

# RE-IMAGINING THE AUSTRALIAN DREAM

Creating awareness to the deep historical connection with suburbia through the cultural and spatial turn.

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Thesis "Suburbia"

## I INTRODUCTION

Research methods, the course that invites students to critically reflect on a set of methodological apparatuses to architecture. By incrementally engaging and with these methods, we learn to position our own approaches within and to architectural knowledge systems. According to the standard dictionary definition, heuristic is a method of learning or solving problems that allows people to discover things themselves and learn from their own experiences.<sup>1</sup> That is exactly where the lecture series of research methods is focusing on, a heuristic approach to learning by study and the use of heuristic techniques. As Lakatos stated, "*you need rules or heuristics to regulate your position*".<sup>2</sup>

The course research methods showed me the importance towards the way you can get a deeper understanding of your assignment. I have never started my design research with a research-methodology or heuristic technique in mind. This lecture series has offered multiple options to develop a more guided way of working to a position in your approach. Raymond Lucas, a Senior Lecturer at Manchester School of Architecture, stated, "*the contribution to knowledge is the potential of research in architecture*".<sup>3</sup> In order for architecture to progress, we must continue to conduct research into its history. As context and precedent; social and cultural role of buildings; and the theory of what it means to build and dwell. By developing the role of architecture as a discipline with an interest in the theory of spatial production, the social role of space, and the historical context within which we live, we need research methods appropriate to architectural humanities.<sup>3</sup> This is interesting because a building is often designed for a generic assumption of an imaginary person. With the approach of choosing a research methodology, it pushes us in a specific direction to build up a sustainable research for the user and the community.

In the recent discussion about the liveability of Australia at the Mpavilion platform in Melbourne, they argued the importance to engage the gap between living in the city and living in the suburbs.<sup>4</sup> As my thesis research is about redesigning suburbia, I need to integrate this idea of the theory of spatial production, the social role of space, and the historical context into my research to get a better understanding of what suburbia is in the eyes of the Australians population and what discover the aspects that we love about living in the city .

This paper is about the methodological design approaches which can be used to discover the historical patterns of suburbia in Melbourne because of the forecasted growth of the population. Australians have a deep historical connection with suburbia due to the Australian dream. Regarding to my studio "*Interior building cities, Independent group*" it is important to get a deep understanding of the conditions of the place, the people where you are working for and the consequences of the outcome. The research question that came up for this paper is how to analyse the patterns of suburbia in Melbourne to understand the importance of the deep historical connection with Australian dream?

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1: Hornby, A. S., & Cowie, A. P. (1995). *Oxford advanced learner's dictionary*

2: Anderson, S. (2011). *Rational Reconstructions and Architectural Knowledge*.

3: Lucas, R. (2016). *Research Methods for Architecture*. London. Laurence King Publishing Ltd.

4: Issue 10 - Housing (Oct. 9, 2018) The culture of living closer together, Who gets to decide. Assemble papers, p7

## II LIVING THE SUBURBAN LIFE

A research with the approach to bridge the gap between living in the city and living in the suburbs needs a research method that define historical pattern of living in suburbs and heuristic techniques to describe those patterns. Kaplan defines methods as the study of the process rather than the product and methodology as an aspects of the research process. He used the term methods and methodology to focus on research divided into four frames, whereby the method that a general research is with the methodology as the semantic distinction between frames two and three, the strategy and tactics. Strategy is defined as the skillful management and planning of anything, the method and tactics defined as any skilful move, the methodology.<sup>5</sup> This strategies and tactics could be seen as the heuristic techniques to explore the research method and therefore the research question.

The research method that fits the most due to the research question; how to analyse the patterns of suburbia in Melbourne to understand the importance of the deep historical connection with Australian dream, is history research. History research brings into view something from the past, because the “something from the past” is not empirically accessible.<sup>5</sup> According to Lucas, who made a distinction between context, methodology and theory-led research to build up a research method, we start from the context led research.<sup>3</sup> A way of establishing the primary importance of the physical, social or historical setting. It is commonly known that Australians have a deep historical connection with their life in the suburbs. Most of them are grown up and are still living there. They are happy and it remind them of their childhood.<sup>6</sup> But why staying if the gap between living in the city and the suburbs is becoming bigger and bigger according to the lack of services and facilities? To find patterns of the movement of suburbia the methodology led research comes forward. As said before, we use heuristic techniques to define a methodology led research. The methodology to unlock patterns and understand the connection with suburbia, is praxeology. Marieke Berkers spoke in her lecture about “praxeology”, as praxis + logy, the study of human action and conduct.<sup>7</sup> This methodology of researching involves three important approaches; doing research from your own experience, being an active observer and involve the people who you are going to design for. Heuristic techniques for this methodology are the scripting techniques. Specifically, interviews, documentation, photo-/videography and analytic writing, bringing it all together to the theory led research that puts everything in a framework of understanding.

The output of history research is not verse, or essay, or some other literary form; the output is narrative.<sup>5</sup> Using the “investigating spatial narratives” as methodology to discover the way how a story is connected together with “praxeology”, it lead to an understanding of the connection between the Australian dream and the living patterns in suburbia.

## III UNDERSTANDING THE SUBURBAN LIFE

With a view towards the change in the practice of history, Tosh cites two influential bodies of theory. The first is the ‘*cultural turn*’,. The cultural turn is the theory whereby cultural meanings are interpreted by historians drawing up from cultural anthropology. A second body of theory derives broadly from various social theories, the ‘*spatial turn*’.<sup>5</sup> The change of the practice of history lays more in the ‘*cultural turn*’. Georg Iggers stated, that the historians shared the optimism of the professionalized sciences generally, that methodologically controlled research made objective knowledge possible. Thereby described Iggers that the cultural turn changed from objective anthropology knowledge to paying greater attention to smaller segments; to the lives and, significantly, to the experiences of people. Thus the cultural turn encourages focus on local, vernacular realities rather than, for instance, national histories. Beside the cultural turn we also need the spatial turn in historical analysis, both physical objects along with subjective constructions of the space.<sup>8</sup>

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5: Groat, L. N., & Wang, D. (2013). *Architectural research methods*. John Wiley & Sons.

6: The conversation. (Feb. 20, 2019) Living ‘liveable’: this is what residents have to say about life on the urban fringe.

7: Berkers, M. (2018). Praxeology. *Research methods*, (p. 59). Delft.

8: Iggers, G. (1984) *Historiography: From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University of Minnesota).

The 'spatial turn' in this research is an intellectual movement that places emphasis on place and space in social science and the humanities. This theory hasn't changed by itself but places and spaces have changed by the humanity. So whereby the cultural turn is more focussed on the change in the culture of a population, the spatial turn shows how this change can be seen in the places and spaces where we live in. As stated, historical analyses will result in a narrative. A narrative whereby the context of human life is unavoidably in architecture, and that is why spaces and buildings play an essential role. It is about how people relate to their urban environment and the experience of space. Those elements are combined in words and stories about personal experience. To describe this experience, it is conducive to use praxeology as a substantiation and addition to your historical research to shows the changes in the live of people. To fit in your thoughts about the future later on.

An example of how the cultural turn encourages consideration of artifacts can be seen in Dolores Hayden's *The power of place: urban landscapes as public history*. Her chapter "Place Memory and Urban Preservation" catalogues how the history of brass workers in Waterbury, connecticut, and the lives of laundry workers in New York's Chinatown all become subjects for research as "public history". Hayden considers examples of buildings that are "mundane, battered, and constantly reused" as candidates for historic preservation.<sup>5</sup> This distinctions between humanity and buildings contribute to an understanding of how historical moments are changing by a society that is changing, not looking to objective historical facts but to a subjective view of the people and to the buildings. Similar, Hayden's wrote the book "*Building suburbia: Green Fields and Urban Growth*", a history research of the contested landscapes where the majority of Americans now live, defined in seven eras of suburban development since 1820. With this book Hayden's tried to illustrate throughout history research to make an image of the American mania. She portrays housewives and politicians as well as designers and builders making the decisions that have generated America's diverse suburbs. Encompassing environmental controversies as well as the complexities of race, gender, and class, Hayden's fascinating account will forever alter how we think about the communities we build and inhabit.<sup>9</sup> In this research of the American mania it was important to understand the different faces that has developed in America as the objective part but together with the complexity of the humanity that settled down the spacial experience and changes are understood. The researches in this specific subject, suburbia, fits with a question that is stated. While America is different from Australia, the development of the suburbs took a similar pathway, due to the European settlement.

Another researcher Elaine Scarry, writes about the outcome of a history research, namely the spatial narratives. A spatial narrative that is the '*imaginary vivacity*' as a prerequisite for the capacity of a text to ignite our imagination. She explains the vividness of a profound literary text as 'the verbal arts that must somehow also imitate its 'persistence' and, most crucially, its quality of 'givenness'.<sup>10</sup> Literary imagination can strengthen the designer's functional, spatial and functional imagination and project images of life into the nonexistent spaces.<sup>11</sup> This imagination can be used to let people understand how new ideas can fit in the place where they live. Understanding the historical facts where you as an architect are working in and knowing where the developments are coming from brings us to a narrative of imagination what is was, what it is and what it could be.

#### IV CHANGING THE SUBURBAN LIFE

To arrive at a positioning of my own research, I will look at the position that I can assume in literature. The question I asked for this paper is how to analyse the patterns of suburbia in Melbourne to understand the importance of the deep historical connection with the suburbs according to the Australian dream? Through history research using the methodology, investigating spatial narratives, the history of existence can be told as an understanding of the past. This way of dealing with the history of a place can answer the second part of the question, where the deep historical connection is

5: Groat, L. N., & Wang, D. (2013). *Architectural research methods*. John Wiley & Sons.

9: Hayden, D. (2004). *Building suburbia: Green fields and urban growth, 1820-2000*.

10: Scarry, E. (2001) *Dreaming by the Book* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University).

11: Havik, K. (2014). *Urban literacy: reading and writing architecture*. Pallasmaa - Urban Literacy Foreword. Nai010 Publishers.

coming from. Drawing a story on the development of suburbia, like Hayden did, the importance of the dream can be describe, understood and imagined. From this point we need to answer the first part of the question, what are the patterns of suburbia according to the Australian dream. In this search we need beside the methodology *'investigating spatial narratives'*, *'praxeology'* as a research methodology. This methodology can contribute to the discovery and understanding of the experiences view of people in the suburbs. In her lecture on praxeology, Marieke Berkers explained the necessity of the human voice in architectural projects. One of the case studies she describes was the affordable housing project in Casablanca. She stated, that in the area where she should build quantity seems to be the main consideration rather than quality and this need to change. Throughout interviews, observations and analyze "how the indigenous or native voices are variously silenced and erased by landscape representation"<sup>7</sup>, she pointed out the need to create quality in the neighbourhood. Coming back to the research we did in the method history research an then the part of the cultural turn, praxeology take the answer of my question from a objective research to a more subjective research whereby knowledge is paying a greater attention to smaller segments, to the experiences of people. Reflecting on the cultural turn in the research towards the connection with the Australian dream, similar knowledge as Berkers is required. Asking the inhabitant about to importance, needs, and benefits to live in the suburbs, I can point out what the requirements are for a building design.

Nowadays, suburbs are seen as appendix to the city rather than being part of it because of there urban design. On only Australia is dealing with this fact but also America, New Zealand and other part of the world are design that way. As the population is forecasted to grow and cities are becoming more dense than ever, it's time for the suburbs to become part of the city. This population grow is a problem all over the world, not only in the countries that is dealing with a widespread development, but the countries with this structure have the most possibilities to contribute to this problem. The development of the suburbs to respond to this change lays in different outcomes due to the exciting urban structure, cultural elements of the population and historical aspects. To know and understand the field where you are working I used my own knowledge about the site by researching history and existing structures and never before I thought about the humanity that already is there or is gonna live in that place. The first lecture of Marieke Berkers realised me that a new perspective is needed. She stated that studying the praxis of architecture one can develop an eye for the actual users of building, and not the imagined ones. This was the point where I realised, this methodology will be part of my graduation research. Together with *'Investigating Spatial Narratives'* the methodology I used or seeks to use from the start, in my opinion can lead to a very deep understanding of project requirements. There are two heuristic techniques that I am going to address for the methodology *'praxeology'*, interviewing, and observing. Interviewing the inhabitants of the site and observing through pictures and drawings the use of the suburb. From the methodology *'Investigating Spatial Narratives'*, two main techniques I want to use are character, and narrative. The character is the sense that buildings are designed for a specific purpose, or group of people, and just like people reflect their own personalities, so should buildings. But to understand the character of the building you are designing, you must know its purpose, and its users. Therefore you need the technique narrative.

*"The manner in which human sense perception is organized, the medium in which it is accomplished, is determined not only by nature, but by historical circumstances as well".<sup>7</sup>*

- Walter Benjamin

A contradiction that comes into view writing this paper is; the praxis of architecture one can develop an eye for the actual users of building and, the spatial narrative that is the 'imaginary vivacity'. The first one is a objective view on the requirements and the second one can be seen as a subjective

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<sup>7</sup>: Berkers, M. (2018). *Praceology. Research methods*, (p. 59). Delft.

view on requirement. From my personal perspective, both are needed to address the answer on the research question. The patterns of the population as objective study for the people I am designing for and the 'imaginary vivacity' to give the people I am designing for a forecast in where they could live in, in the future.

## REFERENCES

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