

Re-covering suburbia: An investigation into the reconfiguration of the suburban landscape

by

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Candidate's Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university. To the best of the author's knowledge, it contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text.

Andrew MacKenzie

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. MacKenzie', is positioned in the center of the page. The signature is stylized and fluid.

Thursday 24 May 2012

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Abstract

The latter half of the twentieth century has seen a dramatic change in the way modern Australian suburbs develop. In as little as 40 years, the Australian home has transformed from modest cottages to conspicuous palatial rendered houses often referred to as McMansions. The impact of this shift has resulted in a reconfiguration of the suburban landscape, as open spaces on blocks of land are no longer synonymous with the traditional backyard, but are reduced to residual ribbons of green circumscribing the perimeter fence.

This shift has occurred in a period of increasing awareness of the environmental challenges created by resource depletion, climate change and rapid urbanisation. Yet as architecture, planning and design professions embrace and promote sustainable development practices the built outcomes are suburban homes that are larger than ever with fewer people per household than in any other point in Australia's history.

The major consequence of this shift is twofold. Firstly, the goals of planning and development professions to achieve a more sustainable urban form appear to be in contrast to the design and development of detached dwellings in suburbs. Secondly, as a result of this shift, the socio-cultural view of the home and the suburb has also changed. This thesis asks what these spatial changes reveal about our attitudes towards the suburb, the home and living in a world that is at odds with the environmental challenges we face. It explores how the suburb has altered as a socio-cultural space in the early twenty-first century.

Recovering suburbia reflects on planning and architecture's role in reframing the suburb from what Boyd referred to as 'the mundane aspects of creature comforts and irritatingly austere approach to architecture' (Boyd, 1963, p.192), to today's pervasive view of new conspicuous forms manifested through a real estate lens.

This thesis examines the recovery of a suburb, after bushfires in 2003, through a landscape lens. It presents the landscape as a conceptual framing tool to explore how society negotiates the appropriation of space and formation of community in a suburban context. It seeks to understand how this case study dramatises some of the changes occurring in western suburban cities undergoing suburban renewal and uncovers contemporary understandings of land, landscape, property and home. In turn it proposes that landscape's role in framing the twenty-first century suburban city has diminished in our pursuit of a sustainable urban form.

Table of Contents

Candidate's Declaration.....	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Abstract.....	iv
List of figures.....	viii
List of tables	viii
List of acronyms and abbreviations	ix
Preface	x
Part 1: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW	1
Chapter 1: Why landscape?	2
1.1 Introduction	2
1.2 Landschaft to the signified landscape: An etymological perspective on an elusive term	5
1.2.1 <i>Understanding the unknown landscape</i>	6
1.2.2 <i>The picturesque suburban landscape</i>	9
1.3 Modernity: graphic order and the grid	11
1.3.1 <i>Landscape and citizenship in the suburb: contested territory</i>	12
1.3.2 <i>Urbanising landscapes: contemporary interpretations in the 21st century</i>	14
1.4 Contemporary cultural explanations of landscape	15
1.4.1 <i>Aesthetics: the performance of landscape</i>	17
1.4.2 <i>Place – belonging and identity: a cultural interpretation of landscape</i>	18
1.5 Contemporary suburban landscape values	20
1.5.1 <i>Measuring urban landscape values</i>	21
1.6 Conclusion.....	22
Chapter 2: Towards the post-sprawl city	25
2.1 Introduction	25
2.2 The modern suburban landscape	26
2.2.1 <i>Spatial utopias and social reformers</i>	27
2.2.2 <i>Modernity and the growth of the suburban city</i>	29
2.3 The single dwelling in Australia: the pervasive ideology	31
2.3.1 <i>The national agenda to meet housing demand</i>	31
2.3.2 <i>Whitlam's decentralising agenda and the NCDC</i>	33
2.3.3 <i>Consolidation and neo-liberal environmentalism</i>	35
2.3.4 <i>Containment boundaries: Post-2000 metropolitan planning in Australia</i>	38
2.3.5 <i>Designing urban policy for sustainability</i>	38
2.4 Canberra: The twentieth century urban experiment	40
2.4.1 <i>Canberra's relationship with the urban landscape</i>	42
2.4.2 <i>Shifting landscape values in a climate of uncertainty in the ACT</i>	46
2.5 Conclusion.....	48
Chapter 3: The suburb as a cultural space	50
3.1 Introduction	50
3.2 Producer and consumer dynamics	50
3.3 The suburb as a cultural lens	51
3.3.1 <i>New discourses for suburban form</i>	53
3.3.2 <i>Cultural planning: a narrow view of suburban culture</i>	55
3.3.3 <i>Translating social spaces into physical spaces</i>	57
3.4 Conclusion.....	57
Part 2: METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES	59
Chapter 4: The case study background.....	60
4.1 Introduction	60
4.2 Duffy: A case study of suburban recovery	62
4.3 Development history pre–2003 bushfire	64

4.4	Development history post–2003 bushfire	65
4.5	Policy approaches to achieving sustainable urban development in the ACT	66
4.6	Conclusion	69
Chapter 5: Methodology, research design and methods.....		71
5.1	Introduction.....	71
5.2	Research foundations: Meaning and action – idealism and realism	74
5.2.1	<i>Social construction of place</i>	75
5.3	Research strategy: understanding events and actions in a suburban context.....	76
5.3.1	<i>Operating across scientific disciplines</i>	76
5.4	Research design	77
5.4.1	<i>Data collection and analysis: interpreting the material and socio-cultural changes to the landscape</i>	78
5.4.2	<i>Narrative analysis: understanding change in and through stories</i>	82
5.5	Documenting the spatial reconfiguration of the landscape.....	84
5.5.1	<i>High resolution satellite imagery analysis</i>	84
5.5.2	<i>Development application analysis</i>	86
5.6	Conducting interviews with the producers	88
5.7	Conducting interviews with the consumers	89
5.8	Data analysis: negotiating multiple data sets through visualisation	90
5.9	Narrative analysis of the producers and consumers.....	93
5.10	Conclusion	94
Chapter 6: Quantitative results		95
6.1	Introduction.....	95
6.2	The spatial reconfiguration of Duffy	96
6.2.1	<i>Spatial comparison of Duffy</i>	100
6.2.2	<i>Characteristics of CCD 8021601 or East Duffy</i>	100
6.2.3	<i>Characteristics of CCD 8021603 or West Duffy</i>	101
6.3	Demographic character of Duffy	102
6.3.1	<i>Time series comparison of Duffy</i>	103
6.4	Demographic change within Duffy.....	106
6.5	Conclusion	108
Part 3: QUALITATIVE RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF EMERGING THEMES		109
Chapter 7: Planning for redevelopment in suburbs		110
7.1	Introduction.....	110
7.2	Contributing to the recovery process: rational decisions	110
7.2.1	<i>Is architecture a public good?</i>	112
7.2.2	<i>Incorporating sustainability rhetoric into practice</i>	113
7.2.3	<i>Making decisions in time and space</i>	115
7.3	The producers’ prudent actions.....	117
7.3.1	<i>Negotiating change</i>	118
7.3.2	<i>Stages of engagement in the prudential process</i>	120
7.4	Planning practice in the recovery process.....	122
7.4.1	<i>Initiating the change</i>	123
7.5	The performance of landscape	125
7.5.1	<i>Landscapes performing a symbolic function</i>	126
7.5.2	<i>The landscape change paradox</i>	128
Chapter 8: Understanding the suburban consumer’s dream.....		130
8.1	Introduction.....	130
8.2	C2 homes: Big people living in small houses	132
8.2.1	<i>Tacit values</i>	133
8.2.2	<i>Efficiency and expectations</i>	134
8.2.3	<i>Consumer awareness of green design</i>	135
8.2.4	<i>Embodied landscapes</i>	137
8.2.5	<i>Symbolism of the new</i>	138
8.2.6	<i>Space, light, comfort and efficiency</i>	139
8.3	C3: Little people living in big houses	140

8.3.1	<i>Efficiency, atomism and environmental credential-ism</i>	142
8.3.2	<i>Surplus house and surplus space</i>	145
8.3.3	<i>The consumers' relationship to architecture and house design</i>	147
8.3.4	<i>C3: The consumer's place in the suburb</i>	149
8.4	CTR: Examining the expectation of the ideal home	151
8.4.1	<i>Surplus space and conspicuous homes</i>	152
8.4.2	<i>The Duffy pecuniary social contract: seeking a new suburban place</i>	154
8.5	Consumer expectation of the suburban landscape	156
8.5.1	<i>C2: A sense of stewardship over the recovering landscape</i>	157
8.5.2	<i>C3: Reconciling competing landscape values</i>	159
8.5.3	<i>CTR: Seeking an imagined community</i>	161
8.6	Mediating the recovery of the landscape.....	162
Chapter 9: Emerging knowledge towards a theory of re-covering suburbia		164
9.1	Introduction	164
9.2	The suburban landscape: examining values beyond the backyard.....	166
9.2.1	<i>The landscape as a metaphor for contested values</i>	168
9.2.2	<i>Public goods in the suburb</i>	169
9.2.3	<i>Green design not green gardens</i>	170
9.2.4	<i>Well kept suburbs: the symbolic pecuniary contract</i>	171
9.2.5	<i>Framing the suburban landscape</i>	172
9.3	Stories of change: Two case studies of C2 and C3 residents	173
9.3.1	<i>Bryce and Margi's story</i>	174
9.3.2	<i>Amanda's story</i>	180
Chapter 10: Planning for sub-urbanity		187
10.1.1	<i>Change agents in the recovery of Duffy</i>	187
10.1.2	<i>McMansionism in Duffy – mobilising social capital</i>	189
10.1.3	<i>Accepting change</i>	190
10.2	Using the landscape as an organising principle for decision making and change.....	192
10.2.1	<i>Green is the new black – mobilising a new green credibility</i>	194
10.2.2	<i>Sustaining suburban landscapes</i>	196
10.2.3	<i>Balancing landscape values</i>	198
10.3	Future research: Unpacking the modes of production through architecture	200
10.4	Postscript.....	201
References		203

List of figures

Figure 1: Location of Duffy and classification of suburbs designed during the NCDC period of 1958–1988	xix
Figure 2: Henri Peacham, <i>Rura Mihi et Silentium</i> from <i>Minerva Britannia</i> , 1612.....	7
Figure 3: The Canberra Metropolitan Policy Plan (2010).....	46
Figure 4: The research rationale for examining the socio-spatial changes in Duffy.....	61
Figure 5: Diagrammatic description of the data collection and the analysis method.....	73
Figure 6: Diagrammatic description of the abductive reasoning method.....	81
Figure 7: Quickbird multispectral imagery showing the changed distribution of vegetation between 2002 above and 2006 below (SKM 2009).	85
Figure 8: Map indicating the spatial boundaries of the two census collection districts used for comparison of ABS and spatial data	86
Figure 9: Diagram indicating the spatial classification of surface coverage of submitted DA plans	87
Figure 10: A word cloud frequency diagram for all the data on the left and a list of codes for respondent categories and response categories on the right.....	91
Figure 11: Word cloud identifying words associated by proximity	92
Figure 12: This example is for a C2 resident. The house is shown in the top right corner and the frequency of references to the terms house and its relationship to other terms is shown in the right corner.....	93
Figure 13: NVDI comparative distribution of vegetation 2002 above and 2006 below.	97
Figure 14: NVDI comparative distribution of built structures with 2002 above and 2006 below; red indicates the increase in reflective surfaces or built structures	98
Figure 15: Map indicating CCD boundaries and DAs submitted for rebuilds between 2003 and 2006.....	99
Figure 16: A typical house type developed in the 1970s	101
Figure 17: Typical house types developed between 2003 and 2006.....	102
Figure 18: Duffy Population 1991–2006	103
Figure 19: Age structure in Duffy 1996–2006.....	104
Figure 20: Household structure Duffy 1996–2006.....	104
Figure 21: Population by occupation in Duffy 1996–2006.....	105
Figure 22: Household ownership in Duffy 1996–2006.....	106
Figure 23: Age structure comparison between CCDs in 2006.....	107
Figure 24: Age structure comparison between CCDs in 2006.....	107
Figure 25: Individual income comparison between CCDs in 2006	108
Figure 26: Bryce and Margi’s house (Google Earth 17 June 2011).....	180
Figure 27: Amanda’s house (Google Earth 17 June 2011)	186
Figure 28: Describes how landscapes can be used as an organising principle to understand and embody the different and competing values associated with change.....	199

List of tables

Table 1: The phenomena of landscape change.....	xiv
Table 2 Average gross floor area of new houses by Category of DA	89
Table 3: Indicates the relationship between landscape scale processes and planning objectives, <i>adapted from Le Du-Blayo 2011</i>	194

List of acronyms and abbreviations

ACTPLA	Australian Capital Territory Planning and Land Authority
DA	Development Application
EER	Energy Efficiency Rating
EM	Ecological Modernisation
GFA	Gross Floor Area
GIS	Geographic Information Systems
HQSD	High Quality Sustainable Design
NCA	National Capital Authority
NCDC	National Capital Development Commission
NCOSS	National Capital Open Space System
NCP	National Capital Plan
NCPA	National Capital Planning Authority
NVDI	Normalised Vegetation Differentiation Index
PALM	Planning and Land Management
SD	Sustainable Development
TAMS	Territory and Municipal Services