

The Coburg Plan

Jessie Scott

These photographs were taken, words written, and this book produced on the unceded lands of the Wurundjeri, Wathaurong and Bunurong people of the Kulin Nation in Narm/Melbourne, and the Turrbal and Jagera peoples in Meanjin/Brisbane.

Myself and my collaborators would like to pay our respects to their elders past, present and future.

Colophon

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The Coburg Plan: From an Image of Place to a Place among Images (and Back Again)

By Kyle Weise

Bas Princen's photograph, *Ringroad (Houston)*, portrays a generic suburban office block with an enormous freeway visible in the background.

It is a simple composition, the central framing of the building emphasising the monumentality of this otherwise non-descript, glass curtain building. Strikingly, the horizon line is reflected in the building's mirrored surface and aligns exactly with the background horizon. The effect gives the building a sense of transparency that integrates it with its surrounding, simultaneous to its monumentality. Princen presents this office block as a discrete architectural form for aesthetic contemplation *and* as inseparable from its context. The image is both banal and arresting, simple and unsettling, and eleven years after it was developed, *Ringroad (Houston)* became the subject of a book dedicated entirely to this specific photograph.¹

The resulting book, *The Construction of an Image*, emphasises the connection of this image to other images, and is filled with reference images; not just the images that Princen produced at the time, but a diverse accumulation of images sourced online. For Princen, Kirsten Geers writes, "a picture always refers to another picture."² Princen's essay elaborates on this:

The only way I can think of defining a 'good image' is as one that connects itself to some earlier images, and others made afterwards. It is an image that becomes part of our world of countless images and depictions, and can find a place there. This is how an image is constructed; not at the moment of its making but through the way it accumulates meaning over time by relating to other images and ideas.³

Ringroad (Houston), like so much recent urban photography, suggests a formalist response to the generic spaces of the urban fringe,⁴ the 'anywhere' of the post-1980s developments of the perimeter highway.⁵ Yet it is also a document of a specific time and place, and an equivalent photograph could no longer be taken, as the building's gold-tinted facade has been replaced with silver glass.⁶ As much as *Ringroad (Houston)* seems detached from place, both in the generic architecture it presents and in the web of other images it evokes, it maintains an inevitable grounding in the physical context in which it was taken.

Taking a cue from *Ringroad (Houston)*, this essay will contextualise *The Coburg Plan* among some of its art historical antecedents: the images within which its images are entangled. Alongside this, I will also consider the grounding of Scott's photographs in a particular time and place, and the inevitably unique position from which these photographs speak, as they converse with other images, both past and future. Like Princen's work, Jessie Scott's images tend to focus on a singular building. *The Coburg Plan* suggests architectural contemplation but connects these individual forms to a broader context via glimpses of neighbouring structures and adjoining streets and, most forcefully, via the seriality of the photobook format. In Scott's photograph, *Former Shop-dwelling, Reynard St*, the weathered period architecture of a former grocery shop is shown next to a construction site, emphasising the continuous making and remaking of the streetscape.⁷ A prominent reflection in the former shopfront window offers a glimpse of the picket fences of the suburban context. Most significantly, however, the reflection also captures the figure of Scott standing across the street taking the picture. It is an image that underlines the centrality of the artist's grounding in this place, as a space of aesthetic contemplation, and yet also as a specific lived social context.

Scott's work shares with Princen a lineage to the 1975 exhibition, *New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-Altered Landscape*, curated by William Jenkins, and which included work by Robert Adams, Lewis Baltz, Bernd and Hilla Becher, Joe Deal, Frank Gohlke, Nicholas Nixon, John Schott, Stephen Shore and Henry Wessel, Jr. Many of these artists were in the early stages of their careers and the New Topographics label would follow them for decades. This unassuming exhibition, primarily of small black and white framed photographs, turned the gaze of landscape photography toward ordinary places. The exhibition has since had an enormous influence; commentators on its expanded restaging in 2009 emphasised its seminal status and almost unparalleled influence on contemporary photographic art.⁸ As Wendy Cheng notes, the New Topographics, "affirm the importance of everyday landscapes, not as sentiment or fetish, but as significant sites of intellectual and philosophical inquiry."⁹

At the time, the exhibition's apparent dullness was equated with its detachment, and its restaging similarly drew comments that noted, not necessarily negatively, the exhibition's 'boring' imagery.¹⁰ Indeed, in his original catalogue essay for the exhibition, Jenkins emphasises the 'neutrality' of the images, suggesting that they simply present 'information' about the landscape as it is, without aesthetic flourish.¹¹

The Coburg Plan, in particular, recalls Henry Wessel's photographs. Wessel's work, as exhibited in the New Topographics exhibition, consisted almost exclusively of frontal images of single, detached suburban houses. Later, Wessel

would publish *House Pictures* (1992), comprised entirely of photographs taken in the area around which he lived, each showing a single house from the street, emphasising this connection to Scott's images which were similarly taken near her home.¹² Wessel's mother was a real estate agent and, as with *The Coburg Plan*, real estate photography is an implicit reference. Wessel's and Scott's images, however, refute the prescription of real estate photography. Their images are removed from the framing discourses typical of commercial photography, which aim to interpellate the viewer, inviting one to imagine themselves in a particular lifestyle or aspirational context.¹³ This circumscription of place in real estate images is alluded to in the tighter framing of the *Auction Board* images in *The Coburg Plan*, which incorporate real estate signage.

We will return to the importance of real estate in Scott's work, but for now, it is worth noting that images of newly built developments were central to the New Topographics, notably in the work of Lewis Baltz and Robert Adams. Baltz's contribution consisted of even more rigorously frontal and horizontal images of buildings in a newly completed industrial park. The determinedly frontal framing is mirrored in much of *The Coburg Plan* and Baltz's formal geometric play with the minimal rectangular forms of the industrial park is also occasionally alluded to, as in Scott's image, *Toilet Block, Coburg Drive-in*. Baltz's repetitive and formal imagery doubled the bureaucratic gaze and restricted geometries associated with these new developments.¹⁴ In contrast, Scott's images are more ad-hoc, lingering on signs of deterioration and the mixture of old and new forms. In this sense, taken as a whole, *The Coburg Plan* is closer to the looser explorations of Frank Gohlke and Stephen Shore. Gohlke's and Shore's imagery is desolate, and cars are the only signs of life among empty streets and parking lots.¹⁵ These melancholy images seem to mourn pedestrian life and here the idea of the supposed neutrality of the New Topographics begins to unravel. This is particularly apparent in the work of Robert Adams, whose work in New Topographics, and beyond, looms large as an influence on Scott's photographic work.

In *The New West*, Adams captured newly built suburbs in Colorado in the late 1960s and early 1970s, as they expanded beyond the existing city fringes, alongside occasional details of older structures. Of course, time and place create crucial reinterpretations of similar imagery. A photograph of a drive-in cinema in Adams's work acts as a symbol of car culture and crass commercial interests imposing themselves on the majesty of the natural environment.¹⁶ While in Scott's work, a similar image of a drive-in is an unexpected and nostalgia-tinged relic of a time passed, nestled among encroaching development. Similarly, the faded facade of a video library, *Tempo Video Italian DVD Centre, Bell St*, records

the final gasps of an industry that had risen and fallen in the time between *The New West* and *The Coburg Plan*.¹⁷

Because of the paradigmatic shift represented in the 'ordinary' landscapes of New Topographics, the idea of the detached neutrality of the images received some initial acceptance and is reflected in reviews of the original exhibition.¹⁸ This supposed neutrality has since been widely critiqued.¹⁹ In his original catalogue essay, Jenkins speaks almost entirely of style, with little mention of the specific landscapes interpreted by the photographs. In retrospect, it is clear that environmentalism was an important subtext.²⁰ Finis Dunaway argues that Adams's work is a pessimistic response to the environmental destruction of suburban sprawl, the reliance on automobiles, and the displacement of citizenship by consumption.²¹ Similarly, Greg Foster-Rice suggests that the much of the New Topographics photographs were an ambivalent response to building developments, and a conscious critique of car culture and unfettered consumption.²² Certainly, Adams is outspoken in his environmentalism.²³ Though rarely interviewed, Lewis Baltz recently described the context of land speculation in which he took his industrial parks photographs in 1974, stating, "As you can clearly see from the photographs I made, I thought it was a nightmare."²⁴

These environmental overtones, subtly alluded to in the curbside rubbish, demolition and construction sites catalogued in *The Coburg Plan*, lead us further into the history of images. In particular, Robert Smithson's *Monuments for Passaic* (1967), which documented various banal structures and sites of environmental waste and destruction in plain, snapshot-like, black and white photographs. This work is an important art-historical referent for the environmentalist interpretations of the New Topographics' legacy, the application of the snapshot to landscape photography, and crucially, to the use of photography as a tool of conceptual art.²⁵

In the context of the post-war boom in suburban construction in the United States, William Garnett's aerial images of Lakewood became particularly iconic and continue to influence photographic representations of the suburbs. Though commissioned to simply document the scope of development in the early 1950s, Garnett's emphasis on the repetitive patterning of almost identical houses in a denuded landscape would be leveraged in the service of environmentalism over the next decade, and beyond.²⁶ If Lakewood was once the symbol of the inhuman geometry of suburbia, today it is a pleasant, settled community indistinguishable from the surrounds of Los Angeles in which it is enmeshed.²⁷ In *The Coburg Plan*, the uniform monotony of new developments is exacerbated by their duplex format. Coburg has seen waves of developments, but the uniformity of these, as Scott's images of older suburban developments suggests, are eventually overcome by the character of eccentricities.

If the 'character' of a suburb is so often defined by the surfaces of its streetscapes, Kim Dovey's research into several Melbourne suburbs suggests a more complex understanding.²⁸ Dovey investigates the conflation of architectural uniformity with social homogeneity—implied by the synoptic imagery of suburban sprawl descended from Garnett—as well as the detail of the 'character' of distinct suburbs. Dovey finds that in the older suburb of Camberwell, the quest to maintain the uniformity of heritage architecture *is* aligned with a desire for conservative social uniformity. In Fitzroy, by contrast, the heritage streetscape is part of a diversity of building-types and developments. This architectural diversity does preserve social housing to some degree and is aligned with the area's perceived diversity of 'character'. Yet its 'edgy' streetscape is increasingly a camouflage for a demographic drive towards social homogeneity via gentrification.

Dovey finds another contrast in Beacon Cove. Developed in the 1990s, this Melbourne suburb is a planned residential development in which the appearance of all dwellings is regulated by strict covenants. Despite pejorative descriptions of the suburb as 'Legoland', the architectural uniformity belies its relative social heterogeneity (though one limited by cost).²⁹ Thus, 'character' is associated with the built form, but not reducible to it. In a suburb like Coburg, similar discourses apply. Dovey argues strongly against the emphasis on abstracted images in architectural discourse, which contribute only to the production of symbolic capital for architects and clients rather than social function.³⁰ Instead, Dovey focuses on use and the assemblages of desires that construct a place, and whose circulations are never static or settled.³¹ Scott's work is, of course, only images, but its seriality suggests the social embeddedness of each consecutive building. *The Coburg Plan*, produced over six years, and incorporating change, stasis, deterioration and growth—sometimes within the same site—conveys this complex *becoming* of place: its 'character' is never settled, but "is more alive because it is threatened, contested and defended."³²

In any consideration of the physical appearance of the Australian suburbs, *The Australian Ugliness*, written by architect Robin Boyd and published in 1960, is a touchstone.³³ The work is a broader critique of Australian society told through its built form and was written as Garnett's Lakewood images were circulating in the wake of similar expansions of suburbia in Australia. What is shared between Garnett, the New Topographics and Boyd is a concern over the denuding of the natural landscape via suburban development. Boyd uses the term 'arboraphobe' to describe the Australian obsession with tree-clearing and the substitution of native trees with imported species:

Once the pioneer's aesthetic direction is adopted, practically nothing that is natural to Australia fits in. One by one everything that is native has to go, even if one has to hold a hose all evening to keep the English grass green and the daphne alive.³⁴

This "annihilatory urge" of the "pioneer cult"³⁵ is certainly in evidence throughout *The Coburg Plan*, though the final images suggest that wattles and other native trees have come back into fashion for developers, in strictly contained pockets.

The denuded landscape, however, is significant for Boyd primarily as a component of his central complaint: 'featurism'. For Boyd, the suburb is the home of featurism, and he is appalled by the accumulation of ornamentation in which every surface of a building is given a decorative flourish, a veneer.³⁶ For Boyd, this preoccupation with artificiality belies a deeper failure of ideas, of planning and of architecture to be true to its material, form and context. Tokens of the dreaded featurism are in abundance in Scott's images, in various states of disrepair: finials; stairways in patterned tiles and marble; striped canvas awnings; miniature colonnades; decorated parapets; stained glass; intricately patterned wrought-iron; a door of intricately patterned wrought iron that also incorporates an impression of a bird...and so on. The denuded landscape, Boyd suggests, enhances featurism by placing space between each dwelling, which can then define its distinctive features with the addition of ill-considered ornament.³⁷

Featurism, for Boyd, is part of a lack of overall planning and its isolation of elements results in a lack of consideration of the infrastructure that surrounds it. In this context, the "crooked poles", "wiry ghosts" and "spiders' webs" of overhead powerlines and telephone poles attract particular and repeated criticism from Boyd.³⁸ In *The Coburg Plan*, such poles and wires are a constant presence, flying across the images, casting hard shadows onto buildings and obscuring views. That the New Topographics presented telephone wires as part of their images was an essential component of the paradigmatic shift they represented.³⁹ In the Pictorial era that preceded the New Topographics, telephone poles would often be removed via careful working of the film negative.⁴⁰ In the wake of Pop Art, Boyd's introduction to the 1968 edition of *Australian Ugliness* specifically emphasises that if the reader has any sympathy for visual pollution, for the careless ugliness or functional beauty of telephone poles and the squalor of billboards, then his book is definitely *not* for them.⁴¹ Within four years, the first edition of *Learning from Las Vegas* (1972) would express this sympathy in one of the most influential architectural texts of the twentieth century.⁴² Indeed, the authors Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour would overtly celebrate this. More than just a

text, *Learning from Las Vegas* is a work of photography and is filled with grids of images cataloguing the banal details of Las Vegas streetscapes.⁴³ Though its politics differ markedly from the environmentalism and critique of automobility in Adams, Gohlke and Baltz, *Learning* is considered an important influence on the New Topographics for its photographic cataloguing of, and minute attention to, the everyday details of the built environment.⁴⁴ It is a significant reference for Scott's work and a relevant rebuttal to aspects of Boyd in the context of *The Coburg Plan*.

For Boyd, featurism placed the symbolic over use-value and he presents the idea of buildings that use the techniques of advertising as an absurd joke.⁴⁵ Yet, this was exactly what interested Venturi and Scott Brown about Las Vegas: the rise of an architecture designed around capturing the eye of the driver from the street. Venturi and Scott Brown argue that unadorned modernist architecture of the mid-twentieth century (in which Boyd could be included) had itself become an example of the triumph of iconography over use, akin to a building shaped like a doughnut or a duck; except the symbolism of 'functional' modernism (the industrial revolution) is more out of date.⁴⁶ The 'honest' functional modernism of Boyd is a veneer; it is just another sign, and one whose referent (the machine age), in the age of media, is as anachronistic as a pseudo-Grecian colonnade in Coburg. While Venturi and Scott Brown focus on the commercial strip, they also identify the importance of eclectic ornament, and identity via symbolism, as crucial to the sprawl of the suburbs. And they challenge architects who dismiss this:

Architects who [...] like uncluttered architectural form see only too well the symbolism in the suburban residential landscape [...]. They recognise the symbolism but they do not accept it. To them the symbolic decoration of the split-level suburban shed represents the debased, materialistic values of a consumer economy where people are brainwashed by mass marketing and have no choice but to move into the tacky-tacky, with its vulgar violations of the nature of materials and its visual pollution of architectural sensibilities, and surely, therefore, the ecology. This viewpoint throws out the variety with the vulgarity.⁴⁷

Venturi and Scott Brown dismiss, in particular, the alignment of vernacular suburbia with regressive politics.⁴⁸ Having had critics describe their architectural work as "ugly" and "ordinary", Venturi and Scott Brown reappropriate this 'criticism', and in *Learning from Las Vegas* they dedicate themselves to the serious, and sometimes celebratory, study of the "ugly and ordinary" as a direct alternative to modernism's "heroic and original".⁴⁹

In the introduction to the second edition of

The Australian Ugliness, Boyd refers twice to ‘plastic flowers’, and they seem to symbolise all that Boyd finds wrong with Australian architecture: a cheap, decorative veneer; signs without substance.⁵⁰ Just three years later, esteemed architectural critic, Ada Louise Huxtable, would title her article about Venturi and Scott Brown’s architecture, “Plastic Flowers Are Almost All Right.”⁵¹ Here, the vernacular and its ornaments are to be visually catalogued and studied; rather than dismissed, they are signs to be read. Together with the New Topographics, Venturi and Scott Brown ensured that the everyday built environment, in all of its ‘ugly’, ‘ordinary’ and ‘boring’ detail, had become a focus for photography, one legitimated in discourses of art, architecture and urbanism.

Yet both the New Topographics and Venturi and Scott Brown refer back to another artist’s photographs, and one who is crucial to contextualising *The Coburg Plan*: Ed Ruscha. Between 1962 and 1972, Ruscha published 16 photobooks, all printed cheaply and sold at an affordable price. Several of these were comprised of snapshot photography of ordinary places, compiled in deadpan collections, with no commentary. The first, *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* (1962), consisted of black and white images of twenty-six gasoline stations. *Some Los Angeles Apartments* (1965) includes, well, some photographs of apartment exteriors. *Thirtyfour parking Lots* (1967) outsourced the photography to aerial photographers, but, again, the title says it all.⁵² Just as the places were ordinary, so were the books, suggesting a democratic art for the masses.⁵³ In his original catalogue for the New Topographics exhibition, Jenkins notes the particular similarity between John Schott’s images of Route 66 motels and Ruscha’s gasoline station images. But Jenkins goes on to argue that the difference is that Ruscha’s works are about *art*, rather than the landscape they image.⁵⁴ Certainly, Ruscha’s images have been understood as crucial to the development of the strategies of conceptual art. Benjamin Buchloh interprets them as a dismantling of the privileged artistic object in content (banal architecture), form (amateur photographs) and distribution (mass produced books).⁵⁵ Buchloh’s disinterest in the content of the work, echoing other art historical responses, only partly recognises the impact of Ruscha’s photobooks. Crucially, their content, as an intimate engagement with the everyday built environment, has had a continued and significant impact,⁵⁶ as is evident in *The Coburg Plan* and its no-frills attention to Scott’s workaday environment.

Venturi and Scott Brown were overt in their debt to Ruscha, acknowledging him several times in *Learning from Las Vegas*, and even producing their own photographic typology of gasoline stations.⁵⁷ Venturi and Scott Brown used Ruscha to think about then-emerging and contemporary urban forms. However, with time, Ruscha’s books, *Every Building on*

Sunset Strip in particular, have developed an archival element, as they captured the quotidian details of a specific place and moment.⁵⁸ Contemporary projects, such as David Wadellon’s photographs of *Milk Bars* across Melbourne, are a nostalgic descendent of Ruscha’s photobooks.⁵⁹ A widely circulated example, in this vein, is Zoe Leonard’s *Analogue* (1998-2009), a series of photographs of small businesses in New York’s Lower East Side increasingly displaced by gentrification. Leonard’s work, even more so than Scott’s, has a consistent frontal perspective, and similarly explores the streetscape surfaces of the artist’s own neighbourhood over a number of years. Leonard’s work, however, makes a fuss of its medium: every image was shot with a 1950s Rolleiflex camera, and processed in her own darkroom, with the black edges of the negative usually visible and declaring the Kodak film stock.⁶⁰ The work is as much about a nostalgia for film, displaced by the digital, as it is for the old streetscapes of the Lower East Side, displaced by gentrification.⁶¹ Scott, on the other hand, does not fetishise the technical medium, and *The Coburg Plan* moves from analogue to digital photography simply for the expediency of the project. As such, the work drifts closer to Ruscha’s conceptualism, and also towards his deadpan style. Certainly, Scott’s unfussy approach to photography is at odds with the obsessive fine photographic printing of the New Topographics. Indeed, Salvesen suggests that comparisons of the New Topographics to Ruscha’s work were partly a result of the poor quality of the reproductions in the *New Topographics* exhibition catalogue, and that they had little interest in the reproducibility and de-skilling crucial to Ruscha.⁶²

Ruscha’s photobook *Real Estate Opportunities* (1970), presents snapshot images of a range of empty lots and abandoned buildings, all with ‘For Sale’ signs. The works seem directly referenced in Scott’s *Auction Board, Vacant Lot, Phillips St*, which presents a denuded lot for sale, containing only a skip bin and temporary fencing. Coburg as real estate is a constant reference here, via images of construction sites, newly completed apartments, houses for sale and lease, and glimpses of the development of Pentridge Prison into a luxurious urban ‘village’. Ruscha’s ‘opportunities’ may have been ironic,⁶³ but in *The Coburg Plan*, they are manifest and palpable. Just as the New Topographics are inseparable from their historical context amid a rapidly changing landscape driven by market forces, so Scott’s images are embroiled in the specificity of Coburg as a *market*.

Housing—increasingly unaffordable—is, apparently, in ‘crisis’. Yet, as David Madden and Peter Marcuse argue, to call this a crisis is disingenuous. This crisis is just the housing system—in a context of de-regulation, financialisation and globalisation—working as intended: in which the use value of housing has been subordinated to its economic value.

Essentially, this is the subordination of housing as a home, a social space, to housing as real estate, a commodity.⁶⁴ Housing policy, Madden and Marcuse argue, is more concerned with bolstering a political and economic order than with meeting housing needs.⁶⁵ Australia exemplifies their argument, and has seen the movement of government policy away from ensuring adequate housing and towards supporting private development, resulting in an ever-increasing disparity in access to affordable housing.⁶⁶ Established suburbs like Coburg demand a premium due to a preference of Australians to live in established suburbs.⁶⁷ Yet, inseparable from this monetary value, and this appeal, are the communities that form over time; housing is a commodity, but one that defines connections between people and communities, and which structures our everyday life within this web of physical connections.⁶⁸ *The Coburg Plan* straddles this binary; it is a loving portrait of a community, but also an image of housing's transformation into an increasingly unattainable commodity. This unattainability is strikingly symbolised in *Apartments, Pentridge*, an image that presents a glimpse of luxury apartments, rising from behind the imposing heritage-protected walls of the former Pentridge Prison site.

The Coburg Plan resonates with echoes of preceding images: Boyd's small sketches spread throughout the pages of *The Australian Ugliness*, the photographs of Venturi and Scott Brown, the New Topographics, Ed Ruscha, Zoe Leonard, David Wadellton and Bas Princen, among many others. These references endure, not just because they are images, but because they are connected to social contexts that have continued relevance. Scott's work emerges out of this sea of images, while capturing and archiving the specificity of its own time and place.

1 Bas Princen, *The Construction of an Image* (London: Bedford Press, 2016).

2 Kersten Geers, "False Friend," *Ibid.*, n.p.

3 Bas Princen, "Ringroad (Houston), 2005: The Construction of an Image." *Ibid.*, n.p.

4 On this trend, see: Steven Jacobs, "Photographing Post-Urban Space: The Demise of Street Photography and the Rise of the Spectacular," *Spectacular City: Photographing the Future* (Rotterdam: NAI, 2006), 169-72.

5 This is described by Rem Koolhaas, "Atlanta: A Reading," *Atlanta* (Barcelona: Actar, 1995), 74-85.

6 Princen, "Ringroad", n.p.

7 I have previously considered this element of Scott's work via her video *Olympic Doughnuts*, 2011. See: Kyle Weise, "Footscrayism," *Un Magazine* 5.2 (2011): 93-95. Online: <http://unprojects.org.au/magazine/issues/issue-5-2/footscrayism/>

8 See, for example: Tim Davis, "The New New Topographics," *Aperture* 198 (2010): 16-17; Jan Tumlir, "New Topographics," *X-Tra* 12.4 (2010): 26-37; and Alison Nördstrom, "After New: Thinking About New Topographics from 1975 to the Present," *New Topographics* (Tucson, AZ: Center for Creative Photography; Rochester, NY: George Eastman House; Göttingen: Steidl, 2009), 69-79. The restaging was accompanied by an extensive and elaborate catalogue, and also coincided with a new collection of essays assessing the original exhibition: *Reframing the New Topographics*, ed. Greg Foster-Rice and John Rohrbach (Chicago: Center for American Places at Columbia College, 2010).

9 Wendy Cheng, "'New Topographics': Locating epistemological Concerns in the American Landscape," *American Quarterly* 63.1 (2011): 161-62.

10 Davis, 16; Robert W. Woolard, "Man-Shaped Landscapes," *Image* 47.1 (2009): 20-22. (Originally published in *Artweek*, 27 March 1976); and Britt Salvesen, "New Topographics," in *New Topographics* (2009), 53-54.

11 William Jenkins, "Introduction," *New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-Altered Landscape* (Rochester, NY: International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House, 1975), 5-7. This original catalogue is now highly prized as a collector's item, as noted by Salvesen ("New Topographics," 49). A facsimile copy of this original catalogue is included in *New Topographics* (2009), 248-261. This catalogue, accompanying the re-staged exhibition tour (2009-2011), is now itself out of print, and has also become a collector's item.

12 For a brief commentary on *House Pictures*, see: *Various Small Books: Referencing Various Small Books by Ed Ruscha*, ed. Jeff Brouws, Wendy Burton and Hermann Zscheigner (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013), 48-49.

13 Britt Salvesen, "'Real Estate Opportunities': Commercial Photography as Conceptual Source in *New Topographics*," in *Reframing*, 82-84.

14 Chris Balaschack. "New Worlds: Lewis Baltz and a Geography of Aesthetic Decisions," In *Reconsidering 'The New Industrial Parks near Irvine,*

California' by Lewis Baltz, 1974, ed. Mario Pfeifer (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2011), 38.

15 Rosemary Hawker notes the enduring influence of the New Topographics in the move towards the "emptiness and anonymity of the contemporary city." This 'emptiness' is both literal, the lack of people and movement in the frame, and stylistic, in terms of the goal of an image emptied, supposedly, of style. "Repopulating the Street: Contemporary Photography and Urban Experience." *History of Photography*, 37.3 (2013): 341-52.

16 See, for example, *Outdoor Theater, Colorado Springs, Colorado*, 1968. This photograph is reproduced in *The New West: Landscapes Along the Colorado Front Range*, (Köln: Verlag de Buchhandlung Walther König, 2000), 91. (Originally published in 1974). This image can also be viewed online: <https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/1971.531.6/>.

17 Scott's nostalgic relationship to video stores is the subject of her project *Miraculous Ribbon*, 2015. See <http://www.jessiescott.tv/projects/miraculous-ribbon2015/>.

18 See, for example, Woolard, 21.

19 See, for example: Toby Jurovics, "Same as it Ever Was: Re-Reading the *New Topographics*," *Reframing*, 1-12; Mark Rawlinson, "Disconsolate and Inconsolable: Neutrality and the New Topographics," *Reframing*, 121-137. A recent review of Stephen Shore's retrospective at MoMA, expresses puzzled bewilderment at the wall text introducing the show, which suggests the 'neutrality' of his work: Amy Zion, "Fifty Years of Photography: Stephen Shore's Retrospective," *Frieze.com* 28 Feb. 2018: <https://frieze.com/article/fifty-years-photography-stephen-shores-retrospective>.

20 Gisela Parak connects the New Topographics specifically and predominately to environmentalism and critical environmental representations: "From 'Topographic' to 'Environmental': A Look into the Past and the Presence of the New Topographics Movement," *Depth of Field* 7.1 (2015): <http://journal.depthoffield.eu/vol07/nr01/a01/en>.

21 Finis Dunaway, "Beyond Wilderness: Robert Adams, *New Topographics*, and the Aesthetics of Ecological Citizenship," *Reframing*, 13-43.

- 22 Greg Foster-Rice, "'Systems Everywhere': *New Topographics* and Art of the 1970s," *Reframing*, 45-69.
- 23 Salvesen notes that, at the time, Adams was the New Topographics artist most clearly aligned with environmentalism ("New Topographics," 35). Adams's ongoing support of environmental causes in his work and life is, more recently, discussed in: Randy Gragg, "Visionary Photographer Robert Adams Turns his Lens on Oregon," *Portland Monthly* September, 2013. Online: <https://www.pdxmonthly.com/articles/2013/9/3/robert-adams-turns-his-lens-on-oregon-september-2013>.
- 24 Lewis Baltz and Mario Pfeiffer, "An Email Conversation," *Reconsidering*, 67.
- 25 Robert Smithson, "A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey," *Artforum* December (1967): 52-57. On Smithson and the New Topographics, see: Foster-Rice, 51; Parak, n.p.; Salvesen, "New Topographics," 31-36.
- 26 Denis Cosgrove and William L. Fox, *Photography and Flight* (Exposures, London: Reaktion, 2010), 63-66; Kim Sichel, *To Fly: Contemporary Aerial Photography* (Boston: Boston University Art Gallery, 2007), 18; Kim Sichel, "Deadpan Geometries: Mapping, Aerial Photography, and the American Landscape," *Reframing*, 99-101.
- 27 Cosgrove and Fox, 65. Similarly, Levittown, which in the 1950s drew harsh criticism as the epitome of developer-driven new suburbia and architectural uniformity, would, by the 1970s, be transformed by the architectural modifications of its owners. See: Jessica Lutin, "More than Ticky Tacky: Venturi, Scott Brown and Learning from the Levittown Studio," *Second Suburb: Levittown, Pennsylvania*, ed. Dianne Harris (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010): 314-39. Rowan Moore provides some fascinating histories of West London and Bijlmer (Amsterdam), which demonstrate the way that single pieces of architecture can serve socially disparate desires, uses and identities over time, and which are never settled or determined by their original intention or creation: *Why We Build* (London: Picador, 2012), 49-64.
- 28 Kim Dovey, *Becoming Places: Urbanism/Architecture/Identity/Power* (London: Routledge, 2010), 57-78.
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 Ibid., 38-41.
- 31 Ibid., 3-31.
- 32 Ibid., 78.
- 33 Mathew Aitchison notes that Boyd's work was part of an international trend critiquing post-war architecture and planning: "The Boyd Ultimatum," *AA Files* 66 (2013), 59.
- 34 Robin Boyd, *The Australian Ugliness*, 1960, (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2012), 98. The consequences of 'arborophobia' is described throughout; see, for example, 31-33, 93-98, 103, 106, 177, 181. Peter Conrad's review of the fiftieth anniversary edition of *The Australian Ugliness* notes that Boyd's comments on the drive to environmental destruction are one of the book's most appealing arguments: "Coming of Age." *The Monthly* December (2009), 62.
- 35 Boyd, 106
- 36 Ibid., 170-74.
- 37 Ibid., 31-32.
- 38 Ibid., 10, 38, 109-13, 181. See also Boyd's drawn caricature of such wires and poles on p.242. One pre-featurist building, according to Boyd, now "suffers" from electrical connections, ruining its clean lines (160).
- 39 Salveson, "New Topographics," 11. Throughout Robert Adams's *The New West*, telephone and powerlines are emphasised, and are sometimes the only 'feature' of the landscapes photographed. One of the most iconic images of the New Topographics is Baltz's photograph of a Mazda Motors showroom in California. The image has a striking minimalism, with the geometric grid of the building's surface emphasised by the flat, symmetrical framing. The image almost looks like an architectural elevation, not a photograph, except for the reflection in the windows. This reflection reveals a tangle of powerlines and the denuded industrial wasteland in which the building sits (Sichel, "Deadpan Geometries," 92). The full title of Baltz's work is *South Wall, Mazda Motors, 2121 East Main Street, Irvine*, from the portfolio *The New Industrial Parks near Irvine, California*. This image can be viewed at: <https://www.sfmoma.org/artwork/80.472.40>.
- 40 Anthony Bannon and Amy Van Dussen, "Truth-Beauty and New Topographics," *Image* 47.1 (2009): 7.41
- 41 Boyd, 7-8.
- 42 That such a significant conceptual rebuttal would (incidentally) appear so soon after the second edition of *The Australian Ugliness* is often remarked upon, see: Aitchison, 66-67; Conrad, 63; and Emma Letizia Jones, "Australian Ugliness," *The Architectural Review* 17 March, 2015: <https://www.architectural-review.com/rethink/viewpoints/australian-ugliness/8679108.article>.
- 43 Martino Stierli emphasises the importance of photography as central to the provocation of *Learning from Las Vegas*; photography is both part of their argument, and a representation of this: "Las Vegas Studio," *Las Vegas Studio: Images from the Archives of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown*, ed. Hilar Stadler and Martino Stierli (Kriens: Museum im Bellapr; Zurich: Scheidegger and Spiess, 2008), 13-15.
- 44 Salvesen, "New Topographics," 23; Dunaway, 30-32.
- 45 Boyd, 244, 256, 263.
- 46 Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, Steven Izenour, *Learning From Las Vegas*, 1972, Revised Edition (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1977), 103, 114-17, 129-30, 135, 137, 162-63. The building shaped like a duck is a reference to a photograph in Peter Blake's *God's Own Junkyard: The Planned Deterioration of America's Landscape* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964). Boyd refers directly to Peter Blake's work, and certainly his critique of the "accretion of ugliness" (Blake, 30) aligns with Boyd's concern over the rise of "visual squalor" and the "screams of billboards" (Boyd, 9-10). Venturi et al. comically usurp Blake's image in the service of their argument, which is diametrically opposed to Blake's (and Boyd's). *Learning from Las Vegas* is certainly not immune to critique, however. Felicity D. Scott argues that the emphasis Venturi et al. placed on semiotic play closed down consideration of wider social and political concerns (*Architecture or Techno-utopia: Politics After Modernism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), 152-53, 181-82). James Howard Kunstler, similarly to Scott, considers Venturi et al. to be completely complicit with prevailing capitalist forces: *The Geography of Nowhere: The Rise and Decline of America's Man-Made Landscape*, 1993 (New York: Touchstone: 1994), 82. More recent remarks by Venturi indicate that they were more ambivalent about Las Vegas than their book suggests, and he notes that Las Vegas in 1966 "horrified and fascinated us" (Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, "Learning from *Learning From Las Vegas*," *Supercrit #2: Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown 'Learning from Las Vegas'*, ed. Kester Rattenbury and Samantha Hardingham (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007): 69. Their goal was to take this urban form seriously rather than to dismiss this out of hand and it seems that their apparent praise for elements of this was, at times, a rhetorical device.
- 47 Venturi, et al., 153. Boyd makes almost this exact argument, suggesting the continuation of Featurism is a result of the "propaganda machine for conspicuous consumption" (174).
- 48 Venturi, et al., 153-55. On this, see also Lutin.
- 49 Ibid., 128.
- 50 Boyd, 9, 12.
- 51 Ada Louise Huxtable, "Plastic Flowers are Almost All Right," *New York Times*, 10 October 1971: D22.
- 52 Cosgrove and Fox note the influence of *ThirtyFour Parking Lots* on the New Topographics and its debt to Garnett (124-26). Sichel notes that the images were recorded by a commercial pilot, not Ruscha (*To Fly*, 16), as does Alexandra Schwartz (*Ed Ruscha's Los Angeles* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010): 132).
- 53 Schwartz, 205. Schwartz notes the contradictions in this, as the books were tied into Ruscha's cultivation of an artistic persona more generally, which was intimately connected to the economy and discourses of high art (199-209).

Here, there is no cash: Scenes from Coburg Trash & Treasure

By Maggie Scott

The Coburg Drive-In powers down when the crowd-pleasing entertainment encapsulated in its projection booth has no earning power. The infrastructure may as well be put to use during unviable screening time. Three movie screens mark out the boundaries of the cinema, their faces massive and blank in the cold light of day. A panoramic slate of grey sky stretches across the lot, a live CinemaScope of wide open space, with more wide open space beyond: creek and park, with no buildings, houses or trees to compromise the skyline. Even deepest, darkest Pentridge looks squat and insignificant in the middle distance.

This early in the morning, a few straggling rows of cars with their boots up are transacting a cash and trade economy. Punters wander over from their own cars wantonly parked in a vast expanse of gravel nearby. They have pockets full of small notes and loose change, their nonchalant gait disguising their efficient eyes speed-scanning all the stuff spilling out from boots onto tarps spread on the gravel. If they don't want any of it, they move on without even looking at the individual whose belongings or curated wares are up for grabs at low prices.

Coburg Trash & Treasure doesn't hold a punter's attention like a movie does, nor does it make them part with as much cash. It's a market of last-ditch opportunities and off chances, sometimes necessity. Get in, get out, hopefully with a bargain and maybe something fried and sugary in the belly.

#

"The diner is very 'It's the 80s and we're attempting—and failing—to be nostalgic for the 50s.'" Cam lifts his sunnies and glares at the diner, as if seeing it clearly will prove his point. "Well it's the Naughties. Get with the program, Village," he declares at the woman browsing his overcrowded trestle table, who had just mentioned, in her polite chit chat, that the diner is very charming.

He says this, or some scathing version of this, every time a potential customer admires the diner and begins reminiscing about the good old days and the good old drive-ins, and how they'd hide in the boot to get in, then watch the movie from

- 54 Jenkins, 5. Tumlrir notes that Ruscha's books, along with *Learning from Las Vegas*, were included as an addition to the 2009 restaging of *New Topographics* (32). Also, Jenkins has since expressed regret he didn't include Ruscha's works in the exhibition. See: Salvesen, "New Topographics," 27; Salvesen, "Real Estate Opportunities," 76–77.
- 55 Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962–1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," *October* 55 (1990): 119–24.
- 56 Schwartz, 162.
- 57 Venturi, et al., xii, 32–33, 46, 53, 105. On the relationship of *Learning from Las Vegas* to Ruscha, including Scott Brown's studio visits with the artist, see also: Brouws, et al., 37; Stierli, 15, 23–27; Schwartz, 143–60.
- 58 Ruscha's *Then and Now* (2004), which combined images of Hollywood Boulevard in 1973 and 2004, and mimicked the style of *Every Building*, emphasises this aspect of the work. Daniel Crooks's video *High St (After Ed Ruscha)* (2017) presents a digitally altered, incredibly complex, video version of Ruscha's *Sunset Strip* work, applied to High St in Preston (Melbourne). Preston is a suburb adjacent to Coburg.
- 59 Eamon Donnelly's photographs of Milk Bars across Australia are another example. Though Donnelly's are more overtly nostalgic and celebratory, photographed in vivid colour and in varying styles, in contrast to Waderton's consistently framed black and white imagery, which is more akin to Ruscha's 'deadpan' style.
- 60 Jordan Troeller, "Against Abstraction: Zoe Leonard's *Analogue*," *Art Journal* 69.4 (2010): 109.
- 61 On the importance of the material object of the photograph in Leonard's work, see: Margaret Iverson, "Analogue: On Zoe Leonard and Tacita Dean," *Critical Inquiry* 38 (2012): 796–818; Mark Godfrey, "Mirror Displacements," *Artforum* (March 2008): 292–300. For a nuanced overview of the literature on *Analogue*, which finds a path between critique and celebration, see: Paolo Magagnoli, *Documents of Utopia: The Politics of Experimental Documentary* (London: Wallflower, 2015): 90–98.
- 62 Salvesen, "Real Estate Opportunities," 80–81.
- 63 As Schwartz suggests (143). Though, Eric Doeringer's return to these sites in his 2009 photobook, *Real Estate Opportunities*, demonstrates that these, in fact, did turn out to be opportunities (see: Brouws et al., 196).
- 64 David Madden and Peter Marcuse, *In Defence of Housing* (London: Verso, 2016): 1–52.
- 65 Ibid., 118–20.
- 66 Nicole Gurrán, Nick Gallent and Rebecca L.H. Chiu, *Politics, Planning and Housing Supply in Australia, England and Hong Kong* (New York: Routledge, 2016): 29–57.
- 67 Ibid., 37.
- 68 Marcuse and Madden, 51, 89.

the boot and blah blah blah. He'd be rich if he had a buck for every time he heard some variation of these memories.

"And you should see the clientele here on the weekend," he continues. "You'll see eight-year-old girls wearing high heels, carrying four-year-olds with dummies. You'll see your meth heads, too busy cruising around in their cars to even watch the movies, and you better hope they don't notice you. You'll see..."

He stops talking only when his browser nods awkwardly at him and walks away.

These customers don't get it... they are fly-bys, tourists, day-trippers, obsessed with superficial aesthetics, don't understand how anything works on the inside, probably looking to buy in the area. Well fuck her, he thinks, watching the woman talking about him at Dimi's Donuts next door, she can wait in fuckin' line like the rest of us.

That is literally how he thinks. Cam doesn't have the emotional maturity it takes to be a man in his 60s, laid off from a job he'd been doing for twenty-six years and not a lot of work prospects for his future. He doesn't have enough cash to put down a deposit for even a small shitty flat in the suburb he's been living in his whole life. The truth is, he's just going to have to stay living at his dad's place and wait for him to die. He's okay with that.

His things lie untouched and unsold on the table as they have always done. Some vintage cameras he'd 'borrowed' from work, never used and never given back. Likewise, lenses, camera cases and boxes, tripods, film stock, wipes and all the other stuff that overflowed in the warehouses. The perks of being Storeman. All in good nick though, highly collectible if you like that sort of thing. He savoured the power he had when that first dickhead customer inevitably tried to haggle with him earlier that morning.

"That's the price, we don't bargain here."

"Yeah but everyone else at the market haggles."

"Not here we don't. You either buy it or you don't buy it. At that price."

"Right. I don't buy it, SEE YA!" And off the man stomped, fuming and swearing. It made Cam feel good.

But not as good as when he senses a collector who desperately wants something off his table. The joy he gets from leading them on and then refusing to sell is delicious. Like that one woman who threw a \$100 note in his face, grabbed a bunch of stuff and walked off with it as if it was rightfully hers, so angry her face was actually red. She cried when the guys at the exit blocked her car.

He glances over at Pentridge and thinks about Chopper who, much like himself, is 'just a normal bloke who likes a bit of torture.'

#

"Coburg Trash & Treasure is full of pretty special people," says Dimi from her donut stand, performing an exaggerated side-eye in Cam's direction. She has big eyes, magnified by a daily ritual of eyeliner, mascara and her trifocal lenses.

"Oh well, we all have our scars," Cam's former customer smiles generously.

"Yeah, well, Cam is in denial about being a hoarder. He won't part with any of it but brings it all for 'sale'"—here she inserts some air quotes—"every weekend. For years. Seriously, the lord only knows what he lives on."

Dimi is talking to herself at this point, because the woman is distracted, looking around the market with a quizzical expression.

"Want a donut?"

"What?"

Dimi waves her hand over her cart.

"Oh, no thanks! I'm on a diet."

"Why would you admit that in public?" Dimi says under her breath, skilfully raising one eyebrow at the retreating woman's conservative bob.

Albert wanders up, smoking in plain sight like it's 2006.

"Good morning Al!" Dimi calls out. "Bad news... Josie will not like this. But I'm afraid I couldn't find Accidentally Expecting! for her this week."

Albert is crestfallen, knowing how disappointed his wife will be when he comes home emptyhanded. In an attempt to avoid that scenario, he gestures to the substantial stack of romance novels behind Dimi's donut cart. "You mind?"

"Be my guest Al."

Albert opens each novel to the back page, runs a finger down until he stops at his wife's initials, JC, scrawled there to keep a record of which books she has already read. He slams the book shut and checks the next one methodically until he has gone through all of them.

"She has read them all," he says tragically.

Man, Dimi sighs, have I earned my inheritance. She could be out to brunch in St Kilda with her friends, but no, here she is operating her parents' donut cart at the weekend market, with

a side trade in LOTE romance novels with Extra Large print, and back catalogues of Il Globo or The goddam Dawn and The goddam Daily. It started out as her parents' supply, but then all the local olds got a whiff of it and the cash-free empire just... expanded. They don't even care if it's last week's news from Athens, they just don't want to pay for it.

"Albert. Hey Al. Look here."

He hoists himself up with difficulty. Dimi slowly reveals a magazine from behind her back, an old issue of Tempo!

"Sophia Loren speciale! Oh Dimi, you sweetheart. What money I can give you?"

"Nah Albert. You and Josie can have that on me. Go enjoy it together. Go on."

Albert walks away slowly, tucking his Tempo! up into his wool-len jumper as if it's contraband.

I'm like that Doris Younane chick from Heartbreak High, Dimi muses, who always plays the long-suffering friend who can see everything clearly, but the only lines she gets are dry and served with one raised eyebrow.

#

Mark finishes unloading his boot of vinyl, cassette tapes, tape decks and a few cute, mint-condition Walkmans and arranges them stylishly across his tarp, accompanied with homemade signage. He's firmly entrenched in the generation of streaming, but he is fascinated by defunct technology from the days of yore.

"Hot tamale!" Dimi calls out as she powerwalks past. "I'll be back to catch up, gorgeous, just have to take care of something."

"Look what I'm wearing..." Mark kicks up his feet, which are enclosed in the glittery black platforms he found at the market last week and had workshopped with Dimi for an hour before purchasing for 50 cents.

"Whoa baby. You make this market great again."

Down a few stalls, Mark can feel the shambolic, judgemental, pale, badly dressed Cam making a pointed effort to ignore their banter. Market carnies aren't known for embracing gays or fashion. But Cam wouldn't had'n't better ever dare say a disparaging thing to or about him. Cam is sweet on Dimi, and Dimi would run him out of town.

It's a slow morning. Mark examines the tape sleeve notes of Prince and The Revolution's Parade, trying to figure out who played cow bell. He doesn't even notice the woman browsing

his wares who is about to ask if he has any CDs. She looks at the glamorous boy who doesn't even know she's there, remembers all the CDs she never listens to at home and moves on.

"Ben Dover!"

The familiar taunt shocks him out of his daydreaming. At school, he'd done a stellar job of pretending he didn't care about the boys who shouted moronic innuendos at him in the hallways with their hysterical, breaking voices. He always remained haughty and dignified, taking to heart his mother's salvo "Sticks and Stones..." and just hoping they'd never cause him grievous bodily harm.

Farhan is standing there, smiling broadly at him, tall and stitched up, combed down, so damn cute. He had been in Mark's year at school, operating in a different silo of isolation—the library—always studying and hiding.

When Farhan notices Mark's horrified expression, his face drops.

"Oh my god, I'm so sorry, sorry. I forgot how not funny that is!" his hands reach out as if to catch Mark from falling.

"Too soon!"

There's a moment of hesitation, of potential awkwardness, but enough years have gone by and they smile instead.

"It's good to not be there anymore," says Farhan.

"Fuck yes," Mark agrees.

They swap memories and gossip. Farhan is doing well in his third year of economics, still living at home, in to his family, out to his friends. He is still in touch with a few school mates, and Mark is pleased to hear that apparently some of his former bullies are married with a million babies.

"Serves them right," Farhan smirks.

Browsing through the tapes, Farhan holds up the soundtrack to Love and Other Catastrophes with rapt excitement. Mark marvels at the big gay squeal this beautiful, preppy boy just emitted over such an obscure find.

"I LOVE this movie. I remember thinking uni would be just like this." Farhan takes the sleeve out of the tape case like it's a precious, delicate museum artefact.

OMG, so cute. Mark has lost his cool at the thought of getting this shy and inexperienced boy on the dancefloor. He takes a deep breath and asks Farhan out to the CLOSET party tonight. Farhan studies the cassette with great focus, but Mark can see a blush emerging on his neck and spreading quickly to his face. He seems reluctant at first, but Mark knows how to tempt him.

“My housemate is the DJ and I’ll make 100% sure she’ll play some retro 90s music for us.”

After they settle the details of where to meet, Farhan walks away with the tape still in his hands.

“Oops, sorry, how much?” he falters, walking back to Mark.
“Wait, hang on, I don’t even have a tape player!”

Mark hands him a treasure, a hot red Walkman with a headset still in its original wrapping and waves away Farhan’s efforts to pay him.

“Don’t worry about it! Buy me a drink tonight.”

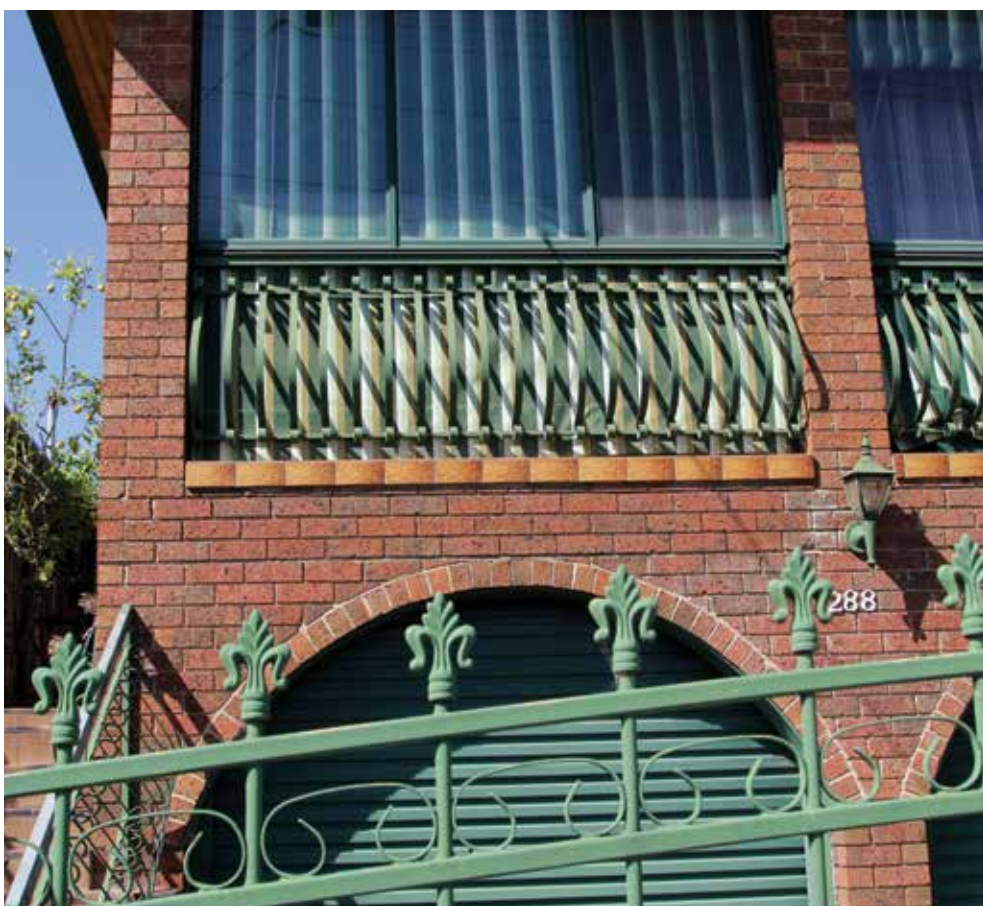
#

The last stragglers at Coburg Trash & Treasure have finally left and the stallholders have finished packing up for the day. Small groups of market carnies huddle around their cars, or at the concrete picnic tables near the diner, sharing sales conquests and complaining about annoying customers, united in the feeling that they somehow own the joint. Dimi has cut up some sugared, jam-filled donuts to share with Cam and Mark, who wolf them down as she smokes a menthol. She hasn’t eaten donuts for as long as her parents have sold them, which is forever. They don’t talk much; they have nothing in common and very little to say when it’s the three of them. But there’s a comfortable enough silence to spend some time in each other’s company; they each think through the next steps in their separate evenings, enjoying the vast quietness of an empty drive-in and meditating upon the rows of disused white speaker-posts stretching out in an orderly matrix whichever angle you look at them.

Cinema staff begin arriving to prepare for the night, wearing their branded uniforms and parking in their allocated areas. They say hello to the market folk but they don’t stop to chat. They have got to count the cash drawers and log into the system. They need to check online bookings and make sure the scanners are working. They need to heat up the oil in the fryers and prepare the pre-mixes and popcorn. They must check the stock at the candy bar, and then walk over to the projection booth and do an equipment check, make sure Deadpool, Solo and The Avengers are all downloaded. Then they must wait for the sun to go down and for the cars to start driving in. They are here to make some actual cash.







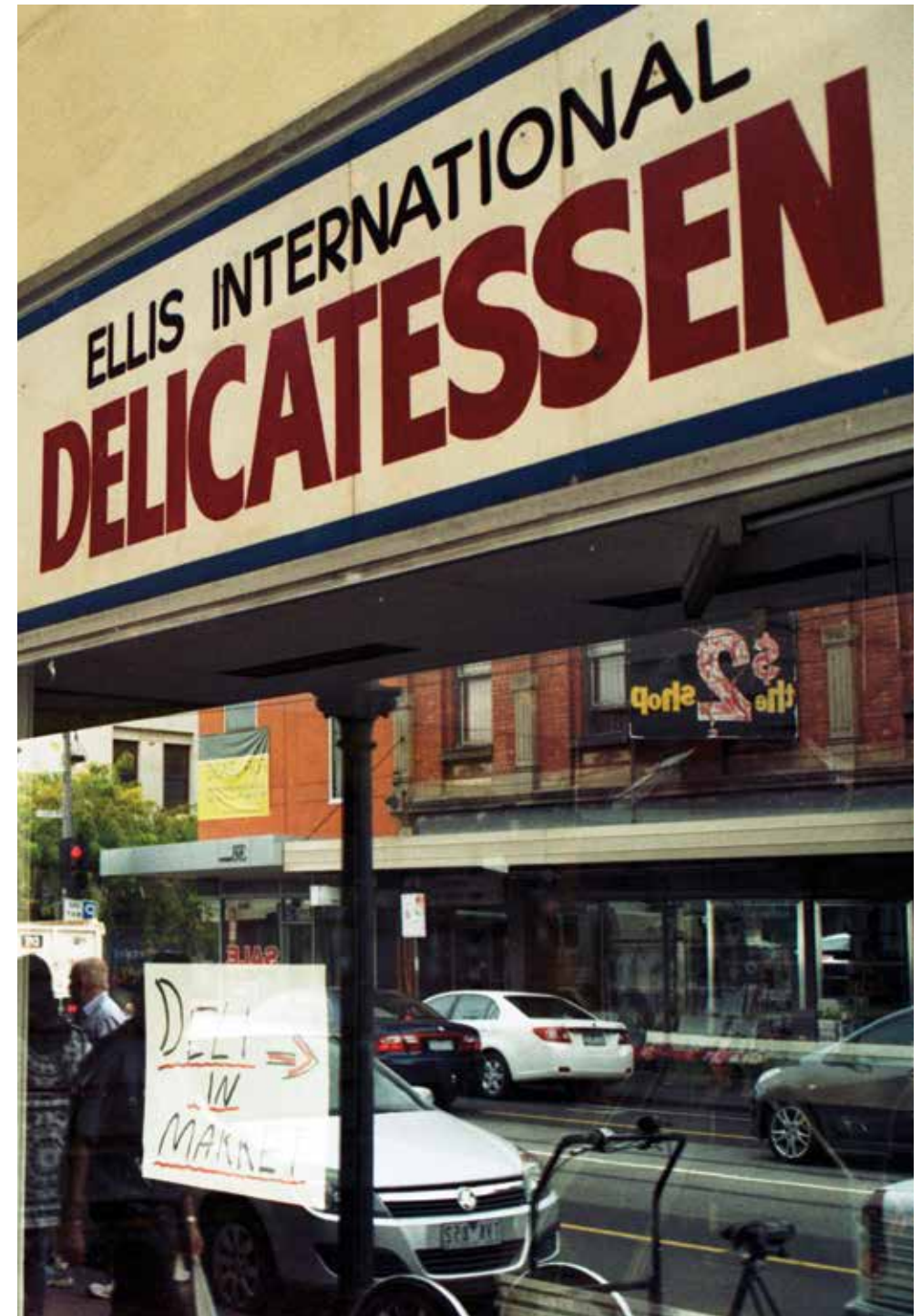




















the_coburg_plan Indoor/outdoor space: around this corner was quite an extensive outdoor kitchen/bar/entertaining area. I still find it quite hard to take my camera right up to people's personal spaces though. Susan Sontag's words linger: "The camera makes everyone a tourist in other people's reality, and eventually in one's own." And so I find myself lurking at the edges, skirting voyeurism and a document, and trying to figure out what can be said/seen inbetween. *#thecoburgplan #coburg #indooroutdoor #susansontag #photography #streetphotography #vernaculararchitecture #concretecolumns #suburban #melbourne*

Catproquo @hot_dawg_av recognise this? 🤔

Onthissideofthewall This house is life goals! I walk by all the time hoping for an invite

dl_Ir Love it!

brereton26 This is at the end of my street. The people who live there are lovely. Their house is beautiful and definitely stands out against all the weatherboards in the area :)

suburbanexposure That is classic!!

apples_chan I know this little nook! I often see the couple who live there sitting on those chairs watching all the action in the morning.

the_coburg_plan @_bea.shae_ posted another shot of it today 😊

the_coburg_plan @apples_chan it's a bit inspiring. I have a tall front fence Cos I live on a busy-ish street, but I really want a spot to sit and watch the street from/get the Neighbourhood goss.

the_coburg_plan Classic Villa layout: stairs to first floor entry, over double garage. Garages in this context are not just for cars. They are work spaces, second kitchens, gyms, pool rooms, wedding reception centres and cellars. My uncle had such a multi-phase garage complex running along his single-fronted brick veneer in Fawkner, and as I wander the streets of Coburg I love getting glimpses of these hives of industrious activity. *#thecoburgplan #coburg #villa #garage #indooroutdoor #multiuse #poolroom #suburban #vernaculararchitecture #streetphotography #melbourne*

suburbanexposure I always wonder what's in 'em!



the_coburg_plan Progress Hall was built by the West Coburg Progress Society in 1923- a group of presumably civic-minded locals about whom I can find little online. There were gatherings here from 1924, and 1927 was the first year it also operated as a cinema. In 1939 this second use became its primary one and the Art Deco facade was added, becoming then known as The Coburg Progress. As it still was when I frequented it as a child and teenager in the 90s, delighted by the old fashioned organist, door prizes held every night, and glamorous decor- certainly more charming and exotic than Highpoint, the previous, er, high point of my cinematic experience. It's now a ballet school, a fact which burns me up every time I stroll past, and note the disrepair it has been allowed to fall into. I was part of a discussion panel at Blindsight gallery in 2015 with the then-mayor of Moreland, Meghan Hopper and took the opportunity to put her on the spot: what's happening with the Coburg Progress? She pointed out that it's now owned privately and there's only so much council can do. I understand the rationality of this, but this place was literally built by the people of this community - people not satisfied to be led by private interests, people making places for themselves. How do places like this even end up in private hands? It operated continuously as a cinema from 1927 until 1998 and looks like it hasn't had a lick of paint since. The terrible inevitability that this tiny suburban glory will one day simply be a retained facade fronting an ugly apartment block haunts the site. Unless...Who wants to chip in and buy a cinema with me? *#thecoburgplan #coburg #coburgprogress#westcoburgprogresssociety#oldcinema#bughouse #movies #localhalls #artdeco#architecture #suburban #vernacular#streetphotography #melbourne #cinema*

grrrouse My husband grew up in Brunswick and he spent half his childhood here as well. It's so sad the condition it's now in.

suburby Love it!

catproquo The seats in the cinema were glorious in an 90's childhood. Plus intermission with prizes!

susie_zarris Me !! I loved watching movies there in my younger years ... and have had dreams of winning Tatts (should actually play) to bring this beauty back .

_yana__n This is so sad. How does this happen?

zoediac My most vivid memory of The Progress is of watching Strictly Ballroom there (approx x3 times)! Would be so fantastic if it became a cinema again!

the_coburg_plan @zoediac the last movie I saw there was an arty French nature doco called Microcosmos. I've peeked in the windows when the ballet classes are on and you can see the posters of the last movies they showed up on the walls 🥹

fraserahrt That super red interior! I have a distinct memory watching Dick Tracey there with my Nan, and the both of us being bored senseless by it. A travesty that it's in the state is.

the_coburg_plan @susiezarris just had the "what would you do if you won tarts" discussion the other day with my sister- a favourite topic with both our nannas- I think this would be top of my list too! Go halves?

the_coburg_plan @the_coburg_plan tatts 🍷

mango_crazy Can we try crowdfunding?

the_coburg_plan @fraserahrt I can't believe you saw a movie with the word dick in the title with your nan 🤔

the_coburg_plan @mango_crazy needs to be on the market first- not sure who owns it. I'd like to see council buy it back and turn it into a community space.

fraserahrt @the_coburg_plan 'Richard', we'll just call him Richard.

kustommoto I've only been inside once as we were looking to see if we could hire it for a party (no go) but there was a concession stand in the foyer that I recall and the inside was beautiful. I live on Lascelles so go past a couple of times a day. At least the cinema is covered somewhat by the Lascelles Street Heritage Overlay we are covered by.

the_coburg_plan @kustommoto yes definitely under a heritage overlay. The lobby is still intact, if you peek over the back fence you can also see the hand painted signs directing people to the ladies and gents 😊

klm_66 Gran lived behind at No 2, school holidays had the best matinees. Loved the ushers and Lolly kiosk. Saw Jaws and Willy Wonka there in the 1970s. Such a shame it has fallen into this state.

the_coburg_plan @klm_66 what incredible memories to have! The Sun in yarraville is the only cinema that gives me something like the feeling of going to the movies at the progress.

tallstorey I guess the progress association was in a way a private undertaking, so they could build it, then sell it (and later cease to exist). But you're very lucky it's still intact, so many other former cinemas already divided into flats, losing their interiors. You should at least agitate for council to give an Individual Heritage Overlay, with the 'interior protection' box ticked. And then maybe for a grant to fix it up (very few councils have heritage grants though) But I assume the lady with the ballet school owns it, so she is effectively saving it for the moment !

the_coburg_plan @tallstorey I guess, but progress associations were a bit more than just a club or something- they were self-organizing community groups that were providing for residents needs, particularly at a time when local council in the area was less responsive. But yes, I guess the ballet school is saving it! I hadn't thought of it like that, and thanks for the heritage advice 🙌



the_coburg_plan Wood houses are badly insulated, they burn easily, get eaten inside out by grubs, need constant attention and care to avoid just rotting into the ground over time. For many first generation Australians of the post-war era, brick cladding was not only a fig leaf over the shame of living in a wood house, but perversely it has protected the weatherboards for future generations of gentrifying renovators to uncover. Of course, the cost of land is so high now, many are opting to demolish and start again. This is one of the first houses I photographed in Coburg, now replaced by 6 hastily built townhouses. *#thecoburgplan #northcoburg#tin-roof #brickcladding #bungalow#vernaculararchitecture #densification#gentrification #suburban #melbourne#streetphotography #35mm*

twolittledickybirdys That's sad....another gone forever.

tallstorey Sometimes the brick sheeting just covered up even encouraged rot - but even a good house that isn't heritage listed is likely to be replaced these days , if the block is big enough.

the_coburg_plan That's really interesting- I believe it was sold to people as a "protective" layer in some instances @tallstorey I've even seen brick houses with a layer of brick cladding!!! But yes, hardly financially viable to preserve places like this now.

carlosfurnari This reads like the story of my Nonna's house... in Coburg! The townhouses haven't replaced it yet... but i'm guessing they will just as soon as it's eventually sold. *#brownbrickbutfakeas*

the_coburg_plan @carlosfurnari ah! A common story now I think- they won't last. I don't know if they should, but the history they embody is pretty rich and interesting, and worth thinking about while they are still around!

Still Circling the Camp



the_coburg_plan All of the East-West minor thoroughfares in Moreland have little clusters of old shopfronts: Union, Albion, Moreland, Reynard, Munro, O'Hea. They speak to the pre-war era before malls or even supermarkets, a more pedestrian era, when shops were smaller and more evenly dispersed through the suburbs, walked to daily. Some of them are still thriving businesses in unlikely locales- the butcher stranded in the middle of Reynard St for example. Some are bricked up and turned into front rooms or developed into units and dwellings. Occasionally they are taken over by cafes. Others are more mysterious- in the middle of a back street, near no such cluster, this house conforms to a typical shop-dwelling, but the completely boarded up facade gives it an uncanny facelessness that somehow spooks me. *#thecoburgplan#coburg#shopfront#shopdwelling#weatherboard-house#vernaculararchitecture#adaptive-reuse#streetphotography#35mm#analog#slr#nikon#suburban#melbourne*

melbournescenes 🌞🌧️lightandshadow

_____feyza I too love old shopfronts! My mother owned a shop on Nicholson St Coburg East, which is currently a construction site for a block of units!

the_coburg_plan @_feyzayazar_ ah so many of them are now! They used to sometimes get taken up by new small businesses, but not so much in the current climate! What was your mother's shop?

jojothedfgo @the_coburg_plan I rescued a beautiful deco building, abandoned and left crumbling for over 30 years, in Pearson St and turned it in to @johngorillacafe

the_coburg_plan @jojothedfgo oh wow! I know the place- so fantastic that places like yours can have a second or third life. I hate the idea of losing all the local shops and cafes - they add so much to quality of life in the area.

_____feyza @the_coburg_plan It was a Turkish/Middle East deli/mini-market, not too far from the mosque! She then bought a milkbar on Gilbert Rd and we lived behind it. It's still operating but struggling!

the_coburg_plan @_feyzayazar_ nice. Was my dream as a kid to live behind a milkbar (lollies on tap!) 🍬 we lost our milkbar on reynard recently (posted on Monday)- it got sold out from under them. It was sad, but they were also exhausted-long hours. One on Munro still going strong, it's a good business and we still use it often.

_____feyza @the_coburg_plan My mother said we, my brother and I ate the profits! It's hard work with long hours and lots of competition from 24/7 supermarkets. Mum sold up and our lives stopped being regulated by the door buzzer! I now live behind a hairdresser in East Coburg. It's very convenient!

olegnocek #noface

emkeezy Fuck I love this account. A++

madameyum Hey @bitchbodyoils you'll love this acct as much as me I'd reckon!!

the_coburg_plan @emkeezy thanks 🙏

bitchbodyoils I do love this @madameyum thanks for sharing 🙏

lindakarafili My 3 yr old is fascinated by the old shop fronts along O'Hea. Non stop questions & imaginings about them. ❤️

the_coburg_plan @lindakarafili the O'hea ones are particularly enigmatic I think! I love how kids are so curious and make you really notice everything again (in great detail!!)

nickzaita That butcher is excellent... best meats in Coburg! @rocky689 @alfiiee_@rosegentile

the_coburg_plan @nickzaita yes agree! Frank is the best 🙌

By Timmah Ball

Our shoulders touch

Circling the 70s cream brick building

Two tiddas out of place

Walk cautiously along a blue cobblestone lane

They say our ancestors are inside

From South-East to West Coast mob

But only sharp metal scaffolding

PRIVATE CAR PARK

And a few roller doors

Are visible

Aboriginal belongings, haphazardly arranged

Locked in a building

All clad up

And we just stare

From the bitumen road

Imagining their dreamings

On Allen St

We saw it opposite Moreland Station

Tidda pointed to the building on the Cnr of Cameron St

As the herd of office workers dispersed to their homes

Enthusiastically following the left leaning progressive types

Who edge further up Sydney Rd

No chance of owning Northcote

When Glenroy, Fawkner and even Broadmeadows are quietly transformed

Posters for CLOSET queer parties, obscure art-punk bands

And alternative living at CERES

Are pasted along a wall

Remnants of the hipster invasion

And the few surviving artists
 Still renting Californian Bungalows
 Cloistered amongst the new home renovators
 Wildly ranting “can’t make art if we’re pushed further out”
 But what’s there to protest
 When you hold the keys to your cultural fortune

Tidda says Melbourne Museum owns the building on Allen St
 Displays most of our clothing, tools and art in their gallery space
 And keeps the left overs locked away
 Other tiddas work for the museum
 Make sure our things stay safe
 Run informal tours
 To the unmarked storage facility
 Site inspections if you like
 For bureaucrats from the Department of Land Use Revitalisation
 With clipboard in their hands
 Creeping quietly through airless rooms
 Infatuated by the intricate beauty of our cultural/historical ‘past’
 Red tape, white labels and anthropological classifications
 Don’t distract their gaze
 Staring longingly at hand woven baskets, piercing spears and Kulin shields
 Touch the possum skin cloaks lightly
 Savouring the texture against their skin
 “By far the best ever strategic government building assessment
 I’ve ever done”
 They grin

Multi-storey apartment buildings germinate Bell St
 A black shadow across the landscape
 Conceals the sky
 We hear the home renovators weeping
 Their dreams gradually expire
 Exotic plants rot violently
 In Swedish-designed front yards
 Gasping competitively for the last specks of light
 And Tidda takes me home
 Carefully unnoticed
 To a quiet place
 Too subtle for inquisitive eyes
 We discuss Alexis, Jeanine and Morten-Robinson
 With cups of tea in the lounge room
 Lying hopeful on the cool concrete floor
 Re-reading Lisa’s BEAUTIFUL YUROKE RED RIVER GUM:

Sometimes the red river gums rustled
 in the beginning of colonization
 - replaced
 by plane trees from England
 and still
 the survivors
 watch.
 1999, Lisa Belleair

Secondary Community: Noise Organics in the Age of Gentrification

By Tilde Joy

For French economist Jacques Attali, noise is the stuff of life; work, play, people, everything that is productive or creative or communicative exudes noise. Noise is also unwanted, unwelcome, unknown and incomprehensible: it attacks order and uniformity. The palaver of noise is not conducive to repetition, reproduction and commercial interest.

We have these spaces, in-betweens, fragmented lots, less than your hallowed quarter-acre, waiting for something to show up. Demolished ruins form queer concrete/soil composites, lumpy dunes for grasses and thorns to colonise. Remaining walls are seized upon by spray can virtuosos. Disused lots attract mysterious household goods – broken appliances, family photos, baby clothes, plush toys, domestic detritus. Elsewhere, idle scaffolding becomes a haunt for urbex kids, climbing cranes and budding apartments that move too slow to actually be owned by anyone. Property is not ownership.

The absence of activity isn't sustained for long. Some developer acquires land, maybe a building too, the plan being to wait until their finances or the property market or both smile upon them favourably. But property is not ownership, and inactivity invites secondary communities to establish themselves. The noise of life is indefatigable. Because by breaking into a demolition site with a goon bag and a paint-roller and a friend, you exert ownership in a far more tangible sense than by knocking down a building and waiting for the stars to align. The vacuum of a community may even collapse.

We see it in the stone gardens of the medium density multi-dwelling townhouse facsimile virus; the lack of activity transforms a stately yucca and agapanthus into a noisy pile of nettles and thorns, blooming in rebellion, awaiting the eventual scalding of a subcontractor's poison pump. But in the in-between, community forms: the workers sing rowdy jigs while the bosses sleep; the kids draw on the walls; a muttering drunk scares almost everyone on the train, except the dreamers with headphones in, who never need to wonder what the fuss is all about. Because once these identical, rectilinear, efficient, grey edifices are established, once the residents reside, all efforts are made to avoid connection, unplanned interaction, bumping into her again. "Thank your mother for the rabbits."

It's so Australian, the ample space we need to claim for ourselves, as if under the infinite sky of our remote continent, bumping into another soul in the void were something

Like Lisa we see our environment change
Or quite possibly
Born in urban areas
More English than bush
Can't fathom what the Red River Gums she talks of might have looked like

Overpriced eggs from bearded waiters
Served salaciously
In exposed brick cafes
Are more familiar to our inner-city observations
Slightly hungover and lacking sleep
We barely notice Courtney B and Jen C
Slip casually into the opposite seats
Tight black jeans and denim jackets
Low-fi Melbourne rock via LA acclaim
Discussing record deals and the hot young hopeful
They might consider signing to their boutique label

Because art is an Instagram account
A well-placed selfie with Ai Weiwei
Cultural monuments from West Coast Australia
Tightly packaged in unmarked graves
Me and my tidda still circling the camp
Searching for something
In decommissioned concrete
Lost until we are found
On revitalised industrial land

sinister. So we built houses too big, with massive yards, and a space between your block and mine, like an empty seat between you and strangers at the cinema. And these awkward little blocks in-between reek of inactivity, they cry for secondary community. But in trying to reverse out of our sprawling excesses we decide not to build anything resembling anything common. We opt for detached mini-houses, garages to park your body when you're not using it at work-community, or drinking-community. Australians tend to think of themselves as egalitarian – you've heard the platitudes: we sit in the front seat of our taxis; we prefer 'mate' or 'darl' to 'sir' and 'ma'am'; we wipe our own arses etc. But we're also people who would cross the road to avoid meeting our neighbours, who coined the phrase 'Fuck Off We're Full', who imprison refugees, vilify people of different dress and religion and send the military in to Intervene with our Indigenous population. Australia is not comfortable with The Other and this is the inscription we leave behind on the world-body.

And in a very real sense property developers and Mum'n'Dad Investors are composing our world. They sculpt the body we doodle upon, they model it after themselves as a perfect reflection of consumption. The authorship of our suburbs is a moral proposition; it codifies the values of the landholders in as permanent a fashion as a prefab concrete box can provide. Proximity to economic activity and public affirmations of social mobility, however faked, are the moral language of these developments.

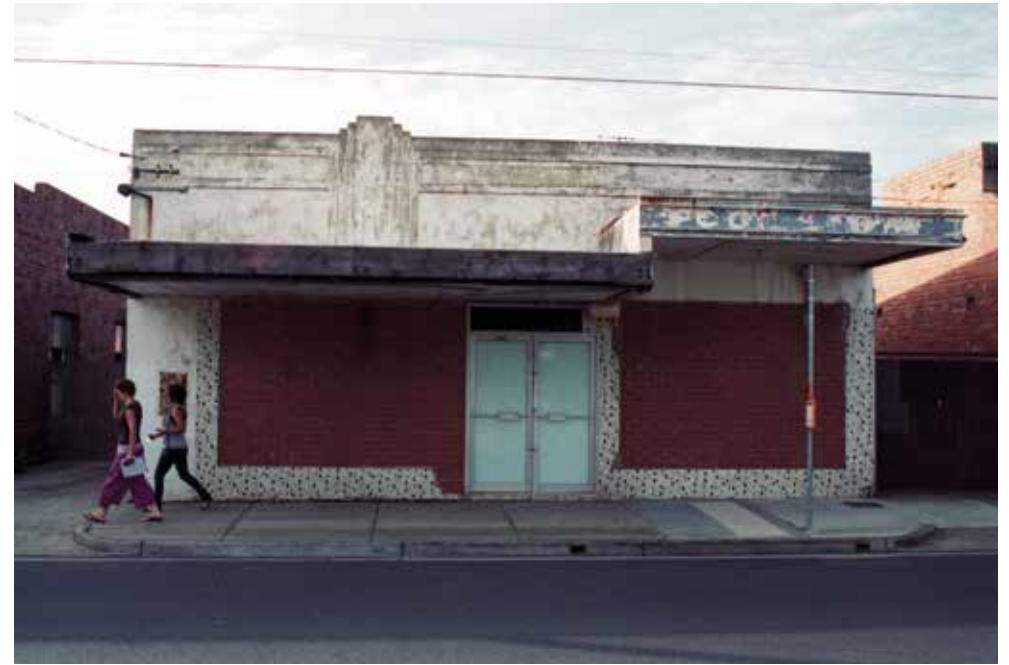
Where private housing conglomerates used to build reasonably ugly, utilitarian blocks of redbrick flats that could reasonably house fifteen couples or small families—often with parking, a shared launderette, and maybe some grass for the kids—we now see 3 or 4 McHouses. These mute grey cuboids provide inhabitants with a taste of The Australian Dream: a place to call your own, a sovereign border between you/yours and the rabble beyond. It's usually marketed as a lifestyle, which is code for vicariously enjoying the trappings of the comfortable classes. It's a call to intensify consumption, privatise resources and retreat from The Other. And in a very real sense this is how we institutionalise our isolation, by thinking global and acting local, by creating cities of citadels.

The all too perfect harmony of ceaseless townhouse vistas is increasingly seen as precarious, and even hostile towards, the replication of the nuclear family unit; that trusty vehicle of consumptive demand in the twentieth century is atomised in favour of aspirational discomfort for individuals. The kids just can't (wait to) move out. The vision of flawless reproduction in housing crumples quickly, as nothing is free of maintenance and nothing is free. And secondary community is latent in all of us in radical actions like not doing the gardening or leaving the bins out for the whole week and

hanging the laundry out on the balcony in violation of council bylaws. Because noise is the byproduct of living and in voicing our noise we make audible the intimacy of community, where Others collide into a collective Self. And to paraphrase the siren on the rocks, we must increase the fucking thing. The romantic part of all of this is that our organic noise chaos is automatic; at a minimum all it requires is non-intervention (though a generalised renter's strike may be more effective). Even as rain falls the not-quite-flush exteriors in the medium density tenements accrue water stains. Colourbond flashings desaturate, windows collect the black spray of exhaust fumes; it's entirely obvious that no-one lives next door. And each instance of this is unique, and would proliferate without the market, because noise is natural and perennial and leaves gnarly cultural tangles wherever it finds itself.

But a lonely townhouse, however unkempt, does not a community make. Real, active intimacy is required. Listening to our streets, authoring our own worlds in whatever way we can, must be central to reclaiming any sense of control or autonomy over our suburbs: from the banks of the Kororoit to the Werribee plains, between Fawkner, Coburg, Pascoe Vale and Essendon, under a hazy lack of stars and hooning sedans, panting, wild, partly lost, bumps on our skin, tired feet and empty lots.











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the_coburg_plan Well over a year ago an older gentleman started work on this house- he built this rather alarming scaff and started meticulously removing each weatherboard, leaving small panels in strange spots inexplicably. I have no idea what the grand plan was, but he seemed to be enjoying the work- done at his own pace, celebrated each day with a bottle of beer. It's sitting now in exactly this state, bones exposed, work halted at some point, the site now surrounded by hurricane fencing. #thecoburgplan #coburg #bungalow#weatherboardhouse #oldhouse#vernaculararchitecture#australianarchitecture #suburban#melbourne #streetphotography #skeleton#construction #renovation

vanity.projects 🙄

twolittledickybirdys The whole thing looks dodgy as....wonder what on earth his future vision is/was.

tallstorey #novisiblemeansofsupport

the_coburg_plan @twolittledickybirdys it felt like he was replacing every single board, one at a time 🙄

Isabellaonabicycle I hope he completes it. Would live to see how it looks.

zoediac I pass this everyday, and wonder what will happen to it...

cieffetrade Looks goodly

the_coburg_plan Clinker bricks were originally considered refuse from the brick-making process: a mistake that became an aesthetic choice. They are dense and water proof, but not as good thermal conductivity as normal bricks. I love them, particularly the slightly blue cast that glints off the vitrified sections of brick. And also that zero ornament is required on a simple form: the material speaks for itself. #houses.#thecoburgplan #northcoburg#newlandsestate #gardensuburb#clinkerbrick #suburban #planning#architecture #streetphotography#commissionhousing

_____feyzal love these houses in Newlands estate, and am happy to see people renovating their property rather than the typical 'knock and build townhouse' phenomenon so pervasive in the rest of Coburg/Preston.

nicolebreedonNo ornament 4eva 🌸

the_coburg_plan@_feyzayazar_ there are lots of little adaptations- they are obviously great houses to live in as people like to and can readily personalize them.

the_coburg_plan @nicolebreedon lol 🙄🌸

dl_lr And a hell of a lot better than the pre fab concrete ones that came next - about as much thermal performance as a tent!

melburbian I think they're very pretty

rebeccajoyofficial Oh wow! TIL! 🌸🌸that's amazing. I love clinker brick too and didn't realise had been considered inferior. I just assumed it was a style.

rebeccajoyofficial @dl_lr we have a lot of the prefab ones in my area that came about in the 60s/70s. Full of asbestos and an eye saw. Some of the older red brick ones aren't so bad, but the fibro ones are awful. As are the chain link fences in the front yard. It's like they just stopped caring.



Clocks for seeing: Reflections, on photography November 2051

By Emma McRae

Where I live there used to be a photographic processing factory, the largest in Australia, so I am told. I know this because Mrs. Harper, who lives down the street at no. 12, keeps a photo of the old factory on her wall. “To keep the history alive,” she says. But the photo and the building appear dead to me: *heavy, motionless, stubborn*¹ – devoid of people, and even of trees.

It’s a large, modern building, with a row of very old cars parked out the front. The building was destroyed long ago and, apart from Mrs. Harper, few people seem to remember it at all. The photo haunts me. It’s a piece of a forgotten past hanging on the wall – and now in my memory. It seems to hint that there is some *funereal immobility, at the very heart of the moving world*.² This photo, taken in the ‘fashion days’, everything black and white, glamorous and cold, is a memory that belongs to a different time. No one takes photos anymore (not humans, anyway).

Around my home all the street names reference a history of photography: Spectrum Way, Focus Drive, Aperture Street, Red Box Street, Camera Walk, Rouse Street, Snapshot Drive. All these words tell me nothing about photography – how to take a photograph, what photography is, or what photography does. So I’ve started collecting photos, trying to understand. There aren’t many around but I’ve found some in collector’s shops and junk shops. This collecting is a bit like uncovering an *inventory of mortality*.³ Some of the photos are spellbinding and I feel *an irresistible compulsion to look*⁴ at them again and again. I’m starting to feel like I’m living inside someone else’s past. Could there be *a link...between photography, madness, and something*⁵ more frightening that has long since been forgotten?

Last week I visited the State Library Archives because they have lots of photos of that old building, the Kodak building, and some of them do have people in them – well, men anyway. I found one photograph that also includes a woman but there was no information about who she was.

Looking at these old photos makes me feel like *the little, tiny faces of the people in the pictures can see out at me*.⁶ Most of them are black and white, but even the colour Kodak photos, which have a lovely golden glow, feel a bit like looking at *the return of the dead*.⁷ I am surrounded now by photos of *what is dead, what is going to die*.⁸ I guess *photography had something to do with resurrection*,⁹ but these days we keep the stories of the dead alive through conversation and song.



the_coburg_plan @paperpinkhearts it’s sad isn’t it- housing used to be seen as a right that it was perfectly legitimate to expect the government to help provide in certain circumstances, and I think now it’s seen as a privilege that you earn as an individual. The gov seems much more concerned with providing ideal circumstances for investment purchases and developers than actually housing people. And architects seem less interested as a profession in solving public housing design- no cache in it. You can always tell housing commission because of the thoughtless use of cheap materials-nothing quite goes together. I’m sure it’s all solid, but it always looks a bit off.

rebeccajoyofficial @the_coburg_plan totally agree - now a lot of the public houses are integrated into the neighbourhoods differently. I think (could be wrong) that the housing commission buy up existing dwellings and rent those out. They definitely don’t create mini suburbs with matchy matchy houses like they once did. (Think Dallas)

dl_lr the prefab ones were a bit of a cutting-edge experiment at the time using new technology made out at Holmesglen, but they weren’t intended to last 50+ years without any maintenance. There’s some old photos showing them new with cute gardens etc, but unfortunately they’re a bit of a fizzer long term especially if you don’t have upkeep 😞

rebeccajoyofficial The Newlands estate and a couple of the older ones (there is one in Port Melbourne) are aesthetically pleasing to look at and aren’t a blight on the landscape. The ones (estates) that got slapped up later are just depressing. The interiors were constructed using the most basic the and cheapest materials they could find - it was almost degrading to the tenants.

the_coburg_plan Garden Cities, pioneered by Sir Ebenezer Howard, were envisioned as small hubs, independent from but in proximity to bigger cities and separated by a green belt that would halt sprawl. The idea morphed into Garden Suburbs, which adopted some of the basic principals, but applied them to outer suburbs which were still dependent on the cities they encircled: in effect extending sprawl. Newlands Estate is one of these proto-commuter exurbs, a latter day Caroline Springs. Set on a lush section of the Merri Creek, the streets curve languorously up and around its banks. There’s plenty of open space and small parks giving the name Garden Suburb some credence. It has a small shopping strip and a childcare centre- hall marks of a planned community. But it feels genuinely embedded in, not plonked on the landscape, and its courts and cul de sacs feel welcoming rather than disorienting. Here’s a view down a laneway from one such cul de sac, spying the handy playground in the park it wraps around. #houses. #thecoburgplan#northcoburg #newlandsestate#gardensuburb #clinkerbrick #suburban#planning #architecture #streetphotography#commissionhousing #plannedcommunity#exurb #greenbelt

¹ Barthes, Roland, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, tr. Richard Howard, Vintage Books, London, 2000, p.12

² Barthes, *op. cit.*, p.5-6

³ Sontag, Susan, *On Photography*, Penguin Books, London, New York, 2008, p.70.

⁴ Benjamin, Walter, ‘A short history of photography (1931),’ in *Screen*, volume 13, issue 1, 1 March 1972, p.7

⁵ Barthes, *op. cit.*, p.116

⁶ Benjamin, *op. cit.*, p.8

⁷ Barthes, *op. cit.*, p.9

⁸ Barthes, *op. cit.*, p.117

⁹ Barthes, *op. cit.*, p.82

*This link between photography and death haunts all the photographs of people*¹⁰ I find. I'm beginning to think it's impossible to look at a photo and not see encroaching death, and these photos too begin to haunt me.

At the SLA I've learned that Rouse—J.J.

Rouse—was the name of one of the two men who started the original company Baker and Rouse Australia Laboratory, which they later sold to the American-owned Eastman Kodak.

Sell outs.

Rouse was the business side of the company while Baker—Thomas Baker—stayed up all night making the dry plates covered in their fine layer of silver salts for capturing light. Those glass plates sound exceptionally fragile, and I like the fact that they were used right up until the end of 20c to photograph the stars: images of pure light.

I don't know what Baker did wrong that there's no street named after him.

Back then, in the 1880s, when they started their company, it took a long time to take a single photograph. The really early photos, from the 1830s look like *well-drawn or painted portraits*¹¹ and I read that, sometimes, to ensure the necessary *long exposures in the open*, they even staged them in cemeteries *where nothing could disturb concentration*.¹² That's creepy. But the photographs were valued as *unique copies and...were often kept in cases like jewellery*.¹³

It took nearly 100 years, but when cameras and film became lighter, cheaper, more accessible, photography exploded. Everyone, it seems, had a camera, and photography was soon subjected to our human compulsion *to generalise, to gregarine, to banalize*.¹⁴ People began to see through their cameras instead of their eyes.

In other words, people forgot how to see.

The reign of silver halide photography didn't last much longer, only about another 50 years. Once everything became distributed, the change was swift. Digital photography snowballed in the distributed age as a collective habit, but, ironically, there was really nothing collective about it. Despite all the sharing, our vision turned increasingly inward and we seem to have been oblivious to the insidious *shame* of photographing, above all else, *ourselves*.¹⁵ I guess this can be seen as the logical conclusion of the industrial process and *impatience with reality*¹⁶ through which the photograph was stripped of its value; an *inclination...to overcome uniqueness in every situation by reproducing it*.¹⁷ No need, anymore, for Mr. Baker and his beautiful glass plates.

There must have been something enjoyable about taking silver halide photos because some people kept doing it even after the digital revolution. Not many, though. I saw a report saying that, in 2017, 1.2 trillion photos were taken around the world. Most were digital – so easily created,

so easily erased. Our portable, transferrable memories; *the moment made eternal*.¹⁸ But that kind of memory can so easily be hacked. And eternity is... incalculable.

The age of Photography corresponds precisely to the explosion of the private into the public.¹⁹

A digital photograph, held (as if by magic) in the cloud, is too near eternity, too far from physical reality, for its existence, its function, to be fully conceivable. It's not really Kodak's fault, but when the company did its patent purge in early 21c in a desperate attempt to save itself, it sold us all to the multinationals—our privacy and our memories. All those Kodak moments.

In each photo I come across I feel compelled *to look for the tiny spark...of the here and now, with which reality has...seared the...picture*.²⁰ Yet throughout the age of photography, as *the practice of touching up* or doctoring the image *became widespread*,²¹ photography's link with reality became increasingly strained and it became impossible to claim with any certainty *that what* you saw in a photograph *had indeed existed*. Photography became *so many "performances"*,²² embodying the fictions we wanted to believe. Theatricality became our preferred version of reality.

But reality cannot be denied, it simply changes; and in changing, so much stays the same. With its pretense of preservation and Edenic illusions, in the end—like *a kind of primitive theatre*²⁴—photography did nothing to obscure the reality of our mortality. It revealed only, with increasing clarity, that we know ourselves to be hiding from this reality, this truth, and that we know this *through the labour of trying to forget it*.²⁵ *The fiction as such* became *unsustainable*,²⁶ people began to look away.

I wonder how many people noticed when that old Kodak factory closed down in 2004. The new houses were all built between 2012 and 2017, but not many people lived here then. I found a collection of photos taken at that time and it looks, not quite like a ghost town, maybe like an empty film set – *empty in the manner of a flat which has not yet found a new occupant*.²⁷ Repetition makes them eerie – even the gardens have matching trees, all grown to the same height.

Collecting these photos, I am compiling an image of the past, *fastened down, like butterflies*,²⁸ and while *it is good to collect things, ... it is better to go on walks*.²⁹ These photos seem to be a way of collecting while walking, so I walk around, holding them up in front of buildings to see if they match. I discover one of my own house.

I stick the photo on my wall.

It's so unfamiliar, so strange *in the immediacy of that long-past moment*.³⁰ But small fragments of my house are recognisable; *the future ... inserts itself* and, *looking back, I ...rediscover it*.³¹ Did the photographer know she was

¹⁰ Sontag, *op. cit.*, p.70

¹¹ Benjamin, *op. cit.*, p.17

¹² Benjamin, *op. cit.*, p.8

¹³ Benjamin, *op. cit.*, p.6

¹⁴ Barthes, *op. cit.*, p.118

¹⁵ Benjamin, *op. cit.*, p.18

¹⁶ Sontag, *op. cit.*, p.65

¹⁷ Benjamin, *op. cit.*, p.20

¹⁸ Sontag, *op. cit.*, p.65

¹⁹ Barthes, *op. cit.*, p.98

²⁰ Benjamin, *op. cit.*, p.7

²¹ Benjamin, *op. cit.*, p.18

²² Barthes, *op. cit.*, p.82

²³ Barthes, *op. cit.*, p.32

²⁴ Barthes, *op. cit.*, p.32

²⁵ Wall, Jeff, quoted in Fried, Michael, *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2008, p.12

²⁶ Fried, *op. cit.*, p.341

²⁷ Benjamin, *op. cit.*, p.21

²⁸ Barthes, *op. cit.*, p.57

²⁹ Anatole France, quoted in Chatwin, Bruce, *The Songlines*, Vintage Books, London, 1998, p.174

³⁰ Benjamin, *op. cit.*, p.7

Speculative Economies

By Eugenia Lim

“Culture is the commodity that sells all the others.”
—Situationist International

I
Labour

Look mum, turns out that I do have a job—as a ‘knowledge worker’¹, a ‘symbolic analyst’², a cultural capitalist, a shaper of cities (for better and worse). I am my own hedge fund manager, futures trader, ponzi-schemer and property merchant, only you can’t live in what I sell (unless you are a culture-loving ant who aspires to hide out in a USB furnished with existential angst-data). I am both worker and boss in one; conditions are renegotiated according to the dictates of the market, but in general terms: wages are set below minimum without a safety net or superannuation and with no certain demand for supply. Like so many of my peers born into industrialised economies, I have worked a series of part-time jobs since the moment it was legal for me to do so: hairdresser’s apprentice; fast food front-of-house; waiter; community arts worker; museum cultural officer and magazine editor. These jobs have always been both time-consuming and better-paid enough to displace my primary profession. Here, in my market-rental studio, I guess you could call what happens ‘labour’; my post-Fordist production line is an ailing Jonathan Ive device that contains less-than-legal software. I rise up in a Wikipedia-for-the-masses kind of way. As for what I make? It’s a trick of light: digital fiction that strives to be analogous to some higher, always out-of-focus truth. It’s speculation with all risk and almost no return.

II Speculation

Hito Steyerl, the all-seeing Nostradamus of our post-representational times, says that contemporary art is “the purest form of neoliberalism... no unworldly discipline nestled away in some remote ivory tower. On the contrary, it is squarely placed in the neoliberal thick of things.”³ For Steyerl, the hype, boom and bust associated with the buying and selling of contemporary art is analogous to the march of post-Cold War capitalism and geopolitical power-play with its globalised “credit addiction and bygone bull markets.”⁴ Is it a coincidence that Jeff Koons—art factory-owner, boss to over ninety

¹ Steyerl, Hito, ‘Politics of Art: Contemporary Art and the Transition to Post-Democracy’, e-flux journal #21, December 2010

² Ibid

³ Ibid

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Ibid

photographing a disappearing world?³² Seeing backwards in time like this, I suddenly understand how *the difference between technology and magic is entirely a matter of historical variables*.³³ Walking with these photos carries me *back to somewhere in myself*.³⁴ I can almost hear *the photographic mechanism*, ...

... krzk,
... krzk,

... as though *cameras ... were clocks for seeing*,³⁵

and it makes me *understand the word ‘place’ as a verb rather than a noun ... which exists in our doings: walking, talking, living*.³⁶

For weeks now I have been carrying these photos with me, like *injuries of time*,³⁷ feeling a closeness with this photographer – her walking, her camera. She gives me vision in a way that all our 21c optics cannot, and I feel myself passing *beyond the unreality of the thing represented*,³⁸ entering *into the object*³⁹ until I *confront ... the wakening of intractable reality*.⁴⁰

Perhaps, beyond the hacking and the theft and the identity probes, what people fear is photography itself – *its madness*.⁴¹ I am confronted, in every photo, by my ‘self’, my own being: *I am alive here and now*,⁴² and the fact that I am here, looking at this photo, is the *underlying truth about photography—that it had the beholder in view from the first*—that can *no longer be denied*.⁴³ I must accept some *responsibility in what I am looking at*.⁴⁴

And suddenly I feel that all photography, all of time, is here and now, reminding me and reminding me that time is; that there is destruction but there is also light. As I awaken to this awareness of time—indifferent, insistent time, to which we all must succumb—I see that, across that spectrum of light and dark, *this is what human beings are capable of doing*.⁴⁵ The photos whisper to me: *Don’t forget*.

I put the photographs down and go for a walk.

- ³¹ Benjamin, *op. cit.*, p.7
- ³² Sontag, *op. cit.*, p.62-63
- ³³ Benjamin, *op. cit.*, p.7-8
- ³⁴ Barthes, *op. cit.*, p.40
- ³⁵ Barthes, *op. cit.*, p.15
- ³⁶ Gill, Simryn quoted by Fitzgerald, Michael, “Against Blankness: The Inhabiting Spaces of Simryn Gill,” in *ArtAsiaPacific*, Issue 82, March/April 2013, available from: <http://artasiapacific.com/Magazine/82/AgainstBlanknessTheInhabitingSpacesOfSimrynGill>
- ³⁷ Sontag, *op. cit.*, p.69
- ³⁸ Barthes, *op. cit.*, p.116
- ³⁹ Becher, Hilla, quoted in Fried, *op. cit.*, p.22
- ⁴⁰ Barthes, *op. cit.*, p.119
- ⁴¹ Barthes, *op. cit.*, p.118
- ⁴² Barthes, *op. cit.*, p.84
- ⁴³ Fried, *op. cit.*, p.26
- ⁴⁴ Bustamante, Jean-Marc quoted in Fried, *op. cit.*, p.20
- ⁴⁵ Sontag, Susan, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, St Martins Press, New York, 2003, p.115
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.115

assistants and one of the most spectacularly remunerated artists of our times—was also once a Wall Street commodities broker? From Chelsea, New York, to Collingwood, Melbourne: Art, just like capital, “pollutes, gentrifies and ravishes.”⁵

Yet Scott’s choice to show images from her long-term project The Coburg Plan in a gallery context in 2016, as an un-funded exhibition within an artist-run-space with its own rental contract—the gallery itself a tenant within a larger post-industrial complex owned by an architect—brings money and real estate into the equation. In her enquiry, her choice of exhibition context and economic conditions, Scott’s project was implicated in the rise (and rise) of the Melbourne property market. The streetscape of Scott’s local neighbourhood appears in this volume as the new frontier in property speculation, and the all-too rapid transformation of local built and social histories into generic housing ‘stock’. Post-war bungalows are bought up then razed; the ground below now far more valuable than the cultural value embedded in brickwork.

III

Suburban skin

“The suburb is Australia’s greatest achievement.
Not it’s proudest... there’s no collective pride in the suburb, only a huge collection of individual prides.”
– Robin Boyd, The Australian Ugliness

In his 1960 book The Australian Ugliness, Robin Boyd rallied against ‘Featurism’: what he saw as artifice, embellishments and kitsch in Australian culture and architecture that masked, he believed, a deep-seated anxiety about national identity and cultural displacement. Scott’s near-obsessive visual cataloguing of the transformation from the suburban Featurism of Boyd’s time to our own contemporary developer-driven malaise depicts the attraction/repulsion that comes with gentrification. In the immortal cycle of cities and suburbs on the rise: first come the working class, then immigrants, then artists, then cafes, shops and live music. Once a locale has ‘buzz’ and becomes celebrated for its ‘vibrancy’—its curtains. Next will come the unscrupulous developer and his vision of mediocrity writ as aluminium-framed, concrete-rendered multi-dwellings. Scott’s archive of an ever-changing suburb sets the scene for ambivalence. We sense the cultural fallout that comes with downsizing the Australian dream. The *dérive* and psychogeography of the Situationists is transposed to the waxing and waning housing typologies in the streets and surrounds of Scott’s own neighbourhood.

IV

Impermanence

Real estate is not something that is seen as seductive or worthy of intellectual thought. Yet it is arguably the thing that most shapes our cities, our suburbs and our lives. Books on architecture abound, but where is the critical thinking and pedagogy on real estate? Jack Self’s Real Estate Architecture Laboratory publishes the quarterly magazine REAL Review; both practice and publishing arm approach architecture as design with spatial and civic consequences, and “real estate as the manifestation of complex social, political and economic power relations.”⁶

In his book How Buildings Learn, Stewart Brand (founder of the Whole Earth Catalogue) writes that the idea of permanence in architecture is an illusion: “A building is a verb and a noun. A ‘building’ is always building and rebuilding. The idea is crystalline, the fact fluid.”⁷ To Brand, only ‘flow’—the continual building, re-skinning and remodeling of our built environment—is constant. Fixes and ornamentation become features. Each building lives three lives, all at once: as habitat, as property and as a part of the surrounding community and context. As Brand says, “The most immediate conflict is financial. Is your house primarily a home or primarily an asset?”⁸ I can imagine him walking with Scott and her camera through the ever-developing, increasingly beige, ruins-in-reverse streets of Coburg as he muses on the tension between use-value (house-as-home) and market-value (house-as-property): “Seeking to be anybody’s house, it becomes nobody’s.”⁹

⁶ <http://real.foundation/>

⁷ Brand, Stewart, *How Buildings Learn*, Penguin Books, New York, 1994

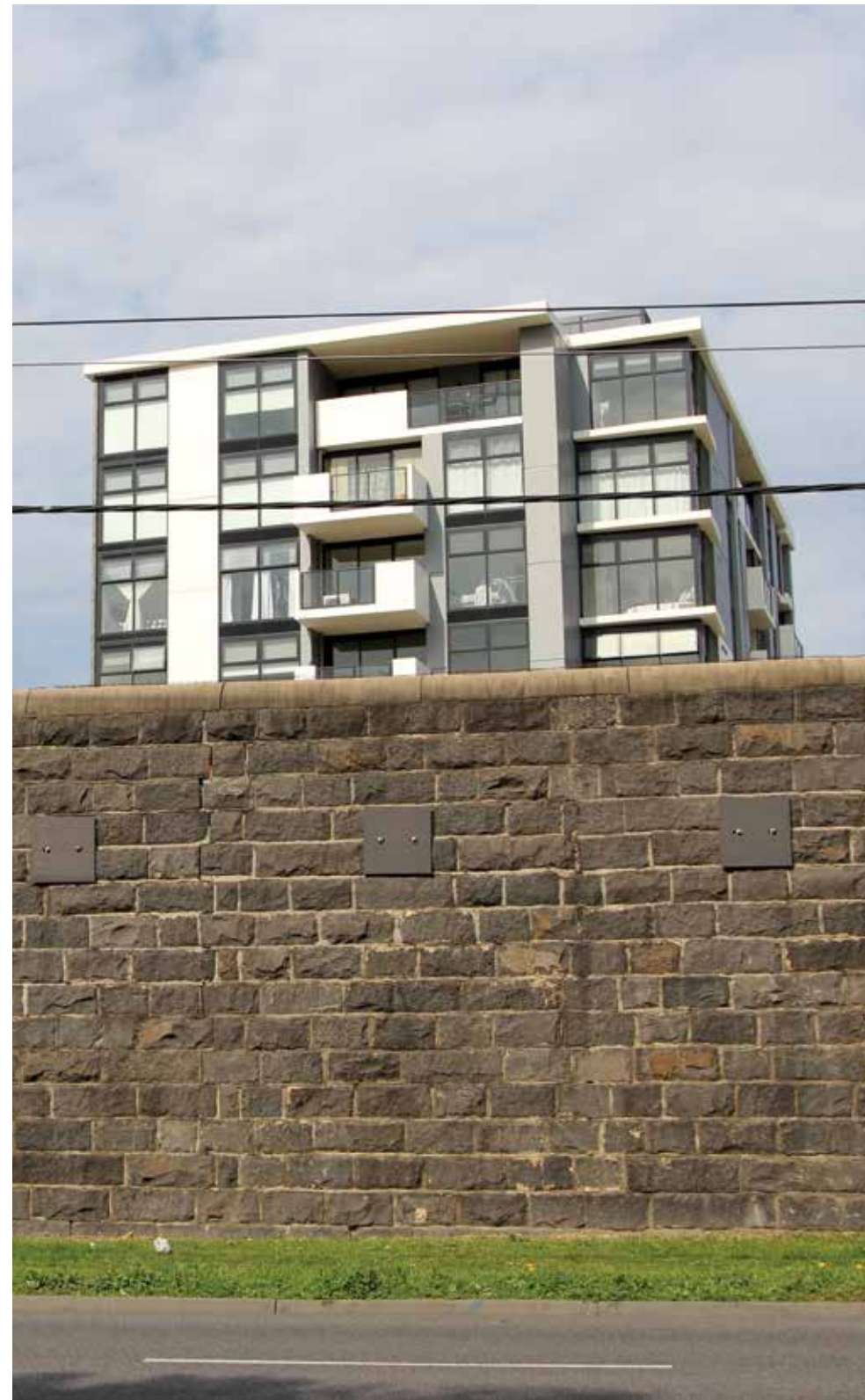
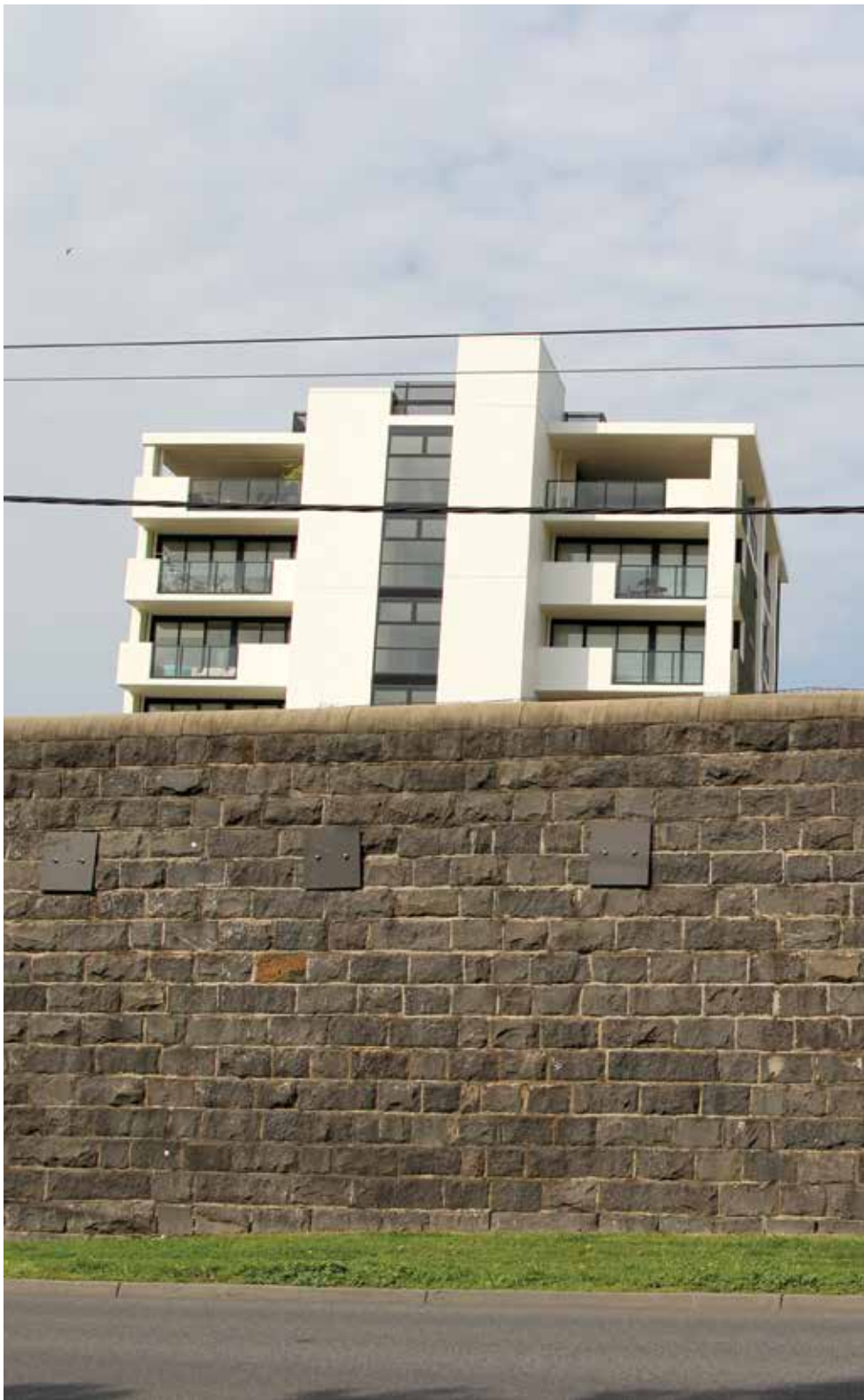
⁸ *Ibid*

⁹ *Ibid*



















the_coburg_plan One of the first brochures issued by Satterley called for community contributions to the heritage planning of the site: this appears to manifest mostly in cute street names like "Spectrum Way". Although the ghost of the monolithic mid-century Kodak factory does haunt the site. Wandering around all those "clean lines" and "contemporary designs" does make you wonder what hath modernism wrought? All the efficiency of the new construction methods with out any of that pesky material integrity...That said, I kinda like this weird corner of the site, where the monochromatic and geometric patterns of the terraces seem to bleed out onto the street. To quote one of the builder/developers own marketing copy: "It's all pretty special" #thecoburgplan#coburghill #kodak #midcentury#housingdevelopment #newconstruction#newmodernism #heritage #suburban#melbourne #architecture #special#streetphotography

tgittify Or, what has a poor copy of modernist aesthetics wrought? These joints will betray their 'cleanliness' to the elements in 6 months, you wait.

kelami Arg it's so easy to be sarcastic - but displaying the air con like that maintains the air con's integrity, very honest !

the_coburg_plan @kelami lol, it's true- there's really not much else you can do with them. They look particularly funny hanging out on balconies like that tho.

nickrichards__ The houses in the last three posts I've legit worked on all of them @lachlangeleit @mattaleardi @mattwatkins7

lachlangeleit You must go see the Vale factory @nickrichards__ tourist attaction

the_coburg_plan I might be projecting/ over thinking it, but something about these apartments does make me think of analog film: canisters, enlargers, developing tanks, slide projectors, camera attachments: all the machinery and gear that was attendant to that medium. Perhaps it is just an product of the fact that photography was an artform of the machine age, and architecture having been transformed by it. Everything looks like gear now. #thecoburgplan #coburghill#kodakfactory #housingdevelopment#newconstruction #apartments #architecture#suburban #melbourne #streetphotography

wildvagrant totally agree that they have machine-part vibes....satisfying interlocking sameness. 🤖🔧

iswoodcock #sketchupitecture

tallstorey Yes have the regularity without the irregularity, just a rhythm of alternating light and dark. Like how film works !

the_coburg_plan @tallstorey ha yes!

kirstenseale @the_coburg_plan I think you are being very generous! The positive/negative paintwork could also be connected to the medium of film itself. On the other hand, the shapes and palette are consistent with the modernism-lite that dominates new housing design today, and does not diverge from the formulaic charcoal-beige colour spectrum. (Come to think of it, modernism, and its connection to modernity, are also interconnected with film...)

the_coburg_plan @kirstenseale yes this is the whole thing I find interesting about the site: the nexus between its history and present as manifestations/fallouts of modernism

kirstenseale @the_coburg_plan thanks for drawing my attention to this site. I find it a fascinating mix of urban design, contemporary modes of modernism, place, and cultural memory: all research interests of mine. I would love to visit and walk around next time in Melbourne.



the_coburg_plan @kirstenseale no worries 😊 your research sounds interesting, where would I find your work?

kirstenseale @the_coburg_plan At the moment, I'm looking at nostalgia and cultural representations of modernist housing estates in Singapore - though I haven't published on that yet. There is a link to my blog in my bio. You might like this post given your interest on street names 📄 <https://marketsplacescities.wordpress.com/2016/04/21/language-in-the-landscape/> I also wrote a book that looks at ideas and practices of the urban and place through the prism of local marketplaces. It's titled -what else? 📖 Markets, places, cities and is published by Routledge.

the_coburg_plan @kirstensealeawesome, thank you- lots for me to look up!

the_coburg_plan @kirstenseale ps have you seen my work Death Watch? It's about the old Moonee Ponds market site- finally being developed after 15 years of planning malaise...is on my website 🙌

the_coburg_plan Moreland's Council Objectives for Redevelopment of the former Kodak site document is an illuminating read. There are many high-minded and forward thinking values and goals asserted. I can imagine it must take some ingenuity for developers to contort around the restrictions documents like this assert in terms of sustainability and environment, open space, affordable housing, disability access etc etc I wonder where the line between willingness to adhere to such objectives intersects with genuine desire? Are there any big developers who seem to have good values? In any case, I like this linear park that runs through the centre of Coburg Hill: across several blocks, with rows of townhouses either side, and a nice view of the back of Conga Foods on Newlands Rd. There are these dorky little exercise corners and some street furniture, which *might* get used, can't hurt. But mostly I hopefully imagine the street parties, kids birthdays, soccer matches and naughty teen rendezvous that might happen here and reckon it's probably going to be a good place to live. *#thecoburgplan #coburghill#linear-park #camerawalk#streetphotography #housing-development#urbanplanning #landscape #architecture#suburban #melbourne #densification*

debsiedoll They stick to the bare minimum requirements to get their planning and building permits.

tallstorey That's the most spindly exercise equipment I've ever seen ! Wonder if this park is now officially owned by Moreland ? And yes developers always argue their way out of too much public anything - they have accountants to prove they can't 'afford' whatever it might be, in this case, keeping the nice 60s Kodak admin building despite it being heritage listed. Though the park is unusually generous.

the_coburg_plan @tallstorey there are some great photos online of the old Kodak buildings- it looked like a Tacita Dean film towards the end- the windows all broken, total urban decay porn. I think the park is public space- seems to be their answer to council requirements- not a terrible one. It's very open and rolls down to the creek path.



the_coburg_plan I found this mural tucked away down a dead-end street that might eventually be an entry point to this ironic housing estate. There is no didactic information attached to the work but the fact it has been incorporated into an otherwise non-descript apartment block in an otherwise dead zone suggests it was a protected part of the prison buildings. Murals may be a slightly outdated trope of community art, but they speak unavoidably to those original placemakers-the people who already live there. This one is intriguingly ambiguous and points to two current absences on the site: public art, and any obvious acknowledgement of the area's indigenous population, history or contemporary cultures. Pentridge continues to fascinate me, whether for its real potential, bloody awkwardness or sheer black comedy, I often think: this could not have happened in any other place. *#thecoburg-plan #coburg#pentridge #housingestate#new-construction #housingdevelopment#community #art #indigenous #mural#suburban #street-photography #melbourne*

jojothedfgo I grew up being able to see Pentridge from my bedroom window- a sobering reminder as a teenager to keep on the straight and narrow. As a child, in the 70s, lots of helicopters overhead were a bad sign- either there was something horrible going down in the gaol or a prisoner had escaped. Our heavily-pregnant neighbour once found an escapee huddled up in her laundry. My primary school was next door to Pentridge and every year we would be marched over to visit "Santa" in H Division. Madness. We actually used to sit on the prisoners' knees and tell them our Christmas wishes. 🙏🙏🙏🙏

the_coburg_plan @jojothedfgo amazing!!!! Growing up in the north-west (moonee ponds) it definitely loomed large in our imaginations...not quite in our laundries tho 🙌 that is definitely what I mean about black humour- I mean, where else but coburg???

tallstorey That mural ?? The whole building must be new judging from the half sunk car park and conc block, so it must've been commissioned, part commemoration, part livening up a dead space.

the_coburg_plan @tallstorey yeah the building is definitely new, but not sure about the mural. It's a pretty ambiguous set of images, not by professional artist, I don't think. I could be wrong, but this blogger suggests they were taken from somewhere else on the grounds, and that feels right to me: <https://www.melbournearcritic.com/2014/11/17/pentridge-more-on-prison-art/amp/?client=safari> if so, I'm glad they were saved, they are really compelling. I wonder if anyone from @pentridgevillage can enlighten us?

the_coburg_plan @pentridgecoburg I mean!

tallstoreyYes I guess they could have come from somewhere else, though if they were on a wall, a bit hard to transplant !



the_coburg_plan I took a stroll through Pentridge the other day. It's still somewhat of a dog's breakfast. Under a new master plan, with massive new works underway, it can't seem to get out from under that old chestnut: the maximum security prison chestnut. I kind of like the defiant Coburg-ian gesture of it, trying to make out like it's just another heritage building, so what? But the stern, hard bluestone, supposedly quarried out of the nearby creek by the prisoners themselves (ok, apocryphal) won't bend to anything. As if finally understanding this, the developers seem to have just gone and built EVERYTHING. *#thecoburgplan #coburg#pentridge #bluestone #newconstruction#multidwelling #densification #gentrification#heritage #suburban #streetphotography#prison*

andykitten As someone who lives inside the bluestone, the developers are heartless profiteers. They plan to build 18 story towers which will block views for many current residents. There's no need for that amount of apartments. Come and walk down Industry Lane to see heritage and development done right

the_coburg_plan @andykitten there are parts of the site that are frankly beautiful, I agree. But what they're building now seems a bit frenzied... two more posts on this, stay tuned!

Tallstorey Years ago the developers (possibly ones who've sold on) said the whole idea of their plans, especially the tower permitted to sit on top of the champ street corner wall (!), was to overcome (I think or overwhelm) the idea it was a prison !

the_coburg_plan @tallstorey I think they might actually be close to achieving that now, definitely feels overwhelming!

tallstorey 🙄



the_coburg_plan "Walking through the suburb where I grew up, childhood memories are blurred; nothing looks the same anymore. Multi-storey apartment buildings dominate and industrial chic cafés adorn the retail strip. The sleek reinventions suggests a larger metropolis, contradicted slightly by the original weatherboard train station, a remaining icon of the suburb's past. These shifts are exciting, demonstrating Melbourne's confidence as it grows and projects forward. Yet within the transformation I am met with uncertainty. I can't remember what used to be here, before the apartments and cafés." - Timmah Ball, From Prison to Village: The architectural reframing of Melbourne's dark past, from Inflection, Vol 02 Projection

"A world that won't forget is a world drowned in its not forgetting. Do we want a world full of unedited memory? To be human is to be finite." Tacita Dean, Film: Tacita Dean *#thecoburgplan #coburghill #tacita-dean#timmahball #architecture #memory#newconstruction #film #streetphotography#suburban #melbourne*

twolittledickybirdys So much lack of soul in one building.

george.bowie Is she describing Coburg? Cus outside of the prison, which was in disuse anyway, it's still 80% the same as it was when I grew up in the 90's.

cookieaux This account is making me gag 🤢🙄

the_coburg_plan @george.bowie no Timmah Ball is talking about where she grew up, but the piece was about Pentridge.

ratcod Fuck, imagine if that was your house

chohicks I like your account, and I agree the architecture isn't pretty, but, gee. It's nothing compared to where I live. We've got 20 towers over 20 stories in addition to most of this stuff.

chohicks We can see the towers everywhere. They loom in every direction from the places we used to work. They're built by outsiders, funded by outsiders, lived in by outsiders. I'd change places in a second. Things could be worse.

siddless I'm lucky that the neighbourhood I grew up in in Coburg in the 60s and 70s had some sort of heritage overlay put on it some years back where the outside cannot be changed. So anytime I go past nothing changes.

the_coburg_plan @chohicks thanks 🙄 I guess the point of my project is documenting a process of change that is happening rapidly in my city. Asking some questions, pointing some stuff out. We are on track to rise from a population of 3million to 8million in the coming decades and densification is going to happen. But I feel like we could have a choice about how it happens.

chohicks @the_coburg_plan if you were in England, I guess I'd encourage you to get some friends as an entryist group into the Coburg historical society to get them to use their voice as a lobbying group to influence the local development plan of your local council, to push for the standards you want, to preserve what you think is important and make sure development is sympathetic to local character.

the_coburg_plan @chohicks I live in Coburg and certainly get involved in local issues, but I'm primarily an artist, not an activist. So part of what I do does have political implications, but it's not the whole goal. Through my photographs I'm trying to get people to pay attention to something- something I'm seeing- in a different way to how they normally would. What they do with that is up to them- some of them may indeed be inspired to take up arms in local planning battles!! I see art as a fundamentally different activity to politics/activism, even though they can overlap.



the_coburg_plan Closing out the week with a spray of hideosity: this is what they built on the site of "my" old milk bar- 6 units, barely the size of the average flat, squeezed onto this double-fronted shop site. The rear set were going for \$550K each, the corner job, which looks like it's got its head screwed on wrong, for \$650K. Two have already have For Lease signs up- a check of the online listing reveals them to be truly unconscionable dogboxes. "Townhomes" is the euphemistic real estate double-speak they've invented for these ones. *#thecoburgplan #coburg #multidwelling#townhome #densification #gentrification#newconstruction #dogboxes#streetphotography #suburban #melbourne#cityofmoreland #moreland*

bv__photomelb Eyesores these things are. I live a block away from them. Developers have bought the property next to us for 1.2mil (place is a dump but has potencial) 3 townhouses to be built with laneway access. Tell you now the car spaces are very tight and they will just park on the street. We are already fighting over car spaces anyway.

funkbunny Just up the road from me... Horrid.

lord_fry Just come home from visiting someone who lives on a similar townhouse. Really no bigger than my unit and obvious maintenance issues for such a recent building. My complex was built in 1974 and even though it is getting older, it's holding up rather well.

lalalazer *#townhome* what a joke, I don't like it.

davidwadelton Yikes! Is this Reynard St @ the_coburg_plan ?

lindakarafili Sadly Coburg is filling up with hideous buildings like this.

the_coburg_plan @davidwadelton yep, unfortunately

Jessie Scott

interviews Frank Lloyd Wrong

@uglymelbournehouses



isabellaonabicycle I get so frustrated when I look at homes for sale and they mention 'possibility for subdivision' (STCA) .

davidwadelton @the_coburg_plan the Milk Bar that was demolished to make way for this eyesore was a favourite of mine, with vintage Tarax signs. Reynard Street has been vandalised.

the_coburg_plan @davidwadelton agree! They retained the facade while it was being demolished but was deemed too unstable in the end (I suspect this was all formality and they always intended to rip it down- I can see no reason not to be cynical). I documented at each stage of the process, but sadly don't have pictures of the "before". They were lovely people who ran the milk bar too, and although as a business it was pretty tired, it was a great loss on many fronts.

kustommoto It is almost impressive how perfectly integrated the bland textures, glass and various shades of grey meld with the gloomy skies overhead. The only way you'd make these places have any warmth is literally setting them on fire!

the_coburg_plan @isabellaonabicycle instant demolition in other words 🍷 they don't even bother posting photos of the inside- just the aerial shot with the outline and square meterage

the_coburg_plan Another classic "feature" of the modern unit/townhouse: perennial water stains down their sad rendered faces. These begin to appear within the first year of construction. I can only assume due to inadequate drainage/total lack of eaves (also contributing to top floors being hotboxes that need a split system in every room to be bearable in summer) #thecoburgplan#cityofmoreland #moreland #coburg#multidwelling #newconstruction#densification #gentrification #suburban#melbourne #streetphotography #houses

tgittify It's actually batshit cray these building practices continue #quality

susie_zarris Yep and they are everywhere

lalalazer 🙄

tallstorey 🙄 and same the edge of every single sticking out balcony - which should have a drain back to a downpipe within the building (ie the wastewater) but no it just dribbles over the front.

gemmola 🙄

klm_66 So ugly. These townhouses replaced a gorgeous Californian bungalow with

klm_66 With an amazing coco Palm tree, and on the corner was our local.milk bar for many years. Some may consider this progress.....

sambassadorofsydney I bet the owners think it's gorgeous.

Jessie Scott: Can you tell me a bit about how and why you started the Instagram account Ugly Melbourne Houses?

Frank Lloyd Wrong: It started about four years ago and when I first discovered the excellent @uglybelgianhouses feed.

I love comedy and I love architecture and I love Melbourne; it seemed like something that could work and something I would enjoy. I contacted them and asked permission to use the name and the rest... they say... is history?

It also became a fantastic way to explore the city. There's nothing like getting lost on an ugly safari to discover parts of suburbia you would have never had reason to visit otherwise.

I never really had any specific plan for the account. I was pretty bored with all the endless beauty portrayed on Instagram. Ugliness was an untapped market.

JS: There is a bit of overlap in some of the subjects we both cover in our separate accounts. One difference, though, is that I take all my own photos, and you solicit and receive loads of submissions from your followers. Can you describe how that process evolved on Instagram, and how you now decide what is or isn't an Ugly Melbourne House?

FLW: The first few years were all my own photographs. Things changed radically when Instagram introduced direct messaging; suddenly people were doing my work for me and I started receiving a lot of submissions. I felt like I'd gone from being a one-man band desperately eking out a meagre existence to some sort of multi-national, corporate conglomerate, ugly consultancy. It was very much like what Tony Montana must have felt like in Scarface, except I am yet to be gunned down in a hail of bullets, which is nice.

How do I choose the houses? Well, McMansions get immediate VIP access, a free drinks card and all they can eat render. I have so much time for The Moderne Faux Neo Mock Tudor Parisian Style that is so prevalent in our suburbs. I think the correct

real estate agent's expression is 'timeless beauty'. But that might be something to do with losing their Rolex's in indoor water features.

Other houses get posted simply because there is something bizarre or unusual about them that ignites my imagination: giant porticos; large pink archways; entire purple facades; and massive black glazed circular bay windows will always get a house a gig. However, I post houses that are just plain uninteresting and then it becomes a bit of a challenge for me to see how abstract I can be with the captions.

JS: I have found that since I moved The Coburg Plan to Instagram, after several years of it existing as a range of gallery-based shows, I have had so much more engagement with my work, and from a much more diverse range of people. I have architects, artists, builders, real estate agents (LOL), planners, photographers, and lots of local residents following my account and commenting on my images regularly. It's stepped up my game in many ways, and I love that I can connect my work with people from across many of the areas the work addresses, in this really targeted way. But it sometimes also puts a slight pressure on to get the likes, which makes me feel weird because contemporary artists aren't used to getting likes in this economy.

How would you characterise your audience on Instagram? How do you engage with them, and them with each other, and has it changed how or why you post?

FLW: I never wanted Ugly Melbourne Houses to be narrow in its audience. The more the merrier. I went to the dentist recently, who, without knowing what I did, started telling me about my account. I didn't reveal my identity until I was sure he had finished drilling.

I like the fact that there is no typical Ugly Melbourne Houses follower. It keeps me on my toes and ensures I don't disappear too far up my own triple en suite.

I do love the commentary on the posts. It's a fascinating insight into how people deal with, and discuss, the concept of ugliness. It's an incredibly controversial topic, particularly if your own house is posted. Many of the houses I post, I really, really like, which seems odd.

JS: There is a very sarcastic tone to your captions, but often underlying them is quite a straight design critique, which is a great contrast and which is what I think people enjoy about your account. It's not just straight

sledging, it's like you're saying, "Ok, if we are forced to look at this stuff all day, can we treat it like any other architecture and break it down properly?" Which to me belies the sarcasm and hints at a deeper agenda to what you're doing. Can you tell me if you have a deeper agenda? What, apart from LOLS and internet back-slaps, is the goal of Ugly Melbourne Houses?

FLW: Ugly Melbourne Houses is a very personal undertaking, both in exploration of housing and language. My natural sarcasm rises to the surface, it's very hard to hide.

I find typical architectural criticism a bit elitist. I like to think Ugly Melbourne Houses creates a more accessible and, more importantly, enjoyable alternative. I have had a lot of feedback from people saying that it has changed the way they look at the buildings around them. I like this because it's also changed the way I look at buildings.

There is, however, a gigantically massive scowling elephant in the room: the homeowners. This is the tough, slightly mean-spirited side of Ugly Melbourne Houses that I constantly battle with. I am always very careful not to directly or personally insult the residents. I always make sure my focus is firmly on their inanimate million-dollar asset.

JS: I love the idea of an 'ugly safari' (and I think you need to copyright that term, stat, and start Ugly Melbourne House tours) and I definitely relate to the idea of exploring new terrain through taking photographs. My whole Coburg body of work comes from the fact that I'm a walker—initially it was walking my dog, then my baby that led me to start noticing and documenting my environs. So, I'm wondering if you can expand a little on the term 'ugly safari'—do you think walking through a suburb gives you a different experience of architecture?

FLW: Most definitely, walking is a great way to discover the nooks and crannies of the city. However, my safaris have always been fast-paced affairs involving cars or bicycles. That way I can cover far more ground and really explore the depths of suburbia. For some reason, I've always considered what I do as some sort of clandestine guerrilla activity, which when you really think about it, is totally incorrect. I'm basically just a guy taking photos of houses... and then posting them online... and calling them ugly.... and... well... that's um...yep. OK.

The best safaris are the ones where I get totally lost. There's nothing quite like getting out into the wild unknown, with only your wits, a partially

charged iPhone and an insatiable spirit of adventure. In place of the Serengeti, I have the outer suburbs of Melbourne; and in place of a herd of grazing zebra, I have a majestically over-scaled, four-bedroom, three-bathroom, plus home theatre and rumpus extension McMansion with a purple floral entry portico and three-car garage.

- JS: I'm also interested in your disdain for all the architectural beauty on Instagram. I think there is a filter or effect for almost any topic on Instagram – the excising and amplifying of ideal elements out of the mess and chaos of real life. But architectural photography in general already has that factor—often it is all about aesthetic beauty, line and form—and abstracting the building out of its environment, displaying it as a design object. Are there other kinds of architectural photography? Are you interested in that as a form, and if so, what sort of photography do you think best serves architecture?
- FLW: To quote Donald Trump, “There’s no one who loves beautiful architectural photography more than I do...” It’s just, I am more curious about a darker side of architecture. Houses get old, they decay, they are poorly built, they are garish and they can be just downright ugly. The architectural money shot keeps away from this ugliness and presents us with a sanitised version of the truth. I guess I see Ugly Houses as being very honest; they never lie to me.
- JS: Finally, what sort of house does Ugly Melbourne Houses live in?
- FLW: Ah, the million-dollar question. Well, I designed it myself using the classic Awkward Boxy Gold Tinged Grey Wooden Robot Style but with a definite nod towards the Post Faux Poorly Considered Drainpipe on Dubiously Proportioned Eastern Elevationism. My neighbours all secretly agree that its ugly, but I know they know and they know I know they know. Everyone is happy about that, especially me because after all, what you know they don’t know you know... can’t hurt you.
- From some angles I love my house and from others, it’s pretty damn ugly... but who cares right?

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Principal Artist

Jessie Scott is a practising video artist, writer, programmer and producer who works across the spectrum of screen culture in Melbourne. She is a founding member of audiovisual art collective Tape Projects and co-directed and founded the inaugural Channels Video Art Festival in 2013. Jessie's video and photography work concerns the affective fabric connecting place, community and the built environment. Some of this work can be seen on her Instagram account @the_coburg_plan. She is also actively engaged with the politics of parenting while making art via various collaborations examining the daily compromise at the nexus of being an artist, mother and worker. Recent solo exhibitions include Death Watch at Screen Space (2012); The Coburg Plan (2013) and Romance Traces (2014) at Tinning Street; Miraculous Ribbon (2015) at Grey Gardens; and Multidwelling (2016) at Bus Projects. She has performed extensively with sound artist Alice Hui-Sheng Chang since 2011, and she has performed and screened her work widely in Melbourne as well as in Sydney, Hobart, Alice Springs, Taipei, Tainan and Brooklyn. She currently teaches video art at RMIT and in 2017 was shortlisted for the inaugural Footscray Art Prize.

Writers

Timmah Ball is a writer, spoken word artist and urban researcher of Ballardong Noongar descent. She has written for The Griffith Review, Cordite, Meanjin, Overland, Westerly Magazine and won the Patricia Hackett Prize for writing. She wrote and performed Last Stone Left for Yirramboi Festival and co-produced Wild Tongue zine for Next Wave Festival in 2018. Her first chapbook will be released late 2018 with Rabbit Poetry.

Tilde Joy is a writer, musician, activist, retail employee and transwoman living and working in Narm/ Melbourne. Her background includes a slew of gallery installations as a sound artist and computer technician; a history of improvised guitar performances; organising in artist collectives and trade unions; and publishing emerging artists' written, sounded, seen, thought and felt media. She is currently acting as noise correspondent and co-editor for the workers' publishing house ULTROS_PROFESSIONAL.

Eugenia Lim is an Australian artist who works across video, performance and installation. Interested in how nationalism and stereotypes are formed, Lim invents personas to explore the tensions of an individual within society—the alienation and belonging in a globalised world. Lim's work has been exhibited, performed and screened locally and internationally at venues, festivals and fairs that include: Tate Modern, GOMA, ACMI, HUN Gallery NY, Next Wave, FACT Liverpool, 24HR Art (Darwin), Substation (Singapore), Schoolhouse Studios, Experimenta, Sydney Contemporary, Melbourne Festival, ACAF (Shanghai), TINA, Dark MOFO, Bus Projects, West Space and MPavilion. Collaboration, artistic community and the intersection between art and society informs her practice. In addition to her solo work, she co-directed the inaugural Channels Video Art Festival, is a board member at Next Wave, the founding editor of Assemble Papers and co-founded Tape Projects.

Emma McRae is a curator and writer. From 2008-2017 Emma was Curator at the Australian Centre for the Moving Image where she curated exhibitions including Philippe Parreno: Thenabouts (2016), Daniel Crooks: Phantom Ride (2016), Candice Breitz: The Character (2013), Star Voyager: Exploring Space on Screen (2012), Game Masters (2012), and Hollywood Remix (2009). Emma was Project Manager & Associate Curator with Experimenta Media Arts from 2004-2008, where she co-curated Experimenta Playground (2007) and Experimenta Vanishing Point (2005) (both co-curated with Liz Hughes). Emma has also curated screening programs for organisations including Next Wave, Sydney Film Festival and Urban Screens Melbourne. Emma's writing has been published nationally and internationally in exhibition catalogues and publications including RealTime, un Magazine, Assemble Papers, Broadsheet Journal, and art.es.

Maggie Scott is a writer from Melbourne. She has co-edited and contributed to two anthologies of women writers published by Pan Macmillan, Just Between Us (2013) and Mothers and Others (2015). Her writing has also appeared in Kill Your Darlings and The Big Issue. In a closely related parallel universe, she is a film buff which has led to volunteer feature film previewing for MIFF, and reviews for the Screen Machine TV and Picture Skew blogs. She is currently a co-host of the Club Soderbergh, the incredibly niche podcast chronologically following the feature films of director Steven Soderbergh.

Kyle Weise is a writer and curator. Together with Simone Hine, he co-founded and co-directed two Melbourne art galleries: the not-for-profit gallery Screen Space dedicated to the moving image (2010-2016), and the commercial gallery Beam Contemporary (2010-2014). He has curated or

co-curated exhibitions in Brisbane, Melbourne, Sydney, Perth, Miami and Milan, and has written widely about contemporary Australian art, across catalogue essays and articles for Eyeline, Dissect, un Magazine and Millennium Film Journal, among others. Together with Simone Hine, he has recently founded Kuiper Projects, an independent art initiative in Brisbane, and is the Curator of Exhibitions at Metro Arts, Brisbane.

Frank Lloyd Wrong
(Ugly Melbourne Houses)

Frank Lloyd Wrong is a Senior Executive Amateur Content Delivery Professional at @uglymelbourne-houses, an outbound marketing and non-sales platform that attracts followers/customers by reviewing uploaded ugly house imagery-based material. He graduated with Honours from The University of Outer Eastern Suburbia with a dual Degree in Business Non-Administration and Vaguely Abstract Creative Writing, Majoring in Probably Being Architect in his Day Job. After graduating, his passion for large ugly inanimate expressions of social status and up-scaled fast paced client interaction led him to a role as UMH's first and last ever Executive Intern Re-Assignment Job Title Allocation Production Manager. Realising his undeniable skill for intensely rapid workflow decision-based team manipulation, senior management reallocated him to the Powerful Imagery Caption Department. Frank is a renowned obsessive perfectionist and workaholic. In his spare time, he goes hunting for ugly houses in the outer suburbs of Melbourne with his four Irish Wolfhounds, Pikasso, Monnet, Provinciale and Eiffule Towwers.

Designers

Hope Lumsden-Barry is a Melbourne-based graphic designer. Her research-driven practice is concerned with design-led publishing and cross-disciplinary collaboration. Recent design projects include: Filmme Fatales #6-#8 (issue #6 designed with Stuart Geddes); catalogues for Lamington Drive's inaugural ceramics show, Cooked; Indignata, a publication for sound art collective (no)signal, designed with Ryley Lawson; and the catalogues for the Material Exchange exhibition series at c3 Contemporary Art Space (2017). Hope also presented a workshop on zine-making for creative practice as a part of Material Exchange. She has convened panel discussions at RMIT and the NGV Art Book Fair.

Ryley Lawson is a design researcher based in Coburg. His practice is focussed on the intersections between design and power, with ongoing explorations into precarity, community building, and spaces of dissensus.

He currently works at a small strategic design studio called PaperGiant, and has recently worked in various research positions with Australia Post, RMIT University, and the Design and Social Innovation in Asia-Pacific Research Network. Earlier this year, Ryley and Hope organised an exhibition during Melbourne Design Week called Making Space, which explored the conditions that support critical, socially-engaged, and political design practices.

Typeface

Dennis Grauel is a type and communication designer working in Melbourne. He plays with letters and language. His font, Brunswick Grotesque, responds to the challenge of communicating a sense of place. Building upon the ideas of Peter Bil'ak, Fraser Muggeridge and Vincent Chan, this typeface incorporates a suite of OpenType features to transfigure its texture. Five different widths are blended in each line of text, echoing the irreverent inconsistencies in signage within Brunswick. Rare instances of accidental glyphs reflect typographic gaffes spotted variously in the landscape. The resulting coarseness befits the suburb's progressive multiculturalism, diversity and informality.

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