

# A Dilemma for Landscape Architecture: Suburbs and Utopias.

A thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

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May 2010

## **Declaration**

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; and, ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

Jo Russell-Clarke

3 May 2010

## **Acknowledgements**

This work would not have been possible without the unquestioning support of Mum and Dad. I don't thank them often enough. Ted has patiently endured everything and eagerly helped whenever he could. Throughout my candidature Dr Jonathan Carter has shared his considerable knowledge with much patience and generosity. The cheerful, professional assistance of Jonathan Dale provided much-needed additional support toward completion. My greatest thanks go to Dr SueAnne Ware. She has constantly provided inspiration and argument for critical engagement with landscape architecture. Without her encouragement, goading and friendship the work would never have started and would certainly never have been completed.

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All images are sourced from material received, delivered to letterboxes in Glenroy, a north-central suburb of Melbourne. They comprise advertisements from the free local community newspapers and letterbox-dropped promotional cards and brochures.

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## Summary

### *A Dilemma for Landscape Architecture: Suburbs and Utopias.*

For computer software programmer Ward Cunningham, inventor of the Wiki, problems are enlightening while difficulties are unhelpful distractions. A dangerous dilemma can arise from confusing this distinction. For Karl Mannheim, who distinguished a utopia from an ideology, Fredric Jameson who recognised that utopias allow for consideration of things otherwise inconceivable, and Thomas More who coined a term charged with the paradox of a good place that is no place, utopian endeavour constitutes work on exactly such useful problems. So does design.

Suburbs, utopias and landscape architecture share histories of similar important and revealing problems. These evolving problems, however, now face a new dilemma. This is not another framing of difficulties marking a further evolution of the useful problems that have always existed, but the attempted abolition of problems altogether. This is being pursued in two ways: through a strictly focused enumeration of de-politicised practical difficulties urged by bi-partisan calls for climate change adaptation and global economic resilience, and by the uncritical positioning of change itself as logically inescapable, essentially apolitical, and therefore utterly unproblematic to begin with.

Arguments regarding what might be necessary for an understanding of suburbs, utopias and landscape architecture today appear irrelevant. Just as these three problematic terms have been discarded in favour of fresh vocabularies, the problems they promise have been made redundant too. They have been transcended. Such transcendence leaves suburban dwellings, utopian dreams of dwelling and the landscape architectural design of places to dwell, bereft of possibility for either escape from or error in conception of correct construction of our futures. The aporia inherent to discussions of suburban development, utopian ambition and the design of nature, have become apodictic pronouncements on suburban sprawl, dystopia and sustainable design, or alternatively, complex apologia for having no position at all.

The four chapters of Part I introduce the major areas of research, their contemporary suburban context and an argument for understanding design as a utopian endeavour. They focus on the particular dilemma of current attitudes to suburbs, utopias and landscape architectural design presented by the many understandings which operate as controlling myths, resisted and exposed by those which are utopian subversions. It concludes noting the dangers of slippage from committed and exploratory utopian openness to either newly emphatic closure, or non-committal open-endedness. A variety of disciplinary and other literatures competing for a place of significance in understanding suburbs and design are examined in the chapters of Part II. Part III provides examples of these contests through an evaluation of recent work in two well-known areas of suburban imaging and imagining: the visions of real estate advertisement and the frameworks of urban design legislation.

The work concludes with an appeal to rediscover a utopian impulse, to uncover lost potentials and prior states of utopian optimism, not in order to find the right, lost way or to fix an agreed direction, but to enjoy and realise their multiplication. Faced with intractable problems, the imperative of design to make strange in order to discover new purpose is becoming design estranged from purposeful making. The encouragement of more proposals for projects, not the abolition of the necessity for them, is required to resist the ever-recuperating standardisation, normalisation, and trivialisation of happiness and the good life.

## Introduction

*Something is missing.*

Bertholt Brecht<sup>1</sup>

*When I started to explore the historic utopias, I was seeking to discover what was missing, and to define what was still possible.*

Lewis Mumford<sup>2</sup>

*Substitute whatever you like here - projective 'complicity', digital triumphalism, neoliberal neotraditionalism, etc - in the end, these all amount to a kind of postmodern group therapy designed to soothe but not cure the incurable loss at the heart of the crisis of representation.*

Reinhold Martin<sup>3</sup>

Histories of suburbia and the definitions and development of suburbs by architects, landscape architects, engineers, surveyors, planners and many others disclose a richly contested legacy. Histories of designed landscapes document the poetics and politics of diversely motivated waves of land development. The development of land—the construction of landscapes—has shaped the profession of landscape architecture as well as popular appreciation of environments. Landscapes are revealed as not just variably constituted, but continuously re-constituted, cultural, ecological and economic assets. A design is the literally constructed argument for a variation in value. Something is always missed and there have always been counter-arguments in pursuit of that loss. Now, however, faced with global environmental, economic and other crises, designers are urged to accept a united, if ill-defined, agreement on landscape value—increasingly expressed in terms of ecosystem services—ceding argument to others entrusted with its determination. The loss of argument itself—of the mandate of design to be ‘for’ something, to represent and present a point of view—cannot be cured by further propositions, as these comprise arguments that are already illegitimate. Neither can it be cured by an apparent resistance that claims to be inclusively ‘for’ everything, to be ‘for’ representation rather than the representation of something. Designers construct arguments not their outcomes. Constructions bereft of argument are bereft of design.

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<sup>1</sup> In Bloch, E. 1979, p.45.

<sup>2</sup> Mumford, L. 2003 [1922], p.2.

<sup>3</sup> Martin, R. 2006, p.18.

Human societies have always altered their immediate environments by sudden or sustained, subtly embedded or extravagantly extrovert projects. Nonetheless, a self-conscious history of intentional environmental manipulation by designers is most commonly understood to have emerged in the eighteenth century with the English landscaped estate, concurrent with an Enlightenment reappraisal and appreciation of nature (Hunt 1976; 1994; Jellicoe & Jellicoe 1995; Newton 1971). Such landscape architecture continued to develop expertise and significance throughout its negotiation of the complex changes in land tenure and land management practices of the agricultural revolution and further displacements of the industrial revolution. It became a subject of prominent public debate with the rise of the industry town and the city slum and acquired professional distinction and stature with the emergence of an affluent middle class, planned peripheral suburbs and revitalised city centres. In the twenty-first century the historic relationship of designers to the creation of successive settlement patterns and land development continues to provide material for popular, polemical understandings of landscape design and value. On the one hand, design is regularly hailed as the key factor in building better cities, exemplified by great cities of the past (Krier 1998). On the other, in its guise as the outcome of ego-maniacal experiment, design is demonised as the cause of catastrophic urban failures, also demonstrated with reference to the collapse of past civilisations (Sandercock 1998). Such assessments of past efforts fundamentally form our conflicting appreciations of contemporary suburban landscapes and our inconsistent expectations for their future.

With the twentieth-century rise of planned residential suburbs, land development has gradually established a narrower definition and a more specific agenda. Land development is now commonly understood to involve the provision of adequate and equitable social and service infrastructure for the owners and occupiers of private property. It simultaneously and democratically facilitates yet lawfully limits creative self-expression for an institutionalised greater good, increasingly identified with a triple bottom line of measurable sustainability (DSE 2002). Landscape design too has increasingly emphasised its professional activity as that which most effectively supports such land development. In Australia this is evidenced by the recent promulgation and swift implementation of policy by the Australian Institute of Landscape Architects (AILA), including the release of a Landscape Charter in 2007, the launch of supporting Landscape Principles in 2009 and the integration of both into awards criteria and education accreditation requirements. Any design exploration, expression or admission of the vigorously contested interpretations of adequate and equitable land development is generally opaque where it exists at all. Similarly, the likelihood that AILA-awarded projects may be exemplary not because they meet certain criteria but because they

make particularly inspiring interpretations of criteria which are infinitely interpretable has not been considered.

Beginning with propositions that adopted and adapted earlier utopian models of essentially religious and political literature, proposals for the design of ideal communities have embraced a wide variety of economic and environmental models.<sup>4</sup> These have ranged from self-sufficient garden cities and satellite New Towns, through exclusive, gated communities and dormitory worker enclaves, to networked urban villages and multiple-use zoned hubs, amongst many other forms and very many other names (GUST 2002, p.8; Hayden 2004). The idea and identification of the 'suburb' shares these various experiments. Diffused and concentrated, mixed and solitary, layered, staggered, shattered and sprawling patterns of land use program and landscape form have been tried. Yet while there is seeming consensus on a predominant model of the suburban landscape—reflecting a normalisation and naturalisation of the dream of home ownership made manifest with hard, honest work—there is enormous disagreement as to whether this democratic space of fairly distributed resources and opportunities actually exists, ever has or ever can (Cohen 2003; George et al. 2004; Levine 2005; Negrin 1994). Emerging from a period of disengagement from the suburban realm, architecture and landscape architecture are theorising new and renewed roles for design, along with new and renewed ideas for constructed environments—landscapes—different to the urban, rural or wilderness places more familiar to their published practice. The simple question initially posed is: How do you design the suburbs? And the simple background query asks: How have the suburbs *been* designed? However, the more complex research question which emerges is: How can the shifting disciplinary model of landscape architecture better advocate design of the shifting suburbs and engage with the shifting forces that realise them?

One approach may be to celebrate shiftiness. Zaha Hadid's tricks (Bentley 1999, p.37), Stan Allen's 'stealth' (1998) and Rem Koolhaas's provocations (Koolhaas & Mau 1995), amongst others, provide examples of an astute and engaged, winning yet devious playfulness with the economics and politics of building. As innovators, the traditional predicament of designers is to overcome resistance to change. With change increasingly demanded by market forces, new technology, capricious clients, fickle

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<sup>4</sup> Robert Freestone has discussed early Australian efforts to structure settlement on a variety of imported and compromised utopian models. (See particularly: Freestone, R. 1989). Andrew Milner offers a more recent and even broader consideration of utopianism regarding Australia, including historic conceptions and projections – textual, cartographic and pictorial – of the continent as a utopian place of otherness to European culture (Milner, A. 2006).

popular opinion, an erratic climate and much else outside their control, designers are now urged to better engage with and understand changes forced upon them (AILA 2010; Stickells 2005). However, beyond the responsibility to innovate and the necessity to manipulate—which in practice are indistinguishable—there is another, newer challenge. Along with finding ways to deal with shifts themselves, designers have traditionally resisted the conservatism of those who want to abolish troublesome shifting altogether with appeals to a core or fundamental reality or value to be rediscovered in foundation myths of obscure origin. They have also had to interrogate the motives of those who want to secure the latest particular view, value and form, claiming to have done so with elaborate evidence of irrefutable logic which reveals new ‘facts’ of the ‘real’ situation. Finally, in addition, designers must now also resist those who do not want anything *but* shifting, embracing, however indecorously, the uncontrollable phenomena to which designers are required to reactively adapt in ways which endeavour and claim to be non-controlling themselves. It is this final approach to change as something uncontrollable and the idea of appropriate responses as somehow non-controlling, which constitutes a peculiar threat to design practice, and a particular threat to landscape architecture in its dealings with ‘nature’. How it is manifested in the design of suburbs is the interest of the following chapters.

There are many and varied studies focused on the suburbs, on landscape architecture or urban design more generally, but little that connects their separate yet parallel shifts. The dubious circularity of claims to value and meaning (a good city/place is the result of good design and good design is evident in a good city/place) are tautological references, not proofs. This research aims to make explicit the responsible task of design, in particular landscape architecture in its dealings with ‘natural’ environments, to query all received knowledge directing its endeavours. In doing so it must also self-consciously admit and examine the value-systems and truth-claims attending such inquiry.

Examination is inescapably evaluation. So a final, further question emerges with these queries: to what purpose? To what end should landscape architecture better advocate design of the shifting suburbs and engage with the shifting forces that realise them? Clearly it is to improve them, to be encouraged by possibilities for improvement, yet remain self-conscious of the history of similar failed claims. It is to be utopian. Design is driven by an ever-shifting goal of the good.

### **The Good, the Dilemma and why something is always missing**

Yi-Fu Tuan (1986), amongst a body of work focused on landscape, has outlined four ways that the good life has been envisaged historically in the Western world that can be readily illustrated by visions of the suburbs. The first is 'environmentalism' which requires a special type of physical setting and relationship with nature, whether that is 'natural' nature, the idealised nature of gardens or—a view dominant in the twentieth century—the artificial environments of architecture and engineering. The BBC back-to-nature television series *The Good Life* was a suburban experiment in various aspects of this type. 'Nature' in a variety of guises, from traditionally cultivated productive and ornamental gardens in diverse styles, through preserved wilderness and restored ecosystems, to high-tech sustainable constructed ecological infrastructure (wetlands), provides archetypal as well as photogenic imagery for the promotion of suburban estates.

The second way to envisage the good life is 'to focus on the activity rather than the physical environment' as the means to achieve deep satisfaction. It is what people do and what they contribute to their societies rather than what their environments are or look like that is valued. A work ethic pervades this good life. The suburbs, through their appeal to community and neighbourliness, have traditionally valued this path to the good life. It is a particular feature of New Urbanist developments, which, despite an avowed critique of 'suburbia' have largely been appreciated by consumers as a particular type of better designed and exclusive, if not gated, suburb where these lost community values have been reinstated and protected. Suburbs perhaps would not have existed without a work ethic which raised money for mortgages, committed homeowners to lawn-mowing, home improvement and a degree of busy self-expression, and, finally, which generally promoted the detached home as the reward of battlers.

The third way is 'through the lens of philosophy' which asks what is necessary for the growth and maintenance of happiness for the individual and confirms the relationship between a good life and a virtuous life. This way is not interested in activities or their physical settings. It is less concerned with identifying what is good than exploring what goodness *is*. The suburban home as castle and retreat offers this pursuit of the good life. Regardless of the tastes or class or connections of its owners, the suburban home is valued as the locale for private reflection and active self-improvement.

The fourth way is that of 'utopian thinkers'. 'Their point of departure is a strong discontent with society as it exists in their time ... They do not neglect the physical environment [which] must be hygienic if not also beautiful, and ... must encourage

human communication ... [It is] not a natural Eden' (Tuan 1986, p.5). This last, less well-defined, path to the good life via the rejection of a present unsatisfactory condition and a groping toward an improved and newly imagined one, comes closest to explaining the restlessness of the suburban homeowner today in seeking upgrades to something ever bigger and better. But the musing of utopian thinkers exploring discontent is easily hijacked by the pronouncements of myth-makers exploiting it. The struggle captures that defining quality of suburban expansion which has made the suburbs 'suburbia', turning dissatisfaction into the horizontal flight of 'sprawl'. The suburbs expand not just because of demographic pressure or increasing affluence per se, but because these new landscapes present themselves as highly desirable places to spend—or rather invest—good money in a good life. Each new housing estate endeavours to market a 'new' vision for a hygienic and beautiful environment populated by a friendly community where each home-seeker is importantly offered creative control over their own space, along with financial security and independence.

There are many arguments made for the good life under each of these four categories and arguments for the good of suburbs have employed each of them too. Tuan goes on to note that a study of all these possibilities for appreciation of 'the good' could occupy a hardworking scholar for a lifetime and yet it would remain unclear to what purpose (1986, p.6). A similar question confronts those who have investigated and catalogued the history of suburbs and the organisation of cities, as it has those who have tabled taxonomies of utopias. Following an extensive summary of literature on the history of urban planning, Stephen Ward wonders about its future: 'But if there can be no conscious grand narratives, what prevents the story being a mere accumulation of facts?' (MacLeod & Ward 2002, p.3). In researching Melbourne's suburbs historians Barbara and Graeme Davison 'wonder whether there is anything left to do other than to read all the scholarly monographs and articles and distil them into vivid narrative prose' (in Davison et al. 1995, p.18). They are referring to the work of 'geographers, planners, sociologists, political scientists and economists' and over a decade later suburban analyses remain dominated by the investigations and publications of these fields. Designers and design theorists have had relatively little to say in this popular arena about the physical form of the suburbs. Like Davison and Davison there may seem to be little to do except illustrate the text and data of others' research with the plans and sketches of their professional training, in particular the attractively deployed vegetation of landscape architecture. However, just as the Davisons note that historians bring a particular view of others' 'facts' to debates on suburban values and precedent, designers offer particular critical interpretations, and remind us that there are no merely accumulated facts, just as the eye is never innocent and space is never empty. More

than that, their built interpretations actually constitute the values and precedents that others will examine for 'only design makes purpose manifest and open to debate' (van Schaik 2000b, p.6). Examination of built form can lead to propositions for different form-making procedures, or models or templates for new form. More importantly, design relates these to questions of value and to the arguments of new propositions for the pursuit of the good life and happiness.

A search for happiness is central to radical as well as conservative agendas. The Situationist Internationale noted that: 'Of all the affairs we participate in, with or without interest, the groping search for a new way of life is the only thing that remains really exciting' (Debord 1955). Landscapes are an inseparable part of this search. 'The landscape retains its grip on us as a subject of consuming interest' (Archer 2004, p.6). Michael Archer shows how the life lived in it is necessarily politicised: 'The modality of our belonging to the land, whether that affiliation be time-honoured, God-given or the result of usurpation, colonisation or occupation, is, too, forever in play. A landscape is an image of power relations ...' (p.6). Claims to hold keys to the good life are fundamental to political contest. 'In a socialist country, the general nature and specifics of the good life are at the core of an official doctrine that is relentlessly propagated through government channels. In a capitalist country, it is broadcast ceaselessly through all the powerful and cunning devices of the commercialised media.' (Tuan 1986, p.6)

'Utopia' is a term which Jameson notes is:

... a symbolic token over which essentially political struggles still help us differentiate left and right ... a code word on the left for socialism or communism; while on the right it has become synonymous with 'totalitarianism' or, in effect, with Stalinism ... a left critique of social-democratic reformism, within the system; and on the other hand a free-market fundamentalism (Jameson 2004, p.35).

'Suburb' is certainly employed as 'a code word' for conflicting political viewpoints. The left has seen it as both positive and negative, as has the right. For the left it means fair housing opportunities for all, but is also a term critical of rampant free-market consumerism and unsustainable physical and financial growth. For the right it is the material proof of the successes of capital investment, accumulation and growth, while also used as a slight upon lowest-common-denominator housing provision. Jameson goes on to ask why we cannot simply discuss political issues 'directly and openly, without recourse to this, seemingly literary, third issue of utopia?' (2004, p.35). The same has been suggested of the suburbs: 'one argues about representation of the suburbs rather than the suburbs themselves' (McCann 1998, p.vii). Why not discuss

separable aspects of landscape architectural design such as circulation, programmatic requirements, ecological enhancement, and so on? Why not discuss issues of density, service provision, infrastructure costs, local ecosystem damage and other specific difficulties without resorting to emotionally charged references to suburban sprawl? Jameson continues: 'Indeed, one could turn the question around and say that we are perfectly free to discuss utopia as a historical and textual or generic issue, but not to complicate it with politics. (In any case, has the word not always been used by some of the most eminent political figures on all sides as an insulting slur on their enemies?)' (2004, p.36). Certainly 'suburban' is etymologically derived and has been popularly used as a slur on those less than urban or civilised. Why too with the suburbs, can't we discuss suburban culture and features without resorting to politics for an explanation?

For James and Nancy Duncan, who gathered material from over ten years of study of a wealthy suburban estate in Westchester County, New York City, '[t]he logic of aesthetics parallels the logic of hegemony so that class inequalities are refigured and depoliticised as questions of landscape taste or environmental ethics' (2004, p.31). They interpret gifts and covenants of land for nature preservation as prestigious investments in cultural capital 'that resonate with spiritual and moral power' while 'the language of capitalism, [the] economic rationality of passing wealth from one generation to the next' is attached to these gifts of land (2004, p.154). 'Historic preservation tends to be based on an exclusivist aesthetic that no longer recognises itself as such.' (2004, p.152) Reviewer Margot W. Garcia, a self-proclaimed deep ecologist, disagrees, finding 'many observations and interpretations in this book difficult to accept' (2005, p.106). For her 'such environmentally sensitive and supportive projects' are an 'important and socially responsible act' of support for healthier ecologies which benefits all (2005, p.107).

Debates regarding what is 'good' seem easily distracted or substituted. Similarly, if we are missing a roof over our heads, we are told we need affordable housing not shelter, and if our environments are deficient in basic services for life, we are informed they lack liveability, not adequate infrastructure. Theodor Adorno observes:

He who asks what is the goal of an emancipated society is given answers such as the fulfilment of human possibilities or the richness of life. Just as the inevitable question is illegitimate, so the repellent assurance of the answer is [as] inevitable [as it is ideologically dated] . . . There is tenderness only in the coarsest demand: that no-one shall go hungry any more. Every other seeks to apply to a condition that ought to be determined by human needs, a mode of human conduct adapted to production as an end in itself (2005, pp.155-6).

Foucault's observation that '[t]he guarantee of freedom is freedom' makes the same point (1984, p.372). The goal or guarantee of freedom is freedom just as the goal of an emancipated society is an emancipated society and that of a good life is a life that is good. But what does this mean for designers, whose task is surely more than the provision of shelter; whose task might more familiarly be described as contributing to that 'fulfilment of human possibilities or the richness of life' which Adorno condemns as 'repellent'? Is it a different species of question to ask: What is the goal of design? The answer is not—cannot be—freedom itself, let alone affordability or liveability or sustainability, but only the creative and experimental offering of conceptions of freedom, of newly engaging ideas of an emancipated society that hopes to engender freedom through form that endeavours to encourage and communicate—to embody—those ideas. Adorno warns of a condition where issues of need are determined by, and insidiously become, moral imperatives of appropriate behaviour. When no-one should go without shelter or clean drinking water, the problem is not how to supply *affordable* housing or plumbing, but how to put a roof over everyone's head and provide access to a reliable water supply. To demand affordability is to see the problem only within the terms and conditions which created it; that is, within the aims and ideology of consumer capitalism and, specifically, the real estate and mortgage markets which are, to judge by the causes of the global financial crisis, its primary arena of speculative operation. This is to be trapped within that particular ideology and, as Jameson argues it is the very function of utopianism to enable escape from that condition (2004, p.46). This is also the function of design.

Those involved in the courageous, uncertain and ultimately doomed search for something missing—utopians—are not easy to distinguish from those involved in the confident indulgence of nostalgic life-world substitutions or the excitement of novel lifestyle alternatives. The only possible escape and sole effective response in the face of constant slippery recuperation of liberating ideas is utopianism; the production of new hopeful propositions destined in their turn to fail. That utopias cannot deliver—are impossible—does not negate their importance or usefulness, but rather constitutes it. 'Nothing remains interesting where anything may happen,' declared H. G. Wells (1933, p.140). A century later Rem Koolhaas defined the value of impossibilities:

Impossibilities: A creator is someone who creates his own impossibilities, and thereby creates possibilities. It's by banging your head against the wall that you find an answer. You have to work on the wall, because without a set of impossibilities, you won't have the line of flight, the exit that is creation, the power of falsity that is truth. You have to be liquid or gaseous, precisely because normal perception and opinion are solid, geometric (1995, p.794).

The 'line of flight' is one of hope and '[h]ope is the opposite of security, of a naive optimism. Within it always lurks the category of danger' (Anderson 2004, p.15). For Bloch, architecture call for wings (in Heynen 1999, p.125). Peter Corrigan closed his A. S. Hook Address referencing Emily Dickinson: 'To conclude: architecture should enhance that sense of a defining difference. Which is central to what makes a culture rich and its citizens proud. Architecture is the thing with feathers' (2003).

### **Three themes**

This research investigates three related claims: that suburbs are a key environment of our times in terms of understanding human relationships with a non-human or natural world, that landscape architecture is the key discipline to approach and respond to an improved understanding of suburbs, and that utopianism is the key attitude for any useful design response. The importance of suburbs, of landscape architecture and of utopianism to an understanding of contemporary culture and dominant world-views is not argued in order to settle slippery terminology once and for all, or to reveal the errors of particular definitions in order to propose correct ones, although considerable effort is made to expose inconsistencies and alternatives are offered. Neither was the intention of the work to explain things away by demonstrating the imprecision of terms, nor so generalise definitions so as to render them effectively meaningless or empty. Rather, the research examines terms in order to prompt closer and clearer examinations of things, in the process critiquing the interpretations and histories others have created or assumed for them.

There are those that consider the suburbs to be simply the dormitory residential periphery of a city, located between urban and rural environments. Others acknowledge a range of types, densities, shapes, relationships to other residential and non-residential centres and rural land uses, political and administrative structures and economic bases, along with evolving and newly identified combinations of these. Similarly, the professional practice of landscape architecture might be simply conceived as a negotiation between wilderness and buildings, horticulture and architecture, exterior and interior environments, pursued in accordance with any one of a variety of ideas regarding what constitutes usefulness and delight. There is particular recent interest in positioning the profession at the variously articulated interfaces of 'art' and 'science'. However, like suburbs, landscape architecture also appears at present to be variously and sometimes contradictorily defined. It is considered to be a discipline of ecological stewardship, productive land management, sustainable land use, environmental art, or any combination of these. The present location of professional expertise is scattered across areas that have also developed their own disciplinary and

cross-disciplinary titles. Urban Design has even grown to have its own sub-expertises. Landscape Urbanism claims a new title for a synthesising field of apparently recent endeavour focused on urban environmental processes. New Urbanism claims invention of a particular approach to settlement design organised around a central, essential idea of close community. In combination, the varieties of professional activity rightly or wrongly claimed by landscape architects and poorly or exemplarily undertaken, and the variety of definition given to the term 'suburb', lend themselves to a condition of huge potential variety in approach to the analysis, proposal and realisation of suburban environments.

Suburbs, utopias and landscape architecture share then similar important and revealing problems. A critique of these allows for the formulation of ideas, necessary for the formulation of projects. The goal, then, is the further, clearly articulated exploration and even elaboration of informative problems, rather than the overcoming of limited difficulties. The goal is the encouragement of more proposals for projects, not the abolition of the necessity for them. This approach is not interested in the success or failure of suburbs, of landscape architecture or of utopian propositions, but in understanding and directing the terms of success and failure in defence of the usefulness of critique itself, a critique which can only play itself out in the experiments of built form. Inasmuch as critique requires this physical expression, landscape architecture becomes an essential, critical practice. Inasmuch as it will fail to provide unambiguous, unalterable and ultimate answers to unfixable questions, the effort and work is utopian.

For James Corner 'the future of landscape as a culturally significant practice is dependent on the capacity of its inventors to image the world in new ways and [more significantly and particularly for a spatial design discipline than other arts or sciences] *to body forth those images in richly phenomenal and efficacious terms*' (1999, p.167, my italics). That is, to commit to making in the world. The problem for landscape architecture is not how to retain the open-ended potential of landscapes, for this does not require any design, or indeed any type of considered intervention, while equally, intervention cannot guarantee the constraint of potential. Similarly, the potential for interpretation of images of landscapes is equally impossible to secure, liberate or limit. The vital work of landscape architecture is not just the representation of new worlds representing new ideas, but the striving to realise them. It is not representation that designers should be concerned to re-invent except inasmuch as it assists this. The danger of accepting representation as the work of designers, divorced from a desire for embodiment, is suggested by Michel Foucault: 'It is the connection of desire to reality

(and not its retreat into forms of representation) that possesses revolutionary force' (1984, p.xv).

### **Scope and method**

The core aims of the thesis are to promote landscape architecture as a design profession, to explain design as a critical practice (that is, one which must position and argue the value of its work), and finally to examine present constraints to the critical practice of landscape architecture (that is, the pursuit of argument and the questioning of implicit values). This is undertaken by examining the particularly active and fraught arena of suburban land development. It is in the suburbs that the constraints on design as a critical practice are most evident, and the suburbs of Melbourne, Australian provide both typical and specific examples of constraints in the form of developer advertising and planning policy, while evidencing a dearth of commentary from the profession in either practice or academia. Analyses of the images of advertising and the rhetoric of planning in the final two chapters are preceded by others examining histories and theories of landscape architecture as a critical practice, and suburbs as manifest criticisms of alternative settlement forms. The historic failures and misunderstandings of both suburbs and landscape architecture are explained with reference to utopianism.

The central problem which has been grappled with in this work concerns the link between the value of critique and the value of form as the outcome of critique or critical practice, and the *difference* of these to form as proof of value or self-evidently valuable. Value lies in the persuasiveness—or (albeit limited, compromised and ultimately defeated) success—of argument for a particular form. The form itself has no intrinsic value. It is mute without interpretative argument. Very dangerous oppressions of free thought and action result from assumptions of intrinsic or absolute value for forms. Also, while form may be the outcome and demonstration of a specific argument, it is not argument itself. Forms and landscapes are material expressions of ideas. They are not themselves ideas, but ideas *of* or *for* something. Demonstrating the value of critique does not demonstrate the value of form which results from critical practice. Such elision is the slippage of utopian proposition. The value of utopian effort is not proven by the value of utopian projects (which prove in realisation to be dystopian).

The thesis assertions are an argument for informed—and relentless—criticism as an essential characteristic of design practice. The assertion that design practice is critical practice is intended to influence practice to be critical as well as to make critique practical. This assertion will not generate critical form or make form critical (in the

sense of the pathetic fallacy) although it will make form important in the sense of being a manifestation of critical practice. The assertions cannot be built but they can influence the practice of building. In particular they are intended to alert practitioners to the error of considering built form to be intrinsically valuable by 'virtue' of, for example, claiming self-generation or naturalness or goodness. It is an error to consider form a demonstrable proof of anything. It can only ever be an argument. And the value of argument lies exactly in the inevitable failure to finalise and fix value.

Questions asked of contemporary designers seem to require the assurance of good or correct outcomes. If design critique or critical design cannot ensure the production of such outcomes, what is the point of it? Similarly, if argument cannot build something unarguably good, what is the point of it? If people were not unhappy or oppressed or suffering or even killed because of claims of the unarguable goodness or correctness of materially manifested ideas, argument would not be needed at all. You cannot build 'correct' or 'good' work, only an argument for it. The position of the thesis is that no position is correct or good in a way that can 'go without saying' as Roland Bathes puts it (1972, p.143). Simply, there is no unarguable good that can be manifested. But there are definitely arguments and counter-arguments to be made—and manifested—for what is good.

While there is some tentative work examining the engagement of landscape architects in suburban (or urban) development, there is little published self-reflective critique by practitioners. Initial investigations of the thesis attempted to identify possible projects that addressed, or attempted to address, the failings of design practice to articulate obstacles and frustrations in this arena, anticipating that suggestions, guidelines or even a design project itself may result as a demonstration of ways to overcome present silence. In addition, critique of specific project work as case studies was begun with a similar expectation of identifying present constraints. However, in building a picture of the present situation through which it might first be understood why such design work is problematic and case studies positioned—that is, in building a picture of the state of landscape architecture as a design profession within the arena of suburb development—a considerable body of material was collected which identified its own problem and generated a thesis in itself. This work then does not involve the generation of alternative design propositions or the development of case studies of design projects, but rather seeks to identify the position in which designers find themselves in attempting to distinguish their essential work from that of either pragmatic and instrumentalist disciplines commonly understood as sciences, or ornamental and essentially ameliorative ones understood as art.

Critique is essential to the undertaking as well as understanding of critical work, but also inseparable from the perception as well as production of text and images used to communicate it. Yet the unquestioned—uncriticised—criteria against which any criticism presently happens in suburban land development is argued by the thesis to be set by developer advertisement and planning policy and to be unchallenged by the profession. Resulting work cannot then claim to be critical. And so-called critique of built work against these same unchallenged criteria cannot claim to be critical either. This is the condition under which both written criticism and critical work currently labour and which the thesis endeavours to expose. Critique of built work is not overlooked in the thesis but made mandatory as it is argued that the relationships between image/text and built work make a critical position even possible.

In its first two parts the thesis elucidates a history for various misunderstandings of design purpose as critical practice by considering and categorising prevalent theories of prominent commentators. It then illustrates our current misunderstandings with reference to Melbourne suburbs in the last part.

In its analysis of a wide array of theories and theorists over the first two parts, the thesis seeks to demonstrate why these should be questioned and rejected if found incorrect, unhelpful or hurtful in previously unidentified ways. In a sense the thesis does not have a secure position from which to argue against other positions. Rather it draws on the historic truth of failures of 'positioning' in design discourses, particularly with regard to built environments. The thesis demonstrates the internal (and relative) illogic of many specific positions, not in order to champion a particular new position but to draw attention to the necessity of such examinations inasmuch as articulated critical (self)examination is currently wanting, or incorrectly assumed. A 'correct' position is in fact thought to be impossible. If it is possible to articulate a position for the thesis it would be—as the use of utopianism illustrates—that any position will necessarily become redundant, will become a dystopia, will generate problems even as it solves others, and that it is the failure to acknowledge and examine this which robs design of its power and sophistication in making proposals for a better world that is also an imperfect world.

In choosing to focus on analysis of published text and image in the final part, the importance of built design work was less overlooked than clearly foregrounded and necessarily anticipated, although analysis of it was beyond the scope of the thesis itself. That landscape architects are involved in the production of built suburban

environments is not questioned. Why there is so little critique, discussion, self-reflection or even acknowledgement of this by the profession is the subject of the thesis investigation as a first step toward better design engagement with such environments. In examining the images of developer advertising the thesis sought to show that every drawing or image done by a landscape architect is also an advertisement. Had built work been examined the same might have been said; that is, that all built work is an advertisement. What is meant by either is that both images (including professional drafting such as construction drawings) and their resulting built works are persuasive arguments for ideas about what a good place is. They are not revelations of a truth of what a good place is. Ideas are not true or false, only assertions regarding them. Also, contrary to what seems implied by those who do assert the importance of design in the built environment, material form is no more or less 'true' to an idea than is image or text. The relevance to the profession of landscape architecture of analysing real estate images or planning rhetoric may seem dubious compared with analysis of landscape architecture itself. The thesis argues that such images position and constrain designers in ways that constitute insidious 'briefs' for delivery of built work. The intention of the thesis is to persuade readers that the built work which representations supposedly represent cannot in fact be overlooked.

### **Thesis structure**

Part I introduces the major areas of research, placing these in a contemporary suburban context which offers a renewed argument for understanding design as utopian endeavour. The opening chapter introduces an historic conflict of ambition between designers and their clients, identifying productive tensions as well as outlining widespread and continuing differences of opinion as to the value and aims of design. It argues that landscape architectural design is essentially different to engineering and planning. Chapter 2 identifies four categories of critique common to examination of suburbs and landscape architecture: a simple 'Pro' or 'Con' judgment, a dialogical 'Anti', an open-ended 'Non' and a fourth less clearly articulated openness that is argued to be 'Utopian'. Both Non and Utopian projects are frontier explorations but evidence significantly different attitudes. Non-frontier projects aim through open-endedness to resist absolute or closed systems and the closed minds that accompany them, recovering a state of lost potential. Utopian-frontier projects are, in addition to this exposure of power-relations and recovery of potential, actively invested in exploiting it through new propositions. Rather than just re-cover a state of open-mindedness through open-endedness, utopian-frontier projects are concerned with contestable openness. Unlike non-frontier projects, utopian-frontier projects appreciate that an interest can never actually be disinterested.

Chapters 3 and 4 investigate myth and utopia respectively, contrasting myth-making and mythologies with utopianism. In Chapter 3, Non projects are linked to myth as elaborated by Roland Barthes for whom myth is a communication which ‘has the task of giving an historical intention a natural justification’ (1972, p.142). Chapter 4 proposes that the very idea of landscape is utopian and outlines some taxonomies of utopias, reflecting on their connections to landscape and suburb typologies. It concludes Part I by identifying a danger in the slippage between myth and utopia, distinguishing the possible yet self-effacing open-endedness of mythic projects from the impossible yet self-affirming openness of utopian attitudes.

Part II draws a picture of the variety of disciplinary and other literatures competing for a definitive place in contemporary understandings of suburbs and design. Chapter 5 surveys some of the vast literature of potential relevance for suburban studies. It also reviews an extended recent literature of landscape architecture relevant to suburbs. Chapter 6 considers similar trends in the literatures of both suburbs and landscape architecture in redefining terms for effective criticism. The final chapter in this part then identifies four stages or categories in the critique of suburbs and design: Form, Content, Languages and Frontiers. These four categories are correlated with those identified in Chapter 2.

Following the introductory positioning of the main areas of investigation in Part I, and identification of their disciplinary relationships in Part II, Part III examines the competitive work undertaken to secure the placement of particular visions. It begins with a discussion in Chapter 8 of the similar conditions, critiques and contests facing the three areas of study—suburbs, landscape architecture and utopianism—despite predominantly separate investigations to date. It then summarises key positions within each area, beginning with suburbs, progressing to landscape architecture and finishing with a more extended examination of utopias, drawing links between the history, theory and experiments of all three in creating particular visions of work in each area. The next two chapters—8 and 9—evaluate recent work in two well-known areas of suburban imaging and imagining: the frameworks of urban design legislation and the visions of real estate advertisement. Both of these typically pre-empt and influence the design and designers of Melbourne suburbs. The vision of developers and their representative bodies—the Urban Design Institute of Australia (UDIA), the Real Estate Institute of Victoria (REIV), and others—present a powerful appreciation of suburban value, one which is epitomised by the messages of residential land development advertisement. In constant competition and collusion with the objectives of the

marketplace is government. Arguably the most powerful controls on Melbourne's suburban growth and form come from planning legislation, guided for specific areas by Urban Design Frameworks, Structure Plans and similar documents, and the overall aims of *Melbourne 2030*.

The work concludes by reiterating an appeal to rediscover a utopian impulse, to uncover lost potentials and prior states of utopian optimism, not in order to find the right, lost way or to fix an agreed direction, but to enjoy and realise their multiplication. Faced with intractable problems, the imperative of design to make strange in order to discover new purpose is becoming design estranged from purposeful making. The encouragement of more proposals for projects, not the abolition of the necessity for them, is required to resist the ever-recuperating standardisation, normalisation, and trivialisation of happiness and the good life.

**PART 1**  
**PLACING**

This first part introduces a problem. The ways in which design practice and designed projects are appraised and valued evidence a slippage between understandings of good design as an accurate expression of socio-cultural values, as an accommodation of evolving open-endedness, and as a pursuit of utopian openness. This slippage is exemplified by varying appreciations of landscape architecture's role in the suburbs. Chapter 1 views these broad understandings from two perspectives: that of clients and that of designers. Chapter 2 elaborates on the three understandings—correct design, accommodating design and utopian design—as expressed through four current categories of design criticism: Pro-Con and Anti which are variously concerned with correct design, Non which is concerned with accommodation, and Utopian. Myth and Utopia present two contrasting ideas of a future for design of suburbs examined in Chapters 3 and 4 respectively. The first—Myth—is argued to advocate disempowerment of design and reconstitution of landscape architecture as a discipline subservient to other discourses. The second—Utopia—represents the empowerment of design through critique of the terms for desirable living arrangements set by planning, engineering and sustainability discourses. The challenges of empowerment, the dangers of disempowerment and the slippages between them suggest arguments pursued in later chapters for placing design before other activities in the development of human settlements.

**Chapter 1**  
**A Background of Intentions:**  
**The Determined Designer and Designated Determinants**

*If a job's worth doing it's worth doing badly*

G.K. Chesterton<sup>5</sup>

*Don't worry boys, we'll get over this storm of approval*

Saul Alinsky<sup>6</sup>

A chronological overview of the growth of western cities reveals a relationship between settlements or, more accurately, real estate booms and the emergence and adaptation of built environment disciplines to new economic, political and social circumstances. The stories of this relationship have been told from two, inter-related perspectives: that of determined designers working with form to envisage and embody new ideas that emerge from facts of changed political, technological and other conditions of a society, and that of others pre-determining design via the descriptive and prescriptive designation of outcomes believed to derive from predictive analysis of facts and then stipulated in briefs and guidelines of various sorts for designers to adapt and deliver on specific sites. The intention of designers is to imagine and deliver newly possible forms for better settlement or landscape occupation. That of heterogeneous and competing clients is typically to secure delivery of a particular vision they already have, while that of planning and government is to fix terms for delivery of a generic and predictable form. Where designers please their clients—authorities and the market—too easily and too well, they may be thought to disappointment their own mission.

Architecture was unknown as a professional activity at the start of the Renaissance (Picon & Ponte 2003). Its emergence as a distinct and important activity responding to cultural change wrought by new reflections on our relationship with and understanding of the natural world has parallels with later conditions prompting both the emergence of town planning and, later still, landscape architecture in the twentieth century. Planning as a profession was the invention of the twentieth century born of the writings and speculative plans of social reformers dating back much further but encapsulated and

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<sup>5</sup> Quoted by Peter Corrigan in an unpublished lecture. From Chapter XIV Folly and Female Education in Chesterton, G. K. 2010 [1910], p.254.

<sup>6</sup> In Corrigan, P. 2003, p.41.

popularised in the work of Ebenezer Howard (1898). It was instituted in Australia on a state by state basis through the first two decades immediately following its establishment in England. The profession of landscape architecture was founded much later in Australia in 1966 in response again to a freshly articulated impulse with a similarly long lineage. The 1960s were an era of political activism and of growing awareness of and concern for a newly acknowledged planetary environment shared by all. The first landing on the moon and view of earth from space, the institution of Earth Day in 1969, the publication of Rachel Carson's 1962 *Silent Spring*, Barbara Ward's 1966 *Space Ship Earth*, Paul R. Ehrlich's 1970 *The Population Bomb*, Barbara Ward & Rene Dubos 1972 *Only One Earth*, and many similar texts and related events evidence the rise of environmentalism with which landscape architecture was closely associated, particularly through the work of Ian McHarg (1971; 1998). It was concurrent too with the spread of suburbs and the interest of another group of landscape architects including Dan Kiley, Garret Eckbo (2009), Thomas Church (1995) and others who considered suburbs and the suburban home as sites for both reinvention of personal relationships with the land and with nature, and reinvention of social relations.

The modern history of landscape design is typically presented as emerging from Western, and predominantly English experiments. The practice of amateur English garden design from the end of the seventeenth century—exemplified by William Shenstone—was followed swiftly by emergence of the hired landscape gardener or designer in the eighteenth century—epitomised by Lancelot 'Capability' Brown—from hybrid training as a surveyor, draftsman, sometimes architect and horticulturalist. This was followed by a gradual reduction in estate size and the rise of a wealthy urban middle class in the nineteenth century, moving to 'villas' on the outskirts of cities (Simo 1989). Ideas for the private gardens of these families, and the landscaped infrastructure of their public realms, were disseminated by designers via popular publications, such as those of John Claudius Loudon and his wife Jane, as well as through the example of built works. Spurred by the land booms of the later nineteenth century that brought even greater numbers to live on the outskirts of growing cities, and in Melbourne by the gold rush, an increased interest in city design and the provision of shared public open space for all, found expression in writing, lecturing, lobbying and the demonstrative linking of design endeavour to political endeavour (Olmsted 2010).

While architects and town planners undertook physical design of the growing cities at the start of the twentieth century, by mid-century this was a distinct role. The term 'urban design' emerged in the 1950s 'replacing and superseding the more traditional, narrower and somewhat outmoded term 'civic design' (Carmona & Tiesdell 2007, p.7).

It recognised that 'urban space, however is more than the city centre. It includes the suburbs where large numbers of the urban population live' (2007, p.17). Interest in the architecture of whole landscapes associated with the public realm and provision of its infrastructures also required consideration of natural landscape systems. This focus and the rise of environmentalism consolidated landscape architecture as a profession undertaking the integrated physical design of land with consideration of geo- and biophysical as well as cultural systems. Part of its role in consideration of cultural contexts is the assessment and assignment of value (McHarg 2007; Thompson 2000). Post WWII and more recent histories have come to focus on ex-urban or essentially sub-urban land development and the role, or lack of a role, for professional design disciplines including landscape architecture (Boyd 1952, p.153; Deidrich 2006, pp.15-16; Dunham-Jones 2005; George et al. 2004, p.4; Weller 2008). Here, the important involvement of design in questions of value has become an unwanted and unwanted interference, reduced to value-adding.

Broadly speaking, the 1960s witnessed optimistic experiments with fundamental issues of integrating human settlement with natural systems at all scales including the suburban lot and residential subdivision. The 1970s saw a commercial consolidation and exploitation of these, the 1980s a compilation and review that strengthened urban design as an analytic planning tool, the 1990s undertook critical reassessments that led to the emergence of, for example, landscape urbanism and New Urbanism, while the new millennium ushered in new hope as well as a revisiting of past utopias as paradoxical lessons of such hope (Baudrillard 2006; Busbea 2007; Knabb 2007; Pinder 2002; Scott 2007; van Schaik & Macel 2005). The long, historically articulated relationship of design and settlement agendas in the problematic production of particular landscapes has culminated in recent collections of past observations (Carmona & Tiesdell 2007; Gosling 2002; Larice & Macdonald 2006; Olmsted 2010; Stilgoe 2005; Swaffield 2002; Thompson 2008), ongoing 're-' views (Corner 1999; Dunham-Jones & Williamson 2008; Shane 2005; Treib 2007; Wollscheid et al. 2002) and propositions for 'new' views (Baumeister 2007; Bull 2006; Holden 2003; Kruse & Sugrue 2006) of both the potential of the landscape and the potential of landscape architecture. However, to what ends and in pursuit of what values 'potential' is recognised has been a less clearly articulated or interrogated precondition for the many proposed changes.

### **The determined designer's tools**

The determined designer pursues a vision which examines and challenges the prescription of form determined by planning or other supposedly pre-design investigations. Many designers and design theorists specifically argue that such analyses are in fact already 'designed' and should be acknowledged as the necessary work of designers (Glanville 1999; Kahn 1996). Such prescriptions, guidelines, frameworks or masterplans presuppose outcomes that it is the role of design to interrogate, revealing hidden or neglected alternatives. Significantly, utopian designers are frequently called 'planners' (Fishman 1982). More is meant by this tagging than the scale of their ambition or projects. At issue is the primacy of planning over design but also the nature and validity of a distinction between planning intention and design intention. Both aim at the delivery of better built environments, but while plans describe and prescribe how this is to be done—and ascribe too responsibilities for it—design must *inscribe* a specific response which becomes an inevitable interpretation and challenge to such description, prescription and ascription. Design proposition is the research which tests the sense and value of planning proposals.

Projects begin with descriptive and initial interpretative phases of evaluation. More complex critiques follow that attempt a further explanation prompting investigations of potential for reworking initial assessments toward alternative possible evaluations. This level of work is predominantly the domain of planning-orientated disciplines or approaches, such as those of Ian McHarg and New Urbanism, where identification and codification of site specific 'character' and 'qualities' plays a determining role in how a design should or can be conceived in response to identified value. However, a design process begins prior to this with attempts to re-imagine the situation entirely. Rather than work with what is identified to be valuable, design is the work of finding and establishing an argument for some particular valuing. There is a danger too that such value-seeking processes can themselves become the thing valued, resulting in a failure to design at all.

Before either the decision not to interfere for fear of securing an outcome that will fail, or the belief that correctly informed interference will secure a successful outcome, comes musing; mulling over alternatives, an imaginative play of possibilities. Musing is a state of positive, anticipatory uncertainty, related to other conditions of suspended judgement and iterative thinking such as wonder, amazement, contemplation of the unknown yet strangely familiar or uncanny, melancholy, even boredom. In architectural terms, such musing encompasses responses to terrains vague, ruins and the homeliness of the unhomely, all of which have been identified with the strangely

differentiated sameness and compact emptiness of suburbia. The following considers how such states provide useful ways of understanding design, especially in relation to its efforts to construct nature, and links them to utopianism as that effort which works precisely with such states to envisage future environments. The design of suburbs has become less able to take the time and risk of musing, yet this is what is suggested as now essential to finding new suburban forms are that instead being shaped by ever more rigidly prescribed and urgently implemented government policy and market strategy.

### **Wonder and other useful states**

‘It is through wonder [thaumazein],’ says Aristotle, ‘that men now begin and originally began to philosophize’; and as Plato tells us, through the mouth of Socrates, ‘wonder is the feeling of a philosopher, and philosophy begins in wonder.’ These sayings are well known, and they are also representative of an important thread that runs through much of the Western philosophical tradition, and yet, in contemporary philosophy at least, they are not much reflected upon (Malpas 2006, p.287).

It is through ‘wonder’ that Leon van Schaik suggests that we begin to design (2000a, p.7). Daniel Dahlstrom of Boston University remarks:

Differentiating wonder from puzzlement and curiosity, Malpas makes the case that wonder is not simply a psychological impetus but the first principle and measure of philosophy, its paradoxical origin and limit. While wonder may arise from the extraordinary, it is the extraordinariness of the ordinary (the opacity of ordinary transparency), Malpas submits, that instills wonder ‘at its most basic’ ... disabling and disruptive ... [wonder at] ‘the world in its specificity’. Wonder ... rules out an exclusive pursuit of complete explanation but also a scepticism or relativism about our capacity to make things transparent (2006, unpaginated).

Van Schaik too has an interest in *Transfiguring the Ordinary* (1995) as an aim of the practice of design, dedicated to transparency and specificity. In *Interstitial Modernism* he references Philip Fisher’s *Wonder, the Rainbow, and the Aesthetics of Rare Experiences* (1998) to explain the significance of wonder for design. For Fisher, there is no ‘experience of the ordinary’ with which an ‘experience’ of the extraordinary or wonder is contrasted. Experience is extraordinary and ‘surprise, the eliciting of notice, becomes the very heart of what it means to “have an experience” at all... The ordinary is what is there when there are no experiences going on’ (Fisher 1989 p.20). In the same way it might be suggested that you cannot have ordinary design, just design; the extraordinary in contrast with ordinary non-design. In permitting the ordinary simply to ‘be’ you also cannot claim it is designed or to be designing it. The archetypal ordinariness of late twentieth century suburbs is frequently challenged by those who find the extraordinary there and is continuously threatened by the many who go to seek and make something extraordinary. Design can and should assist them to ‘have an

experience' but cannot do anything extraordinary while serving the marketplace's 'experience economy'. Predictable pleasures are the utterly ordinary condition of real estate environments.

Like Malpas, Fisher is interested in examining the origin of the saying 'philosophy begins in wonder' attributed to Socrates by Plato. He notes the two-fold use of the word 'wonder' in English, as both questioning (I wonder if...) and surprise (what a wonder!) (1989 pp.8-9). It is between the two that design is actively engaged. Alone, the former can lead to perpetual deferment, while the latter ends in self-congratulation. The balance is fine. In *Metacity Datatown* MVRDV argues that the frontier and edge conditions (suburbs) located and examined by their data-turned-diagrams prompt inventiveness, that will 'trigger a series of extrapolations, scenarios, "what ifs"' (1999, p.19). Rather than prompt questioning, however, their diagrams might instead trigger wonder's other exclamatory surprise. The process is explained:

How to study this Metacity? Initially, one can describe its vastness and explore its contents perhaps only by numbers or data... statistical techniques seem the only way to grasp its processes. By selecting or connecting data according to hypothetical prescriptions, a world of numbers turns into diagrams. These diagrams work as emblems for operations, agendas, tasks. A 'datatown' appears that resists the objective of style (1999, p.18).

Is resisting style also resisting the outcome of form? How are diagrams spatialised? The datatown is described in terms of actions—'operations, agendas, tasks'—but being on the move hardly ensures it escapes stylisation. Nike's tick and 'just do it' tagline might be thought of as exactly such a diagram emblematic of imperative action.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps 'hypothetical prescriptions' are hypotheses that prescribe how data is to become a diagram, but it is unclear how the hypothesis will then be tested; that is, to what end the process aims. '[S]electing or connecting data according to hypothetical prescriptions' leads to 'a town of data' but not to an idea for a town conceived beyond this auto-generation (1999, p.19). If, as Malpas suggests, wonder 'rules out an exclusive pursuit of complete explanation' a datatown study of the Metacity process might help avoid pre-empted form, although suggesting instead that it may be self-explanatory. But it must also overcome 'a scepticism or relativism about our capacity to make things transparent' and in this, as with other process-driven design approaches, it is unsuccessful. Wonder is not a static state of wonderment, albeit about an active process, but an active and creative state of wondering. It is the latter that gives design its subversive power.

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<sup>7</sup> See Borries, F. v. 2004, *Who's Afraid of Niketown? Nike-Urbanism, Branding and the City of Tomorrow*. for case studies of Nike's urban marketing strategies in Berlin including appropriation of anti-capitalist 'happenings' of the Situationists.

Peter Corrigan (1996 [1972]) makes the connection between the freedom of wonder and architecture's liberating project. He makes an important distinction between the call for an apparently simple vernacular pragmatism, favorably embraced as a reaction to architectural elitism, and a more difficult offering which may be the quality of a true utopian avant-garde. In this, he warns against the mere reasonableness of argument.

No one denies that change ought to be based on reasonable projections made from present-day technology, socio-economic facts and human psychological need, and that no real, socially relevant environmental change will occur without profound social and political change. But what is missing in all of these discussions is an elusive quality Louis Kahn refers to as 'Wonder'. In the present revolt against our institutions and ways there is no Wonder. Without Wonder the revolt looks only to equality (1996 [1972] p.37).

Citing Walt Whitman, James Whistler, Louis Sullivan, Isadora Duncan, John Cage, Allen Ginsberg and Aretha Franklin, amongst others, Corrigan ascribes 'a uniquely national quality of Rapture' to the 'creative imagination of the U.S.' (p.37). However, he notes that while 'All Power to the Imagination' was painted in the 1960s in Paris, such slogans were not subsequently seen in uprisings in America. Neither were they in Australia.

Fisher suggests that wonder is the experience of 'making sense' rather than 'knowing': 'We are engaged in an ongoing fragile project of "making sense", and it is the nature of making sense rather than the nature of knowing that is my concern' (1998, p.8). Here is design intent distinguished from that of planning, albeit a distinction of great fragility. But in the undertaking to problematise knowledge, to reject certainty, making sense must also be distinguished from making nonsense. 'Socrates insisted that to know what it is that we do not know is the humbling first step of true knowledge. We need to add that the impossibility of knowing any such thing is one of the things that strikes us when we look closely at the reasoning and science of the past' (Fisher 1998, p.9). Anthony Vidler's examination of the uncanny led him to a similar observation: 'Many avant-garde movements from dada to situationism were founded on this type of ironic awareness, the irritation of critical self-consciousness against the primordial Socratic "certainty in doubt"' (1992, p.192). Eighteenth-century Picturesque debates concerned a state or training in reflective self-awareness, in the reciprocal influence of exterior stimuli and an observer's intellectual and emotional responses. Similarly between the defaults of Wonder (your grasp of something) and Surprise (something's grasp of you) is a realm of engaged musing, of mulling things over and considering ideas that suspend both our declarative intelligence and our unreasoned emotional reactions.

'Musing' may be the term for a particularly Australian formulation of wonder. Australian landscape design, like Australian painting and poetry, has an eighteenth century

English heritage. As the title *The Pursuit of Wonder: How Australia's Landscape was Explored, Nature Discovered and Tourism Unleashed* suggests, it is tied to colonial exploration and settlement, but linked too to old-world Enlightenment as well as economic development (Horne 2005). The findings of eighteenth-century aesthetics culminated in a recognition of the problem of determining whether accurate perception lies in the truth of what is observed or the truthfulness of the observer (Hunt 1976, p.242). The experiments of those poet-landscape designers have been frequently re-problematised by colonial and post-colonial poetry and painting, but rarely again by landscape design. The works of landscape architect Martha Schwartz are exceptions, as is the landscape art of Michael Heizer, Robert Smithson, James Turrell, Mary Miss and others.

Harry Heseltine in the introduction to *the Penguin Book of Australian Verse* makes the same observation regarding the concerns of early Australian poets:

The conventional way of judging our nineteenth century poets—treating them as cameras pointed at the landscape—clearly has its uses. Yet those uses are chiefly concerned with the outer trappings of poetry, its conjunction with socio-cultural desiderata. Investigations of Harpur and his successors in terms of their accurate reportage of antipodean phenomena will tell us very little about the inner continuity of Australian poetry, the workings of the imagination in this country, the way it has absorbed the physical environment rather than registered it (1976, p.30).

He then quotes Harpur's *A midsummer noon in the Australian forest* noting that it 'reveals its true inwardness only in its concluding lines [where] ... the whole centre of the poem's gravity is shifted away from the Nature which is observed to the consciousness which is doing the observing' (1976, p.32). With this comment we are where the eighteenth century poets were in their examination of 'nature'. What Hestletine says next concerns the identification of a uniquely Australian contemporary attitude.

Again, while the processes of consciousness are among the universal and unavoidable concerns of all poetry; it is, I believe, the 'musing' quality of the Australian imagination which gives it its special flavour. In Australia, the reflexive fascination of the poet with his own perceiving powers less often reveals a stream of consciousness than something like a static, contemplative mode of knowing the world (1976, p.32).

In the past, landscape design has been as important as poetry and painting as an expression of our cultural identity. Modern Architecture has continued to acknowledge, categorise and argue a range of national, regional and local efforts to distinguish 'place' in architectural production, and has named a host of 'movements' and 'isms' including nationalism, critical regionalism, a polyvocal postmodernism that is sometimes localism or vernacularism or lowbrowism. Landscape architecture has not had a similarly articulate discourse (Treib 1994). As a practice, it has not regained the position it held

in English eighteenth century imaginative life, even if 'landscape' itself is currently claiming a resurgent fascination internationally (Corner 2006).

Charles Waldheim characterises the new discipline of landscape urbanism as the locus of a re-engagement of landscape design within debates that are cultural and political as well as aesthetic (Waldheim & Berger 2008). Waldheim cites Corner to explain why landscape architecture has become *disengaged*: 'the narrow agenda of ecological advocacy that many landscape architects profess to is nothing more than a rear-guard defence of a supposedly autonomous 'nature' conceived to exist, *a priori*, outside of human agency or cultural construction' (2008, p.38). If natural—or non-natural—environments are not outside human control and construction, landscape architecture then needs to engage in the politicised questions of what constitutes them and how they should be constructed. But does landscape urbanism do this? Its practitioners rather seem to suppose their projects re-engage just by questioning the romanticised vision of an *a priori* nature responsible for ecological advocacy, but without themselves being engaged in debate about a new status quo that is an equally romanticised and naturalised idea of an *a priori* equality and legitimacy behind ideas of indeterminacy or a site's self-determination. The moment that musing abandons itself to being either merely amusing or declaring a solution is found, useful problems become mere difficulties or no problem at all,. These are the moments when vital questions of value are de-problematized too.

'Melancholy' is not simply a matter of being sad. The complex ambivalences of melancholy have been examined by Jacky Bowring in *A Field Guide to Melancholy* (2008). The malaise associated with suburban living, described by numerous writers of fiction as well as investigations of non-fiction, could find a champion in Bowring's evocation of the richness and generative usefulness of particular types of engaged sadness. Yet even Bowring can slip. The useful musing of melancholy can become a type of marketable synthesising of happiness and sadness, or a type of paralysing inaction. In her review (2009) of the High Line project of James Corner, Field Operations and architects Diller Scofidio + Renfro, Bowring is critical of the designers' erasure of the existing melancholic qualities of the site, but is ultimately unable to suggest how design might be engaged at all and maintain such qualities. She opens describing the allure of melancholy, which, amongst other places, can be 'found in the marginal zones, the abandoned lands, the terrain vague' (2009, p.128). 'The High Line,' she explains 'was such a place. Overgrown, deserted and in a state of decay, it was the epitome of the aesthetic of melancholy ... a place outside time, like Andrei Tarkovsky's mysterious "Zone" in his film *Stalker*' (p.128). *Stalker* linked Detroit to the

rise of Landscape Urbanism, inspiring a series of studies of its post-industrial cityscape (Shane 2004). Noting that melancholy ‘has often been conflated with mental illness,’ she asks whether the High Line’s new incarnation isn’t ‘a kind of landscape Prozac, a means of suppressing sadness, alleviating gloom, and recasting the landscape in a euphoric glow’ (p.128). A more interesting inquiry might be begun by speculating on what happened to landscape urbanism’s interest in those qualities of place—indeterminacy, open-endedness and emergence—which one of its leading proponents (and a designer of the site) seems to have sacrificed whilst simultaneously claiming them as inspiration.

Describing the makeover of the site, Bowring evocatively suggests that ‘[t]here is something cadaverous about this - like landscape taxidermy’ (p.127). In fact such zombie uncanniness—‘glassy eyes and groomed fur’—is arguably still closely related in sentiment to evocations of loss for a dead or ruined original. Instead, what Bowring sees is ‘as far from a ruin as one could imagine’ (p.127). The space is transformed from ‘a wild and unkempt plateau into a smart urban plaza ... bathed in the glow of conspicuous consumption’ (p.127). Bowring then asks a series of questions that critique the universal (market) value and general positivist attitude to improvement implicit in ‘development and change’ (p.127). She finds a touch-the-ground lightly answer which is, however, inadequate to conveying the complexity of issues which these and similar evocative environments pose. Indeed the outright recreation or mimicry of originally weird and wonderful places can arguably capture more of their uncanny qualities than timorous intervention. The profession does indeed have a ‘predilection’ for doing something, as opposed to nothing, for in the case of the latter they are not needed at all. And this is the problem of landscape urbanism’s claims to affirmation and revealing of already existing site potential. Bowring asks: ‘Why does the “discovery” of a site like the High Line inevitably mean the subsequent erasure of its unique qualities?’ (p.127). Because this has always happened; this is what discovery entails. The ‘frontier’ never stays where it was found and the remembrance and re-creation of its qualities must happen in another medium than the original, which is already lost and cannot be regained. The attempt to maintain it merely replaces a euphoric glow of conspicuous consumption with a melancholic glow equally serving landscape consumption, perhaps less conspicuously than insidiously. Proust’s remembrance of a lost past was evoked by a cake, relived and communicated by the written word. Dido’s grief at losing Aeneas is known to us through Virgil’s text and has also been conveyed by the music of a final aria of an opera by Purcell, amongst many other arts and media. It is the virtuosity of art, not the virtue of originality which has power.

'Can landscape architecture resuscitate the true meaning of melancholy...?' asks Bowring (p.127). Can landscape architecture presume to know this 'truth'? And how would whatever landscape architecture create make claims to a truer truth than what, for example, the consumer marketplace would create? We are not dealing with the natural as true 'nature' but with 'nature' as we conceive and contrive it. Landscape architects are in the business of the artificial, which has at least as much, and ideally far more potential for directed—explicit and implicit—communicative power than what we chance upon in the unmediated natural world. In fact, inasmuch as melancholy might be argued to be an indulgence of the leisure class, true melancholy is exactly what conspicuous consumption offers us. You do not mourn the loss of something until it is irretrievable. The old High Line was melancholic because it spoke of the failure and loss of a transport system built for and representative of the lost might of a defunct industrial mode of production. Its *new* melancholic potential, like that conveyed by the *Stepford Wives* or Michael Grave's creepy Alessi kitchen figures (Naegele 2000), lies in reminding us of the loss of that loss.

There is, Bowring began, 'an intense and paradoxical beauty to be found in places of melancholy' (2009, p.128). It is not the beauty which is paradoxical however, but the finding. The paradox does not lie in sad places providing pleasurable experiences, which is the essence of melancholia, not a contradiction. Rather, it lies in the fact that it is 'found', or, as Bowring puts it later significantly in quotation marks, 'discovered'. Consumer capitalism discovered the *opportunity* to exploit the site (or discovered that it might be bought and valued within emerging models of production and consumption), rather than discovering the site itself, which was, of course, already known, but unvalued. This discovery of the opportunity for exploitation of its qualities subsequently destroyed those qualities which provided the opportunity in the first place, just as suburban housing is accused of destroying the site qualities that are used to sell residential estates in the first place (Weller 2008). We discover or find unexpected beauty, and in the experience of its chance finding in a lost place that we did not knowingly create and cannot control, we cannot then 'find' it again. It can only be found once. Subsequent discovery and the experience of such wonder require the repositioning of art or artifice. However secure our understanding of the experience of melancholy may be, the places where it might be found and the ways in which it might be generated are not so easily agreed upon or assured. A melancholic place cannot be designed with any more certainty than a happy one. The production of healthy happy places for healthy happy people is a familiar mantra and promise of suburban real estate. A design can achieve certain effects that are generally understood yet cannot

be guaranteed to produce certain affects. There is, to put it more accurately, an intense beauty to be paradoxically found in places of loss.

## **Conclusion**

The productive pleasure of musing can slip to the secure self-satisfaction of certainty or the self-indulgent abandonment of any decision-making at all. On the one hand it falls to Socratic doubt that shows the ground upon which to build secure and correct knowledge (the 'rigor' of planning). On the other it slips to nothing is but thinking makes it so (and so there is no need to design, just reflect). Bernard Tschumi has suggested where architecture should situate itself:

The architecture of pleasure lies where concept and experience of space abruptly coincide, where architectural fragments collide and merge in delight, where the culture of architecture is endlessly deconstructed and rules are transgressed. No metaphorical paradise here, but discomfort and the unbalancing of expectations ... The architecture of pleasure depends on a particular feat, which is to keep architecture obsessed with itself in such an ambiguous fashion that it never surrenders to good conscience or parody, to debility or delirious neurosis (1977, p.268).

Design's pleasure is not to be found in conscientious and near-delirious thoroughness or in debilitating 'anything-goes'. It must maintain a state of tension. For Tschumi architecture 'is not a dream (a stage where society's or the individual's unconscious desires can be fulfilled) ... It cannot satisfy your wildest fantasies; but it may exceed the limits set by them' (1977, p.268). To imagine beyond the limitation of what is known is the aim of utopian speculation. It is also the present goal of fraught efforts to find new conceptions of 'suburbs' which we are unable to abandon and yet cannot, with good conscience, let alone resource and land scarcity, continue to build as presently conceived.

Efforts to re-imagine suburbs and realise their lost promises are, like any utopian effort, efforts to realise the impossible. Nonetheless, they are necessary to goad creativity and to clarify the motives and goals that have driven suburban development so far. Jameson outlines a condition under which 'political [or design] institutions seem both unchangeable and infinitely modifiable' and yet also 'this reality [or relevance] paralysis might, in fact, be the precondition of the new, purely intellectual and constructivist freedom' (2004, p.44). However, he then goes on to describe the failure of the opportunities presented by this potential freedom under the pressure of its own urgency:

[A]s one approaches periods of genuine pre-revolutionary ferment, when the system really seems in the process of losing its legitimacy, when the ruling elite is palpably uncertain of itself and full of divisions and self-doubts, when popular demands grow louder and more confident, then what also happens is that those grievances and

demands grow more precise in their insistence and urgency ... But at such a moment the utopian imagination no longer has free play: political thinking and intelligence are trained on very sharply focused issues ... the wide-ranging drifts and digressions of political speculation give way to practical programmes (even if the latter are hopelessly unrealisable and 'utopian' in the other, dismissive sense) (Jameson 2004, p.44).

It is easy to substitute 'design' and 'landscape architecture' for 'politics' and the 'political' institutions discussed above. It is also true that the times of social ferment Jameson describes are also ones of architectural and design ferment that have historically led to changes in disciplinary roles for architects, planners, urban and other designers. Utopian propositions at the end of the nineteenth century led to both literary and built projects. The 1960s were another such time of popular social, political and aesthetic rebellion, and we may be entering another now. Certainly this is what Jameson is suggesting we consider. In this respect the promise of post WWII speculative landscape architectural engagement with emerging environmental concerns and issues of appropriate ecological context has, with the ever-increasing popular and scientific focus on them, become specifically incorporated in a new orthodoxy of technical and practical programs justified under requirements for sustainable design and development. Such requirements are enshrined, for example, in the AILA Landscape Charter and the Landscape Principles.

The re-enforcement of landscape architecture's relevance at this time is positioned as that of leadership in creative adaptive change where design is a combination of 'art and science.' And yet such a role for 'design' is arguably inimical to that which innovation actually requires; that is, not a synthesis of other professional knowledges, but a radical challenge to them. Determined designers no longer have free play. Their utopian longing, their musing, the pursuit of wonder and delight and the exercise of trained imaginative speculation must now deal with sharply focused issues and designated practical programmes, even though these are unlikely to address the problems.

## Chapter 2

### Four Current Categories: Pro-Con, Anti, Non, Utopian

The important problems of suburbs, landscape architecture and utopianism are not those of issues arising from what we agree to be suburbs, landscape architecture and utopianism. Rather they are problems arising from the ways in which importance has been and is again being ascribed to them as tokens for particular world-views and carriers of particular meanings for certain groups. In recent reflective examinations, similar discourses of value and relevance are becoming more apparent across these subject areas. These historically recognisable discourses—generally discussed as positions, views or attitudes—can be seen to broadly adopt three trajectories, along with a less clearly articulate fourth. The first is a simple good-bad, 'pro-con' position which is predominantly descriptive, assuming uncomplicated interpretation of observed conditions. The second is a more complex dialectical, contrarian Anti position. It examines assumptions behind the received data and values from which the Pro-Con positions are constructed, applying and even developing new techniques and technologies in the reassessment of both descriptions and interpretations. It arrives at new explanations and is hopeful of better solutions based on improved information and the rediscovery of overlooked opportunities. Alternatively such projection can also lead to a third position of uncommitted open-endedness, a 'non' position that perpetually defers judgement in an environment that is seen to only hold value or relevance provisionally or where value is inherent to a context which expertise cannot possibly control and therefore judgement can not be trusted to examine or organise. A fourth position, equally aware of the risks of errors in judgment, nonetheless works toward specific propositions.

Attempts to define good suburbs and landscape architecture can be seen to fit these varieties of approach: the Pro-Con is one that attempts to develop a secure, 'workable' definition of absolute criteria, Anti is one that accepts approximate and provisional criteria as a starting point while pursuing more accuracy, and Non accepts no definition as definitive. The last approach is utopian. To explain these positions with more specific reference to landscape architecture, the first is one where simple design along with a simple understanding of what landscape architecture does, proposes to address an evident problem, (pre)determined by a client and their brief for a particular project. A 'good' design outcome is then simply one which solves the identified problem while a

'bad' one does not. This approach is the basis of Pro-Con critique of the value of both design process and designed product.

For many designers the simplicity of this attitude is merely simplistic and a limited difficulty has been mistaken for a problem which lies deeper. A second more complex design approach, Anti either Pro or Con judgment, then attempts to find and address the cause or real problem, as well as consider the more evident symptom with which a client has most likely initially approached the designer. The designer proceeds through a range of explorations and framings of the problem that suggests re-workings of the brief. If 'simple' practise alone cannot find scope for such extended work on causes, or clients fund such re-working of briefs, it is anticipated that academia, government and other funded research areas are or will be active in providing new models, tools and technologies for different and more thoroughly considered framings.<sup>8</sup> With such consideration and having acknowledged and researched a particular site's history and learnt its lessons, the designer can propose a new solution appropriate for its present time and context or claim to extrapolate a solution for future anticipated problems.

For some designers, any re-framing still requires a frame so that the solution is also still constrained by the closed, exclusive or 'appropriate' terms of reference that the designer sets or resets for the client. These still arguably limit the work to getting rid of difficulties rather than solving problems. The third 'non' approach to design evaluation operates at this further level of examination, finally avoiding even posing solutions to what it finds are uncontrollable causes in infinite possible contexts. Here the designer's position is one in favour of the open-ended proliferation of potentialities, becomings and future possibilities that dissolve the problem in history itself, arguably along with any obligation for responsible action or blame for outcomes.

So the first position is a straightforward polemical good or bad one, the second is an elaboration of various possible fruitful negotiations and the third is an expression of the impossibility of any directed resolution if nonetheless hopeful of active engagement in an infinite, ongoing process with no defined purpose. However, the persistent framing of problems as well as the continuing hopeful expectation and exploration of solutions, suggests that while we can find these three positions useful to argue project proposals, we still find them wanting. We still require, still expect, still desire, but have not yet

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<sup>8</sup> Some research into suburbs has been funded by mortgage brokers and the real estate industry. In the United States the Fannie Mae Foundation published Robert Lang, among others, in favor of suburbs as spaces of active and diverse democratic practices. In February 2007 that Foundation, 'one of the biggest donors to local charities' shut down amidst criticism that 'the company was using tax-exempt contributions to advance corporate interests' (Hilzenrath, D. S. & Joyce, A. 2007, unpaginated).

reached any clearly satisfactory alternative. A further, fourth position is hinted at. Rejecting simple good or bad as well as complex possible or impossible framings, there is another approach. The evidence for such a fourth position requires further interrogation. It is the possibilities offered by this fourth position that the thesis is concerned to make apparent as there is within it an acknowledgement and encouragement of engaged action and therefore design. It is proposed that the fourth position is in fact already that from which suburbs, landscape architecture and utopias derive value, but value which is appropriated by the other more easily, familiarly and fashionably articulated positions. This last position does not mistake the solving or dissolving of problems—which is empowering even as it leads forward to other problems—for the overcoming of difficulties which does not lead anywhere except to confirm what was already anticipated.

### **Pro-Con**

David Lowenthal notes that '[c]ities are famously seen through the opposing lenses of redemption and corruption' (2001). He goes on to describe the same response to suburbs. 'For' and 'against' histories of the suburbs are evident from early uses of the term. Pro-sprawl, pro-suburban commentary notes all the reasons why suburbs have succeeded in spreading as evidence of their success. Commentary against sprawl unfavourably assesses the violence of the succession (the destruction of prior environmental, social and other orders of life) as axiomatic evidence of the failure of suburbs. In the first instance, the means not merely justifies but presupposes the end. In the latter the perpetual and brutal means of creative destruction is the sorry end. If pro-sprawl presents a latter-day manifest destiny for post-colonial occupation, to be against it is mere godless gainsaying. But if pro-sprawl is a failure to respect the land and traditional bonds of natural and social relationships with landscape, to be against it is to show responsible stewardship and god-fearing restraint.

The arguments for and against suburban settlement forms are regularly recited. Richard Weller has offered a recent recounting, devoting a summary paragraph to the respective pros and cons of Australian suburbs (2008). The same commentator may hold or develop both views. Frederick Law Olmsted said of suburbs in the 1860s that they represented 'the most attractive, the most refined, and the most soundly wholesome forms of domestic life, and the best application of the arts of civilisation to which mankind has yet attained' (in Fishman 1989, p.17). Yet he noted a decade later that suburbs 'which a few years ago were distinguished for their rural beauty and refined society, have thus, through the gradual development of various uncongenial

elements, entirely lost their former character' (in Fogelson 2005, p.28). Lewis Mumford declared:

In the mass movement into suburban areas a new kind of community was produced, which caricatured both the historic city and the archetypal suburban refuge: a multitude of uniform, unidentifiable houses, lined up inflexibly, at uniform distances, on uniform roads, in a treeless communal waste, inhabited by people of the same class, the same income, the same age group, witnessing the same television performances, eating the same tasteless prefabricated foods, from the same freezers, conforming in every outward and inward respect to a common mould, manufactured in the central metropolis. Thus the ultimate effect of the suburban escape in our time is, ironically, a low-grade uniform environment from which escape is impossible (1961, p.553).

An equivalent complaint updates and adds to Mumford's observation on conformity, although it is less a question of 'outward' or even 'inward' commonalities than a conformity evident in the consistency of goals underlying complex manipulative deceptions of variety serving global capitalism.

Industrial agriculture has established ecologically moribund, machine-dominated monocultures around the globe. Yet we consume the resultant agricultural produce as a stupendous array and a dazzling celebration of traditional world cuisines and their uncountably many hybrids ... the households of a single latemodern suburban street are far more likely to share the presence of microwaves, for warming our cuisine of the moment, than they are to share lifestyle preferences. While neighbors appear to disagree on fundamental moral and spiritual matters, this disagreement generally doesn't penetrate their cooperation in the proliferation of credit cards, reticulated sewerage, and transgenic vaccinations (Davison 2001, p.142).

However Mumford could also say:

Taking the suburb at its best, it provided a parklike setting for the family dwelling-house; and for all the domestic activities associated with it. In the kitchen, the garden, the workshop, activities that had once been the necessities of country life could now be carried on as a relief from the grim, monotonous, imprisoned collective routine of the city ... Thus, in its earliest form, the suburb acknowledged the varieties of human temperament and aspiration, the need for change, contrast, and adventure, and above all, for an environment visibly responsive to one's personal efforts, as even the smallest flower garden is responsive (1961, p.560-561).

In his most famous work *Design with Nature*, Ian McHarg recognises two types of suburb (1971). He distinguishes the legacy of the pre-war 'humane suburb' (p.74) from the 'ticky-tacky' post WWII suburban houses (p.24) of 'inchoate suburbanisation' (p.79) which make up the outer 'sad' (p.20) suburbs of 'unrealisable dream', the 'faceless suburb, no-place, somewhere USA' (p.80). In those 'older areas you will find humane, generous suburbs where spacious men [sic] built their concern into houses and spaces so that dignity and peace, safety and quiet live there' (p.23). What McHarg does not acknowledge is the wealth that enabled the creation of earlier generous suburbs, and that life there was limited to the rich. It is not surprising that an aspiration for something similar for the masses, or even a middle class, could and would not lead to the same outcome in quality of materials or design. And yet it is not simply a failure of design to

be good enough but a failure to employ good design in the first place inasmuch as it both makes the process of development more expensive and is usually not required in order to make the same profit. The peace and dignity of 'spacious men' is funded by the sale of 'ticky-tacky' environments to those who have no choice. What all these observations, and many others, reveal—even if, like McHarg, they do not recognise it—is the connection of suburban development to the growth of consumer capitalism and the circulation of global capital without which alternative scenarios of building and dwelling increasingly appeared impossible to develop.

The Initial observations of post WWII suburban expansion, resulting almost exclusively in condemnation, were succeeded by a period of defiant praise. The earlier partook of nostalgia for the suburbs of pre-sprawl landscapes, the latter, nostalgia for early forms of suburban sprawl. Nostalgia-driven Pro and Con phases continue, contract and overlap as suburban housing continues to change.<sup>9</sup> These have been followed more recently by scepticism of both extremes and an even greater curiosity and wonder at the phenomenon of suburbia and the specific phenomena of various suburbs. As Graham Davison explained in the introduction to essays from two conferences in the early nineties as part of Monash University's investigation into suburbia: 'In urging an open-minded historical reappraisal of the postwar city, however, we do not wish to see the sneering contempt of an earlier generation of intellectuals replaced by the babyboomers' uncritical nostalgia for the days of the FJ Holden, the Sunbeam Mixmaster and the Hills Hoist' (Davison et al. 1995, p.7). Yet it is still not clear what has replaced either and whatever has may already be in need of replacement itself.

## Con

Though the rise of the suburb brought about significant changes in both the social contents and the spatial order of the city, most of the interpreters of the city, until but yesterday, have curiously passed it by; and even the few writers who have touched upon the planning of the suburb, notably Professor Christopher Tunnard, have treated it as a relatively recent phenomenon (Mumford 1961, p.549).

There have always been 'suburbs', at least as long as there have been cities, notes Mumford, as has Ted Bruegmann much more recently (2005). Inasmuch as '[c]ities have always expanded horizontally unless curbed by walls, natural barriers, or the inability to communicate over distance' (Beinart 2004) there was perhaps little comment necessary on the advantages of such inevitable expansion, especially when there was plenty of space to expand into and little of value there which those with any significant power or influence might object to losing.

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<sup>9</sup> Echoing J. B. Jackson's *Westward-Moving House*, George Seddon has outlined the shrinking of 'The Australian Backyard' (Seddon, G. 1997 [1994]) as has Tony Hall (Hall, T. 2007)

The first writings on suburbs then emerge as criticism in reaction to the observed negative effects of suburban growth and the term itself—utilising ‘sub-’ (below) rather than ‘ex-’ (out-of) or extra (beyond)—is negatively constructed. It has been recognised that suburbia ‘has been a neuralgic point in debates about Australian culture and Australian identity since the end of the nineteenth century’ (McCann 1998, p.vii). Louis Esson’s 1911 diatribe against the ‘vaunted purity of the suburban home’ (in McCann 1998, p.vii) captured what is still a pervasive anxiety about suburban life. The suburban home, wrote Esson, ‘stifles the devil-may-care spirit, the Dionysian, the creative spirit. It denounces Art, enthusiasm, heroic virtue. The Muses are immolated on the altar of respectability’ (in McCann 1998, p.vii). In America, the seminal texts of Robert Fishman and Kenneth Jackson in the 1980s, reviewing the earlier critical texts of such observers as Lewis Mumford, Jane Jacobs and William Whyte, echoed by Robin Boyd and others in Australia, have predominantly condemned the suburbs.

From the 1960s, with the use of the term in *Gods Own Junkyard: The Planned Deterioration of America's Landscape* suburbs have become synonymous with ‘sprawl’ (Blakely 2003). The voluminous anti-sprawl position was consolidated by journalist Howard Kunstler in a genre-defining anti-suburban, anti-car assault which praises more contact with undeveloped ‘nature’ as the principal cure to suburban ills (1993) even as contact with domesticated nature in the suburbs was still accepted as a cure for urban ones. The most sustained, vigorous and widely disseminated sprawl attack has arguably been delivered in America by New Urbanism and related movements such as Smart Growth which have spread across the Atlantic (Calthorpe 1997; Calthorpe & Fulton 2001; Duany 1998; Dunham-Jones & Williamson 2008; Farr 2007; Katz 1993). ‘Oldfangled new towns: a brilliant husband-and wife team lead a growing movement to replace charmless suburban sprawl with civilized, familiar places that people love’ (Andersen 1991) is a title typical of popular journalism in praise of New Urbanist efforts. The same attitude and arguments can be found in regular denunciations of suburban sprawl such as ‘The end of the great Australian dream can't come soon enough’ by Elizabeth Farrelly. Farrelly has compiled her anti-sprawl observations into a book: *Blubberland: The Dangers of Happiness* (2007). The predominant understanding of suburbs, their problems and solutions, as cited in the press, are that suburbs and their sprawl are wasteful and bad while planning can solve them through new strategies that compel more efficient and limited use of land concentrating on social and environmental benefits, supported by government and the employment of improved technologies for data capture and analysis as well as project delivery (Adler 1995).

## Two sorts of Pro

At the turn of the millennium another shift toward more positive views of the suburbs by cultural 'elites' of academia and the urban media was recorded by Nick Gillespie. He quotes several sources including the New York Times Magazine which ran a special edition 'that actually had some good things to say about the suburbs'.

One story even went so far as to praise Levittown, Long Island, that reportedly irradiated Ground Zero of the post-war suburban explosion: 'Held up as an example of conformity and monotony, Levittown's 17,000 identical capes have mutated into an exuberant architectural Babel: the sparrows on a wire have each grown their own distinctive plumage' (2000, p.4).

This positive shift is based on claims of diversity and maturity. 'The suburbs today are really cities in horizontal form' (James Hughes in Gillespie 2000, p.4) replete with their variety of services and an array of housing style choices. In one respect this is similar to Mumford's and McHarg's praise for older suburbs and condemnation of the new, albeit their new suburbs are now the old and their old even older. The succession can be partly explained by the physical changes as well as memories and nostalgia that mature landscapes accrue. But ongoing, contracting and overlapping phases of praise and condemnation can also be considered part of competing and manipulated visions of what suburbs are, what they have been and what they could be. These visions emerge from three sources: radical utopian individualism, a conservative community and government, and a speculating market which utilises both. Pro-suburb views can be of two types: those that project utopian alterity and those that exploit or detourn the potential for difference as something not only normal and achievable but purchasable. The distinction is often a slippery one, with governments historically playing to each, variously curbing and encouraging optimistic innovation and cautious consolidation, although, regardless, now almost universally serving a ubiquitous if not always benevolent market economy.

Defenders and advocates of the suburbs take several positions and these are not consistent in either the vision of current suburban life that they wish to defend, or in proposals for the future of suburbs. There are key distinctions between 'suburbs' and 'sprawl' for example, where some commentators support and others condemn sprawl as a key characteristic of suburbs. The rarer pro-sprawl position is posited by Alan Berger in *Drosscape*. '[P]eople concerned with landscape, environment and sustainability issues almost never consider sprawl a positive opportunity, even though it is largely dominated by landscape development' (2006, p.21). Another distinction is made between suburbs supported as a healthy democratic and necessarily capitalist space of free-market investment and return requiring the increased encouragement of freer government policy, and the view that suburbs provide an affordable range of

communal and family benefits where the mounting privatisation of public space and services along with rising house prices unfortunately distort the suburban ideal, requiring firmer legislative intervention. The politics of both left and right make use of the spatial potential of suburbia to realise political potential.

In Australia, the initial post-war pro-suburban counter-attack to the generation of Mumford and McHarg was made in the 1970s by Hugh Stretton. While titled for cities his *Ideas for Australian Cities* is more properly and specifically about Australian suburbs as the best expression of and opportunity for a good life:

So - to sum up - you don't have to be a mindless conformist to choose suburban life. Most of the best poets and painters and inventors and protestors choose it too. It reconciles access to work and city with private, adaptable, self-expressive living space at home...These are the gains our transport costs buy for us (1975, p.21).

For Stretton a pro-suburb view is a political, specifically socialist one. 'What follows is...a political tract, not a planning manual' (1975, p.4). In France in the late 1960s, a group of avant-garde architects, artists, writers, theorists, and critics calling themselves 'spatial urbanists' envisioned a series of urban utopias; phantom cities of a possible future (Busbea 2007). The group 'Utopie' founded by Henri Lefebvre in 1966 included writers, artists, sociologists, architects and landscape architect Isabelle Auricoste. The writings of Jean Baudrillard in its eponymous journal have been recently collected (2006). Like Stretton, although the projects and language are focused on the 'city' of Paris, the issues addressed were those most affecting and evident in the suburbs such as their unprecedented expansion, their poor-quality architecture, the increasing use of cars, population growth and inadequate provision of infrastructure including open space.

Such issues were and continue to be examined as essentially political ones. Witold Rzybczynski's review of Ted Bruegmann's *Sprawl: A Compact History* makes the suburbs' connections with free market economics explicit: 'Sprawl is and always has been inherent to urbanisation. It is driven less by the regulations of legislators, the actions of developers, and the theories of city planners, than by the decisions of millions of individuals - Adam Smith's "invisible hand"' (2005). 'Democracy—consumer preference writ large—unfailingly reflects the popular will' (Kiefer 2004) and reveals itself enthusiastically in suburbs. Globalisation, argued as the spread of such democracy, itself defined as freely circulating capital, is presented as an actor-less, apolitical force of great potential, and ,at any rate, is an irresistible and unyielding power and fact of life (Castells 1996). However, its 'potential' works as well for repression as liberation of different people and their goals and it therefore cannot exist

as an apolitical or undirected force of nature. Global networks and economies are programmed and reprogrammed, designed and redesigned in series of struggles. Even in its newer forms of dissemination via digital communications, the dynamism of global networks—of whatever sort and however personally or corporately exercised, however inclusive of social, economic, architectural or any other arenas of ideas and information—is not freely evolving and opportunities are not freely circulating (Castells 2009). Despite, or rather because of, seeming de-politicisation, the very idea of freedom and potential offered by such networks and the apparently unconstrained emergence of positive potentials generated by them, must be viewed and critiqued as a political and very deliberately motivated project. For David Harvey such projects are controlled by ‘capitalist class interests operating through the agency of the US foreign, military, and commercial policy’ (1997, p.69).

Harvey’s *Spaces of Hope* (2000) relates political struggle specifically to the production of physical space and posits utopian thought and proposition as the key to resistance of otherwise irresistible global forces. The findings of his Baltimore case study might apply to parallel land development in Melbourne: a docklands/harbor redevelopment, a succession of major project investments required to fund their successive borrowing, public-private partnerships for specific sites and the formation of quasi-government bodies to oversee zones of rebuilding (Dockland Authority) and genres of building (VicUrban’s residential housing estates), gentrification of inner ring suburbs, de-industrialisation and intensive development of post-industrial sites, privatisation of city services and infrastructure, subsidised suburban growth, and so on. Even as Harvey names and illustrates fallen utopias—the dystopias of suburban ‘bourgeois utopia’, downtown ‘developers’ utopia’, gentrifying ‘yuppie utopia’, city spectacular ‘event utopia’ and projected ‘videotopia’ and gated ‘privatopia’—in the end he still reserves for the term utopia a transformative power of imagination essential to overcoming arguments that there is no alternative, even as alternatives fall prey to their dystopian realities.

Architecture, planning and landscape architecture, explicitly immersed in spatial production, cannot avoid acting with—or against—such interests, consciously or not. This is clearly evident in the objects of architecture. But the integrated programmatic, ecological and other systems of landscape architecture and of land development, which are not simply inseparable but, in practice, logically synonymous, are even more complicit with political agendas. In particular they are most readily implicated with neo-liberalism and located, above all other landscapes, in the suburban one (Gleeson 2006). As early as the 1960s, even the Australian Labor Party (ALP) had developed a

theory of reform coherent with evoking a 'way of life' and an 'image of Australia as an undifferentiated suburbia, composed of individual households standing free of class relations' (Rowse 1992).

[The ALP] represented not the aspirations of a working class constituted by its subordinate place in production, but the needs of disadvantaged householders, concentrated in regions... After all, a class-oriented conception of the ALP constituency was inadmissible to these ideals precisely because the whole program was to be financed by the continued, privately-directed expropriation of working-class labour – the fundamental source of all the inequalities being dealt with ... Hancock said with a playful mixture of banality and insight: 'There are no classes in Australia except in the economic sense'. He was viewing Australian society through the wrong end of the Marxist telescope. His use of the word 'except' trivialises the very processes which constitute ours as a class society...those who use 'suburbia' as a defining image of Australian society lend their support to this obscuring emphasis (pp.247-250).

In *War on the Dream: How Anti-Sprawl Policy Threatens the Quality of Life* Wendell Cox (2006) argues primarily that suburban growth should be encouraged as there are unaddressed inequities in restraining it. He revisits evidence of earlier pro-suburban texts including *Suburban Legends* (DiLorenzo 2000a), a republication of *The Myth of Suburban Sprawl* (DiLorenzo 2000b). Thomas DiLorenzo argues that the adverse effects of suburban sprawl have been greatly exaggerated and suggests that planning, rather than being a positive force for control of problems, is largely responsible for generating them and for emerging systemic failures of suburban infrastructures. In an uncompromising pro-development, free-market appeal, he addresses and dismisses the major claims made by anti-sprawl advocates, including dwindling productive farmland, inefficiency of road transport, water and infrastructure supply crises, efficiency and equity of central regulatory planning and so on.

To millions of Americans a house in the suburbs, with a nice yard, a garden, and a little open space is the American dream. But to environmentalists and planners it is a sheer nightmare. The invectives used by environmentalists and urban planners to describe suburbia reveal a visceral hatred of it ... Many of the problems the critics of suburbia are concerned with have been either greatly exaggerated or simply fabricated. Moreover, their proposed 'solutions' to these problems—centralized governmental planning of where we live and work and how we commute (ie regulatory sprawl)—is bound to be economically inefficient, harmful to growth, and inherently inequitable ... The major claims made by smart-growth advocates do not hold up to scrutiny (2000b).

Peter Corrigan famously has a favourable view of Australian suburbs: 'I've always been an unabashed fan of the suburbs. I've admired the wonderful sense of survival of suburban Australia, quite in spite of the tiresome harassment from architectural aesthetics. I see them as a source of fabulous energy' (in Clark 2000). His positive view of the suburbs is not, however, unqualified or apolitical approval but consists of a vision of their potential, a utopian pursuit of architecture's potential to help realise human potential. His view of suburbs is not simply Pro, and his suspicion of claims to

the effortlessly reasoned and reasonable working out of problems betrays neither his utopianism nor his appeals to intellectual endeavour and political debate.

In a similar sense, some see the potential of suburbs as valuable and diverse ecological habitat. For Aiden Davison there are signs 'that sub/urban nature is beginning to be thought as something other than an oxymoron' (2005). He notes that biologist Tim Low 'has found a receptive audience for claims that sub/urban environments are more ecologically resilient and adaptive than generally acknowledged'. Human as well as non-human nature has also been argued as unexpectedly diverse:

Suburban or marginal regions across the globe reflect the latest evolving trends in contemporary culture. Beneath a veil of stereotyped uniformity lurk insomniacs and amnesiacs, plagued by fear or driven to invention. Poetry and violence, romance and pornography, and organic gardens and toxic waste are all nestled into the naturalistic settings of the suburbs ... When I recently visited the omnipresent suburb I was struck by how far off the mark my picture of the place really was... We think we know what happens in the suburbs, but we are missing many sides to the story (Lang et al. 1997, pp.6-7).

In a tribute to Peter Corrigan on the occasion of his receiving the (then) RAI A Gold Medal for architecture in 2003, Conrad Hamann positioned his work against Australia's 'suburbhater' and the general disdain of professional architects.

Then there were the suburbs. Seized on early as an exciting Australian substitute for dark satanic mills and tubercular demoralisation, they have been credited with every 1850-1970 vice imaginable, from infantilism to repetition to conservatism to being seen as the realms of a lower order. Hugh Stretton and Hal Porter showed the absurdities of this loading, but for many in architecture the Australian suburb still remains an amorphous enemy ... suburbhating, while claiming high moral ground, turned Modernism's former engagement with more radical political activism into a crusade for taste, certifiable maturity and lifestyle (2003).

Corrigan is not pro-suburb as much as he is against suburbhater. His hope is utopian. Designers are rarely Pro-Con. They do not declare themselves for or against the suburbs, accepting or rejecting arguments presented to them, as much as seek to understand them in order to make—or rather design and build—their own arguments. Their work requires analyses of Pro-Con positions in order to develop new propositions. Such analyses are, in the first limited instance, Anti. They attempt to resolve or anticipate the resolution of polemic, opposing views. They employ or invent new techniques, terms and tactics for overcoming conflict. In these efforts they are also essentially conservative in their acceptance of the terms within which the suburban situation is recognised, its conflicts described and its problems intended to be overcome.

Along with continuing familiar arguments which regard suburbs as phenomena of essentially known fundamental qualities—albeit of unprecedented amendment and growth—there are pleas for more carefully researched and complex appraisals of their history. Such appeals and their research now constitute a major part of literature on the suburbs. As this attitude suggests an optimistic and empowering approach to re-assessment of problems, the Anti stance can be seen to generally favour a positive possible future for suburbs. This view has been most notably led by Ted Bruegmann (2005). He is a leading voice of the American ‘contrarians’, a group who argue that sprawl is not a newly threatening phenomenon and who remind critics that the suburbs have always been appealing. In identifying suburbs as the logical, common and demonstrable outgrowth of improved economies throughout history, Bruegmann denounces the argument that suburban sprawl is a new noxious threat resulting from unprecedented conditions and presenting unique challenges. The conditions he identifies that give rise to suburban expansion are not exceptional to the consumer confidence of our own age, but have been identified as typical to periods of growth in diverse cultures. A year later William Bogart’s *Don’t Call It Sprawl: Metropolitan Structure in the 21st Century* put ‘the current policy debate over urban sprawl ... into a broader analytical and historical context’ (2006, unpaginated) and similarly to Bruegmann suggested that ‘the debate about sprawl has been driven by a fundamental lack of understanding of the structure, functioning, and evolution of modern metropolitan areas’ (unpaginated).

The Anti approach to the suburbs rejects simple Pro-Con arguments. Anti admits greater complexity. It is interested in specificity, authenticity, diversity, fitness, health and safety. It discusses the regional scale as a solution to the failures of focus on both too-small, unintegrated local problem-solving, and on the too-large generalisations of state, national and federal perspectives. It is also an advocate of the human scale against the impersonal inhuman scale of modernist planning and architecture. Anti is the preferred response of governments as well as planning, engineering, social and other sciences. Anti literature pursues rational, pragmatic, ‘real world’ solutions, utilising advanced technologies and techniques with ever-greater precision and capacity. Employing the promises that these make, an Anti attitude is also the preferred stance of real estate and the market, which can construct and embellish their own best-practice and best-value promises around those of authoritative research. In this way Anti is also a compromising, have-your-cake-and-eat-it-too, best of all worlds attitude. Anti is not for or against the suburbs; it proposes to deliver better, newer, more efficient, balanced and—finally—correct suburbs. But Anti is also full of myths. It appeals to an unexplained because self-evident greater good or truth that all its

interests serve. Merely to invoke its key terms—specificity, authenticity, diversity, fitness, health and safety—is to evidence desirable outcomes. Anti then is utopia failed, risk abandoned. Anti is the calculated and carefully planned recuperation of radical detournment.

Anti is concerned with consensus and reasoned compromise. Government agents, the market and those who work for them are interested in reaching acceptable agreements for moving toward an agreed greater good. AILA, typically for institutions, is conservative. With large grants from the Federal Government, it has directed the profession's concerns over the last few years to align with those of government policy and the advice of government agencies such as the CSIRO. Although the role of State Government Architect is managed differently in those states which have the office, part of their general brief is to act as advisors and mediators between government, industry and the public, resolving, advocating, educating and helping reach decisions regarding major projects and policy concerning the built environment (London 2009). For John Denton, appointed Victoria's first State Government Architect in December 2005, this included 'giving comfort' and assurance to government and investors that designers are not being profligate, bureaucracies are not being wastefully obstructionist and developers are not being greedy. 'His experience with high quality design can provide credibility and confidence in managing the bureaucracy's traditionally risk-averse approach' (UDF 2006).

New South Wales' Chris Johnson declares that 'people out in the houses in the suburbs of our capital cities are looking for something they can believe in - something that is more than developer's profit and more than Nimby parochialism' (UDF 2006). To say that 'Government Architects across Australia can act as very useful go-betweens, between the profession and the political world, in ways that move our industry into new areas' is to place architecture firmly within an industry in ways that potentially estrange it from a more influential role it might have in moving society itself into new areas not constrained by industrial economies. Asked what 'good design' is Denton's successor Geoffrey London 'relates it to qualities of life such as amenity, pleasure safety, and economics – with faith in the idea and experience that good design is also good economics' (UDF 2008, unpaginated). Nonetheless Professor Philip Goad of Melbourne University, the then immediate past president of the Australian Institute of Architects, was reported as believing that 'the main challenge will be to ensure that design is actually the guiding principle rather than economic rationalism' (in Dowling 2008, unpaginated). Not dissimilarly, Professor Richard Blythe of RMIT warned that

'state architects are important to ensure controversial projects are not stymied by media populism' (in Dowling 2008, unpaginated).

Ever popular with the media, New Urbanism, along with Smart Growth and similar strategic planning associations and lobby groups, identify themselves as movements against the suburbs. More specifically they are against 'sprawl' as a particularly poor manifestation of the suburban settlement type. However their own propositions might be considered another form of suburb or revived form of older suburb (Meredith 2003). So their propositions and attitude are more correctly Anti, neither for nor against suburbs, but an enhanced or compromised modification of their supposedly better qualities. Peter Calthorpe advised:

It is time to redefine the American Dream. We must make it more accessible to our diverse population: singles, the working poor, the elderly, and the pressed middle-class families who can no longer afford the 'Ozzie and Harriet' version of the good life. Certain traditional values—diversity, community, frugality, and the human scale—should be the foundation of a new direction for both the American dream and the American Metropolis. These values are not a retreat to nostalgia or imitation, but a recognition that certain qualities of culture and community are timeless. And that these timeless imperatives must be married to the modern condition in new ways (1997, p.16).

To know how to make the American Dream 'more' than whatever it is, one needs to know *what* it is. The Dream is self-confessedly not real to begin with. That it will be 'redefined' via certain 'traditional values' which are 'timeless' does not make it more real, as these criteria too are both contested and deeply compromised by conflicting claims to authentic meaning and specific instance. For Calthorpe the 'alternative to sprawl is simple and timely' (1997, p.4). It is basically 'a modern version of a traditional town' which is effectively a denser suburb 'with minimal environmental impacts; less land consumed, less traffic generated, less pollution produced' (1997, p.17).

Planning regulation and legislation is Anti, its power sustained by detailed research and studies that 'prove' both the need for and fairness of controls. New technology is marshalled to assist more accurate assessment—of material, psychological, economic, visual and other characteristics of a given site and situation—and to organise more persuasive and responsive corrections to identified errors. John Hasse's 'Geospatial Approach to Measuring New Development Tracts for Characteristics of Sprawl' (2004) is typical of research which supports this. It comes from a tradition of social engineering exemplified by the detailed work of Alice Coleman on London's public housing which led to the publication of *Utopia on Trial* (1985), a formative text of the type of research informing planning legislation. Following on from the findings of Oscar Newman's *Defensible Space* (1972) which postulated that poor architectural design can encourage criminal activity, Professor Coleman of King's College in London headed a

research group called the Land Use Research Unit. Formed in 1979, it sought links between public housing design and crime as well as general social 'malaise'. The objective was to determine if the spatial scale and configuration of modern, high-rise housing design was a significant contributing factor to social malaise in addition to straightforward criminal acts.

For Tim Benton, Coleman's work is an attack on utopianism at the same time as it is an attack on socialism. It is Anti in its use of statistical proof and its neoliberalism; in not being against denser living or apartments per se, but against social housing:

In general, [Coleman's work] confirms many tenets of modern folklore. The research is flawed in several respects and motivated by a passionate commitment to Thatcherite values of individuality, family, and self-interest as the only guardians of stability ... The lesson of Thatcherite and Reaganite policies, well learned by their successors, is that there are more votes in reducing taxes and creating misery for a minority of unimportant people than in bearing the ever increasing costs of raising standards of service, comfort, and hygiene for all ... the vestigial idealism of the bourgeois architect and planner retreats behind the defensible space of the individual family unit (1999, unpaginated).

Similarly designers retreat behind the entrance features of masterplanned 'community' housing estates. Such studies as Coleman's led to the creation of Design Guides and associated codes and standards. The same form of studies and their comprehensive statistics 'prove' why (traditional) suburban sprawl is bad and suburbs dysfunctional. The relationships between the cause and organisational, even behavioural, effects of long travel distances and isolating detached housing on occupants may be supportable, but the assumption of affects (the misery, desperation and loneliness that explain 'bad' behaviours) is far less easily demonstrated. Even as there has been greater acknowledgment and accommodation of socio-political and cultural difference, there has been a tightening of the ways in which 'facts' and evidence must invariably be recognised and registered.<sup>10</sup>

Sustainability is a mainstream Anti endeavour and an explicit aim of planning. It is no longer a radical concept, but appears as a widely adopted term, principally because it is 'extraordinarily elastic' (Davison 2008a, p.191). It has proven malleable to almost any agenda, and although much has been written on the 'complexity and multiplicity of [an]

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<sup>10</sup> The rise of 'evidence based policy' has been examined in Michael, K. & Michael, M. G. (eds) 2008, *Australia and the New Technologies: Evidence Based Policy in Public Administration (Workshop on the Social Implications of National Security, 2008)*. 'Evidence-based policy (EBP) is an approach to decision-making in government which stipulates that policy-setting should be based on objective evidence' (p.11). However 'EBP does not escape the age-old problem of what actually constitutes evidence. Is evidence fact, and can we really determine who is correct? Is evidence truth? What does it mean to have "enough" proof?' (p.14).

essentially contested concept' there is no inquiry regarding the need for it that is not dismissed as climate change scepticism or similar. Sustainability has been employed by (if it wasn't a construction of) a dominant Western consumer capitalist paradigm formulated to promote new products and patterns of 'smarter', 'greener' consumption to feed continued economic expansion.

Lewis Mumford's *City in History* concludes, immediately following a chapter on suburbia, with a discussion of the 'Myth of the Metropolis'. The myth resides in the supposed disinterestedness and democracy of civic power, a myth fostered to support the banking system through increased access to mortgages and following on from the associated myth of freely chosen demand for such houses (1961, pp.661-3). 'Release and enslavement, freedom and compulsion, have been present from the beginning in urban culture. Out of this inner tension some of the expressions of urban life have come forth' (1961, p.636). In doing away with this tension through the thorough, non-dissenting adoption of the Myth, we do not ensure release and freedom, but submit to dependence and compulsion.

In the 1960s the *Internationale Situationniste* undertook sustained critique of planning logic:

An expert has argued on the basis of precise experiments that the programs proposed by the planners can sometimes create feelings of discontent and revolt, which could have been partly avoided if we had a more profound knowledge of real behaviour, and above all of the motivations for this behaviour (Vaneigem 1961, unpaginated).

The same argument is offered that if only landscape architecture had better knowledge of 'real' nature it could design better and more sustainable environments.

Planning is the big word, the biggest of the lot, some say. The specialists talk of economic planning, and planned urbanism, then they give a knowing wink, and, providing the performance is well rendered, all the world applauds. The high point of the spectacle is the planning of happiness ... Roadways, lawns, natural flowers and artificial forests lubricate the gears of subjection, render it lovable ... it is a matter of scenically organizing the spectacle around everyday life, to let each person live within the bounds which correspond to the role capitalist society imposes on him ... Urbanism is the art of reassuring, which it knows how to practise in its purest form: the ultimate courtesy of a power on the point of assuming total control of our minds (Vaneigem 1961, unpaginated).

The same critique is offered by Guy Debord:

The Situationists have always said that 'unitary urbanism is not a doctrine of urbanism but a critique of urbanism' ... Until it merges with a general revolutionary praxis, urbanism is necessarily the first enemy of all possibilities for human life in our time ... 'improvement' or 'progress' will always be designed to lubricate the system and perfect the conditioning that we must overturn, in urbanism and everywhere else ... 'Experimental Utopia: For a New Urbanism,' already contains the whole ambiguity. For the method of experimental utopia, if it is truly to correspond to its project, must

obviously embrace the whole, and carrying it out would lead not to a 'new urbanism' but to a new way of life, a new revolutionary praxis ... Sociological surveys ... present options only between the dismal variations of what already exists ... Nothing exists but a collection of techniques for integrating people (techniques that effectively resolve conflicts while creating others, at present less known but more serious). These techniques are wielded innocently by imbeciles or deliberately by the police. And all the discourses on urbanism are lies, just as obviously as the space organized by urbanism is the very space of the social lie and of fortified exploitation. Those who discourse on the powers of urbanism seek to make people forget that all they are doing is the urbanism of power (1961).

Such critique is lost on Pro and Con arguments regarding the suburbs and even on more complex work that goes beyond offering summaries of the major points or elaborations of previously predicted scenarios of suburban growth or decay. Overwhelmed by the tremendous complexity of human settlements, now of unprecedented size and diversity and requiring the urgent gathering and analysis of new and more data to drive decision-making, debate regarding the objective of decisions has been largely forgotten. Meanwhile many environments have moved beyond known conditions of urban or suburban forms altogether, beyond the effectiveness of traditional or institutionalised conventions of design constraint or encouragement, and seemingly even beyond the usefulness of the accumulated knowledge of the history of architecture and design. What is being grappled with is not just what can replace present design methodologies or practices, techniques or technologies, but what might enable design to reposition and reinforce its relevance. The answer may not lie with new tools for a known problem but with a reformulation of the problem itself.

The emphasis of literature, as of professional bodies such as the AILA, is on the former Anti search for new and adaptive skills and tools rather than a revolutionary rethinking. The question of relevance is then countered with a demonstrable professional adaptability and a substantial, seemingly overwhelming body of evidence. Yet this may miss the point:

Futurological extrapolations of existing societal developments will doubtless continue, even though they are costly exercises that depend upon an adequate supply of graph paper; but in the end their mechanical anticipations of the next stage are not likely to destroy the utopian propensity, which makes a mockery of planners...To cultivate wisely the ancient art of wishing as an antidote to the present saturation with the pseudoscience of prediction and the busyness of the masters of applied utopistics may be a paramount moral need of the age. But this is more a utopian wish than a great expectation (Manuel & Manuel 1979, p.814).

Without links to disciplinary histories as well as the ongoing history of settlement problems, the newness of tools or approaches or data effectively creates new disciplines. To initiate instead explorations which emphasise the continuing relevance of landscape architecture as a design discipline, would firstly require an

acknowledgement of its histories. And what such a careful inquiry would find amongst the accumulated knowledge of architecture are its failures. Where Anti would seek correctives to these, a third approach actively celebrates them as useful lessons. Yet too indulgent a celebration can turn a useful lesson about a failing into a fetish for the condition of failure, a celebration of non-design that pre-empts ultimate failure and so offers ways to relax with, rather than resist, seemingly inevitable change.

## **Non**

If there are many designers busy in the Anti camp, there are a growing number in the Non. Non is a reaction to the supposed failed rational logic of Anti and more generally of the projects of Modernism, understood as an historical condition whose time is past. Non is linked to increased interest in performance and process across many fields, particularly life sciences and computer programming, from ecology to autonomic computing, autopoiesis, ontological design and other self-generating, interconnected and adaptive systems. Design too is interested in uncertainty, chaos, openness and open-endedness, expressing its investigations in the form of tracing and mapping of networks, flows and agencies, while developing strategies, frameworks and scaffoldings to reveal, understand or organise them. Just as Non experiments in landscape architecture have borrowed from the theory of other disciplines, they can be linked too to dangers already argued within other fields. The main criticism of a new interest in process is the unselfconscious assumption of neutrality and of an apolitical methodology.

Within landscape architecture, reaction to the failed project of Modern architecture and design as well as the ineffectual whimsy of postmodern responses has been complicated by the discipline's already deep, and arguably never broken engagement with natural and morphological processes, and by its relatively weak engagement with the political projects of Modernity as explored by architecture (Treib 1994). Yet its disciplinary relevance has been asserted more recently with the rise of Landscape Urbanism which reclaims the 'agency of the landscape' and the site itself to generate and guide new integrated outcomes preferable to those imposed by human agents. 'Landscape Urbanism is ... so to speak, the reactive child of all the teachings of our rationalist, functionalist and positivist forefathers' (Girod 2006, p.89). Charles Waldheim similarly declared that:

The origins of landscape urbanism can be traced to postmodern critiques of modernist architecture and planning ... [which] indicted modernism for its inability to produce a 'meaningful' or 'liveable' public realm, for its failure to come to terms with the city as an historical construction of collective consciousness, and for its inability to communicate with multiple audiences (Waldheim & Berger 2008, p.38).

However, according to Waldheim, postmodern approaches also failed, retreating to nostalgic comforts and practicing 'a kind of preemptive cultural regression' unable to deal with the 'indeterminacy and flux of the contemporary city' that emergent works of landscape urbanism came to deal with (2008, p.38). Landscape urbanism claims to address a need to deal productively with complexity and uncertainty while avoiding the repressive determinism of positivist closed understandings imposed on rich and diverse possibilities for alternate understandings and ongoing growth.

Architecture and planning in their connection to urban design, have pursued many investigations into indeterminacy as a way to work more appropriately, sensitively and effectively with apparent chaos, if not always with inner doubt (Kolarevic & Malkawi 2005; Kronenburg 2007; Leatherbarrow 2008). These investigations explore both biophysical models (Mateo & Sauter 2007) based around work in ecology (Hagan 2001; Hensel 2008), biology (Cruz & Pike 2008; Gans & Kuz 2003) and genetics for example, and digital or mathematical ones working with parametrics (Meredith 2003), algorithms and computer sciences (Jencks 1997; Kwinter & Davison 2008; Waters 2003).

Landscape architecture claims special knowledge and accumulated experience of types of performative organicism because of a disciplinary tradition dealing with landscape morphology and natural systems. Landscape urbanism reminds landscape architecture that '[a]lthough we visualise the landscape as a place, it is best understood as a process' (Freestone & Murphy 1992, p.184). It notes how architecture, planning and other urban design disciplines are using landscape as a model to better understand the city and urban development (Corner 1999; Waldheim & Berger 2008). Yet it is not 'landscape' as a negotiated construction of nature-culture relations that they find useful to examine or are borrowing models from, but nature as examined afresh through models provided by computer, advanced mathematical, biotechnological, ecological and other sciences. Scientists have observed nature to develop models constructed by humans (IBM 2005), while designers use models constructed by human science to explain nature. 'Nature' is now thoroughly constructed and commodified (Mateo & Sauter 2007; McKibben 2006) not just as a term or concept but in the influence and control humans exercise over its actuality. Given such a relationship, more than usually acute contradictions arise in citing nature as a separate, 'true' and correct source for modelling human constructions, simultaneous with recognising that it is already constructed, and concurrent with claiming to be skilled constructors of it. How can designers claim the efficacy of

something beyond a limited human capacity to create or control it and yet also still claim to be useful themselves? How can an approach be formulated which does not limit the possibilities of a site and its infinite potentials and yet then be needed to intervene or alter it at all? David Shane suggests as much: 'no central designer or masterplanner is necessary; design, as a biological process, takes place autonomously within a network of feedback loops connecting random genetic change to the performance of individuals in the field' (2005, p.89).

In 1997 Stan Allen outlined the significance of 'fields' for architecture: 'The term "field conditions" is at once a reassertion of architecture's contextual assignment and at the same time a proposal to comply with such obligations' (1998, p.24). Why is 'obligation' plural when the assignment is singular? Allen's opening statement would seem to call for the obligation of architecture to consider context. However, he supposes that there are further obligations arising from such consideration: to comply with such obligations *as arise* from consideration of context. Yet how can it be known what these further obligations are? In its obligation to consider context, architecture is obliged to consider the requirements of the client, the brief, the budget and other determined or determinable parameters. The obligation to consider context arises from the defined need to meet or question various project requirements in relation to the site. Context is considered in relation to an objective or objectives. This is the contextual assignment. Having considered the context in order to meet these objectives where do further ones come from? In what ways and to what purpose can architecture comply with or even know that there are obligations beyond what can be determined in considering context in relation to project objectives? To whom is architecture further obliged?

The suggestion is the site itself. The claim is that architecture's obligations stem not from consideration of a context in order to deliver project needs, but from a reversed set of presumptive obligations to meet the site's needs in order to create a project. How the all-inclusive given, the reality of the site, is to be registered or understood without reductive constraint or oppressive transgression and yet produce something new, assumes that such needs can be known; that what is best *for the site* can be known. The field is assumed to be an inclusive collective of uncontested and legible, if complex, opinion and self-evident need. The totality of all possibilities is asked to somehow provide direction or measure for realisation of a particular one, and the outcome is able to avoid individual interpretation or interference. Like the literary, natural, pathetic and other fallacies, it is a conceit of the poet-artist-designer to say that their interpretation is the revelation of a truth rather than the argument for one.

Anita Berrizbeitia urges a move from discussion of flexibility to appreciation of 'scales of undecidability' (2001, p.124). She is careful to footnote her intention to distinguish her use of the phrase from that of Derrida's although she does not say what his use entails. She 'simply mean[s] a landscape's capacity to engage multiple systems of signification at different scales' (2001, fn.13). As with much landscape urbanist writing the landscape is granted a sentient 'capacity to engage' that should be correctly attributed to those experiencing it. She explains in the text that she 'means a landscape's capacity for precision of form notwithstanding flexibility of program - for the precisely open rather than vaguely loose' (2001, p.125). If by 'landscape' she intends to indicate the physical reality of a particular piece of land, it is difficult to imagine how it can have anything but a precise form, however imprecisely described. A thing is exactly - precisely - what it is. A landscape's reality is not a capacity to be real, but *is* real. The flexibility is irrelevant to its physical actuality, although the forms it takes will enable greater or lesser diversity of possible program. The 'precision' of the form does not assist this although the precision of rendering the form accurately from a plan may. Being precise, if this does not mean being real, only makes sense in relation to something. If by 'landscape' she means a design for or representation of one yet to exist, the notion of and call for precision in relation to its realisation has merit. The desire for a proposition that is 'precisely open rather than vaguely loose' in its objectives, representation, description or even its material, programmatic or other specifications makes some sense, as the precision of relationship between the landscape design proposal and designed landscape outcome can be assessed. It remains nonsensical to speak of landscape form itself as precise or loose. Only the comparative clarity of its projection or communication can be so.

Richard Weller has noted that 'the implied mastery of modernist planning underpinned by belief in predictability and utopia is of course now replaced by its obverse, strategies of partial intervention in anticipation of unpredictability and dystopia' (2006, p.84, fn.7). In his contribution to the *Landscape Urbanism Reader* Weller identifies contradictions and other problems with landscape urbanist theories and rhetoric, as have others. He has reiterated some of his concerns more recently, while attempting to apply landscape urbanism's 'loftier theoretical ambitions' to the problems presented by the 'banal' environment of suburbia (2008, p.248). The attempt might have evolved as a utopian challenge to landscape urbanism's Non frontier approach, but has instead become an Anti investigation of voluminously diagrammed and illustrated options of equally indeterminate merit (Weller 2009). The lead designer of the controversial National Museum of Australia's *Garden of Australian Dreams*, Weller is a landscape architect as well known for his strong opinions as for his radical practice. And yet with this research

he has formulated a curiously conservative and thoroughly reasonable approach with an almost apologetic outcome to what might have been a powerful subversion; an investigation in which he could have revelled most in exposing the many myths behind Australian suburban land development rather than just the many possible new forms that might continue them.

The abstract and introduction for Weller's earlier paper in *Landscape Journal* outline a number of research aims which are either contradicted or remain unaddressed, while its language presupposes attitudes which are central to the problems he later discusses—principally the profit-driven motives of land developers and the marketplace—but which are never openly challenged, even when they are briefly acknowledged (2008, p.261). Weller's work does not enter into any discussion of values or of social justice as a measure of values in relation to the many scenarios generated. The work demonstrates the incremental compromise of an Anti approach which neither rejects suburbia, nor accepts its predominant forms, but seeks to 'improve' on an unavoidable, beloved evil without expressly defining the terms of improvement. The sheer weight and diversity of visually rendered statistics in the book is characteristic of the numbing number-crunching of Anti enumerations of the difficulties of making better suburbs. He avoids interrogating the problem behind these difficulties or questioning what 'better' is. In his essay, Weller believes he has provided tools—specifically, an awareness of and skills to work at an 'urban scale', driven by the 'meta-narrative of ecology' and grounded in 'empirical data'—which help 'position landscape architects to more forcefully negotiate the conditions of contemporary sprawl' (2008, p.265). But he fails to suggest to what end or why any negotiation should ensue that is different to what already happens. The tools he provides can be, and have been used by developers to further the status quo of the economic and social conditions generating 'sprawl', even if they superficially alter formal outcomes.

His abstract begins: 'This two-part paper superimposes current landscape urbanist theory onto practical suburban master planning experience so as to help landscape architects play a more influential role in shaping contemporary patterns of suburban sprawl' (2008, p.247). In fact the superimposition does not work for a number of reasons which he outlines and so the intent of using landscape urbanism to shift the practice of landscape architecture 'from one of relative superficiality to one of structural influence' (2008, p.247) remains unachieved in the terms set out. 'This project suggests that the status of the master plan in relation to landscape urbanism's emphasis on indeterminacy is a key issue' (2008, p.247) but this issue remains unresolved and, by the end, is explicitly rejected: 'it rejects landscape urbanism's

penchant for indeterminacy' (2008, p.264). Furthermore, the project's 'essential logic differs little from an established tradition of landscape architects bringing open space networks to the fore in suburban planning' (2008, p.264) and he suggests it actually has more in common with New Urbanism than landscape urbanism.

Tellingly, Weller hits upon the dystopian outcome of what might have been finally a utopian transformation of landscape urbanist Non design through application on a specific site: 'in suburbia, to "irrigate territories with potential" as Koolhaas would have it, could mean simply connecting the internet and the sewerage and letting development loose' or, more in the spirit of Koolhaas, letting those seeking a home loose to negotiate or build their own. This is exactly the point Weller might have been expected to have anticipated at the outset: that is, that the marketplace has such control of the conditions of development that the utopianism of Koolhaas's suggestion could not happen without a radical re-alignment of the ways in which the land development industry operates. Anything less will either be a dystopian failure or only serve the existing system, despite all programmatic, material or other alterations or innovations. And this is what happened with Weller's work. He says that 'suburbia doesn't have much potential' (2008, p.267) in the sense that Koolhaas meant, which is to deny or render ridiculous the very ambition to find and realise the potentials of suburbia with which the project commenced. Weller has assisted the continuation of the industry's hold on the production of suburban dwelling, when he might have weakened it.

What is problematic with an Anti position, which can then lead to a reactionary Non position, is a particular idea of critique. With criticism reduced to what Roland Barthes identified as 'this enumerative mania' in search of verifiable truth (1972, p.81) requiring the Manuels' 'endless supply of graph paper' (1997, p.814), it is not surprising to find a tendency to seek a meta-critical frame for queries that seem already excised from discussion by conservative values or conventions of practice. Such a frame is what Landscape Urbanism attempts to provide and prove. Speaking of a critic's piece in L'Express, Barthes in *Neither-Nor Criticism* writes: 'Its idea was that criticism must be "neither a parlor game, nor a municipal service" - which means that it must be neither reactionary nor communist, neither gratuitous nor political' (1972, p.81). In the same way landscape urbanism has claimed to be neither Modernist (politically reactionary and inclusive) nor postmodern (aesthetically gratuitous and inclusive). Barthes observes two aspects to this superior yet evasive attitude:

I... find, in our Neither-Nor doctrine, two common expedients of bourgeois mythology. The first consists in a certain idea of freedom, conceived as 'the refusal of a priori

judgments'. ... the very absence of a system - especially when it becomes a profession of faith - stems from a very definite system... One can without fear defy anyone ever to practise an innocent criticism, free from any systematic determination... even in the simple word 'adventure', which is used with such alacrity by our Neither-Nor critics in order to moralise against those nasty systems which 'don't cause any surprise', what heredity, what fatality, what routine! Any kind of freedom always in the end re-integrates a known type of coherence, which is nothing but a given a priori... The second bourgeois symptom ... is the euphoric reference to the 'style' of the writer as to an eternal value... This does not mean, naturally, that Literature can exist without some formal artifice. But, with due respect to our neither-nor critics, who are invariably the adepts of a bipartite universe where they would represent divine transcendence, the opposite of good writing is not necessarily bad writing: today it is perhaps just writing (1972 p.82).

The simple word 'performance' is similarly used by designers with alacrity, condemning nasty static projects. The opposite of unsustainable—or sustainable—design may not be sustainable—or unsustainable—design, but perhaps just design.

It is relatively easy to see how Anti serves the status quo, but Non can too. While not often theorised as a design position regarding suburbs, a non-regulatory, non-interventionist approach has long been evident as the default position of a volatile suburban marketplace of 'free' capital eagerly attempting to grow itself by grafting ever-greater numbers of those ever-less able to afford their property investments. The true designers of our most recent suburban landscapes are financiers. It is not the strategic manoeuvres of urbanists but of banks and governments, maintaining speculative opportunities and investment performance, with utter indifference to the form of actual, physical deliverables. This is arguably similar to the maintenance of performatively determined options that some landscape architects and urban designers have offered as a general design strategy appropriate to a postmodern, polyvocal, antiauthoritarian and deregulated age.

Like Anti, Non turns problems into difficulties, or mistakes one for the other, but rather than attempting to find solutions it dismisses them as *mere* difficulties, while the greater problem and interest is positioned elsewhere, essentially untouchable by Anti's too-grounded logic and only approachable indirectly and uncertainly, if not mysteriously, through acts of patient design affirmation. The condition has not gone unnoticed:

We have moved from a conscious form-giving model of the city at the beginning of the twentieth century to a self-generated urbanity based essentially on quantitative programs and regulatory norms at the beginning of the twenty-first ... We have entered a period of blind entropic projection, with its array of unforeseen results. Some theorists have taken on this fatality as a doctrine. The *laissez faire* aesthetic of the contemporaneous city requires, according to them, no vision; it just happens and evolves in an ad hoc manner. The denigration of vision and its relegation to the domain of post facto appreciation confirms the half-blind aberration we work and live in. (Girot 2006, pp.89-90)

As a contribution to *The Landscape Urbanism Reader* it is unclear if Girot is suggesting that landscape urbanism offers a way to avoid this or is complicit with it. What he calls for are new tools of representation, approaches that can grasp and communicate complexity, contradiction and change over time. Yet although this may be what landscape urbanism says it does or seeks to do, it is unclear that this has or can be achieved. More importantly it is unclear and unstated what is to be achieved by this. Its appeal lies in its reaction to the vacuum of faith left by the failure of other political and cultural movements of the last century.

[W]hatever remained of the left [has been] split between 'cautious reformism and post-revolutionary despair'. We have, on the one side, the diversity of pragmatic-realist liberals in pursuit of 'a reasonable chance of peaceful coexistence and mutual respect,' talking about dialogue, communication, recognition of otherness and so on... and, on the other side, those who still cling to some notion of radical Change, but whose Messianism is caught up in the self-defeating vicious circle of self-postponing, of a permanent 'to come' which display a fundamental obscurity or paralysis – thought controlled by situations in which it is impossible to react (Deleuze), by demands that cannot be met (Levinas), needs that can never be reconciled (Lyotard), promises that can never be kept (Derrida). 'Today, however, the end of this deadlock, is on the horizon – the end of the end of utopias.' (Žižek 2006, p.321 quoting Peter Hallward's unpublished *The Politics of Prescription*)

Koolhaas hints at something similar in wondering what happened to urbanism: 'We are simultaneously dogmatic and evasive. Our amalgamated wisdom can be easily caricatured: according to Derrida we cannot be Whole, according to Baudrillard we cannot be Real, according to Virilio we cannot be There' (Koolhaas & Mau 1995, p.958). Žižek does not explain further what Hallward meant by 'the end of the end of utopias' as a response to operational paralysis, and Koolhaas is almost as enigmatic, but offers a different form of clue 'What if we simply declare that there *is* no crisis...?' (Koolhaas & Mau 1995, p.971). That is, like Hallward, declare the end of the end of utopias—as of suburbs—and so proclaim their new beginning?

## **Utopian**

The utopian attitude is not one that can be easily sustained. Its positive interest in the suburbs, along with its experimental propositions, can easily slip to pro-suburban neo-liberal conservatism. Utopianism's implicit critique of dominant political ideologies becomes a promotional tool for exciting new reformist ones, if not just superficially repackaged versions. 'Those who criticize and those who celebrate cities often find themselves similarly disjoined, incapable of discourse because they confront the utterly unlike' (Lowenthal 2001). David Lowenthal suggests a provocative approach to working through this by 'stressing vividly opposed perceptions of urban social pasts' rather than manufacturing consensus. This sounds very like the critical practice of design concerned to reveal tensions and suspend them for examination and productive

development. Yet he goes on to stress merely the encouraged *exhibition* of multiple perceptions and appreciations, rather than any act of curation or commentary that will, more importantly, arise from mere display and come to constitute shared understandings. He suggests that people can 'enlarge their sense of self and community through collaborative projections of memory in public spaces' but not how such enlargement moves from a memorialising aggrandisement to thoughtful transformative growth. He adds:

Such efforts may require an initial impulse from institutional agencies and will also benefit from being monitored by those skilled in translating memorial and historical urges into visual and tactile form. But unless they are rooted in popular inspiration, and continually refurbished by public creativity, these efforts will remain superficial, ephemeral, and alien veneers, rather than durable urban enrichments.

Designers here are left to 'translate' popular perceptions, threatened that otherwise their creations will not endure. Yet endurance is not the principal aim of design and not the opposite of superficiality.

In setting himself the task of examining utopian propositions in the early twentieth century, Robert Fishman (1982) uses the term 'planners' to position the breath of work and scale of projects of Ebenezer Howard, Frank Lloyd Wright and Le Corbusier, although the last two were trained as and more usually referred to as architects. Their broad-scale propositions involved physical design and material detailing as well as diagrammatic masterplanning. The work of town planning early last century involved such design and was undertaken by those from diverse disciplinary backgrounds. What strategic and statutory planning came to involve by mid-century was the un-utopian work of logically and legally positioning and justifying particular propositions, while physical town planning and the imagining and design of built places became the province of landscape architects amongst other designers. Fishman explains that the earlier work was 'planned' with a 'detachment' that was 'not necessarily escapism' (1982, p.x).

Planned with both urban reconstruction and social revolution in mind, the three ideal cities were certainly 'utopias,' but not in the pejorative sense of being vague, impossible dreams. Rather, they come under Karl Mannheim's classic definition of utopia as a coherent program for action arising out of thought that 'transcends the immediate situation,' a program whose realization would 'break the bonds' of the established society (1982, p.x).

The focus of planning has altered such that '[t]o the professional planner today... [the schemes of Howard, Wright and Le Corbusier] appear almost indecently grandiose' and 'a dangerous delusion' (1982, p.xi) while they remain inspirations for design. More recently Robert Freestone has edited a collection of investigations into a range of 'paradigms' in twentieth century urban design including 'quasi-utopias: perfect cities in

an imperfect world', empiricist and rationalist paradigms, the city beautiful paradigm, neighborhood paradigms, and others (2000). For Freestone these paradigms represent utopian positions. His early interest in the failed 'model communities' of last century (1989) has been expanded by further examination of the compromised and continuing Garden City and City Beautiful movements (2007), all of which find extensive experiments in suburban settings.

The difference between the third Non position of open-endedness and the fourth of committed utopian openness is one of both critical and ethical self-consciousness and is the subject of detailed discussion in following chapters. It is possible to link the problems of landscape architecture, suburbs and utopia, or rather to see their problems as those which utopianism faces. Utopianism fights for something that cannot be won. It resists the arguments of adamant Pro-Con, reasoned Anti and self-deprecating Non. It resists those who suppress its propositions as fantasies of whim or force as equally as those who see and would support them as achievable goals. It resists those who see utopias as necessary projects of partial success, of reform rather than revolt, and also those who would see utopian thoughts as an abstract, speculative necessity yet are uncommitted to their implementation. What utopianism has always done, and which Thomas More intended as essential to the term he coined, is propose the impossible in full knowledge of failure, although not in anticipation of it. Discussions of suburbs are mainly Pro-Con and increasingly Anti. Those of the role and value of LA are predominantly Anti but with increasing elaboration of a Non bias. Utopias are characterised, discussed, accused and dismissed as all these, but their role and value actually lie in rejecting all for a fourth attitude. Utopianism *is* the fourth position.

### Chapter 3 Locating Myth

*Myth is depoliticized speech.*

Roland Barthes<sup>11</sup>

*[U]topia emerges at the moment of the suspension of the political.*

Fredric Jameson<sup>12</sup>

For Roland Barthes and Fredric Jameson a similar excision of political consciousness and consequence is necessary for the creative construction of myth and utopia respectively. What distinguishes them—a distinction that will be elaborated in this chapter—is that where myth effaces the political, utopia only suspends it. Myth requires the abolition of doubt to confirm an unprovable story. Utopia requires the ironic knowledge of inevitable failure to be utopian. Myths look backward, framing the present as a condition which has gone astray from a past that can be recaptured and reformed. Utopias look forward, framing past histories in ways that require radical, revolutionary responses. Myths are. Utopias emerge. These differences in approach (revolutionary or reformist), orientation (forward or backward looking) and framing (suspension or erasure) are argued here to indicate a distinction between design and non-design.

The following sets out to compare and contrast ‘utopia’ and ‘myth’ with reference to landscape production, and specifically ‘land development’ understood as the design of suburbs. Barthes *Mythologies* provides an understanding of myth and myth-making which will be explained and adopted here. Utopianism is understood here as proposed by Thomas More (2003), characterised by Karl Mannheim (1936) and Melvin Latsky (1976) and explored by Fredric Jameson (2005) amongst others. The distinction between myth and utopia will be used to better understand how recent and still emerging models for design practice and for suburban development might be considered utopian or mythic, where the former is a positive exercise in liberating, even if ultimately unachievable, possibilities for the future and the latter is a false naturalisation of particular possibilities, a controlled concealment of others in the service of a dominant ideology. It is certainly the case that many critics of utopias generally and certain utopian schemes in particular, view them in the way in which

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<sup>11</sup> Barthes, R. 1972 [1957] p.142

<sup>12</sup> Jameson, F. 2004, p.43

myths have just been described; that is, as tools for the imposition of totalising schemes and totalitarian ideologies. Amongst these critics of utopias are Tony Fry (Fry & Willis 2009), Elizabeth Grosz (2001) and James Corner (1999) whose own characterisations of new approaches reinvent what utopianism already encompassed.

The distinction between a utopian view which explicitly posits reactionary, radical, critical and future-oriented action, and a mythical view which implicitly negates change through reference to a comforting, historically sanctioned, backward-looking confirmation and continuation of constructed pasts, may appear too subtle, unintentional, uncontrollable or even effectively non-existent in practice given the many views that come together to deliver a project, and the many positions which successively come to justify it. All projects look backward and forward to contextualise themselves, using explicit and implicit arguments of value. However, the fundamentally opposed attitudes described here—mythic and utopian—are not over-intellectualised abstractions. An awareness of both is essential to identification and appreciation of ever-new challenges to an idea of design activity which is independent of servitude to other predetermined ideas of landscape value and form. Awareness of utopian and mythical tendencies is necessary to overcome constraints on future forms of habitation, especially where these may be pre-emptively dismissed as forms of suburbanisation. The suburbs are so readily, almost ubiquitously understood in mythical terms, whether attractive or repulsive, that any proposal linked to them loses credibility and viability as an opportunity for 'difference', even while the suburbs continue to provide the most potential for experiment because they continue to constitute the largest, fastest growing and most diverse scene of construction for most people in most countries. The Great Australian Dream has both mythic and utopian pasts and potential.

Applied to the broader study of nature-culture relations, a typology of myth might helpfully demonstrate similar categories of approaches to the same ongoing, purposeful quest for freedom, happiness, truth and beauty as that which designers are obliged to pursue. Applied to questions of settlement patterns and the historic role of their designers, ideas about myth may help identify and organise their contemporaneous positions. Why and how are certain ideas of value inscribed in certain forms or assumed analogous to certain structures? In what ways have we and do we still mythologise the suburbs? What are the myths of suburbia and are they consistent and universal? How are utopias and myths different and how are these linked to landscape architectural and design histories? Finally, how can they be used to understand the future work of landscape architecture?

The following looks first at types of myth by relating them to types of design approach and design criticism with particular reference to landscape architecture and the suburbs. These can be seen to fundamentally reflect categories or theories of nature-culture relations and the landscapes they produce. Four broad phases or groupings of myth are considered: mythopoeia is related to but distinguished from a mystic account of nature-culture relations, while mythological study is related to but distinct from myopic credulity. Following Barthes, consideration is then given to the idea that all types of myth, while they can be seen to evolve, mature and mutate, remain identifiable by certain characteristics, and that constant vigilance is required to make them apparent. For Barthes, myths of whatever type are in the service of ideologies that propose false or pseudo natures, although he concludes that an unmediated knowledge of 'reality' or the 'truth' is not possible either. In consideration of this implied necessity and usefulness of myth, an overview of 'fallacies' is then offered, particularly Ruskin's pathetic fallacy in its relation to design through the lending of sentience to landscapes, landscape architecture, architecture and their various elements. A final consideration of 'lying' as similarly potentially useful concludes the chapter.

### **Myths of nature and culture: mythopoeic, mystic, mythological and myopic relations.**

Myth may be defined as a story or a complex of story elements taken as expressing, and therefore as implicitly symbolizing, certain deep-lying aspects of human and transhuman existence (Wheelwright 1974, p.538).

Philip Wheelwright (in Preminger, Waernke & Hardison 1974) identifies a narrative lineage for 'myth' and the critical discourses surrounding it. He begins with a definition which it then explains is careful to 'avoid two contrary and one-sided views of the matter' (1974, p.538). One view gives no acknowledgement to the intervention or responsibility of the author-designer in the creation of the myth, while the other sees myth as entirely the construction of an author-designer and their subjective view rather than an external reality.

The one ... treats myth as primarily a kind of perspective ... that all knowledge involves at the instant of its reception, a synthesizing activity of the mind ... synonymous with the mythopoeic mode of consciousness; it is simply a basic way of envisaging experience and carries no necessary connotation of storytelling. At the opposite extreme stands the view that myth is merely storytelling ... a tale that is not according to the facts (in Preminger, Waernke & Hardison 1974, p.538).

The entry goes on to identify what might be thought of as a gradation of myth, implying too a progression from something understood in a state of direct personal revelation that is essentially storyless, through development of ways to solicit and share such truth collectively through various modes of storytelling, to myth as a system of universal

truth embodying an all-encompassing story or meta-narrative with a singular myopic viewpoint. At one end is primitive myth as mysticism, moving through philosophy tending to the formulation of explanatory and persuasive tools for order, arriving at the other end with the naturalised dogmas of political, religious and social guidance and control.

Important, writers have believed 'that primitive thought is essentially poetic, in that the endowment of primitive objects with life, will, and emotion is at once the natural tendency of primitive man and the most sublime task of poetry' (Wheelwright in Preminger, Waernke & Hardison 1974, p.539). The same belief can be credited to some designers regarding the task of architectural as opposed to poetic construction. Christopher Alexander's *The Timeless Way of Building* (1979) explores this idea. Following on from his 1977 *Pattern Language*, form is explicitly presented here as 'a process through which the order of a building or a town grows out directly from the inner nature of the people, and the animals, and plants, and matter which are in it' (1979, p.7).

Mythopoeia designates 'that early stage of culture when language is still largely ritualistic and prelogical in character' (Wheelwright in Preminger, Waernke & Hardison 1974, p.539). Beyond direct personal revelation comes the initial effort to communicate what is revealed. Yet tendencies to explain or share an understanding of the world via ritualised or repetitive appeals to emotional, a-logical beliefs are not limited to primitive cultures. Views of the suburbs and the languages used to characterise them are strewn with such attempts. The term 'sprawl' can be considered a token term, invented and invoked in ritualised ways to stand for a condition that is never wholly explained or explicable.

Where a set of linguistic habits is such that virtually no distinction is made between the literal and the figurative there is likely to be just as little distinction between the descriptive and the fanciful. Such psychic and linguistic amalgams are one of the most important factors in the genesis and early growth of myth (1974, p.539).

This is applicable to the growth of myths at any period where language struggles to identify and grasp new experience, as it does now in attempts to grasp rapidly changing landscapes of human settlement and dwelling. The linguistic habit of linking 'sprawl' to suburbs illustrates precisely such a condition where distinction between literal and figurative, descriptive and fanciful, is unquestioned.

Jameson opens his essay on the Politics of Utopia with much the same observation, one which can as easily substitute 'suburbs' for 'utopia': 'Utopia would seem to offer the

spectacle of one of those rare phenomena whose concept is indistinguishable from its reality, whose ontology coincides with its representation' (2004, p.35). However where myth allows this coincidence to persist unexamined as self-supporting circular argument for its own validity (the tautologous suburbia is sprawl and sprawl is suburbia), Jameson goes on to explain that utopian propositions prompt a critical evaluation of each. They require a working out of the conditions under which concept and reality came to be joined so that a separation, albeit impossible, might be imagined and a space made for conceiving other possible realities and relations.

The broader reach of a primitive mythopoeic urging might be distinguished from the expressions of a primitive mysticism. While the former emerges from pre-lingual exploratory communication about experiences and appreciations of non-human nature, the latter claims to share an unmediated communication *with* it. The mystic myth is a familiar default of advertising presenting a desirable human relationship with nature antithetical to the human-dominated, artificial landscapes of a present situation. A dominant environment of 'unhealthy' and even 'evil' repressions of 'natural' instincts is contrasted with the possibility of one that typically recalls traditionally respected nature-culture relations. The myth of a mystic relation with nature is one of freely gifted and openly received benefits such as that delighted in as the experience of unqualified and unlimited health and well-being. The mystic myth is always an implied if not explicit feature of suburb advertisement and a part of the historic appeal of suburbs contrasted with corrupt, polluted and overcrowded cities. The organisation of space as something that might be persuasively 'read' is a particularly skilled use of mystic appeals. The most manipulative arguments of pre-lingual mysticism construct emotional appeals of great sophistication. Kim Dovey begins *Framing Places: Mediating Power in Built Form* quoting Bourdieu: 'The most successful ideological effects are those that have no words, and ask no more than complicitous silence' (1999, p.1).

Following mythopoeic expression and mystic appeal is the emergence of more sophisticated mythological explanation (Wheelwright in Preminger, Waernke & Hardison 1974, p.540). Mythological relations reflect myths of growing complexity 'when the primitive mythopoeic way of envisioning the world has been largely replaced by definite conceptions and a greater reliance upon reasoning, with the result that the older mythic stories have become material to be embellished, recontextualised, and often reinterpreted by the poet's conscious art' (1974, p.540). At its most conscious and furthest from intuitive and speculative impulses, design exercises a planning logic. Unself-conscious faith in this logic is mythological.

While the poet-designer's art remains free to explore new contexts with new expressions, it can continue to make meaningful comment upon the changes and choices of the artist-designer's society. But the further it is directed and constrained by that society and the forces within it to tell a particular story, the more myopic myth becomes. The more that mythological explanation comes to rely upon reasoning that requires ritualised, specialised and accredited training to find expression, the more it enters a phase of 'rules'.

[‘Rule’] may mean the exercise of sovereignty and direct authority or it may mean, again collectively ‘rules’ ... ‘The Rule of Taste’ is intended to imply both a regime in which Taste is paramount and a canon, or a set of regulations by which fashions in taste are governed ... what is peculiar to the period [eighteenth century] is an apparently general agreement upon what constituted Correct taste, and an attempt to substitute the certainty of the Correct for the more doubtful True or Good ... The methods of defining [the Correct] are first the establishment of rules, then the establishment of rulers, and finally the establishment of a tradition of obedience to those rulers (Steegman 1986, pp.ix-x).

If the doubtful True or Good are explained by mythopoeia, mysticism and the mythological, myopic myth explains the Correct. Myopic myths employ carefully detailed explanations and justifications such as the seemingly proven value of natural systems exemplified by planning and engineering logics in regard to sustainable landscapes. This final dogmatic or myopic nature-culture relation is a myth that brooks no interrogation of its imposing and imposed wisdom. This is not to say that facts of climate change are incorrect but that the storylines constructed to explain them and to advocate particular actions in response, are constructed from them in ways which discourage alternative reading or telling. In tracing the rise of planning in America as a rational approach to the problems of rapidly growing human settlements at the end of the nineteenth century, Christine Boyer identifies a realignment and reconstruction of two previously separate mythic storylines:

Between the terms 'instinct', 'upliftance', 'harmony', and those of 'organic', 'unity', 'expert', 'control', a radical realignment of discourse had occurred. In order to understand these two formulations, one stemming from the myth of a harmonious natural order enveloping humans and nature and the other thrusting forward into the rational organization and scientific development of cities, we have to analyze the nature of the space that divides the two dispositions. Held against the ideal standard of nature, the city's purpose, form and growth were impossible to describe rationally. But a rationally controlled city form progressing toward perfection could become the vehicle by which the nation would develop along the path of civilization (1983, pp.3-4).

This describes a process of subsuming mythopoeic urges within a dominant mythological structure of myopic rationalism and Boyer describes this happening concurrently with the rise of suburbs as a place of ideal nature-culture relations: ‘It was only at this point—when they transcended this rural-urban opposition—that the development of a planning mentality becomes possible... it was the necessity for a

totally new orientation, a threshold beyond the natural and the ceremonial' (p.8). However, the initial appeal and promises of planning as a myopic myth of beneficial control necessarily failed, according to Boyer, because of complicity with capitalist economics. Controlling myths are necessarily in the control of someone.

### **Myth, ideology and utopia in suburban landscapes**

Paul Mattingly thought the suburbs worthy of investigation for two reasons:

[F]irst the suburb represents the prevalent locus for American community life in the twentieth century, yet our basic knowledge of suburbia rests on a few exceptional versions of the genre and social mythology ... Second, the general terms that social scientists, journalists and others have applied to suburbanization—homogeneous, affluent, middle-class, parochial—have become so abstract and ahistorical that they misrepresent that actual nature and experience of suburban culture (2001, p.2).

Utopias are exercises in liberation from the merely probable, myths are misrepresentations of it. Myth is 'sickening' for Roland Barthes (1972, p.126, fn.7), an ideological tool for naturalising the cultural, a 'typical act of imbricating a mythical message upon a seemingly innocent sign which, in Barthes's view, makes Bourgeois capitalist ideology particularly sinister' (Csapo 2005, p.278).

From the point of view of ethics, what is disturbing in myth [exercised too as landscape propositions] is precisely that its form is motivated. For if there is a 'health' of language [design proposition], it is the arbitrariness of the sign which is its grounding. What is sickening in myth is its resort to a false nature, its superabundance of significant forms, as in those objects which decorate their usefulness with a natural appearance. The will to weigh the signification with the full guarantee of nature causes a kind of nausea: myth is too rich, and what is in excess is precisely its motivation. This nausea is like the one I feel before the arts which refuse to choose between physis and anti-physis, using the first as an ideal and the second as an economy. Ethically there is a kind of baseness in hedging one's bets (Barthes 1972, p.126, fn.7).

Karl Mannheim's distinction between utopia and ideology treats ideologies as myths in Barthes' sense:

A state of mind is utopian when it is incongruous with the state of reality within which it occurs ... Only those orientations transcending reality will be referred to by us as utopian which, when they pass over into conduct, tend to shatter, either partially or wholly, the order of things prevailing at the time. In limiting the meaning of the term 'utopia' to that type of orientation which transcends reality and which at the same time breaks the bonds of the existing order, a distinction is set up between the utopian and the ideological states of mind ... representatives of a given order have not in all cases taken a hostile attitude towards orientations transcending the existing order. Rather they have always aimed to control those situationally transcendent ideas and interests which are not realizable within the bounds of the present order, and thereby to render them socially impotent, so that such ideas would be confined to a world beyond history and society, where they could not affect the status quo (1936, p.173).

Oscar Wilde's oft-quoted aphorism regarding the inclusion of utopia on any useful map of the world is usually abbreviated to two statements: 'A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at... Progress is the realisation of Utopias'

(1891, pp.303-4).<sup>13</sup> Matthew Beaumont (2004) evidences that in its shortened version, Wilde's statement has been taken for 'a bland bourgeois slogan for the progressive extension of the status quo' of nineteenth century industrialism, and 'simply a paraphrase of the triumphalist history of capitalism' (p.14). Beaumont shows that in this essay, as with his other work employing irony and exaggeration, Wilde is deeply critical of philanthropy and reformists (particularly the Fabians), and all existing institutions that promise change through the perpetuation of systems which created the conditions for the very problems they attempt to ameliorate. 'Wilde dreams instead of rendering the conditions in which charity is considered an adequate mode of social reformation entirely anachronistic' (p.16). Wilde was blunt: 'It is immoral to use private property in order to alleviate the horrible evils that result from the institution of private property' (1891, p.293). Today, concerns to make housing 'affordable' represent just such reformist measures as Wilde criticised.

The utopian effort to transcend such mythologising reformism is what Peter Corrigan recognises in the work of the Venturis amongst others.

To architect planners, a real value of the Archigram Group and all similar propagandists lies, like any durable Fairytale, in the light they shed upon present-day assumptions and not in the quantitative 'success' or 'failure' of what their critics have dismissed as 'self-indulgent fantasies' (2003, p.38).

Myth may seem very close to utopia here as a 'fairytale' but Corrigan goes on to identify a distinction. The former involves 'an utter lack of awareness of any need to distil meaning from appearances' while design as utopianism requires exactly this search for meaning as a 'real need' (p.39).

### **Metaphor and archetype**

In later stages of mythological expression, a more advanced communication of symbols and metaphor become institutionalised. The role of symbols and metaphor in language links poetry and myth as it links designed form and myth. Connecting metaphor to symbols and archetypes more generally it is easy to link myth to architectural and particularly landscape architectural proposition. The planet as generative, life-giving body is still popularly appealed to as 'Mother Earth'. Parks and gardens are the 'lungs' of the city and frequently the 'heart' of suburban estates and their projected communities. Olmsted's Boston Fens park system was an 'emerald necklace' of nine parks around the neck of the city's head, and many other projects use

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<sup>13</sup> The full text reads: 'A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing. And when Humanity lands there, it looks out, and, seeing a better country, sets sail. Progress is the realisation of Utopias.'

similar vegetal and waterway adornment and clothing metaphors for the geographic body parts of significant locations.

A core symbol and metaphor of architectural languages is the archetype of the human body. Its translation into the classical vertical and horizontal of column and beam grounds its appeal in mythopoeic metaphor while advancing an explanatory mythology. The importance of 'human scale' is a myth of good design that has been challenged by Peter Eisenman. Reflecting on their collaboration for a 'garden' in the Parc de La Villette, Jacques Derrida notes that 'the very axiom of architecture that Eisenman begins by overturning, is the measure of man' (1997, p.337).

[T]he 'metaphysics of scale' which Eisenman's 'scaling' attempts to destabilize is, first of all, a humanism or an anthropocentrism. It is a human, all too human, desire for 'presence' and 'origin'. Even in its theological dimensions, this architecture of originary presence returns to man under the law of representation and aesthetics (p.337).

While architects have questioned the usefulness and motives behind the use of anthropocentric archetypes, landscape architects, who would seem easily able to avoid them altogether given the wider, externalised realm of their operations, more often actively court the 'human scale' as not only a positive, but a central objective of landscape architectural intervention (Dee 2001). There are many examples on the AILA website of commentary which advocates and celebrates the human scale of exemplary work. 'Project workshops and surveys ... have shown that one of the key factors in community acceptance of increasing densities is the quality of design' and this quality is identified through 'key desirable themes,' including '[t]hat the development should have a strong sense of place, human scale, with consideration of safety and comfort' (Fuller 2008). The success of 'one of Adelaide's most popular outdoor cafes ... lay in the human scale of the outdoor spaces' (Richardson 2006). Fred Kent and Kathleen Madden 'lecture widely on user-friendly design and planning in cities ... It was their series of slides of people interacting with human-scale sculptures ... which best illustrated the power of settings to encourage spontaneous cheerful behaviour in public spaces' (Chenoweth 1992). Hassell Pty Ltd & BDP London's *Waterfront City* plan was awarded a citation of excellence by AILA Victoria because it 'exhibited a responsiveness to both site and user amenity ... and to its Melbourne context and the focus on human scale, permeability and connectivity' (AILA 2004). Yet while the comforts of such conventionally attributed meaning and value are easy to identify and interrogate, a rejection of presence altogether in favour of absence and imminence, presents a trickier mythic substitution of the responsibility to be meaningful. The myth of imminent 'potential' has been adapted to newly articulated myths of landscape beauty. The beautiful is once again meaningful, and both emerge from

inherent potential to be so, requiring only truthful representation by designers to make this apparent.

### **Beauty and Myth**

Myths of beauty are of all types, from mystic recognition and praise for given or found rather than creatable phenomena, to myopic legislation of rules of taste for both the perception and creation of the beautiful. Robin Boyd's complaint of suburban featurism was one of a misconceived idea of beauty.

Why are the houses different? Partly because everyone likes to think that he or she has better taste than Mr or Mrs Smith next door. Partly because no-one wants to feel just one of the herd and many think that their house should express their individuality. But the visible changes also reflect different ideas about beauty. It is important to realise that nearly all houses are meant by their owners to look beautiful ... Australian houses ... might be more comfortable for living in, if they were designed to look - not more beautiful - but more inviting (1962, p.50).

The same argument was made by Frederick Law Olmsted some hundred years earlier.

'Will it be beautiful?' should be asked as to any proposition for improvement, but it is not by any means the first question to be asked ... Time, effort, and money expended on embellishments, without painstaking thought as to their ultimate result, are apt to be worse than wasted; while wise forethought as to purposes and tendencies may so shape the simplest utilitarian necessities of a village as to give it the beauty of consistency, harmony and truth (in Carson 1905).

In 1905 Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. wrote 'Village Improvement', quoting at length from a manuscript of his father's written some twenty years earlier. In a damning critique of the 'beautification' of American villages through funded improvement schemes, Olmsted Sr. declared that:

[T]he pursuit of beauty through decoration has set back any character they had, either as a local distinction, or as a class, which if found in Norway or Java would be have been known as the beauty of the American village. The beauty, on the other hand, that they have acquired is largely a common extrinsic beauty, which might as well have been produced anywhere else ... on the outskirts of large commercial towns, and in European and Australian towns (in Carson 1905).

This call to site specificity in design believes that 'by far the highest and choicest beauty is that of inherent and comprehensive character and qualities, and whatever decoration hides this, or withholds attention from it, however beautiful in itself, is in effect a blemish.'

Similar 'improvement' can be found in Australian country towns and suburban shopping strips. Local progress associations have been assisted over decades by federal and state funding from Bicentennials, Olympics, Commonwealth and other international sporting events, Pride of Place schemes and gambling taxes. Typical works from this

funding replace serviceable insitu concrete or asphalt pavements with decorative segmented pavers, install 'themed' seats, bins and 'interpretative art'. Like Olmsted, it is possible to be 'pleased' and

... praise the work of architects and gardeners, engineers and sanitary engineers, decorators and esthetes, [but] I do not think that the villages [or suburbs] which have gained most from them, or from the admirable labors of beauty-organizing women are likely to impress visitors ... as pleasingly ... as those of the general character and aspect I have endeavored to recall. [That is,] one consistent expression of character ... particular to its location (in Carson 1905).

Similarly distinguishing beauty from beautification, Robin Boyd also noted the damaging call to 'improvement' as primarily an economically driven endeavour.

[T]he Australian's apparent distaste for trees stemmed not from his heart but from his head. It was based on consideration of the real-estate economic term 'improvements'. Having in mind always the asset which his home represented, the owner was keen to do effect as many improvements as possible. Improvements of course had nothing to do with improving the appearance or comfort of the property. The term could best be defined as changes from nature, for better or worse. Every native tree chopped down made a simple but spectacular change from nature, and thus represented money in some hypothetical future bank. An English tree, on the other hand, was less natural and could almost be considered an improvement. A trimmed hedge or cypress cut into a kangaroo shape also qualified (1952, p.60).

A recent essay by landscape architect Elizabeth Meyer represents a new perspective on the use of beauty, albeit one that seems in danger of repeating old ideological errors. In 2009 she delivered a public lecture and three further presentations in Melbourne discussing her recent article 'Sustaining beauty. The performance of appearance. A manifesto in three parts' (Meyer 2008). She outlines her aim:

Here, I will make a claim for reinserting the aesthetic into discussions of sustainability. I will make a case for the appearance of the designed landscape as more than a visual, stylistic or ornamental issue, as more than a rear-garde [sic] interest in form. I will attempt to rescue the visual, by connecting it to the body and poly-sensual experience. I will try to explain how immersive, aesthetic experience can lead to recognition, empathy, love, respect and care for the environment (p.6).

Meyer is concerned to make a claim for the value of aesthetics and the recognition of beauty as bodily and immersive experiences. Aesthetic knowledge and value embodied and thereby shared through form is certainly what landscape architecture aims for, but the visual does not just need rescuing by a connection to the body and poly-sensual experience, but by connection to the imagination and to intelligence. Aesthetics is not a particular beauty, but the study of sensible or sensory cognition. It considers that 'feeling' is a form of knowledge. The active consideration and examination of feelings—feeling itself—is a way to better understand both our own knowledge of the world and to speculate on how others know the world. However, what we do with this knowledge and in whose service we wield its power is another matter.

Meyer acknowledges that '[a]n aesthetic appreciation of the designed landscape emerged in the eighteenth century' (p.8). John Dixon Hunt has summarised it as follows:

What was basically at issue throughout the latter part of the [eighteenth] century was whether the aesthetic and emotional experience could be located in objects outside the mind (Price and Gilpin provide versions of that) or whether (Knight and Addison are the chief spokesmen here) it was not the property of the thing itself but a way of looking, a habit of the subjective mind (1976, p.242).

These two positions—whether beauty is located in the object or with the perceiving subject—represent a typical bi-polar argument regarding the truthfulness of claims to understand and represent the 'natural' and the 'beautiful'. This dichotomous position can easily be seen as similar to current theoretical argument regarding 'form' and 'process' where landscape 'processes' are seen to be more truthful and valuable than landscape 'forms', even though it is not at all easy to see how they can be separated in reality or practice. While landscape architecture has recently pursued form-process distinctions as an important innovation dealing with contemporary concerns regarding rapid landscape change such as that experienced by suburban expansion, similar subject-object debates of the eighteenth century arrived at a realisation that only provisional and relative truths could be located. Some commentators further recognised that the language and arguments which did locate truth did so as a persuasive exercise of power.

For example, Edmund Burke assumed a *true* nature exists, 'in reality'. The only problem, for him—as for many landscape architects today—is how to show or reveal it. It is, Burke said, 'a matter of no small difficulty to show in a clear light the genuine face of nature' (1998, p.53). He believes that arguments about the Beautiful, Picturesque and Sublime have been simply about correct categorisation and terminology. He argues that, regardless of the terminology, there is a truth and a reality behind the words. He goes on:

If the qualities which I have ranged under the head of the Sublime be all found consistent with each other, and all different from those which I place under the head of beauty; and if those which compose themselves under the class of the Beautiful have the same consistency with themselves and the same opposition to those which are classed under the denomination of Sublime, I am in little pain whether anybody chooses to follow the name I give them or not ... The use I make of the words may be blamed, as too confined or too extended; my meaning cannot be well misunderstood (p.55).

In fact his meanings can be easily misunderstood, especially failing shared cultural contexts. Richard Payne Knight's concern in debating the matter was not about terminology for its own sake but because words stand for things that are themselves unquestioned (e.g. truth, genuine nature, authentic design, sustainability). The 'reality'

Burke assumes to identify is as problematic as his 'nature'. The beauty that Meyer presents is similarly as problematically unproblematic as the 'sustainability' which she calls on beauty to support. It is also then as problematically unproblematic as her goal for the enhanced value and role of landscape architecture.

In 1795, Knight published *Landscape, A Didactic Poem* written in response to Burke (1795). Amongst a range of criticisms, Knight is adamant that no automatic association or emblematic attribution be applied to the intellectual pleasures of aesthetic preference. The experience of particular forms of beauty is not automatically linked with and should not be used to persuade people to think a particular way. The connection Knight *does* make between aesthetic and political liberty is not to be confused with a connection between any *particular* aesthetic and some *particular* politics. It is a matter of freedom of thought and the openness of knowledge itself to new learning. Representation is representative of nothing more than the artist's preferences and skills, and the ideas that they would persuade you of, not the real world. He offers a warning:

All that I entreat is, that they [who would offer solutions based on spurious metaphor] will not at this time, when men's minds are so full of plots and conspiracies, endeavour to find analogies between picturesque composition and political confusion; or suppose that the preservation of trees and terraces has any connection with the destruction of states and kingdoms (unpaginated).

Phrased in consideration of more recent political events, desires for a sustainable landscape architecture, the motives of AILA climate change policy and AILA's Landscape Principles, a similar warning might be made. Those confident in the discovery of design methods which achieve triple bottom line outcomes may find an attentive audience by appealing to concerns about terrorism and global warming, drawing parallels between indigenous plant use or Water Sensitive Urban Design and national pride and security. The preservation of inefficient landscapes or the desire to leave—or even create—strange, dangerous or ambiguous landscapes unimproved by identified sustainable methods and technologies, should not be connected with desire for the destruction of western capitalist democracy or the planet, and offers no support for axes of evil.

Introducing her various presentations in Melbourne, Meyer offered significant reflections: she had received the most responses to the Manifesto of any piece of writing she's ever published, it was the fastest piece of writing she's ever done, initially outlined in a few hours, and she had and continues to have great trouble sourcing images and examples for her categories. In the structure of her piece can be seen the development and expansion of a deceptively simple statement—beauty will help us

understand and fight for sustainability—which begins to unravel as she goes into greater detail and specificity, particularly in applying it to built work. The most important point of her manifesto is not a call to find or develop a new idea or definition of beauty appropriate to our time which will ‘perform’ in ways that help landscape architects to help us all achieve ‘sustainability’. The important, unintended message of her piece is not to have a discussion about what we find beautiful and how we can use it, but rather to continue discussions of how and why we see beauty and how and why we should try to share what we see. *What* is beautiful is not important—what we *think* and *feel* and are prepared to argue is beautiful *is* and this cannot be limited to serving a cause and should not be so co-opted.

Meyer asks many questions herself throughout the piece. ‘What is the value of the visual and formal when human, regional and global health are at stake?’ (p.6). More correctly, what are the *values*. Questions of beauty are questions of plural values. Meyer assumes here that beauty is valuable and that therefore it is *of* value and of use, stripping beauty of its real value: the interrogation of values. A discussion of beauty requires discussion of quality, which means a discussion about how well and to what end beyond mere continued existence, the economy, society and the environment should or could be sustained. It is indeed important—vital—that landscape architecture reaffirm the importance of discussion and debate regarding beauty, because such debates are about values, about unearthing hidden values, sometimes just obscure because they are lazily accepted, sometimes because they have been manipulatively pre-determined; choices and decisions already made which are not open to discussion. Beauty is bent by Meyer to the dominant discourse of sustainability, sustainability is not enriched or questioned by discourses on beauty. She limits the profession, along with the power of beauty, to that which will serve purposes already determined. Sustainability is about physical and material problems of sufficiency. Meyer positions design as the motivator to engage us to recognise these, which are already assumed and defined by others, and find solutions which are also already assumed and defined by others. Is this really all design can or should do?

‘Sustaining Beauty exploits the aesthetic experience of landscape as a tool in the sustainable design toolbox.’ In fact, Meyer’s tool is not even of much use beyond her rhetoric of use, because it cannot be guaranteed what effects the affects of beauty will have. The unproblematic becomes a problem as soon as it is applied to the real world of infinite difference, and the dissent that comes with it. More worryingly though, she would condemn designers to accept and apply her simple equation of beauty with sustainability, the former defined by the latter which is defined by others, rather than

liberate landscape architects to explore, enjoy and share the richness of all potential beauty and the power that it has to undermine any particular persuasive beauty, ever exposing and interrogating the value-systems behind it, while ever delighting in the creation of new forms.

Meyer's manifesto is so intent to persuade landscape architects to make use of the performing power of beauty that it sometimes seems a cunning demonstration of the very thing she means to draw our attention to repudiating; the dangers of all persuasive power. However, it is possibly rather a different audience than the one for which she was writing, that apprehends the dark warning in her wish for a new generation of accepting and complacent 'environmentalist-citizens' to replace the generation of differently complacent consuming ones that we already have. Beauty poses many useful problems rather than supplying an unproblematic solution. What Meyer's manifesto outlines and examples with numerous projects is less evidence for sustaining beauty, the performance of appearance, than about beautifying sustainability, the appearance of performance.

Already new suburbs, under the direction of new legislation, are incorporating best practice sustainable landscapes and these are as beautiful in appearance and performance—that is as fashionably embellished—as they previously were. The role that design might have—always has—is one that exercises independent interrogation of current conditions and criteria challenging inevitable and emerging inequities of present best practice through the uncompromising utopian proposals of something even better.

### **Fallacies and lies**

At the outset of this chapter myth was positioned as storytelling that comprised neither wholly conscious nor wholly unconscious creation, and at any rate was argued not to be simply a deception, deliberate or not. Yet, in its extremes of mystic and myopic, whatever good intentions may lie behind their expression, myth becomes a deceptive story; in the former instance unconsciously and seemingly without authorial direction, in the latter, clearly authored and to deliberate purpose. The unravelling of uncertain intentionality is the subject of formulations of various fallacies and of lying too. John Ruskin's 'pathetic fallacy' British philosopher G. E. Moore's 'naturalistic fallacy', Geoffrey Scott's 'Romantic' or 'literary fallacy', and W. K. Winsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley's 'affective' or 'intentional fallacy' might all be related to misguided objectives of the architecture of landscapes. These fallacies theorise the falsity of particular terms of and criteria for evaluation, whether of poetry, literature, architecture or, by extension,

any creative or created work. Yet they are also variously argued to offer insights that are otherwise incommunicable.

The fallacy of affective criticism arises from a propensity to confuse a poem with its effects, raising concern with effects over regard for the effects' source or means of creation. Yet some form of affective analysis is argued to be legitimate if not necessary to avoid the equal fallacy of judgement based on what the poem or object simply *is*, and that emotional effectiveness must be part of its value. Moore's *Principia Ethica* (2004) intends to clear up moral confusion arising from the 'naturalistic fallacies' of Bentham, Spencer and others. Like other fallacy-formulation critiques, his is concerned to reveal the reductionism as much as the error in defining the good by 'natural' properties. Similarly Manfredo Tafuri asked:

What does it mean ... to liken the city to a natural object? ... [T]he city is not interpreted as a structure that, with its mechanisms of accumulation, transforms the processes of land exploitation and agricultural and property revenues. As a phenomenon likened to a 'natural' process, ahistorical because it is universal, the city is freed from any structural considerations whatsoever ... this naturalisation fulfils its function by ensuring artistic activity an ideological role in the strict sense (2000, p.8).

That is, ensuring that art support the new methods of production and exchange, and be recognised and rewarded too within the monetary value system of a capitalist economy. How much easier is it to then naturalise the value of landscape, particularly in the more nature-filled green of the suburbs? The mythology applies today with naturalism evoked as environmentalism, being supported by both artistic vision and scientific process—the two conjoined in 'research' and often indistinguishable—while the site of the 'city' now crucially includes the development of the suburbs as the locale of new machines and new mechanisms of economic accumulation.

For Moore, the meaning of the term 'good' and the nature of the property goodness are irreducibly *sui generis*. Yet, although goodness itself may be *sui generis*, good architecture and design is not. It must be produced, debated and defended. A naturalistic fallacy applied to architecture which is necessarily not natural must serve to illuminate debate, not about ultimate or absolute good, but about what good is at any time with regard to the production of things which claim to serve it.

John Ruskin is credited with coining the term 'pathetic fallacy' as a derogatory remark regarding those who sentimentally and erroneously credit nature or non-human things with human feelings and sentience. A closer examination of Ruskin reveals that rather than being simply derogatory the pathetic fallacy is a concept that encompasses for him what is both best and worst in poetry and art, and so might it also be so for

landscape design. On the one hand the pathetic fallacy results in mawkish sentiment and inaccurate perception, on the other, considered in relation to the interior state of the speaker, the pathetic (or emotional) fallacy tells a truth. In the second volume of *Modern Painters* he exposes the dilemma at the heart of romantic theory when he states that, 'though we cannot, while we feel deeply, reason shrewdly, yet I doubt if, except when we feel deeply, we can ever comprehend fully' (1906, p.122).

The pathetic fallacy is caused by 'an excited state of feelings, making us, for a time, more or less irrational.' Such irrationality can be both debilitating and liberating, but is always subversive. In his investigation of American suburbia, Peter Rowe advised that:

Generally insisting so totally on empirical measurement and analysis limits the scope of problems that can be seriously entertained or, more important, speculated about. For instance, the symbolic realm of human experience is totally bypassed. The central issue is not whether planning models exhibit explanatory power or predictive accuracy. Rather it is that a limiting, dependent relationship can be struck between the possibility of forming social goals and the technical exigencies of following through on empirical model development (1986, p.233).

The pathetic fallacy and lies can be useful aids to communication and the assigning of meaning to things otherwise incommunicable and meaningless. Inasmuch as form will invite interpretation, it cannot avoid telling a story and so communicative capacity is an unavoidable consideration for designers too. Myth has been argued here however to fix the story communicated and not allow re-telling. Whereas parables, fables and other tales encourage re-interpretative musing, myths hold a single storyline and a clear intent that brooks no dissent. Myths are the fundamentalist tools of vested interests. In the continuum of telling and retelling, 'myth' marks the low point of habitual understanding, unquestioned meaning and ossified emotional response, while utopias mark that of purposeful revolt, new meaning and invigorated emotional engagement, partaking of the better part of fallacies and lies.

## **Conclusion**

Suburbs have multiple mythic and mythical appeals. Suburbs also exhibit multiple utopian efforts. The critique of myth offered by Barthes has been related to types of myth and the ways myths are used to explain and advance the production of landscapes, particularly suburban environments via politically and economically motivated deceptions. Mythopoeic influence in our consideration of the unknowable cannot be avoided and might be beneficially explored and usefully shared, as Ruskin's acknowledgement of the usefulness of the pathetic fallacy allows and as certain lies subversively encourage. But advanced mythological reasoning, employing the attractions and borrowing the forms of mythopoeic expression, constantly recuperates

vital new subversions of what is known and valued. Neither, it seems, can be avoided or contained. '[T]here is no society without a social myth. In what measure can we choose or adopt, and impose, a myth fostering the society which we judge to be desirable?' declared André Breton (1972, p.287-9). Wheelwright phrases this as a statement of the core problem of contemporary literature:

The spiritual problems of the poet in contemporary society arise in part out of the lack of myths which can be felt warmly, envisaged in concrete and contemporary images, and shared with a wide body of responsive readers (1974, p.540).

This is easily rephrased as a problem for designers:

The aesthetic problems of the architect in contemporary society arise in part out of the lack of conceptions of beauty which can be felt warmly, envisaged in concrete and contemporary constructions, and shared with a wide body of responsive stakeholders.

As Breton suggests, there is no society entirely without myth, and emergent gaps which poetry and design might struggle to fill or alternatively cede any responsibility for investigating, can be readily filled by others. Our present ideas of beauty are vigorously directed by markets and marketing, just as our ideas of right conduct in the world are strictly circumscribed by political policy and legal code. Design practice has variously and sometimes simultaneously or indistinguishably served and subverted such control. What Breton really asks is how this condition might be changed. How do we foster or enable a newly desirable social order?

The subversion of dominant myths, such as sustainability, or the imposition or even suggestion of alternative ones is a difficult task. Inasmuch as it is both essential to undertake and unlikely to succeed it is a utopian endeavour. Considering 'in what measure to ... impose' a new myth, the task hints also at the violence of dystopian failure. The following chapter examines the utopian impulse and the ways it has been manifested in different types of utopias. It unpacks the use and abuse of utopianism that has confused myth and utopia, concluding with recognition of danger in the slippage between utopian openness and mythic non-designing open-endedness.

## Chapter 4

### Landing Utopia

The methods for understanding, articulating and addressing the perceived opportunities and constraints offered by suburbs have been founded on the need to provide answers to agreed problems. These are now predominantly understood within the terms of 'sustainability' being forged by prolific and profitable research and an increasing canon of awarded projects. Sustainability is not simply a contested concept but one encompassing a wide range of variously compatible and contradictory visions of closed and open, finally perfect and adaptively evolving environments. These landscape visions—visions of settings for desirable human-nature relations—are meaningful in ways that can be considered broadly utopian or mythical. The difference between the urgings of utopianism's impossible possibilities and the consolations of possible impossibilities that attend belief in myths are neither clear nor stable.

Like the suburbs, utopias and utopian thinking suffered a period of general and architectural disinterest in the later twentieth century, having retreated into simple assumptions representing polarised views of their value to contemporary problems. Just as a body of new work on the suburbs is emerging, questioning the clichés of their Pro and Con conditions and sceptical of the proliferating studies of Anti scientism, utopias too have been the subject of fresh interest and examinations that identify and try to understand similarly extreme assessments of a nonetheless persistent notion (Coleman 2005; Jacoby 2007, Jameson 2005; Moylan & Baccolini 2007; Pinder 2002; Rothstein et al. 2003; Scott 2007; Trahair 1999; van Schaik & Macel 2005; Wegner 1998). Utopian studies speak variously and sometimes interchangeably of utopia, anti-utopia (Elliott 1970), atopia, embedded utopia (Grosz 2001) critical utopia, dystopia and critical dystopia (Moylan 2000) along with a variety of thematically or geographically situated topias such as technotopias, ecotopias, subtopias, and more.

This chapter considers these typologies, especially as they relate to the articulation of space and the construction of place: their landscape setting. The very idea of 'landscape' is a utopian one. The ambition to grasp and share any singular conception of such an infinitely layered, palimpsestuous thing is a hopeful projection. A landscape is a particular perception and preferential re-construction of specified land. Taxonomies of landscapes are similar to those of utopias, identifying a wide range of properties:

location, extent, influences, programmes and purpose, range of spatial features, specific elements, tools and techniques. Above all they are interested in classifications of nature-culture alliances. Utopias and landscapes embody philosophies of approaches to negotiating conditions for the coexistence of human and non-human life, even where non-human life or human nature is seemingly excised from a vision of human living.

### **Closed utopias: good and bad**

The manner in which utopian attitudes to landscape construction have been identified and valued to date can be broadly identified as taking two forms; one in which utopianism is the positive expression of a will to strive for a better world, regardless of the failures of those utopias built as a result, and one which principally sees the disastrous dystopic results of a variously identified blind optimism, hubris or knowing exploitation. Both of these utopia-dystopias convey simple ideas of a closed system where an identified cause of evil has been permanently removed and the further interference of historical change remains unconsidered. The 'good' utopia espouses the usefulness of utopian ambition for an improved world free of a particular evil. The other, 'bad' utopia or dystopia warns of misguided faith in such vain hopes and, frequently by extension, in vanity itself. They reveal the unintended consequences of removal of the particular evil as the encouragement or installation of a new one. Suburbs as good utopian propositions have been presented as places where the evils of city decadence and rural decay, class distinction and other issues of equity and fair access to goods and services can be successfully overcome through planned provision of built and natural infrastructures. As dystopian places they gain instead a range of new evils including social and cultural isolation and fresh forms of inequity, prejudice and poverty.

At an obvious level the good life offered by early ambitions for design of suburbs—regardless of their political, economic, religious, stylistic or other flavour—and the ideal or diagrammatic versions of formal patterns proposed by their designers (architects or proto-landscape architectural planners) together represent the rise and fall of utopian ambitions doomed to dystopic failure. At this level, utopian suburbs, like the single-mindedness of their designers, are cast as lessons not to be repeated and the adjective is clearly intended as pejorative. Nonetheless such exemplary and seemingly obvious lessons are not so easily learnt to judge by the frequency with which both suburbs and designers continue to be so labelled (Weller 2008).

Alternatively, utopianists are dismissed as essentially pessimists, or even sadists, who envisage only failure and pursue it, and where dystopia is the intended outcome (Wegner 1998). In the first case designers of utopias and those who buy into them are simply, albeit often catastrophically, misguided. The sprawling suburbs—which is to say, all suburbs—and their happily escapist, nostalgic neo-styled forms, are unsustainably consuming the resources of the planet such that they and the lifestyles they promote are largely seen as responsible for the environmental catastrophes awaiting us with the advance of global warming. In the latter case the utopians are dangerously charismatic, evil corruptors of common sense ‘good’ who take perverse pleasure in a nihilistic despair. The suburbs are in this case places of unique contemporary wickedness where wife-swapping, incest, indulgences and social dysfunctions of all sorts are celebrated as pleasures of a falsely free society, again busily and selfishly consuming scarce resources. In both cases the utopia-dystopia is an indulgent fantasy and the main objections to them become moral rather than ethical matters. ‘Good’ design is then not about broadening and extending choices in an infinitely varied possible landscape, but about directing and controlling them toward a correct choice which requires a particular landscape vision. This is precisely the role that planning legislation has, from local codes to overarching policy documents such as *Melbourne 2030*.

### **Open utopias: reformist and radical**

Some more complex ideas of utopia than the simple good and bad closed utopia-dystopia have been clarified within a burgeoning literature that re-examines failed propositions of the past in their own context and in acknowledgement of the effects of time and the ongoing operations of historical contexts. This results on the one hand in proposals to reform systems of identified errors. On the other, allowing for the benefits of hindsight and appreciating the unrealised possibilities of proposals that were not then knowingly *impossible*, examiners are encouraged to radical speculation beyond currently proven error and omission. This has two possible consequences. Firstly, such generous licence applied to present plans can freely advocate for their unknown potential on the basis that outcomes are not predictable, albeit such advocacy may be indiscriminately exercised by the same argument. Secondly, it encourages further new specific utopian proposals which can better utilise present knowledge while also pursuing and pushing the shifting boundaries of what is known. At this further level of analysis, the history of utopias, failed suburbs and failed design do not so much offer lessons in how to avoid failure in future, or advocate ignoring failure as an unknowable outcome, but reassert the necessity to take risks in order to know the limits of possibility. This means that the utopian attitude is not one which can possibly repeat

painful yet forgotten lessons, whether in ignorance or deliberately, but must be constantly inventing new ways to fail. Schemes which do not fail in new ways are not, by this definition, 'utopian' at all. Schemes which cannot be assessed to succeed or fail in any event, in light of an open advocacy of any eventuality, are equally non-utopian.

There are, however, a variety of claims made along a sliding scale of invention and novelty that might appear in practice to make it difficult to know to what degree innovation qualifies as sufficiently new or different for utopian status. At a more modest and conservative end of the scale are reformist propositions, gradually increasing to more radical ones at the other. The continuing nuanced evolution of suburban forms of physical layouts, as well as governance structures, provide some evidence of what might be seen as a cautious level of experimental utopianism. Amongst such careful contrivances are the propositions of New Urbanism and Smart Growth. Although there may well be a return to considerations of earlier forms, these propositions might claim a utopian status in the light of their response to new contexts and new problems. However, for some critics, such reformist approaches do not qualify as utopian. Utopias are revolutionary and must offer a fundamental break from the past. 'Utopianism generally is the imaginative projection, positive or negative, of a society that is substantially different from the one in which the author lives' (Claeys & Sargent 1999, p.1). For the publication of forty-three exemplary works of European landscape architecture in 2006 organised and judged by the Landscape Architecture Europe Foundation, one of the jurors, Stig Andersson, explained the core criterion for the inclusion of a project: 'if it has nothing to do with wanting to change the world, then it should not appear in this book' (Diedrich & LAEF 2006, p.16).

New Urbanism has been linked to utopias but only in derogatory or reformist senses.

New Urbanism continues the paradoxical stance of previous modern movements, from the Garden City Movement to CIAM... by combining remedial intervention with a utopian agenda. In both cases urban and architectural form becomes the agent for social reform. Cognizant of the pattern of failure of previous purely architectural movements however, New Urbanists have encouraged the inclusion of a broad coalition of non-architects... yet the sources of the modern cities' problems for the New Urbanists are still, at the core, physical symptoms (Dutton 2001, p.15).

And so no revolutionary program of social change is considered. As Freestone has suggested (1989; 2002), City Beautiful and Garden City movements were corruptions of the radical visions of Ebenezer Howard's initial ideas (Howard 1898). New Urbanism then is only utopian in the mistaken derogatory sense. Along with largely failing to recreate the 'authenticity' of earlier models that they copy, their projects also exploit

nostalgia to deliberately avoid the work of creating new conceptions of desirable settlement types (Fishman 2005).

More recent concepts propose a radical break with the past by advocating an ongoing reactive and flexible open-endedness, such as that explored through the speculative and competition projects of Landscape Urbanism. This apparent radicalism seeks to grasp and hold the positive promise of utopian thinking and avoid something of the ossification of new ideas into dogmatic ideals seen to characterise both 'good' and 'bad' utopias. It also hopes to avoid the consequences of actually failing, by casting the utopian project as an ongoing and indeed limitless endeavour of future possibility. However a 'utopian' project that flatly refuses its utopian destiny, despite radical credentials in regard to its attitude to an inadequate unreformable past, cannot be argued to actually engage with the problems that compel its necessity.

Openness and open-endedness are features of many current design propositions critical of the way power has been exercised and power-relations hidden by closed or absolute systems. Before examining in more detail the distinction between open utopias and merely open-ended propositions, the following reviews the general taxonomic terrain of radical propositions typically labelled utopian.

### **Three Utopian Themes**

Critique of ideal nature-culture relations, whether closed or open, is being undertaken within three broad and interconnecting thematic arenas: that of technological utopias, utopias of creative play and social engagement, and utopias of a life of optimised health and well-being. All three are regularly cited as arguments for the positive possibilities of suburban living. The first involves metaphors of the machine, the second employs an idea of theatre and play, while the third looks at models of life.

Machine metaphors are not just about mechanisms but can also explore ideas of intelligently advanced, self-teaching and learning systems. This theme is primarily techno-centric, and features particularly in the closed utopia-dystopias of the final banishment of evil. Technotopias are characterised by the logics of 'utopistics' (Manuel & Manuel 1979, p.814). They are also readily linked to consumer capitalism:

Capitalist societies are not wanting in horatory, bookish treatises that espouse ideal forms to be established within the existing scientific-technological framework, their obvious intent being the maximisation of capacities for the consumption of goods and services... The run-of-the-mill consumer utopias that peddle a professional optimism concentrate on mechanical inventions and have little or nothing to say about changed social institutions for mankind (p.806).

Technotopias, as projections of technological advancement and applied scientific instrumentalism, are principally the products of engineering. They approach the problems of human alliance or interference with 'nature' as difficulties of essentially technical concerns of appropriate production, distribution and consumption of goods, services and knowledge. Nature, including human nature, is appreciated mechanistically and instrumentally, all other possibilities or qualities circumvented or relegated to a passive or irrelevant background or ornament. The technotopian suburbs and their designers employ the techniques of water sensitive urban design (WSUD), including lot scale water tanks and estate scale wetland stormwater treatment, permeable paving, the use of solar panels at domestic and commercial or community levels, and application of various other schemes and systems to achieve improved energy-ratings and resource efficiency across all scales of the estate development. Such features are standard for advertisements of Melbourne suburban estates. Because of the faith in which scientific solutions to environmental problems are held—and because of media concentration on 'the environment's' problems—their inclusion may be emphasised through covenants or other legal assurances, regardless of whether this may seem to contradict the freedoms of the other arenas of utopian possibility, particularly the socialising communities' playtopias.

Playtopias employ metaphors of theatre, performance and scripting or programming of actions to enable, enhance, imitate or substitute an engaged social life with the satisfactions to be derived from the act of engagement itself. It is people-centred and socio-centric, the product of deliberate social planning, but also equally deliberate anti-planning or illegal social experiments. Playtopias, like technotopias are closed utopias where social and other relations are carefully and ultimately engineered for the benefit of all. But they also feature in open utopias, related to theatres of the absurd that project an ongoing conversation and mediation of the play by the actors themselves. The performative nature of life, and social life in particular, lends itself to consideration of an open-endedness that accepts an ever-evolving contextualisation of action and interpretation. With reference to Karl Mannheim, the manipulation of contexts which is then possible evidences a socialisation of knowledge and even of experience and feeling. In addition, such manipulations which permit apparent freedom of immediate expression and social interaction might be considered, in Roland Barthes' terms, a profoundly limiting naturalisation of culture.

New Urbanist and other gated communities and enclaves are examples of planned social playtopias. While more a feature of American than of Australian residential growth areas, the concept of local controls defining communally acceptable size, style,

colour and other criteria of physical fabrics, and the behaviours and attitudes associated with them, is reflected in Melbourne in local council 'character' overlays. The Victorian Government's Department of Planning and Community Development (DPCD) describes the importance of 'neighbourhood character':

The residential development provisions in Victorian planning schemes and the Victorian Building Regulations are underpinned by key measures to ensure development respects neighbourhood character. Neighbourhood character is shaped by the combination of the public and private realms. Every property, public place or piece of infrastructure makes a contribution, whether great or small. It is the cumulative impact of all these contributions that establishes neighbourhood character (DPCD 2010a).

In America there is a growing phenomenon of residential community associations. Similar bodies are encouraged in Australia by some developers as a marketable feature of their estates. Delfin Lend Lease establishes separate community groups for their estates and organises and funds their activities and newsletters. Delfin, like New Urbanist projects, has focused on 'community' as a primary aim of their residential estates and it is a key to their marketing as the following 'testimonials' to Delfin projects attest:

'Why is it different? I keep coming back to the word community.'  
'It's a great area for kids especially. They love it.'  
'We love living here - wouldn't live anywhere else. It's a great community.'  
'It's a safe place... the relaxed environment is wonderful for parents.' 'Everyone's friendly, everyone talks to you. I get to know everyone's names' (Delfin 2004).  
(see also Plate 27)

As well as being a selling point for the estates, such groups actively assist in maintenance and security (especially important and otherwise expensive for public areas that have not yet been handed to local councils) and can be used for market research: 'Delfin holds regular focus group discussions with residents, purchasers and enquirers to help us gain an insight into changing perceptions, market needs and changing attitudes' (Delfin 2004).

In America such groups have become formalised in ways that have overlapped and appear to usurp local government responsibilities. William Fischel has reviewed these community associations and argued that they have not displaced the mandated regulatory responsibility of municipal government and neither should such private bodies displace elected governance. Harvard Law Professor Gerald Frug sees a role for residents to think of themselves as political and ethical actors (2001), rather than as mere consumers, although it is less clear how or if their actions can be clearly dissociated from economic motives. His argument is that although local government exists precisely to embody the public realm of discussion and difference it is increasingly unable to do so. This most basic form of American democracy is

constantly threatened not only by centralised bureaucracies imposing uniform rules (in Melbourne, State Government planning policies are administered, sometimes reluctantly and with various interpretations, by local governments), but also by the privatisation of local government law in subdivisions operating under development provisions different to established areas that serve to 'wall off' privileged suburbs from the rest of the region. Robert Fishman's critique of Frug is interested in connections between his legal theory and urban design (2001), linking both communitarian and postmodern theorists' attacks on centred conceptions of the self. Frug only briefly discusses New Urbanism, but for Fishman:

Frug's ideas also have cautionary implications about the limits of design. A neighborhood or even a town filled with wonderfully designed public spaces will nevertheless be a betrayal of democracy, if it is governed by privatized conceptions of local law that promote exclusion. One might hope, however, that the converse might eventually prove to be true – that turning local governments into genuine public forums could help to reenergize urban design as the public sphere widens (2001).

Suggesting that something can qualify the appreciation of a public space as 'wonderfully designed', separate from the ways it has been conceived and constructed, already begs a critique of design as somehow merely formally appealing or functionally effective. This appeal and effectiveness must be, by association, already connected with appealing non-formal meanings. In his hope for a reenergized urban design, Fishman advocates utopianism, specifically the 'realistic utopia' of philosopher John Rawls, whose 'political philosophy is realistically utopian when it extends what are ordinarily thought of as the limits of practical political possibility'. For Fishman, the best urban design stretches the limits of the possible in pursuit of precisely that 'community building' that Frug is seeking. 'For what is a regional plan, if not a "realistic utopia"?' Rawl's realistic utopia, like Grosz's embodied utopia and Moylan's critical one is either an oxymoron or a tautology depending from which side of the paradox the utopia is viewed.

A utopia exceeds the limits of the possible, even if only in order to stretch them. New Urbanist and other realisable planned communities are reformist rather than radical. There are many settlement and life-style experiments with claims to utopian radicalism such as various counter-cultural environments including hippy communes and temporary festival congregations such as the annual Burning Man celebration held in the desert of Nevada. It attracts over 35,000 residents to its 'city', run as a gift economy. Sustained experiments in England in the first half of the twentieth century have been documented in *Arcadia For All: The Legacy Of A Makeshift Landscape* (Hardy & Ward 2004) recognising the 'rural slums' (pp.7, 30, 210, 228, etc) and seaside 'eyesores' (p.125) of self-built communities. Early phases of Australian post-

war suburban settlement had similar cultures of self-, and familial or communal building, utilising informal, if not illegal networks to secure scarce materials for builders' lots sold without sewerage, roads or drainage (Davison et al. 1995; Ferber et al. 1994; Garden 1992; Johnston 1964). The tradition of the beach house and bush getaway was even more a place of unplanned and unregulated building. Summer season suburbs of shacks accumulated on the backdunes of coastal towns or overflowed from camping grounds, becoming semi-permanent residences.

Experimentation was not limited to vernacular community efforts. *Non-Plan: Essays on Freedom, Participation and Change in Modern Architecture and Urbanism* (Lang et al. 1997) documents experimental and variously guided, professional and community design and building. In these residents, resident-designers and sometimes non-resident architects participate in shaping their environments. Experiments were made with varieties of 'cluster' housing and irregular lot and/or building integration where landscape and communal outdoor and productive space was a key consideration.

The last and probably most commonly if loosely employed theme of utopias utilises metaphors of, if not direct appeals to, 'life' borrowing from biology, ecology and 'life sciences'. Utopias on this theme simultaneously draw on the awe accorded to nature, the respect granted environmentalism, and the intimidation levered by sustainability discourses. Bio-topias include metaphors of the architectural and social body as living organisms, referring to health, generative and procreative capacities, mortality and cyclically composted immortality. This thematic is primarily nature-centred and bio-centric and is the central theme of open utopias. In references to the suburbs bio-topian appeals encompass everything from the abstractions of economic 'growth' which investment in a suburban home is intended to capitalise on, to the absurdities of marketing blurbs.

Summerhill is a place where life's special memories are made; A place of joy, of laughter, of romance and of tears; a place to love and a place to cherish because Summerhill is not just a place to live but a place for life (*Hume Leader* 26 Jan. 2010, p.51). (Plate 8)

There are many hybrids of techno-play-bio-topias. The examples of each type above incorporate aspects of the other types in explaining and delivering their landscape visions. Projects claiming sustainability implicitly link social (theatre/play), environmental (life) and economic (machine/system) utopias. The type of total landscape picture or *gesamtwerk* they offer is dystopian in a new way according to Lebbeus Woods:

[W]e are heading towards big central planning, big, distant global control of the environment... Maybe there are 'good reasons' for it. I am terrified by this prospect, because even though the reasons offered are humanistic and good, the reality is that politicians are not operating on that basis... What worries me is that... feelings for a kind of unity seem to comply with that control picture... something fairly totalitarian - not in the old style, but in the soft new slick style of packaging and marketing which is nonetheless tyrannical (in Aslet 1993, p.27).

Slick new styles can be seen appropriating the ideas of many of the following utopian landscape taxa.

### **Frameworks for Utopian Nature-Culture Alliances**

Having considered classifications of good and bad, closed and open utopias, and their three major themes, the following considers particular ways that utopian nature-culture alliances have been framed. In two essays published in 2005 and 2006 Lisa Garforth outlined frameworks for organising and understanding utopias. Focused on the depictions of future environments in science fiction, literature and film, these framings might serve equally well for organising current and future visions of actual environments proposed by a range of architects, planners and landscape architects, as well as the politicians, developers and others they work for. Garforth's frameworks pertain specifically to constructed visions of cultural relationships with nature, understood as 'landscapes'. These are clearly relevant to the theory and practice of landscape architecture as a discipline of construction, and particularly relevant to construction endeavours in the suburbs. The earlier work (2005), examines the ways that two novels in particular (Ursula le Guin's *Always Coming Home* and Kim Stanley Robinson's *Pacific Edge*) 'negotiate and deconstruct three of the dominant tropes through which human social relationships with nature have been managed and imagined in modernity' (pp.393-394). These are the apocalyptic, the progressive and the pastoral. All three can be found in narratives of the suburbs.

A year later in *Ideal Nature: Utopias of Landscape and Loss* (2006) Garforth provided an overarching framework of the ways in which nature and utopia have historically expressed alliances in literary, artistic and architectural constructions of the good life. Incorporating aspects of her previous work, she characterises three broad types of visionary nature-culture alliances. The first, termed 'ecotopia' takes three forms, labelled 'ecocentrism', 'sufficiency' and 'embeddedness'. The second is called 'landscape' and the third 'postnatural'. Within this tri-partite framework suburb examples can easily be found. In particular the third 'postnatural' looks at more recent conceptions of what a relationship might mean in a condition after 'the end of nature' (McKibben 2006). As earlier identified, the suburbs and new suburban conceptions

emerge with an end of the city, as new forms of practice are also emerging with the oft-reported death of landscape architecture (Hohmann & Langhorst 2005).

Ecotopia represents a 'self-conscious, ecological utopianism' borne of late twentieth-century environmentalism. It encompasses ideas of dystopic catastrophe as a means to detail specific warnings about behaviours, as well as description of a resultant successful, redemptive, holistic new alliance. Ecotopia is typically explained as achievable via three approaches: 'ecocentrism' which (re)privileges nature over culture; 'sufficiency' which advances an apparently self-explanatory pursuit of 'enough' rather than 'more'; and 'embeddedness' which advocates a reintegration with nature resulting in a physical and spiritual empathy and equality. In all of these visions the separation of nature or a natural world and culture is assumed as the problem which is being overcome. It is not difficult to see how landscape architectural projects and propositions can be located in a tradition of these ecotopias. Typically they are mixed in various combinations with varying emphases. Deliberate suburban expansion was founded on a premise of closer integration of human culture and natural processes that offered a better life principally for people. Most suburban ecotopias are correspondingly about sufficiency or embeddedness, although it is also now suggested that carefully integrated suburbs may offer a better chance of survival for a broader range of non-human species than typically thought (Low 2002). How natural and correspondingly valuable an ecosystem then is, is another issue grappled with by postnatural utopias where it is impossible for nature to escape deliberate or unintentional human interference.

Ecocentrism, although a less common form of ecotopia, is the driving position behind most revegetation and restoration projects, many of which form part of outer-suburban residential developments, particularly along degraded and often ephemeral waterways. This is encouraged by Melbourne Water and new stormwater management policies that require treatment of all runoff onsite prior to discharge into natural waterways. Over the last decade this has led to a proliferation of wetlands and siltation ponds in new suburbs. It was further advanced in 2002 by the release of Victoria's *Native Vegetation Management – A Framework for Action* which outlines a process of net gain of native vegetation throughout the state by required calculated replanting of prioritised areas or Ecological Vegetation Classes to offset the loss of other vegetation in development processes (DSE 2002). Such projects seek to return a site to a pre-occupation condition of presumed ideal stability, if not perfection, although the precise time or historic period of this condition is rarely declared. The site is imagined as it might have existed before a history of human, or in the case of the Native Vegetation

Management Framework, colonial interference. While sometimes in other cases this is also specified as a pre-colonial settlement time, frequently ignoring or erroneously assuming a minimal impact on landscapes by indigenous peoples, it remains committed to an ideal of and preference for the ahistorical timelessness of a natural landscape. In effect the imagined natural landscape exists impossibly in a period before or beyond any history, while, paradoxically, human ingenuity and the latest science is employed both to support arguments for the existence of its past condition as well as its potential, and expansive, return.

Something of the paradoxes of this unnatural naturalisation is explored by Andrew Biro:

A common caricature of radical environmentalists suggests that they are in full revolt against modernity – against modern science and technology in particular. For example one of the slogans of the ecocentric group *Earth First!* is 'Back to the Pleistocene.' Such a caricature is confounded, however, by the ways that deep ecologists so often marshal scientific evidence (often gathered through highly technologically advanced means) in support of their claims that we are indeed facing a profound ecological crisis ... notwithstanding some radical environmentalists' efforts to thoroughly critique modernity and to celebrate primitivism, anti-anthropocentrism remains in some respects fundamentally in keeping with the trajectory of modern science (2005, pp.13-14).

The design and construction of suburbs today deal predominantly in policy and planning with ideas of sufficiency, while marketing the more palatable virtues of embeddedness. Estate marketing abundantly references images of nature and outdoor activities, encouraging enjoyment and—especially through images of children's engagement and fascination with trees, leaves and even sky—an educational and spiritual engagement with nature that embeds humans in natural environments. Embeddedness features too in projects that insert, protect, reconstruct or interpret human programmatic remnants—historic landscape features—into landscapes along with restored or preserved natural systems, superficially or carefully intended to comment on human histories of occupation and engagement with natural landscapes. This has the potential to result in richly layered readings of the ways in which past occupation has lived with and altered natural systems, although it is more frequently an exercise in colonial nostalgia.

Sufficiency is advocated particularly by sustainable projects, by promising at the outset to provide everything one might possibly need. Sufficiency, as Garforth points out in her earlier work, is a counter-theme to a previously dominant utopian tradition of abundance. Environmental awareness has made such profligacy irresponsible, in marketing terms, if in no others. Yet sufficiency requires the establishment by someone of what is sufficient for whom, and this task, as with most important determinations, will be undertaken by the most powerful in a group, to their benefit. The 'sufficiency'

implicated in sustainability measures such as star ratings for appliances and a range of other systems being implemented world-wide, is generating a healthy consumer industry in green goods and services, which might be argued to squander the substantial embedded energy of existing ones. As Garforth notes, an inevitable reductive equivalency is required to arrive at determinations of sufficiency (2005, p.396). Reductive biases, not to mention even more biased corrections, are also at play in treating people, families, suburbs, cities and even nations as equivalent so that they can be comparatively measured. What is sufficient for a Melbourne family in a new residential estate is clearly a particular fiction about what is sufficient for human life, determined by forces that have little to do with quality of life at all, and appearing in practice to define and encourage a sufficient *abundance* necessary to drive (sufficient and sustainable) economic growth.

Garforth's second visionary nature-culture alliance category is 'landscape'. She presents this as an explicitly political but also more insidiously ideological idea of occupation, anticipating at the outset its dystopian side. The power of landscape visions is promulgated by idealised literary and artistic representations of nature. 'Landscape' alliance visions have been seen to offer 'idealised representations of nature [in] debased utopias of mystification, refuge and compensation' (p.13). Landscape utopias are escapist and essentially perfected visions of nature with which the powerful conceal and manipulate the subjugated. Citing texts familiar to landscape architects through the critiques of conventional landscape architecture practice offered by Corner (1999), Waldheim (2008) and others including Raymond Williams (1975), Denis Cosgrove (1984) and William Cronan (1996), Garforth situates landscape utopias as expressions of a nature that is 'socially produced and culturally constructed' where 'dominant "ways of seeing" ... legitimate property and power relations and disguise a real or authentic nature behind them' (p.13).

Nonetheless landscape visions are argued at least to recognise, albeit for the purposes of benevolent or malevolent exploitation, the essential constructedness of the natural. There is obviously a vast genre of such 'landscape' projects: consciously constructed artificial and recreated natures which serve a particular client brief and inevitable bias regardless of any intended inclusiveness or marketed naturalness. Such projects were typical of the grand landscape works of eighteenth-century private parks and nineteenth-century public infrastructures. Richard Weller suggests that aristocratic privilege still plays a large part in the desire for and appreciation and design of suburban estate landscapes (2008). Certainly appeals to exclusivity remain a feature of some marketing. Large parks, or more accurately large open-space systems

integrating many smaller linear and pocket parks, are still built. However, sensitive to popular repudiation of their perceived destructive monumentality and links to aristocratic or other class hegemonies, their designers and sponsors, including government, are now careful to position their artificiality and ambition within the terms of a carefully researched and scientifically supported idea of 'constructed ecology'. Their designers also make sure that the aesthetic delights on offer to human occupants are appreciated as secondary, or rather complimentary, to a responsible stewardship that is more 'ecotopian' than selfishly 'landscaped'.

The third 'postnatural' vision looks at the complex and contested ways that nature is understood after the acknowledged end of a conceivable or even actual natural world separate from human understanding. There is a range of more speculative, largely unbuilt projects that investigate such a 'postnatural' utopian view seeking an understanding of what design can mean after the death not just of nature, but also the author-designer and now even the city as we have known it (Agrawal et al. 2007, p.91; Çinar & Bender 2007, p.xi; Habermas 1982, p.223; Ingersoll 2006, p.3; Lerup 1994, p.22; Rae 2003;). Garforth's three forms of visionary nature-culture alliances, like the machine-theatre-life metaphors they utilise, are rarely wholly uncontaminated by each other. Like the trans-disciplinary design approach required now of any effective practice, projects argue multiple cases for the value of their design vision and there is a liberal use of mixed metaphors, cross-pilfering and hybrid marriages of terminology, theme and theory. This can result in works presented as engines of the theatre of life, the staged imitation of computed processes of growth, and composed varieties of environmental and sustainable natural and adaptive real and virtual structured landscapes.

However it is metaphors of active, adaptive living and cycles of the perpetuity of life and the will to live which currently claim the attention of designers as the essence of an open-ended dialectical and ethical process appropriate for design. Projects are often theorised and justified, if at all and not necessarily for the client, within acknowledgement of an essentially postnatural contemporary condition.

The 'real' nature that Marxist approaches invoke is not an essentialist or solely material category, but rather the nature that is brought into being through its dialectical relationship with the social, primarily through labour and dwelling (Garforth 2006, p.13).

Garforth's postnatural can be linked to the 'next nature' of Mieke Gerritzen and Koert van Mensvoort (2005), Damian White and Chris Wilbert's 'technonature' (2009) to which Aiden Davison contributes a chapter 'Living between nature and technology: The suburban constitution of environmentalism in Australia', and Bruno Latour's discussion

of the 'bifurcation of nature' (2005). Gerritzen and Mensvoort explain the present condition:

The notions of nature and culture seem to be trading places ... Nature, in the sense of trees, plants, animals, atoms and climate is getting increasingly controlled and governed by man [sic]. It has turned into a cultural category. At the same time, products of culture, which used to be in control of man, tend to outgrow us and become autonomous (2005 pp.5,7).

Bill McKibbin also finds a recent irreversible change in ways that humans regard nature (2006). However, the unsettling idea that nature is a cultural construct is at least as old as eighteenth century theorists, and landscape architects have long been aware of it. Conversely, consideration of the ways in which culture is simultaneously naturalised is of more investigative interest and speaks to less acknowledged forms of the politicisation of such processes. Indeed to many it appears that naturalisation is a logically depoliticising process. While 'process' has received considerable recent attention by architecture and landscape architecture, linked to the idea of an open and ongoing dialectics of dwelling constituting the 'real', the conditions in which design takes place, literally, as process are less well articulated. The now unavoidably acculturated, de-natured site for design is still a landscape replete with prior values and designers are demonstrating increasingly subtle skills in finding this richness. However the terms within which they have to date recognised, recorded and shared these values, and the rights and responsibilities with which they presume to ascribe new values through inscription of a design, are very much unsettled. They are not even yet contested as much as seeking articulation. It might be argued that many projects avoid them altogether by ceding to autopoietic 'natural process' the otherwise unnatural task of a design process.

### **Openness and the idea of landscape**

Various levels of openness have been identified above following on from the simple good and bad utopias of closed and static environments. There are many ever-adjusting, newly nuanced reformist visions, radically open-ended ones and the radically open-minded. Arguments have been made for and against reformism in its various guises as essentially realist and non-utopian propositions. Radical openness takes different forms too, which await clearer distinction as well as sustained critique of their usefulness for organising the world, even though, or rather perhaps because, they appear to refrain from the authored production of built outcomes. A variety of problems have been identified with the idea of radical openness as exemplified in the writings of Landscape Urbanism, not least of which are those concerned to query a pre-emptive claim to the historic cachet of radical utopian strength, while avoiding the historic consequences of exercising authoritative decision-making and form-giving.

Garforth appears initially to champion ecotopian visions over landscape ones, vesting the former with 'radical and emancipatory' ambition while landscape visions are founded on deliberate and dystopian manipulations of nature from the start: 'Ecotopia's visions of social conditions explicitly politicise the natural and estrange and critique the social; landscape naturalises the social and mystifies nature' (p.14). Yet the examples of suburban estate ecotopianism above reveal that its ambitions—however radical and emancipatory they are intended to be—are as manipulative as any landscape vision. The assumptions of radical ecological utopianism or ecocentrism partake of the same distinction between nature and culture that is claimed to be the problem, something which Garforth acknowledges:

[E]cocentric thought depends upon assumptions about the taken-for-granted stability and materiality of nature as a discrete cultural category or physical object that have been thoroughly deconstructed and declared untenable within recent social and cultural theory (p.12).

In short, ecotopias are also constructed environments, that is, landscapes. *All* utopian projections are landscapes as they are all constructed environments, albeit immaterial constructs.

Closed good and bad utopias are already failed propositions, historic curiosities proposed under the aegis of a political or religious radicalism that, even when obsessive in formal detail, do not attribute primary significance to form or its design. Because they are of the past, and failed, they no longer have a positive influence on the present. They are not now radical. They are not living utopias. At best they are ex-Utopias. The reformist utopias do not offer that break with the present required to change the world, or they deliberately restrict their influence to enclaves divorced from it and not intended to consort with it, violating a requirement of utopian ambition. Finally the open-ended utopia will never actually fail because it never commits to a form that can. As such it remains, at best, a good idea rather than a utopian one. A true utopia contains a paradox: it is a good place that cannot be any place. Utopian design must hold the paradox in good faith, avoiding becoming either an oxymoron—as the very idea of sustainable or good suburbs has already become to many—or tautological—as the distilled work of landscape urbanism appears to be as when Simon Swaffield elaborates 'landscape [particularly its processes] as a way of knowing the world' (2005, p.3) while explaining that processes of observation of the world 'provide a framework for different ways of knowing landscape' (p.8). This leaves a barely identified open-minded utopia as the only contender for true utopianism.

With the adoption of its *Landscape Principles*, the AILA and its members who are bound by them, place themselves firmly in the ecotopian camp. There is disdain of the old, failed and now utterly inappropriate and discredited 'landscape' camp, despite, as shown above, ecotopian design propositions sharing the same assumptions regarding both the separation of nature and culture and potentials for alliance. There is little production emerging from interest in a postnatural position, although widespread concerns to articulate work in experiments with process and time in the guise of climate change adaptability within the ecotopian genre seem imminent. Situating the profession within the easily reformist ecotopian genre severely limits both the type of work and the types of thinking that landscape architects are encouraged to draw upon and to undertake. It makes much of the past irrelevant and robs the future of ideas of any sophistication or danger, though there will be many of increasing complexity and difficulty. It does forge a ready body of experience and knowledge for continued service to a secure land development industry.

The current status of landscape architecture is one which recognises a past that has been involved in both supporting and challenging suburban settlement patterns, has sought to resolve debates for and against the suburbs through development of propositions for new types of 'suburb', and has begun to explore the potentials of a new openness to design possibilities. It has also begun to posit and exploit such openness as an organised and even designable open-endedness. The slippage between myth and utopia is the same as that which might be made between other similar and generally poorly distinguished terms, such as that detailed by Karl Mannheim (1936) between ideology and utopia. It is also a distinction comparable to that between a moral and an ethical practice. It can further be considered as an emerging, discernable distinction between calls for a landscape architecture of anti-authoritarian open-endedness and one of accountable openness. The latter terms of these pairs argue for a design attitude that requires a suspension rather than a denial of possibilities, positioning the role of design as one which promises to pursue rather than fulfil visions. This is not to say that promises are not made in good faith and with a commitment to their thoroughly researched and documented realisation, but only that designers are not designing if they are only constructing; that they cannot design if they are only envisaging what they already know has or can be built, or conceiving outcomes of which they are already certain.

**PART II**  
**LITERATURES OF COMPETING PLACES (A TOPOGRAPHY)**

Suburban studies, landscape architecture and utopianism are linked by the similarity of their current self-conscious re-examinations. The common symptoms of this include a simultaneous querying of and desire for defined disciplinary and subject boundaries, an interest in cross-disciplinary projects, a proliferation of new terminologies, the collection, reproduction and dissemination of key works, canons and other evidence of bodies of knowledge along with their typological organisation, new taxonomies and categories, and the emergence of sub-disciplines, splinter-disciplines and alternate disciplines. In this reviewing and shaping of their histories, they have each also rediscovered and justified an ambition to re-claim and re-enforce a lost superior significance for their area of study. In doing so, they reach for new framings that strive to elaborate and address overarching issues of universal human concern. Advocates of the suburbs, as of landscape architectural endeavour and utopian propositions, have each claimed that new study in their areas might open areas of much wider interest to urgent questions of the contemporary human condition. James Corner has declared that 'the inventive traditions of landscape architecture actively renew the significance of those cultural and natural processes that undergird the richness of all life on earth' (1999, p.13). In the same collection of essays, Christophe Girod begins his contribution by asking whether landscape architecture might become the one and only environmental panacea of the next century (p.59). The global dominance of suburban landscape forms is viewed as equally all-encompassing and culturally significant, while utopian studies are flourishing with new publications and revived research sectors.

This second part has three chapters. The first, Chapter 5, looks at the considerable extent of literature of potential relevance for an understanding of suburbs, finding in this generative richness part of the reason for a paralysis of critical decision-making and design commitment. It briefly overviews general histories of suburban development, specific developers, the single suburb case study and its extrapolations for a wider picture of suburbia, moves to an overview of fictional suburban portraits and popular collections of these across various media, examines iconic elements and defining artefacts of the suburbs, and includes the dissemination of government funded research along with popular reactions to policy and legislation which emerge from it. The literature relevant to landscape architecture is similarly diverse. This is reviewed with a conclusion that considers the value of a combined focus on suburbs as contested spaces of design experiment. This provides a point of departure to consider in Chapter 6 how such prolific literature has prompted attempts to devise some

organising and explanatory structure. Typically this aims for re-configured 'meta' assessments of past conditions and a 'meta' structure for future scenarios. The literature on suburbs and landscape architecture suggests a four-part categorisation of common areas of analysis and critique examined next in Chapter 7, the final chapter of this part. This four-part categorisation—'form', 'content', 'language' and 'frontiers'—can be related to the four positions or attitudes identified in Chapter 2 as Pro-Con, Anti, Non and Utopian. In particular, analyses at frontiers generate the slippery responses of Non and Utopian propositions which represent core competing values of a place for contemporary landscape architecture, a place distinct from the justifications of the marketplace as well as the empirically determined placements of planning and engineering.

## Chapter 5

### The Potency and Impotence of Vast Potential

There is a vast potential literature of relevance to queries regarding the efficacy of landscape architecture in the design of suburbs. It ranges across all literary genres with appeals to every social and disciplinary group. It includes scholarly and popular writing, empirical analyses and imaginative projections of specific locales and generic 'suburbia', writing on specific aspects and defining artefacts of the suburbs and writing on the various disciplines engaged in the creation, management, development and even destruction of suburbs, suburban identities and suburban values. It incorporates writing on the design professions and the specific discipline of landscape architecture along with its changing relationship to the equally evolving and self-consciously splintering professional arenas of planning (town, statutory, strategic and urban) and engineering (civil, hydrological, environmental, ecological and even industrial). The extent of possible literature also results from long dispute, if not confusion, regarding what constitutes a 'suburb', what 'design' is, and what 'landscape architecture' properly involves as a distinct design profession. It is further expanded in response to the ongoing evolution of these three subject areas and their shifting, disputed definitions. Finally, it includes an increasing number of variously edited, themed and analysed collections of such observations, as well as a proliferation of journals and magazines devoted to ongoing suburban enlightenment and entertainment. Yet despite this wealth of diverse investigation, there is little which combines an investigation of all three contested understandings of 'suburbs', 'design' and 'landscape architecture'. That is, there is little written by or for practicing designers about the morphology of suburbs, particularly in Australia, and little which speculates on the potential for landscape architects to envisage and lead new forms of residential land development designed for new ideas about good living, or the suburban 'good life'.

#### Literatures of Suburbs

Beyond capital cities and central urban areas, about which there is substantial written material, single suburb case studies and discrete local histories are legion. Volunteer and amateur historians utilise the invaluable resources of local and regional libraries, supported by local historical societies. Their publications are increasingly available and circulated. *Hunter's Hill. Australia's Oldest Garden Suburb* (Sherry & Baglin 1989) is a single suburb case study of suburban growth and amateur local history guide with a

preservationist agenda. Local histories and historians play important roles in supporting the modification or defeat of planning applications for new development intervention. In looking at a particular locale, such works sometimes aim to extrapolate a general historical trend or condition. *Rumson: Shaping a Superlative Suburb* was written by its local historian and professional author Randall Gabrielan (2003), comparing and favorably contrasting his home with clear reference to wider American suburb-shaping and a pro-suburb stance. *City: Urbanism and Its End* by Douglas Rae (2003), is both a richly textured portrait of New Haven, Connecticut, and the story of the rise and fall of American cities' (Yale University Press 2010). Robert Freestone in his review of *Constructing Suburbs: Competing Voices in a Debate Over Urban Growth* (Forsyth 1999), notes that it is a 'definitive case study of contemporary Australian suburban development' (2000, p.451). It focuses on the single area of Rouse Hill, a suburb of Sydney anticipated as part of a major growth corridor as far back as 1968, still being developed and still the subject of ongoing analysis. Via thorough investigation of a specific instance, Freestone understood this research as deliberately seeking to understand a wider 'role and meaning of planning in times of change' and to illustrate 'key features of the planning climate, such as the urban consolidation (compact city) debate, dynamics of population growth, urban development financing, and environmental sustainability' (p.451).

Films, poetry, novels, and other fictional accounts of suburban life play a different but no less important part in recording and characterising features of the suburbs. Of numerous Australian authors, George Johnston's oft-cited, semi-autobiographical trilogy—*My Brother Jack*, *Clean Straw for Nothing* and *Cartload of Clay*—charts a developmental coming-of-age that is as much about the Australian suburb as it is about its central character David Meredith. In a famous passage of condemnation of Melbourne suburbs in the 1940s, Meredith climbs on to the roof of his new suburban home to fix the antenna of a time-payment radio and record-player unit.

[My] elevation provided me with the first opportunity I had had to look out over all the Beverley Park Gardens Estate, and there was nothing all around me, as far as I could see, but a plain of dull red rooftops in their three forms of pitching and closer to hand the green squares and rectangles of lawns intersected by ribbons of asphalt and cement ... There was not one tree on the whole estate. Yet there must have been trees once, I thought because when you closely examined the layout of the estate there were little folds to it and faint, graceful rises and declivities, not anywhere near definite enough to be thought of as hills or gullies, but the place was not really flat, that was the point ... The place could have been really beautiful at one time in a tranquil sort of way, I thought – before Bernie Rothenstein came in with his bulldozers and graders and grubbed out all the trees and flattened everything out so that the subdivision pegs could be hammered in and his lorries could move about without hindrance – because there was a blur of higher ground much farther out, and beyond that the bluish bulk of the Dandenongs sat up there against a good bright sky in nice shapes and colours. And now there was nothing but a great red scab grown over the wounds the bulldozers had

made, and not a single tree remaining, because by no stretch of the imagination could anybody count the spindly little sticks which had been stuck in at regular intervals along the footpaths (Johnston 1964, p.288).

This contemplation of suburban Sunday rituals and their setting, with something of a landscape architectural eye for the lie of the land and the significance of topography, is one that might equally be had now in new suburbs. This is despite greater attention and increased legislation to ensure the retention of mature and other significant vegetation, and despite efforts to establish more advanced specimen trees and a concern to offer greater variety of housing stock.

The 2008 Miles Franklin Award winner was *The Time We Have Taken* by Steven Carroll (2007). The suburb of my own home, Glenroy, where Carroll also grew up, provides inspiration and setting for the novel. Interviewed by *The Australian* (Sorensen 2008), Carroll said he hoped Miles Franklin, who set up the award to encourage excellence in writing about Australia by Australians, would approve of a novel set in the suburbs. 'Lots of Australian fiction is set on the rural frontier, but it's also reasonable to suggest that the suburban frontier has been neglected.' Linking ideas of utopian longing, failure and frontiers he noted that '[t]hese characters are all in a constant state of becoming, a yearning towards the perfect being.' He is aware that this makes for a fraught environment, but, like architect Peter Corrigan, does not believe that challenges are incompatible with happiness or optimism, but rather help define what happiness might be. 'People ask me about the sadness in the novels, and I think it's different from depressing. Sadness can be almost a positive emotion, cathartic, thrilling even.'

Such rich and evocative expressions of physical and metaphysical suburban qualities and the temperaments they foster have been collected and examined in a run of publications since 2000, particularly in America and Australia, exploiting an opportunity for centenary, if not also millenary, review. Suzanne Falkiner's *The Writer's Landscape* (1992) has extensive sections on the experience of Australia's suburban landscapes. International examples include *White Diaspora: The Suburb and the Twentieth-Century American Novel* (Jurca 2001) and *SuburbiaNation: Reading Suburban Landscape in Twentieth-Century American Fiction and Film* (Beuka 2004). Further Australian investigations include *Through Artists' Eyes: Australian Suburbs and Their Cities 1919-1945* (Slater 2004) and *Artful Histories: Modern Australian Autobiography* (McCooey 1996) which early noted 'a general reassessment of the place of the suburbs in the Australian imagination' (p145). Film as well as literature has been explored. *Cinematic Urbanism: A History of the Modern from Reel to Real* (AlSayyad 2006) includes extensive discussion of the representation of suburbs

especially as they contrast with the city, including Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times*, Jacques Tati's *Playtime* and Peter Weir's *The Truman Show*. *Welcome to the Dreamhouse: Popular Media and Postwar Suburbs (Console-ing Passions)* (Spigel 2001) compiles essays about suburban television. It features a cover image of spectacular modern architecture atop a cliff with panoramic views across a tropical isle-dotted ocean and a relaxed couple watching a stage-centre television positioned beside an internal rock feature. It is reminiscent of Michael Leunig's well-known cartoon of a father and child watching sunset on TV while the same sunset is seen beyond the window behind them; a popular critique of unhealthily mediated nature-culture relations that is echoed in critiques of suburban nature itself. Reinforcing the idea of such representational feedback loops, the introduction begins describing the television debut in 1949 of a popular radio program which consisted entirely of the two main characters sitting in their living room discussing the TV program they are watching.

The literature of the suburbs also takes in writing on the recognisable physical aspects and artefacts of the suburbs, from the scale of subdivision layout with its archetypal worming lanes, battle-axe or blob court-head culs-de-sac and traffic calming devices, to the scale of the lot with its distinctively anti-urban setbacks and free-standing letterboxes, to consideration of the myriad separate elements of public and private place-making that comprise a suburban landscape. These include icons of the private realm such as Hills Hoists and Victa mowers, while in the public realm suburbanisation evidences itself in items as banal as the location, size and material of side entry pits in nature strips, bus stop furniture and street tree planting.<sup>14</sup> The urbanisation of the suburbs can be seen in recent rethinking, upgrade and redesign of such elements. Suburban bus stops are being supplied with the same Adshell shelters and timetable pole attachments as those until recently to be found throughout the city prior to their upgrading to real-time digital displays and Superstops. This is at least partly explained by the standardisation of furniture elements over the last decade across the metropolitan transport system since its tendering to private enterprise, where once local bus companies operated separate routes.

For similar reasons the upgrading of kerb and guttering and monogrammed side entry pit replacement in many suburbs can be seen to represent the privatisation of once public utility companies. The privatisation of services in the suburban public realm, leading to alterations and removal of various features once thought suburban have been seen as evidence of a challenge to the distinction of the suburbs from the urbs

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<sup>14</sup> Hills hoists and Victa mowers are Australian designed and manufactured proprietary products. The rotary clothes hoist is a backyard suburban icon. The mower was necessary to keep ubiquitous suburban lawns neatly trimmed.

and of corporate and urban interests over private, domestic ones (Gleeson 2006, p.84). In other ways the urbanising increase in density of suburbs, resulting in less open space and smaller nature strips and gardens, has lessened groundwater recharge and increased stormwater runoff. This has led to the application and retrofitting of new urban strategies for managing stormwater in suburban streets, changing characteristic, even iconic features of the suburbs, such as the concrete kerb and channel and side entry pits which are a feature of stormwater engineering developed as best practice at the time of Australia's post war suburban expansion. The new management techniques focus on Water Sensitive Urban Design (WSUD) and its various elements such as swales, bioretention basins, sediments ponds and, for new subdivisions, constructed wetlands. These have been documented in *Water Sensitive Urban Design Engineering Procedures: Stormwater* (Melbourne Water 2005) and their implementation and retrofitting encouraged through numerous workshops, seminars and conferences. These influential elements and forms have largely not been developed by or in initial consultation with landscape architects.

New organising principles and rationales for the gathering of people and sharing of resources are being urgently sought and also bitterly fought world-wide. The support of state and federal government has seen the creation of new university departments devoted to sustainability and globalisation while Australia Research Council grants fund ongoing and extensive study of their many interrelated issues, of which suburban studies form a significant part. Government-funded research and the policies and legislation which slowly emerge through review and consultation processes to implement them, continue to be contested. *Melbourne 2030* released in 2002 continues to undergo regular refinement and revision under the influence of institutional and business lobby groups such as the PIA (Planning Institute of Australia), UDIA (Urban Development Institute of Australia), REIA (Real Estate Institute of Australia), as well as influential community groups such as SOS (Save Our Suburbs) which 'lobbies government on issues such as residents' rights, Melbourne 2030 and reform of VCAT [Victorian Civil Administration Tribunal]' (SOS 2010). The effectiveness of the group is recognised in Miles Lewis *Suburban Backlash* (1999). Again, there is little involvement or comment by landscape architects and designers in this highly contested arena.

As an indication of widely supported interest of suburban studies in Australia, several universities have founded research programs investigating suburban phenomena. Led by Graeme Davison, Monash University began in the nineties to investigate suburban issues as part of a larger ARC-funded study of Melbourne since 1945. Kenneth Jackson, author of the seminal history of suburbs *Crabgrass Frontier: The*

*Suburbanization of the United States* (1985), was the keynote speaker at their first conference in 1992. Griffith University's Urban Research Program established in 2003 has published widely and a key researcher Brendan Gleeson published the award-winning *Australian Heartlands; Making Space for Hope in the Suburbs* in 2006. Its 'provocative' plea that 'the suburbs be given their rightful place in Australia's public consciousness' (p.213) is not dissimilar to *The New Suburban History's* 'provocative' introductory claim that 'any effort to understand modern America must put suburbs at the center' (Kruse & Sugrue 2006, p.2). Numerous conferences and public forums have been convened in the last few years in Melbourne alone by a variety of institutions, including public lecture series at BMW Edge and the Melbourne Museum drawing large, vocal crowds.

For similar reasons as America, but compounded by a smaller population and perhaps also the later foundation of recognised professional bodies and formal education, Australian designers have had a limited involvement in published discussion of suburban issues. The architect Robin Boyd noted in the fifties:

The influence on Australian home life of architects, as a profession, was not great. The few architects who were in politics at various times were not noted for radical proposals. The few who helped municipal officials to frame building regulations from time to time seldom anticipated or encouraged change (1952, p.153).

Boyd articulated his unfavourable assessment of suburbs early in the 1950s and 60s during a period of unprecedented post-war growth in a series of lectures and publications, the most famous of which, *The Australian Ugliness* (1960), was unequivocal in its condemnation of suburban 'featurism'. More than a critique of Australian design culture, it set a standard for disparagement of all types of veneers, of the skin-deep superficiality of imported fashionable taste on the one hand, and the amateur aesthete's misguided search for ultimate laws of beauty on the other that lead to beautification. He championed an inclusively courageous engagement with the reality of new materials and processes, situation and need. While not specifically saying that this engagement was unachievable within suburbia, he established a picture of suburbs defined by the very things he despised. In this way, with superficial featurism and beautification synonymous with suburbs, he effectively condemned the whole realm of their present and potential manifestation along with their defining characteristics. In declaring that '[t]he essence of Australian suburban life is unreality: frank and proud artificiality' (1960, p.163). Boyd conflated the unavoidable artificiality of all construction, with a moral condemnation of escapism. Yet his drawings and clever cartoon illustrations themselves aestheticise the ugliness he condemns, celebrating

suburban unreality, however unintentionally, through the creative flair of his graphic critique.

Meanwhile several architects, including Boyd, were proposing alternatives to predominant subdivision patterns along with dwellings suitable to these configurations. In *Living and Partly Living*, Ian McKay, Hugh Stretton and John Mant (1971), along with Robin Boyd outlined their opinions in essays and profiles of recent projects including cluster housing and high density developments. Architects were also involved in the development of improved project homes for building companies and emerging real estate development companies (London 2007). Existing site features were part of a considered architectural response to environmental context that included modernist contrasts of geometry and materials along with experiments in an organicist vernacular tradition. Professional landscape architectural involvement was focused almost exclusively on planting and an indigenous or 'bush garden' aesthetic.

Despite these instances of involvement, writing of critical or even reflective comment on suburban morphology by practising designers themselves is limited, although there are regular exhortations in professional journals to engage more with both the politics and products of ever-evolving development. Lars Lerup has provided exploratory and provocative examination of urban fabrics in *After the City* (1994). Rem Koolhaas earlier wondered what has happened to such work in 'Whatever Happened to Urbanism?' (OMA et al. 1995). Likely responding to this gap, Peter Calthorpe, an architect, championed a particular assault on the problems of suburbs, founding the prolific Congress for the New Urbanism in 1993 with other architects including Andrés Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, published a book of twenty-four urban plans demonstrating its features (Calthorpe 1997). Earlier, the architect Christopher Alexander (1977) similarly provided an exhaustive systematic categorisation of the 'patterns' of good design so that communities themselves could plan and build their environments and Kevin Lynch (1984), building on earlier work (1960), suggested a *Theory of Good City Form* in his final book.

The work of Alexander and Lynch retains a core place in the literature of professional training for planners, if less so for architects. More recently it is the contemporary work of avant-garde, alternative and utopian architectural practices of the 1960s and their critique of urban planning which have found a new audience in new design-focused publications. They include *New Babylonians: Contemporary Visions of a Situationist City* (Borden & McCreery 2001), *The Activist Drawing: Retracing Situationist Architectures from Constant's New Babylon to Beyond* (Zegher & Wigley 2001),

*Archigram: Architecture without Architecture* (Sadler 2005), and *Superstudio: Life without Objects*, (Lang 2003). These located a useful critique of the suburbs and suburban production in the 1960s writings and happenings of the Internationale Situationniste. Architectural interest was confirmed by publication shortly after of several texts: *Exit Utopia: Architectural Provocations 1956-76* (van Schaik & Macel 2005) *Utopia Deferred: Writings from Utopie 1967–1978* (Baudrillard 2006), *Visions of the City: Utopianism, Power and Politics in Twentieth Century Urbanism* (Pinder 2002), *Topologies: The Urban Utopia in France, 1960-1970* (Busbea 2007), *Utopia Method* *Vision: The Use Value of Social Dreaming* (Moylan & Baccolini 2007), *Architecture or Techno-Utopia: Politics after Modernism* (Scott 2007), and a *Situationist International Anthology* (Knabb 2007). In these writings, urbanism is an experiment in new forms. 'We are bored in the city' (Knabb 2007, p.1), begins a Situationist anthology. The opening of Ivan Chitchevlov's 1953 *Formulary for a New Urbanism* (in Knabb 2007), announces exercises for suburban possibilities. In their critique of the forms, content and boundaries of present human settlement practices and of the compliant cultures of architectural practice, we can find relevance for comparison today with suburbs as well as cities.

Such publications are concurrent with an eagerness of design professions and design education to better appreciate the foundations of their missions. RMIT claims numerous publications documenting this effort and the Spatial Information Architecture Laboratories (SIAL) have contributed analysis and design studio research projects. Shane Murray's 2003 to 2005 ARC-funded *Ageing of Aquarius: Designing New Housing Solutions for Australian Babyboomers* project (2007) looked at the changing needs and altered housing expectations of a diverse cohort of suburban babyboomers. Since 2005, Richard Weller (2008; 2009), one of very few landscape architects to undertake sustained examination of the form of suburbs, with others at the University of Western Australia, have been researching alternatives to orthodox suburban development as part of an Australian Research Council Discovery Grant. However, despite a turn to critique of dominant land development practices, conservatism prevailed. Weller's research has been positioned in support of a reformed but essentially unbinding and readily compromised alternative approach to present subdivision practices.

The Australian Institute of Landscape Architects invited Peter Timms, author of *Australia's Quarter Acre: The Story of the Ordinary Suburban Garden* (2007) and a staunch critic of the work of professional designers, to speak at their 2006 one-day seminar. Here his appeals to revalorisation of the backyard as rightful scene of

productive and messy, bottom-up and distinctly un-designerly engagement with the soil were warmly received, despite long-acknowledged popular trends away from this model of the suburban house and yard (Seddon 1997) and, more importantly, despite the failure to understand that, rather than being antithetical to design, such activities can and have previously been carefully considered by designers (Eckbo 2009).

The sheer variety of the literature to date on all aspects of the suburbs is its strength and indicates collective acknowledgement of the complexity of interconnected issues at scales from the individual lot, or even apartment balcony, to the planet. The more recent direct and difficult involvement of untrained individuals and community groups in design debates as well as political agitation for a range of concessions at local government levels has promoted their wider dissemination. Media focus on global warming and the need to find corrective or sustainable forms of social, economic and cultural production have directed popular, professional and political attention at all levels of government to rethink the necessity and nature of suburban growth and forms. However the very wealth of continually accumulating material also both evidences and further encourages a paralysis of critical faculties as well as decision-making capacities. Criticism is viewed as scepticism and decisions involve less the exercise of choice than the undertaking of whatever is unquestionably determined to be the right thing.

### **Literatures of Design**

The proliferation of collected writings on urban design since 2000 might be considered evidence for a desired reflection on a present body of knowledge toward informed construction of new propositions. Equally they may be evidence of the poverty of new thinking and ambition. Or they may reflect something of both. They include numerous 'Readers' (Carmona & Tiesdell 2007; Freestone 2000; Gosling 2002; Susser 2001). The Routledge Urban Readers series has alone contributed some nine major publications: *The City Cultures Reader* (Borden et al. 2003), *The Sustainable Urban Development Reader* (Wheeler & Beatley 2004), *The Urban Geography Reader* (Fyfe & Kenny 2005), *The Urban Sociology Reader* (Lin & Mele 2005), *Encyclopedia of the City* (Caves 2005), *The Global Cities Reader* (Brenner & Keil 2005), *The Urban Design Reader* (Larice & Macdonald 2006), *The City Reader* (LeGates & Stout 2007) and *The Urban and Regional Planning Reader* (Birch 2008).

From urban and city texts quickly emerged an interest in suburbs. Difficulties of definition and a perhaps coy aversion to the tainted term 'suburb' in discussions of new human settlements, meant that many publications dealt with suburbs under other titles.

*The Earthscan Reader in Rural-Urban Linkages* (Tacoli 2006) largely avoids mentioning suburbs despite them being the logical zone in which rural and urban landscape might be expected to converge. The contents page mentions 'suburban' only once, although employing 'peri-urban', 'intra-urban', amongst other terms. The cover image shows a farmer against a backdrop of highrise buildings. The foreshortened interface is littered with weed and cars. With a focus on the problems faced by developing countries and low-income populations, the essays examine settlement options almost exclusively in terms of issues associated with high urban densities, including slums. Economic and other policy 'linkages' are examined, but not the physical linkage or mediating zone between the rural and urban which has previously been understood as suburban. *Fieldwork* (Diedrich & LAEF 2006) opens with the declaration: 'The most urgent question today is certainly about the city' (p.13). It then explains its title as specific to a European condition of city expansion which necessarily takes place over adjoining fields. This is not so different to the Australian context where cities also expand into agricultural land, albeit of increasingly marginal productivity given combined issues of soil degradation, drought and climate change projections. However, such an expansion is more readily and precisely positioned as a question of suburb rather than city expansion. Charles Waldheim's *The Landscape Urbanism Reader* (2006) crosses disciplinary and geographical boundaries, collecting material that for some confounds and others expands both changing conceptions of the urban and suburban, as well as evolving ideas regarding the realm of landscape architectural and other design practice.

Many other new and hybrid terms have been identified indicating both ambivalence and ambition in researching morphologies of human settlement. An interest in suburbs, by whatever name, can, like the interest in cities, be seen to have culminated in a range of related 'readers', including Becky Nicolaide and Andrew Wiese's *The Suburb Reader* (2006), a collection of articles previously published as *Sprawl and Suburbia: A Harvard Design Magazine Reader* (Saunders 2002), and more popular texts such as *The American Suburb: The Basics* (Teaford 2007). A similar phase of consolidation, review and revision in the built environment professions had been initiated in the 1990s with the publication of anthologies of both theory and practice in the disciplinary areas of landscape architecture, architecture and planning. It included publication of collections of project material, case studies, dictionaries and encyclopaedias that formed the basis of history and theory courses in landscape architecture (Adams 1993; Fleming 1998; Mosser & Mann 1993; Plumptre 1993; Teyssot 1991; Vogelsong 1997;).

There was a continuation of such collections and commentary into the twenty-first century which included Simon Swaffield's *Theory in Landscape Architecture: A Reader* (2002), *Landscape Design: A Cultural and Architectural History* (Rogers 2001) and Oxford University Press' *A Dictionary of Architecture and Landscape Architecture* (Curl 2007) first published in 1999 as a dictionary of only architecture. There were also efforts to bring project anthologies and research up to date with assurances of their 'newness'. Aside from numerous New Urbanist publications, there were: *New Landscape Design* (Holden 2003), *New Landscape Architecture* (Baumeister 2007) and *The New Suburban History* (Kruse & Sugrue 2006).

Australian landscape architecture too has attempted to capture its recent history in *New Conversations with an Old Landscape* (Bull, 2002). Employing the well-worn trope of a 'conversation' with a place, or rather its spirit, this work struggles to represent a critical overview of Australian practice, practice which is itself a critical examination of particular historical conditions of occupation and an endeavour to find meaningful expression of a contemporary Australian character through designed landscape. It reviews achievements within the terms of an established notion of stewardship which sits comfortably within present doctrines of environmental sustainability. Bull offers a 'canon' of Australian work, unaware that a canon is not just a collection of somehow exemplary projects, but a collection which establishes the terms of excellence, challenging future efforts to both confirm and refute them.

Concurrent with 'new' titles, a more reflective overview and critical commentary also emerged with anthologies of landscape architectural writings, featuring 're-'. Beginning with *Recovering Landscape: Essays in Contemporary Landscape Theory* (Corner 1999), followed by *Re-envisioning Landscape Architecture* (Wollscheid et al. 2002), these and other landscape architectural texts (Berger 2008; Dutton 2001; Kirkwood 2001) specifically considered urban peripheries as the site of new considerations vital not only to the future of the profession, but to appreciating contemporary culture and society. A significant text in rethinking nature-culture relations—William Cronan's *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human place in Nature* (1996)—emerged from an interdisciplinary seminar on 'Reinventing Nature,' held at the University of California, Irvine in 1994 as part of a conference series. Inspired by this and similar in scope is another influential book of conference proceedings: *Reinventing Nature?: Responses to Postmodern Deconstructionism* (Soule & Lease 1995).

Undermining the strengths of better informed and more widely distributed debate, is an eagerness to find, and an expectation that there should and will be found, definitive

answers to more carefully articulated and more complexly conceived problems. There is a failure to appreciate that successive attempts to do exactly this have themselves historically failed. It would seem then that a study of failure might be profitable, not just of the failures of specific schemes but of the conditions that attend this tradition of failure. Even while appreciating the interconnectedness of problems associated with the suburban condition, solutions are frequently systematically reduced to those outcomes which result from one of two attitudes to an environmental condition conceived to be a known and finite state. One attitude sees design as the selfish, or at best Machiavellian, manipulation of situations to ensure the most advantageous compromises for one's own position, argued, for example by neo-liberalism, to ultimately benefit all. The other advances a philanthropic vision of shared responsibility, equal reward and equal redistribution of wealth to weak as well as strong. It fights to instigate and ensure the survival of an ultimate, sustainable and finally secure form of settlement, in both physical environmental and abstract political, economic and other social terms. In their extremes these attitudes picture designers as either arrogant elitists or self-effacing servants and the suburbs as either unsustainable escapist indulgence or lowest-common-denominator, mass mediocrity.

There are detailed histories of experiments to realise both these attitudes and the history of these efforts in 'suburbs' is inseparable from the history of their design and of the role of designers. In *A New Design Philosophy; An Introduction to Defuturing*, Tony Fry (1999) elaborates a 'philosophy' around the key concept of 'defuturing', one which he has revived more recently with stronger reference to sustainability (Fry & Willis 2009). On the one hand defuturing is the malignant process of robbing the future, practised by designers because of their arrogant pursuit of perfection and their promotion of particular outcomes and forms at the expense of other possibilities. This design process is responsible for the disastrous destruction wrought on the planet by modernist, technology-driven ambition. On the other hand, defuturing is the positive process by which we can deconstructively rediscover potentialities hidden by 'design' and designers careless of their promises and the world views that their works and false logics create. This leads Fry to vehemently denounce 'utopianism' while simultaneously calling for formulation of a single, driving idea: his. Except that criticism of failed ideas employs the benefit of hindsight that his idea yet escapes, it is difficult to distinguish between the 'old' and 'new' philosophies, if they are philosophies at all.

Similarly cavalier with adjectives, *The New Suburban History* (Kruse & Sugrue 2006), even limiting itself to America, is not essentially new. It claims to be 'provocative', 'original', 'innovative' and 'cutting edge'. That it rejects the popular image of suburbs as

'homogeneous, conformist and bourgeois' (p.3) is no particular innovation. Neither is the concept of investigating issues identifiable nationally across suburban landscapes, questioning the presentation of case studies that have been chosen because, consciously or unconsciously, and almost by definition, they effectively support a predetermined view. Even the declared focus on political economy, the editors admit is 'by no means new' (p.8). But if it is not essentially innovative in its approaches or findings—although there is much new supporting research and analysis—it does offer remarkably sober and well-evidenced comment in a field prone to hyperbole, pejorative slang and self-referential positivism, whether in the dress of neo-liberal economic rationalism or new urbanist reformism. The issues raised by contributors can find parallel, if not precedent, in Australia and would equip a developer, politician or planner with the gamut of argument and counterargument that still characterises the course of typical project debate through authority approvals processes. Appreciating the historical perspectives of ongoing problems is essential to empower designers and foreground design alternatives and experiments. That this alone fails to offer new directions would seem to be exactly because it fails to engage in speculative design investigation. It prioritises the manoeuvrings of abstract motives over the experiments of material incentives.

What *would* be new is a discussion of the history of suburbs as a design endeavour. That is, a history which considers the primacy of built form as an expression of cultural values rather than a secondary reflection of them. Perhaps it is a prejudice of text-based disciplines to explain 'fragmented, politically and economically competitive suburbs ... [as] shaped through politics and the law' (Kruse & Sugrue 2006, p.8). This emphasises imagination and desire for abstract goodness that then lead to pursuit of physical built goods. It discusses the spatialisation of politics. The disciplinary prejudice of designers speaks instead of the politicisation of space. It sees that politics and laws are reactively shaped by pre-emptive or uncontrolled physical building. It appreciates that the power of imagination and the manipulation of desire lies primarily in an ability to conceive of built outcomes rather than the secondary descriptions of satisfaction that flow from visions and examples of home-ownership. Echoing Jameson's call for utopianism's 'visceral commitment' (2004, p.53), this perspective advances the relevance and primacy of design professions to offer new suburban ideas and ideals. The struggles and slippages of these different perspectives and their conflicting conceptualisations of the problems of design and suburbs are the subject of the following chapter examining emerging frameworks for suburban and landscape architectural criticism.

## Chapter 6

### Reconceptualising Conditions and Critiques: Meta-concepts

*The task of metacriticism is the critical examination of criticism: of its technical terms, its logical structure, its fundamental principles and premises*

Max j Baym<sup>15</sup>

*[T]he absolute which was once a means of entering into communion with the divine, has now become an instrument used by those who profit from it, to distort, pervert, and conceal the meaning of the present.*

Karl Mannheim<sup>16</sup>

*We must think of Utopia in terms of a philosophy of philosophies.*

Eugenio Battist<sup>17</sup>

The first two quotations above offer two assessments of the framing of overarching concerns for assessing the frameworks of assessment of lesser concerns. In saying so the iteration of frames already hints at where we will end up, or rather where we will not; we will not eventually settle on any secure meta-frame. Terms for the value of landscape architecture and for specific landscape architectural designs will remain contested. Recent attempts to fix the terms of suburban critique within the metaframe of sustainability and to fix the terms of landscape architectural critique within related frames of either scientific pre-determinism or artistic non-determinism are shown in this chapter to be dangerous constraints to design endeavour. They also mistake the value of design, which is found in its embodiment.

The first quotation proposes a higher order critique or upward transposition of the techniques of similar examinations of lower-order things and processes; the critical examination of criticism. The second warns that the framing of meta-concerns and its intended advantages (contemplating the absolute in order to enter into communion with the divine) have been and can be appropriated (for example, in guise of the 'greater good' or 'the planet') as ways to manipulate the frames or meanings of lesser, immediate concerns. This is a common technique for the exercise of power and a familiar criticism of the powerful. It was precisely the criticism articulated most frequently by the Internationale Situationniste in the 1960s and made often and

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<sup>15</sup> Baym, M. j. 1974, p. 951.

<sup>16</sup> Mannheim, K. 1936 [1929], p.78.

<sup>17</sup> Battisti, E. 1998, p.156.

specifically in regard to the design and construction of human settlement and dwelling: 'The sacred, by devaluing itself, becomes mystery: urbanism is the Great Architect's final fall from grace' (Vaneigem 1961). Together the first two quotations describe both the advantages and dangers of utopian conceptions. Substituting 'design' for 'metacriticism', 'designs' for 'criticism' and 'design proposition' for 'the absolute' they also describe critical design practice. Regardless of any particular advantages or disadvantages, they more importantly imply that an ever higher-order meta-meta-conceptualising and framing follows, just as redesign does.

What the last quotation suggests is that utopianism, first and foremost, provides for the fixing of a position that is necessary even to begin speculation. This position will, of course, not actually hold, as it is somewhere that cannot be anywhere. Yet even as it fails, even as it is agreed to be wrong or inadequate or evil, regardless of the failure of Utopia to provide a philosophy of philosophies, a meta-frame for truth or right or good, it does indeed suggest one. Like a design proposal, it has the courage to think so, should be granted the courtesy to be thought so, and be allowed to require that suspension of disbelief which makes both engagement and then criticism even possible. Without this, the only alternative response to the impossibility of constructing a secure frame or metaframe—a correct design—is uncritical acceptance of any frame or design, or, effectively, the abandonment of framing and designing altogether.

Just as utopias cannot be any place, only ever realised as mere topos, meta-critique cannot get beyond a requirement to clarify its own terms of evaluation and so is merely criticism in practice. Masterplans become just a particular (and poorly particularised) plan in application. Utopias, meta-criticism and masterplans are 'second order' framings or understandings. Landscape is a second-order nature: 'Nature can be experienced directly - lived in, walked through, exploited or enjoyed - but landscape is a kind of second-order nature, a refashioning of nature in our own image, and as such, is incontrovertible evidence of what and who we are' (Archer 2004, p.8). Perhaps then the landscapes designed by landscape architects are not second-order nature as much as second-order landscapes—or third-order nature—reconstructions of land already fashioned into landscape. Leon van Schaik (2000a) heralded a second-order modernism in titling the introduction to collected works from the RMIT Research by Project program *Interstitial Modernism – 'second-order' or meta-modernism at RMIT*, 'because of a growing feeling that there is an underlying ethical argument being worked through in these investigations' (p.7). Underlying or overarching, the groping for explanatory frameworks is 'optimistic' (p.8). Such optimism is utopian.

All overarching systems become in practice just a system, and as Roland Barthes (1972, p.82) points out, even 'the very absence of a system - especially when it becomes a profession of faith - stems from a very definite system'. Utopias, in offering a final overview, a meta-solution, a philosophy of philosophies, know they stem from a very definite view, while the anti-utopian rejection of definitive viewpoints is a definite view with no such self-awareness. It is a myth. Barthes thought myth a metalanguage, 'because it is a second language, *in which* one speaks about the first' (p.115). But it can be thought an infinite-order development, as is the practice of practice (van Schaik 2003), the design of design (Glanville 1999) and the architecture of architecture.

Let us never forget that there is an architecture of architecture. Down even to its archaic foundation, the most fundamental concept of architecture has been *constructed*. This naturalised architecture is bequeathed to us; we inhabit it, it inhabits us ... it is not natural ... It goes right through us to the point that we forget its very historicity: we take it for nature (Derrida 1997, p.326, author italics).

Barthes has warnings for the mythologist as one who 'constantly runs the risk of causing the reality which he purports to protect, to disappear ... the mechanic, the engineer, even the user, "*speak* the object"; but the mythologist is condemned to metalanguage' (p.158, author italics), just as the designer is condemned to meta-representation. Landscape architecture never represents nature, let alone presents it. Yet a distinction may be drawn between the mythologist who does not see the warning and denies it (claiming through scientific analysis of or conversing with landscapes to know a truth), and the utopian who is fully aware of it and defies it (knowing that imperfect and provisional truth is all that can be claimed). Landscape, being a thing already en-cultured, already mythologised, is a sign that becomes a signifier for a *further* sign of the landscape architect's ambition; their de-sign. All designers are necessarily mythologists in Barthes' terms, dealing in objects that are not only already signs, but often also different and conflicting signs for different communities, partaking of overlapping myths at any one time. The utopian designer's meta-representation, failing in the impossible task to fully encompass the pre-represented pre-existing landscape, is inevitably a mis-representation doomed to re-representation, but nonetheless actively engaged in ongoing contests of representational value. The mythologist designer, especially in the guise of non-designing revealer, claims representational opinion as meta-representational doxa when, according to Pierre Bourdieu (1984) doxa and opinion simply denote, respectively, a society's taken-for-granted, unquestioned truths, and the sphere of that which may be openly contested and discussed. For Bourdieu, 'the utopian paradox breaks the doxa' (p.397).

At the frontiers of knowledge meta-criticism can suggest two design approaches. With one the object of criticism (nature or landscape or landscape architecture) can be

confronted as an independent object, having objective reality and rights independent of subjective human evaluation, a life and value independent of human needs for or manipulation of it such that its own—natural—processes may be left to develop themselves from open-ended propositions. With the other approach, the object only has value via human evaluation expressed by and for humans as a clear measure and view of our values (the object shows the subject what they are and helps define them) and which, unlike an apparently objective and independently located value, makes us fully responsible for such evaluation and all actions arising from it. In this approach openness to reassessment of value is required while open-endedness is intolerable.

Our present attempts to grasp the absolute or construct an explanatory meta-condition of life have been positioned as entering into an appreciation of the potentialities of infinite difference, change or 'becoming'. But the pursuit of 'potential' is a fetishistic reversal of the potential of pursuit. The slippery focus on the transcendent, prior to even establishing what is being transcended, eschewing 'meaning' in favour of 'doing', neglects the object and fails to provide an objective. It fails to ask what is being done and why *to* whom or what, or, conversely to what end or why might landscapes *do* something or anything anyway. The absolute is discredited and another meta-condition of perpetually imminent potential substituted. Where utopian absolutism existed relative to a diagnosed and criticised condition, 'potential' assumes a relation and a relevance that is uncritical, even unaware of the existing condition.

Architectural criticism has recently developed a meta-critical tendency that resists criticism by eschewing it. While there have been perennial complaints of the divide between architectural theory and practice, criticism in architecture and design has been a subject of intense debate in the new millennium. Beginning in the US, several journals have produced special issues or devoted major sections to emerging factions of 'post-critical', 'criticality' and 'projective' architecture debates, including *Perspecta*, *Architectural Record*, *Assemblage*, *A+U*, *Harvard Design Magazine*, *Log* and *AD*. Significant texts appearing over several years in the *Harvard Design Magazine* have been collected in a series of books on interconnected themes (Saunders 2002). Architecture's 'crit wars', like the concurrent US-led 'culture wars' and Australia's 'history wars' regarding the portrayal and record of indigenous cultures, share similar right-wing, if multi-layered and variously nuanced reactions to perceived extremities of left-wing political correctness. The assertion of a 'post-critical' design agenda has been concurrent too with the rise of Landscape Urbanism which shares much of its rhetoric. In regard to the growth of cities and issues surrounding the expansion of human settlements its approach claims to be a corrective to landscape architectural errors of

both over-determination and under-engagement. It is opposed to utopianism on these grounds urging the abandonment of ambitions to grasp absolutes, while unaware that such denial is equally the product of absolutism. Beyond problematising representation and its traditions, design is ultimately challenged as a representational practice (the performative turn remains a representational one) to communicate or operate without it and retain the name and cause of architecture.

The absolute as a utopian proposition, as an architectural ideal of spatial experience as much as a political ideology of action, did not just become problematic in the twentieth century, but should be seen to have always been a manipulative perversion of particular facts and views. Just as the attempt to commune with the divine may lead to submission to precepts and processes of a particular dogma (fastings and other prescribed abstentions), an equivalent contemporary attempt to appreciate the infinite complexities of life today can also lead to an unquestioning and obscuring adherence to fashionable theoretical or philosophical posturing and terminology. The search for the absolute or ideal—the commitment to a design idea—faces three objections: that all absolutism is bad, that whatever the goodness of intention, the outcome will be used as an instrument of perversion by others less well-intentioned, and finally, that the effort will succumb to supporting already existing perverse instruments simply in order to and as a result of becoming a reality within the system it is attempting to overthrow. Put another way, design innovation or design for change, becomes an instrument of the status quo, employed for profit, or, as the Situationiste Internationale described it, recuperated by market capitalism, materialism and instrumentalism (Knabb 2007). Given that it is impossible to escape one's context or to avoid having a position, and given then that one's work will inescapably reflect this too, the utopianism of a doomed attempt to be neutral, objective or inclusive is all that can be hoped for—and always was. That we may know better after the fact (although it has been a point made often in the past and is central to More's *Utopia*) is just another of the myths of progress. Jameson explains:

The utopian, to be sure, imagines his effort as one of rising above all immediate determinations in some all-embracing resolution of every imaginable evil and misery of our own fallen society and reality... [but] even the most capacious Absolute Spirit, remains an ideological one. No matter how comprehensive and trans-class or post-ideological the inventory of reality's flaws and defects, the imagined resolution necessarily remains wedded to this or that ideological perspective' (2004, p.47).

Nonetheless he goes on to advocate the necessity for utopian thought. The idea of utopia deserves attention according to Jameson because 'that weakening of the sense of history and of the imagination of historical difference which characterises postmodernity is, paradoxically, intertwined with the loss of that place beyond all history

(or after its end) which we call utopia' (p.36). Rhetoric of 'loss' in architectural theory is rife and in urban and suburban theory even more so (Berman 1988; Davis 1998; Ellin 1997; Koolhaas & Mau 1995; Kunstler 1993; Mau 2004; Sorkin 1992; Whyte 2002; Zukin 2009). It also permeates discussions of the suburbs as both a continuing opportunity for rediscovery of a lost good life and a lost opportunity overtaken by backward-looking nostalgia for a doubly lost past that never actually was. The difficulty our imaginations have to conceive new forms of settlement is not unlike the difficulty that Jameson sees in trying to imagine

... any radical political program today without the conception of systemic otherness, of an alternate society, which only the idea of utopia seems to keep alive, however feebly. This clearly does not mean that, even if we succeed in reviving utopia itself, the outlines of a new and effective practical politics for the era of globalization will at once become visible; but only that we will never come to one without it (p.36).

Utopianism is a manipulative perversion that *knows* it is, a plan for greater good that exposes existing, unacknowledged greater goods—or greater evils—that would otherwise remain unremarked. Without utopianism, the attention and energy for a revelation requiring meta-critical examination—that is, examination at the frontier of knowledge—is focused instead on merely critical categorising of what is already well known. Critique is then a means serving ends already deemed determined. While there is considerable debate surrounding the reasons for a designer choosing, for example, one type of suburban street layout over another (the grid perhaps over the wormy cul-de-sac) or for a home-buyer preferring one housing estate or electrical appliance over another, there is not yet a clear critical examination of the parameters for forming such opinions. Rather than ask what makes one suburb better than another, we have neglected the requirement to first appreciate what makes one opinion about a better suburb, better than another. And while this appreciation will itself be opinionated, it at least involves a higher-order query that takes us closer toward the edges of what we can answer easily, remembering too that there is an immemorial race to control, establish or obscure this edge. There are few attempts to frame a meta-critical overview with which to examine and appreciate value-judgements of the criticisms of either suburbs or landscape architecture. For some commentators, such a framework is provided by the precepts and principles of 'sustainability', yet in practice this is a merely critical structure, providing check-list ratings schemes for building better suburbs against an assumed inarguable a priori aim of survival (Yu & Padua 2006). To ask about whose survival, on what terms, by what means and even why, begins a meta-critical enquiry of utopian ambition.

Design is commonly thought a critical act, and architecture a critical practice. It has also been called problem-solving. But it must surely now be meta-critical too at a time

when the popularly acknowledged complexity of inseparable, inter-related problems suggests the necessity for a bigger picture. Indeed, considering the tumultuous times in which various key phases of significant landscape change have occurred (the landscape improvement of the eighteenth century agricultural revolution, the resource exploitation of the nineteenth century industrial revolution, and the land development of the twentieth) and given the enormity of impacts which such manipulation has had, a meta-critical attitude has always been essential to the approved manipulation of landscapes while being an equally necessary presumption for unapproved change. In this sense design is only problem-solving in that it critiques the terms of reference for identification of problems, seeking higher-order ones, which will in their turn be questioned. The role that landscape architecture plays then in design for a better future must self-consciously explain what better is.

There are many and sometimes contradictory criticisms of landscape architecture, suburbs and utopianism. There is no single paradigm of sustainable design and critique of sustainability is not offered exclusively by climate-change sceptics. Similarly there is no single model of the suburbs and critique of them is not limited to New Urbanist attacks on sprawl. Utopias too are for some too utopian (the inhumanity of being all too human) and for others not utopian (human, inhuman or superhuman) enough. Buckminster Fuller has said 'We humans are manifestly here for problem solving and, if we are any good at problem-solving, we don't come to utopia, we come to more difficult problems to solve' (in Zung 2002, p.306). He is also famous for declaring 'The World has become too dangerous for anything less than utopia.' How can these statements be reconciled? Clues lie in the titles of his variously collected works. *Utopia or Oblivion: The Prospects for Humanity* (Fuller & Snyder 2008b) clearly endorses utopia, while *And It Came to Pass – Not to Stay* (Fuller & Snyder 2008a), self-evidently puns the nature of history and of inevitable change. Simply, the utopian aim, unachievable, nonetheless takes us further toward different, more difficult but also more important problems.

#### **Four critical positions, four stages of criticism and four types of critic**

There are three main critical positions adopted regarding the development of suburbs and the practice of landscape architecture, as there are three predominant ways in which utopias are understood. And then there is a fourth. The first constitutes a simple, received understanding where they are either good and helpful or bad and dangerous. Most comment is devoted to arguing this Pro or Con stance. Depending on whether the utopian designer is believed to be in charge or not, architects are then either divine or devilish geniuses, or humble or victimised servant messengers. A complication of these

extremes and appreciation of their historical and contextual complexities has resulted in two further positions or judgements. The second appreciation attempts a dialectic resolution or synthesis of these polarised for and against arguments, finding them artificially opposed. This is the designer as negotiator and value-adder, a specialist in creative conflict resolution adopting a positive position Anti either Pro or Con assessments. A third understanding argues that while neither extreme is valid, a synthetic resolution is also a falsely constructed position. In this understanding all solutions are the result of inescapable cultural conditioning and contexts that distort any attempt at objective and neutral judgement of their value. As no neutral position is actually possible from which to construct or judge them, there is no sure value in mythic or in utopian design propositions that can be usefully contemplated or employed and all the designer can then honestly do is enable, encourage and gently affirm already inherent, latent or emergent potential conditions in a non-authoritarian, non-interfering way. This third Non design position is challenged by a fourth: the utopian.

Critical statements can be sorted into four categories—description, interpretation, explanation and evaluation—considered too as four stages in development of critical argument (Baym 1974). These can be seen to roughly parallel the four critical positions of Pro-Con, Anti, Non and utopia. The first category of criticism comprises descriptions which identify, locate and query the object of criticism typologically, for example whether a dwelling is a detached house or an apartment, whether open space is a sports ground, a playground or a botanical garden, or whether these are part of identifiable collections or arrangements of types. Secondly, there are interpretations which expose project intent through explication, elucidation, exegesis, or, more recently, through appreciation of the work as a performative act whose meaning is its unfolding. Thirdly, there are explanations which note the details or devices indicating a spatial or temporal location or context for the work, for example belonging to a regionally identifiable and historically recognisable cultural group. Finally, there are evaluations which offer an opinion relative to other works, the history of similar works or codified ideals of works, for example as judged against a disciplinary canon, rather than a personal view or feeling. Such evaluation establishes value beyond the status quo.

The first three categories of descriptive Pro-Con, interpretative Anti and explanatory Non, might also be related to William Saunders' three types of critic (2002). The first type of critic practices 'subjectivism' where the critic's claim to especially sensitive emotional and intuitive responses dominates in hyperbolic description and vague analysis. The second type is concerned with 'politics and morality', focusing on built

works interpreted as embodied social ideologies and powers which the critic dogmatically exposes from their own defensible moral high-ground. The third, 'pluralism without relativism', is romantic. 'If sensitivity marks the first position, and sobriety the second, then romanticism, or "affirmation" marks the third: a belief in human possibility, an interest in everything' (Benedikt 2007, p.xxvi). Saunders sees this as the most important goal of criticism, necessary to avoid the dangers and oppressions of 'a universal sure thing' (p.xxvi) toward which other criticism tends. Yet in his introduction Michael Benedikt believes that 'there are dangers and temptations in the pluralist position too'.

At the meta-level (i.e., at the level of criticism of critics), one must note that when broadmindedness is the virtue heralded, profligacy is the only rebuke that sticks, and the one who offers it is likely to be framed as a killjoy; while at the first level (i.e., that of the actual observations about buildings), the romantic view leads one powerfully to the 'pathetic fallacy' (p.xvi).

Avoiding the dangers of romanticism, so similar to the third trusting, affirming Non design category, may require a utopian constitution.

Ignasi de Sola-Morales offers an explanation of the twentieth-century development of architectural criticism that shows an evolution from 'critical' criticism to meta-critical critique. In *Differences: Topographies of Contemporary Architecture* (2000) he begins with an overview of the relationship of twentieth-century architectural practice and architectural criticism. Initially the 'modern movement opened with the architect and the critic in close alliance' supporting a mutual aspiration to disseminate understanding and acceptance of a 'new tradition' appropriate to its time (p.13). They produced statements using the four categories of criticism to describe, interpret, explain and excite interest in the new architecture. He then proposes that following WWII the role and purpose of the architect and the critic divided, resulting in 'an atmosphere of mutual ignorance and alienation', with 'a new conception of criticism as radical critique' (p.13). Although he does not say so, architects clearly continued their own work as a critical and even radical practice, while their once-supportive critics now declaimed that

... the words of architects are the products of a rhetoric of deception; they promise what they cannot deliver, proposing unattainable utopias and impossible models of living; architecture has become the lackey of the mythologising forces of society; capitalism has an intrinsic need to cover over reality with discourses full of tricks, deceptions and manipulations that conceal the truly perverse nature of the processes underlying the construction of spaces for public and private life (p.15).

The tenor of such criticism is echoed today in familiar complaints, yet ones shared as much by divided professional bodies and practitioner groups as by their external critics. Using an analogy composed of landscape architectural elements, Sola-Morales then describes what could be taken as the condition of meta-critical critique:

The explication of architecture is not some arborescent endeavor, comparable to the branches of a tree growing out of a common trunk and nourished through its roots from a particular soil ... Criticism is thus not the recognition or manifestation of branches, but is itself a construct, purposefully produced to cast light on that situation, as a means of drawing the topography of that point where a certain architecture has been produced (p.16).

While Sola-Morales explains that architectural criticism is constructed, he is less revealing about how such construction might be undertaken. Is there an approach that can guide critical evaluation of ideas about and proposals for suburbs, landscape architecture and utopias? Speaking of a note he came across scribbled on a 1979 catalogue, New York art critic Peter Schjeldahl speaks of how he is shamed recalling his failures to live up to the principles of his fifteen-years-younger self:

What do I do as a critic in a gallery? I learn. I walk up to, around, touch if I dare, the objects, meanwhile asking questions in my mind and casting about for answers - all until mind and senses are in some rough agreement, or until fatigue sets in. I try not to think about what I will write, try to keep myself pried open. My nemesis is the veer into mere headiness, where ideas propagate fecklessly, and the sense are reduced to monosyllabic remarks now and then. I try to chasten my intellect with the effort of attention, which in intellectual terms is doubt - doubt being the certainty that you're always missing something. To stay as close as possible to confusion, anxiety, and despair and still be able to function is the best method I know (1994, p.12).

This description of the ideal role and process of the critic might well be different to what is anticipated of the audience who has come to experience the work and different too to the process of conceiving and producing it. But if appreciation requires critical evaluation and design is a critical practice, there must be similarities. The process Schjeldahl describes touches on several themes explored in the assessment of design value. Trying not to think of what he will write, keeping himself 'pried open', hints at the open-mindedness required of design. Already too however, there is the warning of a fall into a situation where 'ideas propagate fecklessly', so similar to the condition of Non designing where site potentials are celebrated indiscriminately and for their own sake. There is doubt, though less a Socratic doubt that would start by acknowledging that nothing is known at all in order to know something definitely, than an ongoing attentive wonder. Mind and sense must be in 'some rough agreement' but certainly not united. Rather than the reward of satisfying exhaustion following the heroic work of reaching a conclusion or decision, it seems this roughness and perpetual casting about is itself to be sustained to the point of fatigue. All in all a place is hinted at that is suspended. It is a place 'as close as possible to confusion, anxiety, and despair' yet still able to function; a place where the critic learns, and where learning is a way of teaching. To put yourself in a place where 'something's missing' and you are always missing something is the goad to utopian endeavour as it is to design.

In the end meta-criticism—as its utopianism hints at—provides less of a framework for secure future construction than a temporary vantage-point for a better view that requires continual re-positioning. The meta-narratives of utopian re-organisation of the world reveal their dystopian shortcomings in fresh utopian propositions. Similarly, landscape architecture, by whatever name, is developing new paradigms of practice which will invite, and have already invited, further critique responsive to their perceived and emerging failures. The meta-patterns of suburban development too, again by whatever name, invite revisions and re-visiting of both idealised and realised geometries. Utopianism as an attitude, landscape architecture as a practice, and suburbs as a product are all concerned to realise and share the experience of desirable places.

### **Definition**

Four categories of similar motives and beliefs regarding the problems of definition, not dissimilar to the problems of ‘representation’ for design, can be detected in attempts to define or represent the suburbs, landscape architecture and utopias. A common, conservative approach is found in the urge to secure a ‘workable’ definition that can be used for consistent understanding of issues. Another approach views definition as the starting point for questions refining an understanding. Another accepts the validity of no definition and rejects even provisional classification. A fourth proposes new definitions.

As well as variously critical and meta-critical questions there are further theoretical questions to be asked by critical designers as well as design critics, for example regarding what constitutes a suburb or how or even if we might any longer identify a global settlement type by common general properties. Debates about the suburbs and their design then have engaged in an unacknowledged tangle of criticism, meta-criticism and theoretical enquiry which has further confused the aims and agendas of a wide group of varied stakeholders. Definition is already critical and evaluative. Debates about the usefulness or need for definition comprise those regarding criticism more generally.

Definition is never the innocent first step in a process of empirical discovery that it is sometimes made to seem: it is rather always the final precipitate of an already elaborate theory. To begin with a definition is therefore in an important sense to begin at the end, and to urge acceptance of a position before presenting the arguments or the evidence (Csapo 2005, p.1).

Understanding something like this, Geert Bekeert (2002) begins his introduction to *After Sprawl* recounting the beginnings of the project and the arguments between Belgian cultural philosopher Lieven de Cauter and himself along with the other architects of their firm Xaveer de Geyter. De Cauter had opened with a ‘seemingly self-

evident' declaration: 'Of course, it is not unimportant that we try to understand what urbanity actually is before we endeavour to dig up a theory of the city' (p.9). But this was exactly what the architects believed to be the problematic 'crux of the issue!':

Must we start out from a definition or an idea in order to attempt to understand reality? Do we [not rather] need to take the 'words' for granted in order to perceive the 'things', as Michel Foucault wondered? Or do we somehow have access to the reality in some form or another which allows us to shape the so essential and inescapable concepts, to charge them with meaning and elaborate them into an always provisional theory - a theory of the after-sprawl, for instance, which takes both the city and the sprawl for what they are or were? (p.9).

As Pierce Lewis noted: 'Language is important. We cannot talk about phenomena unless we possess the vocabulary to describe them, and many observers still cannot agree on what to call this new amorphous form of urban geography' (in Lang 2003, p.61). For Bekaert it is instead, quoting Stephan Hertman's *Antigone* in *Mind the Gap*, important to 'protect yourself from the language' (p.10). Bekaert goes on to develop a thesis which pits language against experience, definition against understanding and words against tasks. And yet they both aim for a position of only provisional certainty and both sides are in search of ways to assess and communicate meaning and value. Bekaert refers to De Cauter's characterisation of the urban as requiring "a kind of indifference" that forms the cornerstone of this courteousness' (p.10), accusing him of snobbery and insouciant disregard rather than critical distance. Yet this then seems little different from Bekaert's own idea of urbanity a page later as that which 'signifies estrangement in a positive sense, the blessing of anomie' (p.11). While language can risk limiting or predisposing thought, is it possible to think or imagine without it? Is a language of text and words different—more or less 'real', more or less 'utopian'—to a language of architectural forms?

John Macarthur (1993) has discussed the dangers that attend the rejection of definition and the refutation of explanatory pragmatism regarding a discussion of form, recording the debate between Peter Eisenman and Jacques Derrida. Eisenman had said of Derrida and their collaboration on the competition for the gardens of Parc de la Villette:

He wants architecture to stand still and be what he assumes it appropriately should be in order that philosophy can be free to move and speculate. In other words, that architecture is real, is grounded, is solid, doesn't move around - is precisely what Jacques wants. And so when I made the first crack at a project we were doing together - which was a public garden in Paris - he said things to me that filled me with horror like, 'How can it be a garden without plants?' or 'Where are the trees?' or 'Where are the benches for people to sit on?' This is what you philosophers want, you want to know where the benches are (p.99).

As Macarthur records, Derrida responded in 'A Letter to Peter Eisenman' published in *Assemblage* in 1990 warning 'that you believe in it, absence, too much' (p.100). To

Macarthur Derrida 'sets out to show Eisenman the sorts of problems he encounters by insisting on the erasure of these descriptions of things people might want, might do, of the places they might find themselves' (p.100). Macarthur does not intend his own essay 'as a critique of Eisenman's buildings or writings, but rather attempts to produce from Derrida's witty diatribe a working agenda for thinking about the experiences of architecture' (p.100). He begins with an 'attempt to map out what it might mean for Eisenman to "believe in absence too much"', to believe it unnecessary to commit to or define things sufficiently to communicate or build them as specific possible outcomes, and 'why it is in many ways convenient and prestigious, rather than eccentric and critical, to have difficulties with presence in architecture' (p.100). For Macarthur:

Eisenman is not concerned with what architecture might be if lent the tools of more sophisticated concepts of human subjectivity. Rather his architecture is a device to lend post-structuralist architectural theory, which is, or ought to be, provisional, critical and polysemic, an apodictic character (p.102).

Assumption and meaning are frequently and unclearly opposed in discussions of definition. 'Once we suspend the assumption that the city is a totality, which implies conceptual and definitional closure, then it becomes meaningful to enquire how cities are imagined in more open ways' (Çinar & Bender 2007, p.xiii). Openness and freedom of thought is conflated here with that of things. It is imagination which is asked to be more open rather than the city, and yet it is quite possible to freely and openly imagine other totalities. 'To locate, identify and understand such a city draws the scholar... toward the imagination and toward the making and remaking of public culture' (p.xiii). Surely, to 'locate, identify and understand' is to define? Are not cities, assumptions, definitions, meanings, enquiries all part of imaginative, investigative exercises? What is imagination opposed or alternative to and are its images so different to the concepts to which it declares itself opposed? What is argued here is that closed minds equal closed cities, whereas an open, imaginative and creative mind equals open, creative cities. But might it also equal an imaginary city? To make meaningful enquiries it is necessary to suspend assumptions, and yet any enquiry, to avoid aimlessness as well as meaninglessness itself, needs an assumption to interrogate.

The attitude of Bekaert, Eisenman, Çinar and others disdains efforts at definition because of the limitations it places on unfettered exploration, and this would seem to be supported by Csapo's exposure of definition's guilty intentionality and reductionism. However, on careful reading, his point is not that definition should be avoided because it is inevitably and deceptively controlling, but that definition is necessary to expose that control, to permit debate and to reopen and unpack conclusions already reached. Csapo's message is not to *not* deal with definitions, but to be aware that definitions

need very much to be dealt with. Similarly for design, a project idea does not come unbidden from nowhere, but in opposition and reaction to other articulated ideas. At the very least, more sophisticated and subtle designs grow from advancing arguments and developing expressions of them in critical reaction to poorly defined briefs or the failings of other defined projects. You might choose not to define—but a definition will assert itself—and even the conviction not to define is decidedly definitive.

Numerous recent texts from both America and Australia have explored the relationship between language and landscape, finding that each shapes and is shaped by the other in a reciprocal bond similar to that between culture and place or between designer and site common in discourse on built environments (Bonyhady 2001; Cranston & Zeller 2007; Lopez & Gwartney 2006; Macarthur 2003; Slater 2004; Tredinnick 2003;). A major thematic interest in present writing about the environment, as about the identification of interlocutor accountability in nature-culture discourses, concerns the mutual influence of consumer and consumed, user and the used, to the extent that their mutually responsive and responsible relationship is the defining quality of both habitat and inhabitant. The significance of the following statement is acknowledged by its full page enlargement in the introduction to *Sense of the City*: 'I experience myself in the city, and the city exists through my embodied experience. The city and my body supplement and define each other. I dwell in the city and the city dwells in me' (Pallasmaa in Zardini 2005, p.14). It echoes Bloch: 'Not only does the man make his world, but the world makes the man' (1979, p.45). And David Harvey:

As we collectively produce our cities, so we collectively produce ourselves. Projects concerning what we want our cities to be then are, therefore, projects concerning human possibilities, who we are, or, perhaps more pertinently, who we do not want to become. Every single one of us has something to think, say and do about that. How our individual and collective imagination works is, therefore, crucial to defining the labor of urbanization. Critical reflection of our imaginaries entails, however, both confronting the hidden utopianism and resurrecting it in order to act as conscious architects of our fates rather than as 'helpless puppets' of the institutional and imaginative worlds we inhabit. If, as Unger puts it, we accept that society is made and imagined, then we can also believe that it can be 'remade and reimagined' (1997, p.159).

Reciprocity—and design—requires distance as well as association; the critical distance resulting from something made unfamiliar or strange and the sympathy and empathy that results from deep familiarity. The textual genre of utopian narratives claims a similar thoroughly inter-critical role:

[N]arrative utopias not only contributed to the re-education of their audiences in the ways they imagined the places they inhabited, they helped their authors define, in a new and continuously evolving way, the vocation of the modern intellectual, a project also already begun with More's founding text' (Wegner 1998, p.4).

Contested, shifting definitions of the suburbs, landscape architecture and utopia come from larger shifts in contests regarding the aims of settlement and human dwelling, the significance of design generally, and the value and meaning of projected and embodied notions of happiness, satisfaction and just goals. Utopias occupy the designer's working space between absence and presence, utopianism is designed play between contingent possibilities and the impossible contingencies located within any definition, and utopians are designers; those who acknowledge the necessity for such a space and such an effort. The following chapter considers four levels of effort undertaken toward evaluation, from simple, seemingly self-evident assessments of form, through debated content and manipulative languages, to a frontier of knowledge where utopian effort faces acquiescent effortlessness.

## Chapter 7

### From Form to Frontier via Content and Language: Four Ways to Talk About the Suburbs

*'Ask the fact for the form,' Emerson said, but the history of American poetry has tended to illustrate a rival quest, which is to beg the form for the fact ... whether in tone, in cognitive aim, or in human stance, [every passage quoted here] shows the same anxiety: to ask the fact for the form, while being fearful that the fact no longer has a form.*

Harold Bloom and David Bromwich<sup>18</sup>

The work of categorising and evaluating suburb design and development has adopted a variety of organisational methods. Often chronological, they are also based on four common issues: firstly, a concern to identify suburbs by their physical form (or formlessness); secondly, a desire to elucidate the content or elements that structure and compose characteristic form and that influence interpretation; thirdly, an interest in disciplinary and other languages of those who can exercise such influence, including landscape architects; and, finally, writing which speculates beyond the secure projection of these analyses of evident influences, to find new potential on insecure frontiers. These four approaches taken by writings on the suburbs are used to consider the literature in this section.

Form, Content, Languages and Frontiers are not mutually exclusive although writing tends to proceed in this order; that is, texts begin with an expository definition drawn from examination of form, closely linked to an implied intent or guiding will constituting the meaningful content behind particular form. This is followed by a further analysis identifying particular group influences by their languages, whether these are secret vocabularies hiding vested interests such as those employed by specialists or, on the other hand, by locals employing a distinct vernacular or class dialect, or utterances obscuring both conscious and unconscious agendas such as the habitual speak of politicians or advertising or media, or even accidental expressions fomenting misunderstanding or prejudice. Finally, beyond this research into forms, meanings and languages, an inspirational alternative is sometimes offered, a rejection, violent or whimsical, of cumulative data or accepted convention in favour of a risk—a leap neither logical nor attractive—over a gap that others have either not noticed, chosen to ignore

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<sup>18</sup> In Preminger, A. Waernke, F. & Hardison, O. B. (eds) 1974, p.919

as irrelevant or fantastic, or, sensing its seductive power, attempted to cover over in embarrassment. These writings and propositions express frontier ideas of self-conscious exploration, but they take two forms: a self-effacing non-involvement and a self-affirming utopianism.

The material of anthologies in particular and how they are curated can be considered representative of the four broad categories suggested in Chapter 2: Pro-Con, Anti, Non and utopian. These will be related to the four categories just outlined: form, content, languages and frontiers. These linked quartets of approaches also represent a gradation of correspondence between form—which is the central concern and ultimate expression of architecture, as well as the stuff which everyday life negotiates—and fact, considered as the accumulated evidence of past form interpreted and used as demonstrative argument for future formation.

Recent literature on suburban landscapes has rehearsed traditional and ongoing Pro and Con narratives. These attitudes are predominantly presented in relation to the form of suburbs. Landscape form (frequently confused with structure) and its content (confused with meaning) provide the basic material for Pro-Con positions. For example, patterns of winding or gridded or other-shaped formulations of repeatable lot modules, understood collectively as uncontrolled structural sprawl, inform an anti-suburban view of wasteful, selfish and ignorant unsustainability. Conversely, they epitomise a pro-suburban view of democratically and equitably parcelled and distributed space. In Pro-Con narratives the forms and facts of suburban stories have a simple and presumed inevitable correspondence. For example, to pro-suburbanists, low density evidences greater and equal access to open spaces and cleaner air, cheaper family home-ownership, private garden cultivation and proximity to both natural and cultural expressions of seasonal cycles, and so on. Alternatively, the contrary opinion views the sprawling, low-density, formless form of suburbs as clear evidence of the many evils it engenders, including lack of a sense of community, expensive infrastructure, dispersed services, high resource and energy use, and creation of false natures and shallow cultures.

Where Pro-Con attitudes can be related to writing of simple analyses of meaningful form, literature on the suburbs is also finding and articulating a more complex, Anti story of settlement beyond either Pro or Con attitudes. This writing pursues an investigation of variously privileged, specifically located and specialised influential languages seeking evidence for a critique uncovering concealed agendas and shifting, relative meanings. It incorporates examination of design and construction professionals

as well as developers, politicians, specific social classes and other groups, including most recently as part of the analysis of the global financial crisis and sub-prime mortgage dilemma, banks and financiers, all variously credited with responsibility for suburban forms. It examines a contingent and complex form-fact correspondence, focused on analyses of built environment disciplines and other interested groups, rather than on form itself as inherently, independently and singularly meaningful. It is rich with the data of specific, context-dependent relationships that represent a detailed examination of architectural, social, political, advertising and other relevant languages. For example, more nuanced histories of suburban development recognise that certain forms have worked well in certain landscapes under certain social and political conditions, but do not readily translate to other environments for other groups.

The anxiety that Harold Bloom and David Bromwich identify in late twentieth century American poetry regarding the capacity of form to speak meaningfully of the world, is that shared by contemporary architecture and landscape architecture. The open-endedness of a flexible Non approach identified in the first chapter, is increasingly apparent in theoretical writings as a response to this anxiety. It represents the first of two types of frontier literature. This first Non frontier approach to examination of the suburbs goes beyond analyses of both simple form-fact correspondence and more complex and contingent analyses of language as the determinant of form-fact correspondence, to emphasise and advocate instead an escape from any possible or necessary correspondence at all. The reactionary, open-ended Non approach attempts to escape the inevitable faults of any particular and reductive form-fact correspondence, maintaining an open-endedness that celebrates absence or at least emergence over what is normatively predicted to or has already emerged. Such writing argues that the suburbs have no meaning or can have any meaning. Rather than looking at the significance or aim of suburban form or the significance or aim of those involved in its conception and construction, Non frontier writing speculatively examines the suburbs' multiple and contradictory processes, systems or forces, and their ever-emergent, temporarily rendered expression. This literature can be identified with an interest in absence and increasing attempts to negate or neutralise the effects of controlling form or languages through an uncontrolled elaboration and dissolution of direct design authority. The Non approach recognises a perpetually expanding literal and metaphoric frontier of suburban knowledge, construction and definition, although in positioning itself negatively, it has typically failed to identify positive possible action. For example, the recent identification of the limitations and inherent biases of conventional techniques for landscape representation has only resulted in a call for more or different techniques but has not been able to suggest a bias-free one.

Finally, a second type of utopian frontier literature is evident in attempts to work beyond the simple or contingent explanations of form or language and toward something other than their outright negation. A utopian openness responds to the same limiting failures exposed through wider and more accurate data collection but probes beyond known languages and identified form-fact correspondences to suggest newly possible correspondences. Rather than a reactionary celebration of absence and open-endedness, it calls for a responsive and responsible expression of openness and determined presence. Rather than escape from the unpredictable and perpetual shifting of suburb definition and landscape architectural purpose, it suggests a positive engagement with these shifts. Non frontier speculation is sceptical of where or if a place of unshifting security can be attained and avoids it as a desirable or possible design goal given the tragic histories of utopias that didn't acknowledge they were utopian. Utopian frontier propositions are fully aware that their promises are impossible to deliver, but pursue them nonetheless as exactly the sort of exposure of frauds and provocation toward improvement that Non frontier visions promise in vain.

In summary, the first three—Pro-Con form-content, Anti language and Non frontier—all place importance on form-fact correspondence, particularly Non's attempted avoidance of it. The last utopian attitude essentially doubts correspondence and loses the expected, effective association between sign and signified, form and fact which limits free association and the subsequent focused musing on alternative possible associations. The following table assembles these relationships.

**Table 1. Correspondences: Four approaches and four arenas**

<b>Four approaches</b>	<b>Four arenas</b>	<b>Demonstrated/evidenced through:</b>	<b>Characterised by:</b>
Pro-con	Suburbs	Form & Content as fixed, secure meaning	Simple form-fact correspondence
Anti	LA / built environment disciplines and professions	Languages representing shifting, relative meaning	Contingent and complex form-fact correspondence
Non	Design for marketing Reactionary design	Frontier of one sort indicating any or no meaning (meaningless)	Escape from any correspondence, open-endedness (absence)
Utopia	Responsive design	Utopian Frontier	Rigorously contingent openness (determined presence)

### **Form and content**

The suburbs are recognised, examined, celebrated and condemned by their 'shape'. This is variously documented, both in regard to representational technique (photograph, diagram, statistic) and criteria documented (land cover, land use and zoning, density, house size or style, governance type and extent, class and income

distribution, mortgage type, and so on). Issues surrounding the shape of land development, including relative and absolute size, scale, pattern and extent, are the professional concerns of designers as they examine issues of created form. For a designer, the problem of realising the ideal is not only of formulating an idea but also of giving an idea form. Architecture requires formal consciousness and intentional physical intervention, and is therefore responsible and influential.

Examination of suburban form at a variety of scales, from individual lots and residences to whole estates and even metropolitan regions, appears awkwardly limited to either diagrammatic abstraction or elaborate pictorial illustration. Design contribution seems reduced to beautifying the empirically determined necessities of engineering and planning, producing diagrams and views of projected finished outcomes and supporting the promises of advertising with scenes of beautiful, buyable places. Suburbs exemplify the fundamental problems of form-giving. Sprawl is famously formless. Commentators deny it not only shapeliness but any shape, acknowledging only extension. Suburbs as sprawl become a process rather than definitive product. 'Compared with the amount of literature on the social character and experience of suburbia, little has been written about its physical form' (Harris & Larkham 1999, p.17). Hugh Stretton (1975) is an exception. He considers that there are 'many ways of breaking up the regular march of sixty-foot frontages' (p.22). He looks too at an even larger scale at collections of suburbs in the forms of 'clusters' organised in webs, radial or linear collections. Yet while a form cannot necessarily mean a particular thing, it cannot mean anything at all or nothing, only itself.

Discussions of form can be confused by what is meant by form. Patrick Troy, Professor Emeritus at the Australian National University and Adjunct Professor at the Urban Policy Program, Griffith University, distinguishes structure from form in a paper examining Australian cities and the 'two fundamental forces that shape the way we live in them':

Structure is the spatial relationships between cities and their services and activities. That is, whether the activities are arranged in linear relationships and are highly centralised, or whether the city is structured as an interconnected set of nodes around which development is arranged. Form is the nature or density of development. All major cities in Australia are essentially low density, especially in their residential areas, although recently the city centers have been developed to high density (2004, p.1).

Landscape architect Garret Eckbo means something else:

A good theory of landscape design... must be a theory of form as well as of function... We cannot avoid the problem of producing form in the landscape ... We must remember that most landscape problems are so plastic, so little under the control of functional requirements that any number of solutions is possible. For most, the final best

solution is probably as unreachable as the final best solution for a square of canvas on an easel, or a block of stone in the sculptor's yard. Design, like life, has no limits to its development ... It has been said then, on what shall we base our forms? Where shall we find them? And the answer is, in the world which is around you in space and behind you in time (in Swaffield 2002, pp.10-11).

The understanding and search for form of the planner and the designer are shown here to be different, if related. The emphasis of the designer is on form as a plastic, concrete expression, of the planner on abstract organisational principles. And yet Troy concludes his paper admitting that the abstractions of planning and policy proposals are misdirected and he appeals specifically instead to the need to give *physical* expression to our aspirations:

There is one danger in all this on which I would offer one piece of advice: it is important to resist the visiting 'snake oil merchant' who claims to have the solution to the urban problems of Brisbane – or any other city for that matter. Whether they propose consolidation and the downsizing of dwellings, priority for public transport to the exclusion of private travel, the introduction of privatisation or the rigorous market pricing systems for urban services, they all claim to be able to solve the problem. In doing so they hope that citizens will forget that: there is always a simple solution to every complex problem ... But it is always wrong! I suggest that we accept that our cities are complex highly adaptive systems and that we need to develop planning systems that are not physically deterministic but are built on the notion that in accommodating the basic forces operating in our society we must find appropriate ways of giving them acceptable physical expression (p.13, capitalisation removed).

Such physical expression is hardly an uncomplicated or secure translation of forces and values and architects are well aware too, as utopians, that form remains part of the problematic of their expression rather than a final solution. Lars Lerup says of Manfredo Tafuri in *Beyond Utopia* that:

[H]e saw the weakness of formfulness and silence as almost equally futile... [he] points out the futility of seeing form alone. Only in the mind of the architect does form stand alone; in life it is always motivated by use and thought. A willing interlocutor can rescue exasperated and silenced form. These touch on the subjects of the dwellers and their liberty (1994, p.24).

Further:

The role of the enlightened architect, outlined by Tafuri as 'the ideologist of the city' using 'form as the tool' to persuade the public that modernist planning can withstand the hit-or-miss market forces of modern urban organisation, has been radically reconstituted. This is very frustrating to modern reflective architects, who see themselves as unwilling instruments of capital without influence on urban organisation. Less reflective architects seem equally frustrated because they blame themselves for these same facts (p.23).

This frustration and the hesitation that it occasions is perhaps nowhere more apparent than in the shaping of suburbs. But sprawl, declares Lerup, does have form. 'It is asinine to suggest that the single-family house and its lot, agglomerated, have no consequence for urban form ... These agglomerations or megaforms, are hard to visualize despite their molecular regimentation (house, lot and street) because their

horizons, their coherence as objects, are fuzzy and disjointed' (p.25). The difficulty Lerup sees is that 'an urban configuration (say in all its market-driven formlessness) is acknowledged as basically democratic but somehow the form it takes is not right, even though the right form is not possible because too utopian' (p.27).

Despite Tafuri's contention that both formfulness and silence—the silence of formlessness—are equally futile, informality and even formlessness itself have been embraced as desirable aims of design in reaction to the violence of imposed form taken as explanation for the failed project of Modern architecture. Slums are an 'informal' urbanism, 'resisting representation' (Fabricius 2008). Suburbs are similarly formless, resisting descriptive, confounding graphic, and challenging even statistical representation. It has been suggested too that suburbs are or will be the slums of the future (Leinberger 2008). In *Resisting Representation: The Informal Geographies of Rio de Janeiro* (Fabricius 2008), Daniela Fabricius discusses 'Urban Informality' (AlSayyad 2004). This describes a shift in the twentieth century study of cities from the Chicago School where 'the city is studied from what is essentially a Modernist perspective based on the model of a centralized nucleus with clear distinctions between centre and periphery' to the Los Angeles Model 'which can be characterized as postmodern, developed in the late 1970s emphasiz[ing] the decentralization of the city and the role of the global capitalist economy and advances in communications technology in determining urban form. The periphery of the city, in this case, controls the center' (Fabricius 2008). More importantly for Fabricius is the lesson 'that these two models, exported and applied to cities in the Third World, no longer apply (or perhaps never did) to most cities in the world, and that the very tools of analysis must be reconsidered.'

For Fabricius this realisation is a helpful one:

As geographers, architects, or planners, accepting our inability to articulate urban boundaries is infinitely useful for describing the contemporary city. Accepting partial knowledge and relinquishing epistemic control is a step toward a geography of the informal (Fabricius 2008, unpaginated).

While 'infinitely useful' for describing the present, questions remain regarding the steps that follow. Having relinquished control, then what do you do? Is a *different* form of control implied and if so, what? Form (as well as the representation of form), like definition discussed earlier, is both unavoidable and unavoidably representative of ideas albeit unintentionally. Form is not important because it means something but because it cannot mean nothing. For this reason forms—and formlessness—lead to utopian manifestations of ideas as ideals.

Discussion of form as something other than spatial is pervasive. Form is considered an abstraction of other forces upon materials, not the material which gives force to abstract ideas. In 'Logistics Landscape' landscape form is 'described' as the product of economic forces (Waldheim & Berger 2008). Three historical configurations are identified: 'concentrated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, decentralized in mid-twentieth century, and distributed at the end of the twentieth century' and linked to shifts in capitalist 'modes of production' (p.219). The division echoes Foucault's identification (1984) of a change from 'localization' or 'emplacement', to 'extension', to networks of 'arrangement' or the 'relations of proximity' determining and constituting any 'site'. It also recalls Cedric Price's boiled, fried and scrambled egg analogy of city morphology (in Waldheim & Berger 2008, p.64). These instances and others note a present formal condition of chaotically dispersed and diverse elements. For Waldheim and Berger this creates

... a new form of landscape, a landscape of logistics. This logistics landscape ... is characterized by new Industrial forms based on global supply chains and vast territories given over to accommodating the shipment, staging, and delivery of goods. This paper offers a provisional theoretical framework and describes three emergent categories of logistics landscape: distribution and delivery, consumption and convenience, and accommodation and disposal ... [It represents] an initial attempt to describe these spaces, to make them available for reading as landscape, and to begin the longer term project of their critical cultural appraisal (2008, p.219).

Berger and Waldheim offer their research as the start of a 'critical appraisal' of a condition, but it is the condition of economic activity and logistical necessity which is critiqued, not form itself. Form is secondary. As designers the authors are curiously uncritical of the landscape itself or its capacity to be designed—that is shaped—to resist or represent anything other than the forces identified. It is unclear whether designers are to do more than work with or perhaps just understand the identified forces, rather than be a force themselves in articulating and shaping desirable future forms.

Architect George L. Clafien Jr., considering conflict in architectural education, notes the 'surprising lack of literature in architecture on the actual making of form which creates the vacuum sometimes filled by the misapplied debris of other disciplines' (Clafien undated, unpaginated). In relating the discourses of other disciplines to that of architecture, or rather to architecture as form, architects need to be alert to dangers of 'the frequent act of employing the properties of architecture to do nothing more than symbolize or aestheticise the processes of other disciplines whether science or poststructuralist philosophy' (Clafien undated, unpaginated). Or economics or logistics.

Much earlier, Russian architect Ivan Leonidov similarly argued for the importance of architectural form as determining, rather than predetermined:

The ideas of OSA [Union of Contemporary Architects] are criticised not only by ASNOVA [Association of New Architects] but equally by other architectural groups for their denial of the influence of forms on the human being. But in fact it is only the OSA which is stepping over this *artificial* notion of the influence of external form, and is trying to genuinely design the architectural object in a way that takes account of the ideological dimension from the very beginning, in relation to the social function of the building, and right to the very end, down to the details, at the level of their standardisation, correct functioning and justification (in Kuzmin 1988, p.94).

An appreciation of form is inseparable from appreciating its effects. An understanding of physical suburbs is inseparable from understanding them as part of active, altering sprawl. Time and space cannot usefully be examined separately. However there is an ongoing privileging of investigations into the former over the latter evident in continuing interest in what constructions or landscapes 'do' over what they 'mean' or 'are' (Corner 1999; Hensel 2008; Kolarevic & Malkawi 2005), in processes over appearances, in their timeliness or dromology over their morphology (Virilio 1986), their infrastructure over their structure (Varnelis 2009), their extended networks over their immediate works (Castells 1996). Their performance (Davison 2005) and accidents (Virilio 1986) are in danger of being disembodied from the bodies that suffer them. The emphasis risks a separation of inseparable and mutually influential causes and effects.

Content is inseparable from form. Even forms argued to arise spontaneously, organically or independent of human effort, are inevitably speculated to 'mean' something—denotatively and connotatively—when brought within human notice and cultural contexts. Literature of content asserts that suburbs are the physical expression of experiments, good or bad, conducted by controlling powers. It most often takes a positivist attitude, examining and stressing the logic of applied accumulated knowledge and the generally successful spread of improved living conditions as a result of this application. It presents a belief in the possibility of achieving a method and form ensuring good and right outcomes as the pursuit and objective application of research that has already determined what good is. Conversely, work not applying such methods and forms is bad. Sprawl is the effect of economic and other non-material causes. However this positivist rationalism has failed to resolve existing problems or prevent the continuing revelation of new ones, while the totalitarian powers needed to develop and instigate change arguably cause more oppressive environments than those they replace. The strictures of New Urbanism and the structures they give form to are examples of this simple pro-con, form-fact relationship. Much Urban Design, applying the work of Christian Norberg-Schulz (1968), Kevin Lynch (1984) and others is similarly concerned to establish and follow clear and logical guidelines for delivery of

appropriate form, understood as the outcome of applied common sense. This persuasive aim is most recently evident in the twelve key-word 'Principles' of the *Urban Design Charter for Victoria* which include structure, accessibility, legibility, fit and function, safety, inclusiveness and interaction (DPCD 2010b).

In speaking of form as that which, on the one hand, is responsible for architectural violence and error, while on the other, is avoided by architects as their direct concern through a focus instead on processes of formation, we have already broached questions of content and meaning. As mentioned, a prevailing tendency is to explain form as the seemingly inevitable outcome of a range of forces which are the actual subject of examination and critique. Suburbs, as also outlined, are most frequently examined and understood as active sprawl, responsive to these forces. A typical example, produced by and for architects by 'Architectural Design Magazine', was an issue devoted to The Anglo-American Suburb, coinciding with the 'Suburbs' exhibition at the Cooper Hewitt Museum, New York (Stern & Massengale 1981). Prefaced by an explanatory essay, it provided plans, sketches, photographs and other graphics, profiling fifty American suburban developments, prefaced by four British prototypical suburbs. In an overlapping, roughly chronological sequence, they were organised into types based speculatively on rationales for their founding: railroad suburbs, streetcar and subway suburbs, industrial villages, resort suburbs, automobile suburbs and 'recent suburbs'. In contrast, architect Michael Sorkin (1996) privileges form as the influence and cause of other non-material effects. He interprets and utilises the planner's code as an instrument for creative development of urban form. 'This code is written in the belief that meanings inhere in forms, and that the settings for social life can aid its fulfilment' (p.11). The code is written to forefront form as the embodied evidence of abstract principles. Such discredited utopianism makes this a rare positioning.

The literature of content seeks meaning and intent behind the creation of form. For suburbs it seeks to explain both form and the growth of that form. It represents the normative identification of problems and proposes either solutions or directions for further research that will reveal solutions. It does not consider that there is no certain, guaranteed, unmediated and meaningful intent that can be securely invested in any form. It believes that meaning can be found and understood, although it can and has been accidentally and wilfully misunderstood, leading to abuses of agreed canons of design taste and standards. The internal logic of the grid's rational order became an externally imposed logic enabling its use as a tool for swift and disorderly subdivision of land. The particular curvature of William Hogarth's 'line of grace' and Lancelot Brown's

serpentine horizontal and vertical alignments of paths and waterbodies became the blob and wavy perimeter edging of Kwik Kerb suburban garden beds. The complex Picturesque investigations of irregularity and earlier theoretical interest in the asymmetry of non-western 'Sharawadgi' (Temple 2008) was echoed by twentieth century 'townscaping' (Cullen 1961; Wolfe 1949) and eventually became the real estate developers wormy cul-de-sac. No longer a response to topography, the artifice of winding lanes on flat ground is pretence to a topographic—as well as socially superior—sensitivity. Some writing recognises or excuses such corrupted misunderstandings and trivialisation as the result of inappropriate education, lack of exposure to exemplars or insufficient immersion in the context of original developments. Such observers become less interested in expounding form-content relationship and focus instead on the languages which frame and claim them.

### **Language and frontiers**

In order to unpack possible and shifting meanings one needs to analyse and deconstruct languages. Literature interested in languages offers critique of particular readings or perspectives of proposals for built form, seeking evidence for controlling groups and their ideologies. It analyses and examines the languages and grammars of various disciplines including different sciences, planning, design and other specialist disciplines, as well as that of advertising, journalism and academia. It looks too at dialects or fashionable accents within groups such as the many 'isms' associated with design movements. The dialects of popular culture and the ordinary person too are recognised in vernacularism and regionalism through to the coining of terms for localised critical practices such as Robin Boyd's futurism and lowbrowism. Such 'isms' become legitimised or normalised as '-ations' (for example modernism becomes modernisation).

The workings of languages become important to appreciate, not in order that correct translations might then be undertaken that simply demonstrate the correspondences of form and content already argued for, but because difference and differentiation involve questions of choice and value and therefore issues of power. Identifying the intended meaning behind forms and the manipulative interpretation of shape and statistics as significant and signifying content requires unpacking motives behind the inventiveness of the naming and claiming process itself. This process is one determined by languages. Literature that examines languages accepts that a shape may be a direct expression or manifestation of a designer's idea which can be understood by various others who share his or her language, whether a narrow circle of fellow designers or a wider group.

The idea of a language of suburban design and development has been approached in various ways, from precise visual and physical systems of communication utilising elements of the built environment at different scales—analogue to the alphabets, words and grammars governing textual communication—to more abstract metaphors hinting at less precise landscape knowledge dissemination. Ledoux's *architecture parlante*, (speaking architecture) is one that attempts to clearly symbolise its function and do away with human interpretative or manipulative intervention. Design guidelines can be seen to assume the same simple transliteration of text or diagram to form. Languages of landscape, the city or the suburbs have followed the various rhetorical and semiotic turns of architectural theory too.

The language of design both reads and writes form. Built environments have 'legibility' (Lynch 1960). Aggregates of forms, like the sequencing of words, sentences and paragraphs, form meaningful patterns (Alexander 1977). Yet there is resistance to the ease with which communication is implied by linguistic analogies.

OMA refuses the positive inquiry into semantics, the structural semiotics that have characterized so many attempts to develop 'true' languages in recent years. Nor does it intend to anthropologize its productions... the linguistic analogy, while affording valuable insights into the operation of signs... no longer holds an absolute interpretative value (Vidler 1992, p.196).

Linguistic analogies, like other explanatory, representational and essentially interpretative tools, never did have absolute value or unambiguously communicated and finite meaning, despite appeals to universal values or fundamental principles for which they claim to stand. In her appeal to landscape architects to undertake new conversations with an old landscape Catherin Bull (2006) would disagree. She suggests that designers have simply forgotten to chat with them in order to learn what to do (pp.12, 16, 54).

Failures and inadequacies of design are also explained as the limits and failures of present poor languages of representation rather than inevitable failures to realise the unrealisable. Anthony Vidler quotes Roland Barthes to preface a discussion of architectural representation: "To change language," that Mallarmean expression, is a concomitant of "to change the world," that Marxian one' (1992, p.190). Similarly '[t]he limits of my language mean the limits of my world' (Wittgenstein 2001, p.68). Design pursues and pushes those limitations beyond present frontiers, although the frontier—the limit—will never be dispensed with. The expansion and alteration of representational languages expands and alters conceptions of and building for the world, even as such changes fall behind the frontier that has been expanded, ossifying

as new orthodoxies, being fixed as new limitations and abused as false liberations. Don Watson's *Death Sentences : How Cliches, Weasel Words and Management-Speak Are Strangling Public Language* (2003) could be read as parallel critique of the abuse of design language and discourse by the clichés of planning and market imperatives to 'build better cities'.

The present focus of interest in what form 'does' rather than what form 'is', appeals to natural common sense over formally acquired appreciation. It finds value in the demonstrative truth of meaningful function rather than the pretension to being meaningful. Yet what 'doing' demonstrates is still only meaningful within terms that have also been pre-determined. Dispensing with determination, in what we do or what we are, like attempting to escape all limitation, makes the meaningless falsely meaningful. In its production and reproduction of form, design activity appeals to and employs both learnt traditions of exclusive knowledge regarding the appreciation of form, as well as intuitive or natural reactions to environmental phenomena. It is only the closely examined ever-shifting relationship between both that generates defensible argument for any meaning.

Frontier writing considers emerging and scattered speculations addressing the unpredictable and perpetual shifting of suburb definition and landscape architectural purpose. Designers work at frontiers but there are two types of approach to their challenges: one that acquiesces to unknowability (Non) and one which projects something desired to be known and made real (Utopian). The work and writings on frontiers explore the uses of irony and related notions of the uncanny, the fall, horror and disgust, open-endedness, chaos and indeterminacy. Frontiers are the edge between the known and unknown. Frontiers are for exploring. They command a particular view into the unknown and demand poetical as well as political apprehension and appropriation. The term is borrowed from Lerup's *Beyond the City*:

Still seeking, but now for a frontier where we can play out a distributed architecture and situate its architects. Searching the suburban metropolis for its frontier is confusing ... The frontier is a heterogeneous subject, especially since it is increasingly mythical if not already fictional (1994, p.156).

Suburbs are at frontiers, the edge, the hinterland of cities, the borderlands. Lewis Mumford explicitly connects the motivation to suburban settlement with America's frontier settlement: 'What Francis Parkman had said of the westward march of the pioneer was equally true of the suburb: "The sons of civilization, drawn by the fascination of a fresher and bolder life, thronged to the western wilds in multitudes

which blighted the charm that had lured them” (1961, p.559). First and foremost of the charms destroyed was the sense of there even being a frontier.

The literature of wastelands and deserts, of colonial occupation and expansion is a literature of expanding frontiers. Poetry, painting and other forms of expressive communication, are part of early experiments to understand the Australian landscape. In 1801 William Westall set sail as official artist on board *Investigator* with Matthew Flinder's expedition to Australia in 'hopes of finding an Arcadia, a rustic paradise of picturesque vistas' (Findlay 1998, p.xi). He was not simply disappointed but completely traumatised by his inability—the failure of his training in the conventions of European landscape painting—to find a way to grasp the difference of Australian landscape and light.

In *Seeking the Centre: The Australian Desert in Literature, Art and Film* Roslyn Haynes (1999) examines the wide-ranging impact of the desert on Australian culture. In the opening chapter, 'The Land is a Map' (and thereby, incidentally, a human construction), she quotes the aboriginal poet Jack Davis:

Some call it a desert / But it is full of life / pulsating life / if one knows where to find it / in the land I love (p.3).

In a similar discovery of the variety and richness of American deserts—which we are reminded was a term applied to any form of unprofitable wasteland—David Miller speculates on swamps noting that 'descriptions of landscape can be a revealing index of both the culture's inner life and its professed worldview' (2000, p.2). It was during the 1850s that:

... the swamp overcame, in the minds of many thoughtful Americans, its age-old stigma. Rather than evoking stock responses, it began to be confronted with fresh awareness ... this scrutiny of the swamp, through exploration and advancing scientific knowledge, led to a number of unforeseen implications. The image ... illuminated emergent attitudes and half-repressed emotions and also gave shape to the moods and insights being engendered by a changing economic and social reality ... Even more significantly ... [it was] granted a new, more positive perspective (p.3).

Less ambitious in geographical and disciplinary scope, *Reading, Writing, Seeing Wetlands* (Giblett & Webb 1996) presents evidence for the same influence and potential of the wetlands of Western Australia on the literary imagination. In these and similar publications examining the cultural impacts of particular ecologically delineated landscapes, there emerges the valuable discovery of a wealth of unexpected richness and rare life. Substituting 'suburbs' for deserts or other wastelands in such studies makes it easy to see how the suburbs too might become the sites of rich and rewarding closer observation.

*Fluctuating Borders: Speculations about Memory and Emergence* (Monacella & Ware 2007) collects project work and essays on the theme of borders; a type of two-way frontier. If frontiers mark the edge of the unknown, borders delineate a complex mirror-line of threatening strangeness, reflective and reflexive, where utopian and Non responses accumulate. Opening with the deceptive simplicity of an understatement, Monacella's concluding essay 'On the Emergent Line: Complex Systems and Self-Regulating Orders of the City' urges consideration of a complexity that is already well exploited, a detournment that has been long recuperated: 'The complexity of the urban periphery is difficult to capture through a singular line or figure on a map' (Monacella 2007, p.108). Anuradha Mathur and Dilip Da Cunha write eloquently of the fundamental lie of lines, particularly those employed in the demarcation of coastlines and the location of rivers (2001; 2009). They are alert not only to water's three-dimensionality (it overflows not flows) but to four-dimensional swell and shifting. The fair-weather maps of surveyors record a mythic fair-weather lie of the land, essential to claims of control if not to an actual ability to do so.

Monacella discusses landscape form as a 'topological modulation' changing over time, which cannot be considered as an object 'detached' from its 'manifold' contexts (p.108). In such a condition the line of a border, drawn on a map, 'becomes less a decisive mark and more a suggestive mark' although no suggestions are made as to what it may offer (p.108). She suggests, following Corner, that the 'landscape architect designs strategies that affirm the landscape's infinite change in time' (p.110) although it is unclear why it is necessary to do this. She adds that it is to 'facilitate the emergence of becomings and potentialities' (p.111) while strictly avoiding the facilitation of any particular potential (p.117). Yet all potentials are already shown to be potentially something else; part of the manifold landscape continuum. Design here is a service to aid the proliferation of difference, the generation of alternatives, easily co-opted as the production of designer novelty. Broadly interpreting Paolo Virno, Monacella determines that the work of design, following on its duty to 'work against convention' is 'to rework the old conventions of design in order to forge new design methodologies and processes' although in order to further achieve what with these new conventions remains unclear beyond the self-effacing claim to 'create the conditions whence potential for change can take place' (p.114).

Rather than being used to subvert the dominant hegemonies that establish lines and erect defensive borders, the flexibility and uncertainty of the line theorised here has already become something employed by controlling forces to deflect attention from

other offensive activities. The line, nominally securing the sovereignty of both sides, is already a convenient fiction rather than an inconvenient constraint to the powerful. It is happily conceded by those who can ignore it with legal impunity and technological superiority.<sup>19</sup> Possibilities do indeed emerge and can be exploited more effectively by already dominant forces to maintain and extend power than by others to diffuse or dispel it. The celebration of and plea for recognition of mere possibilities does not suggest or champion any particular possibilities. Australia has a thickened border of literal fluidity: 'the very air and sea, the whole transparent labyrinth of the South Pacific, would become a wall 14,000 miles thick' (Robert Hughes in Davidson 2006, p.106). Full of possible occupations and hopeful crossings, it is better known as a place of desperation and death, that the dispossessed and lost known as asylum seekers and illegal immigrants, look to cross to find a new life. Yet despite - or because of - lines drawn in water demarcating responsibility, people drown and none are held responsible. 'A landscape architect draws lines that will open up fields of emerging possibilities' (Monacella 2007, p.121) although it is arguable that possibilities will emerge equally well without them. As the essay repeatedly points out, the richness and variety of all manner of natural and unnatural forces acting upon an already non-delimited and essentially undefined landscape can hardly avoid it. Without the intention to open up *particular* possibilities, admitting that this closes off others, the intervention of landscape architects must be utterly irrelevant, rather than just risk being merely ineffectual or incorrect.

Elaborating on Alex Wall's 'urban surface' as 'dynamic and responsive like a catalytic emulsion', Monacella declares that 'The change that happens within a city [or any landscape?] is not telic; it does not necessarily need to move toward a utopian end forecast by jurisdictional and governmental authorities' (p.117). This may be so, but should not design in fact attempt to do this: to move toward a forecast of an admittedly utopian—ultimately unachievable—end? Isn't this what constitutes a design proposal? Otherwise what is the role of design? She continues: 'The life of a city, the macro and micro events that are taking place within it are not mapped out. The affective change between events will unfold in time; in fact, one may consider that city's surface to really be this event of unfolding' (p.117). This will happen irrespective of the presence of designers. The 'life' of the city is another instance of the pathetic fallacy, so easily abused as a token to substitute rather than prompt reconsideration and evaluation of the forces acting upon it, to conceal rather than expose the quality of that life.

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<sup>19</sup> For several essays on the theme of borders in different locations world-wide—considered not as protection from but as incitement to and enactment of a violence that occurs despite apparent de-limiting—see: Davidson, C. (ed.) 2006

To this point, with the support of reference to Corner, Wall, Kwinter and others, Monacella has been concerned to indicate that a task of design is 'working against conventions' (p.114) even while demonstrating that this is called for within contemporary contexts of great flux which seem to beg the question of what remains conventional. The aim appears to be for the 'new' and for more and greater 'change', 'transformation' and 'potential' (as well as 'potential for change' to add to the landscape's already 'continual transformation'), but no mention is made of outcomes or to what end the intensification of existing profligate indeterminacy is to be pursued. There is, however, one key moment that supposes an end is required, and it comes with admission of the designer's political task. Quoting Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, this task is 'not simply to resist these processes (taking place within old conventions) but to reorganise them and redirect them toward new *ends*'. Monacella has added the parenthesised elaboration and goes on to advise that 'the process of radical design is not aimed at creating nothingness but aimed at a process of re-ordering existing conditions so that new subjectivities and spaces may emerge' (p.114). Yet how can an earlier declared constraint on producing an end that might be 'mapped out'—i.e. something—not engender the nothing-in-particular of 'shifting relations'? Specifically, the 'city as a multitude holds the risk of it being collapsed into nothingness or the postmodern capitalist celebration of pastiche which may imply the reifications and exploitation of cultures, peoples and spaces' (p.113). Hardt and Negri, unacknowledged by Monacella, go on to say that 'the multitude will have to invent new democratic forms and a new constituent power' (Hardt & Negri 2000, p.xv). In other words, the multitude will design whether or not designers do.

In her outline of a design approach to the challenges of borders or frontiers, Monacella references Corner's 'eidetic image' (pp.110-111), invokes Deleuze and Felix Guattari's 'intensive spatium' (p.111), Delanda's 'heterogeneous assemblages' (p.111), Hardt and Negri's 'networks of flows' (p.115), Wall's 'urban surface' (p.117), and Kwinter's 'epigeneic landscape' (p.120), amongst others. Frontiers are where meaning is uncertain because what we think we know of the world and how we understand it is challenged by the utterly unfamiliar. To accept the unfamiliar as unknowable is one possible response; a Non frontier approach. The granting of agency to landscape, the appeal to the unknown to reveal itself through unfolding inherent processes, can divest the observer of responsibility to consider their own place within and influence upon such processes. Unlike appeals to *genius loci*—the assigning of sentience or exercises of similar pathetic fallacies adopted within traditional sanctifications of place as part of ritual approaches to the unknown—the granting of agency to a landscape is an unacknowledged fiction. Whereas earlier appeals were intended to be understood as

conventions aiding a groping toward understanding the ineffable, recent appeals to landscape agency are offered as ways to rediscover a truth that conventions have obscured and sullied. The dangers of this deception are great. Open-ended processes and undefined potential can be as easily appropriated and directed as more transparently constrictive processes and limited potential.

Frontiers are certainly places where purpose fails, where one can become lost, succumbing to fear and despair or just indifference. Literature and work that ventures to or beyond frontiers of apparent relevance, identifiable application or acceptable disciplinary scope is argued here to hold the most value for future settlement design, as it has always done. Rather than be abandoned for their failure and dismissed for their ambition, investigatory utopian attempts need to be revisited and newly reconstituted. Utopia is a frontier project. The suburbs are a utopian frontier project. Parables are frontier tales, diagrams are frontier maps, climbing a frontier exploration, falling a frontier act, failing a frontier achievement (especially in Australian history) and irony a frontier past-time. Frontiers are where contests for uncertain rewards are fought.

**PART III**  
**WORKS OF COMPETITIVE PLACEMENT (A TOPOLOGY)**

This final part examines and examples ways that landscape architecture, suburbs and utopian propositions have positioned and argued their relevance in dealing with contemporary environmental, social, economic and other concerns. At present the terms of relevance have been dictated by various and conflicting concerns for environmental health and human survival collected under the unifying cause of sustainability as a central issue. Under such terms the historic obligations of design, suburban development and utopianism to pursue escape and otherness are not welcomed as liberating subversions or even argued as problematic but condemned as unacceptable. The place that these three held historically in generating alternative world-views and challenging truth-claims, along with exemplifying the built forms resulting from these efforts, has been occupied by calls for united approaches to environmental crises at the very time when alternatives are urgently required. Landscape architecture, suburbs and utopias are important because of, rather than despite, ultimate failures to sustain their visions and work, falling themselves to new orthodoxies that require new subversions, new competitions. Ignoring the successes of multiple successions, it is their failures to ultimately deliver on successive promises that have enabled a take-over of their valued place in cultural discourses, halting further competitive complexity.

Chapter 8 shows how landscape architecture, suburbs and utopias have struggled to position their relevance, revealing their place has failed to hold. Chapter 9 looks at how advertisement, and real estate advertising in particular, positions the relevance of the topic areas to solving present problems in both simple and sophisticated ways that strip design itself of that purpose. The good design of new suburbs is accepted as the self-evident outcome of unambiguously advertised claims. Finally, chapter 10 argues that planning and urban design are similarly relieving designers of their obligations, suburbs of their greater potential and utopias of their liberating power. They favour securing correct outcomes through a range of non-competitive tools including charters, guidelines, frameworks and other legislated restrictions on non-conforming experiment and opinion.

## Chapter 8

### Suburbs, Landscape Architecture and Utopias: Difficult Definition, Problematic Position

*The profession of landscape architecture appears to be finished. Its edges have been overtaken by architects and environmental artists. Ecology has been taken over by engineers and hasn't really affected design. At the same time, the profession hasn't found a core. The centre has not been defined and held.*

Diana Balmori<sup>20</sup>

*The center in fact has not held, and the boundaries of the city cannot be specified. There is not even an agreed-on name for the gargantuan urban agglomerations in which we live, no matter what continent we live on.*

Thomas Bender<sup>21</sup>

*Increasingly we 'exist in a state of continuous construction and deconstruction; it is a world where anything goes that can be negotiated. Each reality of self gives way to reflexive questioning, irony, and ultimately the playful probing of yet another reality. The centre fails to hold.*

Sherry Turkle<sup>22</sup>

Suburbs have been argued by many not to exist at all, inasmuch as the morphologies of primarily residential and low-density landscapes which we believe are being referred to are actually so diverse that even density and residential occupancy are sometimes inapplicable primary criteria for identification. 'Suburbia' is a more accurate, because less precise, word to indicate a mythic landscape type inclusive of all suburbs, but it is not necessarily more helpful in characterising them in ways which assist in positioning a response to the concerns of specific existing or proposed suburbs. Landscape architecture, somewhat similarly, has undertaken such an expansion and diversity of theoretical and practical projects that its scope of works, seen by many as a crisis of identity, of relevance, of professionalism or some other characterising quality or mission, may enable any design, contextualised as all design is within an external world and 'natural' systems, to be an architecture of landscapes. Again, while some landscape architectural practice may seek more accuracy in calling itself, for example, landscape urbanism, in order locate its geographical or other area of interest, this is not necessarily proving more helpful in either accurately characterising the traditional

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<sup>20</sup> In Beardsley, J. 2008, p.178

<sup>21</sup> Bender, T. 2007, unpaginated.

<sup>22</sup> In Nash, C. 2001, p.4

practice to which it is opposed or in enabling the formulation of specific project responses. Utopias are already, by deliberate definition, no-places that cannot actually exist. Yet unlike the problematic and re-problematized existence of the suburbs and of landscape architecture—both constantly threatened with extinction—the pre-confirmed impossibility of utopias has a well-argued, irresistible, if often misrepresented positive value. Understanding the arguments and value of utopian thought should clarify the potential value of problems encountered in thinking about suburbs and landscape architecture.

The following examination of present understandings of suburbs, landscape architecture and utopianism outlines contested definitions for each, reinforcing similar difficulties and directions. For each term it investigates dominant and debated positions, and trends in new ones, also suggesting others that may be useful for present discussions, recalling past, overlooked or forgotten obligations.

### **It's all about the suburbs**

The many initiatives and investigations world-wide pursuing solutions to identified problems of human settlement are typified in discussions of the suburbs. The triple bottom line considerations of environmental, social and economic responsibility are more than contemporary obligations of the public face of business accounting or government accountability; they have become personal attitudes expressed and encouraged in the private realm. Important issues of environmental and ecological crises are currently largely understood as matters to be overcome by greater technical efficiency and supportive styling. Design addresses them respectively as difficulties of systems performance and selling, whether at the scale of the individual domestic consumer or of corporate or political collectives.

The documented problems and promises of the suburbs have been seen to evidence, even exemplify, the identified failures and projected promises of our times. These problems are typically described in the hyperbolic terms of a culmination of Western cultural ambition, if not human destiny itself and they are pitched at two extremes. Suburbia is sin for some and reward for others, indulgence or sacrifice made manifest, the result of an exercise of rights and responsibilities either triumphant or tragic. Globalisation, global warming, and other varieties of apocalypse and transformation have been located and vividly illustrated in residential suburbs. From cartoons, TV soaps, films and games to government enquiry and legislation at all levels, from the invention of new terminologies that attempt to comprehend it, to new disciplines that

attempt to deal with it, suburban studies attract everyone. The suburbs are scenes of accommodation for a range of lifestyles from the contemplative private life, the active communal one, the family life, the consumer lifestyle, the self-sufficient life, the globally connected life, even the *vita religiosa* in one's own defensible monastery-castle or in suburban enclaves or purpose-built gated communities of single faiths, classes or other orders. The suburbs have served, and increasingly supply the material, metaphor and meaning for an examination of the contemporary human condition. The suburbs are our definitive and defining space.

While 'the city' continues to be a key term for self-conscious sites of cultural production, it is the suburbs which have arguably and increasingly given cities any reason for existence. More frequently, it is the suburbs and suburban conditions which are invoked and intended when the urban and cities are discussed. The much-publicised United Nations announcement (UN-Habitat 2007) that from 2007 more people would live in cities than the country for the first time in human history, distinguishes, as its other reports do (UN-Habitat 2008), between urban and rural, counting the suburban metropolis as part of the city. Hugh Stretton's *Ideas for Australian Cities* (1975) is actually a discussion of suburbs, complete with case studies that analyse alternative gridded, linear and other arrangements for a speculatively mapped expansion of Canberra. Dejan Sudjik's *200 Mile City* (1993) is effectively a discussion of linear suburban spread, while his most recent work declares an *Endless City* (2008) where the urban is conflated with the suburban. MVRDV described the condition of a 'Metacity': 'More and more regions have become more or less continuous fields... Even the former anti-urban elements are colonized; they are now concentrated parts of the urban condition: nature has become crowded' (MVRDV 1999, p.16) although the 'urban' condition of crowded nature in continuous fields is more familiarly termed suburban. City or suburb growth, particularly in developing countries, is discussed as the expansion of slums. The 'first global enumeration of slums at the country level' undertaken by the United Nations (López 2003) and a follow-up report of the same year (UN-Habitat 2003) generated considerable interest in 'informal' settlement (Neuwirth 2006; Davis 2007) including suburbs.

Slums are not confined to developing countries nor limited to the name-calling of clearly demarcated upper classes on lower. Poor initial design exacerbated by economic recession led Frederic Law Olmsted to note that many once attractive suburban lots near New York City in the 1870s had deteriorated and been turned into 'boarding and tenement houses' (in Fogelson 2005, p.28). Over 130 years later the same '[s]trange days are upon the residents of many a suburban cul-de-sac. Once-tidy

yards have become overgrown, as the houses they front have gone vacant. Signs of physical and social disorder are spreading' (Leinberger 2008). The subprime crisis is, he continues, 'just the tip of the iceberg' as '[f]undamental changes in American life may turn today's McMansions into tomorrow's tenements.'

Olmsted's generous and McHarg's humane suburbs threaten to become urbs in other ways. Recently the redevelopment, retrofitting or retrofilling of suburbs intentionally and explicitly rethinks them as either self-sufficient towns ideally within preserved or reclaimed rural open-space, or as denser urban nodes. 'Efforts to urbanize suburbia are becoming a major development genre' (Dunham-Jones & Williamson 2008). In Melbourne, Delfin's 'warehouse concept' was launched in July 2002 at the outer suburban housing estate of Caroline Springs (Delfin 2002), while most developers include higher-density zones incorporating terrace rows around town centres and community parks which provide compensatory open space for that taken from traditional suburban backyards. New Urbanism would like to urbanise the suburbs although it may be happening without their help (Hall 2007). For Robert Fishman (1989, p.xi) suburbia 'has become what even the greatest advocates of suburban growth never desired - a new form of city'. They might equally be considered suburbanised in a new way; not new cities or towns as much as new forms of suburb, or new as-yet-unnamed settlement form altogether.

As early as 1982, considering 'disillusioned attempts' to rehabilitate cities and build suburbs, Habermas wondered 'whether the actual *notion* of the city has not itself been superseded' (1982, p.223). Alev Cinar and Thomas Bender open their *Urban Imaginaries: Locating the Modern City* with reiteration of the difficulty of defining the 'city', citing Robert Fishman and quoting architect Richard Ingersoll from a 1992 article: 'cities have become impossible to describe' (2007, p.xi). By 2006 Ingersoll claims 'the city has disappeared' (2006, p.3) and Lars Lerup, as his book's title *After the City* suggests, agrees that 'the metropolis has replaced the city' (1994, p.22). *Architectural Design* devoted an issue to 'emergent types of public space in low-density environments' which questioned 'the traditional boundaries between cities, suburbs, countryside and wilderness' describing a 'new form of urbanism: de-centralised, in a constant process of expansion and contraction, not homogenous or necessarily low-rise, nor guided by one mode of development, typology or pattern' (Segal & Verbakel 2008). Sanford Kwinter announced that 'The traditional notion of the city as an historical and institutional core surrounded by postwar suburbs and then open countryside has largely been replaced' (in Agrawal et al. 2007, p.91) although it

remains unclear with what. The already indefinable suburbs are competing for a place against multiple emerging and yet-to-be-defined morphologies.

There is an increasing interest and growing literature into the origins, forms, strengths and weaknesses, benefits and threats of suburbs. This includes a burgeoning publication of popular, professional and scholarly viewpoints, case studies and analysis in both theoretical and practical modes, scientific and poetic description and serious and satirical commentary. A common concern of all studies is to adequately define the area of study. Yet as Aiden Davison has recognised: 'The study of suburban ideals and practices takes place amidst considerable semantic confusion' (2005). This is a result of the increasing complexity of physical geographies of suburban form, as well as their 'diverse, historically layered and ambivalent cultural geographies.' Chris Healy wrote almost a decade earlier that suburbia has functioned as an imagined space 'on to which a vast array of fears, desires, insecurities, obsessions and yearning have been projected and displaced' (in Ferber et al. 1994, p.xiii). Andrew McCann noted:

Suburbia is both a tangible site, a distinct set of spatial relations, and a discursive fiction, a facet of various imaginary topographies in which it is stigmatised or mythologised according to certain ideological and aesthetic imperatives ... the suburb and the connotations that surround it are...as much a function of particular discourse and narratives as they are palpable realities (1998, p.vii).

Even more significantly he notes that '[i]f this undecidability, this confluence of the real and the imagined, might be seen as constitutive of the "problem" of suburbia, one of the challenges in writing about it may well be to avoid a position in which suburbia itself becomes one more vanishing referent which evades direct comment' (p.vii). This is precisely Jameson's observation regarding utopia: 'Utopia would seem to offer the spectacle of one of those rare phenomena whose concept is indistinguishable from its reality, whose ontology coincides with its representation' (2004, p.35), although for Jameson this seeming self-referential coincidence generates enlightening investigation rather than dispenses with the need for it.

Despite or because of difficulties, all literature, to some degree, attempts to cover a statistically prescriptive or poetically descriptive background to position its field of investigation. For suburban studies, this attempt claims considerable energy and admits frequent failure.

Politicians, environmentalists, geographers, farmers, designers and many other groups associated with land development struggle with generating a vocabulary to describe the causes and effects of rapid horizontal urbanisation... this vocabulary has, in many cases, further obfuscated and polarised the issue. Hundreds of acronyms and abbreviated names have emerged to describe the organizational structures, processes

and technical aspects of urbanization... A number of scholars insist the term suburbia inaccurately describes urbanisation outside cities (Berger 2006, p.19).

There is customary confusion of suburb definition by even statistical evidence. This makes it possible to argue, but impossible to prove, the truth of claims to, for example, the first suburban development or the most suburbanised nation. Despite this, much work is devoted to collecting data, developing organisational methods and clarifying statistical terms of reference. The Planning Institute of Australia (Victorian Division) compiled an extensive response to the tabulated questions raised by a Victorian Parliamentary Committee into Outer Suburban/Interface Services and Development. It noted first the difficulty of definition of the areas of concern (i.e. of suburbs) and listed many international references struggling with this same constraint (Cousens 2003). In the same year the American Planning Association declared:

We should be building a scholarship and a planning policy that is based firmly on suburban reality. First, though, we need a definition. The few thinkers who take the suburbs seriously are handicapped by the need to define the territory before every study. Economic development scholars like myself are limited by the lack of common economic geographical units to measure suburbs in this country and abroad (Blakely 2003, p.50).

*Landscape Journal* frequently publishes research into such concerns for accurate quantification, for example 'A geospatial approach to measuring new development tracts for characteristics of sprawl' (Hasse 2004). Ian McHarg (1971) provided an enduring model for systematically locating landscape architectural design intervention along with organising the planning and management of landscape uses. Much more recently the lure of statistical play and thrills of its bald revelations inspired graphic designers to cover *The Endless City* (Sudjic 2008) with some of the fascinating facts and figures which fill the interior.

In one respect, particularly important to planning, the history, theory and future proposition of suburban forms remains constrained by difficulties of definition and much is being done to find consistent and more precise methods for gathering and assessing data (d\_city 2008; Sustainability Victoria 2010). However these same difficulties expose more important problems in the form of assumptions regarding what data reveals of values and what direction it gives for action. This has been the basis of criticisms levelled at McHarg. McHarg's unrelenting rhetoric of values and his methods for translating them into design projects are argued to be problematic for two reasons. Firstly he fails to recognise or allow them to be heterogeneous since he speaks of all humanity (actually, 'man') as a homogenous group with the same needs and desires. Secondly he fails to consider that even the seeming comprehensiveness of his analysis and mapping system may not capture all important information. Principally and crucially

it cannot map the values which are his main interest; it only maps objects and materials to which we ascribe value.

There is much recent literature that investigates these issues, including the extensive literature of ecocriticism. In contrast to much of the prolific research and interest in biomimicry and the writings of Deep Ecology, Intelligent Design and other pseudo-sciences which continue some of the errors of McHarg's thinking—primarily that it is apolitical—'[e]cocriticism is... an avowedly political mode of analysis' (Garrard 2004, p.3). Garrard distinguishes between 'problems in ecology' (which call for scientific analysis) and 'ecological problems' (requiring social and cultural understanding), a formulation of John Passmore's much earlier publication *Man's Responsibility for Nature: Ecological Problems and Western Traditions* (1974, p.43). The same very helpful distinction might be made between problems of suburbs which are instrumental and constitute the basis of extensive Anti investigation, and suburban problems which require understanding rather than solving. Utopias bind and problematise these very two forms of problem.

Particularly since Andrew Ross exposed the 'perversities of environmentalism' (2004), others have investigated the nuanced and conflicted ways in which nature— and ecology as its study—have forged our attitudes and directed decisions regarding the design and development of land. Andrew Biro (2005) demonstrates that in its construction of nature and the human/non-human divide, ecology is not susceptible to the critique that it is just another construction, another ideological view, 'and this becomes especially troublesome when this scientific view of nature is used to arrive at conclusions in the social realm' (p.15), regardless of the ever-more careful, detailed and differentiated ecological intelligence being gathered by painstaking research. This is nowhere more clearly demonstrated than by McHarg's 1963 paper *Man and Environment*, republished and delivered numerous times as a lecture throughout America and overseas as *Is Man a Planetary Disease?* (1998). George Seddon (1997) recounts its delivery and his deep concern regarding its enthusiastic reception at a lecture given in 1971 in Sydney at the invitation of the (then) Royal Australian Institute of Architects. For Seddon, McHarg is revealed as 'the Billy Graham of the environmental scene' (1997, p.191) and he relates with wit and precision the absurdity of McHarg's anti-rationalism:

'Algae know about creativity but man does not.' My own preference is for Mozart or Einstein, but perhaps I have not met the right algae ... Finally we have to learn a prayer... 'a plain prayer... addressed to the elements, hydrogen, helium and so on'... However desperate the environmental crisis, I will not say prayers to helium (1997, p.194).

In *Large Parks* (Lister 2007), the premise of better landscape architecture, following McHarg, is outlined in relation to better understanding of constructed ecologies and the greater size at which ecological sustainability and natural systems work independently of, by implication, unsustainable human assistance.

In parks of smaller area in urbanizing landscapes, ecological structures and functions are often significantly altered... Such areas usually require intensive management to retain the ecology in place. Although ecological considerations do play into the design ... in smaller parks, I suggest that this is 'designer ecology' - an ecology that is vital, indeed essential, for educational, aesthetic, spiritual and other reasons. Yet this is largely a symbolic gesture ... to recall or represent nature.... Designer ecology, while valid and desirable in urban contexts for many reasons, is not operational ecology; it does not program, facilitate or ultimately permit the emergence and evolution of self-organizing, resilient ecological systems - a basic requirement for long-term sustainability (Lister 2007, pp.35-37).

Large parks, by contrast, are capable of such self-organisation, which begs the question of whether they need to be designed at all. It is also unclear what it is that is being sustained long-term. How was it recognised, chosen and preferred? And, especially if it's accepted that it will evolve anyway, why notice and value it above another thing or phase of things? Innocent of such queries Lister goes on to suggest that large parks 'demand an approach I have generalized as "adaptive ecological design"... large parks must be designed for both ecological and programmatic complexity, for both biological and socio-cultural diversity, and, accordingly, for all facets of sustainability' (p.36). She then suggests that 'over the past two decades' there has been a fundamental change in the way we understand ecosystems and that although there is an emerging discourse of adaptive management (and she lists other related terms used to describe this approach), 'there are few tangible projects' (p.36). She goes on to discuss Corner's Downsview Park as a 'prototype of adaptive design' (p.37). Her thesis and its relevance to suburb design are contained in the following challenge issued to landscape architects: 'How might an adaptive, systems-based, ecological design approach be applied to urban and urbanizing ecosystems, or cultural-natural landscapes that characterize this confluence?' (p.37). The further question that might be asked is why design should pursue such an application at all, given that all landscapes already negotiate and reflect such confluence. The question is not how ecosystems do whatever they do and how might that be imitated, but why designers should try to do it too and to what end might they do anything different to what already happens, especially given that what already does demonstrably happen (and has been painstakingly studied) is seemingly what is aimed for.

Just as telling as, and deliberately more provocative than these manipulations, is the growth of increasingly bizarre urban and suburban terminologies and monikers. This

includes a revived obsession for acronyms that would seek to allow for more precision, and also perhaps to assume the authority of officialdom, by conveniently abbreviating fuller description, although this offers well-exploited scope for satire as well. Such acronyms range from the reasonably straightforward, such as TOD (Transit Oriented Development/Design) to NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard), NIMFYE (Not In My Front Yard Either), BANANA (Build Absolutely Nothing Anywhere, Near Anyplace) and many similar.<sup>23</sup> Part Three of Alan Berger's *Drosscape: Wasting Land in Urban America* (Berger 2006) is a list of satirical acronyms. James Corner's introduction to the *Landscape Urbanism Reader* (Waldheim & Berger 2008) also discusses the proliferation of acronyms relating to suburban forms.

There are terms popularised by journalism that are deliberately emotive rather than informative. 'Sprawl', applied to the suburbs, is an early example. As Lieven De Broeck notes:

With the publication of *God's Own Junkyard: The Planned Deterioration of America's Landscape* by Peter Blake in 1964, 'sprawl' ... became a topic in urban planning. Prior to this, sprawl was nothing more than a latent phenomenon that had remained locked in the subconscious of the discipline ... The overwhelming ubiquity of the phenomenon itself, and not the pure interest in it, has ensured that sprawl has established a permanent place in urban planning and architectural thinking ever since (2002, p.21).

With the ever-increasing interest of not only urban planning in this now international phenomenon, sprawl has become—if it wasn't already—a value-laden, yet still ill-defined term. In attempting a distinction between sprawl and New Urbanist development Jeremy Meredith tries, with difficulty, to define sprawl:

The harms of urban sprawl are being articulated with increasing clarity, yet 'sprawl' evades a precise definition or a clear solution. Since some amount of growth on the outskirts of cities occurs almost inevitably as population expands, sprawl must be distinguished from the larger category of 'suburban growth.' Some scholars have likened sprawl to Justice Potter Stewart's description of pornography: 'I know it when I see it.' Other commentators have taken a more scientific approach ... First, sprawl has a low relative density. Second, it consists of unlimited and noncontiguous or 'leapfrog' development ... Third, under sprawled conditions, different types of land uses tend to be segregated ... Fourth, sprawl consumes large quantities of exurban agricultural and other fragile lands. Fifth, in sprawled areas, people must rely on automobiles to access individual land uses (2003, p.448).

Architect Aaron Betsky tells a tale:

Some time ago I got into an argument in a conference with a woman who by my standards lived in sprawl. Yet she vehemently protested and said: 'I don't live in sprawl. I know exactly what exit-ramp I take and when I get to my community there's a Starbuck's here and a Blockbuster there. My neighborhood has all the other things that make it into a real community. I do not live in sprawl.' This, I suppose, might be the

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<sup>23</sup> Many websites offer to decipher these, including: <http://planningwiki.cyburbia.org/Acroynms>, <http://www.planetizen.com/node/152>

motto for all of us... I do not live in sprawl, sprawl is elsewhere, sprawl is everything beyond my immediate experience (in GUST 2002, p.89).

If the suburbs are a confusing concept and moving target, now even '[s]prawl is no longer what it used to be' according to Edward Soja (GUST 2002, p.76) and the other things it might be have generated other names. Dolores Hayden's *A Field Guide to Sprawl* (2004) is a visual dictionary of descriptive and slang terms for 'suburbs' from 'alligator' to 'zoomurb', although ultimately it is less about active sprawl or whole suburbs than limited and fixed instances of particular forms to be found within them. The book begins with a declaration: 'Words such as city, suburb, and countryside no longer capture the reality of real estate development in the United States' (p.7). The Ghent Urban Studies Team (GUST) introduces their *Post, Ex, Sub, Dis* via the neologisms that seek to describe the new urban/suburban forms of the contemporary cityscape:

Terms such as posturban space, postsuburbia, exurbia and disturbia are part of a dizzying collection of labels that may be further supplemented by expressions like edge city, generic city, city a la carte, middle landscape, carpet metropolis, the burbs, slurb, technoburb, superurbia, nonplace urban field, technocity, polynucleated city, nebular city, galazy city, spread city, perimeter city, citta diffusa, citta autostradale, Nowheresville, autopia and so forth (2002, p.8).

While most comment is focused on grasping the unprecedented growth of sprawling cities, *Shrinking Cities* (Beyer et al. 2006), the published atlas of a project and website of the same name, along with two books, seemingly documents the reverse. However in asking which urban areas people are leaving and why, *Shrinking Cities* reveals that people are moving from city centers to non-city suburbs. Shrinking cities are a product of the well-documented 'donut effect' and 'white flight' typical of America's 'rustbelt' cities and most familiar to landscape architects through *Stalking Detroit* (Daskalakis et al. 2002). It is the premise of Robert A. Beauregard (2006), and noted also by Waldheim (1999, p.126) that suburbs became a significant form of settlement with white flight after WWII during the cold war as suburbs would be harder to hit with nuclear targets. For Beauregard suburban development was always spurred more by nightmares than dreams. That suburbs grow because of the pursuit of dreams is argued to be one of their founding myths. The growth of suburbs represents a shift from 'distributive to parasitic urbanisation' (2006, p.xi), the result of practical government policy and economic strategies rather than citizen choice (Levine 2005).

Suburbs are global phenomena associated with the rise of global capitalism and a globalised market economy. However some have seen the quintessential suburban landscape as an Australian one. In 1952 Robin Boyd could say that 'Australia is the small house' (unpaginated). Fifty years later *The Oxford Companion to Australian*

*Gardens* claimed that '[b]y becoming suburbanites Australians fulfilled one of the great national goals - occupation of their own residence, on their own block of land and with their own garden' (Aitken 2002). Most Australians live in suburbs and both critics and champions largely come from them. In *Familiarity?: Re-examining Australian Suburbia* (Negrin 1994), the catalogue essay for an exhibition of artists in Hobart, the connection between suburban landscape and national identity was explicit: 'While the rise of suburbia was a feature of a number of modern cities in America, Britain and Australia, in Australia, it came to acquire connotations not present elsewhere ... it came to be regarded as integral to definitions of Australian national identity' (p.24). Resisting planning policies that encourage densification and infill development of older suburbs, the Save Our Suburbs group declare that 'the suburbs and environs of Melbourne ... provide the city with some of the most desirable living conditions in the world and a lifestyle which is quintessentially Australian' (SOS 2010).

Australia's quintessential suburbanisation may also be evidence of its attempted utopianisation. That is to say that the Australian urge to build a new life in a new land, evident in colonial histories of both free and convict settlement is part of the utopian endeavour to break with an existing system (Milner 2006). It is also evidence that urbanisation, moved to a realm of suburbanisation, has more in common with an architecture of landscape than with an architecture of buildings. This is partly a matter of scale. Suburbs are more extensive than their central cities, as landscape settings are more extensive than their buildings. It is also partly a matter of materials as suburbs claim more open space and 'nature' as part of their fabric than buildings generally can. But it is even more an issue of familiarity with inherent and irresolvable tensions in ideas about variously constructed natures and cultures. There is an inseparable tension too between the apprehension of a planetary landscape and its systems, and the recognition of many distinguishable, site specific landscapes. These tensions are mirrored in the critiques of a universally conceived suburbia, and the acknowledgement of specific local suburbs. Architecture too has grappled with the application of a style representative of universally applicable values (specifically the International Style of modern architecture) and the promotion of a critical regionalism of difference.

The suburbs have emerging importance in their own right, identified, celebrated and condemned in familiarly accepted terms, but they are also the default or implied unnamed space of a growing non-urban and non-rural occupation that cannot be otherwise explained except as an unstable, in-between, edge or boundary condition. Suburbs are important then because they cannot be ultimately identified, enumerated

or addressed. In this they are closely linked to the history and development of landscape architecture, particularly as a sub-version of urbanism (Marot 2003) and to utopianism through a range of experimental subversions with both intended and unintended consequences. The bewildering speed and scale of suburban development, the disjunct establishment of dwelling on unfamiliar territory in familiar circumstances, and the uncanny experience of founding a home in wasteland and deserts, connects suburbs with a critical avant-garde and utopian tradition of making strange that will be argued to be that of landscape architecture too.

### **LA is dead. Long live LA.**

*Landscape architecture is the internationally recognised profession with the responsibility to shape and form future communities through the creative combination of art and science. The importance of landscape architecture as an agent for positive change has never been greater with the environmental and social challenges facing the planet, individual countries and local communities. Landscape architects through their professional activities enhance essential ecological processes and guide development in a sustainable manner to enhance the diversity of the natural and built environments and to enrich the human environment.*

AILA<sup>24</sup>

*We suspect that landscape architecture's critical condition indicates that the profession is on its deathbed. But should we continue to administer care? Should we really desire to resuscitate the patient? Might landscape architecture not be a field whose time has come and has now passed? Are landscape architects thus like other defunct nineteenth century professionals such as farriers, wheelwrights, chimney sweeps, bloodletters? Has landscape architecture now become a practice of nostalgia?*

Heide Hohmann and Joern Langhorst<sup>25</sup>

The dissolution of certainties in regard to what constitutes suburbs, or at least of how to approach and articulate their problems or organise the multivalent problematising of their critics, parallels uncertainty regarding the role and necessity of particular distinct design disciplines, including landscape architecture. Disciplinary literatures of architecture, landscape architecture and planning note shared concerns of a failing effectiveness in control, and even understanding, of suburban forms and growth. These concerns are often articulated as crises and they note similar professional neuroses and cures to recover effective respective roles in directing land development. There are also shared ethical concerns—to balance often contradictory goals of economic and ecological 'sustainability' against the realisation of social 'dreams' that reject limitation—as well as philosophical concerns to situate sustainability against the limitless background of history itself.

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<sup>24</sup> AILA 2009, unpaginated.

<sup>25</sup> Hohmann, H. & Langhorst, J. 2005, unpaginated.

Architecture suffers perennial complaints of irrelevance, in particular with regard to later twentieth-century suburbs. 'While architecture and urban design are important in contributing to the character of the built environment, much of the decision-making about what kind of structure gets built when and where is in the hands ... of others, such as developers and politicians' (George et al. 2004). This is a point made often (Boyd 1952; Corrigan 2003; Dunham-Jones 2005; Weller 2008). Landscape architecture has been similarly slighted, by popular complaint (Timms 2007), professional critique (Boyd 1952; Carson 1905; Treib 1994) and academic censure (Lewis, M. 1999; Lewis, P. 1994) for its failure to be engaged, and even for results when it is. '[W]e cannot help getting the impression that landscape architects ... have little influence on initiating major changes in spatial planning in cities, in the country or in suburbia' (Deidrich 2006, p.15-16).

While the legislated preparation of subdivision plans by qualified design professionals may appear to favour the influential involvement of landscape architects, such plans are approved by local government planners in accordance with the planning legislation which they administer on behalf of all levels of government as well as other public, semi-public and private authorities. The legislation of environmental quality in this situation has seen the introduction of 'design guides' and even 'pattern books' and considerable ongoing debate regarding the interpretative skills of administrators untrained in design wielding the traditional tools of designers. The efficacy of the introduction of design review panels and reintroduction of State Government Architects in providing corrective advice is currently being tested. But what is 'correct' remains a discussion limited by focus on sustainability criteria determined by ecosystem service measurements as prescribed by planning requirements.

The challenges facing landscape architecture, often linked to those facing other design and built environment professions generally, have been articulated by many respected commentators and practitioners. Nonetheless, when a selection of these struggles and failures were gathered together in 2004 by Heide Hohmann and Joern Langhorst and distributed via email and the web, the reaction was swift and damning. *Landscape Architecture: An Apocalyptic Manifesto* (2005) is an overview of the state of Landscape Architecture as an effective profession compared to other disciplines, particularly planning. Beginning with the question 'Is It Dead?' it identifies six symptoms of the profession's 'chronic' sickness, and then 'dissects five of the most blatantly optimistic and most frequently presented cures', anticipating and countering hope for the patient's effective survival. Manifestoes tread a tricky literary path. This one generally failed as

an ironic attempt at mock despair, being taken at face value as an unwarranted attack on the sincere efforts of a profession struggling to reinvent itself in order to address contemporary problems. The negative dialectic that it attempted to engage in, identifying landscape architecture's role via negation of all the roles it is currently and unsuccessfully claiming—for example environmental and hydrological engineering, landscape art, horticulture, conservation biology, urban design, philosophy, and others—and all the roles it has assimilated over time—architecture, painting, forestry, civic design and town planning among them—was dismissed as unhelpful pessimism and cynicism.

And yet contestation is exactly what is necessary to a determination of meaning and value. *Agitation* declared that:

... in the US there is currently an agitation shortage. There is not much work that incites discord with the prevalent views held by the profession ... And there are few that feel agitated, or irritated, about this as the overall state of today's situation. The scarcity of agitation is agitating ... Constructive commentary and supportive engagement are replacing contention. Painstaking effort is made to arrive at complementary views rather than to spark conflict ... overall one can sense the growing belief that insight is best gained through balanced discussion (Inaba 2007, p.2).

Jeffrey Inaba's introduction discusses the misunderstood agitator—as too the utopian—as a negative troublemaker; 'someone who stirs things up to upset the status quo as an end in itself' (p.2). The agitator is understood simplistically to be merely unruly. Inaba also suggests a more sinister motive for such dismissal: 'Others abuse the term while at the same time renouncing it ... there are leaders in power who actively combat agitation at home that then agitate foreign situations specifically by exercising disruptive force in the name of stability' (p.2). The same might be said of critics of the suburbs as 'sprawl', who nonetheless embrace essentially suburban forms to advance their own version of residential and community design. There are those too who attack the opposition of some to predominant conditions, while advocating their own version of change, for example those who decry what they characterise as utopian ideas while repackaging them, for example, as 'futuring' (Fry & Willis 2009) or 'embodied utopias' (Grosz 2001).

An issue of the ASLA's 'Landscape Architecture' journal devoted several pages to letters in response to the Manifesto. They included one from Elizabeth Meyer who also offered a more sustained criticism via the development of a short essay introducing a course exercise for her undergraduate history-theory class at University of Virginia. Meyer undertakes a critique entitled 'Eyes that Can See and Hands that Can Make. A Response' (2006) which reframes Le Corbusier's 'eyes that do *not* see' (Corbusier

2008, p.145) With this positivist framing she risks a positivism which partly explains why she failed to consider that the manifesto attempted a critique that sought to make explicit what is implicit, assumed, repressed or contradictory in the claims and projects of the profession of landscape architecture. Meyer and the Manifesto authors are in agreement regarding what constitutes vital concerns of the profession. They disagree over whether the profession is fully aware and actively engaged in investigation of them. They also disagree about the value of different modes of altering, encouraging and provoking landscape architects to action and, finally, they may disagree about what the actual value of landscape architecture is.

The *Manifesto* debates revealed a slipperiness regarding landscape architecture's value as a profession certain of what it is doing compared with its even greater value as one *uncertain*, exploratory and liberated by shifting disciplinary definition. It seems that *both* the authors and critics of the *Manifesto* are trying to claim the latter: the Manifesto by showing how landscape architecture's confident, familiar and essentially conservative responses to problems have failed: Meyer by pointing out that landscape architecture has and is undertaking far more diversely informed and experimental work than the manifesto acknowledges. The former sees the issue of professional relevance as one of claiming a new significance through contestation and agitation, the latter sees it as one of reinforcing the work that landscape architects are already united in pursuing.

In addition to long-standing concerns regarding the particular usefulness, motives and value of design, as opposed to an apparently more simple, cost-effective, pragmatic, unbiased and demonstrably useful building or construction, landscape architecture must counter equally entrenched suspicions regarding the appropriateness and value of human intervention in supposedly natural and thereby automatically good 'green' environments. While a defence of architectural value in the construction of buildings and urban environments has been well-articulated, the arguments for landscape architectural value in construction of 'natural' environments have been made inconsistently and with much greater difficulty. The inescapable artificiality of designed and constructed landscapes struggles to be acceptable, while such art is a given, if not specifically celebrated, in other forms of architecture. This is particularly so at a time when threats to fragile existing biophysical and geophysical systems—or ecosystem services as they are increasingly known—appear to condemn all artifice as the intrusive destruction of a prior 'natural' condition requiring urgent restitution. That the suburbs have been argued as both more and less appreciative of nature than city or

countryside complicates further the ways in which landscape architecture is envisaged to best work there.

In the face of this prevailing attitude and on top of the usual accusations levelled at design activity as elitist and exclusionary, and in any case expensive and unnecessary, professional landscape architectural design has generally failed to identify and expose erroneous assumptions. These include the uncompromised benefits of the natural conditions of existing landscape systems; the possibility of apolitical construction projects and their consequently passive acceptance; the untrammelled simplicity of a purely useful project or universally agreed criteria of usefulness; and universally appreciable criteria of beauty. These assumptions operate amongst other continuing, if paradoxical ones such as the continuous improvement of best practice by technologies, the ever-consistent greatness of art through successive movements, and the possibility of sustainable growth. Rather than undertake the difficult yet obvious critique of these assumptions toward the revelation of design as the very activity which takes responsibility for researching, revealing and delivering specific decisions on matters which cannot be assumed or avoided, the defence of landscape architecture has been made with claims of vital relevance in two other key areas. The first is in regard to sustainability, specifically professional experience and training in the practical choice of materials and application of processes for greater energy and resource efficiency. The second is a claim to knowledge and experience dealing with a newly emerging concern for programmatic flexibility to adapt to indefinite and changing project and site circumstances. Both of these are applicable at smaller scales, but are more significant at larger scales of site selection, design, construction and long-term maintenance.

The first argument of sustainability relevance has been actively presented by professional bodies and is being embedded in their policy, statements and other documents and activities. AILA (like ASLA) has recently claimed a reinvigorated contemporary role for the profession in a series of documents that include a *Landscape Charter* and a *Directions Paper* (AILA 2009). With funding from the Australian Federal Government, AILA is also currently involved in the development of training programmes for members. Preliminary documents and a discussion paper for the *Climate Change Adaptation Skills for Professionals Program*, are focused wholly on environmental planning and remediation. While newly packaged and updated, such sustainability relevance builds on the traditional interest and skills of landscape designers to understand and manage environmental forces, larger landscape system contexts and ideas of ecological health and performance. It is an argument for the

practice of landscape architecture as an inherently useful, practical and even superior design discipline with historic experience dealing directly with issues of environmental, social and economic sustainability and with a body of adaptable knowledge ready to assist with our present pressing environmental crises.

A second argument for landscape architectural relevance equally references a disciplinary history of dealings with the complexity and unpredictability of environmental forces and processes, but emphasises the flexibility and even the indefinability of its design approaches as its particular expertise and skill. This newly revived skill in adaptive or flexible design has been largely disseminated by academics and academic-practitioners through publication and theorisation arising from studio and competition projects, few of which have been constructed. It is associated with the work of Landscape Urbanism and offered as part of a disciplinary reinvention, evident in the titles of key publications, for example, *Re-envisioning Landscape Architecture* (Wollscheid et al. 2002) and *Recovering Landscape* (Corner 1999). Landscape Urbanism positions itself as a type of interdisciplinary practice. Its rise is coincident with a general interest in interdisciplinarity, or as Jameson has observed:

[S]uch heterogeneous disciplines as psychoanalysis and geography, history and business, economics and engineering, biography, ecology, feminism, area studies, ideological analysis, classical studies, legal decisions, crisis theory, et cetera [now work with and borrow from each other]. Perhaps this kind of immense disciplinary range is no longer quite so astonishing in a postmodern era, in which the law of being is de-differentiation, and in which we are most interested in how things overlap and necessarily spill across the disciplinary boundaries. Or, if you prefer, in the postmodern the distinction between the old specialized disciplines is constitutively effaced and they now fold back on each other (2003, p.68).

The first claim of relevance then is that landscape architecture is essentially sustainable design as advocated by a scientific and analytic approach to managing environmental problems by adapting our environments more efficiently to our needs, according to principles of sustainable growth. This is clearly pertinent to suburb design and also to the paradoxes of utopian construction. The second claim of relevance is through an artistic and expressive practice of handling environmental problems by exposing, celebrating and adapting human wants and needs to environmental conditions. Again this phenomenological focus is significant for suburbs as sites of personal expression and growth and for utopias as projections of wish-fulfilment. Although often presented as conflicting approaches, there are clearly overlapping ideas and projects that partake of both sets of arguments. The two fronts from which these arguments have been deployed are, on the one hand, that landscape architecture is newly aware and active in its important role as either sustainable design practice or flexible process, while, on the other, it has re-discovered these important roles which

had become obscured or otherwise lost, most commonly in misguided service to Enlightenment or Modernist agendas.

The problems of the profession of landscape architecture and its disciplinary specificity have been variously conceived. James Corner identifies the three most common within the profession as indifference, political and aesthetic conservatism, and the mythologising of nature (1999, fn.28). These three are linked to the marginalisation of design as serious intellectual or aesthetic endeavour, its fetishism of fashionable landscape elements such as particular species, materials or features like rain gardens, and an emphasis on rationalism which is becoming more explicitly the success of economic rationalism linked to ecological performance.

Architecture focuses its attention on buildings. Private residences as well as local community facilities help define the character of neighbourhoods. The architectural expression of this character is documented by such bodies as the National Trust through the recognition and protection of exemplar, not only of architectural excellence in general, but of local rarity or typicality. Such recognition now plays an important role in assessing the allowable intrusion or alteration of such identified areas of built fabric; a particularly contested role in the development of residential suburbs. It might be expected that landscape architecture should have an even more important role in such character documentation in the suburbs. The garden is central to definitions of suburban character, providing the essential setting for individual, detached dwellings, as well as the network of public realm parkland and open space, including necessary road reserve and other infrastructure corridors that make low density settlement possible. Jennifer Atkinson challenges 'our customary associations of gardening as decidedly apolitical, escapist, or compensatory' (2007, p.237). Similarly, the suburbs as garden-rich environments may not be a neutral ground of apathetic or apolitical domesticity. She examines the common depiction of gardens in scenes of both utopian dreaming and suburban comfort. Quoting Tom Moylan who seeks to rescue utopianism from such escapism, she examples his applause of literary texts that expose 'compromises and weaknesses found within utopian dreaming and actual opposition – refusing the temptation to move quickly to a restful refuge (in one's own garden, by the riverside trees, or in some solipsistic cul-de-sac) and to forget the need for collective action' (p.238). For Moylan, gardens and suburbs cannot be settings for political action, which may explain the absence of critical design. By contrast Atkinson evidences the many emerging ways that gardens and gardening pursue radical agendas, including guerrilla gardening movements, which suggest that garden design has an emerging political role there.

Something that should assist in disciplinary definition and clearer arguments of relevance is the identification of arenas of activity and the materials and processes employed there. When the subject of the discipline is confused or even substituted for its object and objective, this is not possible. If landscape, as already the particular product of unique combinations of natural and cultural forces acting upon land, is the thing worked with by landscape architects, landscape *architecture* is the outcome. But 'landscape' seems often to be a term employed as shorthand for landscape architecture (Corner 1999, pp.1,4,5, etc; Stan Allen in Waldheim & Berger 2008, p.37; Waldheim & Berger 2008, p.39) and with this abbreviation, manages to escape the interrogation which we require to be made of architecture as the work of architects. 'Landscape' substituted for 'landscape architecture' mistakes the outcome or process of the design of external or environmental space—however intuitive or minimal—for the pre-existing, living, changing and responsive material condition of the land itself. Landscape is already what the accidentally and deliberately manipulated space of land is. If such manipulation is considered already the outcome of works of design, a discipline of landscape architecture must struggle to distinguish its work from the accumulated and continuing actions already in operation, and 'design' loses any sense of the distinction of a process under particular disciplinary control or one requiring particular expertise. In one view all those who act upon land to consciously change it are then 'designers' (Lewis 1994), and of all changed environments, the Australian suburbs arguably best reflect the ease and extent to which anyone can 'design' their environment.

From the beginning the ordinary Australian suburb was inclined to have more variety than anywhere else in the world. The houses may have been democratically equal in size and number of rooms, but every one was differently ornamented...Nowhere else in the world have ordinary people had so much control over the architecture of their own homes, and therefore of the appearance of the country as a whole (Boyd 1962, p.50).

From another viewpoint, instead of everyone becoming designers more or less conscious of the effects of their actions, nobody is or can claim to be.

In *The Cultured Landscape*, Simon Swaffield's text (2005), exemplifies not just the difficulties of, but the perpetuation of confusion regarding what is meant by landscape in relation to design. It is introduced by the editor as leading the 'first part of the book address[ing] cultural, philosophical and moral implications of landscape,' (Harvey & Fieldhouse 2005, p.xv) already awkwardly inviting a noun, rather than a response to it or action arising from it, to actively imply something. Swaffield 'discusses the complexity of landscape meanings and values' (2005 p.xv) beginning with an evocative description of a New Zealand landscape. He notes that '[p]ersonal narrative is a

common opening device for landscape texts' which we can understand to mean texts about landscape rather than texts which *are* landscape; that is, rather than landscapes which can themselves be 'read' for meaning. Yet what he goes on to say suggests that he does not make this distinction.

While landscape provides 'a framework for understanding' the world (p.6), a page later it is the varieties of understanding which provide 'a framework for different ways of knowing landscape' (p.8). Landscape offers 'a useful way, or ways, of knowing [and] a systematic basis for understanding' (p.6) essentially itself. For Swaffield 'landscape embodies knowledge' (p.6). He suggests that our understanding of landscape/s takes two forms, one involving the reading of known and accepted values, the other questioning these values. 'The striking feature of landscape as a way of knowing the world is that it fulfils both these conventional and radical roles' (p.6) In other words, an examination of the landscape—the creation of a particular view or views of the world and our place in it—can lead us to confirm what we know if our own knowledge is sympathetic to the views that created it. But it may also lead us to question those views if we have different knowledge and experience. There is nothing striking about this. The landscape as embodiment of knowledge can excite argument in support or critique of that demonstrated knowledge. There are perhaps two assumptions here that cause Swaffield's surprise. Firstly, 'landscape' is assumed to embody the lessons of an independent and sentient natural world trying to 'teach' us something. It is not a world constructed by humans with their own message. Secondly, it is assumed that knowledge comprises familiarity with a singular, monolithic, eternal and uncontested truth or wisdom—even if that truth is viewed in different ways from different perspectives—rather than comprising particular, contingent and essentially contested interpretations of what is viewed.

Others have recognised that

... [n]ature is always understood to represent the ideal state from which we have come, and with which, if we are to attain lasting happiness, we must again find an accommodation. A landscape then, is able to show us at one and the same time, both the tragedies and the irreconcilable conflicts of our present situation, and the place in which we might finally escape these pressing difficulties (Archer 2004, p.8).

Swaffield claims that '[l]andscape is therefore a multivalent form of knowledge ... It does not sit easily within any single discipline, nor does it offer only one perspective upon the world' (p.7). What is 'landscape' here? Landscape *architecture*? The way in which the word 'landscape' is used throughout as a noun when it is actually adjectival, obscuring a variety of other implied but unidentified nouns, only perpetuates the difficulties the essay would hope to shed light on. While this perhaps preserves the

marvellous ambiguity and variety of understandings of what landscape is—let alone what it can then be argued to mean or do - it serves only to further mystify the necessity of doing anything at all. As the constructed world, the landscape is a record of many different knowledges, holding the traces of many different ideas about and ambitions for our relationship with the world or the unknown or non-human nature. Obviously then, it can, has and will be constructed by a variety of disciplinary and other group and individual perspectives. Landscape has neither a singularly apprehended form nor represents a single, if multivalent knowledge. 'Landscape', if it is not synonymous with the world or with nature, must be properly plural, just as the multivalence of knowledge is properly 'knowledges', while acknowledgment of collective knowledges might then claim to be wisdom.

If landscape is as multivalent as the world itself, a mere synonym for it, how does it further knowledge? The value here of a utopian attitude, and the necessity of design to engage with utopian—that is, essentially impossible—proposition, lies in acknowledgement of the fundamental and unavoidable failure of any particular view to encompass the totality of the world's potential. It allows us to escape the self-referentiality of authoritative descriptions of the world, for an attitude encouraging further creative and interpretative options. Other, non-design disciplines such as planning and engineering have recently assumed something of the tasks of design by defining the designer as problem-solver, emphasising practical functionalism. The empirical terms of more recent 'critical' evaluation of such design work (for example assessment via energy rating tools) render it capable of quantifiable assessment and improvement which is reassuring and attractive to clients. That is, a devoted enterprise has emerged to analyse and 'critique' mapping and planning in terms that are already favourably predisposed to value them. Such critiques reveal a practical history of the mapping of maps and a pragmatic politics of the planning of plans via a process that is largely, however, itself uncritical of the terms of its own critique (Freestone 2000). Surveying, planning and engineering as makers of maps and plans might escape this further layer of self-reflection, but 'design' is always itself designed so that—for designers—the evidently constructed designing-of-design better avoids the dangers of empirical certainty. Ranulph Glanville (1999, p.90) affirms this, arguing that design as research circumvents the conventional positivist framing of rules as it must recognise 'the primacy and centrality of design, both as an object of study and means of carrying out a study'.

The problems facing landscape architecture are not issues of professional recognition or the difficulties of either altering or retaining existing landscapes, but are the

problems of designing landscapes. These problems will probably require surmounting the site-specific difficulties of a careful, informed use of environmentally and economically efficient processes and materials, drawing on both traditional and new training and technologies. But designing landscape requires a self-conscious application of these toward a statement—an offering—of other value. The mere difficulties may be overcome, particularly with the guidance of legislative frameworks, streamlined industry compliance and market packaging. But the problems of communicating other value will be correspondingly exacerbated, especially in suburban landscapes where a dominant typological view condemns all suburbanism as extravagant yet cheap, and at any rate unsustainable and shallow, and where the profession is held in little or no regard except as stylists or stewards, and often then condemned as upstart fashion slaves or geriatric nostalgists. The problems of designing suburban landscapes can only be approached with utopian hope.

### **From topos to utopias and back again**

*Where history has taken, I feel, a profound and tragic turn is in the triple error: utopia conceived as a sterile, monolithic harmony; revolution as a dogmatic commitment to total change and violent reconstruction; principles of hope and belief transmogrified into an orthodoxy incompatible with heretical dissent or critical opposition. Where history provides consolation (and I, at least, feel so consoled) is in the triple hope: when utopian longing is a supple, changing ideal of diverse virtues and dreams; where revolution represents a reformer's open-eyed recourse to a difficult path of fundamental social reorganization, without conspiratorial self-delusion and bewitching metaphor; and where, whatever the devotion to principles of political action and ethical aspiration, there is present 'the heretic's true cause' – dissent, tolerance and a respect for human reason.*

Melvin Lasky<sup>26</sup>

Melvin Lasky's understanding of utopia might serve as a constant point of reference regarding the attitude of the thesis to design as a necessarily utopian endeavour. A landscape architectural approach to suburban land development should do this: conceive projects that seek and actively engage in attempts to realise ideal environments representing diverse virtues and dreams while encouraging negotiation and design development of supple changing expression; be aware of the difficulties of this open-minded endeavour as a radical challenge to professional practice; resist indulgence in representational distractions, disciplinary self-delusion or pre-determined formulas; resist too the influence of private enterprise, planning legislation and government policy at all levels where the conception and delivery of such projects is obstructed and would be prevented by them, and finally; be alert throughout the

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<sup>26</sup> Lasky, M. 1976, p.xii

commitment to this process of project delivery, to the greater ongoing commitment to simultaneously exercise and encourage dissenting views with tolerance and respect.

More simply, a design process requires a simultaneous commitment to the realisation of an idea and openness to its modification or erasure. This tension or ambiguity cannot be resolved, synthesised or anticipated but it can be worked with. It can neither be turned into a method, as planning, engineering and even some educational and professional bodies advocate, nor left undetermined, as recent calls for open-ended or strategic design approaches encourage. It is essentially deconstructive and utopian.

Utopias and utopianism, like landscape and the suburbs, having undergone a period of relative inattention, are now of interest to many disciplines, supported by new cross-disciplinary journals such as *Spaces of Utopia* and *Utopia and Utopianism*. Monash University continues a series of ARC funded conferences, publication and research begun in 2004. The last five years has seen republication of Mumford's *The Story of Utopias* and a new edition of More's *Utopia*. Considering books alone there have been a range not only of anthologies (Baudrillard 2006; Noble 2009), but new approaches to the use and value of utopian thinking (Jacoby 2007; Moylan & Baccolini 2007; Roemer 2003; Rothstein et al. 2003; Spencer 2006; Wegner 1998;). Architecture and design too have re-examined utopianism and utopian projects (Busbea 2007; Clear 2009; Coleman 2005; Pinder 2002; Sadler 2005; Scott 2007; van Schaik & Macel 2005). There are innumerable conferences, journal and other publications, many prefacing their comments with descriptions of the very explosion of interest to which they further contribute. *Utopia Method Vision: The Use Value of Social Dreaming* (Moylan & Baccolini 2007) begins with a list demonstrating how commercial enterprise has adopted 'utopia' for naming diverse products and services, from clothes to financial services, from fitness centres to toy worlds (Dinotopia, Barbie Fairytopia) and much else besides. While 'we see this once-denigrated notion alive and well in the commercial imagination ... the idea of a utopian alternative in this world is condemned as sinful hubris, useless speculation or dangerous intervention' (p.13). Noting the many publications of David Harvey and Fredric Jameson the authors declare that the 'twinned revival and renunciation of Utopia' (p.14), encompassing not only writing, but other creative media such as film, offers explorations of unprecedented profusion.

These writings consider past framings of the value of utopian endeavour and failure, both popular condemnations as well as passionate support. Many find the inherent inconsistencies, contradictions and paradoxes to be not only interesting and useful, but germane to what utopianism is as Thomas More (2003) intended in coining the term.

Where newer writings about utopian propositions are generally supportive of their value and even view them as essential tools of civilisation and the ongoing operation and redefinition of civil conduct and values—as distinct from an established civilised society or Establishment—writings about architecture, by self-proclaimed conservatives as well as radicals, still often link utopias firmly with insupportable and irresponsible endeavour. Most recently Richard Weller (2008, p.264) declared of his own work investigating potential variations to the suburban development of Perth that it ‘is not utopian’.

In particular the dangers of utopian propositions have been emphasised more recently in relation to environmental rather than social or political constructions.

In many contemporary intellectual milieus the utopian enterprise tends to be viewed with sympathy and condescension, as the projection of the best qualities in human condition. The truth, however, is that the critique of the contemporary world engendered by the emergence of the environmental crisis has made us aware of the ‘human, all too human’ dimensions of utopian constructions, as well as of their close complicity with values that condition environmental deterioration, prolonging and intensifying it (Marques 2007, p.135).

With this environmental emphasis, landscape architecture and the suburbs are assuming importance over architecture and cities in utopian conceptions. Architecture and cities have already excised nature while suburbs and landscape architecture are seen to incorporate and manipulate it. Because architecture and cities do not deal with a ‘natural’ environment, or at least an ecology that requires saving from human intervention, they are excused from more severe environmental criticism. City density is also argued to be more efficient and have less impact on natural ecosystems than low-density suburbs, and buildings are considered necessities that cannot be sacrificed while gardens, especially private ones, can and should be. Suburbs bear the brunt of accusations of derogatory conceptions of utopianism. They are also linked to liberating schemes of positive utopian otherness.

Many who carefully examine utopian propositions, their varied contexts, diverse responses and sundry defeats, are not only alert to project failures, but also to positive gains made in clearer positioning of problems. They are also inspired to speculation on models for newly useful failures. Meanwhile those who condemn utopian ambitions on the basis of their own authoritative positioning of problems appear guilty of the very same utopianism they denounce. Echoing the Bruntland Report’s famous dictum to pursue ‘development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs,’ (1987), Australian Tony Fry’s ‘de-futuring’ (1999), positively respun as ‘futuring’ (2009), makes familiar criticisms of

design presumptions and 'preconceptions'. Fry focuses on how architectural utopianism has been criminally irresponsible in limiting future possibilities by making particular decisions now. He calls for 'sustainment' and 'sustain-able' practice rather than mere sustainability in developing a design practice that not only avoids limiting future possibilities but makes decisions that will generate more. That this was the failed intention of the design practice he criticises and remains a logical impossibility regarding his own good intention (to make any decision or choice limits future choice in some way) makes his own construction an unacknowledged utopia. Like Fry, Karl Popper's anti-utopian arguments have been shown to undermine the alternative socialism he argues for. Michael Freeman (1975, p.26) observes Popper 'committing a sin of which he vigorously accuses his opponents'. 'Popper accuses the utopians of rejecting certain sociological hypotheses *a priori*. I accuse Popper of precisely this error.' He concludes:

A strong case can certainly be made against irrational utopianism and irrational violence. But conservative scientism may not be the best alternative. We should receive political orders from science in a highly critical spirit. The case for utopian experiment remains. The case for sociologically-informed experiment is strong. Sociology and utopia need not be enemies. Science itself (Popper rightly tells us) calls for imagination and creativity as well as realism and rigour. We can heed Max Weber's demand for 'the trained relentlessness in viewing the realities of life' without forgetting that the same Weber wrote in the same essay: 'All historical experience confirms the truth that man would not have attained the possible unless time and again he had reached out for the impossible' (Freeman 1975, p.33).

A utopia is a place that can't be fixed but ever promises to be. To be labelled utopian is to be dismissed, and architectural heroism has been marginalised, if not criminalised. Yet suburbs may be best understood through the lens of utopia. Issues of suburban definition, quality, form and purpose are not merely comparable to, but directly the evidence of, particular and prevalent misunderstandings of utopia, while these are in some important respects interchangeable with a misunderstanding of design. Both suburbs and design have a history of failure. Utopianism redeems doubt and failure as critically useful.

Utopias are places that cannot exist. This is worth recalling as much discussion and censure of utopian thought and endeavour is devoted to projects which are merely ambitious, make claims for an exaggerated aspect of an existing situation or are improbable rather than impossible. But utopias are so radically different to the status quo that they depend on the rejection or suspension of what most people consider normal or achievable. It is the characteristic freedom of utopias that this suspension permits the entertainment of potential violence without evoking the least compassion. Their characteristic danger—their dystopian propensity—is that violence be enacted without restraint. Utopias simultaneously demand critical and creative thought or the

engagement of our imagination, and the disengagement of our easy emotions and ready sympathies. In this way utopian propositions attempt to show us an emotional reality beyond known experiences and expressions of feeling. The value of Utopias is not the projected value that would come with their realisation but the operational value of their otherness. Utopias are negative in their effects; doubly so, by exposing what is presently wrong and by hinting at what will be a failure in their own projected alternative. They show us both the shortcomings of existing places and systems (Jameson's first of two types of utopia; those which excise of a 'root-of-evil') and compel the innovative exploration of new places and systems (his second 'construction' utopia type) (2004). The utopian suspension of disbelief is difficult to maintain. Even those who see its advantages can slip.

Utopia has long been another name for the unreal and the impossible. We have set utopia over against the world. As a matter of fact, it is our utopias that make the world tolerable to us: the cities and mansions that people dream of are those in which they finally live (Mumford 2003, p.11).

Yet Lewis Mumford could also say: 'In fine, though this book takes seriously the literature of Utopias, it turns out in the end to be an anti-utopian tract, for in appreciating the positive contributions of utopian thought... [this book] was also one of the first to bring out... the essential weakness of this tradition' (p.6). What he examples then is the 'weakness' of utopian thought to realise its ideas. This is not an essential weakness however but the essence of utopian thinking. The rejection of utopianism on the grounds of a weak tradition of building utopias is mistaken as utopias can't *be* built. Mumford's anti-utopian confession is mis-placed. He believes his work is anti-utopian because he believes that utopian thought and its communication in literature and plans begets dystopian construction. But this is precisely what defines utopias, something which he demonstrates elsewhere. Utopias cannot be placed in the world. That is their advantage and their point.

Robert Fishman makes a similar slip. At the start of his *Urban Utopias in the Twentieth Century: Ebenezer Howard, Frank Lloyd Wright, Le Corbusier* he determines that three objectives defined the type of utopia he was looking to research: '1) radically original urban design; 2) a revolutionary program for social change; and 3) a sustained personal commitment by their creators to make the plan a reality' (1982, p.xii). He then describes and lists several other types and examples of so-called utopias that did not fit these criteria and which he did not consider truly utopian, such as utopian romances that were vague and derivative including the Citta Nuova of Antonio Sant'Elia, the linear city of Arturo Soria y Mata, and early work of Buckminster Fuller (p.xii). There were also various types of urban ideologies which advanced the interests of groups

already 'within the context of an established social order... to preserve and glorify an already powerful class' (pp.xii-xiii). These are represented by the ideal city propositions of totalitarian regimes, whether left- or right-wing, from Mussolini, Stalin and Hitler to General Motor's Autopia at the Chicago World's Fair (p.xiii). Another form of 'urban ideology' is represented by the essentially reformist program of designers such as those of the Bauhaus, concerned to establish 'the minimal standards of housing and urban life at a time when attaining even the minimum was an ambitious ideal' (p.xiii). Many of these rejected utopias have equivalents today. The last idea can be considered the same as presently dominant methods for pursuit of sustainability where a variety of reforms attempt to meet minimum standards, nonetheless considered ambitious, with no concern to encourage social change or challenge existing power relations, ones that actually prevent their implementation. Despite having made so clear a case for the radicalism of utopias on his second page, on the second last Fishman says that planners 'confront the question of values not as a search for some utopian harmony or in order to impose their self-image on others, but because planning can never be separated from consideration of the common good' (p.276). Here utopia is used in the pejorative sense that Fishman rejected from the start.

Similar to Fishman, Nathaniel Coleman (2005) champions utopian architectural proposition, defined as 'humane modernism' in reaction to Kenneth Frampton's 'orthodox modern', illustrated through the work of three architects: Le Corbusier, Louis Kahn and Eldo van Eyck. He opens with a description of twentieth-century modern architecture characterised by the history of CIAM. Its utopian ambitions went wrong because of 'a desire for order spurred on by supposed rationality taken to irrational extremes' (Coleman 2005, p.2). Throughout his investigations Coleman plays awkwardly with a twofold radical and reformist idea of utopia, sometimes favouring one, then the other. Coleman wishes to 'reform the concept of utopia' (p.2) going on to describe a difference between 'pathological' (p.58) and 'constitutive' (p.60) utopias as that between, respectively, totalitarian or inflexibly absolute and partial schemes. The reformist attitude and acceptance of partial or approximate schemes seems at odds with the idea of utopianism elsewhere expressed. The distinction between pathological and constitutive utopias is expanded in chapter four, with reference to Ricoeur's recognition and use of these terms (p.63). It is also compared with Lewis Mumford's distinction between utopian propensities to fantasise 'utopias of escape' and to plan 'utopias of reconstruction' (2003, p.15). These seem to be Jameson's utopias of 'wish-fulfillment' and of 'construction' which, for him, are both valid types. For Mumford too are they linked via representation. They *both* exist initially 'on paper'. 'It is absurd to dispose of utopia by saying that it exists only on paper. The answer to this is: precisely

the same thing may be said of the architect's plans for a house, and houses are no the worse for it.' (2003, p.16).

But if it is not always clear what forms of utopia are true utopias for Coleman, he does offer clarification on what should definitely *not* be considered utopian:

In my effort to identify utopian potential, I will show how distinguishing the concept of utopia from science fiction, futurology and technical utopianism, with which it is often confused, is necessary for an understanding of architecture and utopia. Throughout, I will argue that *architectural invention is akin to utopian projection* and that utopia harbors the potential to rescue architecture from aimlessness, obsessive matter-of-factness, or a non-critical embrace of global capitalism (p.6, my italics).

A distinction is identified between the concept of utopia and particular forms and modes of speculative future possibility from which he hopes to 'rescue' architecture. These attitudes can be seen to relate to those already discussed: aimlessness is a form of Non design; obsessive matter-of-factness is Anti conflict or the de-problematized acceptance of statistical or schematic framing of difficulties and their apparently logical and practical handling; while a non-critical embrace of global capitalism partakes of both Non dismissal of critical analysis and Anti adoption of the logic of market forces.

Utopias know their place: nowhere. Dystopias are the presumptuous upstarts; faith become dogma. The *Internationale Situationniste* picture the inherent radicalism of utopias, especially as applied to architecture and urbanism, and contrasted with projects of justifiable practical reform:

Until it merges with a general revolutionary praxis, urbanism is necessarily the first enemy of all possibilities for human life in our time. By accepting this specialization of urbanism, one puts oneself at the service of the prevailing social and urbanist lie of the State, in order to carry out one of the many possible 'practical' urbanisms... Confrontation ... is the sole criterion for a genuine liberation in the field of urban architecture ... Otherwise, 'improvement' or 'progress' will always be designed to lubricate the system and perfect the conditioning that we must overturn, in urbanism and everywhere else ... Medico-sociological banalities on the 'pathology of housing projects,' the emotional isolation of people who must live in them, or the development of certain extreme reactions of denial ... [represent an approach that] is building the sites that accurately represent it, combining the conditions most suitable for its proper functioning, while at the same time translating into spatial terms, in the clear language of the organization of everyday life, its fundamental principle of alienation and constraint (Debord 1961, unpaginated).

Descriptions of existing and proposed suburbs may be analysed as utopias are. As propositions they can hold the promise of radically changed ideas for a good life. This cannot be realised within the existing structure of suburban development but such proposition nonetheless pursue and expand our ideas of good and our capacity to imagine them outside that structure. Alternatively suburbs can be misunderstood, as utopias are, as already failed propositions under already known and accepted

circumstances, the product of irresponsible indulgences and greed. Landscape architects can work with the former radical rethinking of suburbs as part of a larger challenge. Or they can reject utopianism in favour of reformist support for incremental improvement of a structure that is thereby reinforced. In either case they cannot escape making choices and producing designs that have political consequences. Most commonly and perhaps most correctly, the suburbs may be described as the locale of The Great Australian Dream. But whether this is an unconstrained yearning for a good life set in the suburbs or the precisely costed desire to own a suburban house, becomes unclear. A dream or projected fantasy which bears no resemblance to possible reality yet draws continued strength from the power of its desirability is a potent tool that design forsakes at the risk of irrelevance. Utopias cannot exist and neither do dreams, yet '[u]topias are non-fictional even though they are also non-existent' (Jameson 2004, p.54). A design too is not a fantasy even if it remains unbuilt.

It may well be that there are no longer suburbs of the sorts that have been identified to date. There may be no more landscape architecture as we have known it or even environments with qualities that we have hitherto valued. We may fear too that we have lost hope in imagining, let alone achieving a desirable future such as the exercise of utopian thoughts allowed us. But in all of these pictures of apparent loss and crisis can be seen the lineage of past crises positioned and overcome, or repositioned and circumvented, as present conditions will be. The importance of problems with regard to suburbs, landscape architecture and utopia is determined by how they are placed, by their identification with larger competing ideological attitudes and bodies of work, and the competitive values placed on those. The next two chapters review two such bodies of work with reference to design. The first considers how the production of real estate advertisement competes with the products of design. The second considers how planning also competes in a visionary placement that can also displace design.

## Chapter 9

### Pretend and Real Estate Advertisement

Landscape architecture has been concerned over the last decade to discuss and develop new representational techniques that better reflect changed conditions and new problems in the design of contemporary environments. In part, in the tradition of the avant-garde, this is an ambition to reinvent the language of the discipline in order to reinvent the ways in which the world can be imagined, seen and experienced, as well as designed. For some, a new representational language is an urgent requirement. A new way to show the truth of site conditions and contexts is not only imperative but now possible with new techniques—for example, Corner's eidetic imaging (1999)—and new technologies, for example, video and other real-time and multimedia soft- and hard-ware as advocated by Christophe Girot (2006). These are argued to allow us to finally see and communicate complex environments clearly and comprehensively.

In the quest for newly revealing or more appropriate forms of representation, a distinction is assumed between images created in good faith for the dissemination, edification and revelation of the freshly available truth of landscapes, and those composed to manipulate truth. Manipulations occur within contexts where distortions are understood as acceptable conventions, for example road maps that do not show houses or trees although we know they are there, or with efforts to deliberately deceive, such as the images of the real estate industry anticipating scenes which may never eventuate as pictured. What Malcolm Barnard (1995) has pointed out is that there is no difference between informative and persuasive visual representations. In 'Advertising: The Rhetorical Imperative' he investigates the seeming contrast between images and advertising which are innocently and helpfully informative and those which are 'more suspicious and potentially morally questionable' in their reprehensible efforts to influence or persuade viewers (p.27). What he determines is that 'the supposedly innocent sense has never existed and can never have existed apart from the sense of influencing' (p.27). As Chris Jenks explains in prefacing the collection of essays to which Barnard contributes:

What we see and the manner in which we come to see it, is not simply a part of natural ability. It is rather intimately linked with the ways our society has, over time, arranged its forms of knowledge, its strategies of power and its systems of desire ... There is only a social not a formal relation between vision and truth (1995).

Similarly there is only a social not a formal relation between design and goodness. If the innocent eye is blind, anyone who can see, let alone anyone who creates and deals in images, is guilty of intent. All images—all representations—created by landscape architects are advertisements for something.

### **Branding architecture and landscape**

There is an extensive recent literature of architecture's contribution to the branding of space and place, from the design of iconographic single structures to whole urban regions (Borries 2004; Conley 2008; Donald et al. 2008; Dovey 1999; Florida 2002; Horne 2005; Klingmann 2007). Impulses to communicate through structure and decoration have always been part of architecture's explorations of meaningfulness. A collection of Robert Venturi's writings (1998) recognises the legacy of his work in recording and theorising the significance of vernacular and commercial architectures in their response to technological innovations in both representation and construction of buildings and also in their reaction to the International Style. But what does such architecture actually signify? The duck and decorated shed represented better experiments in form and function for the aims of American post-WWII consumer capitalism, and Venturi celebrated such experimentation as subversive of the predominant style of Modern corporate capitalism, itself originally conceived as a subversion of the ornate, cumulative style of Europe's bourgeoisie.

Lizabeth Cohen (2003) has examined the rise of American mass consumption and the presumption of prosperity and equality that accompanied it. She finds that the egalitarianism it promised—for example by the spread of affordable suburban housing—was tempered by failures of policy to consider women, African-Americans and the poor, and by marketing which targeted beneficiaries along class, gender, age, race and ethnic lines, accentuating divisions and undermining commonalities. The cover of Venturi's book pairs an interior detail of the iconographically-rich mosaic tiling in the fifth-century tomb of Galla Placidia in Ravenna, with an image of similarly coloured random computer-generated dots. The archaic and the up-to-the-minute, sacred and profane, can both be employed to serve the pursuit of saleable significance, regardless of the intended significance of the designer.<sup>27</sup>

The desire for differentiation and for meaningfulness itself, rather than any particular meaning, operates in the same way that Pierre Bourdieu (1984) describes the desire to acquire a prestigious state of tastefulness rather than exercise taste. Such covetous

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<sup>27</sup> Compare Lears, J. 1995. He sees advertising as one of creative efforts to expand rather than fix the imaginative capacities of consumers.

desire drives the branded experience economy that launched the careers of starchitects, a term invented by journalists to simultaneously promote and lampoon. Starchitects are hired less for the buildings they will design than because their reputations assist in the development and approvals processes long before any design commences. Their clients are not paying for architecture, let alone a building, nor do they even buy the anticipated experience of the physical creation to come. They purchase, and sell on, the guarantee of a great building long before its formal conception is even toyed with. They invest in the sure-bet gamble of a future discovery of potential that architects will realise for the site. Indeed they have already realised it by being contracted.

The discovery of potential—that is, the dual ability to frame a dream on the one hand and capitalise on selling it on the other—drove the discovery of land for colonial empires, as well as suburban subdivision, as it does the discovery of any new markets for capital. John Locke ‘the philosopher who probably had the greatest influence on the men who founded the American republic, added economic specificity to [the] utilitarian concept of space’ (Marx 1991, p.65). Leo Marx explains that Locke’s famous statement, ‘In the beginning, all the world was America,’ is typically quoted out of context, admitting he has done so himself. This has led to

the misleading implication that Locke was calling attention to the general resemblance between the uncolonized state of North America and the prehistoric state of the world. Locke's actual point in the chapter 'Of Property' in his widely read *Second Treatise on Civil Government* (1690), however, is far more specific and revealing; namely, that incorporation into an economy, or commodity exchange, is a necessary precondition for imparting value to anything, including land ... [H]e was able to contemplate the possibility, unimaginable in Europe, that fertile, habitable land could be so abundant as to lack value. The importance of this commodity-exchange facet of the American ideology of space cannot be exaggerated (p.65).

Julia Horne (2005) focuses on the history of discovery of Australian nature predominantly through access to and advertisement of its mountains, caves and wet, ferny forests, rather than the desert and arid plains which cover a larger portion of the continent. More recently, even these latter places are made attractive icons of an Australian uniqueness of character, utilised in car, airline and other product advertisements as well as advertisements for themselves in their offer of a special experience of place. In this, they tap into the core lure of advertising; the offer of experience rather than the offerings of objects or services. Suburban real estate employs this same appeal.

Catherin Bull (2002) has promoted the role of landscape architects in providing tourists with access to the experience of Australia’s landscapes. One of several motifs of her

theme of a conversation with landscape involves familiarity. The value of experience and desire for experiences are bound in contradictory ways with familiarity and novelty, knowledge and the unknown. Bull notes that the Australian bush and outback have been called 'formless, colorless or monotonous, plain and unknowable' (p.20). However 'the use of such derogatory adjectives to describe the bush landscape ... cannot merely be credited to those ignorant of such things' (p.21), meaning, presumably, to those unfamiliar with experience of the bush or of its biological diversity and ecological value. This seems to contradict the assumption that familiarity will breed comfortable acceptance, even though shortly after we are told of pioneer landscape architects who 'presented unusual indigenous plants in designed landscapes in ways that people could relate to and, through that relationship, become familiar with' (p.21). Perhaps it is the unfamiliar, framed within the familiar, that is the point here, but if indeed the bush will never, in its natural or unmediated form, be acceptable to civilisation we can only conclude that any conversation we record is one of persuasion on the part of humans and submissive alteration and adaptation on the part of nature. Or in other words, as with earlier examples of conversations, it is an exchange of our own one-sided scripting, another example of the pathetic fallacy.

Later this is made explicit: 'The designed landscape is used as a means by which to achieve a greater acceptance of the qualities and value of the bush, through its artful interpretation ... the familiarisation that follows is crucial to acceptance of the bush as a valid ... part of Australia's settled landscape' (p.22). And again: '... appreciation could be encouraged through the day-to-day familiarity of those who lived there with the artfully presented nature of the place' (pp.25-26). And yet again: 'the design proposes that familiarisation encourages appreciation and acceptance of local nature' except that this artful landscape is now surely not 'the bush' (31). This much is admitted a few pages on: 'Although they appear more nature than artefact, these designed landscapes are artful in the extreme' (p.36). Not only is the vaunted conversation with landscape shown to be a deceptive ventriloquism, it doesn't even necessarily work. We learn that '[d]espite the efforts made by planners and landscape architects ... to make settlements that were responsive to the unique qualities of places' they often failed (p.38).

The most interesting observation, not pursued, is the suggestion that the Australian landscape may be essentially unknowable. Chapter three 'Beyond the Black Stump'—where dead men lie—begins with evocative descriptions of an alien and challenging landscape of 'mythic and unknowable power' (p.38). In a string of conflicting comments, she suggests that, despite being the subject of popular tales, stories and

paintings, harsh desert landscapes were not valued. Perhaps they were not valued as non-desert landscapes were. She further suggests that ‘these landscapes had to wait until the middle of the twentieth century’ to be represented in ‘compelling and interesting ways’, even though they had inspired considerable creative work and even though the emptiness recalls much earlier uncanny fascinations with similar spaces (p.38). Anthony Vidler (2000) relates a history of spatial anxieties and phobias from before the seventeenth century to the present day, developing a concept of ‘warped space’ that he links to recent architectural experiments in digitisation and virtual reality. He recalls Pascal’s ‘eternal silence of these infinite spaces,’ uncovering a phobia that cannot be explained by the accumulated myths of runaway carriages, but rather by the fact of his being a philosopher, ‘a scientific spirit who searches for the truth of phenomena with a sense of the powerlessness of science to discover the essential secret of the universe’ (p.22).

Bull continues, with no acknowledgment of this history, suggesting that we now value such landscapes because they are recognised as metaphors for ‘the contemporary human condition ... capturing and communicating the prevailing insecurities and unease of our time’ (2002, p.38). Tellingly ‘[t]hese qualities have attracted new *users* to the remote parts of Australia ... tourists, who come in their masses to explore and experience the intractability of these environments’ (p.39). But they are not so intractable as to disallow exploration by the masses. As she notes ‘the previously unknown became known, even iconic’ (p.39). More correctly, such landscapes were well known as unknowable and were already icons of such a state. They became packagable. Clearly, the value of experience can be translated into a money amount, bound to a concept of usefulness for paying users.

Lucas Conley (2008) considers branding an illness. He distinguishes branding from advertising, considering packaging, or rather re-packaging, as a substitute for new ideas or product innovation. There is an implication that advertising may be fair dissemination of information about new ideas and product something shown by Barnard to be impossible. Yet it is a distinction that President Obama made in a speech just prior to the launch of the book’s paperback edition.

We’ve become accustomed to our economic dominance in the world, forgetting that it wasn’t reckless deals and get-rich-quick schemes that got us there; but hard work and smart ideas – quality products and wise investments (Obama 2009).

In fact it was, strictly speaking, not the ideas themselves, but ownership of them—and the brand is the stamp of ownership—which brought America prosperity. Economic dominance is not directly correlated to the development of ideas, but to the control of

economies. 'So we started taking shortcuts. We started living on credit, instead of building up savings' (Obama 2009). Viewed another way, bourgeois America, like bourgeois Europe and other empires before it, ran out of territory and markets. 'We saw businesses focus more on rebranding and repackaging than innovating and developing new ideas and products that improve our lives.' What is unclear and always controlled by advertising are the terms of improvement for a better quality of life. For many the diversions and satisfactions of packaging are real enough. The effects of good branding are positive affects. In its own terms, branding does improve lives. Art for art's sake is no different to branding for branding's sake, architecture for architecture's sake or nature for nature's sake. They all have value and truth within their own value-systems, conceived to be more valuable and truthful than other value-systems or truth-claims. Neither branding nor advertising intend to advance a discussion of what a good or bad product or service is beyond their own terms. 'Today, anything with a brand name is vulnerable and anything without one is an opportunity' (Conley 2008, p.3). The proliferation of terms—for suburbs, for landscape architecture and for utopias—is an exploitation of opportunities to brand.

For Bull the qualities of the landscape 'attracted new users' as opposed to new admirers (2002, p.39). The trivialising picturesqueness she condemns is indistinguishable from the picture-photograph-worthiness she appears to extol. Again, there is nothing here that would have surprised the eighteenth century landscape connoisseur for whom the frisson of the unexpected, carefully documented and even iconically revered was an anticipated delight of travel. It is not necessary or correct to credit 'pioneering artistic explorations of the previous generations of abstract painters' with making the awesome power of Australian landscapes popular, for the same market forces that made their strange and unfamiliar works attractive to art collectors, made strange, unfamiliar landscapes attractive too. One could as easily say tourism fed a hunger for representations of landscape features transforming them into iconic works of art as say painters made landscape features iconic works of nature.

The distinction between good information and bad advertising, faithful representation and exploitative illustration, characterisation and caricature, treads a line claiming to separate essentialism from reductionism, and it is followed closely by moral claims distinguishing art from pornography. Martin Walch (2005) adopts the term 'nature-porn' to warn against exploitive representations of nature. 'There are no moral or intellectual rights to protect the integrity of natural subjects being represented ... There is presently no way of ensuring the subject will not be misrepresented, and the viewer lied to.' Yet who determines what this integrity is and was there ever a secure claim to

representational truth? 'The nature-pornographers have rapidly appropriated the stylistic conventions and compositional devices originally developed by artists in the fields of landscape painting and photography ... without concern for the ethical stance of those that established the genre.' The stance of landscape painters, photographers and architects was one which had readily served landed gentry and a continuing clientele of the wealthy and powerful. Walch contrasts money-making motives from awareness-raising ones via an appeal to inherent value linked to sustainability 'of both the environment and humanity.' Although independent of the viewer, nature's inherent values require representations of 'integrity' as 'primary forces' to persuade us of their value. Human representations of nature secure a particular value in the service of a particular view. What is the nature we see 'beyond the camouflaged Nature of nature-porn'? Nature-porn 'deliver[s] the natural world to the public as a commodity' although it is not explained in what entirely non-commodifiable ways it might otherwise be (re)presented. That nature-porn is thought to substitute manipulative experience for accurate representation 'is simply compounding the problem'. This cannot be the problem of understanding our unmediated experiences, as representations are not only an indispensable aid to making sense of them but also essential to communicating them. In contrast, for Walch it is essential to maintain a 'critical awareness of nature-porn as an active modifier of our relationship with the natural environment'. Given we already have a relationship, where or how can a primal or unmodified one be rediscovered and re-inscribed? Should we not critically examine *all* awareness and the assumptions built into all relationships? The line between true and false representation is not something that can be found but must be and is always made.

Anna Klingmann's *Brandscapes: Architecture in the Experience Economy* (2007) argues that branding can be employed by architects, not as a selling tool but as a strategic tool to effect economic and cultural transformations. However branding is already a strategic tool for selling and the selling point is economic and cultural transformation. Just as there is no difference between informative and persuasive images there is no difference between branding as a tool for selling or as a tool for transformations that both promote selling and result from it. Klingmann sees a danger in the focus on branding single buildings rather than wider urban contexts because single buildings have encouraged a 'culture of the copy' (p.3) while branding wider areas will promote critical examinations of cultural differentiation. It may be easier to copy a single building than a city but otherwise there is no constraint to critique just because design moves to another scale. Arguably many places now copy others wholesale. She further suggests that the practice of branding she advocates will avoid the commodification of experience resulting from a homogenisation of place. Branding

is differentiation and 'it falls to architects to infuse an ever more aseptic landscape with authentic transformations' that also, significantly, are for sale (p.322). As she has already explained, the object is not longer the commodity. In the Experience Economy, the experience is, and architects therefore aid rather than escape commodification in providing novel experiences of place. Klingmann offers no discussion of the aim or value of experiences. All experience is desirable if it is promoted as being distinct from experiences already available; that is, if it has novelty. Noting her 'rigorously jaundiced eye' Michael Sorkin seems to suggest that Klingmann is aware of the irony of her appeal to branding to provide the very thing that the object it promotes—the architecture—is to provide. Yet her target audience—architects—are unlikely to feel encouraged by this while their clients would probably prefer any ironic detachment be kept quite from their own customers.

### **Time**

The packaging and presentation of constructed or natural landscape features for tourism or other consumption is a similar process to their promotion as desirable features of a potential place of residence. The immediately available stimulations of incorporated or near-by natural and pre-settlement attractions—often recreated or rejuvenated—are a constant feature of recent subdivision estate advertising. The most common and most important factor used in advertisements to promote the desirability of specific suburban estates after their landscape's relationship with nature is their relationship with time. This is used to differentiate and universalise landscape values to exploit advantages of speed and proximity as well as the attractions of taking your time. Two half-page advertisements sharing a page of the real estate supplement for the Hume Leader (covering Melbourne's north) evidence this. The upper page advertorial alerts readers to the 'Push on Eynesbury development' where the new director 'wants to accelerate the delivery of the project's town centre' and is 'looking at speeding up the rate' at which it develops (*Hume Leader Real Estate Supplement*, 9 Feb. 2010, p.67). The lower page shows a gently dusk-lit field where a woman and boy are spreading a billowing tablecloth. It begins: 'Where life and love can gently unfold ... If you like things slow, the way Nature does, Providence could be just what you're looking for. Here, Sunday lunch with friends and family can, quite unexpectedly, turn into sunset teas' (Plate 1). Strange things happen to the time-space continuum in the suburbs. The development company *Stockland* regularly features different aspects of time in its advertisements. Its *Highlands* estate in Craigieburn is 'Just moments from the rolling parklands of Norval Green ... only 30 minutes from the Melbourne CBD' (2005, *Northern Property News*, 15 Aug., p.15) while a little to the east at the

*Hawkstowe* estate 'there are endless opportunities to relax, discover or simply enjoy time with family and friends' (Plate 2).

The city is fast, the country slow, but the in-between suburbs pulse with the benefits of both. The commonly referenced middle landscape of the aspiring middle class is shown as a realm between times, even beyond time. Emptying urban centres and swallowing rural farmland, fed by the contrasts of continually obliterated adjacency, suburbia is both the floating dreamscape and groundless nightmare of real estate promotion. Timely and timeless it offers a breathless proximity to surrounding landscapes 'just moments', or 'only' short trips from city and countryside. Yet within its airy realm there are 'endless opportunities to relax'. The well-designed suburb is one where you 'discover', as well as 'simply enjoy', time. On the one hand, suburbia is condemned as the realisation of backwards visions of unsustainable, variously failed, stalled and stagnant pastoral utopias. On the one hand the relentless spread of suburban estates, uncontained by the planned efforts of urban growth boundaries, green wedges or rings, is a development phenomenon that has been accomplished with a swiftness unprecedented in the history of human settlement. Its developers offer it as the reinvented Eden of healthy living, where an ever-new, more accessible and equitable range of technological refinements for environmentally sensitive, indeed recuperated and enhanced landscape and lifestyle options is enacted.

Both advertising and suburb design create their own times. The images and text of advertisements, as of material prepared by designers for client meetings and even planning approvals, employ common strategies and techniques to portray time. They attempt to particularise the advantages of each residential subdivision by characterising its special relationship to time through various manifestations of timeliness and timelessness of life on that estate. Advance advertising for estates, for which landscape architects supply draft design proposals if not the images themselves, pre-empts the actual work of designing the future physical fabric of suburbia. Expectations for delivery of both operational and visual aspects of estate landscapes are determined by their advertising. The design of time necessarily considers the possibilities and purposes of ordering space to figure time, employing invented explanatory and exploitive uses of time.

Real estate advertisement generally portrays time in two ways: timely and timeless. Timely time is empirically measurable, translating the effort of tasks and actions—car travel, shopping, home loan repayment—into terms of the universal clock and calendar. It relates the space of the estate to the wider space and context of services and

facilities surrounding it. It includes all the persuasive facts of definite minutes, hours, days and years along with marvellous data of statistical agglomeration—numbers of events in given time spans across given areas—such as those that evidence the fastest-growing, selling or improving area. This is time as speed and sprawl, demonstrated with up-to-the-minute technologies and statistics. This measurable way of revealing time argues for timeliness and lends itself to predominantly textual expression. Occasionally, abstracted maps emphasise proximity and images support claims of adjacencies utilising views not actually available within the estate. Even though they have the weight of pseudo-scientific, impersonal conviction, and even excusing the emphasis of evident distortions, such measurements are, however, still only expectations rather than certainties. (Plate 3 offers a rare glimpse of the messy realities of landscape construction.) They are future probabilities of how fast things will sell, how quickly you can get somewhere or how large will be your investment return. They are not guarantees and most advertising carries disclaimers to this effect.

The other way time is portrayed concerns space internal to the estate itself. It is experiential time, relative to unnamed, undescribed rival estates, comparable to a range of attractive historical precedents yet immeasurable in its essential quality: timelessness. If the first way presents savings of measurable, translatable time-as-money, this way presents priceless time. This second type of time is what the sale of the suburbs really deals in. For all its time-saving and space-rich conveniences what the advertising of suburbs has always sold is a dream (Plates 4-7). The speed of development, urgency of involvement, pressure of limited offers and fast sales contrasts with a space where there is ample time to watch the grass and children grow. This is time in slow motion, hazy images and stretched sound (Plates 8, 9, 10). Ready relaxation and tranquillity are key qualities within the space of the estate. Relaxation is inescapable in the romantic half-light of dawn or dusk when streetlights and sky slowly trade intensity and colour. We half-remember, as kids, our dormitory suburbs coming alive in the early morning with the steamy light of frosted bathroom windows and at evening with the lace-curtain flickering of television screens. But a gorgeous sunset sky or its reflected glow in a glass of wine better suits saleable nostalgia for what we—or rather our parents—never actually experienced (Plates 10-13). More accurately, these are pre-packaged future memories.

A non-specific special place of calm is 'waiting', suspended in time for 'you', although as anyone who can afford it will do as well, you had better hurry (Plates 14 & 15). The special space of the estate is not just a place of sleepy time suspended in contemplative relaxation. It is even more popularly a place of critically suspended time,

a snapshot of heightened excitement on the cusp of release (Plates 16 & 17). There is something nearly erotic in the disorientating blur of context; a swollen, elevated suspension of disbelief as well as a frozen moment in time. Fathers mainly with daughters, poised just before flight, swinging loved-ones between security and disaster. Defying gravity is defying time, slowing or speeding the rotation of the earth (Plates 5, 18, 19).

One way to ensure the wholesomeness of these happy families is to give them the innocence of youth. Almost exclusively the families depicted are of two young adults, a man and woman, and two young children, a girl and boy (Plates 8, 20, 21, 22, and even Plate 23). There are no teenagers (Owens 2002) and very few old or seemingly single people. The depicted activities are carefully available only to neatly balanced nuclear families of narrowly defined age. Another way to avoid improper over-excitement is to depict reassuringly old-fashioned recreations, staying clear of troublesome, violent or antisocial teenage games involving new technologies and gadgets. The reality of troubles in new estates including graffiti and vandalism attributed to bored skating youth and their destructive addictions, is in another section of the newspaper. 'Timeless' forms of play abound in advertising including kite-flying, swings, fishing, picnicking. The accoutrements of these activities are reassuringly anachronistic if unlikely to be present: no developer for example, would provide a timber plank swing supported with knotted rope (Plate 24).

Finally, security is afforded by the heritage aura of good old Times Past, regardless again of how much heritage remains intact once buyers have moved in (Plate 25). The frisson of the frozen moment in time captures both the desperation and boredom of delayed expectation. Delfin's Caroline Springs 'Catch-up' campaign may be too clever, more confusing than ambiguous (Plate 26). The exclamatory 'catch-up' might mean either hurry up (verb) because you will be left behind, or it could mean relax and enjoy your 'catch-up' (noun) because you're already here. It is both accusatory (you have not caught up if you don't live at Caroline Springs) and congratulatory (it's great to catch up with people here). Juxtaposed with an image of the city, it is unclear whether we are to catch up with Melbourne by coming to live on its well-connect fringe, or Melbourne is being exhorted to catch up with us already there. Like most advertising it is a display of ambiguous urgency, a blanket emotional appeal to implicit insecurities. Without debunking, exposing and fundamentally de-valuing the regimes of time-relationship established by advertisement, designers are subsequently to deliver specific proposals for built form. On one level, they face the same difficulties in construction of arguments to justify their uses of time. They can borrow from advertising's timely and timeless

shopping lists of efficiency and beauty. On another, built reality has a habit of engendering its own problems, stubbornly ignoring the limited agendas set for it.

The two portrayals of time outlined above—timely and timeless—do not just apply to time in estate advertising. The advertisement of time-saving efficiency with its measurable, concrete, particular value arguing the choice of one estate over another is closely supported by evocation of the timeless attraction of abstract, universal value-adding experiences available to those living within the estate itself. Efficiency and attractiveness are also axioms of good design. The generation of design and development of criteria for its analysis and evaluation often consists in the variously contested weighting of the timely functionality of specific, concrete details on the one hand, against the timeless effect of universal, holistic significance on the other. Other criticism considers more closely the observable relationship between how things work and what they communicate in a limited context, and what they may mean or reveal within a history of aggregate contexts. The value of a specific space and time is ascertained through an apprehension of both.

This is in one sense also the interplay of ‘form’ and ‘function’. For some critics, as for advertisers, a project may look good (have mature trees, garden beds, wide roads or parks) separately from working well (having good traffic circulation, efficient drainage, easy service access) so the matter of functional design is largely determined by engineers, the issues of aesthetic design pursued by architects, all overseen by the requirements dictated by statutory planners. For other critics and more rarely advertisers, the good look of the estate is inseparable from good function (broad tree-lined streets supply a cool, quick driving experience) requiring a close working relationship between engineers and architects. The relationship of time to space in the suburbs is one of proximities and promises. The design of time then is about the engineering of efficient spatial arrangements—timeliness—on the one hand, and participation in the good life of good taste—timelessness—on the other (Calthorpe 1997). For yet other critics the compromises of prioritising how combined elements function and appear will lead to more complex appreciations of value and other layers of interpretative interest (Bogart 2006; GUST 2002; Lerup 2000; Stretton 1975).

Design endeavour is something other than the task of integrating timeliness and timelessness, engineering and art, efficiency and style, function and form. Efficiency and attractiveness might be considered the overriding categories of Philip Johnson’s *Seven Crutches of Architecture* (1997). The crutches are seven excuses for form-making that Johnson believes designers erroneously identify as their task and which

can be found in the arguments estate advertisement. The efficiency crutches include utility: an 'old Harvard habit' that proposes a building is good if it works properly; comfort: the delivery of good environmental control; cheapness or cost effectiveness: elimination of superfluousness; and serving the client. The attractiveness crutches are history: yesterday's good past design is good today; and pretty drawings: substitution of built reality for representation. Finally and most dangerously because 'awfully close to home' is structure, partaking of both efficiency and attractiveness. '[C]lear structure clearly expressed' pretends to be sufficient for the achievement of good design. Johnson does not say what design is, but suggests the outlines of its work by indicating what it is not.

Both timely efficiency of particular function and timeless attractiveness of abstract form are constructed—that is manipulated and manipulative—concepts. Their use and abuse is as inescapable for designers as it is for advertising. As there is no innocent advertisement or disinterested dissemination of information, there is no innocent, disinterested, and thereby good design. For designers the questions of imitation or innovation are two sides of the same coin of an appreciation of precedent, and a prerequisite for assessment of design quality. This is meant not in the sense that a proposition be judged favourably if it simply *have* a precedent—for all proposals do in many and various respects—or that if it have particularly glorious precedents it will be necessarily glorious now, but rather that its past provides comparative clues to the probable reception of similar propositions in new contexts, which can only be judged by their own future performance. In a letter to *The Harvard Architectural Review* on the occasion of its call for submissions on 'the use of precedent and the role of invention', Colin Rowe comments: 'I can't really perceive how your topic ... can very well lead to profitable dispute. I can never begin to understand how it is possible to attack or to question the use of precedent' (1986, p.188). His suggestion for an alternative topic is 'How does the new invade the old and how does the old invade the new' (p.189). This is a helpful reminder that the championship of absolute or relative models of time, as of good design, could easily presuppose no messy mixed alternatives.

Timely and timeless appeals are similar to advertising's newer appeal to usefulness and uselessness. In an essay in praise of 'Useless Landscapes' Chris Sawyer (2005) argues that these only 'apparently useless' landscapes are in fact extremely useful, providing 'very basic functions' (p.66). He characterises them as 'ambiguous' spaces of 'no clear rules', 'unregulated', 'loose' and 'wild', being 'about generalities rather than specifics' which is a condition 'intolerable to the market' (p.66). In contrast 'useful' urban space is critiqued for its emphasis on qualities and elements designed to

maximise the generation of revenue, 'absorbed into the economic function of the city, 24/7' (p.66) through the cramming of activities and events for consumption. Useless 'usefulness' is essentially defined by its money-making capacity while useful 'uselessness' plays no economic role.

At first look, new suburban parks—the parks and open space of estate advertisement—seem to be exactly such praiseworthy useless landscapes, promising communal, ambiguous, undefined opportunity for unfettered appropriation, 'to observe, to spectate, promenade and to wander' (p.66). Where Sawyer criticises the modern urban park for having become just a backdrop to money-making events staged within it, it should be noted that the admirably useless suburban estate park is the backdrop for sales of houses around it. The coercive spending tactics of market-sanctioned activities within urban public space have their parallels in the mere existence of suburban parks whose main purpose for the developer is to coerce home-seekers to settle. However much provision of parkland may be legislated, the developer's brief for suburban open space requires it to be designed and maintained at the outset to be effective for a limited time to generate one-off revenue from house sales. Once the developer leaves, it remains to be seen if such spaces can remain so attractive to cash-strapped Councils. Already there have been several responses to this dilemma including the agreed sharing of construction and maintenance cost with other authorities such as Melbourne Water, the formation of Friends groups and co-opting of sporting clubs who donate materials and voluntary labour, the complete redesign of parks, and even the removal of all maintenance-intensive or vandal-attracting features such as garden beds, irrigation, picnic facilities and playgrounds.

Sawyer claims that 'historically, public landscapes have been gloriously free of specific program' (p.66). The history of public urban parks as well as other open spaces such as preserved wilderness or those grounds serving quite specific primary programs—botanical collections, cemeteries, water catchment or drainage easements—was, from the start, one of contested rights of entry, hours and eligibility for access, strictly prescribed behaviour, carefully allocated expense, and variously organised sources of public and private funding, all requiring detailed design consideration. There are no useless landscapes—not because Sawyer is right or wrong about condemning remuneratively useful landscapes as 'useless'—but more importantly because there are simply too many types of use. If landscape exists, it is, can and will be used. It is then impossible to design useful or useless landscapes. Unavoidably useful to someone, there are then no landscapes that can avoid inclusion in systems of economic value. It is the designer's task to design, investigate and understand the

contingent realities of the site. They can resist some forces and privilege others but they ignore them at their peril. A non-defined need not be a non-designed space. Conversely defined spaces are not necessarily designed. The mere fact of usefulness or indeed uselessness is not a guarantee of goodness or good design. There are compelling reasons to resist 'cramming our public spaces with more and more stuff' but the alternative is not to design spaces that will be used 'in ways and for reasons not necessarily considered by the designer' and Sawyer's own work contradicts this in continuing to demonstrate the difficult diversity of his complex investigations.

More than the illogic of designing useless things, it should be recognised that uselessness itself is not necessarily, or even likely, to be subversive but has long been appropriated by advertising as a desirable and purchasable quality. Many people will pay a premium for the simple, basic and nominally free experiences Sawyer presents as somehow significantly distinct from those experiences offered by organised events. Indeed such 'general' experiences are more prone to the 'glib, adjective-rich marketing campaigns' (p.67) which he condemns than the succinct nouns and verbs of particular activities: drinking coffee, watching a show, riding skateboards and spending money. A praise of historic park forms of essentially elite culture is in more danger of supporting the hidden forces of exclusive, acquisitive capitalism than the obvious new forms of inclusive-by-definition mass-culture.

More cunning than either overt or hidden payment for the experiences of the space itself, are campaigns that make money from the sale of products and services only associated with the space. Billboard advertisement and naming rights are not considered part of design consideration. Whether memorial reserves named after worthies or their battles are more reputable forms of association than corporate titles or product slogans, their purpose is the same: a conferral of meaning and value which usurps that of the experience of the designed space itself. All products have a value inclusive of inseparable direct experiences and indirect associations. These are socially determined and may not be reflected in either the initial cost-price, or the sale-price, but this value should not be confused with 'good', although that too is, yet independently, socially determined.

Thorstein Veblen (2005) does not confuse, as readers of his often seem to, honour with good. A moral judgement of the excesses of the leisure classes is irrelevant to the social and economic power that society accords the 'disserviceable anachronisms' of their 'noble' and 'higher' pursuits and properties (p.96). Conspicuous consumption, like

conspicuous wealth, is demonstratively wasteful and, for good or ill, is vigorously pursued.

However substantial may be the merits of the contention that the classic lore results in a more truly human culture and character, it does not concern the question in hand. The question in hand is as to how far these branches of learning and the point of view for which they stand in the educational system, help or hinder an efficient collective life in modern industrial circumstances – how far they further a more facile adaptation to the economic situation of to-day (p.96).

That the classic design of parks or open space assists our character or humanity is similarly irrelevant to whether experiencing them helps or hinders citizens to adapt to economic as well as linked environmental priorities. Compare Graeme Davison:

[S]uburbanites themselves display a disconcertingly high level of satisfaction with their way of life. In doing so they often register their desire for values and conveniences that may not rate highly in the intellectual's scale of proper urban virtues, but which have more utility, even in an environment of recession, than its alternatives (1993, p.113).

Yet Davison then describes a range of quite un-utilitarian features of the spreading suburbs such as increasing commuter distances and smaller allotments. More disconcerting than the suburbanite's happy ignorance or rejection of 'proper urban virtues', is their uncanny ignorance of their real situation as Davison describes it. It seems it is not simply utility but something more compelling that must make the suburban home 'something to which most young Australians continue to aspire. It is a dream which the future may deny them, but which they seem unlikely to renounce of their own free will' (p.113). The suburbs may be stuck between the aspirations of lower classes for the conspicuous wealth of long-established, old-money material excess on the one hand, and the desire for efficient delivery of modern conveniences on the other. Or they may equally be offering what people want, regardless of what developer advertising, government planning or designers suggest they should want; an opportunity, despite all persuasions to the contrary, to pursue and craft their own dream.

Yet even this opportunity is appropriated by others to sell back to those wanting to be told, and then persuaded, where and how they can best do this. In January 2009, Delfin ran a television commercial utilising their familiar testimonial approach (Plate 27). The main interviewees were a young couple. The man declares: 'Rather than buy someone else's dream, we have created our own.' They stand before a project home within a materplanned estate. What can he possibly mean? In what sense can this be true? The intended implication is surely not that they avoided paying for their house and land or squatted and built it themselves. Perhaps it is that Delfin offers so much choice that the couple found or could customise—create—something different to the

stereotypes of suburban happiness represented by any other house. In one sentence Delfin confounds and reinvents what the dream is. There is another, more sophisticated and sinister possible message. The dream of this couple is shown to be exactly that: immaterial; all in their heads and their heads alone. Delfin no longer claims or feels it has a duty to provide dreams, or, rather, they have ceased to pretend to have any responsibility for the provision of happiness. By contrast The Pask Property Group's *Providence* estate advertisement declares: 'We don't sell lots of land, we sell lots of dreams' (Plate 7). Delfin just provides the house. The dream—the home—is up to you to make. By inference, compared to their courageous, destiny-fulfilling couple, you are uncreative and ungrateful not to grasp Delfin's honest offer to assist you to do so. But of course the couple have not materially created any of their dream and they have or will pay for the material house they inhabit, even if their creative imaginations are responsible for rendering it, in their minds and daily habits, a home. The designer's traditional role is to *embody* dreams, although it seems unnecessary to go to the trouble of providing embodiment at all—a well-designed product—when disembodied suggestion achieves the same effect.

Both advertising and design of suburbs construct arguments of timely and timeless use, presenting the desirable experience of proposed products, services or space. Advertising exists to reap the financial rewards of such argument as promptly as possible, for itself and its clients. Design, in the service of the same clients, must address the same economic imperatives but also seeks differently timed, usually longer-term benefits for more stakeholders. It will probably make or support the same arguments—efficient use and environmental comfort, cost effectiveness, client responsiveness, historically sanctioned attractiveness and structural legibility—but is unnecessary to achieve only this. More importantly its arguments make the motives of arguments themselves transparent. That is its empowerment: not keys to a dream but open access to dreaming. Design—and Landscape Architecture in particular because it deals with natural environments comprising objects and processes which are easily hijacked by conceptions of incontestable higher purpose—becomes advertising when it fools itself that good comes from self-proclaimed usefulness or uselessness. This is merely another naturalised construction, not a self-evidently good one. The works of design challenge the ever-shifting terms of timely and timeless use, while continually fighting for the usefulness of doing so. The objectives of planning to establish and administer agreed terms are contrasted with this in the following chapter.

## Chapter 10

### Design Guides and Pattern Books: Framing Work for the Suburbs

If advertising represents one pole of influence in the construction of suburbs, planning represents another. They might be characterised as appealing to fantasy and carefully applied reason respectively, although this may equally be considered inversely: the overt if benevolent control of professional and political representatives is a fiction while representative fictional lifestyles are the reality of market control. This chapter looks at Melbourne planning policy and tools including Melbourne 2030, in particular the debate on the efficacy of urban design and Urban Design Frameworks (UDFs) in delivering 'places for people' (Abbott 2006; DPCD 2009). It considers the gradual and ineffective privileging of planning over design and of planning department design guides over architectural canon and pattern books as a basis of UDF development.

In the last decade Melbourne's approach to resolution of suburban land resource and use problems has resulted in a range of changes to policy and legislative requirements for subdivision design. Released in 2002 by the Department of Sustainability and Environment for the Victorian Government, *Melbourne 2030* provides the still-current, if much contested and frequently adjusted, framework for Melbourne's land development. Other State Government Departments have roles in its interpretation along with local governments who largely implement State Government policy. The role of the Victorian Civil Administration Tribunal (VCAT) continues to provide a vibrant forum for debate on its application to specific conditions while industry bodies and diverse lobby groups continue to argue particular priorities. The difficulties experienced in policy application, perceived failures of specific legislation and the inadequacies of the planning process have been variously explained: a lack of detailed guidance and measurable targets, the necessary teething problems of new approaches, popular fear and misunderstanding of change, a lack of local government resources for proper implementation, and corruption and mismanagement of individual projects by responsible authorities and developers. However there seems to have been little mention that difficulties arise specifically and inevitably from the design process itself: the process that realises built form from articulated goals, however detailed, measurable or beneficial. The present lack of an effective design role for landscape architecture in suburban land development is one explanation for the failure of policy and legislation to deliver satisfactory product and, conversely, for product to deliver a satisfactory interpretation

of the intent of policy. There is always an intrinsic interpretative design process in the documentation and realisation of form for a specific location. The legislation of design quality is not possible although the obligation to pursue it is. Utopian ambitions represent exactly this paradox.

Since its launch in 2002, *Melbourne 2030* has been regularly reviewed and amended, particularly in regard to its Urban Growth Boundary (UGB). As a tool to limit residential land subdivision—‘suburban sprawl’ and its associated infrastructure costs and environmental damage—such boundaries have been employed in other cities internationally including Portland (Oregon), Boulder (Colorado), Virginia Beach (Virginia), Lexington (Kentucky) and San Jose (California) in the United States and Vancouver, Toronto and Ottawa in Canada. Since 2000 South Africa’s ‘Municipal Systems Act No 32’ for local authorities has required the development of growth boundaries, presently represented in earlier regional plans for Durban and Pietermaritzburg. Major revisions to Melbourne’s UGB were undertaken in 2005 and 2006 with the proposal of Delfin Lend Lease for a \$4.5 billion development outside the UGB, and in 2008 when *The Age* newspaper announced that *Melbourne 2030* was ‘now a stretch of the imagination’ (*The Age*, 4 Dec. 2008, editorial). A further expansion, announced in December 2009, is to be confirmed in 2010.

The first major UGB extension in 2005 was to accommodate further housing following an unpredicted population and building boom. The UGB was accused of unfairly and artificially increasing housing prices, severely limiting further industry growth and opportunities for consumer choice and affordability (Millar 2008). The same argument has applied to later changes and there is general admission that population growth has far exceeded that anticipated by the plan. Based originally on 1 million additional people by 2030, now ‘another 1.8 million people are predicted to be living in the city and its suburbs by 2036’ (*The Age*, 9 June 2009, editorial), almost double 2002 projections. Dr Bob Birrell, a staunch critic of the plan, launched a book with colleagues in March 2005 that anticipated the erosion of the UGB and flexibility of its principles and called for a fundamental review of the policy and its tools (Birrell et al. 2005). Along with pointed analysis and criticism of the failure of objectives to be aligned with any clear or specific mechanisms to achieve them, ‘Melbourne 2030 has little to say about the possibilities of innovation in planning outer suburban communities’ (Birrell et al. 2005, p.06-8).

Despite issuing an ‘Urban Growth Boundary Strategic Assessment Fact Sheet’ in March 2009 to explain the rationale, process and powers of the government in relation

to boundary changes, many regard the UGB and the principles it stands for to be compromised to the point of rendering *Melbourne 2030* pointless. 'Melbourne 2030 is stone dead. The trouble is we don't have a proper policy in its place, we have Rafferty's rules led by the development community, and the Government's just rolling over' (Michael Buxton in *The Age*, 9 June 2009, editorial). This is despite continuing statements from State Government that it supports the plan and believes it is being implemented. 'The Government insists that it has not wavered in its resolve to implement 2030, which seeks to check Melbourne's costly and unsustainable sprawl by setting an urban growth boundary' (*The Age*, 28 May 2008, editorial). While the weakness of State Government, and specifically its capitulation to the interests of road transport, land development and real estate lobbies is often blamed (Davison 2008b, Lucas 2009; *The Age*, 4 Dec. 2008, editorial; *The Age*, 9 June 2009, editorial; *The Age*, 19 June. 2009, editorial), the very nature and work of planning policy as written intention—as opposed to design demonstration through built example—is such that powerful groups are always able to argue adherence to the binding universal spirit of policy (sustainability) while accommodating variously framed truths and realities of the moment (affordability and the crises of economic growth).

Planning rhetoric is demonstrably central to the work of urban 'design'. In January 2010, Victoria's Department of Planning and Community Development (DPCD) launched an Urban Design Charter (DPCD 2010b). Its twelve Principles are comparable to the Principles and nine Key Directions of Melbourne 2030 and intended to reinforce the objectives and authority of planning policy. They are also similar to the Principles of the Landscape Charter of the AILA (AILA 2009). The DCPD Urban design Charter is concerned to address: Structure, Accessibility, Legibility, Animation, Fit and function, Complementary mixed uses, Sense of place, Consistency and variety, Continuity and change, Safety, and Sensory pleasure, and Inclusiveness and interaction. Melbourne 2030's Key Directions seek: A more compact city; Better management of metropolitan growth; Networks with the regional cities; A more prosperous city; A great place to be; A fairer city; A greener city; Better transport links; and Better planning decisions, careful management. Finally AILA Landscape Charter requires members to: value our landscape; protect—enhance—regenerate; design with respect; Design for the future; and embrace responsive design.

### **Planning and urban design terms**

The language of urban design as promulgated by Christopher Alexander (1977; 1979), Kevin Lynch (1960; 1984), Christian Norberg-Schulz (1968), Jan Gehl (2008) and new urbanists Peter Katz (1993), Peter Calthorpe (1997), and Andres Duany (1998),

amongst others, abundantly employs such terms as those heading the principles and directions above. Even when linked to documented project proposals or built outcomes, they prove to be utterly flexible monikers of intention and interpretation. Fredric Jameson points out the difficulty of mounting argument against the seeming logic of this language and the danger of accepting it. Regarding the writings of Lynch and Norberg-Schulz he admits:

It is difficult to argue against these visions, since such an argument would seem to stand out for ugliness and squalor, for lack of perception and so forth. But two things need to be pointed out: first, that this is bad Utopianism... it asks for resurrection without paying the price; change without politics; transformation by simple persuasion and common sense... The second point is a class one:... not merely... a class vision, a description of the way in which the upper classes... inhabit their spacious dwelling... not the will to restore my perceptions, but rather the envy of those full perceptions as they are exercised by another class (1997, p.267).

Deceptive reasonableness, like that of urban design, is challenged too by Peter Corrigan:

I will never forget hearing as a youth, one of Mies van der Rohe's mantras at a student party 'St Thomas Aquinas says, reason is the first principle of all human action. If you understand this you act accordingly.' This self-serving truism retains its relevance, but more probably the truth lies closer to Goya's 'the dream of reason brings forth monsters.' Or more simply, that the law of unintended consequences usually applies and asymmetry gives force to its own recognition (2003).

The intentions of urban design to build safe, legible, accessible, permeable, beautiful and clean public space, do not translate automatically into form. Gross simplifications of the effort required offer easy readings and ready approval for improvement schemes. Assumptions of the relationship between intention and form can employ, without irony, symbols of deliberate oppression as those of apparent philanthropy. Here the class envy Jameson notes is in operation (Plates 28 & 29). Footscray's former Angliss meatworks and abattoir site was developed in the late eighties by the Victorian Ministry of Housing and Construction. Leon van Schaik, attending a dinner at Government House in 1990 to celebrate its receipt of the Charles Joseph LaTrobe Design for Living Award, recorded his opinion of the design and the award process. Recalling the arcane pageantry of an evening celebrating participatory design to which none of the public users were actually invited, he also noted that:

The publicity handout itself contains written history and historical images that are impregnated with sympathy for the feudal estate and overlordship of William Angliss himself; this symbolism may have engendered the references in the form of the houses. Hardly a proper expression of the soul of participation ... Examine the architecture of this scheme ... How can anyone seriously argue that Federation style houses are representations of the popular will? And that some watered down reference to that architect-invented style represents for all time what people want and need?... Do these elements contribute to the well-being of the inhabitants? Or are they really the signs of

the users subordinate and uncreative role as the consumers of the process? (1990, p.71).

Is it possible to appeal to inhabitants defined in any other terms than as 'consumers'? If it is true, as Jameson feared and Locke believed, that there is no space outside exchange society, can architecture challenge at least the terms by which value is assigned and exchanged? The most potent term applied to the value of suburbs, agreed to by all political sides, is 'affordability'. Affordability is clearly intended to enable those with less money to purchase a home, or, more accurately, obtain a mortgage. At the same time the market needs to ensure continually rising prices to make investment worthwhile. A condition of uncertain financial and job markets, the trend for smaller houses, and increased government intervention in planning legislation all expose the conflicting benefits of affordability to buyers, banks and government.

Victorian Executive Director of the Urban Development Institute of Australia (UDIA), Tony De Domenico, contributed a column to local newspaper real estate supplements in late 2008 unintentionally exposing affordability's confused objectives. The UDIA exists to serve the interests of the private property development industry. The title of De Domenico's article 'Danger in Affordability' (2008) might seem to hint at there being no danger, or less, in non-affordability or higher prices, something likely to appeal to the industry. But he does not articulate anything so unpalatable to consumers and ends with a question that equally does not supply an answer to the many problematic scenarios it raises throughout the text. De Domenico begins by explaining the growing demand for housing, pointing out a 'production problem' that everyone 'will have to cope with – or not' (p.58). The first non-coping group identified are architects who, through their Institute (the Australian Institute of Architects) lobbied government to ban further subdivision in the outer suburbs within the continually expanded UGB, but whose arguments are 'so full of self-interest [they're] hardly worth bothering with' (p.58). Next he notes that many builders offer much smaller homes (not houses) that will fit on much smaller lots. 'Some would have us believe it's all in the name of what they're calling sustainability' as smaller houses are cheaper to run and generally better 'in the climate-change scheme of things' (p.58). The author finds the word 'a little overdone lately' (p.58) which does not explain why he disagrees with policy logic that has served the industry well in promoting its innovative new 'green' housing products that he has elsewhere championed (see de Domenico 2007). He does think that the argument of making houses more affordable (cheaper to build) by making them smaller is defeated by rates and service charges that are not more affordable (less expensive to run). The final sentences are intended to summarise the dilemma:

Also, the danger is that what is affordable today will almost certainly be affordable tomorrow and, unless great care is taken, the less likely it is to be anything other than affordable (p.58).

What is cheap today will not appreciate in value and will remain cheap and nasty altogether. Everything De Domenico suggests is a difficulty in continuing the multi-layered myth of affordability that has so far enabled the land development industry to continue selling property and houses in ways that sustain profit. What he has identified is the deceptive logic of affordability which has been forged by the industry to enable its continuance from the outset. He concludes demanding to know how his industry can be sustained:

But the big question is: how long can need and affordability be sustained, especially with a commodity like a home and especially in a market that depends on improvement in value for its very existence? (p.58).

The question might more clearly be asked: How long can the dream of detached outer-suburban housing be stimulated and prices be kept affordable (low) while mortgage banking relies on rising prices to maintain affordability (the profitability of the banking system and investment value of homeowners)? And a better question might be asked: Why continue treating a home, as the industry insists on mythologising it, as a commodity at all? It is a utopian effort to transcend such mythologising.

Specificity, authenticity and the concept of the 'region' are other key terms in the language of planning and urban design. As with American arguments concerning strategies for dealing with sprawl (Frug 2001), Marcus Spiller (2005), ex-president of the Planning Institute of Australia, argues for the restoration of effective metropolitan level governance structures to deal with regional problems unsuited to local, state or federal level regulation. The lack of regional thinking is presented as the cause of failures and confusion arising from *Melbourne 2030*. In particular Spiller believes that the social and environmental issues of suburban sprawl can only be dealt with at a regional level. But 'regionalism' is an ill-defined concept, one which has changed over time with regard to geophysical areas and one which has no legal standing or distinct jurisdictional authority in Australia. Its very vagueness has been suggested as the reason for its increasing popularity (Morrison & Lane 2006). Jane Jacobs has been blunt regarding the term's manipulation and essential convenient meaninglessness. 'A region is an area safely larger than the last one to which we found no solution' (1993, p.533).

Regionalism in architecture has enjoyed similar popularity to planning; that is, it has served to bring together diverse interests in potentially contradictory ways. The critical

regionalism of Kenneth Frampton (1983) that is understood to value architecture drawn from its context, was earlier framed by Alexander Tzonis and Liane Lefaivre (1981) as production which is responsive to but not necessarily consistent with its context. Indeed elements that distinguish themselves by their contrast with context are even more effective in focusing reflection on it. Jameson has critiqued Frampton's *Critical Regionalism* (1996). The idea of 'region' in America has often served to isolate places from each other, observes Douglas Powell (2007). Whether in the nostalgic celebration of folk cultures or the urban distaste for 'hicks,' certain regions of the country are identified as static, insular, and culturally disconnected from everywhere else. Powell begins his consideration of 'critical regionalism' with Italo Calvino's tale of the city of Leandra and the dispute of Penates ('who attach themselves to specific families') and Lares ('whose loyalties instead are to a particular house or lot') to claim to represent the 'true essence' of the city. Calvino concludes that 'it is not either definition, but the interaction of their definitions, that makes Leandra what it is.' Powell similarly declares he is not interested in answering questions of correct regional attribution, or in taking sides, but rather wants 'to suggest that it is the very asking of questions like these that generates the complex and variable experience of place' (p.33). Quoting Nicholas Entrikin on the 'betweenness of place', he adds:

To understand place... requires that we have access to both an objective and subjective reality ... More important, this very suspension, a tense and dynamic state maintained by the exchange of opinions, ideas, and arguments about the nature of the place in question, gives that place its distinctive character (p.34).

Authenticity is another slippery term in the rhetoric of Anti. Lebbeus Woods offers a critique of the 'authentic tradition' proposed by Leon Krier and other New Urbanists (in Aslet 1993). Krier criticised the 'pretensions' of modernism that 'talk about being forward-looking and daring' and also of suburbs 'literally without quality'. He proposes that architects must produce 'real buildings' where the 'structure not only looks traditional but is a traditional form with proper walls and a proper roof' (pp.15-16). Woods responds:

I completely cannot accept this orientation towards a past which might or might not have existed: I don't even want to debate that particular point. What I am interested in is the fact that we have undergone changes qualitatively in modern life. You showed a slide of a builder's catalogue that advertised kind of pseudo-traditional houses. I find them far less horrifying intellectually and spiritually than I do the idea: 'let's be authentically traditional, let's give them authentic tradition.' I can accept a kind of hybrid, kitschy as it might be, from a builder's catalogue, as being a genuine evolution of something happening. But really to try and give them the genuine past, which won't be genuine either, is much more of a pretension – much more horrifying for me to contemplate (p.16).

There are those that suggest that kitsch *is* the genuine expression of our time. Manuel Gausa declares that 'Three commonly accepted clichés spring into the collective mind

when the subject of single-family housing comes up' (Gausa 2002, p.53). The first is 'a diffuse jigsaw of elements,' a 'Frankenstein' of architectural features including ridge roof, picture-window balcony and brass latches that make up 'the house of our dreams' (p.53). The second is the 'domestic interior' comprising again a list of elements including fitted lace curtains and porcelain objects amongst other items that 'suggest a commercialized and manufactured "multicultural" feeling of HOME' (p.53). The last cliché is the garden gnome and other exterior equivalents of the interior decor, such as the kidney-shaped swimming pool and brick barbeque. 'Transcending contexts and cultures, these clichés form, today, the authentic "fetishes" of our fin-de-siecle culture' (p.53). Robin Boyd ultimately had an ambivalent attitude toward what he initially dismissed as featurism. While some would declare that there is no kitsch only design (Selle 1989), inasmuch as a challenge to the good taste of conservative values is what design should also do, others link it to a profit-motivated populism irrelevant, if not inimical, to design objectives, and distinct from fashion (Schjeldahl 1994). This view argues that it is not a high versus low culture contest but a good versus bad one.

The next speaker in *Architecture in Arcadia*, Peter Pran, believed Woods, in his criticism of Krier was referring also to site specificity as the answer to the problem of correct form. He argued that 'developments in the countryside have to be site specific in both concept and execution; they should belong to and enrich the sites. With all the alien buildings there that we hate, there has to be a new respect and a new spirit' (in Aslet 1993, p16). The difficulty lies in assumptions as to what is alien or appropriate, and how site specificity could ever be unproblematically applied as justification for proposals. Within Australian planning legislation, heritage protection and character overlays are increasingly linked to environmental protection as inter-dependant determinants of a place's unique value. It has been suggested that neoliberalism has linked vernacular heritage and environmental citizenship in order to reinforce political rationalisation of collective interests, promoting 'new forms of trade-able property within market systems' (Lane et al. 2008, p.1135). New regulatory practices are emerging that encourage 'active citizens and engaged communities' on the one hand, while on the other supporting privatisation of a wide range of services previously regulated by government agencies. Site specificity becomes an integral, and yet again ill-defined, part of arguments for these changes.

Elizabeth Meyer (2005) has examined the considered response of landscape architects to the specificity of sites as their distinct contribution to modern design thinking. The book to which she contributes her essay examines ways in which the concept of 'site' has changed over the last century in particular. Meyer is concerned with contemporary

landscape architectural interest in site-specificity not simply as site analysis or the rational recording and regulated respect for site features which planning regulation is concerned with, but as material to be interpreted. Site specificity is not just about specifying the site in relation to others as science does, but in relation to observers' experiences. How the site is experienced and how those experiences are related, compared and contrasted to the experiences of other sites, gives it distinction. Exemplifying A. J. Downing's 'revealing' of a 'found' site, she says that the nineteenth century valued landscape architecture as a discipline that could read and interpret sites but that later this was not valued. The reason given is that the twentieth century, in exploring and offering abstraction, has turned from offering the observer an interpretation, to requiring them to make their own. It is also implied that specificity as determined by planning similarly fails to make sense of the site through offering a necessary interpretation, settling for what is merely collated particulars of a place. She discusses the work of nineteenth century sciences and arts as having helped landscape architects in their 'ability to read and alter a site', giving them 'additional lenses for appreciating and understanding specific sites', which 'enriched the site readings and practices of both designers and their clients' (p.99). It does not seem, however, that Meyer actually explains what makes a site 'specific' or what requirements there may be for use of that specificity such that it constitutes an 'interpretation' rather than an assumption or presumption. On the one hand, sites are assumed to be specific and only need attention drawn to them, while on the other, planning presumes that a site is distinct in empirically determinable ways that do not require and should not be interpreted as much as respected or maintained. How then does interpretation make a site specific?

'Growing interest in site specificity challenged early nineteenth century idealized conceptions of landscape' says Meyer (2005, pp.100-101). The newer interest 'valued the particular and the unique', while the older 'valued the general and repeatable' (p.100). Meyer contrasts F. L. Olmsted's 1872 description of scenery based on the English pastoral ideal comprising grazed meadows and high canopy trees whose 'edges were not visible in the deep shadows', with Cleveland's 1870 preference for a found American landscape: a 'richly layered ecotone of impenetrable perennials, shrubs and small trees' (p.101). Meyer says that Olmsted 'valued [his] park scenery because he believed it aroused certain universal human emotions,' while what Cleveland described was 'not based on an idealized type or a distant site, but the actual forest/meadow edges in the various regions in which he lived and worked' (p.101). Meyer believes that specificity is to be celebrated in Cleveland's 'advocacy of the found site, his commitment to finding beauty in the actual site without abstraction'

(p.101). She goes on to credit and compare Cleveland's sensitivity to site, to ideas of Horatio Greenough and Ralph Waldo Emerson whose works endorsed 'the potential of American art forms not derivative of European models, but grounded in specific, not idealized nature and in fitting responses to utility and function' (p.101).

Yet site specificity is already an idealised concept of site understanding abstracted from a site. It is, for Meyer, an ideal of site uniqueness dependent on the designer drawing it out for the observer to appreciate. Nonetheless, the forms Cleveland describes are not art but nature and the degree of praise for their site specificity is exactly commensurate with their not having been designed. They have not been adapted to utility or function, as English parks were to grazing herds. Cleveland 'taught his readers and clients to see regional sites as worthy sources of landscape beauty and design form' (p.101). But it remains unclear how this was accomplished and why they were not sources of delight as they were. In fact they provided ideas for design form that would be—necessarily artificially—imposed on a site that did not already look like that, just as European forms had been imposed. They would not then be the actual site but would represent a particular alteration to site and a particular idea of what was to be understood and celebrated as specific to the site. They may have been derived from more proximate geographic models, but they would not be exactly of that site, and would represent only one of many possible claims to the virtuous naturalness or pragmatic utility that supported the democratic American patriotism Meyer describes.

She continues: 'Landscapes meant something because of not only their appearance, but also the associations they aroused' (p.102) although pleasure in appearance is inseparable from the associations it arouses. The English landscape park also aroused associations and probably more easily than Cleveland's designs, albeit Meyer's point may be that America was looking for new and different ones. Reading landscapes, as much as designing them to be read, is a complex and uncertain matter of responding to appearance and the many resonant contexts as well as any conscious or learned understanding of intended associations that each individual may have. Meyer endeavours to outline a correct, rather than simply different or even preferable, form of response by designers in an American context.

### **Urban Design Frameworks**

'Urban design guidelines are ... not new' (Gosling 2002, p.9) and are at least as old as a 1262 statute regulating the form of houses fronting the Piazza del Campo in Siena. Planned regulation of building works—their physical attributes as well as less tangible qualities—are the central tool of planning. For Alun Chapman 'The Urban Design

Framework is one of the most significant advances in the application of urban design theory of the past 20 years' (2006, p.53). Chapman reviews the impact of Melbourne's UDFs generated as part of the State Government of Victoria's 'Pride of Place' initiative in 1997. Initially defined as 'a design tool that provides physical interpretation of local visions and strategies' (Chapman 2006, p.54)—although including as outcomes the Framework document, urban design advice and capital works—by 2002, UDFs had become 'strategic planning tools that set out an integrated design vision for the desired future development of Municipal Strategic Statements and Planning Schemes to practical urban design action at the local level' (p.54). Articulating a wide range of skills requiring multi-disciplinary teams, the clarification nonetheless emphasised analysis, stakeholder consultation and pre-design planning over an earlier explicit interest in capital works. Although the 'underlying "driver" was to be good design' (p.55) this was pursued via extensive pre-design work rather than with design proposals themselves. The main criticism of the program has been the 'the lack of tangible outcomes' (p.55). Although Chapman sees this as a lesson for future similar programs, he does not draw the most obvious conclusion: that emphasis on the value of planning to alleviate risk was made at the expense of the value of design proposition to embrace and transform it.

In 2006 Kevin Abbott, then urban designer with the Urban Management Branch (Growth Areas) of the Victorian Department of Sustainability and Environment, contributed an article to Urban Design Forum. He addressed comments raised in the previous issue reviewing the mixed achievements of UDFs. In an apparent effort to clean up misunderstandings through a clear-sighted overview, Abbott instead demonstrated some of the embedded differences of understanding regarding the role of design in processes of developing built outcomes. Beginning with the incorrect observation that the previous commentators had 'confined' (if not consigned) UDFs to the 'dust bin of failed strategies', he asks why they had failed in Victoria when apparently successful in other states. He begins to speculate on answers before explaining what exactly constitutes a 'failure' for a UDF or what the common criteria are for success. He makes no attempt to make sense of why they are failures or successes by first asking how such failure or success is to be ascertained. As it stands, the logical answer to 'why?' is offered by the observation that unlike other states, Victoria's UDFs are 'embedded into [sic] the statutory planning system'. Despite linking failure to the planning system, the next paragraph immediately relocates blame. It is 'landscape design' as 'marketable urban design' comprising 'glitzy design ideas' that is guilty. 'Design' is characterised as unrealistic, irresponsible and perhaps even cynically and exploitatively superficial as it looks to the market to sell itself (although to whom?).

Confusingly, the attack is not followed by a logic which actually blames design. 'Most of them lack any real urban management strategies'. The 'them' are the UDFs, not the designs as might be expected, and so the fault lies with the 'strategies' not 'design' however glitzy. In fact, the paragraph may be read as suggesting that glitzy design ideas would succeed if they were adequately supported by well-thought-through implementation strategies. The implication is that 'glitzy' cannot be 'pragmatic' although it would be easy to demonstrate exactly how efficacious a well-placed bit of bling can be.

Abbott then reiterates that professional responsibility requires that the known can only be attempted 'ensuring realistic urban management processes are embedded in their products'. Presumably judgement of what is realistic will be made by managers of those agencies, more likely planners than designers. It would appear then that the measure of success is the degree of acquiescence to process and predictable product, of which only reactive management, rather than proactive design, can conceive. Rather than simply sharing a common understanding of the need for better management processes, the articles from the previous issue characterised two quite different positions in regard to the purpose and focus of UDFs. Chapman, giving good background, was specific in his identification of difficulties for pursuit of design excellence within the cautious constraints of planning. Jenny Donovan's self-evident maxims offered less convincing discussion of applied ideas: only design propositions can test or give meaning to such phrases as 'optimum use', 'intrinsic value', 'greatest contribution' or 'quality of life'. But her commentary did emphasise that design proposals are generated through process, not determined by policy. Abbott's observations are far more troubling. He urges proposals to be in line with 'the agencies [sic] reality'. This warns of a realm different from anybody else's experience and different too from the understandable and multiple contingent realities of various and specific agencies. It would appear from this phrase that any proposition not already presupposed by the system cannot succeed; that the *only* propositions to be made are in accordance with what is already determined as achievable. This marks the effective end of design—and vaunted ambitions for planning innovation—as explorations expanding the scope, understanding and opportunities for improvement.

Few would disagree with Abbott as to the inadequacy of the simple rating system which he then describes determining priorities for implementation of project stages, unless the criteria for determination were also simple. Prioritisation for UDF implementation was to be determined principally on the basis of the ability of successive stages to act as catalysts engendering enthusiasm for potentially long-term works projects; a

principle driven by a design ideal. This is different to staging determined by budgetary constraints, skill availability or other timetabling practicalities. Understandably, these considerations in fact come to justify and determine staging so that there are inevitable complex compromises with the stated priority. Changing prioritisation to reflect the practical means of councils to implement proposals could be argued to defeat the stimulating intent of the whole UDF policy inasmuch as practical projects are what councils would undertake anyway.

Abbot's phrase 'deliver the strategy' is curious and problematic, symptomatic of a chronic inability of planning to relinquish control of 'process' and imagine or accept a designed and built outcome as anything other than the direct and predictable translation to form that results from predetermined content. What you *can* do is strategise the delivery or strategically deliver stages of an outcome. 'In simple language it means that it must be embedded in Council's budget and organisational thinking'. The second 'it' seems to be the 'strategy', which we note is not strictly the thing ultimately being delivered. It is surely the capital works project or at least the strategically determined stages to deliver it which require budgeting and organisation acceptance, not further planning. It is explained in the next paragraph that responsibility is not simply vested in the professional private consultant. Rather, local government is responsible, a point which Abbott earlier credits Chapman and Donovan with making but refutes as insufficient. Abbott then introduces a new concept of 'Champions' who 'must have the authority and influence to overcome the reluctance and pragmatic ways of certain local government departments'. By this description there are already champions aplenty. They are designers, and there is a substantial (planning) literature decrying architectural champions by their more common moniker 'heroes'. Still, the call of champions to overcome reluctance and pragmatism is confusing when 'reality' and 'pragmatism' have been earlier argued as the core requirement of UDF success.

Suddenly, what Abbott has called 'landscape design', already posited as a superficial offering, is more correctly identified as a 'streetscape improvement scheme' exactly because any design endeavour has been appropriated by planning and rendered merely 'schematic'. But the damage has been done to design so that now, without explanation, even a scheme is attributed to designers as inadequate built outcome. 'Beyond built environment outputs' should be found 'real solutions'. What could be more effectual or affective or tangible or debatable or, fundamentally, more 'real' than the physical expression of community aspirations, with all the economic, social and political contexts that shape such realisation in a built work? Abbott urges that

'community values should be the framework's design generator'. It would seem more direct to wish that 'community visions' would become the generator of a framework for design than design for a framework. However, we then have 'practical urban design', a new term announcing the usurpation of design as architecture by design as planning. Real outcomes are said to result from 'fusing practical urban design with municipal strategic direction and governance processes', phrases which anyone must find difficult to accept as closer to reality than proposals for built form.

Finally, paternalistically, readers are urged to remember that UDFs are seeking to 'achieve better places for people'—why not build them?—although by whose judgement seems in contention. As professionals are presumably hired in the first place because the community could not realise or perhaps even envisage what these 'better places' are, it is unlikely they can or will deliver what people don't know they want. 'What is needed is the ability ... to integrate community visions within the built environment planning process'. It is difficult to agree, because it is difficult to see how this ability is lacking in the process. It is even more difficult to see how this ability is related to the built environments which are the subject of critique of UDF efficacy. It is surely easy to plan to include community visions but it is another matter and a different argument to have them incorporated and evidenced within a design proposal and its outcome. It also remains unclear why planning process is privileged over design process or delivery process as the mechanism for appreciation and critique of individual UDFs. Alternatively, one could recognise that the integrative and transformative ability being called for is actually design.

Calls for the 'fusing [sic] of vision within ... process' may not be misguided but meaningless. The logic of any proposal reflects its vision in its product through its process. It is a different call to wish planning to be more distinct and transparent. Perhaps 'fusing' is the wrong metaphor for 'making it [what?] work'. Then, reminded that success happens only after the fusion, you must separately 'establish commitment'. Surely the effective joining is a confirmation of those things, values and processes already committed to? Even then, however, something must still be designed and built to proffer any test or proof of worth. '[E]stablishing commitment', except through coercion of statutory law, is not the role of planning. It is the core offering of design. It might otherwise be called inspiration and it requires the persuasions of the visionary, the utopian and even the glitzy, where delight and determination go hand in hand with full, informed debate and with consensual compromise, even eager sacrifice. No wonder 'it is all too hard' when explained through the prism of planning rhetoric.

The planning, design and construction of built environments is indeed hard, but it is not too hard. Chapman viewed the Pride of Place program and its funding as an expression of optimism, and viewed UDFs as incitements to experimental design of great potential, not recognising that this was necessarily a potential that would not and could not be guaranteed. It therefore risked failure. They also presented opportunities to overcome disciplinary divisions of labour in the difficult task of creating new environments, uncovering a frequently obscured danger of cross-disciplinary misunderstanding. The development of UDFs presented various built environment disciplines with the chance to work—and argue and plan and design—together for new possibilities. In the present climate of multiple fears and urgent challenges, such optimism stands as an example of what might be achieved with a new commitment to design and a better appreciation of how it works to embody change in the world.

## Conclusion

*Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.*

Percy Bysshe Shelley<sup>28</sup>

If poetry and art legislate while planning and engineering implement, design is the reference you call on to check whether either deserves their position. Shelley's famous defense of poetry as the imaginative power necessary to conceive of that which reason then pursues is clearly utopian. But utopianism is even more clearly located where powers of conception and pursuit of construction are united: in design. Poetic prophecy cannot foretell events. That is the pretence of superstition. Design innovation does not guarantee what designed form will achieve. That is the necessary pretence of planning. It would make good design an attribute of correct planning where projected futures are and should be an attribute of designed form.

Planning, engineering and the careful, experienced and skilled application of known techniques using familiar tools with predictable outcomes need not have anything to do with design. The objective of design is to raise awareness of what is unnoticed or unquestioned in even well-planned and beautifully executed propositions. The point of design is to enliven; to make people alive to their being alive. This means provoking appreciation of our powers to conceive and construct while also arousing questions of our rights and responsibilities in exercising those powers.

My grandmother distinguished between cunning, common-sense and cleverness. Nan once told me that I was very clever when I topped the primary-school class for something-or-other. It was not a compliment. At least if I had rat-cunning, she sighed, I would make money, as she predicted (accurately) that my younger brother would. Or if only I had common sense, as my clever older sister had, I would be usefully and happily engaged with the world. But cleverness alone, she warned, doomed me to the life of a second-in-command middle-man, in service to those with more naked ambition if less imagination, more confident and grounded propositions if less reflective visions. My destiny, she tried to tell me, was to give council, to be a worrier: a critic. My elder brother was the black sheep, my sister the white one, my younger brother a frantic

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<sup>28</sup> Shelley, P. B. 1909-1914 [1821], unpaginated.

sheepdog. I was perhaps the paddock. Anyway, something like this, intoned over Vegemite toast, is what I remember now.

Designs hit the ground as dense mats of interwoven cunning, common-sense and council. Yet cunning and commonsense get all the press. Their lessons are better taught and better learnt than those of critical council and they frame life lessons whose rewards are clear and bankable. The careful critique of a clever councillor, musing on multiple suspended scenarios and sensitive to the slightest tensions between them, seems indulgent and over-subtle. Yet, unlike the cunning of the market and the commonsense of well-planned, well-engineered building, it is essential to design. The problem of service is the problem of design. Neither is defined by the difficulties of subservient stewardship. Design service is not deciding how to solve problems but determining—investigating and proposing—precisely what the problem is or may be. This is the position described by the key figure and narrator of Thomas More's *Utopia*. It is the dilemma of someone who wants to serve but for whom obedient service betrays that very objective. It was also the dilemma of Saint Thomas himself, entering the service of Henry VIII only to martyr himself to an ideal of service that wasn't his king's.

The landscape architectural design of suburbs is a utopian endeavour and a necessary service. As a design profession, the service that landscape architecture should render is not that which simply gives form to what others have determined should be done, whether this is to make the plans of carefully determined engineering or planning policy more palatable or saleable, or to submit—somehow—to the actually indeterminable will of Nature or Landscape. Much work argues either within these familiar defaults and the false dualities they engender—man/nature, public/private, fantasy/reality—or for equally misleading and unnecessary synthesis. Landscape architecture needs neither to be justified as contributing to natural evolution (performative affirmation of potentialities) nor rational logic (the enumerative mania of technologically determined solutions). As Sola-Morales said of architecture in contemporary conditions of unprecedented urban change, 'both organicist-evolutionist criteria on the one hand, and the causal logic of the rationalist model on the other, can no longer be applied' (Sola-Morales 2005, p.12).

Histories of human settlement have characterised suburban growth, utopian proposition and landscape architectural practice within four main views. A first thinks they're great (no problem Pro), a second thinks they're not (get rid of them Con) and a third thinks that they *could* be great 'if only' we did whatever the author suggests. But a fourth isn't actually interested in characterising them at all: it is interested in reinventing

them. It is interested in designing them. It is interested in utopianism, in building a good place. The dilemma of what then to do is exemplified by the phrase 'always already'. The 'always already' signals an ambiguity arising from the conflicting readings of hope and despair attached to its critical message. The optimistic warning of 'always already' enables escape from fraudulent claims of newly found answers, but it can also be read—and has been dismissed—as the pessimistic reminder that something more is already always missing. Rather than urging a fight for something new, the 'always already' can tell us we are only returning to something forgotten. However, far from complacent and regressive acceptance, intelligent criticism—especially including the 'always already' alerts—is a finely considered commitment to better understanding.

The always-already is already always held within the idea of utopia. The suspensions, contradictions, paradoxes, concerns, desires and dangers grappled with in the shifting outline of a problem with which designers are engaged: this is the stuff of utopianism, the problematic of utopias. Yet even here there is a final slipperiness where committed and exploratory utopian openness can fall to non-committal open-endedness as easily as it can back to various forms of Pro, Con or Anti closure. The various acknowledgements of a failure of design confidence and faith are masked as either newly prefigured control or as open-ended licence.

The value of utopian thinking is initially two-fold. Firstly, it produces propositions for the relief of an identified condition: the eradication of an evil or the establishment of a good. Secondly, dissatisfied with these initial reactionary ideas, it continues to seek and refine alternatives. Beyond this, utopian thinking more importantly necessitates examination of historical conditions and acknowledgement of historical conditioning, regardless of our inability to escape such conditioning. And while utopia cannot provide a comprehensive solution to essentially infinite, incomprehensible difficulties, 'we will never come to one without it' (Jameson 2004, p.36). As Lewis Mumford noted: 'We can never reach the points of the compass; and so no doubt we shall never live in Utopia; but without the magnetic needle we should not be able to travel intelligently at all' (2003, p.16).

Utopia, like design, is transformative, radical, essentially subversive and innovative in its assertive ambition to concreteness. Even where theoretical possibilities and pre-design expectations have already been thoroughly anticipated, analysed and explicated, design's material making and doing always finds more in the world than could possibly have been accounted for. In this sense it will always actually be a failure of comprehension as comprehensiveness. More significantly, while this is the cause of

design's enormous potential for frustration, it is also its greatest potential gift. If good utopias encourage us to imaginatively explore the otherwise impossible, and good suburbs permit self-discovery and expression, the best utopias make such imaginaries seem achievable and the best suburbs necessitate the encouraged self-expression of their residents. The best utopian propositions return to the argument of the best design propositions: they argue for the making of a distinct place; they argue to realise a good place with material conviction, not a no-place, however otherwise convincing.

## Abbreviations

AILA: Australian Institute of Landscape Architects  
DPCD: Department of Planning and Community Development (State Government of Victoria)  
DSE: Department of Sustainability and Environment (State Government of Victoria)  
SOS: Save Our Suburbs  
UDF: Urban Design Forum  
UN-Habitat: United Nations Human settlements Programme

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