engineer who began isolating each element of a task to increase the efficiency of the entire process, progressive science was often about isolating agents. Bungalow homes isolated the perceived building blocks of society—the family—to help improve national health and efficiency. In the bungalow, infectious diseases, immorality and idleness could be isolated within a family before they spread to the larger community. The detached house, which could be legally declared a single family dwelling, was one way to prevent poorer families from taking in lodgers and creating overcrowded and unhealthy conditions.

The isolation of families into individual homes was seen as advantageous to a well ordered society because, while allowing privacy within the family unit, it opened up the family to community inspection. Walter Burley Griffin believed that he could help make better citizens by arranging space so that individual homes could be isolated within the gaze of the larger community. He wrote:

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\text{there is one of the most peculiar and valuable elements in the uplift of human beings, a neighbourhood unit with its own prides, its own standards to maintain, and to compare with other units, and the greatest of all beneficial restraints the knowledge that the eye of your own people is on you to feel pride or shame in your individual standards.}^{26}\]

By putting the family home within the neighbours’ gaze, the society was to be more self-regulating. Although Griffin’s design for a one room house was considered abhorrent

\(^{25}\)Kilmartin, et al., p. 124.
\(^{26}\)Fischer, p. 29. The arrangement of space to modify behaviour and life style was taken even further by Frank Loyd Wright, who had been Griffin’s employer until 1905. ‘Even with the rich’, Wright ‘was trying to discipline their space’. His clients, ‘could not have their own pictures on walls, which already held just the appropriate (and appropriate amount of) ornament. . . . The owners had to stay together—he even designed dining tables with high corner lamps so those seated had to lean in towards each other, sealing themselves off from the rest of the world.

Wright’s patrons could not have superfluous possessions. There was no place to store them . . . It must all be jettisoned before boarding Wright’s vessel, headed out from the static past’. (Garry Wills, ‘Sons and Daughters of Chicago’, The New York Review of Books, June 9, 1994, p. 58.)
for its lack of privacy within the family, Sulman would ensure that observation of the family home would be possible in Canberra.

While public trade was to be hidden in Sulman’s plan for Canberra, he intended for all private dwellings to be brought into the public view. In shopping areas where residential accommodation ‘was considered necessary in connection with retail shops’, the Committee believed ‘the principle of attaching dwelling accommodation to the rear of or over business premises be discontinued, and that wherever possible semi-detached residences be provided with a frontage to a garden independently of the shop’.27 Consistent with making dwellings within the public gaze, and the FCAC’s idea of garden town principles, was the ‘soft’ enclosure and demarcation of residential properties with hedges. This idea was incorporated into the 1924 Canberra Building Regulations. In its final report the committee wrote:

> It was arranged that garden treatment be an essential feature of the residential development, and that portion of the roadway in front of residences be planted as a parkway, front fences and dividing fences as far back as the building line being prohibited, and their place being taken by hedges planted on the roadside of the frontage line or at the division line of lots.28

The prohibition of front fences was found to be a ‘treatment’ that improved appearances, and provide a ‘stimulus’ to make the occupants of cottages ‘maintain suitable gardens’.29 The committee recommended ‘that any occupiers who might otherwise be lax should be brought into line’.30 The prohibition of front fences remained in effect unchanged in Canberra until 1984 when it was amended to allow partial front fencing.31

When the 1909 Royal Commission on Sydney called Joseph Henry Maiden, the Director of the Botanical Gardens, to testify on the importance of parks, he also spoke

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27 Federal Capital Advisory Committee, *Final Report*, p. 25. This is how the committee designed the shopping area in Manuka.
29 NCDC, pp. 2-3.
about a resolution that had been passed by a suburban council concerning fences.

Maiden believed that,

the ‘no-railings’ cry is an altruistic idea; it applies to the other fellow. While many people will consent to the pulling down of park railings, which do not belong to anybody in particular, the pulling down of railings enclosing private property will be slow in development.

‘An Englishman’s home is his castle’, is an old proverb, and it embodies the sentiment of a good many people, whether Englishmen or not, who dearly love seclusion in their own homes. Let me ask members of this Commission if they are at all anxious to pull down the fences around their own dwelling-houses, which protect them from the dust of the road, and from the prying eyes of passers-by and of neighbours. Is it not a fact that one of the attractions often advertised for the dwelling-house is its ‘seclusion’?\(^3\)

Nominally, seclusion was forfeited for aesthetic reasons in Canberra. However, the selection of the garden suburb ideal for Canberra could also help to create a model society within Sulman’s model city by preventing the creation of slums and unregulated space.

Even if suburban homes did allow for greater surveillance in a community, the need to formally prohibit front fences, as well as the anticipated need to keep some lax residents ‘in line’, indicates that the FCAC was conceding design alone would not sufficiently improve the ‘moral rectitude’ of all inhabitants to insure they would by choice conform to the standards of the model city. Sulman believed he was acting for the greater good and helping to produce better citizens through the creation of garden suburbs in Canberra. However, in practice, even maintaining the image of the ideal community involved the creation of coercive legislation, not merely design innovations.

By 1924, Walter Burley Griffin appears to have become bitter about the government’s planning for the greater good. He wrote,

Welfare by government means, in the end, only Dictation by Politicians, who in turn are the agents of the actual privileged classes whom governments serve. . . Make no mistake, the elimination of the pernicious power of the State to coerce and mold the people will come only through the ablest writers, story-tellers, playwrights, scenario makers, and picture designers!\(^3\)

Griffin saw himself as one of the artists whose work could help liberate people and make their lives better. This had been an important ideal behind his plan for

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\(^3\) Joseph Henry Maiden, Royal Commission, Sydney, p. 191.
\(^3\) Walter Burley Griffin, ‘The Menace of Governments’, Porgies, 1 May 1924, p. 3.
Canberra. Despite his 1915 comment about shaming people into meeting an acceptable standard, he saw his ideas as more noble and having less of a chance of being exploited by the government for the purpose of social control. His plan for the suburb of Winnetka, Illinois, designed in 1914, has a great deal in common with plans he made for some suburbs in Canberra.\textsuperscript{34} [Figure 3.6] They had straight streets and roundabouts. The houses faced onto a large area so children had a place to play safely within a mother’s gaze while she did the housework. The large blocks that Griffin set aside for this kind of arrangement of houses in Canberra were not subdivided in this way after he left, and that is why there are some enormous lots in Red Hill with a single house on them.\textsuperscript{35}

After leaving Canberra, Griffin’s next planning project was Castlecrag, a Sydney suburb, which can either be seen as a criticism of regulating space through observation, or proof that Griffin believed those who could afford to live in Castlecrag could be trusted with privacy and seclusion.\textsuperscript{36} Where Griffin had believed Canberra would be the ideal city of the future, helping create a new type of Australian for the modern world, Castlecrag was an anti-modern statement. It was still an attempt at nurturing an ideal type of citizen--one who participated in the community and one who was close to nature--but it sought to nurture that citizen in a different environment. Griffin did not plan Castlecrag with the straight streets and public parks that he had envisioned for Canberra. Castlecrag incorporated natural spaces to play in, but the streets, named for the parts of a medieval castle, wound around a hillside; narrow passages literally carved into the rock.\textsuperscript{37} [Figure 3.7] The houses are individual designs buried in the landscape--a conscious attempt to return the element of seclusion to the home rather than make them visible to the community.

\textsuperscript{34}Walter Burley Griffin in, Donald Leslie Johnson, \textit{The Architecture of Walter Burley Griffin}, Adelaide, 1977, p. 29.
\textsuperscript{35}Fischer, p. 29.
\textsuperscript{36}Griffin lived in Castlecrag, and designed a home for King O’Malley here.
\textsuperscript{37}Johnson, p. 81.
Figure 3.6 Griffin’s plan for Winnetka Illinois. [Source: Johnson, Donald Leslie, *The Architecture of Walter Burley Griffin*, Adelaide, 1977, p. 29.]
Figure 3.7 Griffin’s plan for Castlecrag. [Source: Johnson, Donald Leslie, *The Architecture of Walter Burley Griffin*, Adelaide, 1977, p. 81.]
Despite a divergence from Griffin’s ideas, the planning and construction of Canberra carried out under the FCAC maintained the ideal of making the capital a model city. However, as the model city came to be populated, its basis in incorrect assumptions about the relationship between urban design and human behaviour became apparent.

2. Populating the Idea

According to ‘Fact Sheet 7: Path to Self Government’:

In 1921, a Federal Capital Advisory Committee was established and proposed a three-stage transfer of the Parliament and Federal government departments from Melbourne, where they had been temporarily established in 1901. Progress was slow although in 1923 the House of Representatives meeting in Melbourne adopted a motion that Parliament would meet in Canberra after the 1926 elections.

To speed up development, a Federal Capital Commission (FCC) was established on 1 January 1925 to plan, develop and administer the National Capital. In its five years of existence, the FCC completed the construction of the provisional Parliament House, a handful of suburbs to house public servants and their families transferred from Melbourne and built shops, guest houses and hotels, houses and a number of public buildings that remained the nucleus of Canberra for almost the next 30 years.

When the FCC was abolished in 1930, responsibility for the Federal Territory returned to the Minister for Home Affairs.

In July of 1923, the House of Representatives passed a resolution that a provisional Parliament House should be constructed. The construction of the capital became a more important priority that year. As the historian Warren Denning wrote, ‘Australia was then enjoying her post-war prosperity, the Government had to spend its mounting surpluses on something, and Mr. Bruce had set his mind on having his name associated with the establishment of Canberra’. The desire to increase the pace of construction created a perceived need to revamp the administration of the capital. The creation of the Federal Capital Commission, which took over the construction and administration of Canberra on 1 January 1925, was the outgrowth of this process.

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38 Another sign of this was that an architectural competition was advertised in November 1923 for the layout of a garden suburb for a better class of homes west of Collins Park. Though Griffin is often blamed, it was this competition that led to the construction of ‘some of the most confusing intersections in all Canberra’. (Fischer, p. 42.)

39 Denning, p. 18.
Several histories have more comprehensively discussed the triumphs and failures associated with the planning, construction, and administration of Canberra under the Federal Capital Commission than I have done in this section. The period has been remembered both as a ‘golden age’ in terms of the ‘finances, corporate planning powers and amount of construction work executed’, and one where ‘mid-Victorian’ and ‘paternalistic’ social controls were imposed by the Commission. Under the administration of the FCC, the city began to function as the national capital. The first 650 public servants were transferred to Canberra in 1927, and by 1930 the population of Canberra was over 7,000. However, the FCC’s concern for completing its construction tasks and making Canberra a model community contributed to the new inhabitants’ personal freedoms being curtailed.

This section does not attempt to retell the history of the Federal Capital Commission, but examines the influence of ideal visions on the planning and construction of the city during its tenure. Fischer has come the closest to acknowledging that ideal visions of the capital were still influencing its construction during the administration of the FCC. He notes, ‘it appears more than likely’ that the planning was ‘not the result of arbitrary subdivision practices’ but ‘an expression of certain ideal concepts on how an ideal community was to be structured. It was as though, in the eyes of the planners, not much explanation or discussion was needed’. However, the Federal Capital Commission did discuss its desire to create the ideal capital, and, like Griffin and Sulman, the FCC’s Commissioner, John Henry Butters, believed the organisation of space in the capital could help produce a better society. Furthermore, despite good intentions, the Federal Capital Commission was mistaken in its belief that it could organise the physical form of the capital in a manner that would compel the city’s inhabitants to adopt the new values that the model city embodied and create the beachhead.

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41 Fischer, pp. 42-43.

42 Fischer, p. 47.
of a new society within the borders of the capital. Instead of eliminating the perceived problems and inequalities of the Australia that existed outside the capital’s borders, the well meaning but misdirected attempts to plan, construct, and administer an ideal community paradoxically exacerbated these problems in the capital.

The Federal Capital Commission and Ideal Visions of the Capital

The government organised the FCC along the lines of a corporation operating semi-autonomously under the direction of a chief executive. The corporate model was perceived by social reformers and by the government to be a particularly efficient and effective means of administering public projects and localities in the 1920s. John Henry Butters, who was chosen as the Chief Commissioner of the FCC had previously been Chief Engineer and General Manager of the Tasmanian Hydro-Electric Scheme. He was considered to have the managerial skill necessary to speed up the construction process.

A ‘Seat of Government Fund’ freed the Commission from annual parliamentary appropriations and allowed for the recruitment of professional experts from outside the public service at higher pay levels than provided for by the public service. The semi-autonomous structure would, under Butters, prove an effective means of completing the FCC’s main task of opening the provisional Parliament House by 1927.

The structure of the FCC would allow it to act as a buffer between the government and Canberra. On the one hand it was hoped that the FCC’s administration of Canberra would maintain a continuity of policy between governments to avoid a situation where, ‘each new Minister seems to think that he has a special mission to alter the Federal Capital Design’.43 On the other hand, the structure of the FCC meant that the Chief Commissioner bore the brunt of criticism rather than the government that set budgets or determined overall policy. Although Butters was undoubtedly aware of this aspect of his job before undertaking it, he could not have imagined the amount of

43R. F. H. Greene, member for Richmond, Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates (CPD) 76:2935.
personal hatred he would accrue as Chief Commissioner. By 1929, one Labor parliamentarian, William Maloney of Victoria, had declared

The most useful act that the Chief Commissioner does will be to leave Canberra. The words ‘thank God’ will then echo in many homes in Canberra and the people are now offering prayers of thanks giving because the dictator’s reign has about finished.  

In setting up the FCC as a semi-private corporation, the government hoped the capital could be financed as a business enterprise with land rents helping to defray the cost of expenditure. According to Brennan, ‘as late as 1928 the anticipated revenue was being spoken of as a fund that will assist to wipe out the national debt’. The Commission approached its task with a ‘strict business attitude’, and sought to maximise land value, since the Commission was charged with paying for all of the government expenditure on the capital dating back to 1901.

Brennan claims that the Commission ‘artificially’ drove up the price of land, ‘pumping the market to give itself a justification for increasing land rentals’. To stop speculation, one of the conditions placed upon leaseholders was that they were required to build on their land before selling it. The Commission removed this restriction and created ‘an orgy of land speculation’, driving land values up 150% in 12 months. The land speculation that went on in the capital was one example of how, despite the original ideal visions of the capital eliminating problems that existed in the rest of Australia, they could be exacerbated by the government within the planned capital.

Despite the more business oriented construction mission and mentality of Butters the engineer, he still saw his role as constructing a model city in Canberra. With the FCC’s relatively high level of funding, Butters was in a better position to carry out his ideal vision of the capital than either Griffin or Sulman had been. The FCC was attempting to create ‘the finest garden city in the world’. Yet urban aesthetics were

44 William, Maloney, CPD 121:889.
45 Brennan, p. 89.
46 Brennan, p. 78.
47 Brennan, p. 90.
48 Brennan, p. 92.
49 Federal Capital Commission, in Fischer, p. 43.
only part of this vision. Butters wrote, ‘We are specially working on the building of a fabric of a city but we can also be building up what is almost as important and that we can entirely control, viz. a community interest and tradition--intangible but all important--which can be an object lesson to the rest of Australia and even the whole world’. Butters wanted to shape the character of the community that inhabited the capital. The capital was to contain a new type of society which was based on instilling in its inhabitants what the FCC called ‘Good Citizenship’. James Dunn of the FCC believed, ‘The determining factor in Community Welfare is the improved character of the individual, and it is upon this foundation that the movement is being built’. Butters still hoped to create the model farm that Senator Staniforth Smith had spoken about at the turn of the century. Butters' capital was also to be one that developed social technologies that could be applied to the rest of the nation after being tested in the capital. The editor of the Canberra Community News called Canberra ‘the world’s biggest experiment in the systematisation of the happiness of humanity’. Canberra was the first step in the ‘creation of continent wide contentment’ which was ‘possible of solution by the hand of science’. Butters’ vision of creating a social experiment was, in effect, a social control experiment. The FCC endeavoured to ensure that, in its own words, ‘the people of Canberra will be worthy of citizenship of a nation’s capital’.

The law and order imposed by the Commission was intended to insure that Canberra’s inhabitants behaved as if they were worthy of living in the ideal city. It maintained the prohibition on buying liquor in the territory until 1927. This prohibition, instituted by the Minster for Home Affairs, King O’Malley, led to a daily exodus to the Queanbeyan, N. S. W. hotels. In Canberra’s government hostels, divided according
to sex, the Commission determined when lights had to be put out, and, as Denning reported,

one night police attempted to preserve the morality of a women’s hostel by arresting a man let out of a window. It turned out to be a Minister of the Crown who had been trying to recapture the spirit of his lost youth by frying sausages over an electric radiator for the edification of a party of bright young people.57

Because of high building costs in Canberra and lease covenants that set a minimum amount to be spent on the homes constructed in different suburbs, many public servants would rely on renting accommodation from the government. Given the restrictions on hostel living, many may have preferred private or government flats to live in, but few of these were available. There was a shortage of government cottages and preference was given to married people.58 Homes were for nuclear families. Until public servants had progressed to this stage of life they were watched over and regimented in hostels. There was simply little accommodation built for those who did not follow a lifestyle of ‘the typical Australia’ as defined by the government.

The urban form of the capital reflected the FCC’s narrow vision of the typical Australian. Uniformity and harmony continued to be guiding aesthetic principles in Canberra. The FCC worried about the aesthetic effect of individual mailboxes being installed in front of houses59 and a hedge clipping service would be introduced to keep hedges uniform.60 Because it was considered of ‘paramount importance’ that it should be easy for residents to establish their gardens ‘in conformity with the garden city ideal’, water meters were not installed for the first two years after the transfer of the Government.61 According to Warren Denning, the aesthetics of the capital created the image that ‘The common democracy of the garden linked the most exclusive departmental

57 Denning, p. 34.
58 Denning, p. 30.
59 Gibbney, p. 137.
60 Fischer, p. 47.
head with the humblest messenger'. However Denning points out, ‘their roses and cabbages bridg[ed] a social gap which in other respects was only too conspicuous’.

Inversions of Utopia

Beyond land speculation in the capital, other inversions of the planned utopia began to appear as the idea of Canberra came to be populated under the FCC. The most obvious inversion of the utopian ideals that were invested in Canberra concerned representation in government. Despite Griffin’s vision of a capital expressing Australia’s democratic values, the city’s inhabitants could not vote. Petitions to allow residents to elect representatives in Parliament from Canberra or to let them vote in their former districts were denied.

The difficulties faced by workers building Canberra were worse than those imposed on incoming public servants. It was as if the government planned to build Parliament House and accommodation for public servants and then hand over a brand new, empty city to the government on inauguration day (9 May 1927). The city was built for public servants, even though in its early stages it wasn’t a city of public servants. It was a city of workmen and their families who did not fit into the government’s ideal visions of the city and society that were to be a model for the rest of the world. It was as if to deny that the city of the future had a history, all links to the Australia outside its borders had to be severed on inauguration day, thus helping to insure the capital’s break with the past was absolute. By the end of 1925, of Canberra’s 5,000 inhabitants, over half were workmen employed by the FCC. Two days after Parliament House was opened in 1927, Butters began the process of firing over 2000 of the 3000 workers employed by the Commission. Despite speeches made by Butters telling workers

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62Denning, p. 50. In 1930, an Advisory Council was created. Although three residents were to be elected to the Council it could only advise the administrator and had no real power.

63Denning, p. 50.

64Gibbney, p. 141. Butters can not be personally blamed for the firings since his budget was reduced after he accomplished the construction of Parliament House.
about the importance of the sacrifices they were making to create the capital, no monument in Canberra specifically commemorated their efforts.

Butters denied that there were different classes of citizens in the capital and said, ‘Personally I hate the word ‘class’, but I must use it in order to say that all classes are co-operating’. However, in populating Canberra, the inequalities and assumptions of Australian society that existed outside of the capital migrated with the population and replicated themselves regardless of the society the planned environment was supposed to create. The simple fact that there were two recruiting procedures for migrants to the capital—one for public servants and one for workers building the capital—created class divisions. The majority of workers, presumed to be only temporary inhabitants of the capital, were housed in work camps. Workmen and their families were accommodated in weatherboard cottages, weatherboard cubicles and tents. The cubicles were 12 feet by 10 feet in area, of timber frame construction and roofed with iron sheeting. Each cubicle was intended to accommodate two workmen and contained two iron bedsteads, electric lighting and a wood stove. In March 1927, about a third of the Commission’s work force was accommodated in tents and a quarter in cubicles. Ironically, in the city which, by design, was to prevent the creation of slums, the failure to provide proper sanitation and housing meant an outbreak of Scarlet Fever occurred at the Molonglo worker’s camp in 1925. This led the medical Officer to report that while some homes in the settlement were clean, some people lived in ‘squalor and filth’. Butters claimed that since unemployment was a problem throughout Australia, the Commission was attempting to employ as many people as possible. In his opinion, the temporary and overcrowded conditions of the camp were a lesser evil than unemployment. Not every married worker could be housed in a cottage, since ‘to do so would occupy as much time

65Fischer, p. 47.
67Graeme Taylor, p. 102. Some workmen who were married and engaged on a more permanent basis were permitted to occupy brick cottages. However, in practice housing shortages prevented many of those who were potentially eligible from doing so. (Federal Capital Advisory Committee, Final Report, p. 17.)
as would suffice to build three or four capitals’. The FCC believed the camps were public health risks not only because of their temporary sanitation arrangements, but also because of ‘the particular class of workmen’ in some of the camps. As the workforce was reduced, the camps were destroyed. There had been twenty workmen’s camps in the city in October 1927, but by May 1929, the FCC planned to maintain only two. Despite the planning of Canberra, the model city developed slums and administrators resorted to slum clearance just as in other Australian cities. It would be inaccurate to claim that the planning of Canberra caused the creation of slums; however, planning alone could not make up for an unwillingness to commit the necessary resources to the proper housing of workers.

Social inequalities in the spatial organisation of the city during the administration of the FCC existed, not only between workmen and the public servants, but among the public servants brought to Canberra. Within the hostels, officers were effectively segregated according to salary. Those with higher salaries were accommodated in a Hostel built on Brisbane Avenue, while less expensive hostels were provided, ‘in which lower paid civil servants might be housed at rates within their means’.

By 1927 the spatial layout of the city was coming under sharp criticism in Parliament. J. H. Scullin claimed in Parliament: ‘I have seen that . . . areas have been mapped out at the Federal Capital Commission for the occupation by public servants according to the salary they receive’. Senator William Reid believed that ‘the time is not far distant when in Canberra there will be a caste system worse than that in India’. William Maloney, contended:

We should make the Federal City a City of Australians. We should not say to the lower-paid public servants ‘You must live in that part of the Capital’, and to the highly-paid ‘This is the splendid place reserved for you’. We do

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70 Graeme Taylor, p. 139.
71 Gibbney, p. 142.
73 J. H. Scullin in Fischer, p. 45.
74 G. Reid in Fischer, p. 45.
not want to breed any second class citizens... No one should be able to
tell any man where he shall live, or how he shall live, at the Federal Capital
... Let us put an end to the creation of class distinctions. 75

Butters responded that,

the Federal Capital Commission has been charged repeatedly in the press
with segregating people in different areas according to salaries. We have in
course of construction 300 cottages. The same designs of cottage are being
built in all the subdivisions of the city, but yet this idea (I don’t know
whether the wish is father to the thought) is becoming a stereotyped
phrase. 76

However, the FCC did not build all of the homes in Canberra and the minimum building
covenants meant that some would not be able to afford to live in certain suburbs. In the
suburb of Mugga Heights the minimum cost of residences was to be £3,500, while the
smallest three bedroom brick cottage built by the Commission cost approximately £950,
and the salary of some public servants being transferred was £4/17/6 per week. 77 The
FCC believed that its policies were only imitating ‘naturally’ occurring distinctions of
‘any town or city,’ 78 however, by attempting to imitate its perception of naturally
occurring social inequalities, the FCC made Canberra’s social organisation more spatially
stratified than that of other parts of Australia. While the FCC claimed it had ‘no objection
if an officer on a low salary took a high priced house’, when it assigned houses to
applicants, there were only a limited number available. Thus, in practice, the
Commission considered itself ‘rightly guided by the economic circumstances of the
applicant’. 79 Unlike other parts of Australia where citizens might have had a means to
redress their grievances, Butters warning to public servants criticising the FCC’s policies
was that, ‘I have no hesitation in saying that we shall be able to dispose of them to private
people within two days’. 80

In attempting to create the model city and society of Australia’s future, Butters
and the FCC paradoxically undermined the values that such an Australia would

75W. Maloney in Fischer, p. 45.
76Canberra Times, 7 April 1927, p. 1, 5-6.
77Graeme Taylor, p. 134.
78Graeme Taylor, p. 135.
79FCC, ‘Transfer of the Department of Patents and Trademarks’, CRS A430, Item G94 (AA) in Graeme
Taylor, p. 135.
80Fischer, p. 45.
presumably be founded upon, such as democracy, freedom of speech, and social equality. Despite a desire to create a city free of slums and disease, the planning and construction of the capital contributed to their existence in Canberra. Despite Butter’s personal ambitions to create better social organisation through the planning and construction of the capital, the Federal Capital Commission’s attempts to use spatial organisation to promote social reform largely failed. Suburban homes, aesthetic uniformity and neatly tended gardens could help symbolise the desire to make Canberra a model community, but they could not in themselves create better citizens or the ‘systemisation of the happiness of humanity’ as the FCC had hoped.

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In the period after the Federal Capital Commission was abolished in 1930, control of Canberra was divided among four government departments. This arrangement lasted until 1957 and ‘the whole period of departmental control brought no fundamentally new planning developments to Canberra’.81 The ideal of creating a low density suburban atmosphere with single family homes was maintained wherever possible, and in 1954, the architect Robin Boyd called the national area of Canberra ‘a few satisfactory buildings swamped in the mediocrity of an enormous sprawling suburb without a centre’.82 By the late 1950s another concentrated effort would be made to have the capital become a symbol of an Australian national identity and a blueprint of Australia’s future. The Federal Capital Commission’s inability to use architecture to ameliorate perceived social problems in the capital would not prevent planners in Canberra’s next period of large-scale growth to attempt to use spatial organisation to create a better society.

In the first three chapters of this thesis I have explored the way ideal visions of the national capital influenced its planning and construction up until 1930. Despite some attempts to portray the capital as a spontaneous representation of an Australian national identity, I have argued that for Canberra’s planners and the government, the capital represented the opportunity to create the Australian city and society of the future rather

81 Fischer, p. 49.
than to affirm the Australia that existed at that time. I have argued that planners’ designs for the city were based in part on the belief that their designs would help promote social reform. The Federal Capital Commission’s inability to use architecture to ameliorate perceived social problems in the capital would not prevent planners in Canberra’s next period of large-scale growth from attempting to use, in their own distinct ways, spatial organisation to create a better society.
Chapter Four: ‘Something that the Australian people would come to admire and respect’

Between 1958 and 1972 the federal government spent nearly $1 billion (1975$) on the planning and construction of Canberra.¹ Canberra’s population increased from 39,000 in 1958 to 155,000 in 1972—a change of nearly 400 per cent.² This second great period of Canberra’s planning and growth saw, not only the planning and construction of new monumental buildings in the parliamentary triangle, but the initiation of construction on two new town centres and a hierarchy of roads to serve them. Planning decisions made during the 1960s will have lasting effects on the urban form of the capital well into the next century.

In this chapter and the following one, I explore the ideals and assumptions behind Canberra’s planning in the late 1950s and 1960s. In his influential 1961 book, The City in History the American urbanist Lewis Mumford opened by asking, ‘what is the city? How did it come into existence? What processes does it further: what functions does it perform: what purposes does it fulfil’?³ An exploration of the way that the Australian government and its Canberra planners answered these questions can further an understanding of the organisation of space in the city during its second great phase of growth.

The National Capital Development Commission (NCDC) evolved as the governmental organisation that was charged with overseeing all aspects of planning and constructing the capital from 1957 to 1988. Aspects of the NCDC’s evolution discussed in this chapter include:

2. Prime Minister Robert Menzies’ vision of the capital.
3. The British architect and planner William Holford’s observations concerning Canberra’s development.
4. The initial structure and composition of the NCDC.

²Sparke, Eric, Canberra 1954-1980, Canberra, 1988, p. 188.
In this chapter my purpose is to show that the ideal visions of the capital’s function in national affairs, as expressed by the Senate Select Committee, Menzies, and Holford contributed to the mission and structure of the NCDC. The following chapter explores how the NCDC sought to carry out its perceived mission in the design of Canberra during the 1960s.

1. The Report of the Senate Select Committee

According to the NCPA’s Fact Sheet 7, ‘The Path to Self Government’:

The Government was concerned at the slow development of Canberra in the postwar years which was holding up the transfer of Federal government departments from Melbourne. The experience of World War II had demonstrated the inadequacies of the National Capital as a centre of administration when so many of its departments were interstate. The existing system of divided departmental responsibility for Canberra was seen as contributing to the problem and a Senate Select Committee of Inquiry was established in 1954.

The Committee recommended the establishment of a single authority to plan, develop and construct Canberra as the National Capital of Australia and with sufficient finance to carry out the task. Consequently, the National Capital Development Commission (NCDC) was set up in 1957 and a period of great expansion of the city was inaugurated.

Perceived inadequacies in the national capital’s ability to function as an administrative centre contributed to the creation of the Senate Select Committee Appointed to Inquire into and Report upon the Development of Canberra. However, the recommendations of the committee encompassed far more than plans for the transfer of more departments to Canberra. In a period of over 10 months the committee interviewed 83 planners and experts from many disciplines. Furthermore, it elicited written statements from individuals and associations concerned with the development of Canberra. According to Fischer, the 2000 pages of minutes, the written statements and the final report of the committee represented ‘a unique document on the state of planning in Australia in the mid-50s and on the mood of the country at the time’. It revealed a ‘spirit of revived national self-confidence’ that was to be transferred to the development of the national capital. The committee was chaired by Senator John McCallum who campaigned throughout the 1950s for increased development of the capital, hoping that ‘the time will

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4 Fischer, p. 64.
5 Fischer, p. 64.
come when every Australian will be proud of Canberra'. 6 The Senate Select Committee argued for the creation of a capital that would be much more than merely a place for government departments to be located.

The committee made several recommendations that would affect the future growth of Canberra. Firstly, the committee recommended that the Garden City aspects of Canberra be maintained in further development. Secondly, it believed that the proposal that Canberra become a repository for national pride and a symbol of Australia's power and stature as a nation. Thirdly, it set down guidelines for a restructuring of the capital administration to facilitate future growth.

A Garden City

In its recommendations for the aesthetics of future development in Canberra, the Senate Committee stressed that the Garden City atmosphere of Canberra should remain the highest priority. The committee believed, 'the most important feature of Canberra's development is its Garden City aspect, which future administrations should observe as fundamental'. 7 By 'Garden City' the Senate Committee mean 'a city of broad avenues with shaded parks and sheltered gardens'. 8 This definition excluded the larger content of Ebenezer Howard's Garden City concept, so that the expression garden city as applied in Canberra could read 'a city of gardens'. 9 The committee also believed that Canberra should 'retain throughout its residential areas all the features of a garden suburb'. 10 According to the committee, bungalow homes on quarter-acre blocks should remain the predominant housing type. It recommended that some flats should be built for lower income families and singles as a way of raising the extremely low density of the city and 'keeping up the standard of bungalow development'. 11 Flats were seen as a method of preventing the creation of smaller, and what the committee perceived as less

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6 McCallum, in Sparke, p. 31.
8 Senate, p. 26.
9 Fischer, p. 64.
10 Senate, p. 28.
11 Senate, p. 28.
representative, bungalows in Canberra. While the Senate Select Committee rejected the growth of large industry in Canberra, it believed:

Canberra should be developed as a national tourist, educational, cultural and religious centre. Developments to this end are entirely keeping with the city’s character as the Seat of Government and the administrative centre, and would foster the development of an admiration and affection for the nation’s capital.

National Pride

Despite the committee’s approval of the Garden City concept in Canberra, it believed that the capital had not lived up to its potential as an object of national pride. The committee believed there was a ‘need for the city to be developed in a manner befitting a national capital’. It shared the opinion of Dennis Winston, Professor of Town Planning at Sydney University, who believed one of the trends had been, ‘to forget that Canberra is a capital city and not a garden suburb’. The committee claimed that, at that time, the ‘important planned areas’ of Canberra

stand out, not as monumental regions symbolising the character of a national capital, but more as graveyards where departed spirits await a resurrection of national pride.

Within the report of the Senate Select Committee was a report by members of the Australian Planning Institute, a body of prominent Australian planners that advised the Senate Select Committee. This report concluded that ‘the development of Canberra, because of the City’s importance as a symbol of the country’s unity, strength and character, places it in the front rank of national responsibilities’.

12Senate, p. 28. The Committee recommended that ‘service flats’ be created for single members of the community as an alternative to hostel accommodation. (Senate, p. 73.)
13Senate, p. 61.
14Senate, p. 70.
15Senate, p. 28.
16Senate, p. 54.
17The Committee of the Australian Planning Institute’s members were: Walter Ralston Bunning, Architect and Town Planning Consultant, Chairman, New South Wales Town and County planning Advisory Committee; Roderick David Lovate Fraser, Chief County planner, Cumberland County Council, Sydney; Peter Firman Harrison, Senior Lecturer in Town and Country Planning, University of Sydney; Assisted by Mr. Walter Geoffrey Faithfull, Officer in Charge of Planning, Cumberland County Council, as executive secretary. (Senate, p. 117.)
18Senate, p. 119.
Australia has taken its place as one of the foremost nations of the world. In two world wars it has built an Australian tradition based on the qualities of courage, leadership and initiative. In peace, it has distinguished itself in world trade and international relations and in the fields of art, science and sport.

In a Commonwealth of sovereign states, strong and independent, no more fitting means of expressing national unity and spirit exists than in the National Capital. The City of Canberra, built according to the principles conceived by Walter Burley Griffin, will be capable of demonstrating Australia's stature as a nation—to Australia's citizens and to visitors from other countries.

The building of the City of Canberra is therefore a project of great magnitude and significance. It is a national development project requiring the utmost skill and vision in planning and administration and is the direct responsibility of the Federal government, representative of the citizens of the Commonwealth.¹⁹

Like the planner John Sulman, who wrote in 1909 that the development of the capital would be a shining example of Australia's progress as a nation, the Committee of the Australian Planning Institute believed the capital could symbolise to the world the stature and strength of Australia. It was probably not lost on either Sulman or the Planning Institute that the further development of Canberra would provide enormous opportunities and challenges for planners whose designs would be on show for the world.

To create the capital that would demonstrate Australia's stature as one of the foremost nations in the world, the Senate Select Committee believed 'monumental public buildings' needed to be created in Canberra.²⁰ The committee did not comment specifically on the types of monumental buildings that should be created, because, 'architects must be left free to develop their plan'. However, it hoped the buildings would meet with the 'intuitive good taste of the uninstructed man', and wanted 'no "uncouth structures rising to enormous heights", no stream-lined "functional" factory-like boxes, but only elegant, graceful, stately and spacious public buildings'.²¹ The Select Committee also commented that while Griffin's plan called for important buildings grouped together and placed in prominent positions, 'protection against atomic warfare suggested dispersion'.²²

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¹⁹Senate, p. 117.
²⁰Senate, p. 32.
²¹Senate, p. 33.
²²Senate, p. 63.
In outlining how the future planning of Canberra should proceed, the Senate Select Committee recalled the proclamation of the Chicago planner, Daniel Burnham, who had said,

Make no little plans. They have no magic to stir man’s blood. Make big plans. Aim high in hope and work remembering that a noble diagram, once recorded, will never die but long after we are gone will be a living thing asserting itself with evergrowing insistency.\(^{23}\)

Although the city had to provide adequately for the present day citizens, ‘as a city of the future it must be protected against those short term views which would imperil its future development in the manner planned’.\(^{24}\) By short term views, the committee meant the desire for ‘cheapness and quick results’ that had ‘obscured’ the creation of a great city in the past.\(^{25}\)

Administrative Recommendations

The Select Committee believed the organisational structure of the capital’s administration would have to be altered to develop Canberra in a manner befitting a national capital.\(^{26}\) The committee recommended that all the activities involved in the development of the capital be unified under a single commission rather than dispersed among various departments. It compared the situation of 1955 with that of 1923 just before the creation of the Federal Capital Commission.\(^{27}\) Senator McCallum, chairman of the Senate Committee, wanted a management organisation that would speed up the ‘dawdling, doddering manner’ in which work had been carried out by several departments which lacked the ‘imagination, vision or energy to carry through a great building project’.\(^{28}\) The new authority in Canberra was to have a commissioner with full executive powers. The committee also compared the organisation it envisaged with the Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Authority, a model for large scale national development.\(^{29}\) During the Senate hearings, Professor Winston suggested that the new

\(^{23}\) Senate, p. 26.

\(^{24}\) Senate, p. 26.

\(^{25}\) Senate, p. 12.

\(^{26}\) Senate, p. 22.

\(^{27}\) Senate, p. 23.

\(^{28}\) Sparke, p. 49.

\(^{29}\) Senate, p. 23.
organisation to oversee Canberra’s planning should be called the National Capital Development Commission.30

2. Menzies’ Vision

The Senate Select Committee’s report was not acted on immediately in 1955 when it came out. However, the personal involvement of Prime Minister Menzies in 1957 led to the implementation of many of the Committee’s recommendations, including the creation of the NCDC and the call for an outside planning expert to comment on the future development of Canberra. Sparke wrote that, ‘Autocrats it may be, build best. Unquestionably, Menzies’ decisive leadership transformed Canberra from a dream of the future into a present reality’.31 [Figure 4.1]

Menzies influenced both qualitative and quantitative aspects of the capital’s development. He personally interviewed potential Commissioners of the NCDC and approved the final selection of John Overall, Chief Architect for the Department of Works in Melbourne.32 Overall was well aware of Menzies’ interest in developing Canberra as an object of national pride, and this inevitably affected the kind of plans created for Canberra, particularly plans for the national areas.

Another example of Menzies’ personal intervention into the capital involved the creation of the lakes which Menzies considered to be an integral part of the future Canberra. When the Treasury struck from the Government Budget a one million pound appropriation to begin work on Canberra’s lake system, Menzies was away in England. After he returned to Australia, he dealt with this issue quickly and stepped up the pace of development. He noted in his memoirs: ‘needless to say, Overall’s men were on the job the next morning’.33

The Prime Minister confessed he had originally considered Canberra ‘a place of exile’, but soon realised that ‘Canberra was and would continue to be the capital of the nation, and that it was imperative to make it a worthy capital; something that the

30Senate, p. 23.
31Sparke, p. 32.
33Menzies, p. 147.
Figure 4.1 From a 1983 NCDC staff magazine. [Source: Sparke, Eric, Canberra 1954-1980, Canberra, 1988, p. 65.]
... In the beginning or circa 1957 A.D.

AND LET THERE BE A

N.C.D.C.
Australian people would come to admire and respect; something that would be a focal point for national pride and sentiment'. Reflecting on the creation of a national capital, Menzies wrote, ‘Old nations have old capitals, rich in history and the beauty of age: London, Paris, Rome, but for a new nation the problem is different, for it must consciously create a capital with all its history to come’. The challenge of creating the capital was also an opportunity to shape ‘the history to come’ with careful planning.

Menzies believed ‘Every nation needs a capital city of which it can be proud’. Looking back in 1970 on the development of the capital, Menzies wrote, ‘I am delighted in my old age to think that Australia’s capital has now become an object of pride and pleasure. This was always a national conclusion devoutly to be wished’. The following chapter explores how and why the creation of a national capital as a proud symbol of Australia may have been particularly relevant to Menzies’ and other parliamentarian’s understanding of Australian society and politics in the late 1950s and 1960s.

3. Holford’s Vision

In 1957, Menzies approached Sir William Holford, Professor of Town Planning at University College, London, about coming to Canberra to comment on the capital’s future development. After Holford returned from his visit to Canberra, Menzies had further discussions about the capital with him in London. Holford was known internationally in 1957 for his work on the postwar reconstruction planning of London and as chairman of the adjudicators in the design competition for the planning of Brasilia. Menzies wanted him to use his considerable authority as a town planner to help galvanise

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35Menzies, p. 142. Menzies also relates in his memoirs that the Minister for the Interior, Gordon Freeth told him, ‘There is a widespread feeling that, as you have been in a material sense the father of this lake, it should be named after you’. Menzies declined and stated his preference for the name Lake Burley Griffin. (Menzies, pp. 147-8.)
36Menzies, p. 142.
37Menzies, p. 147.
38Sparke, p. 56.
39Fischer, p. 65.
political support for increased planning efforts in Canberra. This purpose comes through in Holford’s report, *Observations on the Future Development of Canberra*. Holford’s visionary espousal of developing Canberra would help give renewed vigour to planning and construction, although many of his specific designs would not find their way into implementation.

To emphasise a perceived need for increased funding and development efforts in Canberra, Holford claimed that the city was at an important crossroads with destiny. He described only two alternatives for the city’s future:

*either* to remain a divided city, with the flood plain of the Molonglo as an open wedge between the federal town on the south bank and the municipality on the north ... *or* to become a unified city, metropolitan in character if not size, a cultural and administrative centre and a national capital.

Yet even if there were only two options for Canberra’s development, (and of course there were not) a lack of aesthetic principles to guide Canberra’s development would not, as Holford claimed, prevent Canberra from being an administrative centre. According to Fischer, ‘The actual choice which lay before Canberra was whether it should be developed as a capital whose standards were to be determined by its function as an administrative centre only or whether it should become a representative showpiece of the nation’. [Figure 4.2] Holford labelled the alternatives he presented ‘retrenchment or ‘going forward’ and claimed that if the first alternative was chosen, Canberra ‘would deserve the gibe that has already been thrown at it, of being a good sheep-station spoiled’. While he claimed that he ‘did not imagine that Canberra could be transformed suddenly into a monumental symbol of Federation’, if a ‘real quality and imagination in the design’ were achieved, it would ‘lift Canberra at once into the ranks of the significant capital cities of the world’.

Some of the specific design that Holford recommended will be discussed in the next chapter, however my purpose here is to note that the Senate

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40Holford’s report was completed on 28 December 1957 but not publicly released until 8 May 1958. (Sparke, p. 58.)
42Fischer, p. 67.
43Holford, p. 7
44Holford, p. 7.
Figure 4.2 Peter Harrison’s 1956 comparison what was built in Canberra and what Griffin had intended to build. [Source: Fischer, K.F., *Canberra: Myths and Models*, Hamburg, 1984, pp. 62-63.]
Select Committee, Menzies and Holford all argued for the creation of a national capital that would be a showpiece of Australian strength and stature as a nation. In the Senate Select Committee’s report, men like Griffin, O’Malley and Butters were portrayed as far­sighted men fighting for the creation of the capital, while others—such as members of the Departmental Board that hampered Griffin—appeared to have stood in the way of progress. The legacy that their own involvement with the capital might leave should be recognised as a force that may have contributed to Senator McCallum, Prime Minister Menzies and Professor Holford vigorously espousing the development of the capital. However, each appears to have genuinely believed the development of the capital would be a national asset worth the price to tax payers. It seemed axiomatic to them that the nation should display its perceived prosperity and maturity in the development of a national capital.

4. Structure of the NCDC

In 1957, the federal government created a planning organisation which it believed would have the power and ability to plan and construct a city that would meet its aspirations as elucidated by the Senate Select Committee and Menzies. The NCDC Act of 1957 created a corporate body given the broadly defined task of undertaking and carrying out, ‘the planning, development and construction of the City of Canberra as the National Capital of the Commonwealth’.\(^{45}\) Prime Minister Menzies agreed with the Senate Committee’s recommendations concerning the need for a powerful commission ‘autonomous within its Budget’, to be put in charge of Canberra’s growth.\(^{46}\) The NCDC would have a commissioner appointed for a 7-year term and two associate commissioners. Staff in the Department of Interior and Works engaged in matters that became the responsibility of the commission were transferred to the NCDC. Although the NCDC would have to keep the Minister of the Interior advised of its actions, in the case of an unresolved difference of opinion, the matter would be decided by the

\(^{45}\)NCDC, \textit{First Annual Report}, p. 4.
\(^{46}\)Menzies quoted in, Fischer, p. 67; Sparke, p. 66.
Governor-General in Council. The government would come to fund the NCDC generously throughout the 1960s, but its annual review meant that the commission had to maintain a good relationship with Parliament. Chaired by the commissioner and having eight other members, a National Capital Planning Committee was to advise the commission. The residents of the Australian Capital Territory were represented through an Advisory Council, which could request information and make recommendations to the Minister of the Interior, but had no legislative or executive power. Land was to be transferred to the commission for development and then would revert to the control of the relevant department. In returning the administration of land to government departments after construction, the organisation of the NCDC deliberately differed from that of the Federal Capital Commission, which had become unpopular with residents because it not only planned Canberra but governed the capital.

As mentioned above, the job of Commissioner went to John Overall. Overall was considered to be a leader of men. He was chosen to get a job done just as the Federal Capital Commission’s John Butters had been in 1924. Overall was twice decorated while serving as an engineering officer at Tobruk and El Alamein, and in 1943 organised the first Australian army paratroop force. A parallel can be drawn between the original organisation of the NCDC and an elite military unit. The staff of the NCDC was to be kept small--originally 33. Each of Overall’s associate commissioners and senior officers was picked for loyalty to him and for their expertise in managing the various departments.

47Fischer, p.66; Sparke, p. 65.
48Harrison, in Fischer, p. 67.
49The Advisory Committee was made up of ‘leading men of their professions and drawn from various states in Australia’. It included architects, engineers and members of the Australian Planning Institute. (Canberra Times, 12 March 1959, p. 14.)
50The ACT Advisory Council was established in 1930, to represent residents of the ACT. The council was comprised of four nominated members--one officer each from the Departments of Works and Health and two from Interior--and five members elected by the people. (Sparke, pp. 11-13.)
51R. Mendelsohn, who, as a Member of the Prime Minister’s Department in 1957 helped draft Menzies’ comment on the need to create the NCDC, reflected in 1987 that, ‘What we did not anticipate or recommend was that the NCDC would become involved with day-to-day administration. We saw it essentially as a commission planning and executing works and then passing them over to the Department of the Interior or some other administrative body. The NCDC now diverges sharply from the original intention . . . not to involve itself in day-to-day administration. In the end, what we’ve got now is a situation where it is difficult to know who is responsible for individual matters--the NCDC or the Department of Territories’. (R. Mendelsohn in Phillip Hobbs, ‘A Vision for the Capital’, Canberra Times, January 3, 1987, p. 13.)
required to create a national capital. Associate commissioner, Bill Andrews, brought experience in town planning and local government. The other associate commissioner, Grenfell Rudduck, had been a regional planning adviser to the Department of the Army. Bob Lansdown was trained as an economist, and served as secretary manager. Clive Pierce came from the Tasmanian Hydro-Electric Authority to supervise major engineering works. Peter Funda had worked for the New South Wales Housing Commission and was put in charge of district development—organising the engineering of the city's infrastructure, and homes. Peter Harrison was a Senior Lecturer in Town and Country Planning at the University of Sydney. He became the Senior Town Planner and would be responsible for the overall urban form of the city.

The NCDC's institutional arrangement, relative autonomy, and sufficient funding contributed to a unique environment in which to create a city and national capital. The NCDC intended to hire Australian or international firms perceived to be at the forefront of planning technology and trends and have them act as consultant planners. Once plans were developed, the institutional freedom of the NCDC and its lack of internal bureaucracy allowed the rapid implementation of designs, before the original ideals had been adulterated by politics, or by changing ideas.

The original methodology with which the NCDC planned the future development of Canberra was very similar to that used by the Commonwealth when it first selected the site for the capital 50 years before. The NCDC began with the same process of surveying the Canberra region and analysing data that had been carried out before the Federal Capital Design Competition. The results of the NCDC's initial survey of Canberra were published in 1959 in *Planning Survey of Canberra City District*. This survey included data on the population, infrastructure, land use, geology, and climate. This collection of data was used to produce the long range plan for Canberra described in the 1964 publication, *The Future Canberra*. The plan illustrated in *The Future Canberra* was, like the Griffin plan for growth to 75,000, a design for finite expansion to

53Sparke, p. 69.
54Wigmore, pp. 176-177; Sparke, pp. 173-177.
56NCDC, *The Future Canberra*. 
250,000. By the mid-1960s it became clear that growth would not stop at a population of 250,000 and the plan illustrated in the *Future Canberra* would have to be largely re-worked. The traffic problems it would create if growth exceeded the 250,000 mark would have been extremely difficult to ameliorate. The NCDC’s long-term planning then came to be directed more towards producing strategic plans that recognised the existence of different possible futures to be decided upon later.57

In its *First Annual Report*, the NCDC declared what it perceived to be its fourfold mission:

1. Complete the establishment of Canberra as the seat of government.
2. Further the development of Canberra as the Administrative Centre.
3. Give Canberra an atmosphere and individuality worthy of the National Capital.
4. Further the growth of the National Capital as a place in which to live in comfort and dignity.58

The belief that it should attempt to create a city worthy of being the national capital is an indication that the NCDC was committed to the creation of designs that would attempt to make the capital a national showpiece. The NCDC’s desire to create a national capital ‘atmosphere’ as well as improve the comfort and dignity of life for the city’s residents was well intentioned. However, these intentions were based on the NCDC’s official vision of just what the atmosphere of a national capital was and how people lived in comfort and dignity.

While developing the national capital aspects of Canberra was the NCDC’s primary mission, the initial need to provide for the more practical concerns of the rapidly expanding population appeared to be a more pressing and daunting task. In 1960, the NCDC believed that 95% of its budget would be spent on providing facilities for the growing population, and the size of the population dictated how much it would spend.59

The NCDC was concerned about receiving adequate funding, claiming that it was

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57 Fischer, p. 70.
59 Wigmore, p. 179.
planning for a population of 100,000 in 1970, and that if the growth rate continued to increase it ‘would exceed the Commission’s resources contemplated at present’. If population outstripped funding, land shortages, accommodation shortages, and high prices for housing would result. In 1960 there was already approximately a two-and-a-half year wait for government rental housing.

Once the precedent had been established that the NCDC would receive adequate funding, and the commission became more confident in its ability to meet the task at hand, growth would no longer be declared a problem. In its *Third Annual Report* (1960) the NCDC saw itself having to choose ‘between satisfying municipal pressures and providing for the national elements implicit in the National City concept’. However, the *Sixth Annual Report* (1963) declared that: ‘The city will continue in prosperity and growth through succeeding decades. This is inevitable and desirable’. As the concern about population growth subsided within the NCDC, the development of national areas became a greater priority for planning.

The delineation the NCDC perceived between planning for the needs of the city’s population and the planning of national capital features indicates the way the NCDC conceptualised and organised the planning of Canberra around what it perceived to be different types of space. National areas, residential areas, and commercial areas, as well as the roads that connected them, were designed by different planning departments in the NCDC or contracted out to planning firms specialising in planning these types of spaces. The NCDC assigned spaces with the intended functions they were planned to serve. These perceived functional boundaries also became boundaries between the jurisdictions of the different NCDC departments. Hence maps such as Figure 4.3 not only describe the plan of the city, but are semantic maps of the NCDC’s internal organisational structure. The next chapter explores how the NCDC’s strategy of breaking the city down into planned spaces based on their intended functions carried with it assumptions about

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64NCDC, *Sixth Annual Report*, p. 5; also in Fischer, p. 71.
Figure 4.3 Plan for Canberra’s town centres in late 1980’s. [Source: Sparke, Eric, *Canberra 1954-1980*, Canberra, 1988, p. 159.]
how people would react to and use these spaces. As with the FCC’s development of Canberra, when the idea of the NCDC’s city came to be populated some people invented their own uses for Canberra’s spaces.

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The creation of the NCDC as a powerful and well funded planning organisation signified a governmental commitment to a vision of Canberra as more than the geographical location of government departments and offices. This can be gleaned from the report of the Senate Select Committee and Menzies’ request for Holford to come to Canberra. ‘How much more?’, is one of the questions that the next chapter seeks to explore. I propose that the NCDC attempted to design a capital that would not only be a symbol of existing Australian society, but create the beachhead of a new Australian society that could help reform the existing Australian society. The NCDC declared in 1964:

A city is more than bricks and mortar, it is a reflection of society, and a national capital is bound to reflect the needs and characteristics of the nation which has built it. It is essential that Canberra should work effectively as a legislative and administrative centre, but of even greater importance, is the effect the city will have on the hearts and minds of the Australian people.65

The NCDC believed that its planning would be able to influence the emotions and values, or hearts and minds, of visitors and inhabitants in the national capital. This architecturally deterministic notion would manifest itself, for example, in the attempt to create ‘national shrines’ which invoked an ‘atmosphere of sanctuary and dedication’ for the ‘pilgrims’.66 In its designs, the NCDC was not only attempting to transform the nation’s ‘nebulous ideals and ethos into brick and stone’, thus capturing an official definition of Australian national identity. It was also attempting to create the physical form that it envisioned a more ideal society would inhabit, so that every citizen could participate more fully in this identity.

The belief that the society of the capital would take on characteristics that the NCDC intended its designs to embody emerged as a guiding principle of Canberra’s

planning during the 1960s. The NCDC believed it was responsible for creating the ethos of society in the capital: ‘The development of a particular civic spirit is largely dependent on the environment produced by plans and professional design’. However, in many ways this was a faulty assumption. The superficiality of the plan to create community with the design of Canberra’s environment is illustrated in microcosm by the statue of Ethos (Spirit of the Community) placed in Civic Square in 1962. Tom Bass’ copper sculpture figures prominently in numerous NCDC photos, such as [Figure 4.4] where young children are presumably learning about Australian civitas on a trip to Canberra. However, the stylised sculpture is just that--stylised. It cannot express (let alone inculcate) a real definition of ‘the Spirit of the Community’. The NCDC was incorrect in its assumption that its designs would instantly create emotional attachments to Canberra and between Canberrans. They did not count on people drawing their own conclusions about what the function and meaning of Canberra’s spaces were. Standing as it does, in the so called ‘Civic Square’, which is, even today, often deserted after 5 pm, Ethos may be more of a recognition of a need for community than a means of expressing characteristics of a community.[Figure 4.5]

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Figure 4.4  Tom Bass’ copper sculpture *Ethos (Spirit of the Community)* placed in Civic Square in 1962. [Source: Wigmore, Lionel, *The Long View*, Canberra, 1963, p. 11.]
Figure 4.5 Civic Square. [Source: NCDC, *Fifth Annual Report*, Canberra, 1962, p. 2.]
Canberra City Square, early evening
Chapter Five: The NCDC’s Capital

In the first half of this thesis, I explored how the design of the Australian national capital was not, as was sometimes claimed, a spontaneous expression of an Australian national identity. Rather, the creation of a national capital was a careful and deliberate attempt by parliamentarians and planners to use the city to address problems which were perceived to be threatening the development, security, stability and legitimacy of the nation. I proposed, for example, that the State’s abiding interest in maintaining the health of the Australian race (which was perceived to be under threat) influenced both the location and design of the capital. Successive governments actively sought to employ the design and construction of the capital as a tool to help lead Australian society to adopt the values and characteristics of an ideal Australian society that was perceived to be better for the nation as a whole. The unique organisation of space in Canberra can be better understood by relating it to the government’s national agendas of the same period.

As outlined in Chapter Four, the NCDC was created to give physical form to the ideals and aspirations of another generation of Australians (as their government representatives chose to define them). The NCDC would carry out its own plan--not Griffin’s plan or Sulman’s plan--in an attempt to further contemporary national agendas. In 1905, the Bulletin had called for the creation of a vigorous national heart whose pulsing throbs would be felt in the farthest reaches of the nation and show Australia’s strength to the world.1 Answering this agenda in the 1960s, the NCDC promised to make Canberra ‘the centre of a dynamic country . . . to devise a plan which will provide a physical symbol to the rest of the country and the world of the strength and character of Australia’.2 The NCDC professed that its goal was to make the capital ‘an effective symbol of Australian unity and the common purpose of the Australian people’,3 as well

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1See Chapter One.
2NCDC, Third Annual Report, Canberra, 1960, p. 5.
3NCDC, Third Annual Report, p. 5.
as a symbol of Australian economic development.\textsuperscript{4} In carrying out this mission, however, the NCDC was not necessarily attempting to symbolise existing qualities of the nation. In the 1950s and 1960s, Australia remained largely an exporter of raw materials rather than a manufacturing nation.\textsuperscript{5} Far from feeling complacently culturally unified, Australian culture was perceived, by the government, to be under attack by the mass immigration deemed necessary to fuel development.\textsuperscript{6} Thus, what was to be symbolised in Canberra during the 1960s was not the existing nation, but a desired future for the nation--one where immigrants had been successfully assimilated and development had expanded and altered the Australian economy. Furthermore, the government and planners assumed that the construction of a national capital embodying these ideals would do more than symbolise the hope of the future--it would help create that future in the nation.

The rapid development of the national capital was perceived to be a way of enhancing the further development of the nation beyond Canberra’s borders. William Holford, in a 1965 follow-up report on Canberra, claimed that Canberra was ‘a place where growth and development are being initiated, not only in local projects but in national policies’.\textsuperscript{7} Menzies claimed the ‘broad policy’ of his government was to ensure economic stability at home, not only for its domestic advantages but also because we knew that for the rapid development of our enormous resources, particularly mineral, which were being disclosed, we would need investment and expertise from overseas to supplement our own resources. I believed, and I still believe, that a nation which has any great need of developmental capital from abroad can attract it only if its exhibits to the world an integrity in which the world believes, a responsible attitude towards its obligations, a stable economic base, and political steadiness.\textsuperscript{8}

Menzies believed that many investors saw that the potential for Australian investment was great,

but this alone would not have been sufficient if the nature and actions of the Australian Government had not been such as to give confidence to the investor . . . Most overseas investors wanted to see a stability in the

\textsuperscript{5}Arndt, \textit{A Small Rich Industrial Country}, Canberra, 1968, p. 150.
Australian economy and in its political management, because they did not want to put their treasure into a leaky vessel.9

The Prime Minister realised that making the national capital into a splendid symbol of the nation’s propensity and ability for development, as well as its stability, might help ensure investor ‘confidence’. The image that Menzies was trying to create for the Australian economy would be echoed in the image the NCDC was trying to create for Canberra during the 1960s. According to the NCDC in 1964, ‘Perhaps the most fundamental quality desirable in a capital city is a sense of permanence and stability’.10

In 1962, Alexander Downer, the Minister for Immigration, claimed that ‘Australia has impelling reasons both domestic and external, to demonstrate its determination and ability to maintain [a] high rate of development’.11 The desire to demonstrate an ability to develop stemmed in part from the goal of attracting overseas investment, and the further construction of Canberra became an important means of demonstrating a commitment and ability to develop. By providing tangible proof that Australia could effectively utilise development funds for the creation of national assets such as the Snowy River Project and Canberra, the nation might attract more foreign investment. By the time he retired, Menzies was proud that his government had been able to borrow over a billion dollars for development projects.12 Furthermore, Menzies claimed his government had attracted over $4 billion in private foreign investment to Australia.13

In this chapter I draw on examples of designs created by the NCDC’s traffic planners, national area planners, and residential area planners, and relate their designs to the larger national agendas of promoting development and assimilation. In the last chapter I mentioned that the NCDC divided the city up into different areas based on the function of those areas. While Griffin had designed the entire plan for Canberra—from suburbs to national areas, from streets to shopping facilities—town planners of the 1960s

9Menzies, p. 102. Menzies would also reverse this logic for political gain. In 1958, Menzies claimed, ‘successful borrowing abroad was proof of the confidence which overseas investors had in the soundness of the Australian economy and the good sense of [his] Government’s policies’. (‘Excited about Papua Oil says Mr. Menzies’, Canberra Times, 7 November 1958, p. 15.)
were more likely to specialise in certain aspects of planning, such as, traffic planning, retail planning, or neighbourhood planning. The NCDC even employed the expertise of a ‘lighting engineer’ to plan the illumination of the central areas at night. The sheer diversity and amount of planning that went into Canberra’s second great phase of growth puts a comprehensive discussion of the capital’s planning during this period well beyond the scope of this thesis, however, the examples discussed below contribute to an understanding of the aspirations and assumptions behind Canberra’s design during the 1960s.

1. The Motorised Town

The use of Canberra as a symbol of Australia’s stature in the world had been recommended by the Committee of the Australian Planning Institute, reporting to the 1955 Senate Select Committee. William Holford, however, made the first serious attempt to suggest designs for such a city in his Observations. Holford’s experience as chairman of the adjudicators in the design of Brasilia—the attempt by Juscelino Kubitschek, Brazil’s president (1956-61), to show his country’s ability and propensity for development—made Holford seem well suited to recommend designs for Canberra. The NCDC used Holford’s designs as a starting point for its planning initiatives.

For the overall form of Canberra, Holford envisioned the creation of a ‘fully motorised town’. He believed that if the lake was to be created in the centre of Canberra a ‘road on the lines of an American “freeway” will be urgently required to link various centres together’. His plans included the creation of a ‘main artery’ and various ‘parkways’. [Figure 5.1]

Holford’s design for high speed roads in Canberra linked it to the design of Brasilia, which had also been planned as a city of highways. According to Holston, the planning of Brasilia ‘privileged the automobile and the aesthetic of speed at a time when

16Holford, Observations, p. 10.
17Holford, Observations, p. 11.
18Holford, Observations, p. 12.
Figure 5.1 Holford’s plan for more fast traffic roads (dotted lines).
Brazil (especially under Kubitschek) was embarking on a program of industrialisation especially focussed on the automobile industry’. The design of Canberra also reflects the aesthetic of effortless motor speed at a time when the federal government was emphasising the development of Australia’s automobile manufacturing capabilities. Between mid-1958 to mid-1963, approximately 1.5 million motor bodies were produced --slightly more than the number of new vehicles registered during that period. White notes that both the Labor and Liberal parties emphasised the importance of increasing manufacturing, particularly automobile manufacturing, in the 1960s. In 1964, a Liberal Party think-tank, chaired by the retailer G. J. Coles, looked back with satisfaction on the ‘democratisation of the motor car with its side effects of road congestion, numerous, immaculate petrol stations and modern-architected motels’, as improvements in ‘the Australian way of life’. Minister for Trade John McEwen declared in 1960 that, 'A thousand new motor cars are being registered every day. There are 800,000 television sets in use. Those are indicators of bursting prosperity'.

The NCDC followed Holford’s emphasis on highway planning, and privileged the motor car in the design of Canberra. The NCDC hired American traffic consultants who encouraged the creation of an ‘auto-dominant city’ in Canberra, announcing the capital’s and Australia’s participation in the ‘age of prosperity and convenience’. The NCDC accepted this vision and claimed in 1964 that ‘The plan now proposed for the future city assumes that Canberra will remain a car reliant society--that is to say the percentage of people who use public transport for the critical journey to work will remain relatively small’.

In the 1960s, computer modelling of traffic flows based on American experiences indicated that large traffic corridors would almost always have lower operating costs than

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19Holston, pp. 95-6.
20Bolton, Geoffrey, The Oxford History of Australia, V. 5, Melbourne, 1990, p. 96. By the early 1960s between 80,000 and 100,000 workers were employed in the automotive industry, while over 150,000 people serviced vehicles. (Bolton, p. 99.)
24NCDC, Future Canberra, p. 29.
smaller roads.  

[Figure 5.2] The perceived desirability of freeways--as cost-effective symbols of modernity--helped shape Canberra into the Y-Plan of the late 1960s.  

[Figure 5.3] By spreading the city out over a variety of centres connected by freeways, planning forced more Canberrans to enter the motor age if they could possibly afford it. In this NCDC rendition of a planned traffic corridor connecting town centres, the inclusion of pedestrians alongside cars speeding towards the horizon seems only to emphasise the need for motor transportation in the city the NCDC intended to create. 

[Figure 5.4] The NCDC did not believe the growing size of the low density city would inconvenience inhabitants. The NCDC planned its transportation network to minimise travel time rather than trip length.  

They reasoned that longer trips would not worry travellers because they would be able to speed to their destination in less time by freeway. These priorities were determined before concerns about energy consumption and environmental sustainability became important political issues. However, concerns were raised at the time by some citizens who believed the increased reliance on the motor car did not automatically translate into a better way of life.

In 1966, G. J. R. Linge, fellow in the Department of Geography at the Australian National University, wrote an article, ‘Canberra: a future metropolis’, which criticised the emphasis the NCDC and Holford placed on the development of freeways. He warned of the danger that people could be pushed--even stampeded--into accepting some of the metropolitan-type status symbols (such as an over-elaborate freeway system) without thinking through the alternatives ranging from the reshaping of the form and function of the future metropolitan layout to the upgrading of existing routeways.

The mind boggles at the whole paraphernalia of the freeway system at present proposed for Canberra.  

In planning for the future, the NCDC was, in the early 1960s, perhaps carried away with its plans for expressways. 

Based on traffic studies done in 1961 when the entire population of Canberra was 75,000 people, the NCDC was planning for ‘expressways capable of taking traffic flows of up to 100,000 vehicles daily. This is

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26Fischer, p. 89.
27Fischer, p. 95.
Figure 5.2 Transportation costs associated with different road types. [Source: Fischer, K.F., *Canberra: Myths and Models*, Hamburg, 1984, p. 88.]
Fig. 5. 2. 3. A consultant diagram depicting total transportation costs associated with alternative road types.

Source. Voorhees, 1967
Figure 5.3 The Y-Plan. [Source: Sparke, Eric, *Canberra 1954-1980*, Canberra, 1988, p. 155.]
Looking ahead to future growth of a million for Canberra, the two northern arms of the Y-plan extended over the ACT border into NSW. A linear strategy to cope with long-term growth originated in the report of Alan Voorhees and Associates of Washington to NCDC in January 1967. This diagram by Peter Harrison, which appeared in Architecture in Australia in August 1968, made the full extent of the general concept public for the first time.
Figure 5.4 NCDC's depiction of a traffic corridor. [Source: Fischer, K.F., *Canberra: Myths and Models*, Hamburg, 1984, p. 81.]
Figure 5.5 NCDC’s depiction of Canberra’s road networks. [Source: NCDC, *Twelfth Annual Report*, Canberra, 1969, p. 14.]
Artist's impression illustrating the general principles of the Ring Road to be built on Capital Hill to distribute increasing volumes of north-south traffic through Canberra

Artist's impression of State Circle looking towards the Ring Road overpass bridge

Artist's impression of the Commonwealth Avenue-State Circle overpass bridge
about the same level of traffic flow as on the Sydney Harbour Bridge".29 [Figure 5.6] However, the NCDC was planning not only for a then rapidly increasing population, but for a more affluent time when an even greater proportion of the population would become car reliant.30 Given the NCDC's acceptance of Canberra as a car-reliant city, and the belief that motor cars were a sign of prosperity, had it not planned for large traffic flows in the city's near future, the NCDC might appear to be lacking confidence in the continued 'bursting prosperity' of Australia.

Following from Holford, the NCDC was mindful of how the parliamentary triangle would be viewed from the motor car travelling on high speed roads. Therefore, unlike cities where the buildings were meant to be viewed from close up, the monumental buildings in the parliamentary triangle would have to be designed so that the facades of the buildings would be 'simple and sufficiently large in scale to be easily apparent when viewed from comparatively great distances. In addition, the rhythm of the facades should be simple and clear'.31 [Figure 5.7]

Fischer points out that in the NCDC's vision of a 'pastoral garden city atmosphere' residential areas were meant to 'all but disappear under a canopy of green'.32 This served to magnify the visual contrast between the monumental government buildings and the residential areas when viewed from a distance. Furthermore, because they were planned to be seen at great distances, the open spaces of Canberra's parliamentary triangle became 'mere design elements . . . designed for being viewed from cars and lookouts' but 'virtually inaccessible for pedestrians'.33 Upon reflection today, these design priorities may seem strange, but buildings in the parliamentary triangle still stand out on green lawns as testament to the goals of planning carried out during the 1960s.

2. Key Structures

30 NCDC, Future Canberra, p. 29.
32 NCDC in Fischer, p. 72.
33 Fischer, p. 72.
Figure 5.6 Road specifications. [Source: Rankine & Hill, *Canberra Area Transportation Study*, Canberra, 1963.]
Canberra Area Transportation Study

Minimum Cross Sections
Arterial Streets
250,000 Population Level
Figure 5.7 Groups of buildings designed to be viewed at a distance.
The National Library and new Commonwealth Offices seen across the lake.

Commonwealth Avenue Bridge and lake.

View across the lake to Russell Offices.
Although an emphasis on the motor car was more of an expression of a generic modern culture than a particularly Australian one, Holford assumed that, through design, the capital would become an effective symbol of Australian culture. In his *Observations*, Holford did not define *culture*, calling it 'an awkward word to use'; but, for want of a better, employed it to describe the 'essential character of a capital city'. It seemed to mean that the city would become both a condenser and amplifier of the Australian national identity as the government chose to express it. Holford believed that two new building groups would 'do more than anything else' to start a 'chain reaction' which would lead to Canberra's recognition as a cultural centre. These building groups were a new Parliament House and a 'first-rate civic auditorium'. Both were 'buildings that can be given fine architectural expression in the twentieth century; socially and culturally they are key structures'.

Holford took issue with the notion that the best site for Parliament House would be the focal point of the parliamentary triangle on Capital Hill. He believed the symbolism of looking up at a large Parliament House dominating the highest point of the triangle was wrong. The Parliament House should, in Holford's opinion, be an 'active, democratic building and should be in the forum not on the hilltop'. He proposed that the new Parliament House be located on the land axis at the south shore of the lake. To 'crown Capital Hill', Holford proposed a 'Royal Pavilion' for 'her Majesty the Queen', who was also Queen of Australia. Symbolically this Royal Pavilion would be of immense importance. The Chief Ambassador of the Commonwealth would have an official residence in the midst of the embassies and legations and Ministers' houses in the Capital.

This would have gone a long way towards correcting the symbolism of the Australian-American Memorial at the end of King's Avenue which the British High Commissioner

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34 Holford, p. 10.
35 Holford, p. 10. Holford was not explicit about what a civic auditorium should be. He claimed that it should be something like the Capitol in Washington and the Royal Festival Hall in London. (Holford, p. 10.).
36 Holford, p. 13.
37 Holford, p. 13.
38 Holford, p. 10.
Stephen Holmes described in the mid-1950s as an ‘undesirable transfer of admiration’ from Britain to America.39 [Figure 5.8]

The NCDC agreed with Holford that design could be used to make Canberra reflect and perhaps help define Australian culture. It claimed that, ‘Australia has its own way of life and it is to be hoped that the quality and character of our national buildings will reflect the particular environment in which they are set and the vigorous young culture which inspired them’.40 However, the NCDC placed a greater emphasis on using buildings to construct an authoritative definition of Australian culture than on reaffirming the nation’s ties to the Queen. At the first meeting of the National Capital Planning Committee on 16 April 1958, the NCDC proposed for Capital Hill, the creation of a National Centre. It was to be a kind of ‘Pantheon or secular cathedral’, related to Griffin’s original concept of a ‘Capitol’ for the site.41 [Figure 5.9]

The design of the National Centre was an expression of the NCDC’s belief that in other great capitals the ‘ideals and aspirations’ of the nation were declared. According to the NCDC the capital should ‘excite the imagination and raise the vision of its people’.42 The parliamentary triangle was to create a fine setting for national institutions of Government such as ‘the Parliament, the Courts, the Mint, National Libraries, [and] National Museums. Within these buildings, and in their garden settings, they enshrine their national history’.43 One of the more overt ways that the design of the parliamentary triangle was to advance the agendas of the Australian state was to put an official history of Australia on display. For the NCDC, Washington in particular was considered to be

39S. Holmes, in John Stevens ‘War Memorial symbol of split’, in Sydney Morning Herald, 2 January 1985; Sparke, p. 5. One of the themes of historian K. S. Inglis’ article ‘Ceremonies in a Capital Landscape’, is to show how the planning and architecture of Canberra, especially after WWII, displayed the nation’s increasing ties with the United States. In particular he notes ‘the strategy of successive Australian foreign ministers after the eclipse of British power in the Pacific’ was, in the words of historian W. J. Hudson, ‘ensnarement of the United States’. Inglis believes this was ‘certainly the policy of [Minister for External Affairs] Richard Gardner Casey’. Referring to Canberra’s Australian American Memorial, dedicated in 1954 by the Queen, Inglis wrote, ‘If the American eagle on Russell Hill was not actually ensnared, it looked unlikely to take off’. (K. S. Inglis, ‘Ceremonies in a Capital Landscape: Scenes in the Making of Canberra’, Stephen R. Graubard (ed.), Australia: The Daedalus Symposium, Sydney, 1985, pp. 104-105.)

40NCDC, Future Canberra, p. 12.

41Sparke, p. 78.

42NCDC, Third Annual Report, p. 6.

43NCDC, Third Annual Report, p. 6.
Figure 5.8  Australian-American Memorial. [Source: Sparke, Eric, *Canberra 1954-1980*, Canberra, 1988, p. 4.]
Figure 5.9 1959 NCDC conception of the National Centre. [Source: Sparke, Eric, *Canberra 1954-1980*, Canberra, 1988, p. 79.]
NCDC's 1959 idea for a National Centre on Capital Hill comprised a series of galleries having as their theme the development of Australia and its contribution to civilisation.
‘in every sense a great National Capital’, because ‘it enshrines the nation’s history and it offers great interest to millions of Americans who visit it each year to see the national shrines’. As previously mentioned, these shrines were supposed to invoke an emotional response in the visitors, creating an ‘atmosphere of sanctuary and dedication’ for the ‘pilgrims’. The NCDC believed the National War Memorial, opened in 1941, had achieved this.

The National Centre the NCDC planned as the focal point of Canberra was to have as its central feature:

an assembly area around which there could be a series of pavilions, each dedicated to some particular aspect of Australian culture, illustrating for example the history, national resources and economic development of the country and its territories, native life and customs, literature and the fine arts, and other significant features of the Australian way of life. It would provide a fitting centre for the commemoration of the achievements of the great figures in our history, as well as an appropriate setting for out-of-door ceremonies.

The National Centre remained planned for this site until the late 1960s when the salient feature of Australian culture to be expressed at the apex of the triangle would again be debated.

By having pavilions dedicated to examples of history, national resources and the economic development of the country and its territories, Canberra could proclaim the opportunities for international investment in a kind of permanent World’s Fair exhibition. Even pavilions on other aspects of the ‘Australian way of life’ that the NCDC deemed ‘significant’, such as Australian arts and literature, might help assure Australians as well as foreign investors that, despite Australia’s location in the world, Australian culture was thoroughly western and thoroughly modern. According to White, throughout the 1950s and into the 1960s the concept of the Australian way of life, ‘was central to any discussion of Australian society’.

44NCDC, Third Annual Report, p. 6.
45NCDC, Third Annual Report, p. 6.
46NCDC in Sparke, p. 78.
47White, p. 158. Bolton notes that after World War II, ‘Australia’s dependency on Britain would be followed by dependency, perhaps less formal but no less pervasive, on either the United States or Japan. How far this dependency would be tempered by a mature sense of national identity and nationally determined social and economic self-interest remained one of the great questions of the future. A. D. Hope, in an often quoted poem, looked for the time when Australians would turn their backs on “that chatter of cultured apes/ Which is called civilization over there”’. (Bolton, p. 4.)
national type in the 1940s, and in 1953 alone three general surveys of Australia were published—one entitled *The Australian Way of Life*, and the other two discussing the idea. The term was associated with 'the image of Australia as a sophisticated, urban, industrialised, consumer society'. This image of the Australian way of life was not without challenge in Australia at the time, and the attempt to make it the focus of the parliamentary triangle appears to be an attempt to help make the dream seem to be more of a reality. White notes that critics of the concept pointed out how meaningless it was. According to the journalist Elizabeth Webb:

> When it comes to the Australian Way of Life every foreigner I have met is completely at sea. To quote one—'What is this Way of Life? No one yet tells me what this is! Yet always they tell me I must adopt it... perhaps I begin to behave like you behave in pubs. I drink beer until I am stupid. Or learn to “put in the boot” and bash the other fellow with a bottle... Is this the way of life I must learn? Thank you. No. I stay a bloody Reffo!'

The Australian way of life was difficult to define even for its acolytes, who often had to resort to trying to explain what it was by saying what it wasn’t. One writer claimed that

> ‘the beer-swilling spectacle in any Sydney pub ten minutes before closing time’ was not ‘a true or even partly true picture of the Australian way of life’, but he could only define its essence as ‘something which for all its uneasiness and confusion seems to talk of true democracy of the spirit’.

By emphasising Australia’s achievements in various fields in the National Centre, the NCDC would have been providing tangible exhibitions of the Australian way of life that countered the view that Australians were more interested in drinking or brawling than other nationalities.

Maintaining the identity of a nation committed to the perceived requirements for development such as industriousness, literacy and education, as well as national industrialisation, was important to Australia’s world image. The government wanted to emphasise Australia’s ties to the values and thinking of western developed nations even though Australia had a largely agricultural economy. According to the Canberra based economist, H. W. Arndt, writing in 1968,

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48 White, p. 161.
49 Elizabeth Webb in White, p. 161.
50 George Johnston, in White, p. 160.
Australia is part of a world which, for economic purposes, has come to be divided into two classes of countries: developed and developing. For some years, Australia's official spokesmen have fought a strenuous battle against this simple classification and have claimed for Australia a 'midway' status.51

In 1964 Australian Minister for External Affairs, Sir Garfield Barwick, argued, 'Australia is singularly placed in relation to the [South-East Asian] region. We stand mid-stream between the “have” and the “have-nots” as a developing country'. For Barwick it was 'Our national income ... our standard of literacy and educational facilities', that 'put us vis-a-vis less developed countries in the “haves”'.52 Being classified as a nation among the ‘haves’ was perceived by the Australian government as important to national security.

The use of Canberra as an argument for Australia’s modernity and integrated participation in western culture had direct implications for Australia’s international relations. In the western world, one of the most pervasive ideological by-products of the Cold War was the modernization theory53 of the American economist and Presidential adviser, Walt Rostow. First developed in the 1950s and published in its most complete form in his 1960 book, Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto, Rostow’s theory elucidated five stages of economic growth that all nations passed through. These stages were: the traditional, the pre-conditional for take-off, the take-off, the drive to maturity, and the age of high mass consumption. By Rostow’s own admission many years later, his theories were in many ways a political exercise to help legitimise U. S. foreign policy actions, but the U. S. and most western nations accepted--or felt they could not afford to overlook--Rostow’s findings that less developed nations were much more susceptible to communist insurgency.54 Rostow believed that development could fight communism and thus contribute to internal and regional security as well as economic prosperity.

51Arndt, p. 150.
52Barwick, in Arndt, p. 150.
53Modernization in this context meant, ‘the current term for an old process--the process of social change whereby less developed societies acquire characteristics common to more developed societies’. (Daniel Lerner, ‘Modernization’, International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, V. 10, New York, 1968, p. 386.) I have used the American spelling. In this thesis the term, modernization and development are interchangeable.
In his book, *A Small Rich Industrial Country*, H. W. Arndt attempted to link the development of Canberra with Rostow's concept of economic 'take off', and to promote Canberra as a microcosm of what investment and vision could do for Australia. As early as 1963, Arndt noted that Canberra had begun growing much faster than expected in the late 1950s. It had begun 'a sort of take off into self-sustained cumulative growth'. He believed 'this was bound to happen sometime if the vision of Canberra as a National Capital did not fail'. Despite growth slowing down by 1968, Arndt looked back on his 1963 article, writing, 'The concept of a “take-off” in urban development, the idea that as Canberra reached some minimum size its further growth would become increasingly independent of artificial injections, was, I believe, essentially sound'. Arndt’s theory contributed to conceptions of the capital as a symbol of what the NCDC had called a 'dynamic nation'. Arndt’s interpretation of Canberra’s growth appeared to be proof in microcosm that national economic growth would also reach a form of self-sustaining development after the initial injections of foreign capital.

In Walt Rostow’s analysis of why some societies developed faster than others, he ‘discovered’ an ethos akin to a—not necessarily Protestant—work ethic. Racial type was no longer a determinant of the ability to develop as a nation. Japan’s development and the defeat of Russia in the Russo-Japanese war had shown the fallacy of white supremacy at the turn of the century and it had been reconfirmed during World War II. Rostow’s understanding of how some cultures were considered to be more conducive to creating economic growth may be related to the way Australian uniqueness was constructed in the Australian way of life to be put on display in the National Centre. It was no longer the Anglo-Saxon blood, but the nation’s values or culture (evinced by the National Centre) which helped make Australia qualify for the developmental fast-track. By Rostow’s reasoning, the more developed and culturally committed to development Australia appeared, the stronger ally it would make in the fight against communism.57

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55 Arndt, p. 121.
56 Arndt, p. 128
57 Menzies’ may have harboured the hope that a stronger image as a developed country may have furthered his mission of procuring nuclear weapons from the West. When he had tried to purchase nuclear bombs from Britain in 1957, they had been denied to him. On Menzies bid for nuclear weapons see Bolton, p. 94.
This interpretation of the importance of national culture may have contributed to the NCDC’s placement of the cultural zone. [Figure 5.10]

The National Centre was to feature the development of the Australian Territories. Another way that the construction of Canberra might have been perceived to further Australia’s economic development and international status was the way development of the Australian Capital Territory provided insight and experience which could be applied to other Australian Territories. Paul Hasluck, Minister for Territories, wrote that he toyed with the idea of creating an organisation like the National Capital Development Commission for Papua New Guinea. This ‘Papua New Guinea Development Commission’, would have had responsibility ‘for the planning and execution of designated projects’ such as hydro-electric projects and roads. Thus the capital was still being conceptualised by politicians as the model farm Staniforth Smith had suggested in 1901. Hasluck believed that because the NCDC was a successful organisation for developing the Australian Capital Territory, its example could be applied in other parts of Australia.

Figure 5.11 shows a 1962 Papuan delegation being shown the statue of Ethos in Canberra. This picture neatly summarises an important role that the development and design of the capital could play in national and international affairs. The photo suggests that Australia wanted less developed societies like that of the Papuans to see in the capital the prosperity and democratic system which the Australian ethos created. By instilling the same values in their own people, Papuans could hope to be as prosperous as Australia someday. This scene gave physical form to some politicians’ aspirations for the capital. Senator O’Byrne (Labor, Tasmania) had, like many Senators, expressed his approval of Canberra’s development in Parliament on 12 March 1959. On that day, the Canberra Times printed a supplement describing the NCDC’s plans for Canberra’s growth. O’Byrne’s remarks in Parliament focussed on the effect he wanted the design of the

59It is more common today to recognise that different cultures have their own conceptions of how they want to develop their economies and societies towards the future. It seems that people who believed ‘road congestion’ and ‘immaculate petrol stations’ were positive signs of ‘bursting prosperity’, and improvements on the Australian way of life, assumed that these would be considered by Papuans to be an improvement on the Papuan way of life.
Figure 5.10 1969 NCDC plan for the Parliamentary Triangle with a Culture Zone planned for the apex. [Source: Sparke, Eric, *Canberra 1954-1980*, Canberra, 1988, p. 116.]
Central area as planned in February 1965
Figure 5.11  Papuans brought to see the statue of Ethos (Spirit of the Community). [Source: Wigmore, Lionel, The Long View, Canberra, 1963, p. 205.]
national capital to have on people like the Papuans in Civic Square. He hoped for the further development of

a National Capital of which we all can be proud, a capital that incorporates the width of outlook, and the lofty ideals of a young nation in this part of the world. The concept itself could quite easily set an example for countries in the South-East Asian area which we hope will eventually adopt parliamentary government. Our national capital would be an example to them if the ideals were seen in its right perspective and translated into action.60

It is possible to wonder if the ideals O’Byrne believed in could really be effectively translated into physical space by planners, and whether Papuans, like Australian school children, could learn anything about parliamentary government from examining a stylised statue or monumental buildings. Furthermore, even if the intended message of Civic Square and the statue of *Ethos* was understood by the Papuans or other visitors, planners and politicians could only hope that other images, such as the emptiness of Civic Square captured in figure 4.5, would not lead people to draw their own conclusions about Australia, its ideals and its capital.

The ideals behind the planning of the national areas and other spaces in Canberra, as expressed by O’Byrne, McCallum, Menzies and others, were noble and well intentioned. However, they were based on large assumptions about the ability to convey and inculcate a specific message through the organisation of space. Understanding the government’s ideals and assumptions helps us to interpret and explain the designs the NCDC created in Canberra in the 1960s.

Menzies’ retirement by no means signalled the end of attempts to invest the concept of a national capital with ideals and aspirations. Parliamentarians continued to see the capital as a symbol and blueprint for national development. In 1966 Tom Uren (Labor, N. S. W.) advocated increased expenditure on the capital, claiming it should be ‘developed as a Capital City for a nation between 100 and 150 million people’.61 He believed the government should begin planning for a subway system and that the city would ‘one day be among the greats of the world’. For Uren, planning and development had made ‘a second-class sheep station... into a thing of beauty’, and he hoped the

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60 O’Byrne, Senate CPD 14:362.
government would plan the rest of Australia in what he called ‘the socialist way’. In 1972 Uren, then Whitlam’s Minister for Urban and Regional Development, claimed the government would use Canberra as ‘a social laboratory’ testing policies and programs before they were applied elsewhere in Australia. Whitlam himself believed there could be no better tribute to Walter Burley Griffin ‘than for his ideas of planned development to be taken up and applied throughout Australia’.

3. Suburbia

Between 1965 and 1972 the NCDC was developing 3 new towns or satellite cities on former grazing lands beyond the boundaries of the initial city Griffin had planned for. These areas were called Woden, Weston Creek and Belconnen. The Woden-Weston Creek area was planned to accommodate nearly 90,000 people, while Belconnen was planned to house ultimately 120,000. To provide retail and office space for Woden-Weston Creek, construction began on the Woden Town Centre in 1967. In 1972 the MLC tower was erected and the first stage of the Woden Plaza’s air-conditioned shopping mall was opened.

The NCDC took pride in its rapid development of new suburbs in these areas. It illustrated the pace of construction in a time chart with the Belconnen suburb of Macquarie as an example. It took only fifteen to sixteen months for a suburb to go from being open fields to being populated by its first residents and shopkeepers. Within 20 months, the neighbourhood of Macquarie had 252 houses and 900 residents. By 1972 the population of Belconnen alone was 30,000 in 11 suburbs.

The organisation of space in the new towns planned during the 1960s can be better understood by examining the ideals and assumptions of the politicians and planners responsible for their creation. In the new towns of Canberra, the NCDC had the resources and open land to experiment with many forms of housing. In the first part of this chapter I compared Canberra to Brasilia, which was another example of a planned

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63 Sparke, p. 204.
64 Sparke, p. 204.
capital where the design was influenced by the government’s desire to create a symbol and blueprint for the development of the nation. Brasilia and Canberra shared an urban form planned for the motorcar, as well as monumental government buildings dotting their central areas. In Brasilia, however, the residential areas of the city were designed to be very different from more traditional Brazilian homes. Rather than building homes along streets in Brasilia, the planners created large high-rise apartment buildings called *superquadras* to house the majority of the city’s population. These apartment complexes were arranged in sectors along exits from major highways, so that the journey from living to working could be made quickly and efficiently.[Figure 5.12] They symbolised a break with the past and the creation of a new, more modern Brasilia, which had the values of a rapidly developing nation. In Canberra, by way of comparison, although an important aspect of the NCDC’s residential areas of the 1960s was that they had to be easily accessible from fast traffic roads, the NCDC did not attempt to introduce an entirely new strategy for residential housing. Rather, it sought to refine the traditional Australian suburban development, housing people primarily in single family homes on individual plots of land. These homes were arranged in ‘neighbourhood’ groupings. The form and content of the NCDC’s ‘new towns’ and their ‘neighbourhood’ groupings are discussed below. However, as background to my explanation and interpretation of the NCDC’s residential areas, it is necessary to examine some contemporary perceptions of suburbia that can be related to political support for the continued use of the suburban home as the primary building block of the NCDC’s residential plans. The establishment of this context helps explain the expectations and parameters the NCDC believed politicians and society placed on its designs.

During the 1960s Australian intellectuals seemed to be in agreement with Donald Horne, who wrote in his 1964 book, *The Lucky Country*, about the ‘essentially suburban character of Australia’. The 1962 book, *Australian Civilization*, brought together essays by prominent Australian intellectuals seeking to define aspects of Australian culture. Many of the essays deal with the importance of suburbia to Australian

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66 Holston, p. 164.
Figure 5.12 Brasilia's residential areas. (2 pages) [Source: Holston, James, *The Modernist City: An Anthropological Critique of Brasilia*, Chicago, 1989, pp. 175-176.]
Fig. 3. View of Superquadra South 108 and typical floor plan by Oscar Niemeyer, Brasilia, 1959. From Brasilia: Edição Arbitraria e Engenharia (1960).
Fig. 5.5 Model of Superquadra South 308 and plans of entrance level and typical apartments, Brasilia, 1959. From Brasilia: Edição Arquitetura e Engenharia (1960).
culture. Ronald Taft, Reader in Psychology at the University of Western Australia, described suburbia as ‘that great middle-class institution’, which, ‘has been a prominent feature of Australian life for longer than any other country’. By the 1960s Australia had had, according to Taft, up to three generations of ‘8.10 am train catchers, Saturday gardeners and do-it-yourself home improvers’.68 The defining characteristics of these suburbs, where Taft claimed, eighty percent of Australian city dwellers lived, were ‘detached single-family houses, nearly all wholly or partially owned by the occupier, and nearly all with some type of private garden’.69 Max Harris, co-editor of Australian Letters and the Australian Book Review, put forth the now familiar paradox that ‘While our national mythology is totally coloured by rural experience, the fact is that Australia is one of the most highly urbanised countries on earth. We are city dwellers’.70 He believed that the frontier had been replaced by ‘a vast affluent, reasonably classless suburbia’.71 Harris saw a very small group of intellectuals as dyed-in-the-wool urbanites, and a youthful group ‘whose international symbol is the espresso bar, whose mythic ideal is Elvis Presley, and whose cultural values, superficially at least, have been formed by impressions from outside their community’. However, according to Vincent Buckley, Senior Lecturer in English at the University of Melbourne, even the intellectual in Australia was ‘generally attached very firmly to his home, and that home is generally a solid unit in the vast suburban complex of which all Australian cities, with the possible exception of Sydney, are composed . . . Australian intellectuals are typical of their society’.72

The perceived uniformity of the suburbs and the society they represented seems overdrawn today. However, the assumption that the majority of Australians lived in residential areas that could be classified as suburbs (and did so by choice) is considered by historians to be a fundamental assumption of the NCDC’s residential planning.73 The NCDC claimed in 1964 that ‘Australians like to live in separate houses spread out at low

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69 Taft, p. 196.
70 Max Harris, ‘Morals and Manners’, Australian Civilization, Melbourne, 1962, p. 50.
71 Harris, p. 53.
73 Fischer, p. 113.
densities', and this was the predominant form of housing it created in Canberra during the 1960s. In 1971, describing its planning of residential areas during the 1960s, the NCDC cited 'the Australian preference for family life in private homes and gardens as the prime determination in planning the city's residential areas'. Admittedly, the NCDC clearly believed that, in planning residential areas with single family homes on individual plots of land, it was creating a form of housing that most people would be pleased with. Although it was not directly responsible to the public either on a local or national level, the NCDC did take its understanding of public preferences into account in the planning of residential areas. However, there is an important distinction to be made between the uncritical replication of suburban sprawl based on some loosely defined cultural predisposition for suburbia, and the NCDC's careful and methodical attempt to create a model community in Canberra. The distinction is one of agency, and while some accounts of the NCDC's planning history may attempt to portray the NCDC as merely reflecting a societal preference for suburbia, the NCDC was actively engaged in using its resources to develop better suburbs on the empty grazing land surrounding the existing city.

Considering the broad policies of the federal government during the 1960s to increase the economic development of Australia and promote national stability, there were many reasons why the suburban model (low density areas with family homes on individual plots of land) provided a starting point for attempts at creating an official image of the Australian way of life in Canberra. While I am not suggesting that the use of Canberra to promote a positive national image makes it unique among national capitals of the world, I am suggesting that the unique design of Canberra can be better understood within the context of contemporaneous issues being faced by the Australian government. In the first part of this chapter I related the planning of the National Centre to a desire among members of government to use the national capital to present an image of Australia that would attract foreign investment and promote development. The planning of the

74NCDC, *Future Canberra*, p. 29.
NCDC's residential areas was, in part, influenced by similar motives. The perceptions of suburbia prevalent within Australian culture during the 1960s made it seem to be a form of housing that promoted both stability and development.

Stability

According to Bolton, Australia's post-war social agenda 'was designed to provide a stable and encouraging setting where male breadwinners and female homemakers could feel secure in raising a new generation of young Australians'. The single family home gave physical form to the government policy of encouraging marriage 'as promising greater stability for the future'. For women, marriage usually meant leaving the paid work force and defining themselves, as so many of that generation did, as 'just a housewife'. To some this was a welcome and natural destiny, and with their husbands and children they created the nuclear family unit which many asserted to be the foundation of Australian society.

Suburbia was not without its critics among intellectuals, even in the early 1960s when most intellectuals 'gave suburbia a good name'. Max Harris believed Australia was 'bleakly uniform'. Yet he also believed that this uniformity contributed to stability: 'Fanaticism, collective hysteria, utterly dedicated ambition ... none of these things flourish even in the most boring reaches of Australian suburbia'.

In the same collection of essays where Harris called suburbia boring and uniform, Robin Boyd, architect and author of the Australian Ugliness, wrote that Australia had 'even more of a mess of democratic suburban mediocrity than California'. According to the historian Graeme Davison,

Boyd was a firm believer in the contribution of good design to happy living. His choice of adjectives for the unreconstructed postwar suburb—bald, raw, drab, depressing, forbidding—underlines the close link which he saw between aesthetics and liveability. Like other critics of his

76Bolton, p. 54.
77Bolton, p. 109.
78Bolton, p. 121.
79Bolton, p. 123.
80Harris, p. 51.
81Later in the chapter he says, 'It has been pointed out that mass hysteria and emotional demonstration are untypical of the national suburbia, yet the underdog drama of the West Indian test series produced tumultuous public scenes in the streets of Melbourne of a quite improbable kind. (Harris, p. 57.)
82Harris, p. 53.
generation, Boyd too readily assumed that an environment that looked uniform and boring from the outside must seem so to its inhabitants.84

The fundamental relationship between the urban form and the lives of its inhabitants was also expressed by politicians. Senator Ian Wood, who had served on the Senate Select Committee, claimed in 1959; ‘attractive surroundings improve people’s outlook and tend to make them happier and contented. I do not think anyone can say that, as Canberra is at the moment, people who live here could be discontented’.85

Environmentally deterministic understandings of suburbia, prevalent in Australian society at many levels in the 1960s, linked the organisation of space in suburbia to the behaviour, values and experience of the people who inhabited it. Suburban sprawl was not only seen to be a symptom of affluence, stability, and other cultural values, it was perceived to produce these values in its inhabitants. This idea was very similar to the notion that the physical environment of the slum had a negative effect on the moral and physical health of citizens at the turn of the century. The beliefs that encouraged the government to empower planners to create a capital that altered the physical conditions perceived to be the potential cause of racial and national enervation after the turn of the century, had led men like Sulman to promote the creation of suburbs in Canberra. In the 1960s many people still believed, or at least argued, that suburban homes produced better, happier citizens. For example R. P. Greenish of the ACT Advisory Council called on the NCDC to invest more money in the creation of higher quality single family government homes. By way of justification, he pointed to the relationship between the quality of physical space for living and the behaviour of citizens:

inadequate homes tend to breed insecure families. Cramped quarters, and lifelong mortgages bear down on mental and physical health, moral standards and even in Canberra we are faced with such problems which in

84Graeme Davison, *The Past and Future of the Australian Suburb: Urban Research Program Working Paper No. 33*, Canberra 1993, p. 17. Hugh Stretton in his influential 1970 book, *Ideas for Australian Cities*, challenged the view that suburban life was uniform because suburbia’s physical form was. He believed it was a place which allowed for an enormous amount of freedom and creativity on an individual’s block of land. In contrast, Stretton ‘associated monotony with social uniformity; if only our suburbs were socially more mixed, he suggests, they would be more lively as well’. (Davison, p. 18.) See Hugh Stretton, *Ideas for Australian Cities*, Melbourne, 1970, pp. 103–124. In the 1970s, as Stretton’s theories gained acceptance, the NCDC began to place a greater emphasis on planning residential areas with housing targeted for a range of income levels.

85I. A. C. Wood, Senate CPD 14:359.
turn result in many and varied form of misbehaviour which include juvenile delinquency and vandalism.  

A private survey of housewives in the NCDC-planned suburb of Hughes revealed that most believed the planning of the suburb affected the behaviour and quality of the people who lived there. One woman said that the ‘green streams of pedestrian walkways . . . attracted good people’. When the NCDC wanted to develop more medium density housing in the Woden area during the late 1960s it met with strong resistance from local home owners who saw the type of people who lived in medium density housing as having values very different from their own. Politicians were reluctant to support medium density housing, for, even if they did not believe that single family homes made for better citizens, ‘wherever medium density housing was to be started, local action groups were formed’. In Garran, residents complained that ‘people in rented accommodation do not identify with the area or maintain the property and grounds to as high a standard as home owners’. The ‘Woden Environment Committee’ representing a ‘large body of like-minded citizens’ believed flats would attract single parents and become ‘places of sin’. Though medium density housing increased slightly during the 1960s, the suburban ideal remained firmly entrenched in Canberra with the support of residents and members of government who believed suburbia promoted values and behaviour that encouraged the existing social stability of Australia.

Development

As mentioned in Chapter Three, critiques of suburbia have argued that they maximise capitalist consumption. For example, individual homes promote the use of

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88Gilchrist, p. 143.
89Fischer, p. 117.
90Fischer, p. 117.
91Others have argued that in the latter half of the twentieth century, home ownership works against the capitalist state. Although it may wish to use higher interest rates to redirect more funds to the more productive spheres of the capitalist economy, the state finds itself inhibited by the fear of an electoral backlash from owner occupiers. Owner-occupancy thus becomes dysfunctional to capitalism. (Kilmartin, L., Thorns, D., Burke, T., Social Theory and the Australian City, Sydney, 1985, p. 121.)
private backyard swimming pools rather than facilities shared by the community and perhaps funded publicly. Suburban homes encourage the proliferation of cars, television sets, lawn mowers and hedge clippers. In the 1960s, economists and members of government not only considered the increased consumption of such goods to be a sign of 'bursting prosperity'. Increased domestic consumption was considered to be a driving force behind national economic development.  

Max Harris wrote somewhat favourably of 'our great suburbia, devoted to the ideal of material security', because it promoted stability and, while it was 'materialist', it was not yet 'compulsively status-seeking'. Donald Horne wrote:

> Australia is an extraordinarily stable society. The self satisfaction that is so often attacked is one expression of this stability. Australians seem to know what they want and it includes a house (with an average of five or six rooms) set in its own garden, a considerable amount of privacy, domestic comfort and an involvement in family life. There is a strong materialist streak in Australians: they like things that are useful to them in their homes and they will work overtime to buy them on hire purchase. They have a strong philosophy of how lives should be led. You save money and get married; you pay a deposit on a house and furnish it; you hope your children will lead a happier life than you have led; you plan your retirement so that you will enjoy it; and when you die you leave your house to your children so that it can be sold and the money used to help pay off the mortgages on their own houses.

The suburbs were perceived to aid development not only because they increased consumption. The Australian way of life that developed or existed in suburbia could, according to concerned authorities, help attract and assimilate the large numbers of post-war migrants necessary for development. Elucidation of an Australian way of life based on suburbia was perceived to be important as the country tried to counteract the forces of cultural invasion. One response to the perceived threat was the creation of the Australian Citizenship Convention which met annually to 'consider ways which newcomers to this land from Europe might be encouraged to realise the fullness of assimilation in citizenship'. At the 1961 Australian Citizen Convention, Major-General the Reverend C. A. Osborne declared the task was not to put Australian ideals and ideas into a vacuum. It was 'to replace, if necessary, un-Australian ideals and ideas with ones more in

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92 Arndt, p. 12.
93 Harris, p. 53.
94 Horne, p. 21.
95 Digest, 1961, p. 1.
accordance with our way of life'.  

Bill Snedden, Minister for Immigration in the late 1960s, said: 'We ask particularly of migrants that they be substantially Australian in the first generation and completely Australian in the second generation'. However, as the historian Geoffrey Bolton pointed out, it was not 'certain that the inhabitants of the country whose prime minister was Robert Menzies had yet arrived at a satisfactory consensus on what it meant to be Australian'. This lack of consensus, at a time when many perceived one to be necessary to help assimilate migrants, provided a strong impetus to try and symbolise in the national capital an ideal conception of what it meant to be an Australian. Given the desire to assimilate migrants, we can better understand why the NCDC often defined its goal as making Canberra 'an effective symbol of Australian unity and the common purpose of the Australian people'.

The social-Darwinist belief in a need for progress to prevent Australia's domination by other nations (discussed in Chapter One) continued after World War II. Minister for Immigration, Alexander Downer, declared in 1959:

> We must recognise that the nations of the world 50 years hence, when, so the demographers tell us, the population of this planet may be double what it is today, will have become acutely critical of us unless we can demonstrate a quite dramatic development of our resources and peopling of our continent.

Immigration was deemed crucial to peopling the continent with the necessary speed. In 1959 Governor General William Slim opened the Annual Australian Citizenship conference with: 'the future of this land depends more upon the scale and success of immigration than upon any single factor ... and time is not on our side'. In 1962, Downer declared, 'The powerful stimulus provided by immigration has become a permanent feature of the Australian economy. We have now reached the stage where the forward planning of private enterprise and public utilities is based on a dynamic and continuing rate of population growth'.

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97 B. Snedden, quoted in Bolton, p.110.
98 Ibid.
100 Downer, *Digest*, 1959, p. 9.
101 Wilton and Bosworth, p. 29.
Many officials believed the Australian way of life, as it was to be displayed by the NCDC in Canberra, would be a means of attracting migrants. Dr. J. R. Darling of the Immigration Advisory Council believed, ‘However ambitious we may be, however efficient we may hope to be, the essence of migration in these days is the willingness and satisfaction of the individual migrant’. He believed that housing was crucial to attracting migrants, claiming in 1958:

> you cannot ask a family to leave a home, even in a poor street of an English city, and not guarantee to house him in his new country . . . People are not going to leave their homes in Europe to come across the seas to Australia just because we want to increase our population for economic or strategic reasons.

Ten years later, Lance Barnard, Deputy Leader of the Federal Opposition, gave a speech at the Australian Citizenship Convention in which he stressed the role of migrants in generating economic growth and the need for placing a ‘greater emphasis on the quality of the life we offer to migrants’. At many of the Australian Citizenship Conventions, the advantages of the Australian way of life were expressed through the relatively short amount of time it would take a migrant to buy a home and a car. Just as the government’s desire to increase development gave it compelling reasons to influence the national image promoted by the national areas of Canberra, the government had an abiding interest in the image of Australian life on display in Canberra’s suburbs. In the same way that the creation of a National Centre and a city of freeways could promote to investors the image of Australia as a developing nation, the suburbs of Canberra—designed to showcase living that was as pleasant and convenient as any in the world—could create an image of the good life immigrants (a different type of investor) might achieve in Australia.

Despite a need for immigration, it produced fears among Australians. Governor-General Slim feared ‘new comers might form separate communities with the nation—foreign bodies in the flesh of the nation . . . by sheer numbers they might change almost

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105 L. Bernard in *Digest*, 1968, p. 50.
106 Wilton and Bosworth, p. 118
completely the Australian national character and outlook over the course of time'.

The government was 'continually searching for new ways of promoting quick integration', and suggestions included banning foreign language newspapers as well as anglicising names.

Delegates at the Australian Citizenship Convention believed suburbia could help assimilate migrants. At the 1968 Australian Citizenship Convention, J. Kiosoglous of the South Australia Good Neighbour Council referred to areas with high concentrations of people of a single ethnic origin (other than Anglo-Celtic) as 'the so-called ghettos, a perfect example of which would be the inner suburbs of Adelaide, Sydney, and Melbourne'.

Although more traditional solutions to ghettos were being employed such as 'slum clearance', and the suggestion that migrants should move further out of the city, Mr. Kiosoglous believed the key to turning the ghettos back into suburbs was to reclaim the space as culturally Australian: 'We must convince them that, not by having a Greek neighbour, but by having an Australian neighbour, they will be much happier and will be an adopted part of the community'.

In the 1960s Canberra could be seen as a model of the integrated community the Citizenship Conventions wanted other Australian cities to become. Canberra was a city of migrants that did not develop ethnic concentrations as pronounced as the supposed 'ghettos' of other Australian cities. While this can be related to many factors including

107 William Slim, Digest, 1955, p. 5.
108 C. P. Puzy, Digest, 1958, p. 28.
109 A. Prieditis, Digest, 1960, p. 29.
110 J. Kiosoglous in Digest, 1968, p. 50.
111 At the 1968 Australian Citizenship Convention, W. H. Cullen of the Immigration Advisory Council, commented on the need not just to clear slums, but the role of the suburb in alleviating the problems that slums create. She said, 'In Redfern Sydney slum clearance is going on. In Redfern plans have been made for many multi-storey flat dwellings. Before it is too late, housing authorities should do something about the people who will live in these. There is not that neighbourly community feeling, just a bare front door, no back yard and no proper place for the children to play. The Housing Authorities should train a team of people to care for children and have child minding centres. (Digest, 1968, p. 50.)
112 In response to Kiosoglous' comments on inner suburbs being ghettos, J. W. Andre of the Australian Woolgrowers and Graziers Council, said, 'On hundreds of properties in the country side there are unoccupied cottages. I suggest this avenue may be emphasised to some of our migrant population. These cottages are rent free, there are quite a few amenities, a reasonable wage is paid and there are very pleasant surroundings away from the "ghettos"'. (Digest, 1968, p. 50.)
113 J. Kiosoglous in Digest, 1968, p. 50.
114 Canberra has, throughout its history, remained relatively free of ethnic enclaves, both in popular perception and according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics in Australian Bureau of Statistics, A Social Atlas of Canberra, Canberra, 1986, pp. 10-12.
income levels and migration patterns, the city's design may have been perceived to contribute to assimilation. The single family homes being planned in Canberra usually had three bedrooms, which prevented the concentration of extended families on one property, and helped disperse ethnic communities amongst more 'real' Australians. In attracting migrants, the government gave preference to people of working and child rearing age.\textsuperscript{115} The single family home, by putting forth the nuclear family as 'normal', could possibly discourage the migration of older parents, who might have lived with their working children in their country of origin. Today in Canberra, the 'granny flat' is grudgingly permitted, but it is usually a separate dwelling in the garden, and was not planned for in the design of the original home. As mentioned in the introduction, my purpose is not to discuss how citizens made the planned spaces of Canberra their own, however, the granny flat is a sign that at least some people have adapted the Australian way of life presented in Canberra to suit their own, rather than vice versa.

In the above material, I have suggested that the government could perceive a state interest in promoting the creation of suburban homes in the new developments of Canberra built during the 1960s. It was believed not only that many Australians enjoyed suburban life, but that suburbs could promote development and stability. This background is important to understanding the organisation of space in the suburbs created by the NCDC: it helps explain why the NCDC used the single family home as the basis for its residential planning, and it helps us to understand how the innovations in suburban design created by the NCDC were aimed at enhancing the convenience, seclusion and nuclear-family orientation of residential living during the 1960s.

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In 1964, after a hard day's work in Parliament House--perhaps speaking about Canberra and reasserting that he was 'all for the Canberra concept and I make no apology for what is being done here',\textsuperscript{116} Minister for the Interior, Doug Anthony, might return to his family's new home in the suburb of Hughes. He would most likely travel home along Adelaide Avenue. This road was given its name and the designation 'avenue' by

\textsuperscript{115}Downer in \textit{Digest}, 1961, p. 17.
\textsuperscript{116}Doug Anthony as quoted in Sparke, pp. 111-112.
W. B. Griffin in his original plan. It forms one of the broad, straight spokes of the hub around Capital Hill. In Anthony's time, Adelaide Avenue was designated an ‘arterial’ road by the NCDC. From this arterial road, Anthony would turn onto a distributor road, Kent Street, and pull into his driveway. Like nearly all of his neighbours, Anthony lived in a detached house with its own garden. Anthony moved into one of the first houses built in Hughes, right at the edge of the suburb. Nearby neighbours might exit Kent Street onto a collector street such as Birdwood Street and then turn onto the access street Jess Place, which was a cul-de-sac. As later suburbs were built, the hierarchical system would become more elaborate, with an expressway feeding onto an arterial road, feeding onto a sub-arterial road, leading to the distributor road, collector street, and access street.[Figure 5.13] The higher order roads were designed to make a journey between two places as fast, efficient, and easy as the motorcar would allow. The lower order roads were designed to do the opposite. They were narrow and winding--going nowhere whenever possible. The reason for this was not primarily to make them fit the geography of the area or to fit them in between existing roads. The creation of cul-de-sacs and sharp turns met the planner’s vision of the ideal suburban street of the 1960s. These roads were so constructed as to prevent fast travel and through traffic, making the neighbourhood street safer, and less travelled. To drive Canberra’s hierarchical road system--making the effortless journey from urban space to suburban solitude--was to experience the ‘Canberra concept’.

The NCDC’s ‘Canberra concept’--a hierarchy of roads and new town suburban developments--was an expression of an official ideal vision of the Australian way of life that promoted the development and stability of Australian society. The Canberra concept was part of a vision of employing the latest planning techniques to create a better environment for living and working. The NCDC envisioned Canberra as becoming not only the model that defined and displayed the Australian way of life, but one that would set a standard internationally as well. According to the NCDC, the city was to be a
Figure 5.13 Hierarchy of Roads. [Source: Fischer, K.F., *Canberra: Myths and Models*, Hamburg, 1984, p. 74.]
Fig. 4.3
The hierarchy of roads

Legend
1 Access
2 Collector
3 Distributor
4 Sub-arterial
5 Arterial
6 Freeway
‘reflection of national and international life’ and make a contribution to the improvement of ‘civilised living’.\(^{117}\)

Hughes was the first suburb to be planned and built in the new town of Woden--named after the adjacent homestead built in 1840 by Dr. James Murray, who named his home after the Norse god of wisdom.\(^{118}\) [Figure 5.14] The content of its town centre and its configuration would change, but Woden was initially conceived of as a single unit for a population of 60,000. Later Weston Creek--once a land grant held by Captain E. Weston--was added to boost the area’s population to nearly 90,000. The planning of the residential areas of Woden-Weston Creek began in 1960, and by 1974 twelve areas had been fully planned. By 1983 nine were fully developed. According to an NCDC staff member, these areas were the ‘most comprehensive example of neighbourhood planning in Australia’, and provide the best examples of the NCDC’s 1960s residential planning.\(^{119}\)

The population of Canberra had increased by 56 percent between June 1954 and July 1959, and the development of Canberra was rapidly approaching the borders of the initial city planned by Griffin. In 1958, while he was on the staff of the Town Planning Department at the University of Sydney, Peter Harrison, created an Outline Plan for the future development of Canberra. When he joined the NCDC as the head of its Town Planning Section, his Outline Plan became the NCDC’s Metropolitan Outline Plan of 1959. This plan would be subsequently altered and residential areas planned for Jerrabomberra and Majura would be dropped from later development plans. Nevertheless, Harrison made a fundamental choice about the nature of Canberra’s expansion.

Rather than expanding the urban fringe of Griffin’s plan for Canberra, Harrison proposed to create a barrier of parklands and rural areas between the existing city and its further expansions. The expansions to the city would be developed as satellite towns.

\(^{118}\)Gilchrist, p. 39.
\(^{119}\)Gilchrist, p. 9.
Figure 5.14 Woden-Weston Creek. [Source: Sparke, Eric, *Canberra 1954-1980*, Canberra, 1988, p. 112.]
This planning concept drew upon the Garden City of Ebenezer Howard and the New
Towns then being built in Britain.

In its Planning Report of 28 February 1959, the NCDC expressed a desire to
preserve the panoramic natural vistas of Canberra, which it believed were some of the
city's most attractive features. The green belts could preserve the views of the nearby
hills and the distant mountains. The NCDC envisaged incorporating the hill-slopes
around the initial city into a national or metropolitan park system.\textsuperscript{120} It also believed the
creation of new towns would help Canberra remain a distinctive city, while allowing
more residents to live the way most Australians seemed to like to live. According to the
NCDC,

One of the distinctive characteristics of the city as it has developed to date
and which is widely acclaimed by residents and visitors alike is the open yet
orderly structure of the residential areas lying in the valleys and within a
frame-work of tree covered hills. This arrangement seems to reflect the way
most Australians would like to live; it means that they can enjoy the benefits
of compact urban conditions while living in close proximity to the
countryside.\textsuperscript{121}

The planning of new towns increased the overall size of the city and maintained its low
density. However, the connection of new towns by fast traffic corridors meant that
private cars could travel relatively quickly over the expanding city.

Histories of Canberra such as Sparke's \textit{Canberra 1953-1980} and Fischer's \textit{Myths
and Models} point to the British New Town concept as an origin of the NCDC's plan for
satellite towns separated from the initial city by green belts. However, it should be
recognised that the NCDC's conception of New Towns was more directly related to an
existing Australian attempt at creating a new town—the city of Elizabeth in South
Australia. In particular, the NCDC drew upon the 'neighbourhood' concept employed by
the South Australia Housing Trust in Elizabeth.

The NCDC's Town Planning Division would come to define its neighbourhood
concept as:

\begin{itemize}
  \item a residential area, insulated from through traffic and comprising an
  aggregation of dwellings within convenient walking distance of infants and
  primary schools and also an adequate range of shops and other community
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{120}Gilchrist, p. 32.
\textsuperscript{121}NCDC, \textit{Future Canberra}, p. 27.
facilities to meet daily needs. Within the neighbourhood provision is made for the differing needs of all age groups.\textsuperscript{122}

Within the NCDC there was some initial disagreement about the neighbourhood concept. In 1959, associate commissioner Rudduck, believed that rather than develop Woden by neighbourhoods, the NCDC should establish an initial town centre and then develop outward from there. He considered this to be a more ‘natural’ and more efficient method of creating a new town.\textsuperscript{123} To help persuade the NCDC commissioners, the Town Planning Division produced a paper on 20 April 1959 which further explained and lobbied for its neighbourhood concept. This paper shed light on the ideals behind the Town Planning Division’s suburban plans. The Town Planning Division believed the Woden new town should be made up of a ‘series of population cells’, and each cell should have its own small centre with various amenities which could be supported by the population of the cell. The Town Planning Division pointed to the example of this kind of development that was being carried out in Elizabeth:

The design management at Elizabeth adopts the now widely accepted Neighbourhood Theory, the living areas being arranged in community groups of 5,000 and 6,000 people, each group surrounded and defined by open spaces within which the main traffic routes are located. Each neighbourhood will have its own shopping centre of 18-22 shops.\textsuperscript{124}

These shops were to cater for the housewives’ day-by-day needs and the number and variety of trades will be restricted in order not to upset the balance of business at the Town Centre. The trades envisaged are grocer, butcher, green-grocer, delicatessen, fish, chemist, hardware, draper, cakes, babywear, hairdressers, newsagent and drycleaner.\textsuperscript{125}

According to Mark Peel, the use of the New Town concept in Elizabeth with residential areas based on the neighbourhoods described above meant the city ‘was constructed from pre-emptive closed images of what constituted the good city. It would have a geography to improve its residents by means of neighbourhood reconstruction and a village-like arrangement of space’.\textsuperscript{126} Peel writes that the South Australia Housing Trust believed

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{122}Gilchrist, p. 96.
\item \textsuperscript{123}Gilchrist, p. 60.
\item \textsuperscript{124}Gilchrist, p. 61.
\item \textsuperscript{125}South Australia Housing Trust Brochure, 1959, Gilchrist, p. 62.
\item \textsuperscript{126}Mark Peel, Planning the Good City in Australia: Elizabeth as a New Town., Urban Research Program Working Paper No. 30, Canberra, February 1992, p. 13.
\end{itemize}
that its ‘bold intervention in urban growth’ would promote social progress. This meant that ‘Elizabeth would incorporate the troublesome assumptions of the new town as a strategy for urban life: that residents and users could be shaped by the plan and would do nothing to conflict with the planner’s landscape or threaten their social and economic imperatives’. Elizabeth’s planners believed ‘there would be a single and inevitable relation between what the plan said and what its human objects did. They forgot that plans can neither dictate nor encompass the lived space of real people’.

The NCDC denied any sociological motivation in its creation of suburban ‘neighbourhoods’. The Town Planning Division acknowledged that the ‘average Canberra citizen satisfied most of his community needs without reference to any community groupings and that his interests passed beyond such groupings.’

The high mobility of an auto-dominated population made neighbourhoods redundant and ‘the neighbourhood was never meant to meet all the diverse interests and requirements of a population of an unusual structure, with higher than average intellectual tastes, widely scattered sporting and entertainment needs and social habits’. However, the Town Planning Division believed it could organise space into an environment that would nurture the family. The Town Planning Division claimed the neighbourhood was for the ‘housewife and the 25 per cent of the population under 10 years old’. Within the area of the neighbourhood, ‘medical care could be found, the doctor and dentist could be consulted, a child could be educated and play and meet with friends, the housewife could shop sociably, the teenager could join various youth activities, and the adult could find many of his or her more informal recreational and social needs being met’. The NCDC assumed that Canberra’s residents would

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127 Peel, p. 13.
128 Peel, p. 13.
129 Fischer, p. 96.
131 The use of a masculine pronoun to describe the ‘average citizen’ of Canberra provides an insight into the NCDC’s mental universe.
132 Elizabeth was designed to be an industrial city with a much higher percentage of working-class people than the NCDC envisioned for Canberra. Because the NCDC commissioners may have argued that a neighbourhood design suitable for working-class areas may not have been suitable in the national capital, I read the Town Planning Division’s statements concerning the ‘higher than average intellectual tastes’ of Canberra residents as attempts to argue that the neighbourhood design was relevant in Canberra despite perceived differences between the cities’ populations.
understand and happily use the space of the neighbourhood as the NCDC intended it to be used. As Peel describes the assumptions of how a neighbourhood would function,

The environment is all: it is not people who have traditions, leaders of civic pride, it is ‘neighbourhoods’ which produce these things. While the men are working, their unemployed and gregarious wives will build networks, devoting their energies to community creation and in time confirming the spatial units laid down by the planners as purposeful communities.133

The debate about whether the neighbourhood concept should be employed in Canberra was settled in favour of the Town Planning Division by 1960, and a good example of its neighbourhood planning is the suburb of Hughes in Woden.[Figure 5.15] It was planned in 1960, by John Venn, the head of the NCDC’s neighbourhood design section. Venn oversaw the design of all of the neighbourhoods in Woden and planned some of them himself. The plan for Hughes had larger roads travelling around, rather than through, the neighbourhood, and located homes along small winding roads to provide a safer environment for the pedestrian. The suburb was organised around a primary school and local shops which were in walking distance. Hughes was to occupy 375.5 acres, and although it was planned to have 13.4 acres of medium density housing, the majority of its 4000 residents would be housed on 790 residential blocks. While the NCDC’s secretary manager Bob Lansdown questioned whether the minimum block size of 7,500 sq. ft. was appropriate, the planning and construction of Hughes went ahead as population pressures made the NCDC believe it had to start building.134

The next suburb planned and constructed in Woden was Curtin, also designed by Venn. Part of Curtin was based on the Radburn principle, which advocated grassy common areas between houses that allowed some residents to walk to school or the local shops without crossing roads. An evolution is visible in Venn’s design from the suburbs of Watson and Downer in the initial city to the designs he created in Woden. The use of the Radburn principle in the design of Curtin furthered Venn’s goal of making the suburb a safe and convenient place for the pedestrian. In support of his vision of a neighbourhood environment, Venn cited a quotation by F. H. Blair:

133Peel, p. 18.
134Gilchrist, p. 72. Lansdown questioned whether blocks as small as 5,000 sq. ft. should have been considered to increase the density of Hughes.
Figure 5.15 Woden suburb of Hughes. [Source: Sparke, Eric, *Canberra 1954-1980*, Canberra, 1988, p. 110.]
A neighbourhood should be designed for homes, not automobiles. The car should be as disciplined as the dog. It should not jump at people, bowl children over, dig up the flower beds, make riotous noises or commit other nuisances. It has its place, and its place should be planned for it, and should be taught to stay in it. It should have a place to move around—slowly and without barking—and a place to lie down. In a neighbourhood cars must all be friendly; cars with hostile tendencies should be encouraged to break their springs or wrap themselves around trees.\footnote{Gilchrist, p. 9.}

The good intentions of Venn and the NCDC with regard to the planning of neighbourhoods should not be doubted. By providing local shops and privileging the family and pedestrian, the NCDC could potentially redistribute some of the city’s resources in favour of its less advantaged members. In attempting to cater for the nuclear family with a mother caring for children at home, the NCDC was aiming to suit the needs of many of the new families moving to Canberra. However, as the idea of the NCDC’s neighbourhood came to be populated, the assumption that the NCDC could dictate how spaces in the city would be utilised would prove to be incorrect.

In its ideal conception of the neighbourhood, the NCDC envisioned a space where ‘provision is made for the differing needs of all age groups’. However, the suburban neighbourhood, as a nurturing pedestrian environment, was predicated on the sharp distinction between spaces to be used for business activities and areas for social activities. Neighbourhoods were considered the place where social gatherings were to take place. The NCDC believed the suburban street would be the communication nexus for inhabitants as ‘there is no impediment to communication between inhabitants on either side of the street whereas backyard fences are major impediments’.\footnote{Gilchrist, p. 99.} Houses were conceived to be organised into housing groups: ‘Dwellings on either side of a street were seen as having a greater identity largely because of the shared facility, the street, and also because of visual unity’.\footnote{Gilchrist, p. 99.} The NCDC believed the cul-de-sac was the most ‘unified street group of housing’, but ‘other streets were also seen as having a substantial measure of identity’.\footnote{Gilchrist, p. 99.}
In contrast, the streets in Civic Centre, Canberra's primary shopping and business district, were envisioned to be utilised purely for business purposes and not to have a social function. It was not until the mid-1970s that a pedestrian zone was constructed in Civic and previous attempts to create the atmosphere of a more traditional city street had been thwarted. A café owner who dared to put chairs and tables out on the side walk was fined and finally had his furniture confiscated. The rejection of the multi-functional street in Canberra went back to Sulman, who had declared in 1910 that, the street 'as a public resort, with its numerous cafés, is unknown, and would be unappreciated'.

Particularly before the construction of the enclosed shopping malls in Woden and Belconnen, people who were gathering socially outside of the prescribed areas met with the consternation of those citizens attempting to live the Australian way of life in Canberra. The ACT Advisory Council, which served to represent the city's population to the NCDC and federal government, received numerous letters from concerned citizens complaining about acts of 'vandalism and acts of hooliganism ... committed within hearing of the Police Station in Civic Centre at night and over week ends'. According to an anonymous citizen, East Row, 'is now known as 'Skid Row' ... in which at night regularly there is a collection of 'souped up' old cars stationed, engines running and the exhaust fumes poisoning the whole area. [The occupants] lean out and make offensive remarks to any female person along the streets.'

Canberra's adolescents developed their own use of the city's spaces. They are a good example of a group marginalised by the planning of suburbs in the 1960s and their use of the city in unintended ways bothered the NCDC as well as citizens who wrote to the Advisory Council. In the 1960s the NCDC did not blame the limits of its planning for adolescents' subversiveness (although it was ready to take credit for the housewife's contentedness). Even though 'hooliganism' resulted from evening or weekend activities by young people, the NCDC drew attention to 'the range of employment opportunities [which] is not wide enough, particularly for the teenage groups'. The NCDC claimed, 'if

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139 anonymous, 'Minutes of the 524th Meeting of the Australian Capital Territory Advisory Council', 15 March 1965, p. 197.
sociological problems are to be avoided, planning for the growth of the City should provide for an extension of employment in as many fields as possible. Teenage unemployment is still considered to be a cause of ‘hooliganism’ in Civic Centre in the 1990s, and in addition to community requests for a larger police presence, the installation of surveillance cameras on the streets near the central bus interchange was being contemplated in 1994.

The separation of the residential areas and business areas envisaged by the NCDC created suburbs that differed markedly from those laid out in the Griffin plan. As discussed in Chapter Two, Griffin had planned a more medium density environment, and the residential areas were organised around radial-concentric avenues. These avenues linked even the furthest reaches of the suburb with the central civic areas rather than putting them at the other end of an expressway ride. By way of comparison, in figure 5.4 the traffic corridor separates the city and the suburbs so that neither can be seen from the other. The NCDC’s Town Planning Division criticised Griffin’s design for residential areas as inadequate for meeting the needs of citizens. The Town Planning Division cited testimony given before the Senate Select Committee in 1955 which called Griffin’s arrangements, even for the standard of 1912, ‘of somewhat doubtful validity. The geometric formality of the central idea, when extended to the residential suburbs becomes absurdly extravagant’. By extending the radial-concentric plans to residential areas Griffin blurred the distinction between the private world of home and the public life of the city. This was consistent with his ideas of cutting avenues into a city and eradicating slums by opening them up to the air, light and space of the more prosperous or better kept districts. The ideal citizen for Griffin was one who would actively participate in the larger civic community. In pointing out that Griffin ‘failed to reveal any

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140 NCDC in ‘City planned as capital and place to live in’, Canberra Times, 12 March 1959, p. 12.
142 Gilchrist, p. 62.
143 Although Griffin wanted to create residential areas where amenities were accessible without crossing what he called ‘traffic roads’, and wanted homes separated from business areas, he did not intend to reorganise the traffic flow of the city as extensively as the NCDC. Griffin was at least partially influenced in his design by Robinson’s doctrine that, ‘Like a stream of pure water cleansing what it touches, this tide of traffic, pulsing with the joyousness of the city’s life of toil and purpose, when flowing through an idle or suffering district wakes it to larger interests and higher purpose’. 

rational pattern of suburban development’, planners were judging Griffin by a different agenda. In the 1950s and 1960s the planners’ conception of the importance of a private, rather than a public residential area made them perceive what might be considered the virtues of the Griffin plan to be senseless or thoughtless gestures:

Major roads, channels, parks and reserves and special areas cut through and divided suburbs, and community facilities were scattered in most areas. Occasionally there were small groupings but, generally the facilities were sited at a considerable distance from each other. Instead of a convenient neighbourhood grouping, there existed in many areas a meaningless and spotty arrangement with shops, halls, welfare centres, churches, schools and playgrounds, separated and unrelated to each other.144

The interpretation of Griffin’s plan as ‘scattered’, ‘meaningless’ or ‘spotty’, reflects a misunderstanding of his design’s agenda, which was somewhat different from the NCDC’s. Griffin’s employment of City Beautiful planning doctrines, which encouraged some traffic circulation through neighbourhoods, was contrary to the NCDC’s belief that better communities would result from closing residential areas to traffic. By understanding the agenda behind both plans we can better contrast them and evaluate them. We can also better appreciate the imagination and thoughtfulness with which Griffin and the NCDC planned for their objectives.

Neither the goals of Griffin’s residential planning nor those of the NCDC have endured without the potential for criticism, since social ideals have never been universal and assumptions change over time. Today some people may feel that Griffin’s vision of a more urban, civic-focused community would make for a better ideal to be pursued by planning than the NCDC’s emphasis on nuclear family neighbourhoods. While 1994 was the year of the family in Australia and the family is still officially conceptualised as a nuclear family on the 50 cent piece minted that year, the concept has come under increasing criticism as a government construction that is not based on reality. [Figure 5.16] According to the anthropologist, Julie Marcus, ‘today’s nuclear family is best described as an “aberration” left over from the 1940s and 1950s’. Marcus believed, ‘It’s not functional now, and it never has been. That is why this type of family is surrounded by so much legislation and moral discourse. It needs propping up because it’s not a

144Gilchrist, p. 62.
Figure 5.16 1994 Year of the Family commemorative coin.
natural unit'.145 My purpose is not to debate the validity of the nuclear family in the 1960s or the 1990s, but to point out that—although it may not be as relevant today—it was an important influence on the NCDC’s design principles during the 1960s.

The reliance on the motorcar planned into the designs of the 1960s has already come under criticism as outdated in the environmentally conscious 1990s.146 The plan for a sprawling city with several town centres will soon be interpreted in its turn as ‘scattered’, ‘meaningless’ or ‘spotty’ when it is forgotten that the NCDC dreamed of creating ‘a fully motorised town’ with a safe environment for Prime Minister Menzies’s daughter to push her child’s pram along paved pathways, while her husband, the bread-winner, travelled from suburban seclusion to work and back along a hierarchical road system.147 The NCDC’s assumptions about the role of women as unemployed housewives and mothers will only add to the criticisms of its designs.

By examining the agendas behind the design of Canberra and by putting Canberra’s plans in the context of their time, it is easier to appreciate that the capital’s planning has very rarely been scattered, meaningless or spotty. In this chapter, I have examined several facets of the NCDC’s plans and constructions of the 1960s to show how the urban form of Canberra has been shaped by the ideals, aspirations and assumptions of politicians and planners. In the 1960s, members of government wanted, and planners promised to design, a city with national areas, hierarchical roads and suburbs that would both symbolise and help create a more developed and culturally unified Australia. The legacy of the NCDC’s mission can still be seen in the urban form of Canberra.

147Sparke, p. 31.
Conclusion

In this thesis, I have sought to contribute to the existing historiography of Canberra by suggesting an alternative approach to understanding the origins of Canberra’s urban form. Rather than being primarily concerned with legitimating Canberra as a national capital Australians can be proud of, this thesis examines the ideals, assumptions and aspirations behind the city’s design in two distinct periods. The desire to create a city and society of the future in Canberra is a recurring theme of Canberra’s planning under Griffin, the FCAC, FCC and NCDC. In the 1990s the National Capital Planning Authority has claimed that one of the capital’s purposes is to be ‘the flagship of the nation... Canberra is expected to set the standard of excellence and lead by example in terms of design and maintenance, social and environmental responsibilities’.

Planners’ continued attempts to design the features of a model society in Canberra are at odds with the more widely perceived role of Canberra as a symbol of Australia. I have personally been told by many Australians (usually not Canberrans) that ‘Canberra is not Australia’. Certainly they have a point. The urban form of the city seems intentionally unfamiliar to anyone who has spent time in other Australian cities. Moreover, the intent to create a model city that is supposed to reflect Australia’s desired future and help bring it about, means that the city has never reflected the Australia that existed beyond its borders at any given time. Its design reflects visions of Australia’s aspirations and intended destiny as successive governments have promoted them.

In this thesis, I have tried to rehistoricise Canberra so that people such as O’Malley, the Griffins, Sulman, Menzies and the NCDC staff, who had a real impact on the development of Canberra’s urban form, are recognised for what they were trying to create, rather than presenting them as inconsistent servants of a pure Griffin vision. While each generation of politicians and planners may have seen their ideas for Canberra

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as improvements on the past, this exploration of the first and second great periods of
Canberra’s growth suggests that the differences in plans may have less to do with the
progression and innovation of town planning, and rather more to do with changing ideal
visions of the purpose of the national capital.

Canberra’s planners proposed designs for homes, streets, national buildings and
other spaces which, by design, were intended to elicit certain responses from the people
who inhabited and visited them. Many people still believe that the organisation of
physical space has at least some influence on humans’ thoughts and actions. Admittedly,
residents and visitors are often impressed by the city’s monumental buildings and
panoramic views. However, Canberra’s planners were mistaken when they promised
that they could use design to create a better society in the city and nation. According to
the urbanist, Robert Gutman, writing in 1973,

> The belief that design by itself can create community life, what is often
> referred to as ‘architectural determinism,’ is firmly lodged in the minds of
> many architects. Social research has overwhelmingly demonstrated that this
doctrine is naive, yet it does not disappear. To some architects, the
> persistence of the idea indicated that if it were only restated or if research
> were only better designed, the idea would turn out to be valid. I believe this
> view is nonsense.²

It was not a lack of will or a lack of funding that prevented planners from securing their
various visions of the ideal city and society in Canberra. They were incorrect in
assuming that design alone could create social reform. Nevertheless, by understanding
the way assumptions and ideals influenced the organisation of space in Canberra, we can
better understand how, and why, a remote sheep station was transformed into a unique
city of over 300,000 people in less than 80 years. The physical form of Canberra, as it is
visible today, is a composite of many theoretical approaches to designing the ideal city.
For this reason, the recent moves by planners to reclaim an original Griffin conception of
the parliamentary triangle, or campaigns by residents to preserve Canberra’s unique
suburban form, must be seen as gestures aimed at lending legitimacy to other interests
rather than as attempts to restore the true Canberra. Such a place has never existed.

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Postscript: The Canberra of Today

Thus in 1988 there was [still] a good deal of confusion about what it meant to be Australian.¹

Today, the development of Canberra is still a means for the Australian government and its planners to try and define an ideal national identity, though their methods of discovering what the identity is are somewhat different from those used in the past. Unlike the NCDC, which sought little public input in its attempts to define the ideals and ethos it would attempt to turn into brick and stone, its successor, the National Capital Planning Authority (NCPA) which assumed responsibility in 1988 for the planning of Canberra’s national capital features, has, in 1993 and 1994, undertaken two extensive quantitative surveys and done intensive qualitative research based on discussions with 24 focus groups all over Australia, to find out what ‘Australians really think about Canberra’.²

When pressed on how to make Canberra ‘better represent a national identity based on ethnic diversity and tolerance’, the focus groups responded that it could ‘only be done by giving the capital an injection of humanity’. According to the Deputy Prime Minister, ‘Australians think Canberra is beautiful but boring... sterile, homogeneous, unwelcoming—hence, implicitly, unrepresentative of the Australian national identity’.³ However, in creating a more lively and urbane city, authorities will probably have some difficulties with an important part of the Canberra community which enjoys its suburban peace and quiet. The ‘thrill’ of the city as an environment is often ascribed to the excitement, even the danger, of exploring it. As a thoroughly planned city, Canberra does not have the uncharted back streets which form the basis of exciting urban safaris. What is more, disruption of the city’s existing orderly events are quickly dealt with by concerned citizens of Canberra. One relatively lively cultural event in Canberra, the

¹Bolton, p. 288.
²Brian Howe, Address to the National Press Club, Canberra, 1 February 1995, p. 6.
³Howe, p. 6.
‘Food and Wine Frolic’, will be altered in the future to make it, according to the Canberra Festival’s General Manager, ‘a quintessentially Canberra event’. BYO alcohol will no longer be allowed at the event, so that a ‘gentle, safe atmosphere will be maintained’. This is reminiscent of O’Malley’s ban on ‘stagger juice’ which prompted a nightly exodus to Queanbeyan. Organisers anticipate that the restrictions on alcohol and a $5 admission charge will cut attendance by 90%, but they want to discourage ‘yobbos’ from attending the event.

While what might be described as suburban values linger in Canberra, the suburban home is no longer the only housing option available. A new apartment building has just been built in Civic Centre, the first housing ever available there. The dual function of space as a working and living environment is a retreat from the separation idealised in the 1960s. The simple fact that so many ideal visions of how the citizen should live in the city have been constructed in Canberra means that the average citizen has some choice of housing and life-style. Some would say that the modern city has become a kind of post-modern city which is more ‘ergonomic’ or ‘user friendly’. But ideals remain important and continue to shape Canberra as it grows. The new suburb of Gungahlin is designed to be in tune with nature 1990s style. Gungahlin is designed to be more amenable to public transportation. Houses are supposed to be solar oriented; cats and wood stoves are prohibited. The new Parliament House built into Capital Hill allows citizens to walk on top of their representatives, symbolising an interesting ideal vision of the relationship between citizens and their government.

The panoramic views of Canberra that Walter Burley Griffin planned in 1911 are still recognisable and important features of the city today. In these panoramas, several generations of Australians have now been asked to look out over where Australia has been and where Australia is going. The view is still trying to impress upon citizens and tourists that Canberra is a modern city, that it is consciously and diligently working to improve upon the past. Most people are willing to accept that a capital city is meant to

4David Lawrence, Jacqueline Fuller, ‘Food and Wine--and No More Brawling’, Canberra Times, 10 February 1995, p. 1. In an informal survey, I found a common response to this comment among younger Canberrans was, ‘Quintessentially Canberra, ie., Boring’!

5David Lawrence, in Fuller, p. 1.
inspire pride and convey cultural significance to the nation, but its mechanisms should be recognised. That space is still being organised in Canberra to inculcate a message about Australia’s latest ideal vision of its future--and its past--is shown in the following instance.

Despite its location a few hundred meters from Parliament House, the symbolic centre of the Commonwealth of Australia, the recently established National Capital Exhibition is paradoxically on the frontier, at the very edge of Canberra’s argument for its authoritative representation of that which is Australian. The exhibition is often the first contact that foreign nationals, diplomats, and possibly even some Australians, in Canberra as tourists, have with the argument for an Australian identity--an identity as a distinct culture and society that needs to govern itself so that it can preserve its unique values, history, and experience. It may be the first place where ‘Australian’ begins to have a meaning.

Since this is the frontier, the National Capital Exhibition’s methods may, by necessity, be bolder than others, but its ability to convey that Canberra is the centre and symbol of a modern and technologically advanced nation has been carefully planned. As the tourist steps off the tour bus a sensor automatically opens the doors of the Exhibition and the visitor is greeted by an enormous diorama of the city tilted up on an angle against the wall. A touch sensitive IBM terminal directs laser lights to pick out the ‘important’ features of the landscape in many languages. The visitors can direct the laser and the audio to individual buildings or the computer will narrate a presentation itself. At the end of the presentation, the lights dim and hundreds of fibre optic street lamps and spotlights within the model illuminate it so that visitors exclaim, ‘It looks so real’! The successful manipulation of technology, and its abundance, both promise and proclaim a bright future for Australia.

Over and over the panorama of Canberra is stressed in this exhibit. After viewing the diorama/laser light show, visitors move in a counterclockwise fashion through a series of exhibits, finally arriving at the gift shop. At each exhibit is a ‘Fact Sheet’ summing up a portion of Canberra’s History. The exhibits and Fact Sheets are arranged
in chronological order, but the first Fact Sheet, ‘The Landscape Transformed’, takes the reader over the panorama of Canberra’s history in the first sentence. ‘The Canberra Valley has been transformed from rolling sheep pastures to a great National Capital city in one person’s life time’. Once we know the happy ending of the story we can proceed to Fact Sheet 2, ‘Aboriginal & Early European Settlement’. It reads ‘Aboriginal people lived for thousands of years in the Canberra region . . . yet within 80 years of European settlement, the Aborigines had been dispersed; killed by exotic diseases to which they had no immunity and the despoliation of their ancient hunting grounds by the arrival of the settlers’ sheep and cattle’. Through the use of the passive voice the author lessens the role of European’s actions in the ‘dispersing’ of the Aborigines. But it is the panorama of Canberra that most successfully attempts to excuse Aboriginal ‘dispersion’, or any other past injustice Australia may have once been guilty of. Each aspect of the National Capital Exhibition--from the enormous model of the city, to the views out the window--proclaims what the city has become and where it is going before mentioning what it took to get there. The panorama visible today comforts us that history, like the technology that built the city, is continually being improved upon, and, once created, cannot regress to its former state. History is moving forward and will not repeat itself, so the past is the past and the ends have justified the means. How does the view--looking out over a beautiful, rational, and orderly city from the top floor of the National Library--affect the young students’ view of the Australian history they have come there to read about? Is their impression affected by the planned end of the story that they see around them?
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