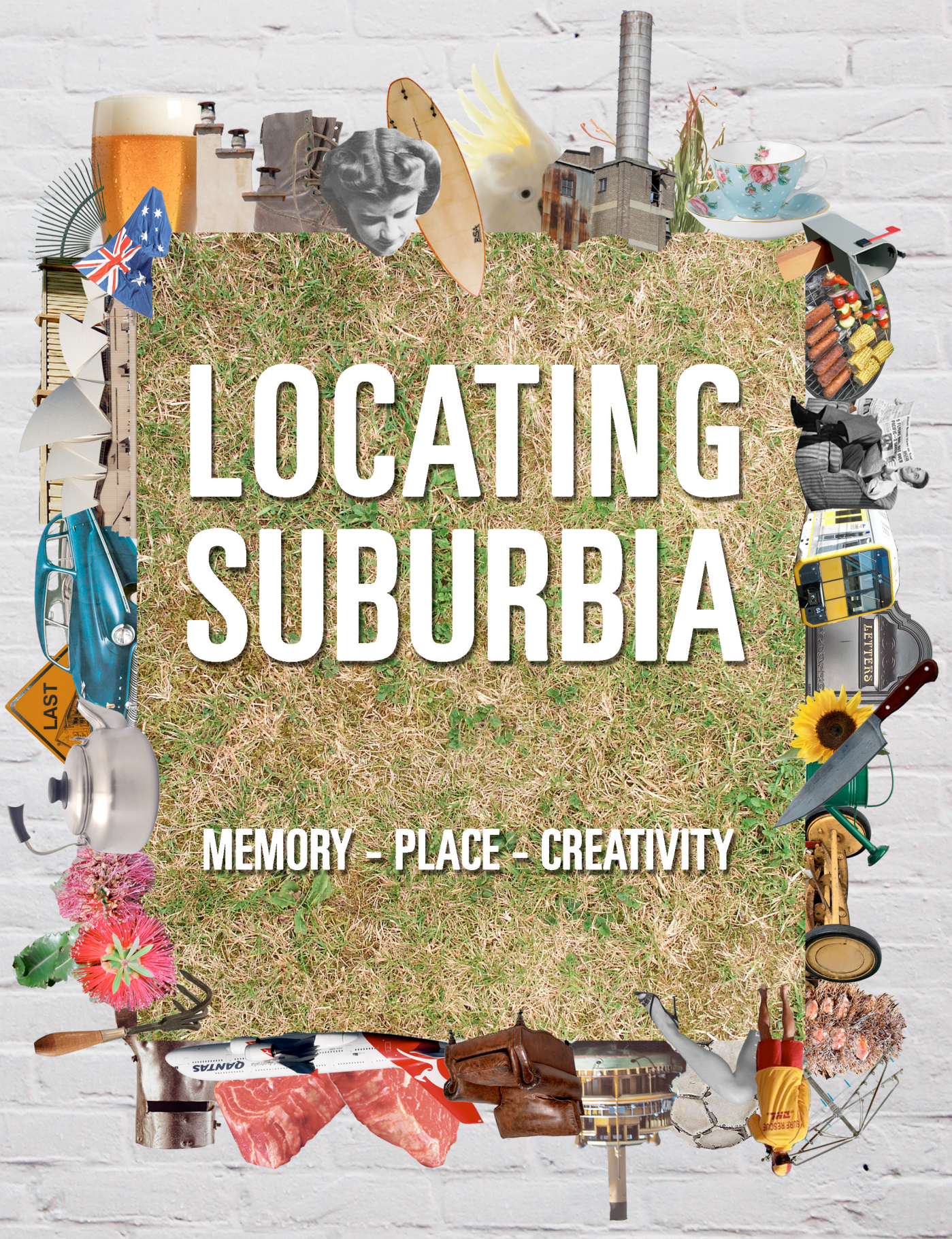




LOCATING SUBURBIA

MEMORY - PLACE - CREATIVITY

EDITED BY

PAULA HAMILTON & PAUL ASHTON

Locating Suburbia
Memory, Place, Creativity

Edited by

Paula Hamilton and Paul Ashton



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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 chrysalis 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



10

'WHAT HAPPENED TO THE LOCALS?'

Penny Stannard

‘WHAT HAPPENED TO THE LOCALS?’

NATIONAL CULTURAL POLICY AND THE AUSTRALIAN SUBURB

Penny Stannard

In a letter to a newspaper in 2010 a resident artist from the outer Sydney suburb of Campbelltown asked ‘What happened to the locals?’ This started a debate that ‘sparked a furore’.¹

Artist Gary Makin questioned whether the cultural policy direction pursued by Campbelltown City Council through its award winning arts centre was actually delivering more for inner-city Sydney artists and audiences - the 'Sydney arts scene' - than the local community. He argued that the 'neglect shown by the Campbelltown Arts Centre towards our local artists' indicated that it was more concerned 'in big noting with the Sydney mob'.² Supporters of the arts centre pointed to its recent achievement in gaining multi-art form status from the Australia Council, the Australian Government's arts funding agency. This status enabled greater access to federal government support while confirming Campbelltown Arts Centre's position beyond a localised context to one that was part of the national cultural scene.³ Yet Campbelltown's Mayor in his defence of the arts centre iterated that its core role 'should be [as] the creative hub for the local arts community'.⁴ Thus on the one hand, the value and role of the centre in delivering cultural policy outcomes were predicated on its position within the national contemporary cultural sector, while on the other, its core function was articulated to be local cultural development. Could it be both?

The Campbelltown debate raises a number of issues concerning cultural policy direction generally, an area of public policy that has gained recent attention due to the Australian Government's release of the 2011 *National cultural policy discussion paper*, which outlined the development of the first national cultural policy since Paul Keating's 1994 *Creative nation*.⁵ The debate demonstrates: firstly, that local communities are engaged in discussion concerning the cultural policy directions pursued by their representative governments; secondly, that the spatial dimensions of cultural policy are considered to be important to the discussion; and thirdly, that ambiguities exist in how local cultural needs are understood and evaluated within an overarching national policy context. Crucial to all three points is Campbelltown's position as an outer suburb of greater metropolitan Sydney.

Australia has been described as, fundamentally, a suburban nation.⁶ The majority of Australians spend their daily lives in suburban communities and according to Terry Flew are increasingly choosing to do so.⁷ It is 'in the daily lives of all Australians', the *National cultural policy discussion paper* notes, that situates how the new cultural policy will 'reflect the important role that arts and creativity play' and 'will help to integrate arts and cultural policy within our broader social and

economic goals'.⁸ Despite the rhetoric, the intended policy direction as articulated in the 2011 *Discussion paper* omits any reference to suburban Australia. Omission, or more particularly the exclusion of suburbia, is also highlighted by cultural geographers such as Chris Gibson who critiques recent cultural policy models that deal with urban communities, such as the cultural capitals or creative cities theses which have become popular policy approaches in Australia throughout the past two decades. Considered together, these policy approaches might lead one to the assumption that suburban Australia and cultural policy are mutually exclusive. The 2010 Campbelltown debate, however, illustrates that this is not the case. While it aired as Campbelltown Arts Centre approached its fifth year in its current form as a producer of multidisciplinary contemporary arts programs, the issues it raised are not new. Indeed Campbelltown has had a long history of engagement with cultural policy direction, particularly the policy elements associated with notions of cultural identity and urban development, and the points of intersection that occur between these elements and across the policy spectrum as it extends from local to national concerns.

The 2010 Campbelltown debate provides an access point to engage with the new Australian cultural policy. It also provides an opportunity to reflect upon the historical trajectory of cultural policy direction and the intersections that this public policy area has had with the development of suburban Australia. The term 'cultural policy direction' is used in this article as a way of encompassing public support for cultural activity that extends from both the 'ad hoc' to that which is systematically directed through formalised policy models.⁹ This chapter examines the outer metropolitan local government area of Campbelltown, in Sydney's southwest, as a research case study. How has the development and implementation of cultural policy direction in a suburban community been informed and influenced by broader political and social contexts, including regional development and urban growth, as well as community driven social movements and the development of an Australian cultural identity? It places the arts, in reference to forms of cultural practice, as a focal point in examining cultural policy. While not suggesting that the arts alone constitute a definition of culture or are the sole concern of cultural policy, it follows both Deborah Stevenson and Deborah Mills' assertion that cultural policy to a large extent becomes 'operationalised' through arts and heritage spheres.¹⁰ Given this, reference to cultural policy at a national level relates primarily to the Australia Council.

The historical period under review extends from the mid 1950s to the early 1970s, capturing a time in which Australia's development and urban growth was harnessed toward suburbs like Campbelltown

that lay on the outer edges of major capital cities. During this period cultural policy also became formalised as part of a broader public policy agenda through the establishment of the Australia Council. Investigating a specific historical period of time alongside contemporary cultural policy developments allows us to uncover the antecedents of the issues underscoring much of today's cultural policy dialogue. It also demonstrates that suburban communities such as Campbelltown have had a continuity of engagement with cultural policy.

Omission of suburban Australia, and the spatial dimensions associated with cultural policy more broadly, have been identified by cultural policy studies scholars Justin O'Connor, Deborah Stevenson and David Rowe and journalist Steven Crittenden in their individual responses to the 2011 *National cultural policy discussion paper*. O'Connor argues that an Australian national cultural policy, developed for a nation that is highly urbanised, cannot ignore the critical role that Australian cities have as powerhouses of arts and creative industries.¹¹ Stevenson and Rowe suggest that the proposed cultural policy should address a range of spatial issues including those that concern the relations between different sections of cities and between rural and urban environments.¹² *Global Mail* journalist Steven Crittenden also identified spatial dimensions as one of the discussion paper's major shortcomings. He noted that cultural policy needs to establish a way of including the intersections that occur between the suburbs of major cities and their resident communities.¹³ All three commentators agree that the spatial dimensions that characterise Australia, of which suburbia is a predominant element, must be addressed in the development of future cultural policy in order for it to have resonance across the nation and within the Australian population more broadly.

Much attention has been paid to the role of the Australian suburb in the nation's cultural life.¹⁴ Far less consideration has been given to suburbia and cultural policy. Chris Gibson contends that one of the reasons for this is that suburban zones – which sit beyond the inner urban cores that underwrite the creative cities or cultural capitals theses of Richard Florida, Charles Landry and Franco Bianchini – have suffered from being labelled as 'uncreative'.¹⁵ This has caused suburban zones to be excluded from the cultural policy discussion over the decades in which the creative cities/cultural capitals policy approach has dominated. Responding to this, Gibson and others such as Chris Brennan-Horley and the recent *Creative Suburbia* group have produced a body of research over the past decade that has examined cultural policy in suburban Australia by using industry and occupational data to measure and quantify cultural activity in suburbs to demonstrate how it contributes to wider regional economies.¹⁶ This work has been undertaken using a cultural industries lens. Here, I

examine suburbia through a cultural policy studies approach that draws from a range of disciplines including public history, cultural geography, urban and media studies. I seek to build a fuller understanding of how cultural activity and the resultant or precedent policy directions have developed over time in tandem with and in response to social concerns that place Campbelltown as a microcosm to Australia's development as a suburban nation in the late 20th century.

'Until the 1950s There Was No Suburban Campbelltown'

Spanning 312 square km, the Campbelltown Local Government Area is located 55 km from the Sydney central business district and contains 145,967 residents.¹⁷ 'Campbell Town' was named by Lachlan Macquarie, then Governor of the colony of New South Wales, in 1820 in honour of his wife, Elizabeth, whose maiden name was Campbell. The Campbelltown area had become an important place in Australia's post-invasion agricultural economy following an 1805 land grant made to John and Elizabeth Macarthur who had pioneered the breeding of merino sheep to export fine wool. Campbelltown remained largely rural until the early 1950s.¹⁸ It developed gradually in the post-war years unlike other outer Sydney areas such as Liverpool and Fairfield, which had grown quickly to meet the housing demand generated by returned soldier and new immigrant populations.

This pace changed with the NSW Government's release (1948) and gazetting (1951) of the Cumberland Plan, which had been developed to address the growing needs of metropolitan Sydney's expanding population. The Plan has been described as 'the most definitive expression of a public policy on the form and content of an Australian metropolitan area ever attempted'.¹⁹ It regarded Campbelltown, located halfway between Sydney and Wollongong, as the 'town most readily adaptable for expansion into a new city' and projected that its population would grow by 30,000 in two decades.²⁰ The Plan drew not only on Campbelltown's geographic location but also on its intangible cultural attributes such as a 'strong individuality', 'civic pride' and 'historical past' to establish a rationale for development.²¹ As the Plan's initially quarantined green belt was released and developed, growth in Campbelltown reached figures that had been projected for the 1970s.²² This caused a hastier than planned transformation of the rural landscapes. The period marks the start of decades of development in Campbelltown, which became the site in which Sydney's suburban growth was concentrated from the 1970s to 2000.²³

Abandoned in 1963, the Cumberland Plan was succeeded in 1968 by the State Planning Authority's *Sydney region outline plan 1970–2000AD* (SROP), which proposed that Campbelltown and its neighbouring municipalities of Camden and Appin, the 'South West

Sector', house 500 000 people by 2001.²⁴ Later named the 'Macarthur Growth Centre', the 'three cities' were part of the national growth centres program, which has been described as having 'raised the idea of new cities to new heights in Australian public policy'.²⁵ Macarthur, however, 'was unique amongst the Australian growth centres in that it was the only *metropolitan* growth centre, being an integral part of the Sydney metropolitan region', unlike places such as Albury-Wodonga and Bathurst-Orange which followed the more traditional British new town model of decentralisation into the regions.²⁶ Under *SROP*, and later the growth centres program, large amounts of land was acquired for the development of local industries to generate employment and city centre development in Campbelltown, including public housing.²⁷ This would have far reaching impacts not only in the physical development of the city but also its social and cultural development.

A regional development lens provides an overarching public policy perspective from which we can understand Campbelltown's transition from what had been a century-and-a-half of rural lands and village communities to a modern suburban space. The urbanisation of Campbelltown was initially conceptualised as a satellite site within greater metropolitan Sydney. As a result of urban policy reform from the late 1960s Campbelltown was conceptually re-positioned to be part of a national program of regional development. It thus came to occupy an ambiguous conceptual policy space as a suburban tract of metropolitan Sydney and a centre of significance in a growing Australia. Over time this policy ambiguity would develop cultural dimensions too, in particular in the relationship between Campbelltown's local and Australia's national cultural development. While the 2010 debate concerning Campbelltown City Council and its arts centre provides a recent example, the roots of this cultural ambiguity can be traced back to an unlikely source. Fifty years earlier, the local legend of Fisher's Ghost – a tale of murder and mystery – materialised as a policy instrument that was inextricably linked to Campbelltown's emergence as a suburban space.

Fisher's Ghost

While the Cumberland Plan had identified Campbelltown as a satellite city, no additional funds or further planning guidelines had been released and the future of Campbelltown remained with the local authority up until the release in 1968 of *SROP*.²⁸ Campbelltown had been growing rapidly from a population of 8840 in 1952 to 25,300 in 1966 – an increase of 265 per cent.²⁹ New services were required for the community. But the rates income base was insufficient to finance the development of these services. To address the shortage of funds Campbelltown Council adopted an entrepreneurial approach.³⁰

The first activity of this type was the inaugural Fisher's Ghost Parade in 1956. The colonial story of Fisher's Ghost emerged in the years following the murder of local man Fred Fisher in 1826 and the trial and eventual execution of his neighbour George Worrell. Carol Liston notes that the records surrounding the disappearance and subsequent trial was the best documented of all colonial New South Wales legal dramas. Paranormal dimensions began to emerge in the story of Fisher's murder as it was recounted through poems and published stories in the 1830s. From then on Fisher's Ghost proved 'endlessly fascinating' for publishers.³¹

Poems, dramas, novels and journalistic work featured Fisher's Ghost throughout the mid to late 1800s.³² It entered the Australian vernacular in the early 1900s. In 1924, the accused in a civic corruption case was 'looked upon as a fisher's ghost to the officials at the Town-hall... a nightmare'.³³ Earlier, in 1910, the *Brisbane Courier* used the headline, 'MR. FISHER'S GHOSTS' in reference to Federal Labour Party Leader Mr Fisher's speech to Gympie constituents concerning socialism in relation to Federation. The use of the term 'ghost' implied that Mr Fisher's argument had not represented the true situation.³⁴ In the 1920s Raymond Longford's silent film *Fisher's Ghost* toured across Australia screening to packed audiences.³⁵ The film was described as an 'Australian historical drama, based upon a sensational criminal trial in the early days... also made entirely by Australians'.³⁶ The Longford film was used as evidence in the 1927 Royal Commission into Film that locally produced films could be as popular and commercially profitable as those imported from Hollywood.³⁷ In 1925 *The Advertiser* reported that Fisher's Ghost was 'a world Australian story [sic]'.³⁸ And in 1932 the *Sydney Morning Herald* described it as the first really indigenous Australian ghost story.³⁹ Two decades later L.A. Triebel, Professor of Modern Languages at the University of Tasmania, wrote that 'no single fact in its history is more responsible for putting Campbelltown "on the map" than the world famous story of Fisher's Ghost'.⁴⁰

Triebel's statement draws attention to how a local Campbelltown story had developed national and international interest and as such functioned as a signifier of place for Campbelltown. This point made by Triebel in 1950 can be read as a precursor to how the story as a cultural narrative would develop in the coming years to form an instrument of public policy as Campbelltown transitioned from farmland and townships into a region of Sydney's outer metropolitan suburbia.

A 1955 re-enactment of the Fisher's Ghost story featuring a sheet flung ghost-like over the rump of a cow had drawn a large audience of Sydneysiders to Campbelltown. This convinced the council that

the story had enough interest and popular currency to establish the Fisher's Ghost Parade as an annual event.⁴¹ The parade was the main event in the inaugural 1956 'Campbelltown Commemorative Festival', a major community cultural event that had been organised to 'make the name of Campbelltown and its great potential known throughout the country' and to direct 'financial gains' made from it towards the development of much needed public infrastructure.⁴² A public holiday was gazetted on 19 October 1956 to celebrate the first Fisher's Ghost Parade. The 'long awaited' Fisher's Ghost float was reported to be the highlight of the parade.⁴³ A council float, pictured below, states on its banner, 'Campbelltown Municipal Council Fosters the Growth', while young women dressed in ballet tutus with tiaras and fairy wings sit astride a large sculptured mushroom on the float's top. In the following years, the Commemorative Festival, which was officially re-named as the 'Festival of Fishers Ghost' was used to raise funds for the development of public infrastructure including an ambulance station and music shell in Mawson Park.⁴⁴ The establishment of the parade in 1956 represented a turning point in the trajectory of Fisher's Ghost as a cultural narrative. Where the story previously had been a subject of fascination to artists and popular with large audiences, from 1956 local government used it in a deliberate and instrumental way to raise funds for public facilities, thus forming a direction of cultural policy.



Fisher's Ghost Parade, 1956, photo courtesy of Campbelltown City Council.

It is worth pausing at this point in the history of the Fisher's Ghost story to examine it in relation to cultural policy direction. For more than

a century, the tale of Fisher's Ghost had been told repeatedly through various forms to audiences far and wide and as such had emerged both as a Campbelltown specific and national cultural narrative. Tim Rowse has characterised cultural policy in Australia from the mid 1950s to the late 1960s as being a model of voluntary entrepreneurship – 'the efforts of a diverse group of self appointed altruistic leaders lobbying for a range of cultural activities'.⁴⁵ He refers specifically to the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust (AETT), which was established in 1954 to commemorate the Queen's visit and to encourage Australian opera, ballet and drama and the development of a national theatre. While the AETT context differed markedly to Campbelltown's case, the approach to cultural policy was similar.

The Australian Women's Weekly introduced a third perspective into the Fisher's Ghost story as an instrument of cultural policy. *The Weekly*, upon hearing of the intention to establish a monument to Fisher's Ghost as a means to raise money for an ambulance station, drew attention to the need to modernise. Columnist 'Dorothy Drain' wrote:

This is an age of plastics, and it should be possible to devise some illuminated plastic representation of Fisher... fluorescent lighting, which can do some pretty ghastly things to living complexions, would be ideal... Fisher's Ghost would be a night attraction and would doubtless, in time, be surrounded by snack bars and petrol stations.⁴⁶

The Weekly's column captures the tensions associated with Campbelltown's transition into modernity and how cultural policy direction can be implicated in such change. Liston rightly argues that there was no suburban Campbelltown before 1950.⁴⁷ Once suburban development took hold from the 1950s, organised local cultural activity became a vehicle of public policy to support communities through this urban and social transformation.

From Fisher's Ghost to an Australian Cultural Identity

From the 1950s to late 1960s Australia experienced a period of social change with unprecedented levels of immigration and the rapid expansion of outer-metropolitan suburban areas such as Campbelltown.⁴⁸ Modern Australia celebrated 175 years in 1963. There was a growing sense that it needed to develop its own cultural identity as an independent nation state.⁴⁹ This led to a renewed interest in home-grown stories from which an Australian identity could be carved rather than one that was transposed from Britain. Bernard Smith observed that the development of Australian art at the time was underscored by a cultural sense of identity that had grown from local myths and legends.⁵⁰ The legend of Fisher's Ghost had qualified as

genuinely Australian and was featured by *The Australian Women's Weekly* in its coverage of Australia's 175th anniversary celebrations.⁵¹

Television was to provide a new platform for interpreting and disseminating material relating to the development of an Australian cultural identity. Between 1956 and 1960 almost 250 000 television sets were purchased in Australia.⁵² Concurrently, Australia's expanding population was increasingly residing in the rapidly developing spaces of metropolitan outer suburbs. The 1963 *Senate Select Committee on the encouragement of Australian productions for television*, known as the 'Vincent Report' had made recommendations addressing the need to increase the Australian content in television programming.⁵³ It was thought that the 'field of drama – light, medium, heavy or musical' offered the most effective form of creating a genuine Australian image.⁵⁴ Opera, a dramatic musical form, was ideally suited to the task, and in 1963 the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) produced John Gordon and Robert Allnutt's *Fisher's Ghost*, the first Australian television opera production and, also noted by *The Weekly* at the time, the first with an historical Australian story.⁵⁵

Gordon and Allnutt's *Fisher's Ghost*, which was created and produced specifically for television, was indicative of the ABC's role in facilitating an awareness and the development of a modern Australian identity. The production fulfilled the ABC's charter to encourage local talent and seek to establish musical groups for the purpose of high quality broadcasts.⁵⁶ As well as re-interpreting an Australian home-grown cultural narrative through a dramatic musical form, *Fisher's Ghost* was both created and performed by Australians including the young soprano Marilyn Richardson, who was to go on to have an international operatic career.

The ABC's television opera production furthered the trajectory of the *Fisher's Ghost* cultural narrative and its intersection with cultural policy direction. Television brought Campbelltown and its famous story into the cultural consciousness of an ever-expanding suburban Australia. The opera shared commonalities with the Longford silent film from nearly 40 years earlier in that both had been produced with the most contemporary cultural form of the time, and both were all-Australian productions seen by audiences across the nation. The use of contemporary cultural forms and practices offer an effective means to interpret and forge new-generation resonance with past cultural narratives and provide an effective means of renegotiating and inhabiting history.⁵⁷ The place and the tale have formed a powerful partnership that has operated as a site of cultural negotiation for Campbelltown as it has transitioned from farmlands to suburbia to claim a sense of identity that holds sway both locally and beyond.

During the 1960s a growing cultural awareness spread into Australia's suburbs and towns as an increasing amount of pictorial work by visual artists was submitted to suburban and rural art prize competitions.⁵⁸ This work explored home-grown Australian myths and legends and has been described by Bernard Smith as forming a 'prototype for popular art' which had a conceptual and aesthetic accessibility that enabled it to gain an audience with the wider community. Visual arts activity in this sense contributed to engaging suburban communities in the development of a modern Australian cultural identity, which, according to Campbelltown history researcher Lynne Marsh, provided a broad context for the establishment of an art prize as part of the Fisher's Ghost Festival program in 1962.⁵⁹

While initially undertaken as a fundraising exercise to resource the production of the overall festival, the Fisher's Ghost Art Prize soon became the field on which the cultural traditionalists and modernists drew battle lines as Campbelltown was fast losing remnants of its agrarian landscape to modern suburban housing. The 1969 Fisher's Ghost Art Prize marked an occasion in which the older rural values of Campbelltown clashed with the shift to modernity. Prominent veterinary surgeon Dr Russell F. Rick opened the 1969 exhibition. In his speech he remarked that the traditional 'Hans Heyson' [sic] style of landscape held a greater validity than artwork in which 'expression is completely devoid of formal arrangements'. He asserted that 'its very nature forbids us to call it art'.⁶⁰ Rick referred to Australian painter Hans Heysen who 'made the Australian gum tree monumental and the hero of his nationalistic pictures'.⁶¹ Heysen's work represents a tradition of historical realist art that romanticised the Australian bush landscape and the 19th-century pioneering spirit. Rick's remarks eluded to the growing number of modern art works being entered into the art prize, which in 1969 included the work of Suzanne Archer and Peter Laverty. At the time, the *Campbelltown-Ingleburn News* reported that local art teacher Joan Brassil had given a talk on the 'abstract art' that was in the show to an 'enthusiastic audience'.⁶² That contemporary artists had work exhibited signalled, according to Marsh, an acceptance of modernity and the changing face of Campbelltown.⁶³

The Fisher's Ghost Art Prize, which in 2012 celebrated its 50th anniversary, has developed into a major cultural event in its own right and has attracted some of the biggest names in Australian visual arts.⁶⁴ The establishment of the art prize represented a new shift in the application of the Fisher's Ghost story towards cultural policy. It initiated a focus on organised visual arts activity that would sow the seeds of a social movement that was to gain momentum over the following decades. The movement was to evolve through the collective work and advocacy of artists such as Joan Brassil

and Barbara Romalis who had been trained in modern art in the 1950s and who had come to live and work in Campbelltown. This movement would ultimately influence and become the central focus of Campbelltown City Council's cultural policy direction from the early 1980s through to the establishment of the Campbelltown City Bicentennial Art Gallery in 1988, which was developed into the Campbelltown Arts Centre in 2005.

Turning Points: Australian Cultural Policy Developments in the Late 1960s to Early 1970s

The late 1960s and early 1970s are often described as being a turning point in cultural policy in Australia.⁶⁵ It was during these years that the systematic direction for supporting cultural activity through formalised policy models was established through the Australia Council, founded in 1968.⁶⁶ Under the Whitlam Labor government (1972–75), cultural policy direction – ‘the arts’ as it was then understood – came to be seen as an important and integrated component of national renewal and reform. In his 13 November 1972 election policy speech Gough Whitlam had announced a suite of cultural policy directions designed: ‘to promote a standard of excellence in the arts; to widen access to, and the understanding and application of, the arts in the community generally; to help establish and express an Australian identity through the arts; and to promote an awareness of Australian culture abroad’.⁶⁷

The inclusion of cultural objectives by the Whitlam government within the broader public policy arena and the resulting significant commitment of funds towards cultural activity nationally, gave some sections of the Australian population access to federal cultural funding for the first time. They were classified as being ‘culturally disadvantaged’ and included those that lived in outer suburban areas such as Campbelltown. These areas represented neither the city nor the ‘bush’, which were the spatial zones that the publically funded Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust (AETT) and Australian Council for the Arts (ACA), now Regional Arts Australia, addressed in their core and touring programs. Outer suburban areas were thought to be a ‘cultural desert’.⁶⁸ While outer suburban areas contained substantial and growing populations, resident communities had little access to the AETT and ACA programs. Outer suburban cultural disadvantage was also understood as having resulted from rapid population growth over two decades which outstripped the provision of infrastructure, facilities and services including those for cultural, recreational and leisure activities. As Australia Council Chairman Dr H.C. Coombs reported in 1973:

A major long-term problem in support for the arts lies in the lack of the basic physical facilities for their practice or enjoyment.

In country areas and in less affluent suburbs in particular, buildings in which performing arts can be presented or visual arts exhibited with safety are sadly lacking. In the newer and growing urban and suburban areas such facilities have so far come low in planners' priorities.⁶⁹

He also noted that:

The absence of adequate arts facilities in rapidly developing areas around metropolitan cities in Australia has been seen as a barrier to the Council's function to widen access to the arts in the community.⁷⁰

Without dedicated facilities for the arts featuring in the planning and development of new outer suburban areas such as Campbelltown, the Australia Council's policy objective of widening access to the arts was significantly compromised.

Campbelltown, as the centre of the Macarthur region, occupied a unique position in policy terms, which included the cultural sphere, for the Whitlam government. Firstly, it was the sole metropolitan entity in the national growth centres program, and secondly, it was classified as a region within Western Sydney that was deemed culturally disadvantaged. This binary emphasis established a cultural policy paradigm in which Campbelltown was understood as a place that was important to Australia's development nationally, and as a local community that required cultural policy attention to lift it out of disadvantage.

As cultural policy direction streamed from the Australia Council framed by objectives of excellence in, and community access to the arts – as well as a mandate to develop and promote national cultural identity – it was thought that suburban-based cultural disadvantage could be rectified through the development of dedicated cultural facilities. Such action would ensure that in the case of Campbelltown, its nightly arts activities would no longer be 'sacrificed on the deluded altar of the multi-purpose municipal hall'.⁷¹ An uninformed reading of this might assume that cultural policy direction in Campbelltown started with the Australia Council leading the charge. But cultural policy direction, as conducted through the Fisher's Ghost story, had been in place in Campbelltown for some time. The interpretation and celebration of the story had provided the instrument for Campbelltown City Council to deliver public policy outcomes in the mid 1950s. Further interpretation of Fisher's Ghost in the 1960s had built a connection between Campbelltown and the broader movements that had been working towards the development of a national cultural identity. Prior to this, the celebrated 'home-grown' cultural narrative that Fisher's Ghost had

become since the 1830s and its interpretation through a wide range of cultural forms, provided a place for Campbelltown on the national and sometime international stage.

So why did the Australia Council in its assessment of Campbelltown seemingly ignore what had been a successful history of locally driven cultural policy development? Gay Hawkins contends that the notion of 'community' occupied a central conceptual place within the Whitlam government's social democratic agenda.⁷² For Katya Johanson, 'community' was 'a chief catchphrase of government, the public services and newly forming social organisations'.⁷³ There was a vision for direct support from central government to the community, the consequence of which was that state and local governments were sidestepped in the process.⁷⁴ Cultural policy direction in Campbelltown in the early 1970s was disrupted from its local roots and became a field of direct intervention by the federal government via the Australia Council's objectives. By 1973 Coombs could note that these objectives had an 'inherent tension'. While 'excellence' implied the work of the 'exceptionally talented' this elitism was at odds with the aim to widen participation in and experience of the arts in the community generally.⁷⁵ This tension would magnify and retract at various times throughout the history of the Australia Council, the impacts of which would be played out through processes of restructure and reformation of funding programs.⁷⁶ Thus the issues that emerged in the 2010 debate about Campbelltown Arts Centre in relation to its stated core role as a local community enterprise in contrast to its measure of value as a nationally recognised arts organisation, have their roots in policy objectives that many years earlier had been acknowledged as containing inherent tension.

Flat, Dry and Filled with Sinister Silence

In 2011 Hollywood star, Sydney resident and the then Sydney Theatre Company (STC) Artistic Director Cate Blanchett and her co-director husband Andrew Upton recounted their suburban youth in the 1980s for the purpose of securing further government investment in Sydney's harbour-side cultural precinct, which sits astride the Sydney Harbour Bridge and is where the STC and numerous, other subsidised cultural organisations and institutions are located. For Upton, the suburbs were 'flat, dry [and] filled with sinister silence', while 'town [the city] was the centre', a 'magnetic attractor', a chance to invent and create.⁷⁷ Blanchett and Upton insisted passionately that it is 'vital for the children of the suburbs that capital cities act like capital cities' and develop metropolitan inner city precincts filled with artists and cultural organisations. But they also stressed that the key to the success of such precincts lay in them being located where people live. Blanchett and

Upton were unaware of the paradoxical nature of their statement. The majority of Sydneysiders, and indeed Australians, live in the suburbs.

Such pronouncements by urban cognoscenti represent the view of high profile people that Australian officials are increasingly calling upon to inform policy direction, including cultural policy, through forums such as former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's 2020 Summit and the Lord Mayor of Sydney's City Talks program. Blanchett and Upton clearly express a view that suburban Australia is a cultural 'no man's land'. They continue a tradition of Australian cultural leaders who for over 60 years have pursued a way of thinking in which the suburbs are cast as places that are culturally void and deficient.⁷⁸ The *National cultural policy discussion paper* fails to consider where suburban spaces and communities feature in Australia's cultural landscapes and respected cultural policy scholars identify the general and more specific neglect of suburban spaces in Australian cultural policy. How successful will a new national cultural policy be in embedding the arts and creativity within the daily lives of Australians when the suburbs are ignored at best or derided by those whose voices carry weight?

'Place matters' conclude Paul Widdup and David Cutts in their analysis of how communities experience cultural activity.⁷⁹ The Campbelltown case study clearly demonstrates that Australia's suburban communities have long been engaging in discussions concerning cultural policy. The spatial dimensions of suburbanisation, particularly as it has related to the wider public policy arena, have been critical to the development of cultural policy direction in Campbelltown. In articulating the fundamental concerns of cultural policy, Australia's most eminent cultural economist, David Throsby, has observed that one of its key objectives is cultural identity, something that is constructed through the recognition and celebration of national, regional and local identities.⁸⁰ A sense of cultural identity that encapsulates how Campbelltown is understood as a suburban place both locally and beyond has also formed a significant element of its cultural policy direction. From the interpretation of the Fisher's Ghost legend over many decades a famous cultural narrative emerged that ensured that the place of Campbelltown was well positioned in terms of an Australian cultural identity. As the Australian Government develops a new cultural policy, influential voices and policymakers would do well to ensure that, rather than seeing the places in which the majority of the nation's population live as 'flat, dry [and] filled with sinister silence', they are cognisant of the depth of engagement with cultural activity and cultural policy direction that exists in Australia's suburbs.

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