



The Space Wasters

**The architecture of
Australian misanthropy
Robert Nelson**

THE SPACE WASTERS

The space wasters
the architecture of Australian misanthropy

by Robert Nelson

published by the Planning Institute of Australia,
Carlton, 2011
ISBN 978-1-921994-01-2

Disclaimer

All opinions and responsibility for factual content are the author's and do not belong to the Planning Institute of Australia.

Copyright © Robert Nelson

Robert Nelson is Associate Director Student Experience at Monash University and Art Critic for *The Age*.

Design: Andrew Murray

CHAPTERS

- 1 Introduction to antisocial space**
- 2 Modern misanthropy**
- 3 Alphatecture**
- 4 Gardenography**
- 5 The proprietorship of light**
- 6 Holiday house**
- 7 The car**
- 8 Tiny capital**
- 9 The bike**
- 10 Grass and class**
- 11 Space to burn**

THE SPACE WASTERS **AT A GLANCE**

Even when spacious and visually charming, Australian urban environments have a hostile side. Coining the term antisocial space, this book uncovers the hidden unfriendliness behind our most cherished aesthetics. Leafy and low, our generous spaces are designed for keeping people apart from one another rather than for coming together. The antisocial dimension is shared by much contemporary architecture, which shuns the life of the street. And it is not just space that is antisocial. Australian lifestyles and aspirations also discourage the feeling of living in a society. This book reveals how antisocial space is related to waste and how it produces an intolerance of people, resulting in cities with among the worst ecological footprint in the world.

THE SPACE WASTERS **SUMMARY**

1 INTRODUCTION TO ANTISOCIAL SPACE

defines the idea of antisocial space as any area—even when set up for aesthetic purposes—which is devised to keep people apart from one another rather than facilitating their congress. It argues that putting unnecessary distance between people creates a hostile and discriminatory environment which is unsafe for children and structurally aggressive for adults.

2 MODERN MISANTHROPY

reveals how our impoverished understanding of space has brought about a new hatred of people. Identifying the spatial origin of our prejudice against denser urban configurations, the chapter explains why Australia, which is among the most sparsely populated countries in the world, considers itself overpopulated.

3 ALPHATECTURE

explains the role that architects have played in fulfilling the pervasiveness of antisocial space. It identifies two archetypes of urban design: (i) engaged or E-type architecture, where buildings sit against one another hard by the street and (ii) alpha-architecture or alphatecture, the object in space without a rapport with the street and repudiating contact with the community. The contrast reveals the functional and social advantages of the first over the great prestige of the second.

4 GARDENOGRAPHY

sympathetically explores the enduring attraction of private gardens. It identifies their great appeal and notes how they are protected by building regulations. It then explores the ecological problems that setback laws create and argues that while private gardens are undeniably pleasant for some, the mandatory gardening legislation that perpetuates them has a questionable moral basis.

5 THE PROPRIETORSHIP OF LIGHT

describes the fraught relationship that Australians have with sunshine, both heliotropic and terrified of skin cancer and ageing. It presents a brief outline of sun-protection in Australian architecture and observes the paradoxes of the widespread fear of tall buildings casting a shadow, given that in most other circumstances the provision of shade is considered a blessing.

6 HOLIDAY HOUSE

considers the advantages and problems of this highly sought-after institution of Australian aspiration. Contrasting the contemporary holiday house with functional and recreational practices from the renaissance, it argues that the owners of a holiday house are bound to much unwanted commitment. Pursuing the theory that a waste of space correlates with a waste of time, it contemplates the drawbacks of some of our vanities.

7 THE CAR

observes the great fondness for the motorcar, exceptional among machines as a symbol of family cohesion and love as well as power and energy, and confesses how most of us are dependent upon its convenience. It then turns to the large volume of objections, which include their corrosive impact on public space. It identifies the car as one of the key authors of antisocial space.

8 TINY CAPITAL

argues that the economic basis of low-rise Australian development lies in the fragmentation and paucity of capital. It reveals how the pattern perpetuates itself, because low-rise architecture has limited longevity under pressure of accommodation, so buildings erected on a greatly sub-optimal footprint are doomed, hence a waste of capital. It identifies aggregation of capital as a sustainable economic solution which aligns with ecological priorities.

9 THE BIKE

explains how the great enthusiasm for the bicycle in Australia is skewed toward recreation rather than a transport alternative. Instead of providing a cue for an alternative social spatiality, the bike has become a symbol either of private euphoria or institutionalized sport. It considers how risk is handled by cyclists and how riding for fun has negligible impact on the spatial hegemony of cars.

10 GRASS AND CLASS

uses the example of education as a reason for prolonged daily travel and investigates the basis of crossing town in order to gain competitive advantage from a chosen school. It contemplates the emphasis of leadership and sport and links their aspirational rhetoric to the physical landscape of schools, noting the parallel stress in the lawns and gardens of universities.

11 SPACE TO BURN

provides a history of Australian space from prehistoric antiquity to now, concluding that low-density Australian spatialities are dissipating and antisocial, as opposed to urban counterparts elsewhere. It sums up the underlying themes of the book which equate a waste of space with a waste of time. It defends the moral motif of judging other people's fun and proposes how we might predicate our culture on more critical values.

1

**Introduction
to antisocial space**

Australia, which has so much space, has remarkably little idea of what to do with it. After two centuries of European settlement, the wisdom has not expanded to match the growth and contention. Whenever new developments arise, they are attended by great local trepidation, as the community waits in dread to see how much the new excrescence—or monstrosity, which is the other Australian word for new building—disrupts the character and lifestyle that belong to our heritage. Locals are anxious about any development and mistrustful of the experts behind it. Development will bring too many people into the neighbourhood, will impose too much concrete bulk on the available space, create parking problems, denude the locality of gardens, wreck the character of the vicinity and create shadows or wind tunnels.

Our bad experience with tall buildings outside the city centre began in the 1960s when public housing was commissioned for disadvantaged people. The towers were to replace what was seen as the squalor of inner suburban slums, zones which were subsequently valorized by the middle class as charming and picturesque. In all Australian capitals, like their counterparts in America, these flats have no friends and set in train a firm conviction that dense residential configurations are evil. Like utopia built on shabby foundations, they treat people badly and breed crime. From that decade, Australia has been development-resistant, fearing that progress means a retrograde capitulation of community values to greedy developers, the outcome of which is to force people to live on top of one another, as if demeaning them in chicken coups.

Large developments based on demolition always vaguely recall Le Corbusier's plan to raze a part of inner Paris to establish modern architecture surrounded by abundant open space. The experiment was not realized in Europe but aftershocks of the proposal were felt in other countries, like Australia. Instructively, because it revealed that when we have the opportunity to start again, with plenty of land, we have little idea of what to do. We build up, sure enough, but on the condition that the buildings have open space around them, so that they do not replicate the city centre, which in modern Australia became dedicated to bureaucratic purposes. So the new estate incorporates its own gardens in acknowledgement of a domestic template. To a greater or lesser degree, this compromise characterizes a great deal of development beyond the city, whether domestic or commercial.

Regardless of any spatial concessions, new developments outside the city centre seldom win public approval and everyone senses that there is something wrong. We agree on the condition but not the cause. Some complain that there is not enough green or recreational space, that there are no barbeques or play equipment or netball courts, that there are no birds, that there is no life and that everything is artificial. Some protest that there are too many towers that create shadows and that developers have sacrificed the open space necessary for communities.

Scrutinized by international comparators, the reasons do not add up and reveal naivety over space and its social meanings. The need for space and greenery around buildings is not axiomatic in other parts of the globe. Think of the busiest and buzziest streets

of Milan or Berlin or Tokyo: they do not have gardens in them; and if they have trees, the specimens are set in the pavement, occupying little space in the same concourse that people use in moving between businesses. The trees stand up in the street a bit like people, with people milling around them, just like in Collins St in Melbourne. Many glamorous and grungy strips in Manhattan rarely have birds in them; and when birds decide to settle in a metropolis, they often create more trouble than joy. Even the idea that a vibrant city cannot be new is unconvincing, when you think that half the cities of Asia—thronging with commercial vitality, conversation and colour—are new. In many parts, there are few stately old buildings but streets packed with relatively new buildings, sometimes of unimaginative design, that nevertheless serve the purposes that belong to urban vitality.

We have enough space in Australia to create relatively large aesthetic reservations around our buildings outside the city centre. Alas, while conceived for beautification, these spaces rather weaken the street. The street, which is the genius of urban communities, sometimes almost seems to be missing. I mean a street in the sense of a living platform which is theatrically fronted by buildings, a stage where the actors and audience of daily life figuratively turn out, meet and pass on their collective festivity. To comply with contemporary sensitivities over their height, our new buildings are often forced to recede from the street or road as if they do not want to make contact with it. There are banks of garden to insulate the large buildings from the street, just as with suburban houses, to make them seem as if they are nestling in nature. The result is a place that does not really want you in it.

So many people deplore the proliferation of multi-storey buildings and long for more garden around them, often citing the natural rights of children as requiring fields or gardens for exercise. But the success of other metropolises, which also have children in them, is precisely the absence of gaps between buildings and street. In any case, the spaces that we put around buildings seem to be designed for buildings, not for people; and least of all are they designed for children, which is why children are seldom to be seen there. We clamour for a solution which aggravates the problem: we want to see more garden, more dressing of buildings with beds and shrubs and sequestered pathways. These spatial wrappers deny contact between building and street. And in most cases, to lack contact with the street is architectural suicide. The street is the defining element of vital townscapes elsewhere in the world, always physically created by a theatrical architectural backdrop that makes people happy to perform their individual lives in public. Unhappily, the preferred archetype of a building in Australia is informed by a negative social aspiration: to be disconnected from the street as much as space and shrub will allow. The result is that we have space—plenty of it—which is uninhabitable, and especially by children.

For the better part of a century, Australian architecture has been spooked by space. We expect lots of space around everything and cannot think of human dignity without large amounts of landscaped wadding. We identify welfare with abundant landscaping and crave it, even when we have more than we can look after. The result is a built environment that has little sense of community but lots of unsocialized buildings lodged amid artificial

hillocks, bristly bushes, volcanic rock and other landscaped inventions that no one ever mingles within. An unhappy physical manifestation of this social discomfort is the wind that howls between the isolated towers, which is less of a problem in denser cities. The tall buildings of Paris or Seoul (as in the city centres of Australia) achieve a solidarity in their shoulder-to-shoulder lining of the street; and this barrier, though far from impermeable, at least screens out the transverse wind and protects the pedestrians, as if the high currents have to pass above the wind break that is the city itself. In so many newer Australian developments and university campuses, the freestanding buildings—reflecting the ideal freestanding domestic archetype—channel the ambient winds into a blast at the bottom. The proud sculptural motif of building as object-in-space summons the whole anger of the heavens, funnelling the breeze in wind-tunnels that add to the hostile nature of the spaces that are already depopulated by a garden aesthetic.

If you give Australian developers land in a neighbourhood which does not already have a Victorian footprint, you will see three features: first, the buildings will be conceived as object-in-space, to be seen as sculpture in the round but without a direct presence on the street. Second, the space that subtracts from the dynamism of the street will be wasted with gardens that nobody will ever use but are regarded as an essential element of aesthetic hygiene according to Australian values. And third, the wasted space which is imagined as salubrious will be harrowed by wind and surrounding traffic, and the efforts to retrofit the urban deserts

around the buildings will yield equivocal solutions that provide no substitute for a vibrant street.

Throughout the globe, space is a precious resource, and we have more of it in Australia than the minerals that support our economy. With this superabundance comes an equal and opposite indisposition to use space effectively to create tall streets with conversational communities. New developments are forced to comply with the principle of unsocialized building stock amid copious gardens, a principle that underlies the whole suburban footprint of Australian cities. It is a pattern of ineffective space, with many nasty disappointments. Our well-admired older suburbs are seen as a friendly set of nests that nestle among private gardens. We do not notice that they too are based on a great spatial vacancy, where signs of community are scarcely to be seen and you feel exposed against the glare of the open sky and the cars that roar past in enormous waves.

Few people use the footpath in our suburbs without feeling anomalous; and this alienation is only broken by an intrepid exercise program, such as jogging or walking a dog, which naturalizes the otherwise forbidding terrain. The houses recede behind their plot of land, each with its own combination of mini-carpark, mini-road (the drive) and garden. The houses do not look at you as if either they or you belong to the street. As far as possible, the street is interpreted as a kind of country road or lane. The houses step back from the street, as if suspiciously eyeing you off from a distance. Though often handsome and certainly well-intentioned and fervently protected by community groups, the

provision of space around the houses is also somehow unsociable, based on turning away from the community and insulating themselves from society. A town endowed with so much space is only good for cars, and the experience of traversing it by other means is either tedious or traumatic.

Waiting at the bus-stop or walking beside the traffic, I feel reproached for not having a car of my own. Although some of the gardens may have a pretty aspect, they are structurally a buffer to insulate the house from the street and, of course, they also accommodate the owner's car, which is the principal means of making contact with the street. It is unpleasant to be within the space unless in a car, which is why there are so few pedestrians in the vicinity. Very often, and even in handsome leafy streets, the space is fundamentally antisocial.

Urban space does not have to be antisocial or alienating. On the contrary, all space is intrinsically precious: it represents the earth and, in combination with humans, it can provide the most valuable experiences by being organized around the reception of people. Gorgeous tall streets all around the world testify to the magical interpretation of space by architects and planners—both ancient and modern—which makes space sociable, ceremonial, august, intimate, cheerful, exciting and seductive. Buildings and pavements are disposed to maximize the chances of conversation, to be socially oriented, to greet people, even to be configured as if the buildings themselves are talking to the street, having a conversation themselves, and sheltering people from the glare. With overhanging balconies, shops and cafés, everyone in

the street feels welcome, even if there are cars rolling by: the street communicates its love of human exchanges and people congregating, often intimately, for conversation.

In the dense metropolises overseas, if the bus left two minutes early, you will not mind waiting for the next, because you are not an intruder in antisocial space. First, you will not be anxious about getting the next bus, because there are frequent services, thanks to the large demand that a dense population generates. And second, the architectonic presence of the built-up street is reassuring and provides what I think of as personable space. With its rich attention to display and reception, the street is directed to affirming your presence rather than hiding from your presence: it pays you attention rather than being split between houses that withdraw from the street and cars that rip through space with alarming ferocity.

This book proposes a distinction in the way that space functions. The distinction is between personable space and antisocial space. Personable space is designed to make the individual comfortable within a public. Antisocial space is designed to protect buildings and their inhabitants from public contact. The distinction is cultural and we want to find the cultural consequences and roots. It is all about the communication of values, mood, intentions and ways of using time; it concerns signs of receptiveness and is not a simple function of physical ingredients or economic contingencies.

Space can be private or public and it can be warm or hostile. There is no necessary relation between them. Just because space is public, it does not mean that it is warm and receptive; and just because it is private it does not indicate the contrary. There is no link between the friendliness of space and its ownership. The places where you want to be, perhaps to sit down and converse, are not inviting because the proprietor is the state or a company or an individual, in the same way that it is immaterial who owns or leases the places that you feel shunned by or uneasy within.

Nor is it a question of materials. A strip of grass in front of a building can be just as unpleasant to stand upon as the same area surfaced in concrete; and in fact you can feel worse on the grass because grass suggests that you are not meant to be there: you are crushing it beneath your big boots, and if everyone did the same, it would degenerate into mud. Either the concrete or the grass can belong to the state, a corporation or a homemaker and neither variable on its own makes the place more welcoming or disagreeable.

It is tempting to think that the definition of personable space involves nature, because we love trees in all circumstances. But then, as we have noted, beautiful urban precincts can surprise us with an absence of vegetation. Contrariwise, a given location can have bushes and trees to the side but there is still nothing inviting about it. Similarly, the absence of nature is neither reassuring nor necessarily offputting, since many of the most comely outdoor places in the world have neither leaf nor wood but consist of little but masonry; and while some form

of overhead canopy might seem important to one site, it seems dispensable in another.

You might assume that personable space is about whether there are barriers or not. But that too deserves agnostic scrutiny. It depends on the design of the barriers and the space, as the consequences can either be very good or very bad. A wall or a fence can make you feel excluded but it can also make you feel secure among people. It is the reason, for example, that street cafés erect portable fences, to provide a sense of solidarity for the outdoor customers and to designate their coherence and comfort in public space. There are numerous delightful parapets that have the role of separating spaces but which do not for that reason yield an alienating effect but rather invite people into the enclosed area.

Because I am an art critic, it would suit me to think that a determining condition of socialized space might be sculpture; but unfortunately the friendliness or hostility of a place has little to do with art either. Sculpture can act as a welcome landmark around which people like to gather; but a sculpture can also be forbidding, anomalous, alienating or trivial; and it is not uncommon that modernist sculptures express their autonomy at the expense of the built environment. As beautiful and curious as some sculptures are, others suggest on the contrary that the place is unsuitable for trysting in any mood. And similar observations can be made of murals, which may be intrinsically seductive but cannot redeem a space determined to be antisocial.

Nor is the friendliness of a space necessarily a question of insulating us from noise, even though the balance of peace and noise must clearly be struck to afford comfort and joy. Think of the restaurants that you might frequent. Among the most popular venues are the noisiest. Even if a bit stressful on the ear, the loudness has some festive appeal and we feel excited by the gregarious mood. To get relief from the din (as you can witness when people in a restaurant receive a mobile phone call) you may have to go out onto the street where the agitation of the traffic is relatively calm compared to the raucous vocal-explosions inside the restaurant. Meanwhile, there are silent sequestered parts of town that have little appeal or are downright sinister, where the quiet seems eerie and irksome.

Personable space does not even seem to be a question of the area or quantity of available land. A space can be big or little and enjoyable or horrid in no clear relation. Just by virtue of its generous air of spaciousness, a large area provides no guarantee of a warm vibe. There are no rules along these lines. A large amount of space neither assures us with its sweeping greatness nor does it necessarily diminish us with its emptiness or make us feel vulnerable and lonely. Just as there are open parts that are desolate, bald and windswept, so there are narrow small parts that seem dangerous or dingy. A wide street can be either illustrious or barren, just as a narrow street can be either intimate or claustrophobic.

Australians, like suburban Americans, believe strongly that the amount of space equates with health. To be cramped is like hav-

ing a limb in plaster, whereas to be free is to occupy space liberally. So we start out with the assumption that lots of space around objects, buildings and people is salubrious, a form of social hygiene, a way of calibrating ease and privilege. Nothing characterizes Australians and suburban Americans so much as their desire to spread out; and this spatial incontinence as a natural expectation of prosperity reinforces the prejudice that large amounts of space are natural and essential to the friendliness of cities. Unfortunately, the reverse is often the case: in many circumstances, a superabundance of space is a recipe for unpersonable environments, because it is conceived in denial of the street.

The formula for what makes personable space is both simpler and more complicated than any of these clumsy physical measures. A space is warm and inviting when it has been designed for people to come together to enjoy one another's company. It is cold and offputting when it has been designed to keep people apart from one another, even if it is contrived for aesthetic purposes and has a certain prettiness. No matter how decorative, if the purpose is to keep people apart from one another, a given plot of land will not be experienced as socialized space.

To this unpleasant condition, I am attaching the word *antisocial*, because the design discourages contact between people: whether unintentionally or deliberately, it diminishes the confidence that an individual feels to communicate with another person. To be sure, I could have chosen a less provocative word than antisocial, perhaps just unsociable. On the face of it, that is more than enough of an insult, to interpret the retiring habit of suburban

houses or towers, for example, as simply lacking in gregarious spirit and being taciturn, a bit grumpy, turning away from other people, like a cranky recluse. Sadly, however, the spatial templates of Australian cities that the suburban houses collectively create are worse than unsociable. They are antisocial not just because they discourage the gregarious basis of community life but because they demand a regime of movement which is intimidating and dangerous.

You can never let a child pedal a bike on the road because it is lethal. Suburban space disempowers anyone who does not drive a motorcar—which is the entire population of the young and much of the old—and it makes pedestrians dependent and resentful. The people who are not motorists or who cannot depend on a family chauffeur for their rides are condemned to long periods of waiting for buses on exposed corners and desolate slip roads, where they feel alienated. All too often, public transport is too remote because spread-out cities mean few and infrequent services. To lose a driver's licence is to be excommunicated and this punishment is weighed as a strong penalty imposed against a crime. To walk in automotive space, which is nearly all Australian suburbs including many of the inner suburbs, means feeling estranged from the community; and indeed you cannot see the community in any manifestation on the streets. I call it antisocial space because it is worse than unfriendly but ferocious. On a bike, you are likely to be maimed and the alienation brings on a brooding dissatisfaction, a glum and defeated feeling, a damnation that might only be redeemed by the prospect of future car ownership.

Regrettably, most of Australia has been built on keeping people apart from one another and, as in much of America, we have inherited—and continue to perpetuate—some of the least sociable urban environments imaginable. The free-standing house and the car are telling symbols of the desire to keep ourselves apart from others, the house with its moat of private carpark and garden and, of course, the car itself, a cellular tank which is designed to keep us apart from one another, to a paranoiac degree, since contact means an accident, which we avoid at all costs.

Together, the house and car have created a paradigm of Australian urban organization which replicates antisocial space ubiquitously, often extending to multi-storey developments which are not based on a Victorian footprint. For the whole duration of modern development, the spatial aspiration has been to flee from the city, to get away from the crowds, to distance ourselves from people. The layout and mode of construction reflect a fundamental dislike of people in a society, and logically creates what I am calling antisocial space.

If antisocial space were only in the industrial parts or if it were confined to the outskirts, it might be something to overlook. But antisocial space is institutionalized in the common fabric of our cities, established in aesthetic codes and regulated to remain so by strenuous laws that apply to urban development. Creating and maintaining antisocial space is intimately part of Australia's faith in itself, its sense of heritage and its aspirations. The legal framework is well-intentioned and the laws in their own way are touching, just like many of the aesthetic beliefs that they protect. But

the laws and the fondness that they safeguard ultimately have a catastrophic effect on the social fabric as well as our equally fragile ecology.

Most of the world's ecological problems, along with many social problems, have an aesthetic cause. We create unhappy commitments to one another, consume huge amounts of energy and limit people's rights, all because of aesthetic templates: we believe that something is beautiful enough to spend exorbitant amounts of energy and personal stress in order to gain and maintain it. For aesthetic attachments, we believe that we have to protect the stock and the habits that we have inherited and in which we have staked our pride and identity. The term heritage is attached to this feeling. It means the preservation of the realities that we know, from the building stock to the way of life that its gardens enshrine. The preservationist spirit normally begins with the noble protection of historical buildings but then extends to whole paradigms of development and lifestyle which can now be suspected of antisocial principles. In the same way that one citizen is insulated from another, just so we are complacently insulated from any critique of our aesthetic convictions, which grow with rich conceits and remain largely impervious to reevaluation. Critical spatial discourse has not grown in a way which is commensurate with the geographical expansion; on the contrary, public consciousness of space may not have expended greatly since the publication of classics like Henri Lefebvre's *Spatial dialectics*, Christian Norberg-Schultz's *Genius loci* and the vigorous Jane Jacobs' book *The death and life of great American cities*. Australia, meanwhile turned a deaf ear to voices like Deborah

White's *Seeds for change: creatively confronting the energy crisis* of 1978, with its catch-cry of 'cluster and connect'. How much our understanding of space has advanced from that period is open to question.

*

As far as the eye can see, from any hill or tower, the suburbs of Australia present a curtain of green, which is hugely and understandably cherished. For enormous distances, the spread of gardens cloaks the domestic architecture with a charming verdant mantle—like in a fairy tale—where a large population seems almost unaware of itself. Millions of people return home in the comforting ambience of leaf and birds and happy dog, and the experience in many of the small streets is quiet. The pavements are balanced by porous beds of flowers and shrubs and, in richer established parts, the trees support a canopy with welcome shade for the hot summer months. Australians are joined by foreign visitors in believing that a more ideal circumstance could scarcely be imagined. Thanks to the luxury of abundant space, the Australian building stock is very low, mostly single or double storey and with plenty of garden around the buildings. It will be news to any occupant of paradise that this welcome aesthetic balm to one and all could ever be called antisocial.

But in talking of children earlier, we have already contemplated the problem that disturbs our suburban idyll. It is the intensive transport needed to traverse the handsome expanses of land. And here it all unravels. All the quiet streets are tributaries to

busy roads; and along the shady groves that make the main roads, thousands of cars furiously run their course at every instant. The roads are either deadly because of the fierce speeds or they are choked with slow frustrated motorists who are desperate to get out of the traffic. The space, which looks beautiful when viewed from a distant prospect or a sequestered cul de sac, turns out to be fraught and hellish when you are on the ground experiencing its circulation. The space is wrecked by the very means to overcome it.

The immediate reaction to the horrors of traffic is to blame the transport system or population growth, and we hear complaints so frequently that they are almost as annoying and repetitious as the car journeys themselves. It is less common to blame the spatial organization of the city; and, whenever Australians do contemplate the disastrous sprawl, they conveniently blame people who live further out, in suburbs only a few kilometres more remote than their own; and in this scorn for the outliers, no one considers that the very existence of suburbs further out is a logical consequence of the suburbs *further in* failing to increase their density, to adopt more compressed spatiality, like in other parts of the world. The automotive pastures begin beyond their front gate but not within it. The history of Australian letters will not throw up a single author who blames his or her own gardens (a) for the suburbs further out and (b) for the strangulatory volumes of traffic that they generate. It is a national blindspot. And least of all would we ever contemplate that the beautiful place that we inhabit and cultivate with love has an antisocial dimension which is all about keeping people remote from one another.

To look at suburbia and see nothing but trees is a winsome source of pride but it is also delusional. How do you avoid seeing the cars? And how do you avoid hearing and feeling the destructive effect that they have on space and the comfort of all people who are not in cars, to say nothing of the atmosphere? If you are predisposed to enjoying the layout that our grandparents designed, you see tranquillity. But if you are trying to get anywhere—including when you are in a car—you experience little but impatience and strife. Even where we are accustomed to seeing green, we can smell the petrol and become asthmatic through its toxic pollution.

So Australian cities are scenic when observed from the safe distance of a hill or the quiet recesses of a suburban garden; but only metres away, the traffic roars angrily and paradise turns demonic. Australians believe that the roads are a necessary evil (because cities need roads) but that the gardens and generous open spaces around buildings temper the stress, gratefully forming an enlightened aesthetic counterbalance, judiciously instituted by visionary laws—and at times inspired by heroic union action—to offset the fumes and noise and moderate the danger and contention of the traffic. Unfortunately, however, it is the proliferation of open private spaces that creates the need for the private motor traffic, which is the most inefficient transport system in the world, servicing the most energy-inefficient building stock in the world; and far from being a buffer that counters the effects of the seething traffic, the relatively unoccupied land is in fact the cause of the uncontained volumes of cars that haggle with one another in the bursting streets.

The more you scrutinize the regulated open spaces of the Australian suburbs, the more it appears that they are not at all antithetical to the nastiness of the traffic. In fact they belong to the same antisocial structure as the hostile competition of the roads. Most of the open spaces are not designed for people. They are not configured to allow folk to congregate or to find social formations or to perform their individuality in public. Rather, most of the open space that we set aside with grass or concrete or bushes is a kind of buffer to distance people from people; and consequently, no one really belongs there. From pioneering myths—sometimes shamelessly conflated with Indigenous veneration of land—we are used to thinking of the blessedness of Australia consisting in its abundant space, which is afforded on such a scale almost nowhere else in the world. Unfortunately, the blessing is polluted, and Australians find it difficult to cohere as a society throughout their massive suburbs, where the visible presence of pedestrians is exiguous and stressed.

At heart, we know that we are under pressure. The bounteous spaces of yore are threatened, and navigating in our cities is horrible. But this knowledge only provokes uncreative anxiety. Australians feel that all the options are blocked. Space is throttled not just physically but in an angry conceptual gridlock: we vehemently reject development and consider that our heritage is sacred, must never be demolished and leaves no room for adjustment. At the same time, we loathe the sprawl and hate the traffic. Alas, we are also resistant to change to more efficient spatialities and cite antisocial public housing projects from the 1960s to reassure ourselves that vertical development is a disaster. The dis-

satisfaction with the intensity of traffic is coupled with visceral feelings of conservation for the very circumstances that cause it; and in this stymied planner's cramp, we protest at inner developments without any sense that what we want to protect is the cause of what we hate. To avoid the embarrassment of this manifest contradiction, we look around for something non-spatial to blame. It is the people, the numbers, the population.

Blaming the increased population is a perfect symbol of the underlying cause of our spatial problem. It is a peculiarly modern reluctance to see people as a community, the fundamentally joyful elements of a society, who would naturally cohere in the civic space of the streets. Australians prefer their spatialities to isolate people; and so people in abundance inspire dread, as if they are a menacing force predisposed to wreck the relative isolation that we are still able to enjoy in our spacious country. So a deep suspicion of people is structurally rooted into our built environment, a fear of people themselves, which then expresses itself in the misanthropic anxiety over population. The one is in neat alignment with the other: the concern for too many people and the production of antisocial space.

If antisocial space is defined by its outcome—keeping people apart rather than bringing them together—it remains to explain what can identify it architecturally, without excessive subjectivity. This book points to another pattern, somewhat related but more on the functional and behavioural side, that helps reveal what makes antisocial space. It is wasted space. Wasted space generally means antisocial space; though it does not work in re-

verse: not all antisocial space is wasted space, because there are lots of other ways to make antisocial space, as with the unreceptive slippery walls of much contemporary architecture—the object in space that imitates autonomous sculpture—which also spurns the street. Still, if a space lacks a practical use for people, we can assume, as a rule of thumb, that it is largely antisocial.

For example, public parks are for people to come together and are therefore not a waste of space: we go there with our children or haunt the depths as lovers or saunter as voyeurs. The parks, like footpaths with chairs and tables, allow people to congregate and converse. Waste, meanwhile, arises when open space is unused for any purpose other than its maintenance, as with private gardens around houses or businesses or government offices which are only inhabited on the occasions when lone individuals go out to mow the lawn or weed the beds.

This book goes into the causes and consequences of antisocial space and reveals what inspires it, how it acts and how it spreads. We have a lot of antisocial space in Australia, but it is not recognized and, as a culture, we are very far from grasping its effects. As in America, open space is rather considered the great benediction of the frontier, the antidote to the pressure of urban environments, the stress of business, the avidness to profit from every square inch that you see in Asia; it is the national cure against the greed and evil colonizing and competitive spirit of developers and their shameless agenda of exploitation. Unfortunately—and I know that it is counterintuitive—the reverse is the case. The open spaces that are taken for a sign of psychological

and physical restoration are mostly wasted; and the tragic result is not only that they are antisocial but that they produce a misanthropic view of other people.

Australia and America are enormous countries with enormous waste. Their great natural beauty is also an inspiration to replicate the organic grandeur of plants and landscape in our urban environments. But wherever there is waste, there is a spatial lesion which brings all the antisocial consequences that deserve a fresh analysis. Alarming, we come to a point where we see that antisocial space equates with a misanthropic view of the public and an equal and opposite dedication to private leisure. The chapters to come reveal how this resistance to the terms of living as a society expresses itself as a festival of private consumption and wasted time. It is mostly reversible but not without rearranging our spatial aesthetics which have caused an antisocial culture to dig itself in from the front lawn to the new world of bureaucratic landscape gardening.

2

**Modern
misanthropy**

Imagine going for a holiday. You have packed the car and the family is stoked on breakfast and coffee—maybe kids clambering into the back seat with electronic toys—and you are off! There is a bit of traffic in town, but before long you clear it and you are flying along the freeway. The suburbs thin out and, as the scent of holidays billows through the air-vents, the mood in the cabin vibrates with the euphoric prospect of the countryside. The motor effortlessly glides around a bend and then, whoa! it suddenly changes. You are forced to jam the brakes on. Cars ahead have slowed almost to a halt. It is bumper-to-bumper. You look to the other lanes but they too are at a standstill. The freeway is choked.

We rather suppress those moments when the elation dies. They are always about people and their mobile corollary, traffic. The wrong people, surplus people, people who get in front of you, people who break your run and spoil the intimacy of your fantasy, the little world that you had created where the family, say, enjoyed its beautiful solidarity in the abstract time and space of motor transport; and suddenly, this promise of pleasure was deceived by the conspicuous glut of people wanting the same thing, as if a flock of sparrows competing for a savoury rusk. What can we do but resent the presence of these importunate people? Even the thought that they were there before you does not alter your resentment. You were playing at being independent and they broke the game. For a while, you could nourish the illusion that humanity was a kind of scenic backdrop that you could drive through in a dynamic bubble. To find instead that humanity seethes with a proliferation of similar bubbles, all over-

taking your dream of insularity, creates a bitter disappointment and incites a revulsion for people themselves.

We live in an age that causes us to deplore the presence of people. Historically, this horror at the sight of people is relatively new because the city was identified with the people in it.¹ There was once a time when the sight of other people gave us a thrill, bringing thoughts of collective joy, music-making, revelry, entertainment and cheer. They were the days when there was a conspicuous community—symbolized by pedestrian movement and architectural institutions like the town square—when individuals felt that they lived in a society. People in large numbers were associated with festivity, with outgoing expressions of community to greet other people, as with carnival and other pagan left-overs. Busy streets were interpreted as lively, the places to be, with gorgeous architectural decoration to suggest that the street is the ceremonial place for eternal conversations.

In former times, horror would rather be caused by an absence of people: solitude would be good for no one but introverted philosophers or outcast prophets, shepherds languishing in the grove, excommunicated leaders in bitter exile or melancholy poets who sing of forlorn love.² For other folk, the sense of living in a society was intense and the symbols of rich interchange among people are monumentally present throughout Europe in the form of dense old cities, with loggias and largos, richly ornamented in gracious reception of a thronging populace.

How is it that we no longer enjoy the prospect of encountering other people and think of humanity as a regrettable swarm that mortifies our leisure? All the obvious social developments would indicate the opposite response. As a society, we are relatively cohesive. Nowadays, there are far fewer dangers *per capita*. People are much better educated and schooled in a more enlightened spirit. There are fewer ugly expressions of class difference and we have elaborate programs to make sure that individuals do not offend one another, to avoid all manifestations of chauvinism or discrimination. Even language is controlled, so that nothing demeaning or derogatory can be uttered without moderation. We all take it to heart and seldom grizzle about political correctness: schools everywhere indoctrinate kids in good social habits, praising them for being supportive to one another and having compassion toward those who maybe have an unhappy family life and bring the bad mood to school.

People, if anything, are much lovelier than ever before, not just begrudgingly tolerant but more sensitive and accommodating of difference. Sometimes exercising Scandinavian levels of forbearance, we are ready to try to understand other perspectives, to appreciate that the burqa, say, may have cultural value to traditional communities who do not share our feminist reasons for discouraging it. In any social context, we feel comfortable saying the right things to one another and projecting our view tactfully. These values are cultivated throughout state schools and have broad acceptance as an aspiration, even if the necessary etiquette lags in reality.

The times when we hate people are when we do not interact with them using language but rather when we are set aside from other people in private structures that flatter our individualism at the expense of community. In the taxonomy of consumption, they are all the items of greatest prestige: the car, the suburban garden, the holiday house; but even the spot that you claim on the beach can assume the same jealousy of proprietorship, because you take a dim view of people encroaching on your littoral idyll. In contemporary life, the social contexts that allow for interaction are either scarce or fraught; and in all other circumstances, we loathe the thought of people wherever we are. We construe our joy as the time that we own by ourselves and for our own diversion: other people are responsible for breaking the game.

Sadly, all those people impeding our progress on the freeway are actually just like us, families or couples or bunches of friends headed for a similar destination to ours and probably of a similar class. If you got to know them, they are likely to be mostly okay, as folks go, and somewhat rewarding to talk to: the chances are that they would be very sweet and somewhat generous. But you will never know them in any connexion other than the competitive horror of the traffic jam that they seem to create: the people in rows of cars who prevent you from fantasizing about your autonomy in your own car. Never mind that you are doing exactly the same damage to their fantasies of spatial autonomy, and they hate you in return, for no reason other than being there and being people.

It is nothing against you personally. Australians are affable men and women when in company and gregarious and amusing at a party. The party does not present any kind of threat, and it is easy to be sociable and remember to act hale-fellow-well-met. There is no private game that gets to be broken by the proliferation of people and the contact with the chosen people does not have the appalling effect that it does when you let yourself expect isolation. Australians are not misanthropic by nature. When induced to go among people, we have no trouble enjoying one another's company. It is the same reason that explains the Australian love of crowds, say, at the football, a rock concert, a Moomba parade or the Sydney Mardi Gras festival which is also adored by heterosexuals because of its proud assertion of community. And even though the crowd at the football stadium might be intimidating in its scale and tribal solidarity, Australians do not mind the density of the mob, because the individual is persuaded in advance that he or she is among friends. The game is not predicated on privacy.

Large sporting or public events hold a significant place in the Australian heart, because they prove that a certain medieval fondness for other people can survive middle-class isolation, and that we are not pathologically or intrinsically misanthropic but rather that our misanthropy is only induced upon us by artificial middle-class isolation. The large events reassure us that our horror of people is reversible. Unfortunately, however, the high carnivalesque spirits do not stick from event to event, and the Australian immediately defaults to a fearful distaste for people

the moment the artificial excitement of the match has passed and the manic crowd disperses.

In case you think that the modern misanthropy is rather the exception, in the same way that holidays are unusual in the grind of weekly work patterns, consider some other weekly circumstances, where the multiplicity of people horrifies us. The prime example is shopping. To get the groceries and a pair of sandals to replace the ones that have broken, you jump in a car and drive to a large shopping complex. This is Australia where, statistically, few people have the luxury of walking to strip shopping; and even when this amenity is on offer, Australians are persuaded that they would not be able to get the groceries home without a car or get the full range of things that the mall provides. So off we go to an enormous moonscape of carparks surrounding the mall, even on multiple levels connected by ramps. Sometimes, you will get a park immediately or you might even risk driving a bit further to get a spot closer to the entrance. But it all depends on the volumes of traffic frequenting the centre. At the level of optimum occupancy, like a river about to burst its banks, a tiny increase in patrons causes immense anxiety, competition and chaos. With a scarcity of carparking places, drivers compete and are tempted to park illegally and take a risk on it. At peak times, the levels of stress are considerable. When the frazzled automotive shopper finally returns home, the report of the trauma will always condemn the crowds. The crowds were shocking. Boy, it was so crowded.

The bad experience of a choked carpark is never likely to be so horrific that the convenience of automotive shopping is deeply challenged. Especially if there are kids in tow—somewhat resistant to walking at the best of times—people still believe that the car is the easiest and most efficient way to get the shopping done. You would never blame the archetype but only two of the variables: the volume of people and the infrastructure to handle it. Shocking crowds. Too many people. They ought to build extra carparks. It is dreadful these days and getting worse. We look upon people as a deplorable epidemic, a surging infestation that will cause imminent social breakdown, unless the roads are widened and more carparks are built. We detest congestion and, after vilifying the civic engineers for not making more exits or entrances or bays or lanes or helicopters, we can only lay the blame at people, the people in our way. We despise the crowds because they are not in any sense company but only a nuisance.

The problem is not people *per se*, of course, but their mode of occupying space. The spatial tolerance of cars is extremely low, because cars take up a large and inflexible quantum of space which cannot be compressed or shifted slightly to one side for three seconds to allow for some intervention. It is a huge amount of space, maybe 50 times the area that a human occupies, depending on the speed. Cars respond very clumsily to the organic flux of life, the breathing in and out that communities naturally do by ageless diurnal rhythms. The car is a machine that nevertheless seems to have unbendable rights, and it cannot adjust its entitlements to even a slightly compromised circumstance. When things get busier, the cars pile up along their lanes in paralysis.

The motorist experiences the slightest change to optimal driving as congestion and immediately feels frustrated with the volumes, the poor performance of the motor and the loss of petrol. So is the problem the car itself? No, we are not ready for that argument. Rather, there are too many people. The horror of people is intense. There can be no sense of community in a carpark.

Something valuable has fallen out of human relations as a result of this perceived people-pressure. Australians no longer feel that they live in a society. Our architecture, our past-times and habits, the layout of our cities, the templates for our infrastructure and our aspirations no longer have much to do with a society. The contact with community has been largely disabled, and the individual has little interest in belonging to a society. A society, for Australians, means nothing but a comprehensive service-provider with responsibilities to maintain and improve the rights, amenities and luxuries of the individual. As for a society as an organic network of affections, we want to get as far away from other people as we possibly can.

This alienation has nothing to do with the internet or some kind of depersonalization of computers. It has nothing to do with violent video games, alcohol, drugs or a general loss of moral wisdom. If anything, we have superior social capital as a result of virtual communities; and, as suggested, education has never been so community-oriented. Education has made visible strides in softening the prejudice and chauvinism that characterized the past. Rather, as counterintuitive as it may seem, the changes are

physical and architectural, with unfortunate psychological and social corollaries.

The big changes to the Australian and American sense of community all occurred just before the first world war; and every community in the new world which was planned from that date bears the same signs of social emptiness. The war itself is not to blame, because the changes were already structurally afoot in the Edwardian period. In the first decade of the twentieth century, Australians turned their back on the street and retreated to cellular private reservations, a house surrounded by garden, seeking privacy and self-preservation.

Compare houses built in Australia in the Victorian period with Edwardian houses. The august nineteenth-century Italianate houses built before 1900 front directly onto the street; and even if they are set back in a garden, they figuratively look at the street with a frontal address to the opposite side, as in the renaissance, bolstered by muscular ornaments, emphatically declaring the compressive bearing of each member upon the one below, with much pomp, much sense of occasion and air of the landmark. The Edwardian houses built in the new century, on the other hand—with their combination of hip and gable roofs and episodic multiplicity of spaces—seek to nestle within garden beds while hugging their internal volumes. Lacking the former muscular engagement with the street, the Edwardian houses withdraw from the public encounter and propose an almost ramshackle growth of intimate quarters that repudiate the franchise of the street. Even in inner suburbs, Edwardian houses suggest privacy,

a retiring habit, a fondness for hidden corners and the country nook. They abandon the strong urban presence of the earlier styles in favour of a fairy-tale landscaped folly, part vernacular cottage and part medieval fantasy, with pinnacles and gargoyles and steep roof-lines.

The pattern is set for the century ahead: not the style but the relation to land and community. We reject any engagement with the street other than through decorating the thoroughfare with a private garden that might connect with street plantations. The house recedes from the street behind its garden and declares the property as an institution of private withdrawal. From the 1920s, the car and garage become *de rigueur*. The old pattern from the inner suburbs where the blocks were narrow is regarded as proper to slums, signs of a primitive age where modernity was not served by the appropriate space. The car is integral and necessary to the expansion of space in the suburb: it created the transport and hence afforded the sprawl. As well as determining the footprint of cities, the car also completed the isolation of the individual from pedestrian space; and before long, the presence of people would no longer contribute to a sense of living in a society, but rather people themselves, all locked in cellular competition, would be seen as a breach of paradise.

Ever since the early twentieth century, life has been configured around new and evolving spaces, new and evolving rituals and locomotion. They all interlock with one another over new aspirations, expectations, fears, ambitions and values; and together, they define modern culture. It is a fabric, if you like,

woven with thick inflexible monofibres: spaces and objects lined up as the warps and a dense and knotty weft of contemporary myth. The myths of Australia are no longer about wild stockmen or bushrangers: they are about how you get access to privilege, fun, competitive advantage and improved standards, how you get ahead and manage to have a better life than the next person. In all of this, though seldom overtly smug about other people, we identify with no one and see humanity as either competition or an outright menace. We do not mean to be misanthropic but, against all our heartiness in jovial intimate company, we are structurally so, conditioned to be thus by the spatiality that we have built for ourselves.

The new misanthropy explains how it is that Australians think that their country is overcrowded. In fact Australia is one of the larger countries in the world with one of the smaller populations; and even if, for the purposes of argument, you excise the part which is sometimes dismissed as 'desert', the remaining fertile country is still so enormous that several European countries would fit inside it, each of which with populations larger than the whole of Australia. As for water shortages and a fragile ecology—serious problems, to be sure—the same combinations exist in other countries, like Israel, without the paranoia that there should be fewer Jews living there and that the land cannot naturally support so many people. The record so far is that nobody starves; and the catastrophes of farming, like salinity and erosion, are all about inappropriate horticultures for the given terrain, not an absolute limit that prevents appropriate dry crops. Australians are actually delighted if they can find an agricultural

excuse to decry the growth of population, which is well under half a percent of the population of the earth.

Rather than looking at unlikely explanations related to farming, we should admit that our reasons for considering ourselves overpopulated are fundamentally cultural and, in world terms, anomalous. They derive from our impoverished sense of space, built up on the wrong footprint, which makes our cities dysfunctional, our greenhouse gas production exorbitant and our head full of intolerant ideas about too many people. There is no logic to defend this paranoia; and because Australians are not fundamentally xenophobic, the reason sits squarely with the deep mistakes of our spatialities, which are inflexible, intractable, antisocial and dangerous. Let us see how this indisposition may be analysed.

3

Alphatecture **architecture against the street**

To appreciate Australia and its horror of people, you have to understand its abiding mistrust of the street, some of which is reasonable. Australians do not like streets, unless they look like a continuous garden and aesthetically conceal their function and essence. Otherwise, the street symbolizes all that can ever go wrong and create chaos; above all, and in all circumstances, they are extremely dangerous, a death-zone, where cars vie for space and create rapid gullies of fatal risk. A car travelling at almost any speed can kill you; and with their mortal movement, the roads are loud and fearsome, even without the demonstrative driving and mean-looking anthropomorphic industrial design that make the roads competitive in spirit and exceedingly dangerous for any creature on legs. The street is known as ‘the road’ whenever we speak of traffic hazards to children. Stick to the footpath, lad: do not go on the road. The road is lethal to children, not just because it has cars but large volumes of cars that are driven aggressively. We know from driving a motorcar that automotive behavior is impatient, angry and mad. A child could be nothing but a victim without a similar metal volume and weight to intimidate the other people on the road. The road is fundamentally inimical to people and is seen as the battleground—chivalrous at best and all too often ruthless—for a struggle among drivers in contest, translating all their instincts for survival and hormonal vigour into the fray.

Perhaps this is the keynote for numerous other views that see the street as a zone without grace. If there are too many people in the street—which, in Australia, means two per housefront—there is cause for anxiety: they might swell in numbers to become a

noisy crowd, crushing the grass on the nature-strip, where you can no longer walk in peace; and you may even be caused to vary your pace or risk being pushed into the gutter. Also, given that a street is an undesirable place to be, you might be suspicious of the motives for anyone lingering in the street, or loitering as the English tongue says so derisively, with an air of legal reprisal. Unless accompanied by a dog—and therefore artificially socialized by appeal to canine instinct—any people whom you might meet on a street are those who have no choice in the matter. They are compelled to be in an undesirable place because they do not have an adequate private life: they go to the street where they rely on the vulnerability of others whom they annoy. To many Australians, the street is full of ratbags or at least any number of importunate people have a licence to be there, and their presence cannot easily be controlled and certainly cannot be influenced by the individual without great embarrassment. You have no privacy on the street; and the only people that a street is good for are teenagers on the loose, either showing off their bodies or attracting attention by being rowdy.

Australia is one of the more honest and peaceful countries on the globe, with relatively small chance of anything violent occurring anywhere. Its streets are highly regulated and relatively safe; and when you walk on a street and encounter a person, the chances are that you will even raise a smile. But in spite of this relative security and absence of threat in reality, the street is perceived as a necessary evil, where you are likely to feel uncomfortable unless you are either in a car or on the prowl for a sexual friend or among friends already and you want to show off.

We have to think what a street is other parts of the world. Throughout Europe and Asia, the buildings of four or more storeys which are devoted to accommodation often have shops and cafés at ground floor. There are scores of people who use the street in the neighbourhood for their local needs. You do not need to travel far for anything, because the density is high. You can get whatever you want within a tiny distance, probably reached by foot; and so the streets are full of people walking. With the greater urban density, there are likely to be railway stations nearby, offering frequent services, so the streets have high pedestrian occupancy relative to automotive. As a result, the street is full of conversation, where people go for pleasure as well as business in a highly socialized ambience. Even without the tourists who throng within the more famous centres, the street is a people-garden, a theatre of talk and gawk, hectic at times and seldom favoured by the beautiful weather that we have in Australia but gorgeously connecting citizens to the outdoors and one another. It is an amazing irony that with the city built up to six or seven stories and no private gardens to speak of and very patchy weather, the average Parisian gets to feel the sky above the head much more than the Australian, who anxiously scuttles between the suburban bungalow and the shopping centre in a car.

The Australian fear of the street is the cause of the desolation of Australian streets. Outside a few famous strips which most people reach by car, Australians have difficulty appreciating the civic virtue of streets in bringing communities together or in providing the stagecraft for the joyful operation of a society. Australia is far from Europe and, despite the fact that Australians

find Europe picturesque and appealing (and, by world standards, we travel extensively), we pay little attention to how streets function throughout Europe. Alas, the urbanistic vacuum in Australia also sucks our architects into the void and they too forget what a street is and how best to serve it with an edifice; and more often than not, their most imaginative designs create antisocial planar volumes that deny the congress of people in front of them.

At the heart of Europe, there is a powerful urbanism that we cannot easily recognize in Australia; and even Europeans in the automotive age find it difficult to recover their traditions when they plan new developments. The European urbanism which is nevertheless ingrained in all the established centres is best revealed in the centrality of the street to ancient European ideas of festivity and equality. Streets are sometimes ugly but even the patchy ones are based on a beautiful idea. In all ages, to either side of the street lie private properties, but the street itself is common and belongs to the public. Against an exclusive world of ownership, the street is egalitarian and theoretically belongs to us all. As Shakespeare asks: “are not the streets as free for me as for you?”³ When we can claim nothing else in the city, the street remains our urban birthright.

Among urban forms, however, the street is poorly recognized in architectural terms; and in many ways, architects are to blame for building buildings rather than building streets. In a sense, the street is too hard even for architects to grasp, much less for an automotive community traumatized by the thought of the higger-mugger. Conceptually, the street is neither a building

proper, with its own authorial integrity, nor a grandiose plan that subsumes the whole operation of a city. The street is often neglected as an architectural form and remains weak as an entity in its own right. Buildings are monumental and prestigious, as are urban plans, with their aerial coordination and air of genius-coordination; but the street itself falls symbolically in the middle, with neither a sense of authorship in a building nor the logistical power of a city plan.

To be fair, if we go back to the renaissance, the street has a torrid history. When they were beautiful they were dangerous; and now that we are clever at controlling crime and planting trees as well as erecting sophisticated buildings, our streets are often desolate or alienating. Nor is this a uniquely Australian problem. One might argue that throughout other vigorous countries like America, a good street has not been built for a century, and it seems that the causes of failed streets may be identified in the way that architecture and community are conceived.

Throughout history, we have never had good conceptual tools for defining streets. Various formulae arose almost by happenstance from antiquity onward; and they served pre-automotive cultures well. But the consciousness of how and why they work has been tenuous in all epochs; and from the period of automotive cities—where streets have been radically redefined—this weakness has become problematic because of the ecological calamity of motor transport.⁴

Thinking about how buildings sit relative to the street always involves a search for a vocabulary, because things to do with space are not word-rich. Maybe before building new streets or even appreciating or criticizing existing ones, we need to create some architectural words that describe buildings from the point of view of the street.

If we try to think of an admirable piece of architecture, we might name Bjørn Utzon's beautiful Sydney Opera House. It occupies a place in our minds not just because it is an imaginative form but rather because it conforms to an ancient template. As the key Australian architectural icon to be featured in international textbooks, inspiring Australian architects with hope for a new start in the history of the discipline, the Opera House is in fact conceived spatially according to a venerable footprint. The principal conception of architecture that we carry around in our heads is to see a building as an object-in-space. It is especially tenacious in Australia and America, though it is properly international and is as old as the Pyramids. Ideally situated on a platform to afford inspection from all angles, the building is conceptualized in the round, with maximum visibility, as with the Parthenon on the Acropolis, by the luxury of open space. Frequently, the three-dimensional integrity of the building is afforded by spacious grounds, ideally supplemented by a waterfront. It is the luxury of space that you can recognize with the landscaped estate of a chateau or a church or house set within a garden. We might label such buildings alpha-architecture (by analogy to the alpha male) or the object-in-space.

Alpha-architecture or alphatecture is very glamorous and, when imaginative or majestic, it sticks in the mind; but how well does it match the fabric of cities? It is revealed by a walk down Pitt St in Sydney or Queen St in Melbourne. In many ways, the streetscape is similar to its downtown counterparts around the world. The street seems to walk along with you. If they are old stock, the individual buildings are notable by their beautiful detail—their doors and windows perhaps richly ornamented with entablatures and the storeys marked out with massive progressions—but structurally speaking, the buildings are all very alike and all link up analogue-style. The most complete example of such architecture is Paris, where the streets have a certain uniformity, where the buildings are set to a statutory height limit and are unified by common patterns of robust articulation. The buildings on the Boulevard Saint-Michel in Paris are not exceptional designs that demand space around them, like a solitary egg demanding a basket all to itself. The buildings do not necessarily stand out as distinctive and original statements of architecture but achieve the most compelling pedestrian corridors, suitable also for the rush of dense transport with many millions of commuters.

So aside from alphatecture, this is the other paradigm, which dominated urban architecture until around 1900, and which still remains the principal motif of downtown architecture the world over. It sees the building as a façade in a continuum with other façades which constitute the defining walls for the street. The building presents as a two-dimensional screen: a perpendicular bracket that occupies its allocated frontage, lining up with its neighbours. Façades in a street are somewhat interdependent;

and this relational attachment is both their strength and weakness. Buildings are not autonomous in any sense but express the pressing contingency of the street. For too long, it seems to me, such noble street-buildings have gone without a name. Let us define such buildings as E-type or engaged architecture, because the building makes direct contact with the street and the neighbours, literally touching the land that does not belong to the property.

Engaged architecture was perhaps better suited to the styles of the past, with their argumentative mass and muscular ornament, than the sheer materials and abstraction of modernism; and throughout modernism, the relational protocols of one slab to another—all broadly based on transparency and cantilevering—was experienced uncomfortably. In modernism, the old decorative *lingua franca* of ornamental give-and-take no longer looked after the contiguities. However, this is not the principal reason for architectural historians disdaining the E-type building and concentrating on alphatecture. After all, modernism is responsible for most streetscapes throughout Asia. The modernist towers of Tokyo, though built to a ramshackle skyline, provide beautiful streets which enjoy high pedestrian occupancy, are delightfully full of conversation, are lined at ground level with shops and restaurants and have the same or even greater festivity as the august counterparts of premodern Europe.

The problem, rather, is how architects see E-type buildings as something less, something lacking, something that they fear disappoints what architecture fundamentally is. The thought that

preoccupies architects more than most is essentially negative: it is a concern with how to avoid the cube, the box, the predictable geometric unit that has been replicated ubiquitously and is universally denounced as unimaginative and oppressive, unless decked out with mannerism. There is an understandable contempt for the sterility of certain commonplace geometric slab designs in ferroconcrete; and so the imaginative labours of architects are dedicated to how a building might have impact by asserting its presence in the round. It seems a terrible stigma to be accused of propagating yet another box on the boring template of boxes; and nothing seems to guarantee this fate so much as the constraints of neighbouring walls.

The attachment of one building to the other in the stepwise concatenation of a street seems to confess some symbolic conformity to a streetscape which limits the autonomous imagination of the architect and cripples the integrity of the building. Modernist architects never liked it. They see engaged architecture as a 'mere' façade. A façade is like a box that is purely graphic and does not even express a volume within. The very word façade has pejorative connotations. To design a building as blank on three sides and only expressing a relation to the eye on the front is seen in modern architecture as selling the three-dimensional soul of architecture for a two-dimensional subordination to the street. Modernist stand-out architecture wants a field around it, not a whole lot of neighbours and milling cafés: it is flattered not by people in a street but an abstract plane upon which to circumnavigate it Platonically; and the footprint already spells the empire of the car.

Perhaps for that reason, alphatecture is light-on for motifs which symbolize or facilitate pedestrian movement. It is mean with doors and windows, because these motifs—which clearly address the street as the province of people who walk—also seem to disappoint the sculptural autonomy of the object in space. Doorways with lintels and columns seem, to make a pun, pedestrian: they do not soar or transcend but handle space as a part of processional space, that rhythmical totality which is the life of the street, in the same way that windows spell out the details of internal spaces and provide inviting access to those on the outside. It is notable how often pieces of alphatecture spurn the street at ground level, providing abstract antisocial walls that deflect the traction that a pedestrian might psychologically achieve relative to the building. They tend to have excitement from afar but seldom sustain the same thrill up close, where the pedestrian confronts a mausoleum of sheer mineral. It seems immaterial if this impenetrable skin is geometric or biomorphic: it shuns pedestrian life and is not conceived for a street. Uninflected by ornament or permeability or an aesthetic system based on the relationality of its constituents (which would provide an analogy to a community) the alphatectural wall is antisocial.

In Melbourne, it has been popular to signal doorways by means of a ramp or a shaft which performs a kind of military salute. The language of these gestures is largely derived from automotive signage, and hence its suitability for freeways. In the most commanding example of monumental architecture, the Melbourne Museum designed by the firm Denton Corker Marshall sends a shaft into the sky which at present makes up a part of the sky-

line over the Carlton Gardens. Symbolically enough, this grand semantic device indicates neither a front door nor a back door but gestures to open space at a point of no access behind the park. As a stroke of alphatecture, the shaft acts as sculpture without a world of pedestrians around it (if not those with dogs on an autonomous insular canine mission), much less those whom you might beckon to in friendly accord with the urban rhythms of the street. It is like the tail feathers of a bird sticking out beyond the cage, which in other respects the building replicates with its girders and east-west wings.

For a very long time, however, such buildings have been celebrated as somehow redemptive, recovering the imagination of architectural design against the horrible conformity which is determined by the geometric regularity of city streets. Especially in an architectural culture which is terrified of pastiche—which actually characterizes a great deal of beautiful E-type architecture in Australia and elsewhere—the only architecture worthy of the imagination, so it seems to many architects, is alphatecture, devoid of all the socializing ornaments and fenestration that create festivity in even the clumsiest pastiche. But perhaps the greater fear remains the modernist alternative to pastiche, which is the box.

For its tendency to reduce the building to a façade, so the fear goes, the street seems to compromise the dignity of architecture in the round. Much urban architecture is conceived in resistance to the structure of the street. That is why whenever we see new buildings celebrated as a triumph of original architecture in

magazines like *Steel Profile*, it is the alpha building that features. It is the object-in-space. And even if the building is effectively a façade, the photographers will do everything in their power to transform it into alphatecture, to present it as if it were an object-in-space to distinguish it from the assumed conformity and spatial constriction of the context. So even though the footprint confesses E-type engagement, its photographic representation still champions the alpha ideal of object-in-space.

In historical practice, however, engaged architecture was never seen in a reductive planar way, as if necessarily a concession, whereby the sculptural prowess of architecture acquiesces to the noisy incumbencies of traffic. Quite the reverse! Façade or E-type architecture, perhaps just because it is based on engagement both with the street and neighbours, has historically been more tactile, more conspicuously plastic, than most modernist objects-in-space. In traditions that were alive until the 1930s, the façade was often richly inflected with three-dimensional ornamental detail, with its seductive push and pull and articulated members, aedicules, entablatures and columns.

The renaissance building stock, best known through the urban *palazzo*, supplied European cities with a strong archetype of urban design, in which the presence of the building and the coherence of the street were mutually reinforced. Establishing the prestige of engaged architecture by alignment with the buildings of ancient Rome, the urban *palazzo* typically fronts directly onto the street and there is no strip of land that separates the façade from the pavement. At most, there is a colonnade, as when the

street is effectively a *piazza*; but even so, the façade treats the *piazza* as if it were a street, or a *largo*, which is the word still found on various Italian streets that swell out at a certain point.⁵

Most European cities follow this template. The inner city precincts of the new world and Asia are predicated on a similar footprint, with sometimes more regular gridded streets, as in Chicago or Melbourne. Though taller, the buildings seldom sacrifice land as a barrier between the street and the façade. Sometimes, especially in Europe, the block has a courtyard or light-wells in the middle. There are social and ecological benefits in a footprint which occupies the whole site, without a margin of land on the four sides of the building. The land use is optimized and the accommodation is substantially greater. The periphery of any block represents a large proportion of the land, because the area goes up by the square the further out you build. In multi-storey buildings, the accommodation goes up by the cube. The strip of land left at the periphery of the block is extremely costly; and in many cases, there is no discernable aesthetic or social benefit from the empty margin.

A waste of space also means a waste of accommodation resources and consequent inefficiencies in transport. The *per capita* environmental benefits of greater urban density are significant.⁶ As apartments sit on top of one another in tall blocks, the heating expense is considerably less than with houses of one or two stories. As noted, the population has fewer transport needs or meets them more easily through highly patronized transport services. There seems little doubt that *per capita* emissions in

high-density cities are much lower than in sprawling cities, as in much of America and most of Australia;⁷ and the ecologically wasteful pattern has global manifestations, as with the postwar development of Kuala Lumpur, where navigation around the suburbs seems inconceivable without a car or motorbike.

In general, we could say that wherever there is wealth and space enough for motor transport, the global trend has been toward a sprawling arrogation of farmlands for the sake of low-density housing and automotive shopping complexes. In Australia, where we have a lot of land, the pattern has expanded exponentially, obliterating any sense of a sustainable alternative. These developments are conceived according to aesthetic conventions which sadly demand space around buildings, many margins of free land which commit later development to an inefficient footprint. To the ecological benefits of high-density cities, we have to add the strong social benefits in the motif that were noted above: best known through the metropolises of Europe, there are also abundant examples throughout Asia and the older parts of America, where multi-storey apartment blocks that sit hard on the street accommodate shops and cafés at ground level, with the result of visible street festivity. Analogous streetscapes are found even in the villages.

Judging by recent Australian and American patterns, however, there is limited sentimental or symbolic sympathy for the motif of high density, and communities suspecting that a vertical complex may be forced upon them often experience resentfully the very suggestion of development. The idea of high-density itself

is regarded as unnatural, frightening electorates with a sense of panic for overcrowding. Often, it is tolerated on pre-existing grids almost as a necessary evil, akin to economic rationalism, with its pathological optimization of available opportunities and the shameless exploitation of resources, all at the expense of human dignity. Wherever a choice is presented, many people opt for the luxurious open spaces of private gardens (forming a peripheral spatial couch for an alpha-house or even apartment block) and what they see as the convenience of motor transport.⁸ So fearful are communities of the incursions of high-density living that suburban areas dedicated to low-density are treated like reservations. Elaborate legislative frameworks are established to protect the sparseness of people and building-stock, so that the degree of overlooking and visual bulk of each new start or home renovation are limited by law.

Contemporary cities reflect a complicated negotiation between the two motifs; and they cannot easily be dichotomized in the way that geography suggests: a vertical city core (downtown) and a horizontal sprawl of dormitories (the suburbs). New development is often structurally located at the intersection, where a set of curious and unresolved compromises is visible throughout the world. Thus apartment blocks are set among gardens, just as office complexes are set among car parks. In new developments outside the inner precinct, we see a great deal of multi-storey construction; but, true to the alpha principle of quarantining a strip of land as reservation—which may be called a negative garden⁹—the tower has no relation with the street. The suburbanization of the tower means the death of the street, because the

building has no commitment to contact or engage with the street: it no longer creates the street, no longer brings architectural definition to it, superintends it or enhances its liveliness. There is no longer a sense of a permeable wall, where you can walk along a street and feel invited to pass through the very wall that holds the confines of the space, as you do when you go into a shop or a café.

Two factors, therefore, have conspired against the street in the postwar period internationally: the vernacular appeal of the peripheral reservation or garden (served by a large fleet of cars) and the modernist architectural alpha bias for buildings as objects-in-space. Both are inextricably linked to ideas of freedom, a liberation from cramped conventions of the past. Just as it seems more natural to the spirit to wander through a garden with an arbour than through a laneway with overhanging balconies, so it seems more natural to see architecture as autonomous, as a three-dimensional presence rather than as a screen that subscribes to a conventional line-up of other screens to make a street.

The alpha paradigm is seductive and flattering to architects, and is strongly reinforced not so much by the nature of construction as by the nature of designing. When architecture students produce their maquettes or design-firms create models for tender, they create wonderful shapes upon a tablet. These conceptions by and large seek the monumentality of autonomous sculpture, where the shape is dignified by an assumed continuous viewpoint. Just as artists after Cézanne scorn the restrictive guidelines of single-point perspective in painting, so architects prefer the liberated idea of a corporal engagement with space,

emphatically recognizing the plasticity of volumes which might be thought of as the sculptural integrity of the architecture. The masterpieces in the canon of modernist architectural history are conspicuously sculptural statements like Le Corbusier's *Ronchamp Chapel*, beautiful and significant things, to be sure, but structurally speaking what would have been described in the renaissance as a little chapel off the road that you reach by horse.¹⁰ Alas, the horse is now the car, and it forms the hidden history to our most hallowed examples of independent architectural imagination, as with buildings like the Fort Worth *Modern Art Museum* by Tadao Ando.

Generally we might say of contemporary architecture internationally—from the most highbrow statements of alpha purity to the most vulgar department store set amid car parks—that it has lost touch with the street. With postmodern consciousness fired by architects like Robert Venturi, a recognition of the street entered architectural discourse,¹¹ but this is fundamentally the road as seen from a speeding car: it is about highway culture rather than street culture; and it signally favours the alpha building over engaged architecture. As yet, we have neither recognized nor fathomed the needs and virtues of pedestrian and cycling spaces in high-density cities, other than through non-architectural studies such as the beautiful and vigorous historicized apologia for bipedality by Rebecca Solnit.¹² We remain mystified by the factors that make for beautiful streets, that make streets inhabitable for large numbers, seductive, hospitable, curious, enriched, inflected or prestigious; and most authorities, faced with the challenge of enhancing urban environments, can think of nothing better than

requiring reservations or setbacks or gardens. Alas, these strategies represent the very suburbanization which is the antithesis of the urban street and which ultimately spells its symbolic doom.

From the late 1960s, many tall developments have been created on land that was formerly low-rise. They tend to reveal a pattern of land compensation. You lose the private gardens or the open spaces that were once rail yards, factories or slums; and in return for accepting the towers, we will give you the reassurance of plenty of garden. So the tower sits in grounds which are like moonscapes carpeted in green, where no street as pedestrian continuity is felt, where footpaths connect alphatectonic structures with yawning chasms for underground car parks. A footpath in this terrain conspicuously cuts across automotive space: the pedestrian or cycling thoroughfare is anomalous and the sense of the buildings having reciprocal façades that convoke the festive gathering of people on foot is entirely absent.

Streets are necessarily reciprocal. A streetscape depends on one side of the street answering the other side. This was understood in the renaissance, where Italian writers would talk about buildings responding to one another or answering one another.¹³ This consciousness has been almost entirely lost. With few exceptions, if you give us land, we will eradicate every semblance of social potential that it might have accommodated. We are more likely to see the street in a new vertical development as if it were a road through farming lands. Taller buildings are set inside their blocks and the roads snake around them, hardly touching them and never proposing a continuity of walls. Because there is no

visual invitation to see buildings as a concatenation of façades, each building might as well be a fortress in a landscape suitable for jousting.

The problem of trade-off gardening—where we compensate for taking away small private gardens by providing larger communal front and back gardens (rather than courtyards)—is not just that it intrinsically weakens the street but that prevailing architectural training compounds it. Championing the building as an abstract object-in-space, the alphatectonic mindset fundamentally dislikes the street as a suite of façades, because they are literally full of contingencies. The street is a set of each building rubbing up against another, producing lots of contingencies, none of which can be controlled by the architect of a given block. The street has an energy which is greater than the sum of its parts, a synergy made by unforeseeable overlaps and contrasts. Alas, architectural aspirations emphasize what you can do with a clean slate, a white canvas. Architecture has so long aspired to autonomous form and abstraction that it does not easily handle the episodic contingencies and hubbub of the street.

Even the modern skyscraper which occupies the four corners of the allotment, aspires to be an object-in-space. It may incidentally have a good street-oriented façade, as in Victorian times; but structurally speaking, it does not settle for a horizontal solidarity with its neighbours to form a scenic backdrop for the street but strives to be recognized as a three-dimensional landmark from afar. Among celebrity architects (known as starchitects) a skyscraper commission is prestigious, because a

very tall building is sure to emerge as a sculpture, even though you may not be able to see all aspects of it at any given point. You may not have free space around the block but if the skyscraper towers over its neighbours, it achieves some of the pre-eminence that alpha-architecture seeks.

In its materials of glass and ferro-concrete, as noted above, the skyscraper has a somewhat slippery and placeless disposition which is not geared to engagement. Nevertheless, they do occupy the whole allotment: the skyscraper in the grid of Manhattan or Tokyo respects the edge of the street and, as noted earlier, does not necessarily wreck the integrity of the street. Utopian architecture, however, calls for utopian settings; and the street, with its noisy contingencies, its perpetual air of being built-in, plus an underlying conformity of address, does not qualify. For utopian architects, the street is messy. It lacks the requisite purity. To design a building with lateral walls that do not have a view seems like an indignity, something that we endure by commercial necessity but which fundamentally does not celebrate architecture. Like modernist artists, architects have been trained toward transcendence, scorning the limitations of time and place. In the ethos of what we are calling alpha architecture or alphatecture, the street is one of those contingencies that you try to transcend.

Architects are hardly the only authors of utopia. There are numerous others who conspire to make the object-in-space the prevailing aspiration and the defining principle of new estates or complexes in the expanding suburbs throughout the globe.

In spite of all the tourists who adore Florence and Paris as an artwork, the template that these gracious cities are based upon—with multistorey façades built directly onto the street—has few apologists. Instead, patrons, local authorities and the public all clamour for space, freedom and light; and the idea of creating a street outside the established dense precincts is little in evidence.

The very existence of tall buildings for housing is often resented so much that the engagement that they potentially offer is not recognized. So if we insist on putting people in tall apartments, we feel that there has to be a trade-off already at the bottom of the tower, namely (a) a transcendent sculptural architectural statement, which is usually antisocial and (b) some kind of garden. These compensatory gardens are more often than not a waste of space, because as well as corroding the presence of the street, they create empty places which are good for no one and dissipate any architectonic sense of occasion that the building make create. As suggested earlier, gardens are usually built for the sake of buildings rather than people: they are installed as an institution of visual hygiene against the contaminant of people and the masonry that contains them, so that we seem to be insulated from consciousness of either. But whereas a suburban backyard could at least be defended on the grounds that it supports family fun, the garden around a block of flats hardly ever gets used by the people in the flats—as opposed to a courtyard—because they are never intimate; and of course the spaces are out-of-bounds for anyone else. Our streets are disjointed not by the natural ornament that gardens offer but by their function and symbolism. Certainly, the leaf and branch are

welcome in themselves, as in the public boulevards and parks of Paris and Melbourne. But private gardens—creating a buffer between street and building, what we have called a green moat that symbolically protects the dwelling from the presence of the street—defy the logic of the street as public engagement, and are an antisocial statement of the privatization of urban space and the consequent alienation of streets. The private gardens are corrosive to the street as theatre and paradoxically define space in terms of automotive thoroughfares. Architecture as object-in-space with its coulisse of garden is supported in contemporary times only because of cars; and the formula writes the car in, as it were, to the contract of how space is negotiated.

In the 1970s, an Australian architect published a book with special ecological relevance to the vast but highly urbanized island continent, which in so many ways resembles America.¹⁴ With a catch-cry of “cluster and connect”, Deborah White’s *Seeds for change* made the case for the virtues of urban density at a time when four trends in building were prevalent. First, we made very tall bureaucratic buildings in the city centre. Second, we pushed the urban boundaries outward and created single-storey suburbs with private gardens on large allotments; third, we erected blocks of flats with gardens around them, with strict setback provisions to prevent the land from being used to the borders; and finally we built factories and shopping complexes organized entirely around automotive transport. None of these trends allowed people to cluster or connect. They were all dissipating, antisocial and alienating; and of course the environmental consequences of this social failure are dreadful.

The problem is an idea. It is a misguided ideal that freedom equates with space, and also that aesthetics demand an autonomous form which expresses the freedom of space. This is indeed the basis of the fond conceit of the architectural object-in-space, where we build as if we were Vladimir Tatlin, creating alpha buildings as sculptural monuments in the abstract language of geometry and plying shapes without reference to human scale or the rhythms of pedestrians in the street. Given what we know from the history of the street and its clustered and connective amenities in style and function, these themes of modernism are immensely destructive conceits which urgently need deconstruction.

4

Gardenography

I love gardens.¹⁵ They are an adorable amenity, a balm to the eye and the feet in an age of machines and skyscrapers. In prosperous and spacious countries like Australia, you can still enjoy a secluded spot, a quiet stretch of verdant land, a place of your own that has nature in it. In the gentle garden, you have a sanctuary at the back or side of the house where flowers yield colour, shrubs veil the masonry or screen out the ugly fences, while trees provide an overhead canopy, protecting you from the glare and heat of the sun. In a garden, there are many seductions. To the charm of nature, you can add the condiment of little fountains and sculptures and episodic pathways and borders. With nothing more than a bird-bath, nature is enjoined to follow our architectural fancies, as the garden magically resonates with the chirping of winged fauna and entertains their seasonal frolicsome society. While only a block away, the traffic roars unrelentingly, the pace of the garden belongs to an earlier age, an eternal time, the age of nature itself, with its literally earthy roots and healthy chthonic smells. Compensating for the filth and pressure of the cars and other emissions of industry, the private garden gives off vital oxygen and remains one of the most appealing and widespread symbols of ecological sanity.

Unfortunately, however, this is the one virtue that suburban gardens do not have. Far from a reserve of ecological restoration, suburban gardens might be suspected of contributing to ecological doom. In spite of my natural affection for gardens and all that they symbolize, I have had to recognize and wrestle with some sobering truths about these most popular and apparently harmless suburban sites. There is a causal chain of environmental dis-

asters shackled to the suburban garden. Because we have gardens, we have low-rise buildings, jealously regulated by setback provisions in order to protect the privacy of neighbouring gardens. The setback legislation guarantees the perpetual maintenance of low-density cities. And because we have an urban sprawl by this legal resolution, we have an ineffectual public transport system, with a consequent reliance on automotive transport. The reason for much of the fumes in the city—the exorbitant generation of greenhouse gasses, with its incalculable damage to the environment—is paradoxically the suburban garden.

It is sad, because people live for their gardens; and gardening in Australia might be considered the national hobby. The garden is the place for the weekend and many joyful hours of work, design and contemplation, where you can also have parties, barbecues and open-air smoking. In Australia, New Zealand and even America, people have ‘voted with their feet’ for this lifestyle, carried forward and constantly improved since Victorian times. They choose to live in the great sprawling suburbs rather than the high-rise centre. But there is no garden city—to use the term from the time of Walter Burley Griffin—without cars. The private gardens grew, historically, with the proliferation of cars, and were only feasible in cities of millions of people with automotive support. The population needs to be dispersed in a vast radius that makes public transport inefficient and frustrating. In Melbourne, for example, the garden city reaches 50 kilometres into what might be the countryside. Bicycles cease to be practical beyond a 15 kilometre radius. Despite trains running axially from the centre to the periphery, there is a near total reliance

on petrol; because getting to the railway, just like the shopping centre, day care or school, requires a car trip. Life in the suburbs is inconceivable without cars. And so the term 'to vote with one's feet' is deceptive. We vote with motorized wheels.

The problem is the gardens. We put water on the gardens; but in socio-economic terms, they only thrive on a constant flow of petrol. It is the petrol that it takes to get to the shops, to get to work, to drive to inner-suburban private schools, or occasionally to the theatre or concert hall. Even to get to one another's houses requires us to travel past hectares of garden. This all means car trips, because in a highly spread-out city, the public transport mainly fails our expectations. So while we instinctively think of gardens as green, they are—in terms of the carbon economy—firmly in the red. We think of gardens restoring the good air; but in fact they indirectly generate the greenhouse gasses that cannot be handled by the world's forests.

Against all sentimentality and personal attachments, we need a critical appraisal of the suburban garden. We were brought up to believe that our gardens were the lungs of the city, that is, the restorative breathing apparatus that turns the fumes into oxygen. We need to interrogate this ongoing assumption that the suburban garden is a zone of health and environmental restoration, with its trees and shrubs bringing country airs to the city, dispersing the fumes and granting us the oxygen that the city deprives us of. First, by virtue of pushing the population into the suburban sprawl, the garden is in fact responsible for our reliance on private motor transport and hence the uncontrolled CO₂

emissions that now threaten the planet with global warming. And second, the garden also defines a house, a single or detached dwelling which is the least energy-efficient form of accommodation. So if gardens fail the carbon test, we have to scrutinize all the articles of faith and legal provisions that protect them. They are, in effect, an institution of the private good against the public good or—more accurately—an institution of current taste against the future good, against the prospects of generations to come, against the biosphere and planetary survival.

From an ethical point of view, the continuing support of garden culture (with concomitant bungalow) could be expressed as the triumph of the aesthetic over the ecological. Planning and protecting the private suburban garden means prioritizing the looks and luxury of property over the health and future prospects of the planet and all its inhabitants. The private delights are won at the expense of the planetary ecosystem. It is always difficult to measure private action in the context of global responsibility; but if you do, it seems that placing current aesthetic interests over the health of the future could be considered somehow immoral. Never before has the aesthetic come under such pressure. So I want to get to the heart of our aesthetic fondness and see in what ways it is illegitimate—or how and why the aesthetic was promoted over the responsibility for the common future good—and, with this understanding, how can we judiciously substitute our currently wasteful dependencies with something more sustainable?

The case in favour of gardens is also felt and fought with moral zeal. Part of the reason is another more embracing institution, namely tradition and heritage, which extends to the affection for beautiful old architecture, passionately defended against predatory developers. Anyone who is imminently turning grey will remember a city which had its outskirts much closer to town than today. The houses were smaller while the gardens were larger; and, in the fateful alignment of things handsome and worthy, the solid-brick houses were more august and the gardens were more gracious. Children lived more of their life in the outdoors and were sent outside to play for hours on end, which required little prompting, because outdoor activity was culturally embedded in childhood.

There is no doubt that gardens can contribute to sustaining a beautiful way of life, which is easy to remember nostalgically. And now we witness a threat to the garden and the lovely balance of yore, which is constituted in deep layers of unconscious memory as somehow natural. Against nature, then, the houses are becoming larger and the gardens smaller. Sometimes the blocks are subdivided to become smaller and sometimes a house is demolished and two units are put on the same quarter acre block. This is often viewed with dismay, because the gardens are no longer of a size that will accommodate the cricket of an eight year old; and the mower has very little work to do, so much so that a petrol mower seems unnecessary and electrical mowers seem a better fit. The threat to the garden is seen, therefore, as development.

Against tradition and a nostalgic view of nature, development rears up as a monster. It tends to be seen by the public in pejorative terms. A report from 2007 emanating from Griffith University (in the rapidly developing state of Queensland) is called *Where have all the gardens gone?* Its author, Tony Wood, explains—with an air of lamentation—that gardens are contracting relative to the size of the dwelling. Using Google Earth as an inspection tool, the author has scrutinized the newer developments for the areas devoted respectively to garden and house. The figure is falling. In the popular imagination, this is seen as a pity. Perhaps it is attributed to the greed of developers, who naturally seek to maximize the profit on their investment. They buy so much land and subdivide it to achieve the optimum volume of sales at the maximum price that the market will bear. This force of the free market is seen as retrograde, if not immoral; and steps must be taken to prevent its free reign. This anxiety is not merely implicit or a vague undercurrent of hidden feeling. It is borne out by the creation of a huge regulatory framework that explicitly hinders development, especially in the inner areas which have the greatest environmental impact.

The most tangible evidence of this garden protectionism is setback. It is a key element in the regulatory framework for building and construction on Australian civic soil. Every local council has a set of rules described as setback. An example can be taken from the City of Boroondara, which is a prosperous leafy municipality in Melbourne, comprising the desirable suburbs of Kew, Hawthorn, Canterbury and Camberwell. Its *Residential Design Policy*¹⁶ is intended ‘to prevent the mass, bulk and scale of the develop-

ment from impacting on adjoining properties and, in particular, their secluded private open space'. It provides 'for the protection of adjoining properties' secluded private open space from overlooking, overshadowing and visual bulk'.

According to this document, there is a setback that prescribes how closely you can build to the edge of the property and how high up you can go relative to the border. You can build '1.2 metres from the boundary at 3.6 metres plus 0.3 metres for every metre of height over 3.6 metres up to 6.9 metres and 1.0 metres for every 1.0 metres of height over 6.9 metres.' Houses or units therefore have to be staggered in their profile, so that they mount upward—somewhat in the shape of a pyramid—to avoid 'overlooking, overshadowing and visual bulk'. You can see the outcome of this all across Boroondara and its sister municipalities. Seen with other aesthetic criteria, it is another visual disgrace; but above all, it is a social and environmental disaster. Extensions put upon old building stock are only allowed to be a fraction of the footprint of the house, so the accommodation gained is marginal. We therefore have a whole extra storey which often only amounts to two rooms, as opposed to accommodation for another family.

With limited candour, the reason for the setbacks is confessed in the municipal document: it is the garden. If houses were only surrounded by pavement, people may not be so jealous of 'secluded private open space', because the relished secluded private open space is assumed to be aesthetically appealing. The precious element that is so assiduously guarded is implicitly the

garden. These zoning laws have been introduced, in noble defiance of the profiteering instincts of developers, to retain the amenity value of the garden next door. This is sometimes expressed as protecting the aesthetic and historical character of the suburb, which is a matter of pride, and is sometimes expressed in Australia as heritage or heritage value.

The worst setback from an environmental point of view is that it is often illegal in the suburbs to build to the periphery of the block. Depending on the municipality, this can sometimes mean that a large proportion of the available land is sacrificed. Even industrial estates in outer suburbs face similar restrictions and are only allowed to occupy 70% of the block, sometimes for the sake of beautification and sometimes explained in terms of parking provisions; because it seems a fair assumption that no one will arrive at a factory upon an industrial estate using anything but a car; and the streets would rapidly become overcrowded with parked cars if parking spaces were not allocated on the land of the business itself. The environmental impact of these laws multiplies if you contemplate adding more storeys upon the restricted footprint. By mathematical logic, the loss of accommodation is multiplied exponentially: it goes up by the cube, not just the square. In all circumstances, the metres shaved off the block at the periphery constitute a large proportion of the useable land.

Many of these regulatory frameworks in the domestic sphere are well-intentioned and are conceived on Edwardian principles of privacy by means of a leafy margin and fences, all gorgeous in their own right; but, as well as creating the antisocial auto-

motive spaces described throughout, the hardy garden vision is an environmental calamity, maintaining a private luxury at the expense of copious fossil fuel, loading the air with carbon and creating spaces that are scarcely navigable in anything but a car. If we can only have gardens by virtue of motorcars—and on top of it we are committed to energy-hungry cottages—, we have to reevaluate these wonderful spaces, their function and use, their sacred origins and ongoing salubrious effects on the individual.

The discussion has to take place on a plane that includes the ethics of ecology. We need to judge the benefits of gardens and cottage on a scale that includes the damage that they indirectly cause. What are these gardens really good for? They seem to be almost configured around aesthetic priorities, the subtext of which, however, is keeping people apart from one another. The comfort, health and lifestyle of children is often invoked in their defence; but in my experience, kids (rightly or wrongly) do not play in them any more, as they once did, because the gardens are more and more dedicated to good looks. As suggested above, Australian gardens tend to be built for buildings rather than for people; and insofar as they provide a service to people, it is either for looking at or for working in. The gardens no longer reflect the shambles of free and creative play. A boy's project with old bits of wood would disappoint the adult aesthetic expectations that make the garden a subject of home-pride. In most suburbs, gardens no longer support grape vines, chooks or fruit trees and are not allowed to be used to store spare parts. Promoted by fashionable magazines and television programs, the Australian garden has changed toward aesthetic formality, lifestyle image,

the ornamental and the non-functional. Seen in magazines like *House & Garden*, the front- and back-garden is a new kind of place between the sacred and the showy, both a hallowed grove and a competitive asset.

Gardens presuppose two structures: one is the house which addresses the garden and the other is the fence which keeps it in. Fences are a consequence of gardens. In some cities, there is no need or temptation for fences because there are no gardens; and occasionally, as in the 1970s, suburban gardens were not fenced off along the frontage, though they always were to the sides—where the property normally meets a neighbour—even if with a lower profile of fence toward the front. Fences can be strong or weak depending on their degree of definition; but there are other aspects of the fence, such as its very placement, which are telling in relation to the purpose of the garden. During the 1970s, fences were sometimes constructed well within the boundaries of the property, rather than at the edge, thus leaving a margin between street and fence where a further garden could exist. Touchingly, this outer bed is a garden given to the public by the private owner who thereby magnanimously renounces a portion of his or her property as a kind of corridor-shrine. There are many varieties of this equivocal treatment which continue to be created in some suburban areas. Beyond altruism, there is no apparent reason for the concession of land to the street except, possibly, to make the fence appear free-standing and monumental, perhaps to draw attention to its presence away from its traditional position and function of marking the edge of the property. Or perhaps the idea

is to project an air of luxury, as if we have so much land that we can donate some to the street.

There appears to be a whole game of give and take, which ultimately acknowledges that the land is good for nothing but creating aesthetic statements of privacy and street pride. We use the land between fence and house no more than we use the land between fence and street. The only difference in the two zones is that one can be seen and the other remains somewhat hidden. The recessive fences both call attention to themselves and yet weaken the expressive function of a marker of place, where their logical placement would be the border. In that sense, the recessive fences renounce their marking-function in order, presumably, to highlight another priority: they step back to shield the property and, by this somewhat equivocal manoeuvre, they assert the priority of privacy without insisting on the presence of the border. They voice the garden message *par excellence*: behold our land and think well about our property but do not come in. We live in a garden and our dedication to gardens is so strong that we put a garden to either side of the fence. It is as if there is some reluctance to acknowledge the fence as the fence, that the fence is a barrier and not pure garden; so the fence itself has to be hidden or softened by its own garden.

Amazingly common, these sacrificial gardens are in one sense an illogical motif that confesses most candidly the superabundance and disposability of land, because they indicate that the owner really does not need a margin of the property and so allows land to be consigned from private to public. In this role, the outer

garden either apologizes for the fence or it adds to the keep-off status of same. In either case, the sacrificial garden which cannot be seen from the house reveals the structure of aesthetic pride in having a garden: they are for other people to look at, a gesture against masonry or wall of any kind in favour of eyes but not feet. So at the same time, the recessive fence advertises an artificial exclusiveness, a further degree of fencing off, as the fence itself is set apart from the street. Recessive fences may appear modest in their concession of land to the street; but they can just as easily be seen as an expression of haughtiness, as if even the fence is condescending and declines to meet the street. Besides, the fence itself has to be claimed as private property: it cannot sit on the street where one of its surfaces would partake of the logical edge which all properties on the street share. It has to be insulated by a garden, its own garden.

I have come from a personal position of loving gardens, acknowledging their sometimes sacred qualities and the delight that they have long supplied to those fortunate enough to share in them. For many years now, I have felt somewhat offended by my own conclusions that they are retrograde. Like me, our children still have the privilege of looking out upon a garden and enjoying the change of scenery, perchance absorbing the atmosphere and witnessing the enchanting mysteries of botany. All of their friends at school still grow up with an enviable sensitivity for 'secluded private open space' and a refined distaste for visual bulk. In a sense it pains me to recognize what is so disturbingly wrong with this great institution of domestic heritage that blesses Aus-

tralia, America and New Zealand more than most parts of Asia and Europe.

For all that, we cannot maintain a fantasy against the awareness of ecology and the necessary recognition of the environmental damage that gardens and the bungalow cause. When our community, eager to protect private privilege and public symbols of identity and distinction, champions the inestimable virtues of the suburban garden, it speaks in denial of environmental impact, where the cause of our major environmental scandals lies.

To continue to rate the suburban garden and bungalow as a key priority of our community amounts to collective selfishness. Arguing for the sanctity of suburban gardens is tantamount to declaring that the environment does not matter so much, that aesthetic symbols of wellbeing and prosperity are more important than our planetary future. The sense of entitlement to space which even your neighbour has to yield is a tangible case of NIM-BY (not in my back yard): I do not care what devastation I wreak, so long as I continue to enjoy leafy streets with 'secluded private open space' in my patch.

The extent of the Australian nimbism in this matter is hard to chart, but it is congruent with the other antisocial dimensions of private cellular space configured to keep people apart. But the paradoxes are rich. A common response to the layout and traffic problems that beset Australian cities is to express contempt for the suburban sprawl. It is normal for such grievances to be voiced rancorously by people living within the 10 km radius of

the centre. In effect, we loathe the suburban sprawl without condemning the gardens which cause it. The sprawl is nothing but the logical corollary of the gardens and the detached houses that they contain; and in particular, the outer sprawl is caused by the inner setbacks, because the failure to compress and increase density closer in is the reason that new development has to occur further out.

Hatred of the sprawl is more or less an expression of scorn by those relatively well-off against those who cannot afford to be closer to the city. Unless the rancour includes an equally indignant polemic against the gardens of the inner suburbs, it is illogical snobbery, a hypocritical righteousness which is the classical exporting of responsibility from the wealthy to the less fortunate.

Apart from the ethics, these complaints concerning the sprawl are unscientific, for they take no account of the maths. A garden closer to the city is in fact more ecologically damaging than one further out, because it pushes a greater number of properties away from the city than does a garden on the outskirts. The awareness of the harm of inner gardens relative to that of outer gardens is masked by the superior layers of heritage assumed in the older and closer suburbs, which apparently justifies the protection of privilege more defensibly. It seems laudable to look after Edwardian buildings and their garden proportions for future generations. Meanwhile, no intellectual or architectural historian has any regard for the patrimony of Kath & Kim territory; so the polemic is directed to the results, not the cause, of the sprawl.

A cultural reevaluation of the garden is also called for by other environmental reasons. Kath & Kim may never think of their car trips as damaging the earth, in the same way that they will not worry about the detached house being so energy-inefficient. But from year to year, they will assuredly think of the difficulty of watering the garden when water is scarce. Recent water shortages in the south east of Australia have prompted a degree of revisionism in garden design, stigmatizing European trees and shrubs which were popular in the 1990s till recently. For a decade of drought, suburban gardeners looked upon their once-green lawn with resentment. But perhaps we would not have a water shortage if we did not have all the gardens. If Melbourne, for example, were built up like Manhattan, rather than spreading like Beverly Hills, no one would have to worry about how many baths or showers to take. In many circumstances, the garden is nothing but an arid embarrassment, with signs of death haunting its formerly revivifying verdure. Water conservation is not my main thrust and the need for it varies in intensity from decade to decade; but somehow the omens of waste line up, and grave sentences are imminently to be pronounced, as if by destiny.

Gardens cause ecological strife well beyond the arid zones of south east Australia, especially the lavish towns of Sydney and Melbourne. Gardens are wreaking their ecological damage from Stockholm to Rome to Kuala Lumpur to Miami. In all of these places, as in Australia, a house with a garden, served by shiny cars, is considered more prestigious than an apartment of similar levels of luxury in other respects. Garden culture has been exported from the new world back to the old, the revenge—if

you like—of the pioneer. The literal spread of gardens, with their consequent generation of greenhouse gasses, is a global problem and is not confined to Australia. But for all that, there is something fateful in the peculiar urgency of the recent water restrictions caused by El Niño in Australia that allows us to express the problem in its fullness.

The reason, it seems, that the rain did not fall on Melbourne for a ten year period is global climate change. The gardens were stressed by drought because of the pollution, the sun-hungry CO₂ in particular, which is cooking the planet. The reason we have the uncontrolled emissions is the unsustainable volume of automotive transport and wasteful houses; and this, in turn, is promoted by the urban sprawl. In short, the reason the gardens have been wilting in Australia is the gardens themselves; they are simultaneously perpetrator and victim. It is a diabolical cycle of damage, made complete at its point of origin, where the organism that causes the harm finally feels the harm in a cruel and twisted way. The tangible thirst of the garden is the first sign of the apocalyptic destruction that our garden lifestyles are wreaking. The gardens which have been so parched in Australia, are the poetic wreckage of ecological history; and the architecture of policy that still jealously protects them is a social anachronism.

The virtues of the suburban garden are still valued in terms of community feeling and heritage as well as the individual family who directly owns and enjoys them. All of this needs to be acknowledged. But this mass-feeling cannot justify our environmental irresponsibility in the same way that it should not ignore

the great disenfranchising consequences of automotive spaces and their antisocial consequences. The seduction by the garden must not blind us in perpetuity to the irreversible ecological injury that suburban gardens continue to cause with the blessing and insistence of law. This is our cultural setback. Our culture, built upon the ubiquity of motor transport, has left us with a misguided priority, a wrong-headed aesthetic commitment to an ecological disaster.

It remains a painful problem, however, and it never seems like a good time to recognize a long-standing and beloved institution as a sad mistake. It is difficult to revise the laws that were created in such good faith against the perceived rapacity of developers. Apart from the extreme unpopularity of removing a privilege that is held with a tenacious sense of entitlement, it is difficult to accept a reconceptualizing of our sprawling cities and act decisively in favour of the earth. It is much easier to blame public transport and to say that the problem is not the gardens but the fact that a public transport system does not adequately minister to them.

Public transport is everyone's favourite scapegoat but especially in the discipline of gardenology.¹⁷ We like to blame our woes upon public transport, not the spatialities that the transport is supposed to serve; and motorists join in and we are all happy to agree that our targets should be to reduce urban congestion and emissions by means of superior public transport. Australian cities are among the dirtiest in the world and our ecological impact per head of population is disgraceful. So to bury our shame, we

denounce public transport as inadequate, and the cause of our dependence upon cars.

Public transport is a great resource for shifting responsibility for the fundamental causes of urban inefficiency. True, the system can always be improved; but the underlying causes of its failure are all about outdated aesthetic and cultural preferences that have denied our cities the density of large metropolises in other countries. Alas, it is much easier to accuse the symptom than the cause. Berating public transport for not putting on more services follows the same logic as complaining that there is not a supermarket close to them, that there is not a nearby post-office or an orthodontist. The reason such things are not close is that the density is so low. A small neighbourhood in a dense city can support most services and everything lies close to hand.

Although the sober public transport analyst, Dr Paul Mees, has argued that there is no correlation between efficiency of public transport and density, I feel that any public transport system will have difficulty coping with density as low as we have in Australian cities. It has been an honour for me to have participated in debates with this ingenious scholar, first in the newspaper *The Age* and then on the occasion of a launch of his beautiful book under the auspices of the Planning Institute of Australia.¹⁸ Unfortunately, even the most scientific methods of measuring density involve haggling over the denominator and there is some doubt that quibbling over the figures is productive. But while scientific study is essential and must continue, it seems to me logical that

low density would affect public transport adversely, and that one could posit the string of equivalences:

low density ⇔ *low proximity* ⇔ *inefficient public transport*.

Nor are these relationships linear. Because the appeal of public transport is foot-sensitive and is integral with bipedality, it matters a great deal how close the commuter is to the service but also the destination. The further one has to travel by foot at each stage multiplies the inconvenience. It is an exponential relationship which could also be represented schematically: the probability of taking public transport =

distance to destination × *distance to transport* ÷ *convenience of private transport*.

In my experience, the good systems in the world belong to dense cities; and none of the sparse cities that I have visited has a really good system. Public transport in large areas of low demand will always be structurally inefficient: services are infrequent, unconnected and far apart. Anyone who's waited those painful 40 minutes for a bus or tram or train always concludes with the same sage recommendation: 'they ought to put on more services.' But the operators can only put on as many services as there are quanta of passengers; and the sparser the population, the fewer the services, the higher the levels of frustration and the greater the incentive to use cars. The same argument occurs with the route. 'They ought to put on a service to take people here or there.

They ought to let you go west or north.' Alas, the volume of patrons needed to justify a geographic proliferation of services is mainly produced with greater density.

We got ourselves into this mess because of a love of space and especially private gardens. Australia has the luxury of space but it also suffers from the grind of distance. The spacious and leafy suburbs have aesthetic appeal; but the problem is that we have to move around them, enormous distances at a time for shopping, daycare, doctor, school or work. We are so spread out that the probability of services lying close to home is slight. None of this would be so bad if everyone went around on bikes; but the distances require cars. To buy a litre of milk, an Australian has to consume a litre of petrol.

How much good do these gardens do us? Some good greenies believe that suburban gardens can be justified if we grow vegetables in them rather than ornamental trees; but from a greenhouse point of view, the consequences are similar. Horticulture in the city is in the wrong place. A garden of any description which is surrounded by a community causes everyone else to have to drive around it. Vegetable and market gardens belong on the outskirts or in the country proper, where they do not make everyone burn petrol to get anywhere. The oxygen that the gardens produce is dwarfed by the CO₂ that they indirectly generate, and that is before we calculate the exorbitant emissions caused by detached houses as opposed to apartments.

Some gardens yield pleasure for their custodians but other gardens are forced upon us by convention. They are imposed by mandatory gardening legislation, which is setback in a nutshell, that body of local regulation that disallows building over gardens even if the owner does not want a garden. The principle is that you have to have your garden (by law) so that the character of the neighbour's garden is not threatened. So even if you do not want your garden, a huge amount of land lies at the border of dwellings which is good for nothing but is protected under the law. A typical case, as noted in the previous chapter, is the strip that runs around blocks of flats. No one would ever use that land for anything.

Such spaces can be called negative gardens; and, even if they are well maintained and have some prettiness in themselves, they constitute antisocial space. Negative gardens are ones that have no presence by themselves but are instituted solely for the purpose of backing away from the street or in compliance with setback laws. The beautiful towns in Europe—like Paris and Vienna—reveal that these ugly gullies between buildings, in front and to the side, are totally unnecessary. And whereas European architecture has legendary presence, our places, surrounded by negative gardens, look weak and equivocal, as if neither garden nor house has a rationale to be where it is. We institute gardens for reasons of aesthetic hygiene and insist on setback regulations to preserve what we think is the core value of open space; but the aesthetic consequences are questionable.

Setback regulations systematically prevent efficient development. Because we cannot use the whole block, we tend to add to the shell of an existing house, which means that the project merely produces a more wasteful household for one family rather than a taller, wider building for five or ten families. The suburban mansions that sit within their setback all have to be heated and cooled, with calamitous per capita environmental cost.

The only way we can ethically justify this wasteful ecological damage is to invoke heritage values and deplore the living conditions in other parts of the world which lack them. And yes, heritage is important if buildings are really historically significant. But we cannot ethically protect a broken paradigm forever against the survival of the biosphere. There is no point protecting our street with vigilante pride if the whole planet is doomed by global warming. Besides, a pretty low-rise street in one zone means a throttled highway only metres away; and ultimately, what we are protecting is an antisocial urban mess.

As an aesthetic historian, I am the first to concede the value of heritage. But some aspects of heritage deserve to be disowned. To be justified in a city, a building has to be fit for the purpose. If the job is to accommodate scores of people, a single or double storey house with gardens fore and aft is unfit for the purpose. Most of inner Melbourne (with its single and double-storey stock) is unfit for the purpose of a town of four million. Our heritage is largely dysfunctional. In Australia, where heritage is indeed a scanty resource, we tend to cling to anything from the past and gather community feeling in stalwart resistance of change. In

most people's experience, change has been for the worse; and so there has been quite enough of that. We should learn from our mistakes and protect what remains.

And so we live in a spatial stalemate, where the mantra of maintaining the residential character of neighbourhoods is regarded as paramount. In Australia, because we have so little heritage, we are inclined to conflate the importance of our nouns as much as our open spaces; and so we use words like 'character' as if they were absolute. We do not say 'cheerful character' or 'grim character' or 'dense character' or 'sparse character'. We just say: 'the character' of our suburbs. You do not need an adjective which would acknowledge the relativity of the term because it is seen as an absolute: the character that exists and must in perpetuity. If Australians are induced to the colourful hazards of an adjective, they would say 'sparse residential character', meaning the character that belongs essentially and immutably with the ideal suburban peaceful and secluded bungalow, utterly bunkered down in garden and petrol as a bastion of antisocial seclusion.

Preserving the character of the neighbourhood or the character of the streetscape is a powerful invocation to conservative adherence to suburban complacency. It is as if nothing will change because nothing needs to change because character is absolute. The good burghers who defend the character of the neighbourhood perhaps never contemplate that there might be a better character, a character that gives their street greater amenity and prestige.

To be fair, ratepayers have some grounds to fear change, because change has not always been for the better, when, in their view, the character of a neighbourhood has been compromised or sacrificed, where a building of a downright ugly character is clearly no match for the handsome existing stock in the street, to say nothing of the natural idyll of the garden setting. The theme of the character of the neighbourhood remains oppressively absolute, without scope for a creative architectural dimension and improvement in spatial design.

When Australians face a challenge to suburban orthodoxy, they often try to associate the critic with snobbery. The case for density is portrayed as an expression of inner-city contempt for the outer suburbs. From an ecological planning point of view, however, urban density is just as important in Ringwood and Dandenong as it is in Carlton. It makes no sense to raise polemics against the existence of outer suburbs now that they have been built. It is just as important to be close to services in St Albans as it is in Kew.

Adding to the argument above, because of the greater intensity of gardenography in older and established suburbs, urban density is sometimes higher in outer estates than within the 10 kilometre radius, where the blocks are often larger and the households less fertile. So the debate is not about inner versus outer. It is about efficiency throughout the city and beyond in rural centres as well. Paradoxically, the image of the country or outback has dominated the suburban archetype. By means of gardens, we try to replicate as much as possible the image of the homestead

upon a farm. So when studies come out recommending that we have to move from 10 houses per hectare to 100 houses per hectare to achieve the requisite density, there is instant horror and moral panic, because we imagine the same shape of house being squeezed inward and upward on a tiny allotment, with shrinking garden, provoking feelings of claustrophobia and aesthetic scandal. The problem in these scenarios is the persistence of the word ‘house’ which presupposes ‘garden’, as opposed to ‘apartment block’, ‘balcony’ and ‘street’. It is a problem of language and the expectation that the language and tradition set up for us.

The compression of houses offends our sensibilities in the same way that we are aghast at horses or cattle in feed lots being cramped into one tenth of the space of their natural paddock. Certainly, the image of this squeeze creates uncomfortable reactions. But if instead we think of birds in a tree, rather than horses in a paddock, we can happily imagine 100 feathery friends chirping away in a single botanical specimen with a very small footprint, all with plenty of twig and bough and a great gregarious and garrulous relationship among them. Unfortunately, for most of our existing (and highly regulated) urban footprint, we are stuck with the horse on the paddock—house & garden—and this heavy pattern creates almost a literal barrier to vision for a more socialized template for our growing towns.

5

The proprietorship of light

In Australia, all of nature's gifts are the cause of anxiety. Among them is sunshine. We are neurotic about it and cannot decide if it is lovely or destructive. On the one hand, we worship the sun; we strip off at the slightest signal and make long pilgrimages to arrive at a beach somewhere which will licence the greatest exposure to the sun; the occasion allows us to achieve a suntan and attract attention with the spectacle of much skin turned out to the rays. On the other hand, the risks of skin-cancer are well known and form part of the indoctrination of children in primary school. Advice to adults to avoid exposure is given on billboards and so on. When you add the ageing effect of sun upon the skin, which is also well-known, you could say that some of us are in fact quite terrified of the sun, considering it somewhat deadly.

It all makes us equivocal, as if the greatest boon is also our nemesis; and we oscillate between hunger for the sun and horror beneath it; we crave the hot days with clear sky for the liberating nudity that they invite, but at the same time, we have to wear ungainly hats and clothes or smother ourselves with greasy sunscreen to avoid sunburn and long-term damage. Any outing, before the joy can begin, is prefaced with drill, as we dutifully apply whitish unguents on the skin, products that carry their own set of problems, for the absorption of undesirable particulates through the skin, to say nothing of greasy collars and sticky residues. So scared are we of the sun that many who are wary of the corrosive rays may even end up with too little radiation for their longer-term health: their skin fails to produce the requisite dose of vitamin D, which has serious ill-consequences, weakening bones at

the very least and possibly contributing to other, less treatable diseases, like breast cancer.

So these agonies are not capricious. From a physiological point of view, a formula for how much exposure we should get in a land of great solar intensity has not been found. But so, too, from a cultural point of view, the anxiety over sunlight also lacks a point of equilibrium. Depending on the weather, sunshine can be experienced as joyful or oppressive; and each person has different memories and psychological reaction to one circumstance or another. Some are radically heliotropic while others know to keep out of the sun to conserve energy and spirit; and in turn, these preferences and almost inbuilt memories depend to a degree on the prevailing idea of what time is about, whether you live in order to lie around or to work or concentrate or even talk animatedly. If you can shut your eyes, the blinding sunlight is tolerable. On the other hand, if you want to read or even gaze at someone in the course of conversation, you have to screen your eyes, wear hats and inscrutable sunglasses or seek shelter for your company, else the whole encounter will within minutes become stressful.

The spaces that Australia has designed for itself in one way or another reflect these problems in their control of sunshine and provision of shade. Originally, in ancient times, there was no need for the fuss, since the continent was wooded, even in what are sometimes considered desert regions. In its native condition, the bush usually supports an overhead canopy somewhere, even if somewhat sparse, so that at the very least, the horizon is lifted. But most of the temperate coastal zones where the Brit-

ish established settlements had richer soils and rain enough to provide forests. The Australia that the Europeans first encountered, though endowed with such bounteous sunshine as Europe seldom sees, was not an especially glary place. The fierceness of the sun was largely attenuated, if not obscured entirely, by vegetation; and a sense of exposure to blinding light would only have been experienced on the beach.

When the forest and scrub were cleared for agriculture, the problem of the intense glare set in. Architecture, which seldom rose to the four or five storey habits of Europe, provided insufficient shade. From early times, the architectural patterns of Australia were set. With scarce capital and abundant land, we opted for low-rise: single or double storey houses and shops still line the streets of Sydney and Melbourne, testifying to the somewhat meager patterns at the upper end, the parts that were built in stone and brick as opposed to wood, much of which would later be replaced.

To compensate for the glare, a technique was used from industrial architecture (like railways and bridges) in which masonry and metal are combined. Large metal verandahs were thrown out from the low façades, covering the entire frontage and extending to the gutter. Columns would be posted at the extremity of the footpath to support the canopy, which sometimes had a slightly arched disposition, diving from the masonry entablature to a metal lintel held above the gutter. Alternatively, a canopy could be suspended by bars diagonal anchored to the superstructure or a second storey, if there was one. It all works well, except that

the iron lace is likely to be missing, which yielded the most wonderful feathering effect on the otherwise harsh division between brightness and shade.

The footpath, though always remaining in the control of the city council, was effectively arrogated by the building. It would not have been controversial and that is presumably the reason that they were erected ubiquitously in the Victorian parts of our cities. The arrangement of verandahs suited everyone. Private investment contributed to public good. Not only did the public gain protection from the sun but the government did not have to pay for it, plus the private owner effectively gained a large amount of extra land under his or her direct influence. The During the 1950s, when Melbourne was host to the Olympic games, much of this festive covering was demolished. As it was also highly ornamental, in an eclectic blend of the Italian renaissance and greenhouse architectural technology, it was felt to be aesthetically antiquated: it disappointed the aspirations to modernity which Melbourne wanted to project, above all, to the rest of the world. So much of Melbourne is bald as a result, and the lovely canopies only shield you from the glare are only to be found in certain parts that must have been regarded as too retardataire to modernize. Fortunately, the verandahs have got their revenge and the welcome shade has often been restored and sometimes extended to modern buildings.

The history of shade in Australia is a necessary chapter in our saga of discomfort with architecture. In decrying development anywhere, one of the most common accusations of any tall build-

ing is that it casts a shadow. This consequence of architecture is seen almost as a scandal. Once a tall building is erected, a trace of shame visibly originates with the edifice: the shadow, the occlusion of light from neighbouring properties and public areas, as if the shadow in some sense lays barren the surrounding lands, like a cloud of nuclear radiation, a social toxicity, which depresses the welfare of residents, deprives our community of joy and strips our children of their birthright to the sun.

How is it that shadows are so detrimental in Australia in one circumstance only, namely when someone proposes to erect a building? In all other situations, Australians are grateful for the shade and have carefully cultivated it throughout the wealthier suburbs in a continuous canopy of overhead trees in the street plantations as well as the private gardens. As well as the historical houses sporting verandahs to cut down the glare, houses have external sunblinds for the same reason. A tree or a verandah is welcome to cast a shadow; but when it comes to architecture doing the same, it is anathema.

Many Australians will argue that there is a deep and defining difference between a tree casting a shadow and a building doing likewise. First, the tree makes an aesthetic pitter-patter of light and dark. Second, many tree-shadows are not very long and do not affect large numbers of people, even though they may replicate their shade for the length of entire suburban streets; so we see no structural problem with them. Third, there is a big difference between casting a shadow unique to your own frontage—as with a verandah—and imposing the same on someone

else's. Fourth, the larger empire of a building's shadow adds to the gloom of its height and makes us depressed in a way that shorter shadows with cheerful profiles do not. Australians who are jealous of their building profiles believe passionately that all shadows should be castrated and present with modest proportions or not at all.

Strangely, the same logic does not seem to apply to other parts of the world but only Australia. Other countries in Europe, for example, have much less light and the sun is much less vertical than throughout Australia. Even the most southerly capital on the mainland, Melbourne, has a latitude equivalent to that of Athens. It is exceedingly bright and the sun sits high in the sky for a large part of the year, much more than in Paris or London or Berlin. Somehow, however, this heliotropic disadvantage does not blight the majestic metropolises of Europe. Often built to a height of six or so storeys, the buildings hog as much light as they do and cast shadows in the street and upon one another in the measure that they do. It would never occur to anyone to complain that there is shade in the boulevard. It would be like complaining that there is snow when the temperature falls below zero or that a gust of wind might make your coat billow when it is blowy.

You would swear that Australia, which is warm and blasted with light, is the only country in the world where people have reason to be jealous of the sunshine, where a building of any height is regarded as a blight on the landscape, an offense to the neighbours, an affront to the natural right to light which brings oppro-

trium upon the entrepreneur, architect and builder. Throughout our cities, we have buildings that step back from the line of the street, beginning at ground level and then receding further for each storey added, a bit like a sand-castle. This formula is often demanded by the setback regulations, which are extensively conceived around the theme of the right to light.

For Australians, light is absolute. For pretty much everyone else on the planet, light is relative. If you live on a narrow laneway in Bologna, you accept that the sunlight will seldom penetrate in its full blast as it does in the piazza. But the eye does wonderful things to compensate and you still have plenty of light to do what you need to do. Yes, it would be pleasant to have a bit more but we content ourselves with what we have and nothing looks dark in the vicinity because everything else has an analogous tonal value. It is like in music. The same tune sounds just as lovely played on the bass recorder as on the soprano. The light in the gully is not shrill but mellow. Once you get used to the deeper sonorities of the gentle light, the circumstance with the bright light is the more offensive.

Of course light is precious and we love it. Further, if we can bring light into our interiors, we can save electricity by not needing quite so much artificial light. But in architecture, everything lies in a delicate balance and there are many paradoxes. For example, our city buildings which claim so much light often present a perfectly flat glass exterior to the sun. In a country as brilliant as Australia, a huge amount of energy is trapped in the building, which has a fixed curtain wall and no windows that open. As a

result of all the light translated into heat, we of course have to run a very expensive air-conditioning unit. It always amazes me that in the fifteenth century it was possible to devise shutters to keep the light and heat out—even though the sun is weak to relative Australia's—but for us in the twenty first century, these simple features seem to pose an insuperable problem and architects almost never include them. Instead, we rely on consuming fossil fuel to reduce the heat.

If you spend much time in a city, including our own downtown areas and not just the dense metropolises of Europe and Asia or New York, you seldom experience discomfort because of a shadow, but you frequently experience discomfort because of the direct sunlight in the open parts. The main reason that we do not use outdoor spaces is that they are not protected from the glare. Even in cool weather, the glare is felt as an assault, all the more so because the sun is lower and therefore gets beneath your brow. A balcony, for instance, is unlikely to be used much unless it has a balcony above it to reduce the glare. And where we mount terraces in the stepped sand-castle motif mentioned above which is required by setbacks, the open zones are uninhabited—just like suburban gardens—unless there are canopies or umbrellas to screen out the sun.

Balconies which overhang the street are among the most ingenious inventions of architecture. They yield a kind of airborne garden for each person who lives in an apartment; and the land that they occupy is non-existent. Instead, they hang over the street and provide the same kind of shade that a narrow verandah

might, with the advantage that they can also protect the windows on each level that they project over. Finally, they provide a very festive address to the street or the building opposite. Instead of a sheer expanse of masonry, the individual cells of apartments are expressed in their extroversion: they are turned out for display, with outdoor furniture and plants that express the enjoyment of an urban vista.

To the municipal authors of the setback regulations, these airborne gardens are especially evil because they add insult to injury: the shadow that is cast downstairs has eyes looking over it, so that you are not only shaded below but looked at. The occupants of the balcony are the riders of the shadow, exploiting their unethical vantage point and subjecting everyone else to their gaze of darkness.

We could just as easily interpret all of these features as joyful but the Australian spatial psyche is pessimistic and misanthropic. Instead of seeing balconies as cheerful expressions of the individual in an architectural context, we see them as invasive or a kind of theft. We suspect the occupants of stealing something that might belong to someone else, the light and a portion of the sky above, stuff that certainly does not belong to them but belongs to the public, nature or God. The light and sky are arrogated by the design and the cosmos has to endure the indignity of looking at the symbol of presumption and literally being looked down upon from a great height.

For Australians, though, the discourse is not really about light, even though it is given as the ostensible complaint. It is rather

about pride and resentment: pride in the old things that we know and resentment that someone might profit by changing it. We know, deep down, that it has nothing to do with light, because otherwise the same resentment would arise with all the Victorian verandahs which block out light on a much denser scale. We know that it has nothing to do with the sky contracting, because the same narrowing of the sky is craved and admired when caused by trees in the expensive leafy suburbs which, on occasion, completely blot out the sky in a dense and adorable canopy of leaf.

None of these effects has an absolute value. The presence of light or sunshine or bright sky will always have advantages and disadvantages. If we do not like the idea of someone changing what we know or obtaining some benefit that we suspect might be at someone's future expense, we entrench our stubborn gainsaying fears and protest as volubly as we can. In the end, though, it is a discourse without substance: there are just as many personal reasons to applaud the taller building with overhanging balconies as to damn them. Let us say nothing of the advantages of giving people vertical accommodation and the environmental benefits of improving the density of our city. Just the consequence of lessening the light alone: there is no absolute. You could just as easily judge it favourably as condemn it as a scandal or an offence.

My own experience with light, for what it is worth, is on the street on a push-bike for two hours each day. The element that I hate the most is the unremitting sunshine that commits me to wearing dark glasses and a cap underneath my helmet to extend

the protection that the overhang gives my eyes. Every time I turn into the city centre where the taller buildings are, I experience relief, because they act in the same way that the lofty trees do in a beautiful grove. I bless the buildings that so many people deplore, because they raise the horizon and collectively also screen out the strong winds which otherwise cut across the low suburbs. The only basis for distaste for the taller buildings, I surmise, is a compulsive unhappiness with the signs of society—evidence of people—and a desire for buildings to disappear or have the lowest possible profile without actually being blasted from the earth.

6

Holiday house

There have been times when I have wanted a holiday house. Whenever I look at some dear old crockery that has to go to God or a redundant wardrobe that retains some sentimental appeal, I think: this is when you need a holiday house. It could store all the things that we no longer need.

Alas, the only thing that we need less than our cast-offs is a holiday house to store them. Among all the items of Australian folly, the holiday house is the most dispensable. Financially, they may work out, because rising property prices justify the debt. But culturally, psychologically and ecologically, they are a disaster, as they bring little but hardship, erode our fragile sense of community and cause exorbitant consumption.

Holiday houses are understandably bought to provide relief from the rigid routines of a working week; but they succeed in little but producing stress to augment the frazzlement accumulated at work. The idea behind them is to capitalize on leisure. We get little enough leisure all year; so when the opportunity comes around in summer, we want to have a spot near a beach or some other picturesque area, a hideaway where we can wind down, let the children go free-range and maybe indulge in some sport, like sailing or golf or spontaneously playing cricket on the beach with the kids.

Unfortunately, the house itself is needier than the family: the schedule of maintenance multiplies the commitments that already take up your time with the town house. All the things that you have to do in the city still have to be done in the holiday

house, like cooking and cleaning, shopping and washing. And then there is a whole other layer: the deck is rotting, the gutters are blocked, the grass needs slashing, the dust on arrival gives the kids asthma, the garden is a fire hazard, the pergola needs painting and the taps do not work.

So it is off to the hardware to stock up on power-tools and primer, sugar-soap and dodgy plumbing. Unless these jobs are perversely fulfilling, the hopes of joy in leisure are quickly deceived. Everything is further away and you spend an awful lot of time in the car. The weekender is conceived to get away from it all, a place where you can flee from the pressures of the city. But in fact the project is the outcome of urban ambition and carries city anxiety at its core. A greedy ghost persuades you that you need two houses: a useful one and a useless one. The useful house from which you generate your income and educate the kids is associated with the grind of business and, in spite of its proliferation of entertainment systems, the regular town house cannot support a fantasy of freedom and fun.

The fondness of the holiday house is based on resentment for the family home as an inert prison in which you are compelled to get up in the morning, get organized and go to work. Linking the family home with routine, you feel that you need to get away, to escape the rat-race of the city, and have a pad that is remote enough to be undisturbed and idyllic. Ironically, holiday house locations are often remarkably similar to the suburbs, with only an absence of concrete gutters to distinguish the holiday zone from the city that spawns it. For that reason, the unmade

gutter—which is a kind of ditch—almost has heritage value because it is the unique sign that distinguishes the holiday zone from the parent-suburbs closer to town. The underlying aspiration around both properties is structurally identical. Both presuppose a house in the middle of a block, where the dwelling nestles among shrubs and trees and you recede from the street as much as possible. Both are hermetic: you want to be able to shut out humanity, ignore the rest of the world, and only appear in order to impress. You want the biggest block that you can get, where no one can build close to you; but you also want to erect the biggest house that you can afford because size and luxury, privilege and success, are equated with size. In establishing these luxurious spatial hermitages, the greater hopes are invested in the holiday house, because the holiday house is imagined to be somewhat more remote from humanity than the town house.

In Australia, we belong to our private property rather than to a community; and the holiday house is the most direct private expression of the rejection of community. In both suburb and holiday resort, our streets are empty and alienated, except for the parts with the carparks, which marvellously concentrate people at their most anxious. Throughout Australia, we have only a few interesting strips, which are fiercely contested by predatory cars, desperate to pounce on a free parking space. To be fair, the desire to escape such a hostile ambience is understandable; but where will you go? The same cars that make the city hostile also allow people to decamp to the beach in droves, where they overload the feeble infrastructure for a couple of months before abandoning the fantasy.

The existence and apparent need for the holiday house is telling, and most of all for what it says about our satisfaction with the urban template. We cannot live an urban life because we do not feel that we live in a society. Our lives, like our spaces and transport, are uniquely configured around the alienated individual. The streets are harrowed by cars and support no communal pedestrian culture. While dog-walking is common (where the pooch provides the benediction of nature), it aims for a park and a return, and there is no tradition of the urban walk, the stroll, the *passaggiata* or promenade. The few spaces that have been designed around landmark locations are for tourists.

Lacking entirely the feeling of living in a society, the Australian has an exaggerated sense of entitlement to large amounts of private space, which are clinched by the purchase of a second property that requires a lengthy spell in a car to reach. The weekender appeals to us because it seems to naturalize the lack of community, as if hiving ourselves off into a surplus house among ti-trees brings us closer to nature. In fact it only brings us closer to the petrol station.

Even more than the town houses of our sprawling cities, the holiday house is dependent on cars and is inconceivable without them. There is no other way of getting there. At holiday time, the nation's large motor fleet is fired up in vast convoys, commuting along choked and ugly roads. In ecological terms, the holiday house is a sink into which we pour fossil fuel. Closeness to nature comes at a cost. In addition to the carbon-expenditure involved in reaching the destination, they are generally flimsy bungalows,

heated and cooled with electricity, with all the energy-inefficiency of a suburban cottage footprint only with even poorer levels of insulation.

The rationale for this environmental extravagance is sometimes given in terms of human nature. We like change and we need change. We cannot be couped up all year in the one dwelling. We would go mad. It is only natural to want to bundle ourselves off to another location, perhaps to follow the season like migrating birds. All around the world, people do this transitory resettlement, whether or not they have a holiday house. They decamp somewhere else, perhaps to meet up with the family in another town or just to go on a holiday, perhaps with an itinerary and multiple bookings of hotels and coach trips and so on.

Holidays and travel indeed have a very long history; and this is hardly the place to analyse it, much less conduct a polemic against what people clearly want. I personally struggle with the assumption that being in the one location is a form of confinement like slow torture. But let us distinguish for the purposes of argument the need to get away from the need to have a unique spot to get away to, a place of your unique proprietorship which receives you each year after lying dormant for long periods.

The motif has an ancient European ancestry which is also useful to reflect upon. In aristocratic society, wealth and social rank were created by the ownership of estates. Even though the large families of the renaissance, for example, earned spectacular amounts from tertiary industries, notably banking, the origin of

capital was always assumed to exist in primary production and hence hinged upon the ownership of productive property. The fact that the inherited titles went with the property is a symbol of this attachment to country estates.

When we read of the wealthy families of Florence or Milan, we notice that they spoke often of places of retreat. In Latin, the country property (albeit close to the city) would be referred to as a *rus*, whence we get words like rustic.¹⁹ A place of retreat was known in Roman antiquity. Signs of this privilege already recur by the fourteenth century. The villa surrounded by garden whence the young aristocratic raconteurs (or happy band, *lieta brigata*) retire outside Florence in Boccaccio's *Decameron* appears to be a suburban alternative to the town; and Bandello in the sixteenth century gives a number of handsome accounts of places of recreation (*a diporto*) whence the nobles of Milan and elsewhere would repair for restoration, sometimes in Milan itself.²⁰

The difference, of course, is that the dukes of the renaissance as painted by Titian possessed a staff alongside the estate. The country place of recreation served the purposes of fun as a by-product of numerous other functions, mostly economic, which lay in mutual relations. The closest equivalent would be the Collins St farmer phenomenon, where the owner of the land enjoys a toy farm for recreation and a tax dodge in town; but there really is no counterpart today. The staff in the renaissance which maintained the rural properties were part of a family corporation who planned their lives around the pleasure of the lord. A small court

would decamp with the noble; and with this retinue would go all the services. So a writerly priest like Bandello might receive an invitation to dine on a terrace, with stories, wines and viands laid on, overlooking the country property.

In the industrial period, the more well-to-do middle-class discovered that it too could afford a beautiful retreat, as small pockets of rural land had fallen in price relative to urban property. In many parts, it is still not a great outlay, depending on the position; and the price only becomes steep by virtue of other urban-dwellers competing in the market. But while the bourgeoisie can afford the country property, it can seldom afford a self-sufficient farm complete with a permanent staff, plus quarters for a travelling staff or guests, which would parallel the aristocratic privilege and make sense of the investment for leisure.

Instead, we buy a country property in exactly the same spirit that we buy an urban property, with the difference that it has no productive virtue and of course places us in arrears in terms of time and energy as well as money. Against the repayments, we struggle to finance any work that needs to be done toward maintenance or improvement; and so much of this labour has to be done by the owners. From a fantasy of great indulgence, as of renaissance lords, the partners are condemned to become hardy cleaners, gardeners, garbage-removalists, roofing technicians, spontaneous plumbers and chancy electricians, cooks, washers, chauffeurs, mariners and stable hands for the bicycles and jet-skis.

As we lack the courtly privileges of landed aristocracy, the upkeep and running of the holiday house is stressful. The only way that the holiday house can yield leisure is if a disproportionate amount of the labour is borne by one of the partners. It works well for one partner in any circumstance if the other partner takes on the role of servant or slave. The chances of such an agreement yielding happiness—rather than resentment—in the relationship are slim; so as well as every other kind of stress, we can add a layer of managerial tension, where the partners jockey for the upper hand in directing one another to carry the ugly burden in a measure that affords leisure for one.

The remote nest is good for divorce in two senses: first, because it puts pressure on a marriage and second because it creates an asset that can be divided should the partners formally separate. The very existence of an artificial home away from genuine home seems to symbolize a lack of contentment. In the renaissance, the extra property was not artificial but in many ways a primary residence whence the root of the family fortune was considered to spring; and meanwhile, the townhouse reflected the reality that most business is in fact conducted in an urban society. But for us, the holiday house is a mere simulation of grandeur, conceived as relief from a stable routine in town, that reveals structural division rather than unity.

Since when did we have an instinct to build another nest to serve our fundamental need for change? It is widely believed that we perish in a psychological sense if we are confined to living in a single home. The fear assumes that life-enhancing changes

cannot be effected by social means but rather have to be organized privately by physical mobility. It is a mechanical solution to a spiritual problem. But leaving aside the question of whether or not we can happily survive with a less geographical kind of change, there is a question of how effective the holiday house is in providing change of the kind that it promises.

The touching part of the holiday house is that it is a place in the countryside (however suburbanized) which does not move and, in a sense, expresses commitment. Unlike a holiday overseas or interstate, the holiday at the beach-house reproduces the sense of anchorage that existed in the townhouse. There are no complicated logistics of travel as there are with the many bookings and connexions that have to be sorted out in a foreign sightseeing holiday. And to be fair, there may also be less expense in the journeying and, if aeroplanes are involved in the sightseeing experience, considerably less carbon pollution.

But just because of this sense of exchanging home for a home-away-from-home—complete with the reassuring experience among your familiar cast-offs—there is an existential pathos and air of pointlessness to the holiday house. If you were either oppressed with chores or at a loose end at home, you will feel both conditions even more acutely not long after arriving at the holiday house. The only element that it adds which may be experienced positively is a sense of commitment, which sometimes persuades you that a chore is heroic.

It may not be as far as overseas, but reaching the holiday house still requires a great deal of travel. Alas, the motif of change

which the travel is meant to achieve is equivocal and ultimately reminds the holiday-house owner of the futility of being away. Because nothing really changes. Once you arrive at the holiday house, most of the conditions from which you sought refuge assert themselves with even greater urgency. Especially existential inertia, because you always bring your boredom with you: the same impatience with time and your mediocre strategies for enjoying it cause you to become just as dissatisfied in the holiday house as you are in the townhouse.

If you could find out what provides enduring relish in a holiday house—aside from the illusory promise of change—it would amount to the same conditions as those available in the townhouse. The only variety worth having, some might say, coheres around people and their ideas, their music, their conversation, their spaces, their art and acting and gregarious vibe, which is what was mostly understood during the renaissance under the terms of recreation. The varied delights of a networked community are much more within reach in town. They are the fabric of a sense of community which, alas, is barely within the Australian conspectus of how a life can be lived.

Most people in the world feel that they are lucky to have one house; and far from experiencing this single place traumatically as a gaol sentence—as if confinement—they possibly feel on the contrary that they live in a society, with friends and family coming and sharing meals with the same engaged spirit that fills the streets with animated conversation. It is very hard to replicate that sense of community at a holiday house, because to

bring your friends around means inviting them to come from afar, whereupon they may pay court for a short duration before having to head back to wherever they were staying, possibly town.

To be effective for socializing, the holiday house needs to be at home, because that is where your sustainable community of friends is and also the place where you are most likely to have everything in control for receiving guests. Of course you can still invite friends over at the holiday house, and it might be a very attractive offer to them. If the house is big enough, they might even stay for a bit, and it might be hilarious and totally worth the pilgrimage and change of bed-linen (which alas a renaissance staff will not take care of). But these privileges by invitation only heighten the remoteness of the arrangement from a natural sense of community, where people can frequent the family crib without sensing the artificial dispensations of stressful patronage. Apart from the distances involved, having guests in a townhouse seems more natural because reciprocation is easy.

The human need for change cannot be equated with a need for a holiday house, because talking to a couple of friends can change your headspace much more potently than a piece of real estate that ultimately bores you with its predictable chores. More than superfluous and wasteful, the holiday house entrenches the misanthropic structures of the Australian way of life, identifying joy and personal satisfaction with a rejection of community, with an address to the ocean or the forest or the rolling plains as opposed to the witty company of people.

The reason people have holiday houses is not to have a repository for condemned utensils and furniture from the town house. But this melancholy archive of things that you could never love enough is nevertheless a sign of the unsustainable gratification that the holiday house provides: a carbon-intensive bomb-shelter for protection against social interaction. And perhaps worst of all, the motif of the holiday house gives urban people the cue that the remote seaside or country retreat would be a great place to retire to. Now that you have retired and no longer have to go into an office, you could sell up in town and have the life that you always wanted to live, far away from the dreaded public, free of all those people and buildings, distant from conversation and society. In one way, it all makes perfect sense, because the misanthropic structure of suburban life would be potentially fulfilled by a literal retirement from society in the same kind of location to which refuge was sought on holidays.

Alas, it does not work as well as the imaginary idyll. Apart from the enormous inconvenience in the distance from services—which is heightened by a gradual loss of mobility in older age—the desired isolation is in any case compromised by its own popularity: people precede you and follow you, the same retirees and holiday-makers who do not identify with the public and who are possessed by the same motive to get away from other people. It is the final revenge of a fractured society that all its hermits, recluses and misanthropes have to endure one another's exhaust, even in the furthest retreat that the car can reach.

7

The car

Few object are so cherished in the Australian psyche as the motorcar. The car is revered, the object of immense pride, scrupulously maintained by owners who keep them cleaner than their houses and identify with the automotive brand with all the tribal loyalty that is normally lavished on a football side. The standard labels and trademark emblems are sometimes not sufficiently demonstrative, and owners sometimes feel an urge to emblazon further signatures upon the glass to amplify the maker's identity, as if declaring an urgent protestation to the unconverted. Although defaulting to the grime which they are destined to plough through, to gather automotive filth and become greasy and dirty, they are fastidiously polished and are often kept indoors in a garage. In many suburbs built from the 1980s onward, the garage is likely to be incorporated under the single roofline of the house, thus identifying the car with the inhabitants.

The time that an owner devotes to buffing the machine is possibly the least stressful aspect of car ownership and, like maintaining a garden, it has a touching aspect which shows that labour can still be interpreted as recreation. On the weekend, dad goes out with suds and sprays and vacuum cleaner and wax and other unguents and engine products and lavishes great care and attention on the machine which are exemplary for the whole family. With all the doors flung open, the car is a bit like a paralysed pet having its wash; and dad can be seen in all unbecoming postures getting underneath the various features and cleaning out the dirt. Any child who wants to join in and who is not terrified of the noises is most welcome. The car, even when indisposed for this obligatory maintenance, is a powerful symbol of family unity.

All members of the family adore the car and for obvious reasons: it grants mobility in a world where most other forms of mobility are frozen out... by cars, of course. Apart from the socialized family activities in maintaining the car, the power of the car in transporting the family to its favourite places is remembered throughout the year, even when the opportunities for such outings are as remote as the destinations. The genius of the car is that it is identified with pleasurable journeys that belong in our wishes rather than the grind of journeys that belong to reality. Everything about the car is projection. The car leaps through space in your imagination, even while it sits idling in stagnant stifling traffic; and above all, it is invested with the unique privilege of embracing the family and symbolizing its enterprise and joy.

So much has been written about the affection for cars that another chapter, even penned from a uniquely Australian point of view, hardly seems urgent. Along with recognizing its virtues, many polemical accounts have been formulated, which detail the devastation caused by cars and the great social, ecological, economic and personal benefits of abandoning them. The most charming is perhaps Katie Alvord's *Divorce your car! Ending the love affair with the automobile*, which presents almost compelling reasons to shed the vehicle and adopt alternative means of transport. I say almost, because I only know one person who has actually abandoned her car. Everyone else in my acquaintance who reads the book is touched but continues to drive as much as ever.

In many ways, the gap in Alvord's beautiful and logical account is the significance of the destinations that we want to reach. Say-

ing no to the car means saying no to visiting the places that we habitually haunt or are invited to visit. As we have contemplated, no one who owns a holiday house is going to be without a car to get there; and then to remain there with the remote shopping and water sports or winter sports or whatever the appeal was. Ultimately, the dependence upon cars is about space and the way we demand it, the way we feel that we need to overcome it, penetrating vast amounts of it in as little time as we can.

The prior issue is the devaluation of space: the problem at root is seeing space as the stuff that you have to cut through in order to occupy time somewhere else. It is the great spatial alterity, the stuff of alienation; and that is why it looks the way it does: unoccupied, fenced off, desolate, sparsely built over, symbolically insipid and without ceremonial intensity. There is a graveyard phenomenon, which reaches into the aesthetic, as Katie Alvord has notes in her *cri de coeur* over the misuse of space. The connexion between a loss of community and the rape of space by the motorcar:

Cars have an unfortunate tendency to uglify our surroundings ... the sprawl and the strip-mall architecture that have emerged as a result of car dependence are considered visually unappealing by most people, notes planner Anton Nelessen based on responses to his Visual Preference Surveys.

The motels, fast-food chains, neon, and huge parking lots that characterize roadside development influence visual environments because businesses need to catch the attention of fast-

moving drivers. Details of building design that delight walkers in a city serve no purpose for so-called thirty-mile-per-hour architecture, where a business might just as well be, and increasingly is, in a big square box with an equally big sign. Sometimes the attention-grabbing artifacts of auto culture can be quaint or amusing... More often, though, they contribute to what James Howard Kunstler calls the geography of nowhere: cheap buildings without character surrounded by asphalt, leaving a place looking like it could be anywhere.²¹

If this is the space that we have to have, the supreme engine for cutting through it—surprise, surprise—is the motorcar, not because it is fast but because it works entirely in accord with your private interest. Unlike the train or tram or bus, it goes exactly where you determine and has no social or communal dimension. On the contrary, it is openly competitive, limited in its aggression only by the restraint of the driver, speed signs and traffic lights.

And then there is the famous problem that the car, once it helps us interpret space as capable of mechanical transcendence, fulfills the devaluation of space: it creates the suburbs, increases the spread, affords thinner human occupancy, blots out the bicycles with its intimidating mass and speed, propagates further need for cars and thence further automotive space. It is like a self-aggravating contagion which we have known about and watched with impotence for almost a century. And as it goes on, we marvel at our continued affection for the car and how all allowances are made for it against all the more vulnerable alternatives,

which it almost literally kills off. It is because the car, figuratively, owns the space.

I may never understand how it is that I hate what others love, in the same way that I cannot understand how I do not hate the car quite enough to divorce our own, even though I hardly ever drive it but use a bicycle every day. It seems unimaginative to lack sympathy for the widespread affection for cars. If I make an effort, I can certainly see the attraction. In fact, I confess that I am okay behind the wheel. In 30 years of driving, I have enjoyed many conversations with my family and passengers. Thanks to reliable motorcars, I have avoided much heat and cold and rain and sunburn; much back-strain has been saved and deliveries have been made on time and at great convenience. Furthermore, I quite enjoy the gears and the clutch pedal. Once every so often, a passenger in my car will say to me something like: 'Oh, this is a manual car. It is so smooth that I thought it was automatic.' And of course I am flattered, utterly vain about my clutch-driving. I learned the word from an American who said on the way from the airport: 'I like your clutch-driving'. But even without observers, judging the ratios and engine speeds is a beautiful art and running the motor at its most efficient in the chaotic rhythms of the traffic is a challenge of foresight that I am easily seduced by. It is fun to create a gentle ride so that there is no anxiety in the cabin.

I have every reason to be smug. Personally, the car has been good to me. Admittedly, I do not drive any distances regularly; but the statistics are in my favour. So far, I have had no policeman pull

me over for doing something wrong; there has been no red-light camera offence or speeding fines. Nowadays, the car has cruise-control; so I have yet more cause to become smug for being unlikely to be caught in the future, unless, through inadvertence, I neglect to observe a speed sign. With an unblemished record as a motorist, I should be somewhat proud of the automotive experience. I once knocked a cyclist off her bike, but then she was doing something pretty dumb; and when she recovered, she was sweet enough to acknowledge it.

There is another magical thing about the car. It is still amazingly cheap and sometimes even tax-deductible. Given that it is running out, petrol still seems to be cheap. And given that I have a car parked outside the house (and therefore can discount the investment), I notice that a trip costs more if I take public transport. These are horrible truths from a greenhouse point-of-view, but we are talking about me and my selfish interests and affections. If I think of my personal interests, I find it hard to fault the trusty car. Probably the worst thing about it is that it collects bird-cack and looks perpetually filthy because I cannot be bothered cleaning it.

The car gives me a special blessing. If there are people sharing the trip, I have conversation without the fear that I am wasting time. And if I am making the trip on my own, I have time to myself and can listen to music. There are very few other moments when the leisure is freely available to me. The car is bristling with good equipment and the sound-insulation is not bad. In most traffic, I can hear the woody sonorities of the recorder or

the reedy tones of the oboe. While my sight is cluttered with billboards, wires and signs, I can imaginatively retire into a baroque palace and contemplate the garden prospect from some lavish parapet. The car serves my travel needs but also my peace and my fantasy. I impregnate it with my musical taste and it returns the favour with the mood that I find most agreeable.

The car is a transcendent symbol, because it promises a journey, an escape, a holiday, a moment's peace, a reprieve or precious respite, from the pressures of life. And that is despite the traffic and the fact that the journey is inspired by business and is therefore a legitimate tax deduction. As a driver, I have great power. The car itself is immensely strong, capable of towing a keel-boat—not that we have one—and I do not even need the accelerator to get it moving: the clutch will suffice. The whole thing is superbly engineered, and although it is old and far from a luxury vehicle, I find it hard to imagine many respects in which it could be mechanically superior.

So why do I hate the car and why, if I really hate it so much, do not I get rid of it? The two questions almost answer one another. I feel that I cannot get rid of the car without being irresponsible to the family, and this obligation makes me resentful for not being able to abandon something that I personally want to shed. Although I hardly ever fire up the car for my personal use (but use the bike as noted), there is still too much pressure on me to have a car for business and pleasure. Maybe I could countenance functioning less efficiently in transporting necessary things and people. But the real problem is denying the *unnecessary* things,

because these extras are the symbols of love. You have a resource, the car, which you use to demonstrate that other people matter to you to make trips for.

Despite my daily dedication to cycling, I cannot get rid of the car because dumping the car means being dumped by our personal network. The world would reproach me if I sold the machine, because the car is our passport to the world of our friends, the wider family and their activities: the parties, the school events, the extra-curricular fun things, the dinners out, the holidays away, the contact with people who live across town. To maintain a social life, as we call it (an odd term in itself) we are all assumed to need a car. Given the suburban geography that we have, not to have a car means opting out. You could still have friends who come over to your house—which means exporting the transport burden to your guests—but it seems like an impossible odyssey to reciprocate and reach their place or even a restaurant in a neighbouring suburb.

So, to retain the great social franchise and not to condemn the family to a domestic hermitage, we retain the car. We do not want to define ourselves as misanthropic, as if people who do not care enough about visiting, stay-at-home folk who do not like company and prefer to act the recluse. We do not want to opt out. So we have a car parked outside the house, more or less so that we do not have to refuse invitations immediately.

The car parked outside the house also tells me that the public transport system is inadequate to handle the geographic immen-

sity of a suburban city. But given that this story has necessarily come up in so many other contexts, let us leave me brooding on it as yet another reason to feel resentful for the car. The underlying reason for my hatred of cars is that they are extremely destructive; and among the many things that they end up destroying are other forms of infrastructure.

So let us contemplate the extent of destruction that the car wreaks. First, it destroys fossil fuel. The planet only has a certain amount of this precious stuff, and consuming it is clearly not sustainable. Second, the car destroys the planetary cooling system through the production of so much CO₂, and our climate may be permanently changed as a result of this carbon pollution which also poses other health risks, as with carbon monoxide; and the consequences of these changes are very hard to ponder. Third, the car destroys access and opportunities for bipedality, either cycling or pedestrian movement. To walk along a road with speeding traffic is an unpleasant experience; and, according to VicRoads, more people are killed by cars per kilometre of travel when on foot than on a bike. Fourth, the car destroys communal spatiality; it wrecks the eurhythmy of architecture and especially its relationship with the street.

You can immediately tell when spaces have been designed around automotive uses. Two features stand out: isolation and visual drainage; and both are recognizable as antisocial. In the suburbs, which are almost totally configured around cars, the building stands in the middle of a field surrounded by parking spaces and a private roadway or drive, sometimes with multiple

exits. I call this isolation, because the building is like an island surrounded by a sea of bitumen or concrete, perhaps landscaped with garden to make it look prestigious and to make the parking lot look like a garden park.

The other motif, visual drainage, is especially noticeable in the city. Councils often make it a condition for building taller dwellings or offices that the design has to provide for carparking. There is not enough land to place the cars beside or in front of the building, and so parking spaces have to be accommodated in a basement level or ground floor. Consequently, the façade of the building gives way along the street for a gaping unceremonious automotive mouth, where cars can pour in and vomit themselves out. I think of these driveways as visual drainage, because any presence of the architecture as a façade is sucked out of the masonry at the point of the wide gap: a huge discontinuity opens up in the building for the landing and launching of large and dangerous objects. The environment is hostile to foot traffic and the aesthetic is alienating for all locomotion other than automotive. Walking and cycling are frozen out. You feel extremely uncomfortable going past the gully that conducts the cars into the building, as if crossing the valley of death. It seems to unsettle the building, as if it has roads in it instead of furniture. The building expresses dynamism, at best, but alas no rest; and the reassuringly stabilizing presence of architecture is negated. The automotive funnel sucks out the gravity and compressive articulation of the masonry, and instead of the building figuratively accompanying the pedestrian with a sense of measured space,

your gaze plunges into a tunnel, where you fear you will end up if you do not walk well clear of the gap.

Because cars do not share any of the rhythms or even the pavements with humans on foot, they have to be given huge sweeping zones of their own, with curving gutters and yellow paint and zebra patterns and reflective signs. Compared to footspaces, they are barren and desolate, constructed for a continuous bargaining movement rather than a sequential stepwise rhythm which was built in, so to speak, in the classical architectural configurations of measured space. The visual language that facilitates automotive movement bears no relation to the visual language that creates landmarks or enclosures, the terrace, the shop, the parapet, the café, in short the street. The very nature of rolling stock is antithetical to the built fabric of the street, with its language of gravity and ceremony, its bases, columns and lintels and ornamental portals.

The issue is not so much cars themselves but the spaces designed for them. Much as I dislike their destructive effects, cars themselves are mostly quite beautiful, having their own aesthetic properties since the early days of mass manufacture; and these beauties are congruent with the beauty of their function, the excellent gearbox and the motor itself, with all the virtues of speed and power that the Italian futurists extolled. Rather, the issue is spaces that are created for cars. The cars that inhabit old cities which were planned long before the automotive epidemic stand up to the car tolerably well. The cars fill up the roads, create frustration for one another and kill cyclists; but beyond the normal

anger and carnage that go with motorized transport, the impact on design is minimal. Many European councils are smart enough to realize the incongruity of cars and the old city and restrict the movement of cars, as with the *isole pedonali* in Rome, where cars are forbidden unless very slow taxis answering a call. So traffic management can sometimes balance out the various pressures on the space and achieve a happy compromise, based on the underlying definition of space as places for bipedality. Why would you have any pride in owning Rome if you turn it into Los Angeles? And of course the European suspicion of cars also has a strong ecological dimension, for which the social and architectonic corrosiveness of the vehicles is an appropriate symbol.

Of course cars and cities cannot be considered incompatible. Even aesthetically, if cars are parked in parallel with the architecture, no great violence is done, which is why our own inner cities—like so many old cities abroad—can cope aesthetically with the rolling capsules that line the pavement. They might obscure a building here or there and create a perforated barrier; but it is no permanent disaster, because the fence of glass and painted metal is not in itself ugly and neither impedes pedestrian movement nor totally wrecks visual access to established architecture. The damage always comes when spaces are designed around cars, where pavements or walls give way to a dedicated automotive gully; and most of all, the empty spaces around buildings which wait for the arrival and departure of cars transforms much architecture into a wasteland, an anti-architectonic zone that you always feel uncomfortable crossing by foot. Instead of feeling that you are in a *piazza*, a court, a gateway or a *loggia*, you feel

that you are in an autodrome. Any amount of land designed for cars is the quintessence of antisocial space.

Alongside the corroded space of the autodrome, the damage of cars in discouraging free movement is incalculable. Like so much aesthetic horror, it is a symbol of a moral problem. The cars displace foot-traffic and bicycles because their presence is bullying. Cars enjoy the wholesale ownership of the streets and roads; and even when bicycle paths are painted on the side of the street, the cars have a threatening presence which continues to pose a deadly risk; because, to be fair, the cars cannot always travel in harmless parallel to the cyclists, given that they have to turn and hence cross the bike path. So many cyclists are injured each day by cars crashing into them that the only cyclists who dare ride in the traffic—or alongside the traffic, as the illusion goes—are those who are prepared to risk life and limb.

We think of cars being designed for speed and efficiency but structurally speaking they are designed for crashing. You can tell if you compare their design to those of human-powered vehicles. It is technically unnecessary to have two tonnes of mass, enormously thick wheels with huge bearings, heavy engine, massive transmission and of course all the luxurious machinery, like air-conditioning units. The greenhouse crisis and energy crisis have suggested numerous alternative vehicles, each of which is predicated on lightness for the sake of energy conservation. If cars were really designed for speed and efficiency, they would shed a substantial part of their mass, because this is easy to achieve in terms of engineering. The fact that they retain the mass against

all economic and ecological incentives to shed large amounts of it reveals the defensive social inertia, which is the agenda of the archetype: they are really designed for the opposite of efficiency, namely the ultimate inefficiency of crashing. They are designed for human survival in what would otherwise be a death-bubble.

The reason we want two tonnes of metal around us is that when travelling at high speeds we like to feel that there is a large and mighty barrier around us for a collision that could otherwise be fatal. So we carry around the overkill, so to speak, as part of a defence strategy, ingeniously packaged as engineering for higher performance. If a bicycle crashes, the rider gets hurt, almost automatically, unless there is an amazing stroke of good fortune and he or she bounces. But we build cars specifically so that the driver and passengers do not get hurt when the vehicle crashes; because it is quite likely that sooner or later they will crash into one another. Cars are designed for that eventuality as much as anything else, and quite successfully. It has to be a particularly nasty head-on collision for substantial damage to be done, so successful are cars at insulating their occupants from the impact.

Compared to bikes, cars are (a) invulnerable, (b) much more powerful, (c) more massive and visually voluminous, (d) louder and brighter, (e) filthy, (f) faster when there are no traffic jams and (g) greatly in the majority and therefore given much more space and privilege. Every car is experienced as intimidating for a cyclist or pedestrian, because it is structurally little different to a loaded gun pointing at you. You ride alongside cars in the knowledge that at any moment, a second of inadvertence or im-

patience or impulsive or drug-induced anger on the part of the motorist can maim or kill you. Your life depends on their care and kindness.

In the context of all bipedality, the existence of cars such as we have is an unintentional and socially accepted form of bullying. In terms of human movement, cars are an institution that terrorizes all forms of bipedality. For the cyclist, cars almost literally push you off the road, because they make the road unsafe. It is a bit like having a munitions facility or a Maffia node in the next door neighbour's house. The car threatens to knock you down even when the driver is benign, which drivers usually are. In our society, we are all supposed to have equal rights, whether on a bike or in a car; but you manifestly do not enjoy the right to safety if you are on a bike and a car is in the vicinity. The car denies the bicycle the safety which is everyone's right. We have no plans to change this chauvinism. It is entrenched in a carbon intensive culture; and all our infrastructure is created around the privileges of the car over the bipedality that it terrorizes.

Push comes to shove, so to speak, when parents evaluate whether or not the children should ride bicycles on the road. The terror might be something that a hardy parent can withstand for himself or herself; but what about the children? Should you allow your children to be subjected to the risk—and trust their inexperience and untested prudence on the roads—or should you perhaps run them to wherever they want to go in the motorcar? Few parents will default on the latter and chance the former: it is regarded as irresponsible, because you do not get a second chance

if they are killed or gravely injured. And if that is axiomatic, then the motif of mum and dad riding on their own is also considered foolhardy, as if a statement in denial of reality that cars are all about us and totally poised to maim or kill us.

According to the law, you have a right to ride your bicycle; but according to common sense the exercise of your rights is suicidal. What kind of a right is that? An unprotected right? A hollow right? It is clearly inequitable. Our society honours existing privileges rather than minority interests and, when space is in contention, it is resolved in favour of the majority, not the party that has more moral reason or ecological reason. Alas, the problem in maintaining automotive privilege is that it is infinitely replicated, because the car creates automotive space which is hostile to every other moving thing; and life is configured around the need for cars. No one contemplates establishing a business that is not entirely online unless there is carparking. And so with new blocks of flats or anything else. They are all being built around cars and their surrounding landscape is interpreted as automotive space.

It is no consolation for those who look upon the destruction of gentle space in favour of automotive space that the petrol will run out. Cars are clearly not sustainable; but when we admit it and the last drops of petrol are squeezed from the bowser at \$1 each, we will already have wrecked our gentle spaces and created irreversibly alienated neighbourhoods without any sense of community or aggregated social capital.

The car drives past such scruples in the same way that it aggressively drives past landmarks, pedestrians, cyclists, conversations and communities, caring to know about none of them. The car empowers you as a voyeur but not as a participant; it is the perfectly antisocial device, because it blasts the spatial accord between people and wrecks their common ground.

Symbolically enough, when I am in my car, I do not want to stop: where will I park? I am as unsociable as my car is antisocial. The natural state of the car in my imagination is rolling along at a good speed. When it slows down and I have to find a carpark, the anxiety rises. The car does not want to stop, because in that condition, it is worse than useless, a huge burden of land-occupancy which you might be ashamed of were it not for the expectations that society provides for it. That is why roadside architecture is designed for a drive-through experience, because the ideal state for the car is not to stop, not to make contact with society but to accept pitstop ministries and to keep rolling.

To tackle the problem of cars taking over space are redefining it as antisocial, legislation to ban cars in this part or that—as in Holland—will be a long time coming in Australia, thanks to the momentum that car-culture has in the electorate. But fortunately, there is a whole further angle on cars, which seems likelier to be feasible even in the shorter term. Instead of restricting cars, which is clearly unpopular, it is better to allow development of property without requiring provision for carparks. At present, developers must comply with regulations to provide space for cars. These rules have the consequence of (a) creating ugly an-

tisocial buildings and (b) an expectation that the people inside will have a car. If the rules are abolished, developers would be allowed to proceed on the basis that cars are not expected in the inner city, just as carparks are seldom on offer in most of the downtown buildings.

Slowly, with greater urban density, the proportion of car relative to human should decline. But this desirable outcome is much retarded by local councils who cannot be persuaded to change their regulations which assume the ubiquity of cars. And behind this inertia lies a whole further layer of road-obstinacy, a deeply held faith that one way or another, the car will prevail, because people love their cars too much to relinquish them. In Australia, it is a great struggle for noble politicians to sell a carbon tax, and it even seems to be news to many that petrol will not be around forever. Of course we cannot say exactly when it will run out; and this absence of a deadline encourages the unconscious belief that there will always be petrol and certainly a cynical view that we do not have to worry about it in our lifetime. As the supply dwindles, petrol will become progressively dearer. Even the conservative International Energy Agency (IEA) agrees that the pressure on price is rising; and according to CSIRO, it could even reach \$8 per litre by 2018.

But Australians are jolly optimists. Those who accept that the petrol will run out believe that the shortage will not present much of a problem. By the time the price-rises really bite, we will have other solutions. New energy sources and distribution will self-propagate marvellously as the pressure on fossil fuel

increases. Technology is moving at such a rate that it is pointless to worry: a solution will come along. It always does. This technological version of providence attracts belief not because of logic or science but because of hope. If we want to believe something enough, we say that technology will underwrite it and invoke industrial progress as infallibly delivering it. It is the same delusion that says: one day we will have a cure for dying. With science and technology, death will be optional.

At this stage, the great hope in relation to the petrol running out is electric cars; but the only reason that we believe in them is that we cannot think of anything else to replace petrol cars. In principle, an electric car can be sustainable, if you generate the electricity sustainably, that is. Also, because they are somewhat feeble and delicate, the designs favour lightness and smallness, with a more street-friendly presence compared to petrol cars. They would be much better for pedestrians and cyclists because the electrical motorist will have more incentive to conserve the energy stored in the batteries and will therefore not drive so aggressively.

Alas, we will have great difficulty generating enough electricity—sustainably or otherwise—to charge up the national fleet of cars. We are so used to petrol that we have lost sight of just how much energy lies in a cupful. To replace that energy with electricity made by sunshine or wind or tide would mean populating the whole landscape with generators, at a time when other politicians do not even want turbines within eyeshot of anyone who owns land.

Failing a windfall in technological progress, it would seem that the only way to provide the current for so many cars would be to burn more coal or build nuclear installations, both unacceptable outcomes. Unfortunately, we do not need just one miracle; we need several. One of the problems is generating the electricity but the other is the cars themselves. The electric cars, in automotive language, are not very capable. They have a tiny range. You either need to plug in and leave them charging for eight hours or you need to call in at a station to get a fresh battery, a bit like fresh horses in the days of the stage-coach.

If you look at websites promoting electric private transport solutions, you will see great figures, like electric cars that boast a range of 100 or 160 kilometres before needing a recharge. Actually, neither figure is thrilling; but, based on my experience with electric bikes, I am guessing that such figures are obtained in ideal circumstances and that realities might encourage a more conservative estimate. If you want to climb up a hill in Kew—or the tougher topographies of Sydney and Brisbane—you would knock off 30 kilometres from the range each time. To go anywhere, you need to plot your course carefully to maintain your charge; and red lights which make you give up your momentum at the bottom of a hill are especially resented. Most trips involve what has quickly been recognized as ‘range anxiety’, a new sinking feeling in private transport.

Of the millions of people who have faith in electric cars, very few have ever driven one. For four years, I experimented with the latest technology in electric bikes, with lithium batteries and

brushless motors. As a kind of bike, these are the leanest, lightest and most efficient of the electric vehicles currently available. I could get about 40 kilometres out of one charge, but that is with me pushing on the pedals as hard as I can.²² After four years of hefting on the crank-shaft, I had become so fit that I realized that I did not need the motor at all, which was very instructive. When push comes to shove, most people do not need a motor for anything much, especially when we have public motors in trams and trains, which are the obvious answer to our transport problems. Alas, we are clinging so desperately to private cars—still pouring vast investment into them and their infrastructure—when the evidence points to cars either being crippled or doomed. We wish the technologists well in their quest for more efficient private transport, of course, and hope that industry can rise to the challenge. Ultimately, however, it is not even the cars themselves that are necessarily dysfunctional but the energy grid that they presuppose, whether petrol or electric or biofuel; and although there is much expectation that battery technology (largely through advances in mobile computing) will become very much more efficient, my sense of physics is that the drain on power to shift a car will remain unsustainable unless the car approaches the weight of a bike.

Whatever the cars look like, the energy required to run private transport will also be needed to get supplies from farms and factories to shops, for ambulances, police and maybe some aeroplanes for emergencies. Aviation is not going to achieve many take offs with batteries. And just think how many lithium batteries we will need to drive a single lorry 30 kilometres between

30 red lights. Energy is precious and cannot be squandered in perpetuity. Because we think that technology will always redeem our mistakes and minister to our fond habits, we continue to expand our unsustainable suburban metropolis by laws that prevent greater density and transport efficiency. We will never have to tackle the sprawl, because a technological fix will come along and return the mess to its former arcadian hopes.

Most people who run a household have a plan for the future. Sure, unforeseen things might make the plans change; but based on what we know, we need to project what we will do. Alas, I can see little evidence that Australia has plans for when the petrol runs out, other than perpetuating the energy-inefficient sprawl, which is the wasteful spatiality of cars. It is as if, alone among the prosperous nations, Australia and America have a new fuel source that buoys us up with eternally bullish self-belief, a new fuel source that might as well be moonjuice. We have no contingencies for the future because of a guaranteed supply of this heady liquor, always ready to reassure us that sustainability is achieved by new technologies that make common sense redundant.

8

Tiny capital

Australia is a country of enormous land and tiny capital. In many ways, the insularity of our spatial organization mirrors the structure of capital, where small volumes of money are tied up in perfect and intractable isolation from one another in the title of a suburban cottage. In pondering the reasons for an aesthetic motif, it pays to contemplate the economic backdrop; because it seems likely that aesthetics and economics either condition one another or together reveal a common motif: the capital-to-space ratio in Australia has always been very low

It often surprises me that the paradigm of the energy-hungry isolated house nestling in gardens and panoramic automotive traffic is not only tenacious among long-standing residents but equally infectious among new residents. Most of our European refugees from the 1930s and migrants from the 1950s and then Asian refugees and migrants from the 1970s onward came from densely populated countries, where often even village architecture created highly socialized spaces, with multi-storey houses built directly on the street, to say nothing of the ceremonially-oriented configurations in the large European metropolises. But the experience of life in the old country was a memory rapidly expunged in the prolific spreading suburban properties of the new land.

A subtext of Australian spatiality has long been a rejection of the spatialities of Europe and Asia. From Edwardian times, as noted earlier, the streets were laid out in reaction to the density of Europe; and ever since, Australia has been seen as the last frontier, the only remaining place of opportunity and land. For people

who were perhaps never in possession of much property, the chance to own a quarter acre in a city, but still near the country, seemed irresistible. Owning a flat provides no similar symbolic service, because the land itself—with its opportunities for growing grapes and olives—was also a great link to the earth that was so contested back in Europe. Miraculously, however, this quantum of earth which can now be ours is reconciled with modernity, a new clean house with television, conveniences, no stairs and secure provision for a car.

It would never have occurred to any foreign arrival that our cities might now be sufficiently dense, in the same way that no one who was already established for generations could ever have foreseen that the layout was dysfunctional and antisocial. With such powerful symbolism of individual attainment, the free-standing house was also seen as a great investment, appreciating hugely and worthy of all the capital that we can muster. And in many ways, the motif of the quarter acre property somewhere close to town has been a very happy story which poetically matches other parts of our economic fortune. The land, as physical entity, is directly responsible for the wealth of Australia. It is the land which was always exploited, for gold, wool, iron, aluminium and uranium, to generate the prosperity that affords the urban development and their luxurious services and mode of transport.

But even before we contemplate what we know—the environmental and social catastrophes—the story is not all so marvellous. Though blessed with natural assets and prosperous industries, for most of its European history Australia has been a net

importer of capital; and even in boom-time, we find it difficult to save money and repay debt. The reasons seem obscure to me, though I am not an economist. Australians are hard-working and well educated. So where do all our earnings go? Unfortunately, we put substantial savings into items which make no money and are often bound to depreciate. And it is not just the car or holiday.

In spite of what everyone believes through natural pride and vanity, the family house is an asset that depreciates. We should not be deceived that the value of property goes up and up, which of course it does. The rising prices are caused by the land becoming more expensive, not the house itself. Rising property values create the illusion that the pile of bricks has appreciated. Alas, the building stock itself often sinks in value and within a couple of generations can even end up with a negative value, because the next owner pays to get it demolished. With rising demand for the land, the chances of any given house becoming obsolete have increased. The same pressure on the land that causes property prices to exceed inflation simultaneously puts pressure on the existing building stock to be replaced by something more efficient. As a result, the lifespan of Australian houses is falling and the likelihood of the building stock appreciating is decreasing.

There are structural reasons that conceal the historical devaluation of Australian building stock. The bricks and mortar are often valued according to their replacement cost, because the calculation is performed for the sake of insurance. If a house burns down, say, it will cost a great deal to erect the same house again. The replacement cost is always vastly greater than the original

cost, thanks to the normal pressures of inflation on labour and resources. This valuation is logical if the decision is always taken to replace the house with a kind of replica; but this method, which is artificially guaranteed to prop up the estimates, somewhat obscures the underlying pattern that arises when houses are replaced not because of fire but because of dissatisfaction or obsolescence, because the land-use of the existing house is utterly sub-optimal.

Because the suburbs were built on a sparse footprint, the existing stock is too low and sits on the land in the wrong place, often plonked in the middle of a quarter acre and seldom more than a storey or two high. As this footprint is proving unsustainable in every sense—and the signs of greater density are springing up on this corner or that—I do not think that it is fanciful to conjecture that few free-standing houses in Zone 1 Melbourne or counterparts in Sydney and Brisbane will escape demolition within a century.

Looked at historically, Australian development is hesitant and apologetic. We start with a single dwelling in the middle of a block. To fit more people on the allotment, we build a granny flat. Then we demolish both dwellings and erect three or four units. Then we look around for something else to knock down to build a couple more, but always apologetic low-rise, with shy footprint with setbacks and tentative profile, and still with poor prospects for longevity.

Slowly, we make the city denser; but stepwise, by short-term increments that have an expiry date like a mouldy cheese. At each stage, a lot of money is committed toward nothing for posterity, because our traditions have made us resistant to optimal land-use. No domestic construction conforming to existing setback rules is safe from demolition as demand for accommodation mounts and a replacement is indicated. Even when I see third storeys with a setback, I wonder how long it will be before the upper terrace will be filled in and the profile is brought to the border. And to get another storey out of the allotment, it probably makes sense to start again.

Ambitious for their real estate, home-owners go in for renovations, paying half the value of the property to achieve a new extension or new service areas. It might delight a family to have a larger kitchen or a bedroom in the roof. The problem is that the house is in the wrong place and would need another four storeys on top of it to be sustainable in a contemporary metropolis. For that reason, I wonder if any of the houses and units surrounded by garden in the inner to medium suburbs will escape being condemned to the bulldozer by our grandchildren or greatgrandchildren.

Australia puts so much money into obsolescent development based on tiny capital and tinier regulatory vision. Our domestic buildings do not qualify as an investment any more than they qualify as architecture. Suburbia has long been recognized by critics as an ecological disaster, but much less attention has been paid to suburbia as an economic disaster. We have already

pondered how the low-density suburbs damage the environment, first by instituting the least energy-efficient detached housing and second by forcing people into cars on our now strangled roads, which are unsafe for cyclists and fill the air with carbon. But what is never contemplated is how the low-density pattern also has the effect of encouraging families to put their savings into building stock which declines in value.

Many of our commercial buildings are also destined to be razed, because they too are subject to archaic setbacks and height limits, which makes the land-use greatly sub-optimal. Both commercial and domestic buildings can be majestic and last for centuries, as we sense in the CBD. But to build lasting architecture beyond the city means aggregating larger amounts of capital for better multi-storey use of the land.

Rightly or wrongly, significant architecture requires greater concentrations of capital than Australia can muster, with its fragmented family funds buried in naive domestic ephemera. Think of Paris or any other European city which was planned before the arrival of the cars. A tenement in Paris is a gorgeous thing. Providing homes for numerous families, each is built bang on the street and butts hard against the neighbour. Many have a delightful little courtyard which brings light into the apartments. No one will demolish the lofty buildings of Paris in any century hence. They are built to last, not in the sense that the stones were well laid but that the shape and placement are optimal. Six storeys occupying the full allotment: good land-use, a sense of community and gracious aesthetics. Shops below, life in the street, cafés, a

beautiful social environment, rich in pedestrian culture and efficient public transport: these are the fruits of high density coupled with aesthetic vision.

Poor Australia! Whereas French families put money into something durable, Australians put their savings into unsustainable domestic projects that will perish in two or three generations. To perpetuate obsolescent building patterns, we enjoy those wonderful setback regulations which prevent us from using the land efficiently and confine us to a succession of hungry but frustrated architectural compromises, each one devouring the last. Most of our domestic buildings, I suspect, are doomed and ultimately worth not a cent, even though the land continues to appreciate. Indeed, the impressiveness of land-appreciation has blinded us to the lesion of capital which is the Australian building industry.

How Australia got itself into this mess is for historians to lament. What is urgent is to work out how to get out of it as quickly as possible. Personally, I am not at all in favour of demolishing anything where the footprint is optimal; but most projects arise on sites where an optimal footprint is not the case. It seems necessary to abolish the setback regulations which local councils have imposed to protect the garden aesthetic and let developers go ahead with dense and sustainable architecture, drawing upon the necessary capital that individual households will never manage.

9

The bike and the modern cavalier

Bicycles are unique as an instrument of transport, because they offer an alternative. Against the powerful mainstreaming of Australian and American culture along heavy automotive lines, the bicycle stands out as a reminder of youthful autonomy. Against the expectations of status and consumption, each bicycle on the road says: hey, it does not have to be like this.

We can move around without consuming energy, without tonnes of metal and heavy engineering. It is easy, especially if cars can yield somewhat and make it safer to glide along on a bicycle. Almost too easy, like a dream, a fantasy, a joy: the bicycle is the perfectly naïve expression of freedom in movement. So easy that you could almost become smug. Our bikes live indoors, like a brace of family greyhounds, looking docile and nimble. Even as I write, I look at the simple assembly of pipes and a pair of spindly wheels and wonder how it is so magical. I wonder how they can be so capable. How can I, with my scrawny legs, get to a distant university each day faster than a car can manage? It seems incredible that a few bits of turned metal, whose engineering comes from a century ago, can out-perform an enormous machine bristling with all the latest technology. And to reinforce this pride in our simple horse and our supple legs, we enjoy the fixed-wheel variety of bike, which even resists the better bike technology on offer. You do not need gears or even a ratchet on the rear hub.

Silent and gentle, the bicycle is potentially a great symbol of reform and alternative culture. With mixtures of elegant engineering and hippy values, it quietly stands for community change, for

a fairer and more rational society, where the community can address its priorities without one part bullying another, as manifestly happens with the motorized majority intimidating all weaker forms of wheels and banishing them from the roads.

To guarantee that bicycles do not express these seditious ideas, Australian culture has found plenty of ways to make the bicycle mainstream. The bike has been ingeniously detached from a purpose that would make it effectual as an alternative means of transport. Inner Melbourne is the only possible exception but only marginally so. More than any other city in Australia, Melbourne possesses a culture of commuting which is green and reassuring for me, because I belong to it. But we who carry our lunch and laptops to work each day belong to a minority among cyclists. The great enthusiasm for bicycles throughout suburban Australia is for recreation.

Leaving aside the hardy travellers of the inner city, cycling in Australia is defined so that it poses zero threat to car culture. Apart from the margin of commuters, the bike is not widely conceived as any kind of competition to cars. Some sports cyclists also commute, but it is unusual. For the most part, the point of riding is seldom to propose an alternative to a mainstream way of organizing systems or values; quite the contrary, cycling for recreation tends to reinforce the archetype of consumer who spends time without an ulterior purpose.

There are three main cycling phenomena outside the inner city commute. First, and most demonstratively there are ath-

letes in lycra who ride very light bikes in a racing spirit in imitation of the Tour de France. They sometimes go out in team-like formations as friends; and at other times, they aggregate naturally because they ride on a common route where they are sure to enjoy one another's slip-stream and the prospect of spontaneous companionship. The riders are powerful and have sophisticated training regimes and expensive gear to boost their performance. Even if they do not actually race, their attitude to riding is consumed with measurement, margins of performance and competitive advantage.

Second, there are organized tours for cross-country riding. They attract a wider demographic of young people (beginning with late primary school years) to very mature. The rigour of the riding requires a degree of training, as a timetable has been devised and no one is meant to fall too far behind. A caravan accompanies the riders, bearing necessary assistance, accommodation, provisions and medical help. As with any holiday, there are substantial costs and of course commitment of time.

Third, there are weekend riders who enjoy pedalling bikes, mostly on bike paths and mostly as families or couples. Their view of riding is relatively relaxed and non-competitive. Often children are involved who would have neither the skill nor stamina to perform impressively anyway, even if mum or dad wanted to tear ahead. There is sometimes a wobbliness in their style and often the sense of selecting a route is none too deliberate. They are the most rhapsodic of the three but also conduct their riding as organized leisure in the weekly schedule. It may form part of a

larger holiday away, where the bikes are either hired or brought to the holiday location by means of a rack on the car.

All three groups are somewhat given to sequestering the ride. They see the excursion as a thing in itself, like a game of tennis, that has no rapports with any other activity, if not the conversation in the clubhouse. One physical expression of this sequestering is that cyclists may transport the bike in a car to an ideal location, park the car and then set off on the bike. The riding is framed, like a picture on the wall, as a discrete event in time and space which is saluted because it is demonstratively impressive in its own terms and often is served by other modes of transport to happen at all.

There are many marvellous and commendable aspects to the leisure cyclists of Australia. All tend to be highly socialized. Companionship, either incidental or planned, is a large part of the attraction; and often discussions can be held for a very long time concerning the various types of bikes and accessories, means of measuring performance and hatching plans. It makes the concept winsome. All are highly conscious of fitness. The family outing may not yield great cardiac or pulmonary challenges but it nevertheless inducts little people into riding and prepares them for good habits. The friendly exposure to cycling is undoubtedly a wonderful introduction not just to the life-long pleasures of riding but the ingrained comfort and confidence that make riding easier to resume at any stage later in life.

Australian culture easily embraces cycling as sport; and we become excited with new and picturesque reportage of the Giro d'Italia and the Tour de France. These highly branded events define the enthusiasm for cycling as perfectly non-functional. In Australia, the main reason to ride out on a bike is simply to ride back again. It functions, if that is the right word, as a glamorous regression to childhood, where the naivety of pedalling, rolling around and having no idea of a purpose in rolling, is dignified by an artificial goal, a destination of no meaning; and with this blessing, your existential vacuum is heroized. You can cover much distance and construe the journey as a massive triumph, even though it achieves very little and consists principally of going out and coming back again.

Though belonging intimately to mainstream competitive leisure culture, sporting cyclists nevertheless pit themselves against antisocial space. They take to the roads, which is somewhat heroic, and enjoy a certain solidarity against the dominant mode of transport, the motorcar. Most of them are drivers themselves and have no polemics against the car. But when on the road, the risks of serious injury are everywhere felt, as cars, vans and lorries speed past with uncomfortable margins.

In all ways, it is an unlikely team to be countercultural. The camaraderie among cyclists is less than that of soldiers in warfare. Their socialization is patchy, sometimes warm and sometimes indifferent, even among commuting cyclists who share the purpose of getting to an office. But they are all separate offices, reached from different points of departure. Like dogs that snoot at one

another's rear, cyclists are both pack animals and yet disparate, varied, of no common style or breed. Often, cyclists have only one thing in common: riding precariously in a space which is built for cars. And this defiance of safety discourse, which is so much a part of car culture, is the outstanding contribution of these athletic men and women.

Security is a top priority in Australia. Security as a discourse is morally unassailable because no one can ever argue that we should have less of it. It enjoys boundless promises for growth. No one ever feels secure enough, secure against financial downturn, job-loss, accidents, predators, pedophiles, bad exam results, drug addictions, sexual content, thieves and people who might look at you or cut your plants down. To each of these fears, there are elaborate securities, financial products, devices, software, privileged schools and vigilante media which offer to look after us, to say nothing of the regulatory institutions which every year threaten to tighten up on existing provisions to reflect ever increasing community standards. And so with the roads.

An advertisement by one government instrumentality in Victoria urged motorists: if it does not have side-impact air-bags, do not buy it. (An unnamed 'it' in Australia is likely to mean a motor car, like 'it's got plenty of guts'.) So cars, already equipped with seat belts, two tonnes of metal and front air-bags, still represent too great a liability: you are not advised to buy such a car because cars without side protection are now considered unsafe. To accept a lower standard is irresponsible, which means disqualifying almost all second-hand cars and presumably cheaper

cars and meanwhile promoting cars of greater price, sophistication and mass.

Encountering this billboard as a cyclist produces strange and tragic feelings. On our bikes, we have neither seat belts nor two tonnes of metal nor front air-bags, much less the lateral counterparts which are now deemed essential for motorists. Our central nervous system is protected only by our skin and a shirt. When it comes to the road, which is shared by motorists and cyclists, there are two standards. One is governed by escalating expectations of security and the other represents the constant that spooks it: the human body, exposed in its most elegant bipedality, which heroically braces itself against the onslaught of heavier technologies.

This disparity is one of many that riddle Australian culture. From governmental authorities, for example, we have scrupulous oversight of risk to prevent industrial accidents. Guided by severe laws, occupational health and safety are the subject of rigorous management. Risk is scientifically quantified, creating the belief that risk can be handled outside a framework of courage and bravery. Meanwhile, when it comes to certain personal transport choices and sport, individuals still massively rely on ancient ideas of valour and intrepid spirit. So many daily decisions are taken by individuals outside the grid of evaluation and assurance.

The standards of occupational health and safety that we expect in industry are fundamentally different to those in private life. The culture of risk management is unsympathetic to many private

activities, because they are undeniably dangerous, and few scientific templates moderate their spontaneous approval in household cultures. Throughout the workplace, risk is systematically calculated as the severity of impact multiplied by the likelihood of the event occurring. In activities like contact-sport or cycling, the consequence of injury can be extreme, including death, and the chances of a mishap are considerable. According to common workplace formulae, therefore, the risk of serious injury is high; and given that all contact sport could be considered unnecessary, the activity could be defined as ‘an avoidable risk’. Prudent risk management would indicate *risk elimination*, that is, leaving the bicycle at home or not playing contact sport but perhaps walking instead. Even non-contact sports such as tennis are responsible for long-term injuries to elbows and shoulders and other joints; and OHS culture—if it had any influence in private life—would similarly discourage such sports on account of known risks which are essentially avoidable.

But that is for business. Household and community values, on the other hand, are relatively sympathetic to dangerous activities; and because they are largely performed outside the workplace, the legal and cultural framework of industry holds no sway. On the contrary, there is an undeniable energy—totally at variance with best workplace practice—which encourages dangerous activities just because they are dangerous. Footballers in TV commentary are praised for their courage; and similar admiration accrues to intrepid skiers, pole-vaulters, divers, as well as other athletes, such as competition cyclists. An element of this praise relates to courage in defying the athlete’s own pain threshold; but

an element also consists in being undaunted and confident in the face of personal risk, as when competition cyclists, pushing their speed beyond the margin of safety, run off the road and crash.

There is no industrial code or philosophy that takes care of such margins—how can there be?—other than the apparently archaic idea of courage, an appeal which would have questionable legitimacy in the ears of the triage nurse in the event of an accident. Courage, defined as willfully taking risks, is implicitly denounced in workplace culture. To foster courage would run counter to risk-management provisions and would count as workplace negligence. These cavalier standards of care are tolerated and encouraged in sport cultures, perhaps on the basis that sport is structurally a knowing game of chance. It also makes me wonder what we would say of the management of risk outside sporting culture, in earnest commuter cycling. Is the practice of riding to work similarly based on the survival of a warrior instinct in the contemporary world?

Australia earnestly wants more cycling and governments can see that there are limits to how many cars can fit in even a large space. Against the spatiality which massively militates against cycling and so clearly favours cars, contemporary attitudes and policy are in fact somewhat sympathetic to bikes, even though the expressions of this sympathy are somewhat tokenistic relative to the constant growth of motorways. Commuter cycling is mildly promoted by governments and vigorously cultivated by environmental groups as the most efficient means of transport as well as a good form of exercise. The community therefore has

many incentives to encourage this very rational form of transport; and behold, a great hope in the defiance of conservative spatiality! Increased participation in cycling (a) improves health and wellbeing, (b) lightens the traffic burden of both motor and public transport and (c) lowers greenhouse emissions. However, for the individual cyclist, there is also a considerable risk of serious personal injury. Relative to other commuters, cyclists are overrepresented in hospitals with broken bones, contusions, broken teeth and dislocations.

If industrial standards of occupational health and safety prevailed in daily life, no one would cycle to work or ride with mates on a weekend. In fact recreational cycling would be especially vulnerable to risk elimination, that is, ceasing the activity which is deemed to be risky, because strictly speaking it is not necessary. Given the knowledge that the risks of cycling are higher than those of public transport or car usage, it would be seen as irresponsible to maintain a practice known to be relatively unsafe, that is, less safe than other means of getting around. Instead, individuals of very different ideological colour turn a blind eye to the known risks, preferring to hazard their fortunes on the road with very little protection.

The situation involves many paradoxes, and significant—and perhaps intractable—questions arise. Every time I set out on my wheelie-wheelie, I wonder: is courage always and intrinsically antithetical to risk management? What distinguishes courage from foolhardiness? When is defiance of risk admirable? Is risk acceptable simply according to how much we value the outcome

(as with the ends justifying the means)? Do we say that a risky action is courageous because we sufficiently enjoy the feeling of surviving the risk superbly? Do we only say that a risky action is foolish because we do not personally or culturally identify with the risky objective?

Against the demand for precision and auditable process in risk evaluation and worksafe culture, the guidance for most people deciding mortal issues of sport and commuting is vague, murky and instinctual. The discrepancy between a sector which is highly legalized and a population which is extensively impulsive is hard to reconcile philosophically, much less expect sensible policy to be developed around. But it seems that the theme of valour has been resuscitated to take care of the new alienation of automotive space. To sally forth bravely against the traffic is our way of constructing the hostility of urban space in noble terms, as if the fray, the melee, the honorable turmoil that was faced in battles from all ages past.

As we know, bikes have become popular again and sales outstrip those of cars. However, the spatiality of our cities has since been rearranged in favour of cars, and the way we ride our bikes against the traffic and the likelihood of serious injury are an unsettling backdrop to the welcome enthusiasm. For joy or for convenience, the bikes are wheeled out to wage battles against the cars. We say that it is brave or spirited or bold or foolhardy or crazy or naïve and hopeful. With a patronizing and diminutive spirit, we place the cyclists in a historical bloodline of quaint heroes that extols

their courage as individuals almost as an anachronism, or who look after their individual sporting needs with great spirit.

Cyclists can thus be construed as anything flattering other than martyrs of reform. We think of their needs as psychological. Of course they have to be allowed to go out on the roads and enjoy themselves, in the same way that you cannot keep a dog inside all the time. Without doubt there are big risks; but these can be indulged because they are countercurrent in a way that snaps back to mainstream the moment the ride is over.

For most cyclists, the relationship between courage and risk is unknown. We might expect that a few individuals cycle in naive ignorance of safety issues; they are under the illusion that cycling is safe and requires little courage. Some may even believe that cycling has been artificially identified with danger, which has unfairly discouraged cycling participation. Most cyclists, on the other hand, recognize that cycling is somewhat unsafe and that terrible things can happen very suddenly. Cyclists may argue that knowledge of risk is the best strategy toward risk management; so that being somewhat frightened on the road, thanks to a constant memory of danger, is the surest method of self-preservation in the chaotic traffic.

But for all hardy cyclists, the awareness of risk does not discourage the daily subjection to certain danger. There are two possibilities. Either the cyclist is so filled with euphoria by cycling that the pleasure principle takes care of the unsettling worry over risk: the bliss of the ride displaces all monitory feeling and

the cyclist feels uninhibited with the risks thanks to the almost narcotic effect of propulsion over the saddle. Or cycling has appeal just because it is dangerous, just because it is thrilling and requires courage against the most perilous hazards to sustain the necessary determination.

After all these millennia, the world hardly seems more friendly and the moral choices in a period of such sophistication seem as immature and harsh as they ever were in the bloody age of chivalry. We once had beautiful civic places, which enemy communities periodically wrecked with war. And now we have antisocial spaces which we war with daily as individuals in order to have personal rights of movement and peace. Alas, if cyclists do not assert their rights to the road by riding on them, there will be no more bike-paths and they have lost the battle. And so the courage that it takes is always in the balance, always putting cyclists on their mettle, either to continue or to recede and surrender. Sadly, this is what you do in antisocial space, even if you naively want to go out and use a shiny bike with friends for recreation.

10

Grass and class

Among the many causes of exorbitant motor traffic in Australia are the large distances that parents travel to get their children to school. So great is the spread of the suburbs that it may even seem necessary to take a car to reach a school in the same suburb; but the local school may not be felt to be quite good enough. Schooling is too important to let geography get in the way; and if a better or grassier school lies some suburbs away, even if it costs a bank-loan, you have to accept making the pilgrimage twice each day for the sake of your child's education. Besides, if you are going to get into a car for two kilometres anyway to get to the local school—given that suburban density is unlikely to bring a school any closer than two kilometres from your door—you will be in a car anyway and so you may as well travel another ten kilometres to get to the grassier school that you believe will set your child up for life.

It adds a lot of travel and we know the outcomes in terms of their spatial consequences as well as ecological impact. It all seems questionable to me that there is any long-term benefit in these enormous and relentless daily odysseys; but they are as much an article of faith in Australia as the naturally restorative properties of gardens or the decent residential character of a street where you never see a soul unless walking a dog or walking to a car. But both motifs definitely have a perception of nature in common and both involve the most unnatural means of transport imaginable.

It is probably instinct that causes us to be competitive about our children. After all, it is only natural that you want the best for them: the greatest choices, the highest marks, the best match for

their talents and the best prospects. If only for the sake of their durable happiness, you would love them to be successful in every way, to have some illustrious profession, to own property, to have power and hence the greatest chances of personal authority, with the corollary of charisma and appeal to the opposite sex. It is the final relief and consolation of a life in decline that the children are on their way up.

To know with security that this fortune is going to eventuate, we need tangible proofs and reliable strategies. It is not enough to think that your kids are pretty good—as you did when they were babies—because this wishful thinking might lead to conceit and it does not take long for complacency to end in disappointment. The performance of the children becomes your life's project; you recognize it as a part of your responsibility as a parent. You disavow the fond encouragements that were naively lavished on early locutions and instead jealously seek metrics and plans to be reassured that everything is on track for the optimum trajectory.

There is an industry that promises to take care of your development anxieties. It is called private education. Any school run by the government might feel like telling you that you are unwisely competitive, neurotic and overambitious about your kids; young people grow up anyway, find their special thing and have a greater chance of becoming interesting people the less you manage them. But a private school will tell you that all your managerial concern is warranted and responsible planning is more likely to be satisfied by investment in the private education on offer.

Beyond vaunting the generous grassy grounds, the large sports fields, the mowing and rolling equipment, the suite of choices in syllabus, the country retreat and the excellent facilities of every type, the private-school sales-pitch flatters parental anxiety and proffers security with two boastful claims, bowled with the confident spin that belongs with all marketing in private industry. First, our school achieves high grades in the examinations (though we never mention that this performance is the result of selective entry and the ambitious and competitive parental demographic). And second, our school encourages leadership, as well as treating each pupil as an individual (despite the uniform and regimentation) and offering greater academic choices.

The theme of leadership in schools is hardly confined to the private sector but has also leached into certain government schools, which feel that they have to breed leaders and cultivate self-marketing skills; and they too feel a need to attract similar levels of parental approval, albeit on grounds that have a much more modest spatial appearance. In all schools, examination results can only be improved by tiny margins through teaching, because examination outcomes are largely determined by parental and demographic factors and it seems that no one can adduce any evidence that superior teaching is responsible for differences among cohorts from different sectors. Meanwhile, however, the rhetoric of leadership can flourish with lush hyperbole, uninhibited by any metric that might encourage modesty, much less a scientific attribution of cause. And it greatly flatters parental ambitions, almost as a remnant of an earlier class system but translated into corporate language.

In many a lavish grassy school that parents will cross town for their children to attend, everyone is training to be a leader, from prep year onward. It is not clear at this stage whom the little people get to lead, because the only kids available in the school are also jealous leaders and presumably do not take kindly to being led by another leader of greater sway. You cannot very well belong to the cult of leadership and then passively consent to be led by someone with more imperial ambitions. With whatever levels of illusion, all these little guys aspire to be in the lead. Each day presents an opportunity for leadership but twenty opportunities for anxiety, humiliation and defeat.

And then there is a question of where all this illusory leadership leads. Just where do the little people get led by the prevailing leader? Because young people may have incomplete wisdom in the world—but clearly have great leadership potential—it is necessary to devise challenges for them of an arbitrary nature. That is why sport is so important in so many schools that attract competitive parents. With sport, you can have a goal without any wisdom attached. There is no requirement to think about something philosophically to establish a point or to argue the ethics of a plan or policy as opposed to another. The genius of sport is to detach effort from an evaluation of purpose, so competitive energies are mustered at call and without the need for reflexion, much less a critical vision of building cultural capital.

Sport is a cornerstone of private education—even on Saturdays—because it is automatically full of raucous enthusiasm and, in commanding large amounts of land and building as well as dis-

ciplined teams in training, it somehow seems to symbolize power and empire without concomitant levels of thought or vision. The land (or grounds, as we say at that level) is not just an expensive asset but a sign of great ritual pertinence, where the sports that it is largely devoted to have an intricate symbolic function. Sport reduces motivation to the wellspring of competition, where nothing really matters in the outcome but only the competitive quest itself, ingeniously packaged as team-spirit among friends. For all human consequence, it is wholly trivial if team A wins or team B wins. There is no point to the contest, so the energy that goes into it and the mustering of combined forces beneath any number of leaders in the moment can be maintained without any need for a consciously generated purpose. So sport is a framework for propagating leadership without any responsibilities to a purpose. You can have leadership in any amount provided that it applies to an arbitrary and meaningless challenge.

The market for leadership also wants to see competition celebrated at every turn. The school is in competition with all other schools, just as its pupils are in competition with all the other pupils in the state. Institutional games cultivate the competitive spirit. The sport competition, with its almost medieval symbol of green land for jousting, allegorizes the academic competition, with the huge convenience that there is no need to provide content. With the tangible commitment of large amounts of land and investment in facilities, the expectations can be matched with student and parental commitment in spurring one another on in institutionalized competition.

In the terrible days when they used to whip children, the charming isles of Britain invented two types of school. One was a local establishment, set up for lessons during the day and receiving pupils in the morning and dismissing them in the afternoon to return to their families for supper. The other was a boarding school, where pupils would reside for long periods. Initially appealing to landed gentry, whose estates were far from sophisticated centres, the schools took over the responsibility of educating privileged children by keeping them away from their families, much as still occurs with some richer country children in Australia. Though the boarding schools were brutal and barbarous, just like the day schools, they were also expensive, charging substantial fees and constituting a great symbol of privilege. Because they ministered to a social elite, the boarding schools were often imposing edifices set in spacious grounds, with august halls, impressive libraries and stately chambers for the senior masters.

Symbols of authority are tenacious. When mass education burgeoned in the twentieth century, proposing equal educational opportunities to all, the prestige of the old templates remained. Maintaining the privileged archetypes alongside an otherwise universal state education entailed a two-tiered system, which has remained in Britain and was exported to Australia. Continental Europeans were sometimes unimpressed with the British system. My mother tells me that in Vienna one used to joke that the English keep the dog in the house and put the children in kennels. Heartless and callous, the English paradigm seemed for continental observers to evoke the abandonment of children. The main continental counterpart appeared to be the monas-

teries, where children would be taken firmly in hand, divested of family fondness and brought up in an institutional mould. Perhaps that is the reason continental Europeans have a rather unified educational system, because the alternatives to a local day school were long regarded as backward and distasteful.

In Britain and Australia, however, the idea that there are schools for an elite and schools for *hoi polloi* was paradoxically heightened with the age of mass education. The schools for the many are run by the government—and also, with modest fees, by the Catholic church—while the schools for the privileged are private, though usually supported by the Anglican church or some other religious counterpart. The term private school is relatively new, because they used to be called public schools in the age before mass state education: they were called public because underwritten by large public institutions, such as the Church of England. However, by whatever language, the terms of privilege are extremely infectious in Australia; and schools of any kind are often keen to project as much wealth and pomp as they can, invoking archaic military parades and the air of ancestral lands.

Usually, however, the land is sorely hemmed in and the vast spreading grounds have to be evoked by miniaturized representations. Structurally speaking, this is the role of the garden bed and the lawn, which are both such a large part of the schools and university campuses of the English-speaking world. Schools in our cultures are built away from the street, which is the aspiration of all buildings that seek maximum dignity. It is a convention to dignify the schools with rich spatiality and is not so

easily explained by the thought that comes to mind most quickly, namely that the space in front of a school is for the children to play in. That may arise in poor schools that are paved all around in bitumen; but any school with a claim to importance, leadership and privilege will dedicate the whole frontage to ceremonial gardens. Sometimes, these will involve lawns; but they are not of a nature that can be traumatized by hundreds of school shoes. The discourse in such places is about preservation and aesthetic standards. For playing, children have a field out the back, effectively the back yard, which is shy of the public.

Children therefore have to be taught that a part of the school is out of bounds. The garden is only to look at, either from the street or the front offices. It can never be socialized space, because the purpose is related to spectacle and the projection of prosperity and plenty. The circulation of people in such places weakens the sacred air of botanical exclusivity; and no one can think about walking around on the curated platform without compromising its hallowed destiny as aesthetic sanctuary. In the context of any dense community like that of a school, the garden is a reservation to insulate the eye from people.

Even universities which occupy extensive grounds also have this problem, where land is set aside for gardens and even lawns that no one dares walk upon; and in the older ‘city schools’, this land is precious. It is hard to identify the deferential sentiment, perhaps a kind of park-pride which spooks people by the very admiration that the gardening attracts. The garden around the buildings is both quaint and forbidding, an undeniably pretty

condiment to the space but also a zone of great unapproachability, which one steps around, almost tiptoes around, out of respect. And sometimes, the plantings prevent access by their very bulk, with lots of bushes crowding out the space and keeping people out by giving them no room at all.

Universities are also somewhat pitted against one another in the student market (especially for ambitious performers who collect the high marks in their final year at school) and similarly strive to project either the spatial grandeur of privilege or the bounty of virgin nature. Some of them have huge amounts of land with which to indulge the sense of expansive plenty, while others—often growing out of technical colleges or smaller institutions of inferior rank and sway—have little disposable land. They are based on the ‘city school’ model abroad, where the buildings front directly onto the street and inner courtyards provide light and space (densely populated enough) for students and staff. Few institutions are without some gardens, striving, with whatever land, to create the illusion that the university is a kind of park.

Grass has been admired since the renaissance as a kind of natural bed, a soft and verdant blanket upon which the rustic swain or poet might find repose and dream of love.²³ At university, such scenarios are as close to reality as it gets, as the gorgeous students have plenty of time to disport themselves in good weather and perchance satisfy their pining. Parks can afford this gracious platform for people; and if there is an expanse of lawn, there may as well be a suite of borders that lend definition or create intimacy. But the effectiveness of the public idyll depends on the

forbearance of the multitudes, who dutifully stick to the concrete path and leave the grass to the recumbent souls who make a temporary bed there.

It is a bit uneasy, because a person lying down in the wrong place will rapidly feel uncomfortable and is inclined to give up and move on. And if even the most romantic individuals decline to tryst on the lawn, the value of the lawn becomes somewhat questionable. It is unlike a paved patio or a square which is good for tables and chairs and which, by virtue of such signifiers, tells people that sitting and talking and staying put are expected. The patio or square is naturally socialized space, whereas grass is not. In cultural history, leaving aside the use to which institutions put space for the sake of sport and other ceremonies, grass tends to correlate with lonesome wanderers or tender lovers, with the implication of peaceful herbivores in the vicinity.²⁴ Sporting ceremonies aside—where the land is in any case still dedicated to the select members of a team—grass is not pre-eminently a public surface; and it is telling that Australians want to see it everywhere, in the same way that they want to see the public nowhere. Alas, this makes for unhappy terms for the individual too.

In Australia, little attention is given to what makes people comfortable and much more attention is given to what makes the building feel comfortable. A building on one of the larger campuses in Australia is felt to be naked and stranded unless it has gardens around it, a condition largely unique to the English-speaking world. Ideally, in Australia, the building nestles in gardens, so that it seems to proceed from the soil by analogy to a

plant, almost as if it has kindred company, a bed of insulation to keep its feet warm or cool and humid in the dry summer. The aesthetic coulisse is seen as easeful on the eye and symbolizes the resistance of the built environment, almost as if the halls of learning are dug into nature like so many cottages, which leaves us with a very equivocal architecture. The building has a weakened presence, the pavement is aborted, the garden is alienated and cannot be used and the inhabitants are removed behind a verdant moat.

And of course some of our modernist edifices deserve it: anything that will screen out their ugliness is welcome. After sixty years of ugly architecture, the population is deeply mistrustful of architecture and only has faith in gardens as the antidote to the built environment, the cure for offensive masonry and the undesirable volumes of people associated with them. So we think that the land around a building is essentially for scenography, a place for fertile green bulk that can rid us of both the building and its people. The garden is the restorative compensation for any site where people and their accommodation have to be endured.

Public gardens are a good amenity and no city should be without them. But judging their appropriateness and optimum scale is not as easy as planting grass, shrubs and flowers. The gardens in a campus setting are capable of contributing welcome visual variety and may be intrinsically gorgeous, lifting people's spirits; and no one can complain about that. But, depending on the pressure on the site, they can also discourage the congress of people and disqualify better social uses of the site. What might

be experienced as a pleasant balm in the imagination may turn out to be alienating; because even though a sward of grass would be soft underfoot and immediately evokes reassuring thoughts of contact with nature, you will always desist from striding there and so the space is effectively out-of-bounds.

Grass and garden bed are immensely prestigious and enjoy a defining role in the Australian canon of outdoor aesthetics. But as with the private suburban gardens that we have contemplated above, the shared gardens of educational institutions may also be suspected of antisocial dimensions. In the end, our initial question still seems a good yardstick to judge them by: are the spaces for the congress of people or for keeping people apart? And if the answer is that they keep people apart, the space is wasted or worse.

11

Space to burn

Australia proves that a waste of time is also a waste of space. Other countries have less land and perhaps fewer opportunities to squander time. With relative wealth and land to burn, our nation can afford luxurious ways to spend time, with lots of toys, speed boats, private pools in private gardens, spacious houses with many rooms and climate control, electronic entertainments, holiday houses and shiny cars, garages with tools, carbon-fibre bikes, skis, barbeques, spas, gym equipment, outdoor furniture and multiple fridges bulging with rich and abundant alimentation.

Looking at material culture, you would say that the theme of Australia is the quality of life: how can I acquire assets, services and consumer goods that improve my comfort and enjoyment more than last year? Adding to intellectual capital is not much in the news; and the quest to enhance cultural capital is much less conspicuous than increasing consumption and what is described as consumer confidence or spending.

To be sure, just because other countries may be more dedicated to producing intellectual or cultural capital, it does not mean that there is anything intrinsically unnatural in the Australian way of life. On the contrary, the attempt to produce intellectual capital—which is stressfully pursued elsewhere in the world—is psychologically fraught, and it might be natural for any individual (given that the option obtains) to avoid the pressure and concentrate on more hedonistic challenges. Besides, people in other countries are also crazy about certain sports and luxuries, even though their civilizations have been dedicated to accumulating cultural capital for centuries. Our favourite idle techniques

for spending time are mostly inherited and are hardly unique to Australia, just as our wealth is rivalled and exceeded by nations of greater imperial reach. What is remarkable in Australia is how idleness is embedded in the definition of space. The special condition proper to Australia is space. We have so much of it, a bit like rain in Brazil, that we capture it in our imagination no more firmly than run-off in a prolonged downpour.

To be sure, with whatever superabundance of space, we do not have more time than in other parts of the world, and our lives contain the same hours. Given that we have little time to ourselves, spending time for building intellectual capital is regarded as something that you would need to take a holiday from. Work in Australia, like elsewhere, is competitive and tough; and when you have time to yourself, the opportunity for enjoyment needs to be seized by pulling out the gear from the spacious garage. It yields further consumption, consumption of the earth's resources as well as time and space. In Australia, a waste of time also registers conspicuously as a waste of space and energy, a relationship which is less obvious in other parts of the world.

Australia has always had a special relationship to space. In ancient times and still today, our Indigenous people have seen the land as a repository of sacred action: it is the outcome of creation, which is narrated in chant, where the ancestor beings moved across the land and shaped it by their deeds. Country is understood through an elaborate cosmogony that accounts for the beautiful topography: the character of every place is registered in a memorized archive, which the wisdom of the elders

preserved and explored over tens of thousands of years, and developed since time immemorial. What looks like undifferentiated wilderness to whitefella eyes is named and enchanted among Aborigines. It is not space but a set of places, all defined and connected by the logic of the watercourses beneath, the animals who live there and the songs that explain their creation.

With fulsome religious detail, the cosmological awareness of places has been more efficient than GPS. Aborigines never got lost in this vast and at times somewhat uniform country, where hectare upon hectare all looks much the same to Europeans. Upon settling, Europeans and their children would sometimes wander into the bush and might never have re-emerged—almost engulfed by the land—were it not for the grace and kindness of Aborigines who would rescue them, knowing not only their own position but also divining where the lost people might have strayed. The Indigenous knowledge of places is not just about geographical relationships, as if pieces of land are parcels that necessarily share contiguities. Rather, the places are meaningful and flowing, riddled with multiple pathways and part of a great story which describes the gestation of all features of the earth that you describe as your country.

From this understanding in which the land is hallowed by the knowledge of its gestation, Australia has become a country in which the land is devalued by its superabundance. In modern culture, land is conceived as stuff in between things, either a sign of freedom or an obstacle or barrier. Land is either a commodity (when it belongs to you) or a nuisance (when it does not). By the

modern world-view, space either affords insulation from other people and a site for accumulation or it is a pest that you have to drive through to get to a destination. We seldom speak of ‘place’, but occupy ourselves a great deal with the arrogation of space: space that gives people privacy or light or allows for improved traffic flows, the luxury stuff that lets you store things or move around in without bumping into people.

When the English settlers first created the footprint for our cities, they brought with them the old European respect for land. It was not based on holy principles and was radically different from the sacrosanct Indigenous veneration for land; but it was nonetheless enormously concerned for the value of land along traditional economic lines. In Europe, farmers for many centuries had used every available square inch for agriculture and made the cities as tight and dense as possible. Land was exploited but never wasted. When you occupy land with building stock, you not only do it with optimum efficiency by building to three or four storeys and hard against the border but you dignify the site with architectural festivity. As discussed already, the blocks of land in the city would be built out to the four corners, with ornamental façades looking out onto the street and possibly an efficient courtyard in the middle. The buildings would butt onto one another, without setbacks or gullies intervening; and, as in the USA, this explains the handsome downtown quarters (CBD) in the capital cities and many of the older and urbane regional cities as well.

Alas, because there was so much land in Australia relative to the demand for accommodation, the Victorian builders tended only

to go up two stories—though they did build higher when time and money allowed them to—and often the worker’s cottages were single storey. Here begins the uniquely Australian pattern, where land is relatively cheap and the footprint of the building does not need to honour the site. It is notable that whenever the Victorians built three-storey edifices—like the larger pubs on corner sites—they tended to occupy much more of the land, sometimes going to all corners. Alas, for most other projects outside the city centre, the building seldom covers the land but parcels of open space lie fore and aft in front or back yard.

After the age of foot-traffic and horses, the spatial saga of Australia takes a nasty turn; and unfortunately, it coincided in Australia, and large parts of America, with the periods of massive growth. As motorcars increasingly commandeered lifestyles in the twentieth century, the land began to be seen as we see it today: either a necessary private asset for insulating yourself from the rest of humanity or a necessary obstacle, the intervening inconvenience between house and work or house and holiday. The house itself was constructed as a bungalow surrounded by space, that roomy padding that keeps you at a respectable distance from your neighbours. Though usually conceived as a garden—with a fine aesthetic in its own right—in structural terms, this cushion of space around the house is little but a buffer, what we have described above as a moat of air and grass, that keeps the house isolated from alien feet and hands. Anyone who approaches the house is conscious of setting foot upon private property, either visiting, applying for contact or trespassing.

Australians are great travellers and have access to other spatial templates, many of which are extremely prestigious; but while Milan or St Petersburg are considered beautiful places to visit, Australians return to their sparse townscapes in the belief that they are alone among the world’s peoples to be able to appreciate space. It is true that Australians value space to the extent that they defend what they see as their entitlement to reclusion, and sometimes they even enjoy it insofar as they are keen gardeners; but space itself is devalued as a precious resource, where it sits unattended for months at a time without a soul looking at it in streets where nobody walks except for the occasional exercising of a dog or the routines of intrepid joggers. There are plenty of statements of pride and features such as a bed of roses or a box hedge around an elevated basin. They are clearly designed to receive special attention; but there is negligible social engagement with the land and, at best, it is conceived as scenery to be beheld on your way to your own house. The block of land itself is often structured in automotive terms, with its own roadway, the drive; and all the land between the houses is used for nothing, if not stashing rubbish bins or arranging a washing line.

We sometimes think of our cities (outside the CBD) as single or double storey. But if you count the gardens, it is much less than that. Dividing the total area of the block by the amount of living space upon it reveals that on average Australian cities are more like one third of a storey or half a story. Generally, the aspiration is to use the land as inefficiently as we can, because the peripheral buffer is seen as a desirable luxury and symbol of privilege.

In other parts of the world—and in Australia itself just over a century ago—a waste of land was unthinkable; and the only reason we can support the enormous sprawl of our cities is that we make equally prodigious use of cars. The suburban sprawl is reliant on the same motor transport that created it: car and suburb are mutually dependent and both are ultimately unsustainable. So at the very least, the waste of space equates with a waste of fossil fuel, a handsome volume of the 1,146 barrels of oil that are consumed globally every second. Australians, like Americans, consume much more of it than their fair share; and to this waste we have to add the graver drain on energy through the inefficiencies of the detached bungalow.

The visual expression of our mishandling of land can be seen at almost any street corner throughout Australia. Unless instated with lofty classical landmarks from the Victorian period, our street corners are mostly hostile and barren, places to flee from, where nobody ever feels comfortable. Australians no longer have any idea how to dignify space, how to add to the ceremony of a place and bring a sense of occasion to the architecture. Throughout our two-storey inner city precincts just beyond the downtown area, our street corners are nothing but the meeting of two angry automotive corridors, contesting the space on either side of traffic lights. The low-rise architecture in attendance recedes miserably in its tentative footprint; and if you take a photograph of the intersection, you will notice that the most conspicuous element is the poles that support electrical cables and traffic signals.

You have to think what a corner means in Europe, how beautiful and festive they are in Barcelona or Vienna, to realize what a waste of space looks like in Australia. Australia does not look as desolate in its dry interior as it does in its suburbs, where corners are architecturally corroded by fences and setbacks and where hardly anyone can be found on the streets. Pedestrian movement is not well served when destinations are greatly spread out through space; and, as we have discussed, public transport also seems to become very inefficient when it serves routes of relatively little demand.

If only the waste ended with the aesthetic flattening of architecture and the immense intensity of transport needed to traverse the sprawling suburbs, which can never be served by adequate or efficient public transport! The waste goes into every quarter of Australian life, from the home to the office to the holiday. In the chapters above, we have looked at some of them. They are the activities that Australians identify with status and fun, from cars, surfboards, boats and skis to the national icon of greatest fame, the barbeque, a charming altar on wheels for cooking meat outdoors and which has the apparent consequence of justifying a large and otherwise redundant garden.

If you look at the spatial set up of Vienna or Paris or Milan, you can tell that the organizing idea was the construction of cultural capital. It was already conspicuous in the pre-industrial period, with small communities like those of Florence and Bologna creating tightly-knit neighbourhoods, all built up to about four storeys, with streets and largos and piazzas designed for people

to meet and converse, as they do in paintings by Masaccio or Perugino. This sense of urban richness remained a core value in the redesign of cities on industrial scale, like Paris and New York, with mass-transport systems. They are highly focused on festive street environments, with cafés and shops and vibrant corners for conversation.

If the archetype of the European town organized itself spatially around intellectual capital, Australian cities have organized themselves around gardening, the car, the speed boat, the swimming pool, the footy and what I think of as *the great elsewhere*, the spatial alterity of the surf at a backbeach two hours away and overseas ski trips. It is about private dissipation of time and other resources rather than building up ideas on any of the rich topics that people have written about or handled in art or science or dance or cinema.

Sometimes, I scruple over these conclusions and worry that they may be construed as deriding the private delights of Australia, which we share with so much of America. To condemn the pleasure of our people as vanity and to scorn the space they occupy as an expensive folly carries certain risks of arrogance. It may immediately be objected that using terms like waste, when we are talking about pleasure, are subjective and based on contrary value-systems, charged with emotion and beyond the scope of good scholarship or philosophical argument. Surely waste of space and waste of time are a matter of opinion. Cricket strikes me as a waste of time but it certainly is not a waste of time to a cricketer. Bridal costumes and extravagant wedding ceremonies

strike me as a waste; but if they propitiate a marriage, who are we to say that it has no value? Having your toenails painted strikes me as a waste of time, but if it makes for cheer or in some cases helps prevent depression, then it is clearly worth it and much cheaper than a psychiatrist. You can call anything waste if you do not like it; but no one needs to agree and, ultimately, we may only upset one another with arbitrary insults.

A free society encourages all activity, provided that it is legal, on the basis that a market takes care of the demand for it. So there is a strong economy around cricket and pedicure; people create livelihoods around such enthusiasms, and our society would become unstable if they did not yield employment. Together with the manufacture of furniture and provision of financial services, everything bought and sold contributes to national productivity. To that extent, nothing acquired with money can ever be described as waste. Technically, nothing was wasted because someone thought that whatever it was had value and judged that the price was fair. We tend therefore to be shy about talking of waste, as if it is just snobbery, where people of superior taste sling off at people who do not know how to spend their money to any lasting purpose. We are reticent to speak of waste and it seems patronizing to rate other people's fun as somehow less worthy than our own.

But the economic legitimacy of all market activity does not mean that we cannot distinguish between things of great and lasting value and things of lesser value, especially if we can provide reasons; otherwise, porn might be rated as more valuable than

Shakespeare on the basis of sales. It is a part of moral and aesthetic philosophy that has a very ancient ancestry. Vanity, excess, wastefulness and other foibles were deplored since Greek antiquity; and the ancient Hebrews had special contempt for what they saw as frivolous joys among idle ungodly people. It seems hard to have positive beliefs without having negative beliefs as a corollary; and intellectual honesty partly consists in recognizing that there are problems with what other people believe, including whatever they believe makes for happiness.

The value of Australia in the history of ideas is that it proves something firm and inherent in the institutions of European language: that misspent effort equates with a void, the physical emptiness of misallocated space. They are both united in the linguistic image of emptiness. Fatefully and uncannily, an ancient metaphor of emptiness links a waste of time to a waste of space. Our word for vanity is derived from emptiness. The Latin *vanus* means empty, in the same way that the Greek word for vanity (*kenotês*) derives from empty or hollow (*kenos*).

It is a metaphor because while emptiness or hollowness is primarily spatial, applying to a tub or a bottle, it was used to describe a gap in social and psychological senses. Even in music, a pause could be described as empty time; and perhaps as it gives relief to another chord, the emptiness is also functional and valuable, an idea that was later expressed by the English word 'relief'. But the hollowness that primarily transferred to metaphor is a hollowness of purpose. In biblical antiquity, vanity describes a waste of effort toward inappropriate purposes. Though we may

not agree with the judgement, the view is that heaping up riches, for example, is a silly thing to do, because you die anyway and there was no point being so greedy. The underlying motif in this depreciation of earthly accumulation is that time is a resource that you use unwisely if you gobble it up on things that amount to nothing. It ends badly and the appropriate divine investments were not made.²⁵ Pleasure in the short-term yields Angst in the longer-term.

Today, we think of vanity more in terms of someone looking into the mirror all the time; but this narcissism enters European thought much later and does not appear in premodern literature. When we say 'vanity' and mean self-adoration or some kind of unnecessary balm for the ego, earlier generations just meant wastefulness, an emptiness of purpose or even logic, which is why it is identified with stupidity.

In all epochs, the view of emptiness (vanity) was regarded as a foolish self-esteem or sense of entitlement, your need for expensive pleasures, an over-estimation of your abilities, your reach or influence.²⁶ Vanity could mean a kind of conceit but also delusion. Above all, however, it was a kind of self-love that leads to a misapprehension of values and reality and which causes bad judgement: you think that something is terrifically important and necessary or owing to you, when in fact you could live perfectly well without it, and you would be a lot less deluded if only you could banish the hunger for it.

A great deal of social criticism and stoic philosophy has to do with this word vanity, which is so tellingly derived from emptiness. It might be related to another Latin word for emptiness, *inanis*, inane. Inane is a void of sense, a vacuum of meaning. It is very much the same motif. And even without these cruel words, we still use the metaphor of hollow, as in a hollow argument, which means that there is no substance in the claims and therefore no legitimacy in whatever the purpose was supposed to be.

Vanity and folly may be a slight on one's dignity; but inanity is a nasty insult that we best avoid; and the only reason that I am invoking it is that it shares the spatial metaphor. Besides, in all discussion about idle pursuits, the argument can easily be put that though these vain or inane activities themselves do not yield intellectual capital, they provide restoration for people—relief if you like—who are otherwise stressed in their productivity. Humans need recreation, a space precisely where they do not have to worry about making something or inventing new ideas or intervening in culture. In the same way that we need to sleep and cannot always act toward virtuous goals all around the clock, so we need to take time out and serve our sense of play, enjoy some relief in the torrent of jobs and missed deadlines.

Sure; and we should also acknowledge that leisure was long associated with invention. From antiquity to the end of the baroque, one spoke of leisure or idleness (Latin *otium*, Italian *ozio*) as poetry: it was synonymous with the beautiful things that you do with words in your spare time when you do not have the pressure of war or administration or politics. It was creative,

which is why still today we use the word recreation, which has creativity installed at its heart. And this points to the critical question. Because we can have recreation which is restorative and refreshing and stimulating or we can have recreation which errs to being a waste of time. How creative recreation is in Australia—and therefore how enriching is the space that it takes up—is a question that deserves to be pondered. In the renaissance, a person blessed with moments without pressure was guided by a humanist aspiration to profit from the pause and think creatively, beautifully, to play with words and feeling, enriching consciousness in ways that are only responsible to intellectual or musical delight. It is very like a person today who might use his or her spare time to play music and compose songs in a garage band.

Leisure as pure relief is important. No one will argue that the whole of life has to be structured around building intellectual capital; otherwise, how would we even get to enjoy the benefits of the intellectual capital that we have created, much less take a holiday from the grind of a tough routine. The problem with Austral-American life, however, is that leisure has been fashioned and controlled by marketing from the outset; and the innocence of recreation as something creative has largely been eradicated. Our taxonomy of time is highly dichotomized: there is work, which conforms rigidly to a purpose, someone else's purpose, from which you are more or less alienated. And against that, there is leisure, which has a totally arbitrary purpose, such as pushing a leather ball from one post to another or running down a slope a bit faster than someone else or driving a motor-

boat across the water in a festival of petrol. And into this mix one might ask what purpose is served by a decorative garden that no one ever enters except to perform upkeep.

In the new globalized world, we tend to define enjoyment as working to no purpose unless it is an arbitrary one. It takes plenty of concentration and skill to drive the high-speed boat; and if I were at the helm, I would experience it as intense work. But it is recognized as fun and excitement, unlike driving a taxi through traffic (which is pure unrewarding toil), because speed-boating has an arbitrary purpose. Driving the taxi is for someone else's convenience in exchange for money, so it is defined as work. The same combination of judgement, talent and tension applies to driving both the taxi and the speed boat; but because the racing scenario is framed with an arbitrary purpose, it affords hilarity, perhaps novelty, an exhilarated interruption, as seen on TV, whereas the useful transit that serves a conscious purpose—though just as hair raising—is psychologically doomed to a feeling of need and compulsion.

Underlying this dichotomy is the alienation of work from the means of production that was already described by Karl Marx in the nineteenth century and beautifully followed by intellectuals like the Arts & Crafts theorist and entrepreneur William Morris, who announced that 'art is joy in labour'. Scores of philosophers before him had analysed art in terms of aesthetics, always seen from the perspective of its learned reception; but Morris saw a structural essence in art on the side of its production and yet which distinguished it from alienated forms of production in

industry: art yields joy for the person who works, the person who makes; and as a result, the honest pleasure informs the work and communicates solid joy through the integrity of intention, process and form.

We have no hopes in the revolution which would make our day-job the kind of labour that yields joy; and when Morris's own business failed, no doubt he found the labours of insolvency particularly joyless. But we still have the opportunity to use time in joyful kinds of work and to put the creativity back into recreation. In a miniature but unhappily privatized form, that is what the gardens are about from Edwardian times. Strictly removed from organized labour, they are laid out in the private realm in the hope that the labours of their maintenance will yield joy, because the upkeep indeed involves plenty of voluntary work. And sometimes the gardens do yield joy. But they solve none of the alienation and, if anything, express the alienated condition in a monumental way. The gardens are both symbols of private withdrawal from social interaction and also private accumulation and consumption. We recognize the virtue of the garden by the privileges that it claims for the owner. It is the same as polishing the car. It is work done for the sake of it—and perhaps never resented as is the work at an office—but structurally, the sparkle of the car is a sign of self-sufficiency and a status symbol, jealously projecting the claim of the owner on a scale of acquisitive prestige. For the rest, Austral-American culture is dedicated to leisure with an arbitrary rationale, because that is where commerce finds its infinite market to minister to largely unnecessary demand; and our spaces and levels of consumption

reflect the pre-eminence of this theme, a porous carpet of hunger for energy, goods and services that extends itself indefinitely.

The question in judging the relationships between time and space is not how much time we devote to work or play but why do both time and space only become attractive to us when they are devoted to folly, when they are set up either for consumption or an activity which is relatively frivolous? To gain a perspective on contemporary leisure, it is helpful to think of leisure in former centuries. Part of the reason I like seventeenth-century paintings is that they reveal middle- to working-class life, when there were fewer occasions for leisure. It is notable how often music is featured. People sit around tables with instruments, and singing is common. Painters must have relished these consorts and undoubtedly took part in them. With music made at table, the amateurs were using time creatively.

If everyone in Australia lived by that timetable, the economy would crash, not because we would not get our work done (we might do more) but we would not get our spending done. If we were absorbed for hours on end with music practice and then met up to play together, these autonomous and sustainable patterns of life would entail so much less consumption. What would become of the shopping, the holidays away, the skiing and surfing and barracking and everything else? They involve billions of dollars in the economy, though negligible creative input, because they all involve the expropriation of contentment. Instead of being empowered with the ability to create your own

contentment, you are drawn into uncreative forms of excitement with an arbitrary rationale.

Marx built his great theory around the coercive power of capital, which is the means of production; and people who contribute their labour in exchange for a meagre income are alienated from the means of production. But to understand how his economic model plays out in time and space, we need to recognize *the means of contentment*, the creative templates that make for sustainable happiness. Capitalism has a powerful incentive to arrogate the means of contentment, because it depends absolutely on stimulating consumption. Any form of creative enjoyment which is not by nature part of a marketing strategy is despatched to the invisible margins of culture.

Without a doubt, William Morris was writing toward an ideal; and how much such an ideal is necessary or viable today remains to be seen. Apart from any educational motives or natural wisdom toward the conversational growth and contentment of the individual, there are strong environmental reasons to defy the dictatorship of capital, to resist the acquisitive culture that hogs our time and space. The immediate challenge that we face is to contain the high levels of consumption that drain the earth of its natural resources and damage the atmosphere with unprecedented volumes of carbon dioxide.

The perfect symbol of this crisis is what so many Americans and Australians want most out of life: a large house in a leafy suburb with double garage, bristling with goods and equipment, another

luxurious house somewhere else which is called a holiday house, and an abundance of time with which to go out and indulge in the most ecologically costly leisure. Space and time to burn are literally the motif: to burn petrol and remote coal to fire up the enormous volume of current for the central air-conditioning in the large house. As the planet warms up and meteorological patterns become more chaotic and temperature spikes ravage the countryside with bushfires, we literally have land to burn, a great incendiary which has arisen by the accumulated excess of consumption, symbolized and created by the vast sprawling suburbs that were once productive orchards and market gardens and which require hundreds of litres of petrol per second, all of which end up in the atmosphere heating up the planet.

When these issues are discussed, the most common reaction among those who burn space, electricity and petrol is that the problem is neither cars nor suburbs but people, too many of them: it is a population issue, not a lifestyle issue. Least of all is it an issue of spatiality. We have the optimum layout in Australia. We are blessed with the right balance of space and light and green. We just need to revert to a smaller Australia and reject the idea of more people settling here, as if somehow the population could be decimated by an unknown process. The horror of people and a failure to feel that we live in a society are deeply grounded in spatial paradigms and attitudes to social spaces.

Everything that has a name is either a thing or an idea. The stuff in between all the things with so many colourful names is called space; and, even though it is of utmost importance, it does not

go by many names and is neither a thing nor an idea, given that it is physical. Strictly speaking, it is not really stuff at all but a kind of gap or emptiness where a thing has not been deposited or is deposited but might be taken away. Its main characteristic is absence. We think of space in essence as an area or volume devoid of things.

It is hard to talk about space at the best of times, and these are far from the best of times. Apart from being hard to define and hard to add colour to, space is the subject of fierce contention, where there is little science and enormous passion. Like time, it is something that we never have enough of. Although it often looks like nothing and feels like nothing, it is highly prized, jealously owned and extremely expensive. We all want more space but usually cannot get it; and it is natural that our eyes are set upon space that is not strictly ours but either a neighbour's space or communal space. What happens to the space around us affects our movements, our moods, our sense of wellbeing. It clearly deserves extensive study and is among the richer topics in its potential. Sadly, however, it is also landlocked in conservative discourses, where the great priority is seen as the preservation of the privileges that we seem to enjoy now; and, as we noted earlier, Australians are viscerally dedicated holding onto what they know, without any sense that what they want to protect is the cause of what they hate.

This book began with the paradox of why Australians—among the sparser peoples of the world—are so scared of overcrowding. It rejected the idea that Australians are especially xenophobic

but has explored the reasons in the peculiar way that we relate to space. I have argued that the luxury of abundant space has conditioned our culture to mishandle space and become misanthropic over the intolerant spatial paradigms that we trust, to the point that Australians do not feel that they belong to a society. The text has examined the design of cities, the weakness of Australian streets, the jealous but illogical proprietorship of light and the destructive dominance of automotive culture. From a moral and ecological perspective, the book has then sought to identify the reasons for wasting space in the motif of wasting time—those reassuring follies that occupy so much space, energy and time—and has asked why Australia is so little dedicated to building intellectual capital. Our fondest enthusiasms and institutions seem good for dismantling, things such as the garden, the holiday house, the right school, the car, antisocial signature architecture, the boat and skiing.

Of course all these things are protected by massive capital, as great as the land itself, and perceiving the folly will not change the priorities any more than will seeing the ugliness that we have created or becoming angry at the traffic, which everyone already does. It is the story of a national blindspot, as large as the country is wide, in which we value space to the extent that we are free to wreck it for everyone else in the prolific production of antisocial space. It is a recipe for endless misanthropy and frustration, until we can take a look overseas and recognize that the alternatives are easier, more beautiful, more efficient, greener, happier, more intimate, less wasteful, less destructive and more socialized. If only this humility were not too much for Australian pride to bear,

the space wasters could bury their paranoiac horror of people inhabiting their suburbs and live a gorgeous life in one of the most beautiful countries of the globe.

ENDNOTES

- 1** As Shakespeare's Sicinius says, 'What is the city but the people?' *Coriolanus* 2.2
- 2** This motif is a constant topos of poetic literature from the early renaissance, as in Petrarch, *Canzoniere* 176, or later Tasso, *Rime* 174, 320, 587 and beyond.
- 3** *Taming of the shrew* 1.2.233
- 4** 'Only a few people have asked the question: What should we expect a metropolitan area to look like today? This question leads to the uncomfortable answer that the metropolitan area implicitly or explicitly desired by the antisprawl writers is no longer a possibility.' William T Bogart, *Do not call it sprawl: Metropolitan structure in the 21st century*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2006. Available from: <<http://lib.mylibrary.com.ezproxy.lib.monash.edu.au?ID=70267>> 5 September 2010
- 5** The distinction of a narrow street and wide zone or square is ancient: 'go about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways I will seek him', *Song of Solomon* 3.2. See also: 'Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now, and know, and seek in the broad places thereof, *Jeremiah* 5.1.
- 6** See my article 'Setback', *Arena Magazine*, no. 94, April-May 2008, pp. 37-39
- 7** See also my 'Deceptive green of suburban gardens', *The Age*, 18 September 2009
- 8** It is the case summed up in William T Bogart, *Do not call it sprawl: Metropolitan structure in the 21st century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2006
- 9** cf. my 'Spreading ourselves too thin', *The Age*, 15 November 2010, p. 13
- 10** 'cavalcando pervennero ad una chiesetta fuor di strada', Bandello, *Novelle* 1.27
- 11** Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1977. Focusing on the commercial strip and its signs, this work sought to reinvigorate architecture with symbolic content, sympathetically interpreting Las Vegas in order to learn from contemporary urban sprawl.
- 12** Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust: a history of walking*, London: Verso 2001. See the charming review by Ken Worpole, who also recognizes the threat to walking as 'the result of the disastrous priorities of 20th-century urban planning"', *The Independent*, Saturday 4 August 2001.
- 13** I have noticed this word-use in the lovely sixteenth-century *novelliere* Matteo Bandello: 'on the wall that answered the street below (*nel muro che rispondeva sopra la strada*)', *Novelle* 1.25; 'do not be seen at the window by any of those that correspond across the street (*Fa che io ti veggia più a nostra nessuna di quelle che rispondeno su la strada*)', *Novelle* 2.28; 'he opened the window that answered onto a public street (*aperse la nostra de la camera che rispondeva suso una strada publica*)', *Novelle* 3.6; 'he withdrew to a side on his seat and, leaning on a parapet of the wall that answered the street below (*si ritirò in un canto del seggio, e acciati al parapetto del muro che su la strada risponde*)', *Novelle* 2.22.
- 14** Deborah White, *Seeds for change: creatively confronting the energy crisis*, North Melbourne: Patchwork Press 1978.

15 Much of the following has been grafted from other writings, such as ‘Setback’, *Arena Magazine*, no. 94, April-May 2008, pp. 37–39

16 from 2003 but still current (November 2011), <http://www.boroondara.vic.gov.au/freestyler/files/Residential%20Design%20Policy%2012-03.pdf>

17 Some of the following is grated from my ‘Deceptive green of suburban gardens’, *The Age* 19 September 2009, at <http://www.theage.com.au/opinion/society-and-culture/deceptive-green-of-suburban-gardens-20090918-fvah.html>, and ‘Spreading ourselves too thin’, *The Age* 15 November 2010, at <http://www.theage.com.au/opinion/society-and-culture/spreading-ourselves-too-thin-20101114-17sm7.html>.

18 *Transport for Suburbia: Beyond the Automobile Age*, Earthscan Ltd 2010; see also *The Age*, 23 November 2009

19 *e.g.* for the soul, ‘habet animi causa rus amoenum et suburbanum’, Cicero, *Oratio pro Quinto Roscio Amerino*, 46.133

20 You can get a sense of this privilege through the number of letters in Bandello’s *Novelle* that refer to places or circumstances of ease and recreation, *e.g.* the letter to Ippolita Sforza e Bentivoglia, dedication to the *Novelle*, the letter to Prospero Colonna, *Novelle* 1.1, to Camilla Gonzaga, 1.6, to Pietro Barignano 1.11, Francesco Cantelmo 1.15, Paris Ceresaro 1.17, Pirro Gonzaga 1.29, Luigi Gonzaga 1.38, Camilla Bentivoglia e Gonzaga 1.42, Sigismondo Fanzino 1.51, Francesco Torre 2.9, Lucrezia Gonzaga di Gazuolo 2.20, Anna di Polignac 2.39, Ettore Fregoso 2.48, Stefano Dolcino 2.57, Manfredi signor di Correggio 3.4, Antonio Fileremo 3.8, Girolamo Ticione 3.11, Francesco Tanzio Cornigero 3.42,

Urbano Landriano 3.43, Francesco Berna 3.50, Ridolfo Gonzaga 3.60, Guidone Golardodi Brasaco 3.62, Aloise Gonzaga 4.1.

21 Katie Alvord, *Divorce your car! Ending the love affair with the automobile*, New Society Publishers, Gabriola Island 1999, p. 89.

22 See my book *Moral sustainability and cycling: an ecology of ambition for a hyperactive planet*, Ellikon, Melbourne, and St Andrews University, Fife, 2010 (http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/sasi/media/sustainability_and_cycling.pdf)

23 From the time of Petrarch, for example *Canzoniere* 54.1–4, to Tasso, as at *Rime* 5.1–4, 7.9–11, 12.1–8, 30.1–8, 39.1–8, 145.3–4. But Petrarch does also see grass as a sign of ruin, *Canzoniere* 10.5–9, echoed in the seventeenth century with Marino, *Rime amorose* 49.5–6.

24 As in Tasso’s beautiful poem, *Rime* 147.1–12, and Marino continues the motif in the seventeenth century, *Rime boscherecce* 6.5–8, 10.1–12, even creating a naughty idyll on the grass in the dark, *Rime amorose* 68.1–4.

25 ‘Therefore their days did he consume in vanity, and their years in trouble.’ *Psalms* 78.33, ‘Surely every man walketh in a vain shew: surely they are disquieted in vain: he heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them. Psalm 39.5–6, ‘This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.’ *Ephesians* 4.17–19

26 As in the sixteenth century through the adorable Montaigne: ‘I do not think at all that there is as much evil in us as vanity nor so much malice as stupidity: we are not so full of badness as we are of inanity; we are not as base as we are lowly (*viles*)’, *Essais* 1.50; and ‘to what volumes of vanity (*à combien de vanité*) are we pushed by this good opinion that we have of ourselves?’ *Essais* 2.2