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

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