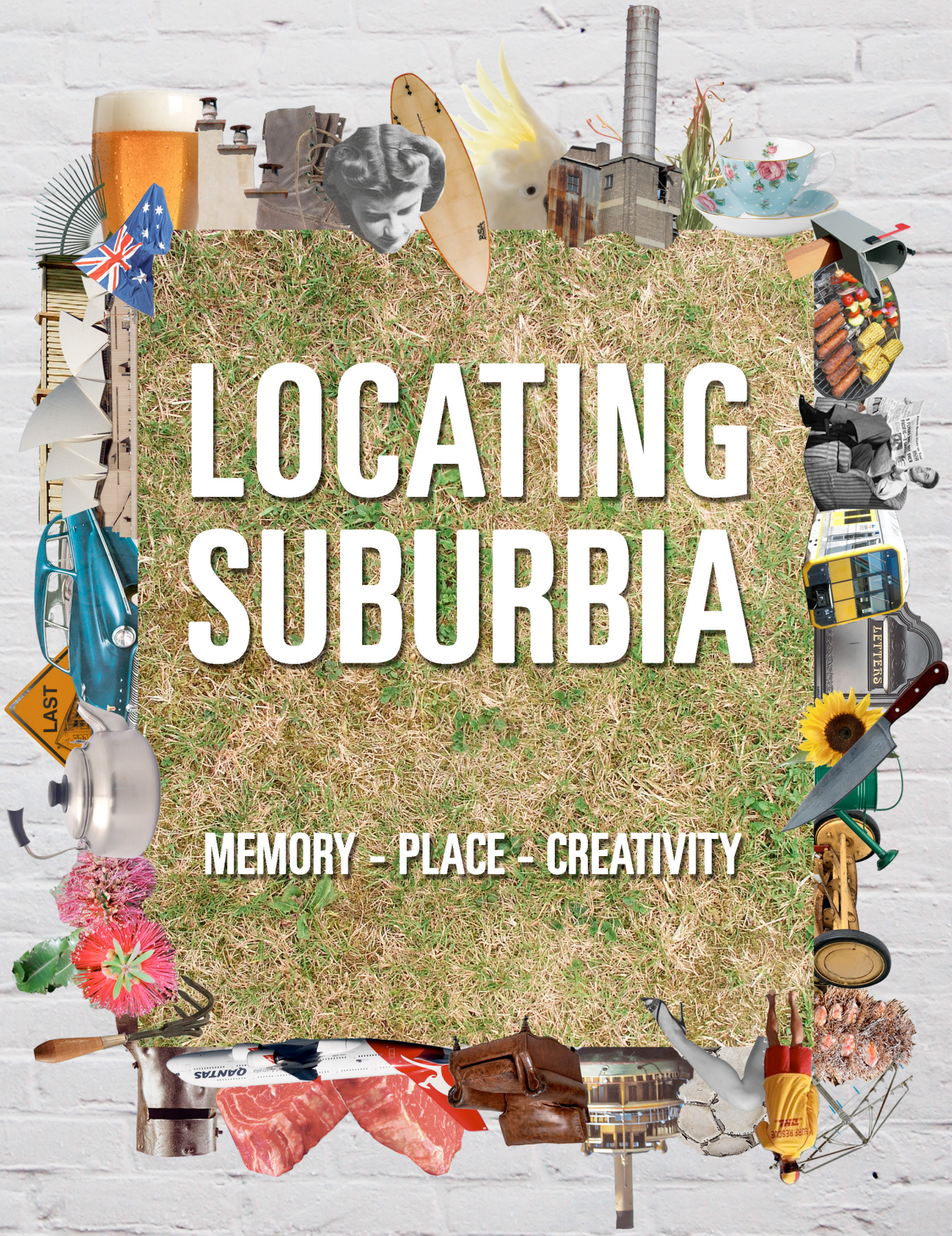

LOCATING SUBURBIA

MEMORY - PLACE - CREATIVITY

EDITED BY

PAULA HAMILTON & PAUL ASHTON

Locating Suburbia
Memory, Place, Creativity

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Paula Hamilton and Paul Ashton

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This eBook was designed by
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INTRODUCTION

THE POLITICS AND PASSIONS OF THE SUBURBAN OASIS

Paula Hamilton and Paul Ashton

> Murder in the suburbs isn't murder technically at all really is it? It's a justifiable reaction to aesthetic deprivation and golf.[1]

Suburbia has been satirised and mocked by the best of them from George Orwell's 1939 caricature in *Coming up for Air* to Dame Edna Everidge from the 1960s and TV's Kath and Kim in twentieth-first century Australia. For many of the generation growing up in the twentieth century, suburbia is, on the one hand, the remembered nightmare from which the human chrysallis escaped to experience adulthood and its pleasures *elsewhere* – the stifling, conformist sameness which nonetheless hid evil deeds like murder. Others hold dear the wistful nostalgic memories about growing up in a domesticated cosy world of backyard games so effectively mobilised by conservative Prime Minister John Howard during the 1990s in relation to Earlwood, a suburb of Sydney.[2]

It is certainly the case that for the older generation who lived through depression and war in the twentieth century, the suburbs represented safety and peace – 'a roof over our heads'; 'a place to call our own'. Like the soldier who came back from Changi POW camp, kissed the ground at Narrabeen, a suburb in Sydney, and said: 'this'll do me'!, the expanding suburbs after the 1950s were the retreat for many men after

time abroad in global conflict; a place to replenish the spirit and build again – individual lives, families, homes, garages, sheds, gardens, lawns. Suburbs have also been long hated,[3] and more recently loved,[4] by writers and intellectuals. They have also been perceived with an uneasy ambiguity, as 'being neither town nor country, but an unwilling combination of both, and either neat and shining, or cheap and nasty, according to the incomes of its inhabitants'.[5] This was the 'half world between city and country in which most Australians lived' that architect Robin Boyd decried in his elitist work on Australia domestic architecture.[6] Recently, however, there has been a strong and growing interest in delineating the complexities of the suburban experience rather than simply denouncing or defending it.

Over the last twenty to thirty years, suburbia has had a make-over. How it is remembered and what place it has had in our lives has also being reconfigured. Many now accept that the nostalgia relates only to a childhood dream of the white Anglo-Saxon part of the population that obscured a great deal more than it revealed. Certainly the historian Andrew May argued in 2009 that 'the reliance of the twin fictions of the novelist's pen and of baby-boomer nostalgia for our predominant images of post-war suburban history precludes the prospect of developing more sophisticated historical narratives'.[7] Even before the impact of the massive post-war migration, the suburbs were more culturally and socially diverse than we have previously understood. Class and religious divisions, if not always race and ethnicity, have a long history within suburban communities.[8] Nowadays, the articulation of that nostalgic memory in public forums is strongly contested, as suburban places are made and remade over time.

In March 2013, for example, Peter Roberts wrote a column for the *Sydney Morning Herald* which had the heading: 'What happened to the suburb I used to know? His particular suburb was Greenacre near Lakemba in Sydney and his article juxtaposed a suburban past and present. He remembers a suburb where he grew up during the late 1950s and early 1960s as a place of peace, sparsely populated, filled with boys sports and games:

> Lakemba? Sure that's where we went to the Sunday matinee at the Odeon every week and watched such pearls as the Three Stooges, Jerry Lewis and Ben-Hur.

Roberts does not mention that Lakemba is now the site of a mosque and one of the biggest Muslim communities in Australia. But most of the *Herald* readers will have this in mind. In his (Anglo-Saxon) memory, there was no violence as there is now, which he blames on the 'enclave of Little Lebanon'. Greenacre and Lakemba now, he says, have been 'turned into a minefield, or a battlefield, or a refuge

of drug dealers, criminals, drive-by shooters and terror'. His elegaic tone is one of sadness and loss:

> That was my home – the place where I once simply couldn't imagine living anywhere else – transformed to the place where I could never imagine living again.

There were several responses to this letter which seemed to strike a Sydney nerve and gave readers a sense of how the media mediates our collective memories. At least two letters accused Roberts of cloaking racism in nostalgia. Omar Sakr replied in the same edition of the *Herald* with an awareness about the public prominence of such views and how they need to be interrogated. Sakr is particularly critical of the assumption that all of the problems are the result of another ethnic group, as though murder and rape were not part of any other suburban culture. This view, he says, absolves one group for taking responsibility for the problems of the community as a whole. For him, growing up in this area probably twenty or thirty years later, the most important element was the camaraderie of his diverse delinquent friends.

One letter, though, was from someone who had lived for eighteen months in Lakemba until recently and also spent time there on a regular basis now. Con Vaitsas, now of Ashbury, claimed that Roberts' vision was 'way out of whack with reality' and very outdated. He argued that Greenacre and Lakemba were no longer predominantly the home of the Lebanese but a mixture of very different nationalities living peacefully side by side: 'my neighbours were Filipinos and Colombians on either side and Africans opposite us', he wrote. So his perception was one of a successful multicultural community.

Such an exchange does little to recognise the complexity of current suburban life but it does juxtapose the memories from different generations and cultures against one another as alternative experiences of belonging to particular suburban localities.

What is Suburbia?

Suburbs are geographically defined areas on a map, spatially located in our memories and also an idea: they colonise our imaginations as both inside and outside the pale. But beyond the government defined boundaries, how are they delineated? Are they anything beyond the city central? Inner city areas such as Surry Hills or Balmain are certainly not brought to mind by this term. Spatially the suburbs are seen as 'out there' away from the inner city which somehow don't meet the criteria for single story occupation on a block of land which we think of as characteristically suburban. But where does the inner city begin and end now? Redfern, Waterloo, Alexandria, Drummoyne,

St Leonard's? 'As a state of mind and a way of living', Humphrey McQueen has observed,

> Suburbia is not confined to certain geographic areas but can thrive where there are no suburbs… It is pointless to lay down a criterion for suburbia that includes duplexes, but excludes a row of terraces. Where it survives outside its natural habitat, suburbia still aspires to the ways of living that are most completely realised by nuclear families on garden blocks with detached houses.[9]

The identity of suburbia, so far as it can be ascribed one, is shifting and insecure; a borderline and liminal space.[10] Dominant stereotypes have listed it as 'on the margins' beyond edges of cultural sophistication and tradition' and the areas that make up 'sprawl'.[11] But in the twenty-first century this static view has to be modified somewhat. And it is evident from this collection that suburban dwellers themselves have redefined being cosmopolitan as house prices in the inner suburbs skyrocket and push people further afield.[12]

The study of suburbs is often viewed as separate from the city or the urban as a whole. But in fact not only are suburbs obviously integral; they are now part of the networked city, reinforcing much older electricity grids, transport and water services with contemporary communications networks, especially the internet and mobile telephony which has facilitated greater interaction between suburbs and across the urban generally. Suburbs are always relational in this sense and though we tend to throw a light on the local or the small concerns within the suburb as case studies, this collection does not argue for their isolation from the wider urban landscape, for we know that local knowledge too, has the power to change lives.

***

This collection was set up as a collaborative project by members of the Research Strength in Creative Practices and Cultural Economy at the University of Technology, Sydney, is in the first instance a testament to that range and complexity of twenty-first century responses to city suburbs, predominantly in Sydney, though with a nod to other suburban contexts on the most-populated eastern seaboard of Australia, such as Melbourne and Brisbane. Secondly, the collection showcases the lively engagement and interdisciplinary nature of the intellectual culture in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Technology, Sydney, from the more traditional scholarly approaches of Humanities scholars to the range of cultural forms which make up Creative Practice in the academy, especially in this

case, Creative Writing and Media Arts.[13] We had many seminars and discussions which took place in 2011 and 2012 about the ideas for the collection. We began by viewing it from the perspective of lived experience, always believing it possible that new technologies can create different spaces for collaborative scholarship within the traditional frame of a book.

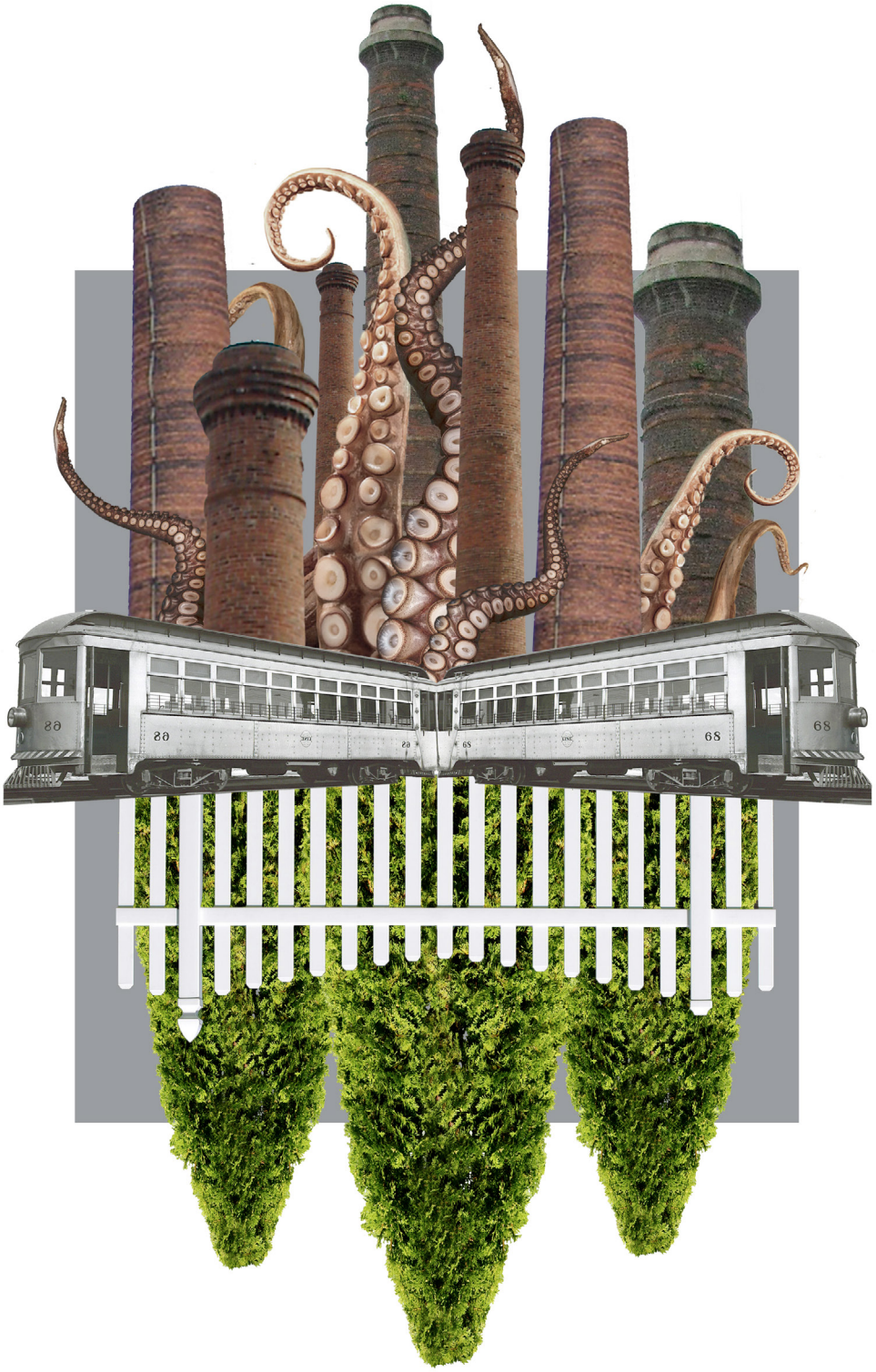
And so it proved. We found that the tension between representing how a world was experienced while keeping that detached critical eye on its form and nature could work very well through a range of artistic and scholarly practice that spoke to each other. Karen Till, writing about her own engagement with memory studies as an artist, argues that more traditional scholars have a lot to gain by heeding the work of artists 'who also acknowledge the ways that people experience memory as multi-sensual, spatial ways of understanding their worlds'.[14]

Three distinct themes emerged in relation to the central concept of re-imagining the suburban which people researched and made for this publication. As our title indicates these became remembered suburbs anchored either by our own personal past or those of others, suburbs as places that were made and remade across time and suburbs not only as the subject for various creative representations but also increasingly where creativity as an identified practice or industry takes place.[15]

Some of our essays take as their subject particular suburbs such as Bondi, Manly and Campbelltown. Others range across time and the space of the urban and suburban. Others focus on those inner city in-betweens, subject of urban renewal and consolidation, such as Marrickville, Pyrmont and Balmain. Some utilise the concept of the even more local through a focus on the park, shops, the backyard or the suburban house. And still others explore what took place in the homes of these areas there that came to be identified with suburban life.

Referring to the suburbs of England, Roger Silverstone previously commented in his 1997 book *Visions of Suburbia* that 'An understanding of how suburbia was produced and continues to be both produced and reproduced is an essential precondition for an understanding of the twentieth century, an understanding above all of our emerging character and contradictions of our everyday lives'.[16] Whether his argument for the centrality of suburbia to historical understanding still holds for the twenty-first century remains to be seen given the many different shapes it now takes in our imaginations.

MEMORY



06

A PLACE FOR EVERYONE

Paul Ashton

A PLACE FOR EVERYONE

CONSTRUCTING 1920s SUBURBAN SYDNEY

Paul Ashton

After World War I, Sydney experienced an enormous surge in the construction of suburban homes. These ranged from modest wooden cottages for the working classes to mansions in areas such as the North Shore. Collectively, these buildings formed a mass of material culture and represented a specific form of cultural consumption. As Pierre Bourdieu has observed, cultural consumption is 'predisposed, consciously and deliberately or not, to fulfill a social function of legitimating social difference'.[1]

The new suburbs, divergent and demarcated as they were, became vehicles for the expression and identification of class and the foundation for modern community formation. In a period of rapid change, and one that witnessed significant social dislocations emanating from the war, as well as industrial disputes and economic recession during the 1920s, suburbs were also, paradoxically, a bulwark against mass society. Ideologues, experts and others promoted the virtues of the salubrious suburbs. But the new suburban order perpetuated old hierarchies and heightened class quarantining.

Dependent on industrialization – heralded in Australia with the opening of BHP's Newcastle steelworks in 1915 – the rise of mass society had on one hand a leveling effect on the culture. Mass production of homes and building supplies, clothes, furniture and art fostered – or at least appeared to foster – a growing homogeneity in society. Developments in mass or popular culture – including radio, first commercially broadcast in Australia in 1923, cinema and sport – did likewise. Radical changes in mass communication and transportation also increased contact between different classes and groups.[2] On the other hand, the emergence of mass society challenged authority and tradition. Class differences became blurred as status symbols changed and social and physical mobility increased.[3]

The spread of the new suburbia entailed a re-configuration of social relations and perceptions of class in the process of community formation. The proliferation and consolidation of local government – as well as cultural institutions such as golf clubs and progress associations – were integral to this process, and impacted on the landscape. But it was not the ideals of enlightened politicians and bureaucrats or the new breed of crusading town planners that underpinned these developments. Rather, bourgeois culture, with its characteristically galvanizing adaptability, assimilated ideological conflicts, appropriated planning mantras and relocated an expanded antipodean version of the English code of gentility – involving notions of gentlemanly virtues and cultured living[4] – into an evolving pattern of respectability which was becoming increasingly suburban and anti-urban from the latter half of the 19th century. The self-professed heirs of the gentry tradition were to see themselves, and be seen, as steadfast social pillars in a rapidly changing and threatening world. Modern ideas and social practices were shunned in suburbia, which became the heartland of a refurbished liberalism. The emerging suburbs became

material expressions and confirmations of the new social order. Their growth was driven in part by the powerful ideology of 'progress'.

The Rise of the Suburb

It was not long after European invasion that Sydney had suburbs. Sydney Town's first 'genteel' suburb was on Woolloomooloo Hill, later referred to as Potts Point. Here in the later 1820s and early 1830s suburban villas – some marine, some in the round – sprang up as the colony's self-styled gentry – in reality a new and powerful officialdom – removed itself from the town. Affecting genteel pretensions, these 'pure merinos' chose suitable names for their grand homes: Tusculum, Bona Vista, Grantham, Springfield, Rose Bank, Orwell.[5] John Claudius Loudon, Scottish horticulturalist and landscape gardener, extolled the virtues of the suburban villa at the height of its popularity in Britain at the close of the 1830s:

> The enjoyments to be derived from a suburban villa depend principally on a knowledge of the resources which a garden, however, small, is capable of affording. The benefits experienced by breathing air unconfined by those streets of houses, and uncontaminated by the smoke of chimneys, the cheerful aspect of vegetation, the singing of birds in their season; and the enlivening effect of finding ourselves unpent-up by buildings, and in comparatively [sic] unlimited space are felt by most people...
>
> The Object which a person has in view in desiring a country [that is, out-of-town] residence will necessarily influence his choice. Health and recreation are the most universal objects, but joined to these, or independent of them, is the love of distinction; of retirement; of seclusion; of horses and dogs, which a country residence affords an excuse for maintaining; of astronomy, botany, gardening and entomology; or of some other study which can better be carried on in the country or in the suburbs of a town, than in the town itself.[6]

Most of Sydney's wealthy merchants, however, located their principal residences in what is arguably the city's oldest suburb, The Rocks. Building mansions along a ridge overlooking Sydney Cove, many of Sydney's leading traders took advantage of views, breezes, good drainage and close proximity to their immediate sources of wealth.[7] Further down the hill, the lower orders lived in crowded and often dangerous conditions close to their places of work.

These patterns and themes, in various manifestations and locales, were to be repeated throughout the 19th century and beyond in

Sydney as the city and its growing metropolis experienced cycles of economic growth and physical expansion and redevelopment. The rise of British style building societies from the mid 19th century in Australia was an important factor in the growth of small but significant levels of home-ownership among the respectable working classes. At this time, the acquisition of property gave men in the lower social orders access to voting and other political rights. And directorships on building society boards could also lead to upward social mobility and great wealth. Financial disasters and scandals in this industry, however, were not unknown.[8]

During most of the 19th century, however, suburbia was largely a place for the well-to-do, along with those who provided daily services for them. In 1841, for example, only 5534 people (or 4.3 per cent of the total population of the colony) were living in Sydney's suburbs (excluding the older, inner most suburbs). By 1891, 275 631 suburbanites appeared on the census (or 24.5 per cent of New South Wales population, again excluding the inner most suburbs).[9] Such growth reflected the rise of middle-class and bourgeois suburbs in the post gold-rush period, particularly in the late 1870s and 1880s. The expansion of horse-drawn bus routes had in part facilitated this suburban surge but this was a relatively expensive mode of transport.[10] Unless a suburb was located along a railway line, spare time and a private means of transit were prerequisites for moving out of the city or its immediate environs. Working-class aspirations to own a free-standing or semi-detached home on a modest or quarter acre block were only possible towards the end of the 19th century and mainly in the 20th century.[11] Indeed, it was the post World War I period that saw the spread and consolidation of the suburbs as the dominant mode of spatial organisation.

Changes in transportation were critical to the spread of the suburbs. Throughout the industrialising world, and in other economically integrated centres, major cities experienced a rise in urban mass transportation systems.[12] Sydney was at the forefront of such developments in Australia.[13] Steam had been the dominant form of power in 19th-century Sydney. From the early 1900s, steam trams were converted to electric traction as Sydney underwent electrification. And as Audley has rightly argued, the 'emphasis in tramway operation was to provide a service to outer suburbs'.[14] Thus the combination of electric trams and trains – the latter catering mainly for mass commuter movements to and from the City of Sydney – now helped drive the expansion of older, outer suburbs and villages and the development of new outer suburbs.

The spread of the suburbs is reflected in the changing balance between urban and suburban populations. In 1911, census figures reveal that more than a third of people living in the metropolis resided in the City of Sydney and its adjoining suburbs of Glebe, Newtown, Redfern, Paddington, Erskinville and Waterloo. A decade later that figure had fallen to just under one quarter. At the 1933 census only 16 per cent of the inhabitants of Greater Sydney lived in the city and its immediately adjoining inner suburbs.[15] The suburb had come of age.

'Building Progress in Sydney'

Peter Spearritt has analysed the expansion of the metropolis and the rise of 1920s suburban Sydney in his pioneering work *Sydney since the Twenties*, subsequently published with revisions as *Sydney's century*.[16] Contemporary observers viewed fluctuations in the building industry with great interest and at times anxiety. It was not simply that they were concerned with monitoring the industry's progress as a measure of capital accumulation per se. 'Progress' itself was being 'built' in Sydney. This powerful, middle-class ideology, with a connection to euthenics and the garden city movement,[17] rested on the belief that general material advancement would lead naturally to improved living conditions for all and to the moral improvement of society. While the loss of the familiar was disturbing in many ways, progress was paramount and 'natural'. Writing of the proposed demolition of Burdekin House in the City of Sydney to make way for the modern Hotel Macquarie, one observer in 1923 noted that:

> another milestone on the road of Sydney's progress is left behind. Ghosts of those days, lang syne, will assuredly accompany us as we speed on. They may, perhaps, gaze wistfully back, but will recognise in this change nature's immutable law, and will wish us success as we, in our turn, journey along. It was ever thus.[18]

Just prior to World War I, the New South Wales Assessor and Receiver's Office noted in its *Annual report* for the financial year 1913–1914 to the Metropolitan Board of Water Supply and Sewerage that substantial 'evidence of the rapid growth of the city and suburbs is to be seen in every direction'.[19] 'Notwithstanding the remarkable progress', the report observed, the demand for houses was 'as keen as ever, and agents are quite unable to accommodate house-seekers'.[20] Despite fears of stagnation as a result of the war, similar growth was reported in the following year. And the Assessor and Receiver was surprised and delighted to convey news of similar findings until 1918 when it was admitted that a 'gradual shrinkage' was apparent over the last few years. This was correctly 'ascribed in the main to the scarcity of materials, increased costs, and financial stringency'.[21] Nonetheless,

progress was still in evidence: 'steady expansion', it was confidently reported, 'is going on in many suburbs, and conditions are, generally speaking, far from being stagnant'.[22] Indeed, 1918 proved to be the turning point for new building work in Sydney.

Fluctuations in building costs combined with long-held expectations of a possible drop in costs undoubtedly contributed to a slackening of investment in new building in the metropolis. But by the early 1920s there was speculation as to a revival, albeit gradual, of activity. In 1922, *The Australian Home Builder* ran a major, optimistic article on 'Building progress in Sydney'. The best results, it told its readers, had been achieved

> in the suburbs of Canterbury, Randwick, Willoughby, Concord, Waverley, and Bankstown. Randwick, Willoughby, and Waverley have in recent years come rapidly to the front as residential areas – Randwick and Waverley because of their proximity to the seaside, and Willoughby because of the light air of the North Shore Hills. Canterbury and Concord are, to a large extent, the suburbs of the workers, who, by thrift, have managed to buy their own little homes. Bankstown, formerly a district of large estates, appeals to the man who likes a good-sized vegetable plot attached to his comfortable house.[23]

With the right work ethic anyone, it seemed, could make their home in a suburb suited to their station.

Though land values in Sydney had been relatively stable in the early years of the 1920s, *The Australian Home Builder* noted in November 1922 that there was a

> tendency... towards an increase in the value of sites in the more favoured localities. The selling season really opened in September, when in one day £36 458 worth of land was sold in the suburbs. The greatest turnover was at the third subdivision of the Kensington Golf Links Estate, £14 000 being realised there. So eager were home-seekers that 55 lots were disposed of in 45 minutes...[24]

One year later, in the midst of a minor boom, the magazine was predicting great things for the building industry and for the apparently ever-expanding suburbs:

> Sydney seems likely soon to leave the other Australian cities far behind in rapidity of expansion. Its people grumble savagely

> about the methods and charges of brick, tile, timber and other 'combines', yet the outlay on new houses, offices and factories this year is already beyond the aggregate reached in any previous period.[25]

Building costs, however, continued to plague 'people of small means who aspire[d] to something better than city tenement life'.[26] Between 1914 and 1923, the price of a modest four-bedroom brick cottage had risen from £388 to £649 (or 60 per cent). Concerns were publicly aired over inflated prices for building materials and in 1923 the Master Builders' Association lodged a formal complaint 'against the tile-makers, who... [were] alleged to have added 40 per cent to their prices as a result of combination'. Despite these tensions and barriers to building, suburban expansion in the 1920s was extraordinary. During this period at least £119 458 641 was invested in new buildings in the suburbs.[27] This represented approximately 81 per cent of all building work on the Cumberland Plain and was equivalent to more than two years of total New South Wales state government's average annual expenditure during the 1920s.[28]

New Cultural Landscapes

Drummoyne, c1920

Buying and building in suburban Sydney had other meanings. The wave of development which was to wash over many parts of Sydney into the 1930s – leaving in its wake cottages, bungalows, flats or art deco mansions, depending on the area – was to remove or drastically remodel earlier cultural landscapes. Just as an older economic order was being replaced,[29] the villas and mansions of the bourgeoisie who had earlier removed themselves from the crowded, dirty city to salubrious locales were either pulled down or engulfed by modern quarter acre and other forms of subdivision which saw their former grounds sliced up and sold off. Juniper Hall in Oxford Street, Paddington – now surrounded by Victorians terraces, narrow laneways and high street shops – is a 19th-century example of this

phenomena. Suburbs such as Concord, Lane Cove and Strathfield provide early 20th-century examples.

Up-and-coming suburban areas were rigorously promoted to attract residents, commerce and light industry to boost rate bases and revenues. Drummoyne, the *Evening News* observed in 1904, was

> a veritable suburb of the red-roofed villas. This is greatly due to the enterprise of Mr. Thomas Henley, who has personally overseen the building of nearly 100 houses he owns in the district, having also instituted the comparatively new line of boats that call in at three wharves on their way to Leichhardt. With the fine electric tram service, this makes the neighbourhood a favourite one for people desiring suburban homes.[30]

Thomas Henley moved to Drummoyne in the mid 1880s having arrived in Sydney in 1883. A wealthy contractor builder and local and state politician who was knighted in 1920,[31] Henley bought and built in Drummoyne on a large, speculative scale. These activities were accompanied by an unrivalled commitment to promoting this marine suburb. Not only did Henley improve the ferry service to the area after his purchase of the Drummoyne, West Balmain and Leichhardt Ferry Company in 1898,[32] he was to play a crucial role in reforming the area's local government which was in tatters by the turn of the century and in re-uniting the district under one municipal banner. As a member of the Metropolitan Board of Water Supply and Sewerage from 1902 until 1933, Henley was to rigorously promote sewerage plans for the area in 1903. By 1910, reticulated sewers had been laid throughout the area.

Local amenity was also improved by the Council via curbing, guttering and asphalting roads, the widening of major thoroughfares, such as Lyons Road – during 1910 for a tramway – and the creation of a scenic drive, the Henley Marine Drive which was under construction in 1910. Street planting schemes were inaugurated to further beautify the area and additional recreational facilities were provided to satisfy local demand and stimulate residential development.[33]

The state was to play an important role in the municipality's development in relation to transport. A steam tram had been extended to Abbotsford in 1893 but this line was fully electrified by 16 April 1905, connecting Abbotsford directly to the city via Burwood. Earlier, and even more importantly, on 29 December 1902, an electric tramway running through Forest Lodge commenced operations linking the Drummoyne end of the Gladesville Bridge via Rozelle Junction to the

Quay.[34] In the absence of a railway the extension of tramways into the municipality was essential to sustained and significant urban growth. It is not surprising, therefore, that the number of occupied dwellings in the area was to approximately double from 625 to 1158 between 1902 – the year Drummoyne received its tramway – and 1905.[35] This new era in municipal maturity, hailed and materially assisted by real estate agents and auctioneers, was also dependent upon the breaking up of the large, landed estates which had been formed on the peninsula during the 19th century.

Arthur Renwick's Abbotsford Park Estate, on which was built the imposing mansion Abbotsford House, went under the hammer of Messrs Batt, Rodd and Purves, Auctioneers, on Saturday 14 November 1903. Subdivided into variously sized 'Blocks and Villa Sites', the elaborate promotional booklet prepared for the sale told prospective buyers that no 'pictures, no matter how faithful, could do full justice to the property. ABBOTSFORD PARK ESTATE IS FAULTLESS'. A summary page in the booklet provided a template of themes which continue to pervade the promotional literature and language of real estate agents and auctioneers:

> Magnificent Building Sites... Perfect Drainage... All prepared and ready to build upon... Lovely Views... No Irritating Government Reservations... Torrens Title... Extremely Liberal Terms... Very Unusual for so Handsome a Property... The Most Charming and Healthy of all Suburbs... Picturesque and Attractive... No Dust... Fine Boating, Swimming and Fishing Facilities... Cheap, Comfortable, Frequent and Quick Access to the City... Rapid and Almost Direct Communication with all Western Suburbs...[36]

In 1910, observers of the municipality, concerned with questions of 'Wealth and Progress', reflected on how 'the place... [had] literally sprung forward with leaps and bounds'.[37] It continued to thrive. Between 1911 and 1917, the number of occupied houses in the municipality increased by 95.4 per cent from 1802 to 3522 while the population more than doubled in the same period from 8678 to 17 610 persons. Again, from 1917 to 1933, occupied dwellings rose from 3522 in number to 7061 (that is, by 85.4 per cent). This period also saw the population escalate from 17 610 to 29 215 (66 per cent) though the annual rate of growth in both instances dropped drastically after 1928 as available land became built out and recession worsened.

Land sales in this period were materially assisted by two other developments in the municipality. While ferries reached their peak of patronage in Sydney in 1927[38] – their subsequent decline leading to the discontinuance of a regular service to Drummoyne during 1939

– private motor bus services commenced operating in the district from around the close of World War I.[39] Though crowded in peak hours and generally in short supply, these services improved transit within the area and between other centres, thus enhancing Drummoyne's attractiveness as a residential suburb.

Manufacturers, too, were to see advantages in the area: its centrality; relatively good transport; a growing population, part of which might be used in their workforce; and the possibility of wharfage. As early as 1884, the Lysaght Brothers had established their wire netting factory on the Parramatta River at Five Dock. But major, permanent secondary industry was not to move into the area on a large scale until the closing years of the 1910s. Having purchased Abbotsford House and its surrounding grounds from Grace Brothers, a large Sydney emporium, Nestlé and Anglo-Swiss Condensed Milk Company, began manufacturing chocolate in a 'model factory' it had constructed on the remnants of the once stately grounds. Symbolising the ascendancy of an industrial bourgeoisie, Abbotsford House became the company's administrative centre. Crompton Parkinson, manufacturers of electric motors and transformers, commenced operations along Lyons Road in 1921 and in 1924 Burwood Fibrous Plaster Work, formed in 1919 to service the suburban boom, built a new factory at Queens Road, Five Dock, in response to a general boom in demand for their products which had been stimulated in part by tariffs.[40] These industrial enterprises were to affect the social composition of the municipality, leading, as they did, to an increase in the numbers of working-class people residing and working in the area. Improvements in transport were also to see a rise in the number of working-class residents who travelled outside of the suburb for employment.

In their various and voluminous literary eulogies on the municipality, real estate agents noted with pride the area's conveniences. Water and gas[41] had been laid on for some time while sewerage had been available since 1910. Electricity had reached the area in 1912. And there were numerous places for leisure and entertainment including picture theatres, a 'Masonic Hall' and a school of arts, a golf club – the number of golf clubs in Sydney jumped from 9 in 1900 to 29 in 1929 – sailing, rowing and swimming clubs. Well-made streets planted with trees and well-established schools, not to mention scenic surroundings amidst the bustle of progress and a healthy environment, were also cited as additional attractions to the place. Some agents went as far as to bestow the progressive title of 'garden suburb' on parts of the municipality. But the latter claim was a sham, resting weakly on empty rhetoric and the area's natural environment as opposed to a real or even philosophical commitment to the ideology of the garden suburb.

The Garden Suburb Ideal

Held up as the 'great lever of social reform', the garden suburb ideal was first promoted by British town planner Ebenezer Howard in 1898. He was an advocate for utopian cities in which people of all classes could live in harmony with themselves and nature. The garden suburb was the product of euthenic thinking. Based on environmental determinism, euthenics promised moral uplift, a higher state of living and social unity. (It had the same aims as eugenics, which was biologically deterministic.) Slums were to be banished. Park, playgrounds, serpentine streets, generally beautiful surroundings and the provision of spaces for congenial social interactions would rid society of the old evils of class jealousy. But ideals such as the 'garden suburb' were whittled down to little more than attractive but socially meaningless subdivision plans and artists' renderings of leafy suburbs from which to make profits.[42]

Nomenclature, however, was to create a deal of conflict among local residents during the early 1920s when a campaign to 'Change the Name' of Five Dock to 'something more euphonious' was launched in 1921. A campaign committee – headed by Norman A. Cashman, a leading real estate agent and largely comprised of other estate agents – worked hard for almost 18 months to replace 'the horrible name' which was, they argued, 'a stigma upon a healthy and picturesque suburb' due to its implied connection with a 'dock and shipping centre, and the unwholesome surroundings usually associated with these places from a residential point of view'. 'My contention', Cashman wrote just prior to a referendum that was held within the old municipal boundaries of Five Dock to decide the question,

> is that the district of Five Dock has not kept pace with the neighbouring suburbs of Drummoyne and Haberfield, and the only reason why is the distasteful name which it unfortunately possesses. The Following Estate Agents (N.A. Cashman and Co., D. and W. Baines, R.J. Donaldson and Co., Ald. George Hazlett) know and fully realize from personal contact with people what a serious handicap the present name is to the progress of the district.[43]

On 2 December 1922, voters decided to support the 'Keep the Name Campaign', an outcome which did nothing to retard development at Five Dock.

The rate and nature of suburban development from one area to another depended on a myriad of factors including historical circumstances, geography, politics, group dynamics and individual effort. Class, and the preservation of class distinctions, was another

powerful ingredient. Industrial suburbs such as Auburn attracted working-class communities. Dormitory working-class suburbs, such as Dundas, grew near places of work or transport. Lower middle-class and middle-class suburbs such as Concord flourished, spawning mile upon mile of bungalows.[44] Many middle-class and bourgeois northern suburbs strove to exclude others on the basis of class via economic means. Covenants governing types of materials and minimum prices for the erection of homes kept 'undesirables' out. Terraces and weatherboard were banned in places such as Haberfield, as were public houses.[45] State experiments in public housing also had a tendency towards class quarantining. This was clearly evident at Daceyville[46] as well as the Sydney Harbour Trust's building program for waterside workers in the inner city suburb of Millers Point.[47] Rates of expansion also varied greatly – from a 151.7 per cent increase in housing stock in Bankstown between 1921 and 1933 to negative growth in isolated or older areas such as Alexandria and Erskineville, where older houses were being replaced by industrial and commercial facilities.

Whatever the specific character of different areas, a new domestic ideal had been successfully implanted in the culture during the first two decades of the 20th century. As perceptions of class became blurred with the rise of mass society, the suburban bungalow, or the more humble suburban cottage, became a symbol of middle-class virtues and values – respectability, individualism, order and material success via hard work and thrift. As Drummoyne, this was fervently advocated and advanced by real estate agents, speculators, business – especially those who made building materials[48] – and architects and other 'experts'. This ideology had its roots in the 'liberal' political tradition:[49] individualism; 'a stake in the country'; frugal habits; self-help. It was to be most clearly articulated a few decades later in Robert Menzies' 1942 radio broadcast, 'The Forgotten People'.[50]

The suburban domestic ideal was also anti-urban. City life, and life in the choked inner suburbs, enveloped the individual and the family in 'chaotic conditions'. A truly suburban existence, experts, idealogues and promoters argued, meant 'method and order, combining the ideal with the utilitarian, which would culminate in the development of greater civic pride and love of country in the hearts of our city and town dwellers'.[51] Thus the middle-class suburban home, or at least aspirations towards this ideal, was held up to be a civilising influence in an unruly, changing world.

Conclusion

Despite the continued growth in investment in 1920s suburbia, the decade saw a re-allocation of resources to industrial interests and

the emergence of authoritarian forces. This was evident in the work of members of the town planning movement.

Walter Burley Griffin's experience after World War I had left him a soured man. He had been more or less sacked as Federal Capitol Director in late 1920 – due in part to his dismissive attitude to economics and bottom lines – and he had been greatly disappointed by his failure to win an international competition in 1922 for the Chicago Tribune Building.[52] Turning to theosophy[53] and later moving to Castlecrag in 1924, Griffin sought to move 'back to nature' to 'develop an organic communal life'[54] with modern means. He detested

> the monotony of the modern environment [which was]... not merely here but everywhere. The isolated relics of earlier art as well as the unique variations in races of men and genera of plants and animals being obliterated in the ubiquitous standardised product of our building art.[55]

'Communion', he wrote, 'with primeval nature is the common school for future architects that it was in the beginning of civilisation'.[56]

To achieve this return to nature, Griffin blended the modern and the anti-modern in his retreat from mass society. His final earthly paradise was to be an exclusive, tightly planned and, at first, middle-class suburb, isolated from the city but accessible via car, on 650 acres which he and his wife Marion had secured through their land development company, the Greater Sydney Development Association.[57] A number of the shareholders in the company, most of whom were Griffin's friends and supporters, took up an offer of a free allotment which was bound by the condition that they construct Griffin-designed homes. This was intended to forge from the outset a special character for the area.

Inspired by the agrarian impulse and the environmental movement in Australia and the USA, Griffin's utopian experiment on the sandstone plateau above Middle Harbour was both a 'crusade' for art[58] and an attempt to separate 'the genius or the man ahead of his times'[59] and his cohort from the 'masses [which] must painfully grope out their own uncertain way'[60] in an age dominated by frightful mass consumption, the market and vulgar economics. 'Two of the factors in the simplest equation concerning the social side of urban life have', he wrote,

> … been lost sight of in all modern cities, which are essentially industrial and treat humanity as one industrial unit... In tribal or village communities, from which all civilization has arisen, there were essential intermediate social units between the family and collective industry. At least there was the neighbourhood of a few families with many interests in common.[61]

Griffin's suburb was eccentric and unique. But here, writ large, was the new suburban inheritance. The suburbs were to effect class segregation – or quarantine – and create insular, village-like environments. Suburban Sydney was to foster cultural narrowness, parochialism, social introspection and exclusivity. Griffin's abhorrence of the 'active destruction going on, not only in the inevitable breaking up of old idols but in the wanton despoliation of nature'[62] was reflected in popular magazines of the times. 'To the average man', journalist Nora Cooper wrote in The Australia Home Beautiful, 'the word "modern" probably conveys nothing at all except a secret sense of strangeness and discomfort at the loss of familiar things'.[63]

Bourgeois and petit-bourgeois suburbanites now pursued the myth of gracious or genteel living in a new socio-economic context. Respectable working-class and lower middle-class suburbs were necessarily more earthy and plain. Here, honest owner-occupiers built 'hearth' lands based on the 'home spirit'. Centred around the nuclear family and the mantra of 'own-your-own', the home spirit was supposed to foster independence, self-reliance, personal security and social stability while being a 'source of national greatness'.[64] The promise of the good life was promoted by the media, politicians, increasingly ineffectual, though well paid experts and building industry and property market interests while being partially underwritten by government-sponsored housing schemes. While the dream remained illusory for many, the new suburban paradigm provided a place for everyone, keeping everyone in their place.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

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