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Culture as commodity: The home as spectacle in popular culture

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Culture as Commodity: The Home as Spectacle in Popular Culture

by

Jillian E. Benn

B Comms (Hons)

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the
Requirements for the Award of
Bachelor of Communications (Media Studies) (Honours).

At the Faculty of Communications, Health and Science,
Edith Cowan University, Mt Lawley
Perth, Western Australia.

Date of submission: November, 1999.

USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.

ABSTRACT

This study proposes to examine representations of the home in the media. The media play a significant role in the culture of Australians, who are obsessed with the suburban home and its cultural and social meanings.

The place of the home within popular thought and culture and the subsequent ideologies and meanings associated with the home, are questioned in this dissertation. The major theme to emerge is that the contemporary suburban home is a spectacle.

This project interprets, evaluates and contributes to current theories and debates surrounding the concept of suburbia. It is an original contribution to the perception of the suburban home within society. The meanings surrounding the contemporary suburban home can be plainly seen in the media, and thus this study textually analyses the constructed discourses of the home within popular culture.

Qualitative research methods through textual analysis of advertisements and lifestyle television programs concerning the suburban home, are utilised in this project. Given that this study concentrates on specific texts and the ways in which they represent the contemporary suburban home, further study into the place of the home within popular culture is necessary.

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signature _____

Date 27/03/2000

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Finally, this project would not have been completed without my family and friends. Special thanks in particular to Geoff, Nola, Anna, Holly, Susan and Michelle for their enthusiasm and support.

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CHAPTER ONE

An Introduction

The spectacle is the acme of ideology, for in its full flower it exposes and manifests the essence of all ideological systems: the impoverishment, enslavement and negation of real life (Debord 1994: 215).

In current Australian society the home has become a site of great cultural importance:

It would be conservative to estimate...that at least half of the monthly mortgage repayments paid by the average Australian home owner goes toward sustaining meanings, rather than keeping out of the rain (Fiske, Hodge and Turner 1987: 26).

Cultural analysis suggests that the home has become more than a simple dwelling. The home has become a spectacle.

An analysis of the meanings, importance and location of the suburban home within the media is useful to further the established field of Australian cultural studies (Craven 1994, Fiske, Hodge and Turner 1987, Frow and Morris 1993, Turner 1993, Turner 1994). Assertions about the place of the home within society can be made and evaluated. Academic work conducted on the place of the suburban home within popular culture and on the theory of the spectacle is thus of primary importance in this dissertation.

The major research thesis then is to evaluate the place of the contemporary

suburban home within society through the textual analysis of media representations. The home is perceived within society as an important social and cultural commodity and the media demonstrate the meanings attached to the Australia suburban home.

Debord and the Spectacle

Guy Debord develops the concept of spectacle in his intriguing work *The Society of the Spectacle* (Buchet-Chastel 1967, Zone 1994). Debord's theory relies on the assumption that capitalism, and thus commodification, has reduced life to pure spectacle. The modern capitalist era is seen as a society of "spectacular" commodity consumption, in which meanings are not made at the point of production, but at the consumption of the commodity:

The spectacle is a permanent opium war waged to make it impossible to distinguish goods from commodities, or true satisfaction from a survival that increases according to its own logic (Debord 1994: 30).

Culture, according to Debord, is reduced to the "spectacular", connoting the visual, superficial and inauthentic.

The term "spectacle" is complicated and rich in meaning:

In one sense it refers to a media and consumer society, organized around the consumption of images, commodities and spectacles, but the concept also refers to the vast institutional and technical apparatus of contemporary capitalism, to all the means and methods power employs, outside of direct force to relegate subjects passive to societal manipulation and to obscure the nature and effects of capitalism's power and deprivations (Best and Kellner, *Debord and the Postmodern Turn: New Stages of the Spectacle* – <http://www.uta.edu/huma/illuminations/kell17.html>).

Further work needs to be conducted in relation to the definition of spectacle. Differences between Debord's interpretation of spectacle and the popular definitions within Australian popular culture differ significantly and require extensive interpretation. Although considerable writing about Debord and the theory exists on the Internet, work in relation to current society (as above) is particularly sparse and worthy of further consideration.

Debord's theory developed amid the rise of the Situationist International, an extreme left-wing Parisian movement prominent during the 1950s and 60s. They have been described as:

...an adventuresome political ensemble of (mostly male) activists, avant-garde artists, writers, theorists, and revolting practitioners of a hybrid of Marxian, anarchist, and festively inspired approaches to cultural and economic rebellion...Situationists attempted to both strategically theorize and inspire disgust for the increasingly commodified character of everyday social life (Pfohl, "We go Round and Round in the Night and Are Consumed by Fire" - http://www.ctheory.com/r-we_go_round.html).

Despite the development of the theory under seemingly "revolutionary" conditions and a considerable time ago, the theory holds relevance and weight in terms of "the commodified character of everyday social life" (ibid.) and is crucial in this analysis. A lack of critical writing exists in relation to the spectacle.

Debord (1994: 7) argues that the, "continued unfolding of our epoch has merely confirmed and further illustrated the theory of the spectacle". This

is reinforced by others who see it as “a virtual commonplace of postmodernity that we inhabit a society of the spectacle” (Lloyd and Thomas 1998: 31) and that “the spectacle now pervades all of reality, making every relationship manipulated and every critique spectacular (Guy Debord - http://www.csc.calpoly.edu/~erCarlso/essays/Guy_Debord.html). However, as far as I can ascertain this thesis is the first time Debord’s ideas on the spectacle have been applied to an analysis of the Australian home in a sustained fashion.

Suburbia Revisited

There is an established tradition of Australian academic criticism relating to the suburban home. Robin Boyd is regarded within Australian cultural theory (see for example Fiske, Hodge and Turner 1987 and Ferber, Healy and McAuliffe 1994) as the founding critical writer on suburbia largely due to his well-known publication, *The Australian Ugliness* (1963). In this text, Boyd’s main criticism is of “Featurism”, which he suggests is the result of suburban sprawl combined with advertising, bad architecture, and the “societal desire” to make things more aesthetically pleasing. Boyd is extremely critical of suburbia and considers suburban featurism to be the primary cause of Australian “ugliness”.

Alternatively, writers such as Hugh Stretton, suggest that,

Suburb-haters, thinking of people without personal resources in ill-designed houses and gardens, too often undervalue the free and satisfying self-expression,

the mixtures of community and privacy, fond familiarity and quick change and escape, which this miniscule subdivision and diversification of the quarter-acre's spaces can offer to the lives it houses (Stretton 1975:15).

Stretton also makes the point that most Australians, even the academics that criticise them "choose" to live in a suburb and, rather than caviling each home's individuality Boyd's concept of "featurism" should be celebrated.

Negative critiques of suburbia seem to continually rely on the notion that suburbia stifles culture, and for critics such as Boyd suburban space is associated with conformity and control. The positive assertions suggest that suburbia is a crucial "part" of culture, and a site where individuality and creativity are encouraged rather than suppressed.

Hence, defining suburbia is difficult. Dictionary definitions are abstract and always associated with terms such as "conventional uniformity", "provinciality", "lacking sophistication", "narrow minded", and "conventional in outlook" (Robinson 1996: 1409). This discourse has ascribed negative emphasis to the term, and this dubious definition of suburbia crosses over and is frequently accepted within popular culture.

It is thus,

...interesting to consider how images and ways of speaking and thinking about suburbia have circulated so as to produce actual suburbs in which people live, to consider how discourses of suburbia have both formed, and been formed by, the literal space of the suburb (Ferber, Healy and McAuliffe (eds) 1994: xiv).

This point is further illustrated by Humphrey McQueen who suggests

that,

As a state of mind and a way of living, suburbia is not confined to certain geographic areas but can thrive where there are no suburbs – in London's Earls Court, in high-rise housing commission units, or underground at Coober Pedy. It is pointless to lay down a criterion for suburbia that includes duplexes, but excludes a row of terraces. Where it survives outside its natural habitat, suburbia still aspires to the ways of living that are most completely realised by nuclear families on garden blocks with detached houses, a pattern which dominated Sydney in 1961 with 71 per cent home ownership, a car for every family unit, and the fertility rate at its post-war zenith (McQueen 1988: 36).

Defining suburbia geographically and demographically is an arduous task and as the above extract reinforces, the popular definition of suburbia is associated with stability, connoting a state of mind still largely associated with regulation and restraint. In the media under analysis in this dissertation "suburbia" is not interpreted as a physical space, but utilises an abstract and popular definition, best defined as – "a state of mind and a way of living" (ibid.).

John Hartley (1996) considers suburbia to be a "postmodern public sphere". He highlights the abstract position of suburbia:

...suburbia emerges...not as a place you can walk into (an oft-noted 'problem' of actual suburbs), but as an image-saturated space which is both intensely personal (inside people's homes and heads) and extensively abstract (pervading the planet). It's where the personal, family, political and cultural meanings are reproduced – a place where people make themselves out of the semiotic and other resources to hand (Hartley 1996: 156).

This contemporary way of thinking about suburbia is significant in terms of the discourse and concepts of the suburban home constructed by the media. It is of little consequence or use to suggest that suburbia suffocates culture and crushes individuality because this argument is no longer

sustainable, and is refuted in various writing surrounding suburbia (see for example, Stretton 1975, Fiske, Hodge and Turner 1987, Ferber, Healy and McAuliffe 1994, Hartley 1996). Similarly “suburbia” is not necessarily a title linked to all actual “suburbs”. The negative emphasis ascribed to the term makes decisions about whether a suburb qualifies as a “suburb” weighted.

Academic work conceptualising suburbia within the context of suburbia is alluded to be Debord, however deeper conclusions need to be drawn from further textual analysis:

We already live in the era of the self-destruction of the urban environment. The explosion of cities into the countryside, covering it with what Mumford calls “formless masses” of urban debris, is presided over in unmediated fashion by the requirements of consumption...As it destroys the cities, urbanism institutes a pseudo-countryside devoid not only of the natural relationships of the country of former times but also of the indirect (and directly contested) relationships of the historical cities. The forms of habitation and the spectacular control of today’s “planned environment” have created a new artificial peasantry (Debord 1994: 123-125).

The Home as Spectacle in the Media

My desire to study the place of the home within society is due to an awareness of the popularity and multiplicity of newspaper lift-outs and lifestyle television programs featuring homes and gardens in the 1990s. Television programs such as *Better Homes and Gardens*, *Burke’s Backyard*, *Our House*, *Hot Property* and *Changing Rooms* thrive on both the social desire to improve homes, and the status society traditionally associates with the suburban dwelling.

One myth particularly evident in the lifestyle programs and newspaper lift-outs is the perception that the home is a marker of social status. This desire for status encourages dominant middle-class ideologies and is reflected in Boyd's work:

...various undercover desires, for respectability or for status, have led many Australians of many periods to the desire for display in the background of their lives and have ensured a good reception for every passing flamboyant decorative device...when a community is not entirely adjusted and not very alert, when people want consciously or unconsciously to display and know not how best to display, only then is Featurism likely to prosper. Indeed it is then inevitable because Featurism is the most elementary form of expression historically displayed by peoples emerging from primitive Functionalism (Boyd 1963: 66).

"Featurism" is continually apparent in the media under analysis.

Australians are in a sense encouraged by the media to express individualism by creating a space that reflects who they are and how they live. The paradox is that this choice may not reflect distinctiveness, but exist to reinforce middle class social status, and create "slaves to the spectacle". "Middle- class" ideology is continually encouraged in the media under analysis in this dissertation.

"Two things, then, are essential for the generation of the climate in which Featurism thrives. One is the desire to make things seem other than what they are. The second is inadequate facilities for the process of camouflaging" (Boyd 1963: 71). Middle-class expression of display within suburbia is associated with the attachment of social status and identity to the home. Theorists suggest that this desire for higher social status

constitutes a movement towards the establishment of a particular middle-class taste as the 'natural' style for the suburban home (Fiske, Hodge and Turner 1987: 35). This is demonstrated through textual analysis in the dissertation.

Chapter Two focuses on the newspaper advertising for new homes in the lift-outs 'New Homes' (*The West Australian*) and 'Home' (*The Sunday Times*). Identity and cultural importance is implied through the naming of the home, the individuality and choice associated with the home, and, the segmentation and separation obvious in the advertising. Through spectacular visual and discursive elements the home is constructed as spectacle.

Chapter Three focuses specifically on the lifestyle television genre featuring the suburban home. In *Better Homes and Gardens* (Channel Seven) and *Our House* (Channel Nine) the suburban home as spectacle is again apparent. These programs construct an Australian way of living, which can be described as "spectacular", ignoring connotations of reality and alternate ways of life. This has implications for gender and class ideologies in relation to the home.

In terms of Australian lifestyle television in the 1980s and 90s it all began when television viewers were "allowed" to set foot into the backyard of

Don Burke, when *Burke's Backyard*, recently described as "ground-breaking" (*Who Weekly* April 12, 1999), debuted on television sets in 1987. Derivative programs such as *Better Homes and Gardens* and *Our House*, screen in peak viewing time and consistently appear in the top ten of weekly viewing figures (*Who Weekly* July – August, 1999). Their popularity constitutes an area of study based on these programs and their importance in terms of recent popular Australian culture.

The appeal of lifestyle television in the current Australian climate requires considerable attention. One may ask why millions of Australians are watching John Jarratt or "Shirl" Strachan produce something such as a stepladder or a wall? Why are viewers so willing to watch a version of "everydayness" in which meanings relating to the suburban home are commodified and portrayed in a constructed, spectacular lifestyle?

Sue Turnbull (1993 and 1996) is one of very few academics to consider the popularity of the lifestyle program within Australian television culture.

She suggests that,

If once national identity was constructed in and around the archetype of the rugged bushman, of late it has been constructed in and around the economy of the suburban home. And no where is that domestic economy better displayed than in the lifestyle or infotainment show (Turnbull 1996: 4).

Turnbull's association of the genre with national identity is crucial to this argument and will be further evaluated in the following chapters.

The media under analysis in this dissertation challenge the idea that work around the suburban home is mundane and “ordinary”. Instead they make positive the notion of working around the home and garden. In a sense what was once regarded as the private is transformed into the public. The everyday acts, spaces and commodities are presented as a primary focus, rather than simple objects lost in everyday banality. Suburbia is not presented as a space of conformity and control, or ordinariness, but a space for creative development and change.

Chapter Four analyses the place of the suburban home in the lifestyle programs *Changing Rooms* (Channel Nine) and *Hot Property* (Channel Seven). These programs feature “real” homes and “ordinary” people, rather than interior designers, celebrities and architects. Suburbia is constructed in line with a more “ordinary” space. A large amount of cultural weight and importance is attached to this “ordinary” suburban home.

This chapter also considers the concept of television and the effect it has on daily life in constructing identity. Gillian Appleton (1987: 13) suggests that Australian content legislation has been structured “to ensure that television plays a role in showing Australians the realities of our own society, and helps us to form a view of ourselves and our place in the world”. The “realities of our own society” are fictional representations of

whom and what we are. While this notion can be dismissed the idea that media constructs identity concerning society and the 'nation' (Anderson 1983) remains.

This way of thinking results in the fictitious,

assumption that what the mass media (or any other cultural form) do is reflect, or show, so that if one ensures that the film or program-makers are Australian and they chose Australian subjects, then the result will be an accurate, or authentic representation of 'the Australian way of life' or 'our' hopes, fears, history, perspective, sense of humour, etc (Jacka 1993: 110).

The television programs and newspaper lift-outs concerning the home present one version of "the Australian way of life": that there is something unique, known and appealing to all Australians. While individuality is discursively encouraged in advertising and television segments, (emphasis on model homes stress the importance of choosing one to suit you!) it is suppressed by suggesting to the audience what they need and want. The constructions of the home and an Australian suburban way of living emulate the spectacle – and the promotion of an affluent and mainly middle-class way of life.

CHAPTER TWO

Identity Formation in Newspaper Advertising

*The suburban home is not as simple, nor as banal, as it looks to many observers
(Fiske, Hodge and Turner 1987: 45).*

*Advertisements...appeal to a range of real needs: real material needs, the social
need for mythology (once fulfilled by art and religion), the psychological desire for
the unified self of the pre-symbolic stage. But in doing this, advertisements create
false wants: we want consumer items instead of real emotions, real social
relations, our real selves
(Irving 1991: <http://kali/murdoch.edu.au/continuum/4.2/Irving.html>).*

Newspaper advertisements construct meanings pertaining to the suburban home. Textual analysis of advertisements featured in the lift-outs 'New Homes' from the Saturday edition of *The West Australian* and 'Home' in *The Sunday Times* demonstrate the suburban home and an associated 'way of life' as spectacle.

Numerous other lift-outs from various Australian newspapers concerning the home and garden could be used to evaluate representations of this important part of our "lived" culture. To analyse them all is obviously beyond the scope of this dissertation. New home lift-outs have been specifically chosen because it is at this point that the creation of the

spectacle is most apparent.

The lift-outs are primarily concerned with new homes, display homes, pre-designed and kit homes, making the lift-out ideal advertising space for these homes. The advertisements aim to create a deliberate association between identity and the individual home.

Dovey (1994) and Fiske, Hodge and Turner (1987) conduct analyses that relate to the display home. This project draws upon and furthers their ideas. Combined with the ideas of Debord, the advertising is an ideal site for analysis, succinctly demonstrating the representation of the suburban home as spectacle.

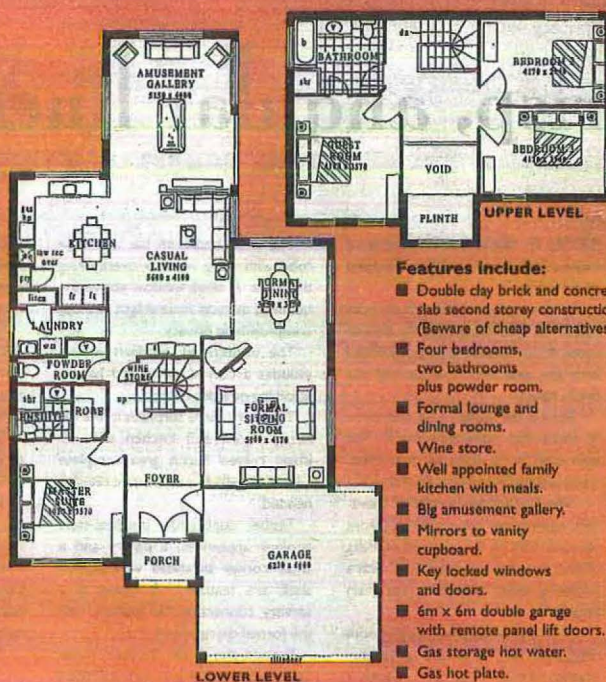
The importance advertisements attach to the ideology of the home contributes to the spectacle. The advertisements construct the "display" homes visually and discursively - they come complete with an identity and a way of living. The home is essentially a marketable commodity and the aim of the advertising is to sell it, however, a struggle occurs when the cultural material is presented as "a way of life". A spectacular way of life is evident in "Amusement Galleries", "Play-Station Activity Areas", "Parent's Retreats", "Spas", "the latest in technology and entertainment" and so on. This allows for comparisons to be made between a home and "a 5-star hotel" ("Independence 2000, 'Home' 15/8/99:14).

Advertising is an area that combines the two fields of academic study outlined in the introduction. As Boyd (1963) and Debord (1994) infer, advertising is crucial in the theories of featurism and the spectacle respectively. Analysis of advertising codes such as language, image, and discourse demonstrate the construction of the home as spectacle. As Irving (1991) suggests consumer items are chosen over “real emotions, real social relations, our real selves”. The analysis of advertising, then, is relevant to the argument of the dissertation.

Three general features are initially apparent in the advertisements and require some clarification. Visual features such as colour photographs or pictures of the elevation, large headlines, written copy and floor plans are immediately obvious. Appearance is very important, thus the picture of the elevation is perfect, enticing the reader to examine the advertisement more closely and ultimately visit the physical space of the home:

...understood on its own terms, the spectacle proclaims the predominance of appearances and asserts that all human life, which is to say all social life, is mere appearance (Debord 1994: 15).

The initial visual picture in the advertisement demonstrates the contemporary suburban home as spectacle (see figures one and two).



**Look at the size, look at the style,
look at the price! \$119,932.**

'The Boston' (elevation as shown) is an imposing home planned on a large scale, suitable for a variety of lot sizes. It has been thoughtfully designed on two levels and contains an abundance of features, like the grand double-door porch entrance and a towering two-storey high foyer, as well as finishes you'd only expect in a home twice its value.

Move up to The Boston.



Perceptions
The 2 - storey builder

Figure one: "The Boston" in 'New Homes' *The West Australian*, Saturday June 26, 1999: 17.

The second obvious feature in the advertising is the “fantastic” discourse, which is crucial in creating ‘the spectacular way of life’. Terms such as “lifestyle”, “dream” and “imagine” repeatedly appear in the advertising creating and connoting a particular image for the potential homeowner. The term “grand” is continually used drawing attention to the spectacular space of the home within society and will be further evaluated below.

The third general feature overtly apparent in the advertising is the price. Homes can generally be categorised according to price range. The most expensive homes (those over \$200 000) are advertised as pure spectacle. There is no emphasis on value; just that they are the very best (see figure two). The homes then decrease in price quite dramatically where the spectacle is located in the discourse of the layout, design and language in the advertising. They are a cheaper form of home, but are constructed as no less a “spectacle”.

There is a large emphasis on the “features” that these cheaper homes include (see figure three). For instance, one home is advertised with an entertaining room that includes the very latest entertainment technology (“The Entertainer” - ‘Home’ 15-08-99: 3). In another case, an “outstanding” kitchen is featured and is accordingly called “The Chef’s Delight” (‘New Homes’ 26-06-99). Although they vary in price range and features, the commodification of the home privileges the spectacle.

DESIGNED TO REFLECT AN ERA OF REFINED ELEGANCE AND GRACIOUS STYLE



THE RESIDENCE

Deluxe Version \$396,660

Here is a home of truly grand proportions - designed and craftsman built to reflect an era of refined elegance and gracious style. As you step inside, journey through a grand portico to discover the substantial formal dining and lounge rooms, a roomy study and separate guests quarters. There's a large, well-equipped chef's kitchen - along with an informal meals area adjoining the cavernous family and games rooms. Upstairs, a palatial master suite featuring separate dressing room, spa and en-suite complement another two well-proportioned bedrooms. A bright, airy sitting room opens on to a sprawling second story balcony.

W&B
WEBB & BROWN - NEAVES
HOME BUILDERS

Distinctly different, decidedly better

7 Delawney Street, Balcatta.

Telephone: 9240 2555.

Facsimile: 9240 2049.

Email: sales@wbn-homes.com.au

Web: <http://www.wbn-homes.com.au>

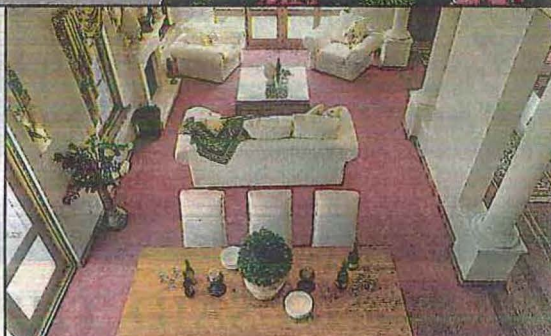


Figure two - "The Residence" in 'New Homes' *The West Australian*, Saturday August 21, 1999.

THE MAXI ADVANCE \$65,590

Optional
Federation Upgrade



FEATURES

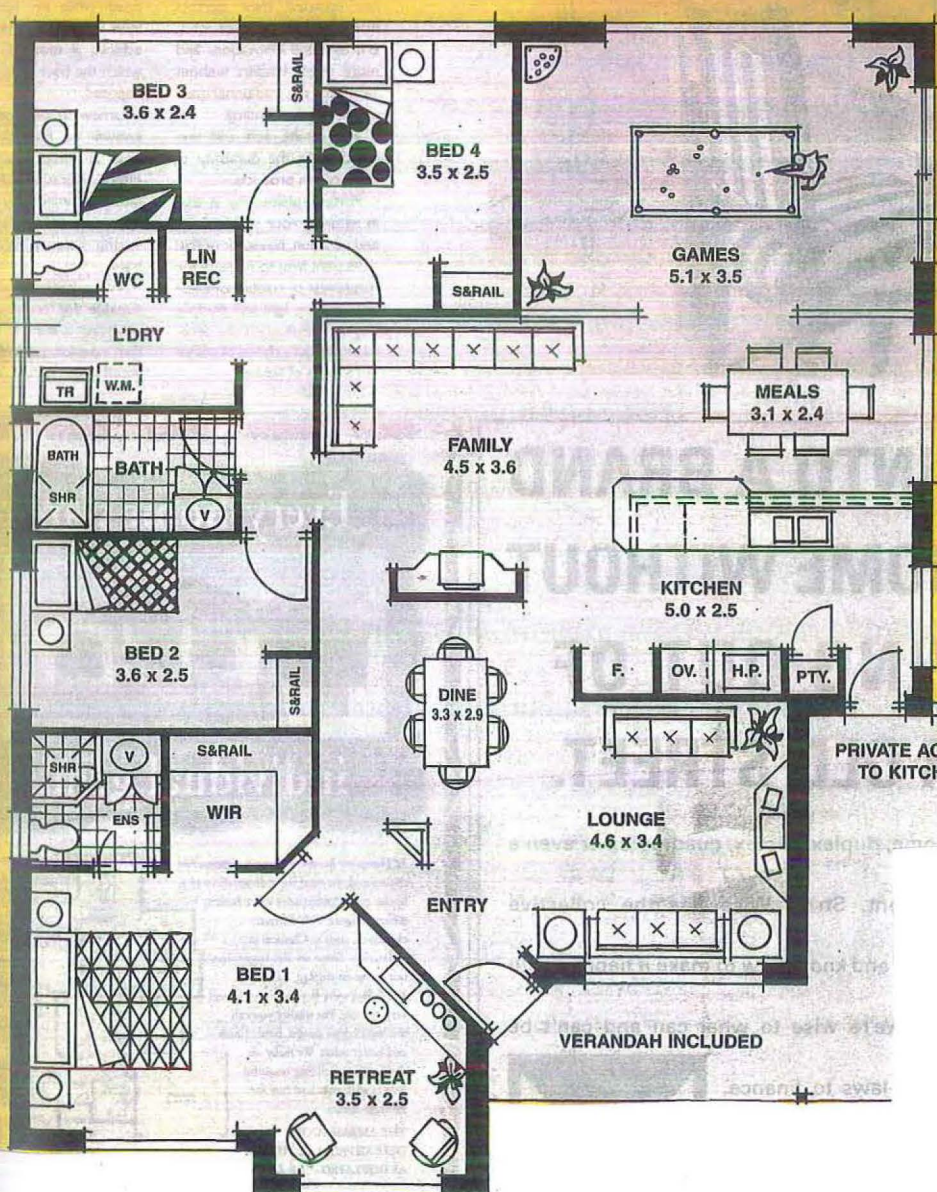
- Huge master bedroom and parents retreat
- Gourmet kitchen with carport access
- Quality carpet and vinyl floor coverings
- Clay paved driveway (full width), hardstand and path
- Stylish vertical blinds
- Vanity cupboards and mirrors to bathroom and ensuite
- Jason Breezelock security windows and Keylock sliding doors
- Double clay brick
- Free Vienna Bristle roof tiles
- Termi-Mesh chemical free termite treatment

NO DEPOSIT HOME LOANS

Fantastic house and land packages available in over 30 suburbs from \$175 a week and absolutely no deposit. This is the first genuine no deposit offer in this State. No hidden finance costs, no exorbitant fees, no tricky savings plans and you're backed by one of WA's most respected builders. Conditions do apply so call now to see if you qualify.

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Open Sat & Public Holidays 1-5pm,
Sun 12-5pm, Mon and Wed 2-5pm.
Head Office open Mon-Fri 9am-5pm,
Weekends and Public Holidays 9am-12pm.



PRIVATE ACCESS
TO KITCHEN

DOUBLE
CARPORT
INCLUDED

Figure three - "The Maxi Advance" in 'New Homes' *The West Australian*, Saturday July 3, 1999: 17.

The media portray the suburban home as a vital part of life and culture reinforcing mythical assumptions within Australian society. The creation of identity, 'a way of life', is fundamental to the presentation of the suburban home as commodity. Identity is created by the names of the homes, the individuality and choice emphasised, and the segmentation and separation dominant in the advertising.

It's All in a Name

Each model home has a name which I have categorised into clusters according to the various provinces of meaning that I interpret then as evoking. The most common and consistent theme is for names that are linked to images of nature such as the use of 'glen' and 'wood'...This theme is linked to the dream of suburbia as an escape from the city...The second most common theme is for names with a British ancestry...Mediterranean or Spanish names are popular. Names which clearly signify status or power...increased during the 1980s. The house names do not fall neatly into categories; indeed there has been a distinct attempt to capture two or more of the provinces of meaning in one name (Dovey 1994: 142).

The visual spectacle, already overtly apparent in the advertising, is aided by the discursive nominal process. Dovey's categorisation of the display-home names in the 1980s has significantly developed and changed. For instance there is now more emphasis on American and much less on "British-ancestry" type names, signifying the Australian 1990s move toward an imagined republicanism and the breakdown of the symbolic historical allegiance to England. Names such as "The Dallas", "The Massive Manhattan", "The Santa Barbara", "The Boston" and "The

Madison" signify that American trends are now popular.

Consider for example, "The Dallas" or "The Santa Barbara", both homes are the names of former popular glitzy and glamorous American soap operas. This connotes most clearly the "spectacular" and all of the adjectives that go with it - big, best, fabulous, exciting, appealing, romantic and so on. Thus the names of the homes are rich in meaning combining a design with the glamorous lifestyles of the characters in the television programs. In the advertisement for "The Dallas" below (figure four) instead of an elevation picture, photographs with expensive fittings and features are illustrated, contributing to the already imagined spectacular lifestyle.

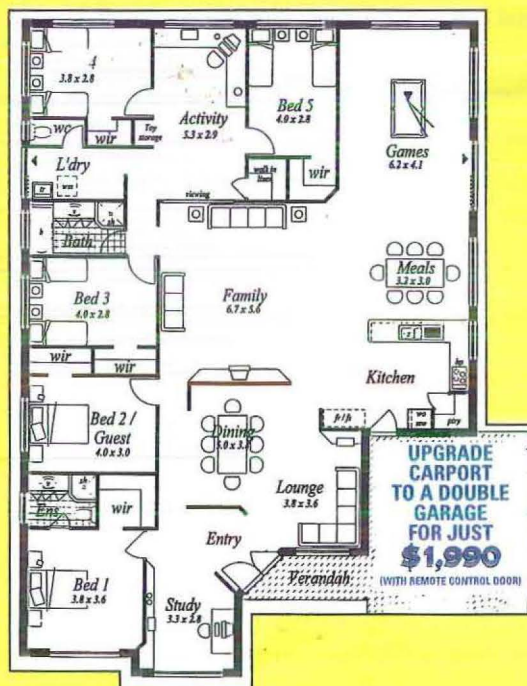
Names emphasising "the romantic" are currently popular. For example, names such as "Villa Chianti", "San Marino", "The Continental", "The Bellini", "The Bella Toscana", "The Aegean", "The Villa Florentine", "The Chianti", "The Napoli" and "The Venezia" appeal to Mediterranean, Italian and cosmopolitan styles of living. The names connote a rich and cultured existence and their popularity by far outweighs indigenous-Australian names that are virtually non-existent. Romance and cosmopolitan ways of living are particularly inherent in the discourses fundamental to the spectacular construction of the home.



THE DALLAS.

A HUGE 250M² OF LIVING SPACE.
MORE ROOM THAN ANY OTHER HOME IN ITS CLASS.

- Nostalgic colonial elevation as illustrated
- Five spacious bedrooms all with walk-in robes
- Convenient study
- Handy activity room
- Luxury fully tiled bathroom and ensuite with vanity cupboards
- Double carport
- Blok paved driveway and verandah
- Affinity windows with security bolts and vent locks
- Huge kitchen with gas hotplate, wall oven, microwave shelf, walk-in pantry and double bowl sink
- Convenient shoppers entry to kitchen
- Walk-in linen cupboard
- Automatic washing machine taps
- Economical 145L gas storage hot water system
- Gas heater point
- Two pre-wired smoke detectors
- Electrical safety switch
- Solid double brick construction
- Cream mortar
- HIA fixed price contract



Many builders offer the mandatory 6 year structural guarantee. With Commodore Homes' exclusive Lifetime Structural Guarantee, you're protected for the entire time you own the home we build for you. Now that's peace-of-mind.



\$79,990

Figure four - "The Dallas" in 'Home', *The Sunday Times*, Sunday August 29, 1999: 5.

The term “grand” illustrates how language and discourse are employed by the advertisements to propose an identity associated with the home (see figures five, six and seven). A dictionary definition for the term “grand” suggests, “large or impressive in size, appearance or style; intended to impress or gain attention; complete; in full; very pleasant; excellent; greatest, highest ranking” (Robinson 1996: 582). These homes are not discursively described as “big” and “good” but as, “grand” to signify the spectacle. The “MeadowBrook 2000” (‘New Homes’ 21-08-99: 11) for example, claims to feature “a grand entry statement”. There is now considerable emphasis on the size of the home and the term “grand” is instrumental in creating the “ultimate” – the spectacle.

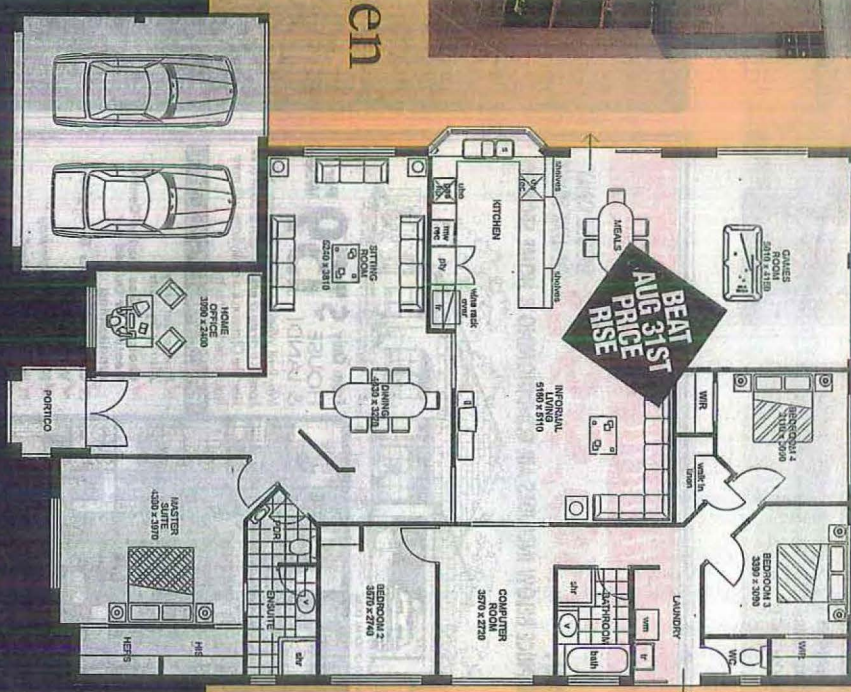
Consider also the use of the term “grande” in figure six. The term appeals to an old-world, traditional and romantic discourse. This is to associate the name of the home with the “Georgian” elevation. The appeal to the architectural style of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is signified by the spelling alteration. This discourse is thus utilised to connote not only all of the adjectives that are associated with the term “grand”, but also the English architectural style during the reign of King George (I-IV).



The Grand Kitchen \$87,858.

At New Dimensions we believe the kitchen is the heart of the home, an inviting place to socialise and entertain, a favourite place to make contact and make memories with your family. It must be well thought out, hard working with plenty of bench space, ample storage and room for more than one cook. The Grand Kitchen is a fine example and unbeatable value for money.

- Tuscan elevation
 - Huge family kitchen as shown
 - Spacious entry foyer
 - Double size bedrooms
 - Fully enclosed games
 - Powder room
 - Blockpaved driveway
 - Stainless steel appliances
- If you want maximum size and traditional features at an affordable price, visit a New Dimensions display home today or free call Barry now 1800 014 440



Landstate: Bancroft
Ramble 9302 1360.
Sanctuary Waters:
Roebuck Ave. 9456 0163.
Perceptions 2 Storey displays:
Iluka: Miami Beach Promenade 9305 3177.
Ranford: Goodwood Way 9456 5484.
Maylands: Peninsula Rd 9271 0074.
Office: 80 Walters Drive, Osborne Park. Phone: 9231 4910.



Figure five - "The Grand Kitchen" in 'New Homes' *The West Australian*, Saturday August 21, 1999: 5.

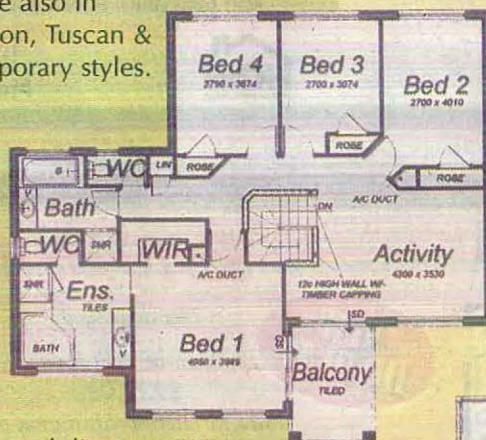


THE GRANDE MANOR

An exclusive Home by Artique

Georgian Elevation — Tuscan Displayed at Chatsworth Gate Canningvale available also in Federation, Tuscan & Contemporary styles.

Reverse upper floor plan available with balcony to rear



Presented with either **GOLD** specification including Air conditioning at \$177,655

SILVER specification as displayed at \$163,853

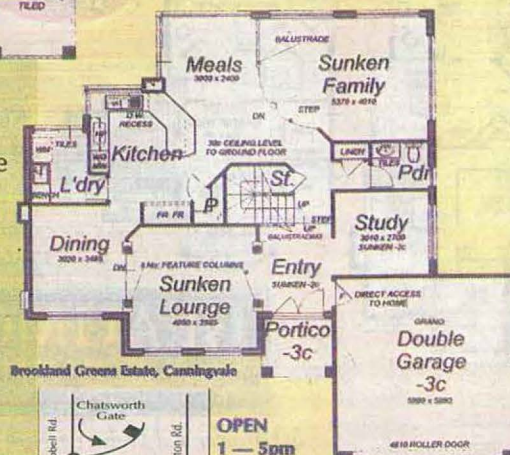
BRONZE specification from \$142,539

Come and discover Artique Homes Guarantee of Quality built by the Finest Craftsmen. We make building an enjoyable experience.

Ring us Today
9455 5566 all hours
We are here for you!



Head Office Suite 4, 152 Balcatta Road, Balcatta, Western Australia 6021 Phone 9240 1142 Fax 9240 1214



Brookland Greens Estate, Canningvale



OPEN
1 — 5pm
Sat, Sun,
Mon, Wed,

Figure six — "The Grande Manor" in 'New Homes' *The West Australian*, Saturday August 21, 1999: 34

The Grand Sensation *on Display*

206m² living area

\$75,990
DELUXE

\$70,990
DISPLAY

ASK OUR EXPERIENCED QUALIFIED CONSULTANTS ABOUT A GARAGE.

PAVED HARDSTAND & 6m LONG PAVED DRIVEWAY INCLUDED!

THE GRAND SENSATION

ON DISPLAY IN THORNLEE

SIMILAR HOME ALSO ON DISPLAY IN ROCKINGHAM

Compare the Inclusions
and you'll agree you won't buy better quality for the price!

- ✓ Reliable double clay brick only
- ✓ Secure 100mm thick slab
- ✓ Durable copper water pipes
- ✓ Paved hardstand/driveway and verandah
- ✓ Enormous, quality gourmet kitchen
- ✓ Shopping utility
- ✓ Quality draught sealed windows and sliding doors with key locks and flyscreens
- ✓ Full site re-peg and contour survey
- ✓ Generous 1.4m sewer connection
- ✓ Attractive post forming or timber edging to kitchen cupboards
- ✓ Protective corner beading strips to internal walls
- ✓ Solid front entry doors with double deadlocks and side lights
- ✓ 4 external lights
- ✓ Flickmixer tap
- ✓ 2 hard wired smoke detectors
- ✓ Coloured framed mirrors
- ✓ Separate W.C. (not through laundry)
- ✓ Huge laundry with door
- ✓ Linen utility
- ✓ Gas package
- ✓ Cream mortar
- ✓ HIA Indemnity Insurance
- ✓ and . . . much more!

LIFETIME STRUCTURAL GUARANTEE

FOR ASSISTANCE & INFORMATION PHONE
(08) 9480 5941

DISPLAY HOME OPENING TIMES:
Mon & Wed 2-5pm • Sat 1-5pm • Sun 12-5pm

SCOTT PARK

YOUR HOME BUILDER

HEAD OFFICE
Level 1, 128 Scarborough Rd, OSBORNE PARK
MARIC DEPAVOVA Ph: 9443 9303

GRAND SENSATION
AUTUMN CRESCENT, THORNLEE
DAVID CHAPMAN Ph: 9452 2575

GRAND INSPIRATION
ALORA DRIVE, ROCKINGHAM
DEREK MCARDLE Ph: 9593 7479

New-age, technological-type names continually appear in the advertising. The 'old' and the 'new' combine to exhibit traditional exterior designs, but with all the modern convenience of a 'new' interior. Names such as "The Complete Matrix 2000", "The Monarch 300", "The Maxi Advance" and "The New M2", signify rapid advancement towards (and Australian society's continual fascination with) the millenium. Emphasis in these advertisements is on discounted price (all of the names mentioned are homes priced under \$100 000). Often, the design of the home will in some way be "updated". For example, a remote-control lift-door on the garage ("The New M2"), or a new DVD player ("The Entertainer") will aim to attract attention in the advertisement. "The Maxi Advance" (see figure three) features, "Huge master bedroom and parents retreat" and "A gourmet kitchen". Using such terms aids spectacular visualisation of the home and associated lifestyle.

The discourse inherent in the names of the homes described above is crucial in the formation of identity associated with the suburban home. The analysis of these names reveals that identities are created and attached to the home for the process of commodification and are crucial in terms of the place of the home within popular culture.

Individuality and Choice

Individuality and choice are crucial in the advertising and demonstrate the suburban home as spectacle. As Dovey suggests,

Despite the fact that the model homes are to be replicated by the thousand, they are marketed as the unique creations of a craft industry that will display the owner's taste...The ideal home is the exception and the rule, popular and unique. (Dovey 1994: 141-142).

To create the "ideal" home advertisement copies constantly appeal to choice and individuality. For example, statements such as, "The stunning Colonial Collection from Ross North homes gives you complete freedom of choice" ('New Homes' 26-06-99: 9), are used to emphasise the act of choosing "your" individual home. Similarly, readers are often given a list of features to choose from, giving them the impression that they are building their own "one-off" dream. Language aims to convince the reader that they are making an individual and personal choice. Imagining someone else living in "their" home would not be a desired response from the audience in terms of the objective of the advertisement.

With the emphasis on choice comes the emphasis on individuality, so reader address is of primary importance. Advertisements ask readers to imagine themselves, to daydream, to form an identity:

Picture this. You've reached a certain point in life. There's no room for a home with 'pretend' rooms. You have space to work in peace and quiet. Space to indulge in relaxation. A whole floor is a bedroom suite just for you, a place where you can be yourself ("The Daintree Life" - 'New Homes' 04-09-99: 7).

"The Independence 2000" ('Home' 15-08-99: 14), similarly asks readers to,

Picture this. Your body floats away on a soothing sea of bubbles in your own large corner bath. As your mind wanders off to a peaceful, relaxing place, a smile adorns your face. It's then you realise this is something to enjoy everyday of your life. It's not a 5 star hotel. It's your home.

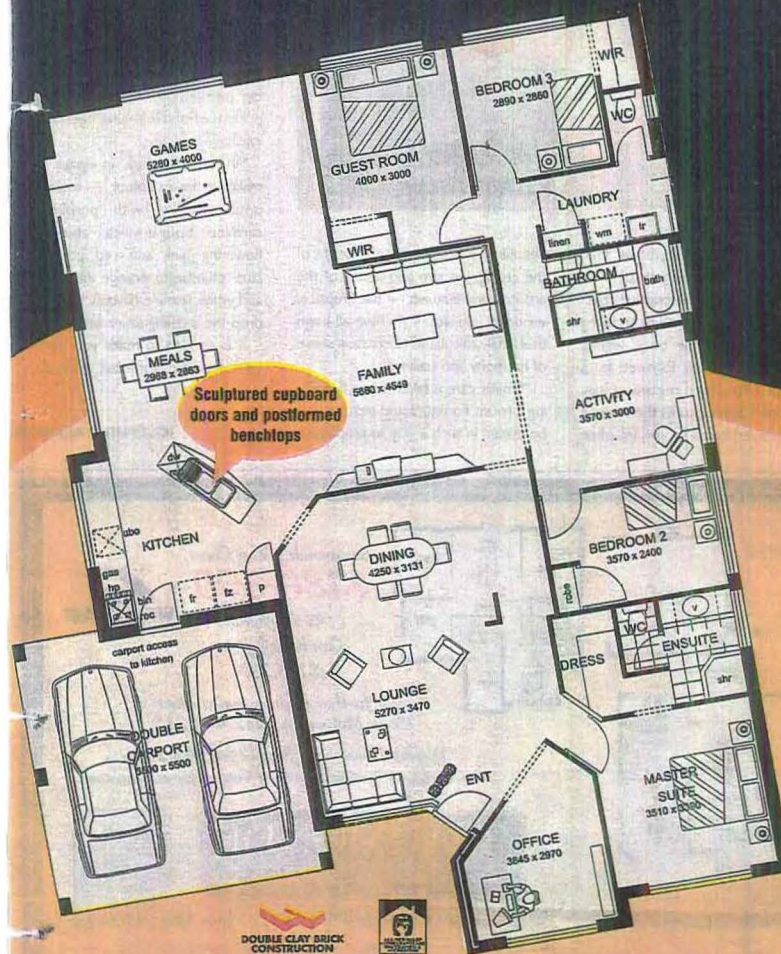
Although the homes are mass-produced, readers are asked to directly identify with individual homes. Statements such as "Come in today and see our display homes, that are individually designed to suit your lifestyle" ("The Cranbrook" - 'Home' 29-08-99: 22), reinforce the emphasis on individuality and "freedom of choice" in the advertising.

Segmentation and Separation

Segmentation and separation are significant characteristics of the modern "ideal" home at different levels. Separation primarily occurs between the interior and exterior of the home. The interior of the home is often totally separated from the exterior, that is, the designs are often totally different. Continuing the 'old' and 'new' opposition, the home will frequently feature a "colonial or heritage style elevation", however this contrasts inside with "new and up-dated" technology and design. The homes are advertised accordingly and the segmentation between the elevation and the floor plan is profoundly apparent. "The Elegant" features new technology in a "double garage and remote door". This conflict between the romantic connotations in the name of the home and the technology makes the features and design of the home very separate (see figure eight).

The 'Elegant', 208m² \$69,995.

July only, pay just \$2500 for a 6x6 double garage and remote door.



■ Plus, well designed, island bench kitchen ■ sculptured cupboard doors ■ roll formed bench tops ■ stainless steel appliances ■ vanity cupboards and mirrors ■ built in robes ■ generous \$35m² tile allowance ■ Blok paved driveway and hardstand ■ gas hotplate and 135 litre hot water storage ■ and a long list of inclusions most other builders call extras. Come in and see us today or call Charmaine anytime on Free call 1800 014 443.

BEECHBORO Orchid Rd. 9377 6426.
CARRAMAR Carwoola Loop 9306 8410.
NEW ELLENBROOK Kalyeeda Tce, 0413 078 100.
KINROSS Dorian Loop, 9304 8004.
MINDARIE Rochester Drive 9407 8026.
THORNIE Rosewood Lane 9459 3894.
ORELIA Belvoir Cres. 0411 479 862.
NEW PORT KENNEDY Alora Drive, 9593 8026.
THOMPSON LAKE Ellesmere Circle, 9414 5921.
HEAD OFFICE 80 Walters Drive, Osborne Park 9231 4911.



ADAM WATTS

Current new homes frequently assert “living space” as the major attraction and feature. An “open kitchen” connected to “games”, “lounge”, “dining”, “meals”, “living”, and “family” rooms is often used in the plan to illustrate a large amount of living space. Designers are frequently inventing new names for the rooms to connote bigger area, thus a games rooms is referred to as an “Amusement Gallery” (figure one) and one open space is separated into four different areas – “games”, “family”, “meals” and “kitchen” (see figure eight).

The living space is measured in square meters and used as a headline in the advertisements. For example, the advertisement for the Dallas (see figure four) boasts, “A huge 250m of living space. More room than any other home in its class”. Homes are described as “our spacious Beechworth” (‘New Homes’ 21-08-99: 23) and, “New Dimensions is putting real size back into homes, with space for your computer, surround-sound stereo, even a full size pool table” (‘New Homes’ 26-06-99: 16). These advertisements combat the perception of rezoning and subdividing the traditional quarter-acre block, which has become commonplace within Australian suburbia.

Separation between living areas and bedrooms is made clearly apparent in the advertising through the floor plan, often perfectly divided in two with one half for the living area and the other for bedrooms. Living space

remains open and public, on display for visitors, and the closed space of the "family" remains private. Rooms such as an activity room, or a computer room exist between the "children's" bedrooms, to emphasise casual living space, separate from formal space. Consider "The Boston" for example (figure one) that separates "formal dining and sitting" from "casual living".

Continual separation occurs between parent's and children's areas; for "family" and "guests" and the formal areas for entertaining and the informal areas for family. This presents an intriguing concept in terms of the spectacle and familial relationships in the 1990s with an emphasis on space for generational differences. The spectacle does not encompass everyday tensions and arguments inherent in the family home and they are excluded in the advertising. So for example, "The Aquarius" ('New Homes' 21-08-99: 24) exhibits, "A contemporary home designed for today's busy family. Clear planning allows lots of room for casual family dining and game activities, while providing plenty of privacy for parents". Dovey (1994: 144-145) suggests that,

The suburban home is a retreat from the constraints of public life, but it also appears to have become the repository for displaced social problems. The new segmentation, for instance, often claims to resolve problems between generations and genders.

So "The Bellini" ('Home' 04-07-99: 13), "is packed with features that will suit the growing family or couples looking for space". Similarly, "The

Grand Kitchen" ('New Homes' 21-08-99: 19 – see figure seven) states, "...we believe the kitchen is the heart of the home, an inviting place to socialise and entertain, a favourite place to make contact and make memories with your family". Statements such as these are often contradictory with the actual design of the home. "The Grand Kitchen" for example places emphasis on the separation of the master suite from the other bedrooms. The "children's rooms" are at the back of the house, away from the living areas, while the master-suite is positioned at the front, complete with parent's spectacular "retreat".

The analysis of advertisements in this chapter demonstrates the construction of the modern Australian suburban home as spectacle. Through the elevation, written copy and floor plans in the advertising identity is constructed, suggesting that the home is a distinct marker of social status. This is achieved in two ways. "Featurism" in the advertising draws attention to features, or appearances rather than simple functions; and discourse attempts to construct a spectacular 'way of life'.

The world the spectacle holds up to view is at once here and elsewhere; it is the world of the commodity ruling over all lived experience (Debord 1994: 26).

In the advertising an identity for the potential owner is attached to the home for commodity to take precedence over "all lived experience" (ibid.). This notion will be explored further in the following chapters.

CHAPTER THREE

Lifestyle Programs and the Suburban Home as Spectacle: *Better Homes and Gardens* and *Our House*.

If television imagines me as that person, they are wrong. If they imagine that that is what I want in my house, they are wrong. Indeed I'm already rather bored with the lifestyle show which seems to me to have no life and too much show. Furthermore, I can't deny a vague feeling of unease about the materiality of the culture represented, so concerned about its own well-being and doing it well. Even the gestures towards a new-agey spirituality seem so trendy as to negate their possibilities for transcendence. In this the way in which we wish to define ourselves as Australians? (Turnbull 1996: 6).

Lifestyle television programs featuring the home and garden demonstrate the suburban home as spectacle. Programs such as *Burke's Backyard* (Nine), *Better Homes and Gardens* (Seven), *Our House* (Nine), *Hot Property* (Seven) and *Changing Rooms* (Nine) are fundamental in reinforcing the ideological position of the suburban home within popular culture:

If once national identity was constructed in and around the archetype of the rugged bushman, of late it has been constructed in and around the economy of the suburban home. And no where is that domestic economy better displayed than in the lifestyle or infotainment show (Turnbull 1996: 4).

Turnbull's (1996) association of the lifestyle show with national identity provides the basic premise for this chapter. By ascertaining links between the suburban home, lifestyle programs and notions of representation we can gain a perception of the virtual locality of the modern suburban home.

As Debord argues, the spectacle,

is both the outcome and the goal of the dominant mode of production: it is not something added to the real world – not a decorative element, so to speak. On the contrary, it is the very heart of society's real unreality. In all its specific manifestations – news or propaganda, advertising or the actual consumption of entertainment – the spectacle epitomizes the prevailing mode of social life. It is the omnipresent celebration of a choice already made in the sphere of production, and the consummate result of that choice. In form as in content the spectacle serves as total justification for the conditions and aims of the existing system. It further ensures the permanent presence of that justification for it governs almost all time spent outside the production process itself (Debord 1994: 13).

Thus, in "society's real unreality", the spectacle "is not something added to the real world...[it] epitomizes the prevailing mode of social life"

(ibid.). In the representation of the suburban home as spectacle this is evident in the middle-class, patriarchal and dominant myths articulated in *Better Homes and Gardens* and *Our House*.

Lifestyle programs provide a site for television analysis where established academic work in Australian cultural studies, specifically on the suburban home, can be extended. While much has been written about suburbia and national identity, less considered are "the ways in which representations of suburbia have the potential...in the definition and redefinition of ideas of Australian identity...little specific work on the moving image and Australian suburbia seems evident" (Craven 1995: 45).

While not subjected to substantial analysis in this chapter, *Burke's Backyard* is significant because it is regarded as, "the grandfather of...infotainment programming" (Woods 1996: 48). The home is deliberately removed from the everyday and the ordinary, and thrust from the private into the public

and directly “constructed” as spectacle:

In the beginning, there was *Burke's Backyard*. It was quirky and we loved those segments which took you into someone's very own backyard to reveal a grotto built from wine bottles or a collection of rusting Holdens (Turnbull 1996: 5).

Burke's Backyard offered an image of a public life composed of private places and passions. Burke appeared as the public figure as gardener, as someone who shares a suburban dream of tending one's own plot, controlling and managing the stable world behind the fence...the fortress of the backyard (Wark 1999: 152).

Burke's Backyard first aired in 1987 and since then a multiplicity of programs have emerged concerning the suburban home and garden, making the “lifestyle” genre a comprehensive component of Australian television. Not unique to Australia, lifestyle programs have become an integral part of 1990s international viewing, although Turnbull suggests they are of greater significance in Australia in comparison to the UK and US (1996: 4).

This viewing includes a diverse range of programs in terms of both form and content screened in peak viewing time and rating highly in weekly figures (*Who Weekly* July - August 1999). Some current examples on Australian commercial networks are *Animal Hospital* (Seven), *Better Homes and Gardens* (Seven), *Burke's Backyard* (Nine), *Bright Ideas* (Ten), *Changing Rooms* (Nine), *Good Medicine* (Nine), *Hot Property* (Seven), *The Motor Show* (Nine), *Our House* (Nine), *Postcards* (Nine), and *The Real Estate Program* (Nine). In-depth analysis of these programs is useful to any study concerning lifestyle programs and Australian cultural studies, but is beyond the capacity of this dissertation and requires analysis elsewhere.

Qualitative analysis of *Better Homes and Gardens* and *Our House* shows sufficient evidence to demonstrate that the contemporary suburban home is constructed as spectacle. Examples from the programs are interchangeable as they both follow the half-hour format in segments, screen in peak viewing time and are almost identical in terms of content.

While a small amount of literature exists on the emergence of *Burke* (see Weaver, 1990, Glover, 1991, Turnbull, 1996, Wark, 1999) it is significant that very little academic work has been conducted on lifestyle programs in general. Recent histories and criticism of Australian television ignore the importance of the genre, although fleeting references to the programs as “infotainment” do exist (see for example Cunningham and Miller 1994 and Lumby and O’Neil 1994).

While beyond the scope of this dissertation, the connotations of the term ‘lifestyle’ need to be evaluated. Although not directly concerned with lifestyle television programs, Eric Michaels (1993: 64) suggests that the term “lifestyle”

...now substitutes everywhere for the term culture to indicate the latter’s demise in a period of ultra-merchandise...Lifestyles are...assemblages of commodified symbols, operating in concert as packages which can be bought, sold, traded or lost. The word proves unnervingly durable, serving to describe housing, automobiles, restaurants, things you wear, things that wear you.

Michaels’ concludes that “lifestyles” are the result of the commodification of culture. In the lifestyle television programs, culture is similarly commodified through constructions of “Australianness”.

Turnbull is one of very few academics who has concentrated on Australian lifestyle shows and her work demonstrates the value of linking the genre with Australian culture and identity (see Turnbull 1993 and 1996). She suggests that,

Australian television constructs a version of the Australian way of life (especially in the lifestyle shows) which is as mythical as that rugged bushman staring me in the face off the cover of my coffee table book from the sixties, entitled simply *The Australians*. We have merely substituted one myth for another: and each is equally exclusionary (Turnbull 1996: 6).

The “exclusionary” myths linked to the suburban home evident in the lifestyle show demonstrate established cultural ideologies surrounding the home. Similar to the newspaper advertisements the home is constructed as a spectacular commodity, as “society’s real unreality” (Debord 1994: 13).

Lifestyle programs construct their own reality – a version of representation. It is a representation that has bears little similarity or relevance to other constructed suburban “realities”. There is a common,

...assumption that the media should reflect ‘reality’...the media do not represent ‘reality’, but a construction of reality, one which indicates power relations in our society, rather than society’s composition and our concepts of nationhood (Bonwick 1996: 58).

Thus the myths utilised illustrate “society’s real unreality” (Debord 1994: 13) to reflect cultural power relations within society. An analysis of the suburban utopia in *Better Homes and Gardens* and *Our House* below, asserts

that the discourse is social, leisurely, colourful, but largely patriarchal and middle-class.

The Lifestyle Utopia, or Who Decided “House-work” is Fun?

The importance of do-it-yourself work on the home is an integral myth within Australian culture. The desire to continually improve the home is part of the constructed mythical “suburban dream”:

On Monday morning at any professional gathering in any Australian city, it is rewarding to inspect the fingernails, watch-faces and spectacle rims of mature males. Small specks of paint will frequently be found, survivors of rapid cleansing after a weekend’s labour on the domestic front...This is part of the DIY infantry, pained and uncertain soldiers in the great army of Australians who invest large amounts of uncosted time and unskilled, often counter-productive labour in doing things to their houses...In Australia it seems culturally impossible to live in a house and not do something to it (Knight 1990: 43-45).

House renovations, garden landscaping, craft and even cooking often can require intensive time and labour – which can be very mundane and ordinary. While the result may be worthwhile, the work itself for the majority of Australians is not necessarily pleasant. In *Better Homes and Gardens* and *Our House* the spectacular lifestyle is portrayed in leisurely, enjoyable and inexpensive activities. Lifestyle shows play on the desire within Australian culture to continually improve “the dream” reinforcing the cultural importance attached to the home in a traditional sense.

For example, *Our House* recently featured a make-over of a water-damaged room. Ignoring the difficulty, the expense or the time of

renovating an entire room, the conclusion of the presenter was, “A water damaged room transformed easily and cheaply and you can do the whole thing on your own” (*Our House* 5/5/99). Shots were edited together in this segment to condense the amount of physical and temporal activity involved in the project, demonstrating the simplicity evoked by the DIY discourse. Gardening segments are similarly made to look easy.

Comments such as “My space saving ways to grow apples mean you’ll still get a bumper crop but in half the space” (*Better Homes...* 25/5/99) or “I thought I’d share a few of my tried and true fern growing secrets that’ll guarantee you’ll have ferns looking as good as these too” (*Better Homes...* 1/6/99) demonstrate how language operates for the purpose of creating the spectacle. Or in producing a storage unit, Fiona Connolly concludes, “so there you have it. A storage unit that not only looks good and it won’t break the bank. If only all problem solving was this easy” (*Better Homes...* 25/5/99).

The happy, instructive and encouraging tone of the presenters constructs “society’s real unreality” (Debord 1994: 13) demonstrating the suburban home as spectacle. For example, Noni Hazelhurst instructs the audience, “When lifting heavy gardening items, like pots, bend your knees and bring the pot as close to your body as you can” (*Better Homes...* 25/5/99). Similarly Belinda Jeffries says, “you know in all my years of teaching

cooking the thing I get asked more than anything else are recipes for slices and they're so easy" (*Better Homes...* 13/4/99).

Colloquial language is used to reinforce the simplicity of construction-work. That "she'll be right mate" mentality is embodied in the "resident" handymen in respective programs, John Jarratt and Shirley Strachan. This "working class" tone and language clashes with the mostly middle-class discourse in the programs. As Knight (1990) suggests above the "DIY infantry" is "professional". Even the DIY segments featuring celebrities such as Harry Cooper, James Morrison, and Brendon Julian utilise working-class discourse. Phrases such as "whack it in", "knock it all together" and "Bob's your uncle" continually occur in these segments. Constructions of class in the lifestyle show genre call for further evaluation and will be considered below.

As well as language, tone and discourse, the production values, or the overall look of the program helps to foster this myth. Bright colours are employed in the opening of both programs and in combination with the lighting the appearance contributes to the overall upbeat and happy feel. The music is sometimes classical, sometimes modern, but always instrumental in contributing to the utopian mood. The classic before and after shot is crucial to the construction of the myth that house-work is zestful and gratifying.

Better Homes and Gardens and *Our House* open and close in the same physical location to create a sense of closure, satisfaction and achievement, and thus reinforce the overall feel of the programs. For example, one episode of *Better Homes and Gardens* (29/6/99) opens with John making a stepladder, and closes when his "task" for the day is completed. Work on the home, often mundane and time-consuming is again deliberately constructed as easy and exciting.

Our House similarly opens and closes in the same fashion usually beginning at an "exclusive" residence belonging to a celebrity, interior designer, builder or architect. The presenter is often relaxing in the home, enjoying the exclusive space for a short time and draws direct attention to the "spectacularity" of the home. Suzie Wilks comments at the beginning of one episode, "In a moment we'll take a look at one of Australia's most spectacular houses, set on Sydney's northern beaches" (*Our House* 5/5/99). Shirley Strachan similarly at the opening of another program suggests, "pretty spectacular place this one, isn't it...it's actually the result of the perfect marriage, a union between a builder and an interior designer" (*Our House* 26/5/99). This space is presented as highly desirable, but largely unattainable, even for the presenter. The representation of the home demonstrates the creation of a utopia, but one which is limited in terms of gender and class.

The Gendering of the Spectacle

Gender representation in these programs is mainly traditional and patriarchal. The emanation of the spectacle does not allow for an explanation of gender issues and thus traditional and patriarchal gender roles are fostered. The popularity of lifestyle shows together with their ideologies embedded in patriarchy reinforces the myth of the “suburban dream”.

The myth of the suburban dream relies on traditional and patriarchal stereotypes, reinforced in the Australian mind during the 1950s and 1960s:

The suburban dream centered on women’s role in the home as full time wives and mothers, but its achievement depended on their contributions as domestic and wage labourers. It was based on a clear cut gender division and unequal power relations between men and women. Along with the sexual division of labour went a construction of sexuality which emphasised the polarity between male and female (Game and Pringle 1997: 89).

The fifties witnessed a revival of domestic ideology...domesticity involved an expression of citizenship in an era of Cold War ideology...To achieve ‘The Australian Way of Life’ involved the acquisition of a home, together with the furnishings and appliances that went with it. Indeed consumer spending in this era was directed towards home, garden and car...Although the domestic ideology increasingly stressed women’s roles as mothers and wives the suburban life style was beyond the reach of many families, unless both parents worked...The ideology of domesticity was at odds with economic reality, as well as the aspirations of many Australian women (Waterhouse 1995: 201).

Game and Pringle (1997) and Waterhouse (1995) demonstrate the traditional gender traits in relation to the “suburban dream”. Both allude to the ambiguity of the women’s role in the dream that was not economically viable, but dependent on their place in the home and portrayed as the “norm” in the media at the time. The acquisition of

commodities and the reinforcement of specific gender roles constituted an “Australian way of life”. *Better Homes and Gardens* and *Our House* continually utilise the suburban dream in their patriarchal constructions of gender.

In *Our House* and *Better Homes and Gardens* these patriarchal stereotypes associate women with inside and men with outside. Women present craft, decorating and some cooking segments, while men do some cooking, building, renovating, gardening and do-it-yourself segments.

With few exceptions then, feminine is associated with craft, decorating, restoring the old, illogical and impractical happenings (featurism) while masculine is associated with renovating, constructing, logical and practical activities (functionalism). Gender representation in these lifestyle shows continues to rely on these distinctions. There are exceptions. *ABC Gardening* (ABC), for example, often reverses gender stereotypes in depicting an alternative version of ‘the Australian Way of Life’, but the commercial lifestyle programs adhere to a traditional gendered representation of Australian society.

With few exceptions then, these programs reinforce the suggestion that men,

...stick to the safer, public spaces, especially to the outdoor living area and backyard, those liminal spaces between nature and culture where masculinity comes into its own presiding over the barbecue ritual (Ferres 1994: 150).

Traditional gender positions within the suburban home are encouraged in the lifestyle program. These traditional representations come from,

...the assumption that women must be the primary carers of children within these settings serves to confirm the 'home' as feminised territory – as a site of female labour and of feminine identity (Duruz 1994: 201).

The backyard and the tool shed serve as a male domain where women can not enter unless accompanied by men. The inside of the home, on the other hand, is portrayed as the female domain where men only enter to build or renovate.

Traditional ideologies are utilised to create “masculine” segments. For example, in *Better Homes and Gardens*, Graham is building an “urn water feature” for the garden and he uses language such as, “cut out the shape with an angle-grinder fitted with a masonry disc...and cover with render” (*Better Homes...* 18/5/99). The gender-specificity is due to the traditional associations between men, tools and this space and the personal direct address to the audience. Shirley Strachan from *Our House* suggests that, “when you buy yourself a new plane or a new set of chisels you’ll find the blades are sharp but they haven’t been honed” (*Our House* 30/6/99) and some apparatus is “one of those tools you should have in your workshop or your toolbox” (*Our House....* 5/5/99). The personal style of address

also assumes that all men are handymen and have a toolbox, filled with an extensive array of tools.

Traditional gender roles are also embodied in the narrative space of *Better Homes and Gardens* with Noni Hazelhurst and John Jarratt. Ironically they “perform being married in the Australian way” (Turnbull, 1996: 5) to fulfil the patriarchal criterion of the “suburban dream”. Irony exists in the fact that their marriage, like the reality of so many marriages in this country, has failed. “Gender specific” roles are reinforced by the couple. Noni does the craft, decorating and simple cooking, while John gets to “play” with his power tools and build things such as bench seats. John employs traditional male characteristics within the home, making comments such as, “the good thing about this one is that it is legless so I don’t have to do any leg jokes and you will be happy about that” (*Better Homes...* 13/4/99).

Noni presents “specific” women’s segments such as simple cooking ideas and “better living” segments. At the beginning of one program Noni is making soup from leftovers and John asks, “Isn’t it going to be a bit watery?” and Noni says, “well that’s where the leftovers come in” (*Better Homes...* 27/7/99). Resourcefulness in the kitchen is continually constructed as an innate feminine trait.

Cooking in these programs continues to privilege traditional gender roles within Australian society. In one episode of *Our House* emphasis is drawn to a healthy desert for the children “as long as you don’t tell them rhubarb is a vegetable” (12/5/99). The kitchen is a place that allows for a cross-over of traditional gender roles. Men can cook but only to create the more exotic restaurant-type meals. Men use cooking as a skill, as a feature, while for women it is a necessity and purely functionalist. There is a reversal of the function/feature binary applied to most other areas of the suburban home.

Men enter the women’s space in the home mostly on a functional basis. Renovations, construction and so on may be undertaken for practical or protective ends, such as putting brackets up to get the microwave off the bench to provide more working space (*Better Homes...* 15/6/99), or putting a cover up over the washing line to keep the clothes dry (*Our House* 31/3/99). These segments exist within the program to make life “easier” for the woman “inside” the home.

The spectacular home demonstrates limited gender positioning. The programs do not focus on problematic gender issues, for this would disrupt their happy, inclusive style. The way in which representations of gender occur reinforce the myth of the “ideal” Australian family within the suburban dream, rather than acknowledging, for example, problems

for women within suburbia (see Johnson 1997). The programs create a spectacular space where no debatable issues can exist. "Society's real unreality" is constructed whereby traditional ideologies surrounding gender are reinforced.

Middle-classness (or what is Decoupage?)

Waterhouse (1995: 200) suggests that the "notions of the importance of property, the superiority of the suburban environment, the primacy of family and domesticity" are essentially middle-class. The lifestyle shows encourage these orientations.

Turnbull (1996: 5) suggests that, "...the obviously middle-class Australian way of life is demonstrated for us in its ideal form by very middle-class Australians" and the presenters on these programs are middle-class with few exceptions. In *Better Homes and Gardens* and *Our House* presenters appear in middle-class homes and gardens and participate in leisurely, traditionally middle-class activities. An exception presents itself in the "working-class handymen" in the programs and at this point the ideology is discursively dislocated. The men presenting gardening and architecture segments are suitably located with the articulate, well-dressed and well-spoken female presenters. Tensions exist between these men and the "working-class handymen", disrupting the discourse of the program.

In *Better Homes and Gardens* and *Our House*, work outside the home is absent. There is little emphasis on the economic “reality” inherent in the lives of many Australians, for this would limit the amount of time spent in homes and gardens engaged in traditional leisurely activities – as opposed to labourious tasks. This advocates traditional middle-class notions of the woman staying at home and patriarchal family situations are dominant. Women presenters are continually engaged in traditionally “feminine” activities – through craft and decorating segments – signifying their place in the home.

In the display home, “everything is ordered for display, for the use of the spectator not by the owners. In a home that is “lived in” lower down the market, vulgar display is joy for the owner, expressing meanings for the self – perhaps reminders of happy times, individual people and places who are known and loved” (Fiske, Hodge and Turner 1987: 37). The homes used in the lifestyle shows are set up like display homes where every feature features a feature.

One “decorating” segment, for example, concerns putting pictures and photographs on the wall for the purpose of display (*Better Homes...* 25/5/99). Viewers are told that their photos, usually personal expressions holding meaning for the owners and their families and friends, “need a bit

of dressing up". The programs privilege middle-class display for the spectator, "don't be afraid to use bright and bold colours...groupings of similar subjects work well" and "you can find some real treasures in that old box of photos". Just like the homes featured in the newspaper advertising appearance is of primary importance.

"Craft" essentially reflects middle-class ideology requiring intensive leisure time and effort to complete projects. This relies on the traditional middle-class assumptions and the location of the woman in the home.

"Decoupage", which is cutting out pictures and sticking them on objects to make them more physically appealing, is described as "one of Australia's best-loved crafts" (*Better Homes...* 4/5/99) (it is referred to as a favourite "national" past-time). While there is no doubt that some persons living within Australia may indeed "love" decoupage, it is difficult to imagine its place alongside other nationally accepted "past-times": sport, cinema, television, and so on. There is a direct association here between craft and notions of Australianness (or constructing what it means to be Australian).

Embroidery, tapestry, crochet, and sewing presented in craft segments are directly appealing to middle-class ideologies and traditional "leisure" time. These activities encourage a dominant middle-class lifestyle.

There are many other signifiers of middle-classness in the lifestyle shows. These include a dog-house makeover where Reg Livermore visits “Dogue” (*Our House* 2/6/99), a shop specialising in products for “fashion conscious canines” and manages to spend \$600 on dog accessories and hundreds more on dog “clothes”. In another segment “Wombat-weight bearers” (*Our House* 2/6/99) are featured, and “they’re really no different from standard pot-feet except they’re more expensive...perhaps a good gift idea after all they are hand made and very cute”. More signifiers of this middle-classness are embodied, for example, in expensive water purifiers, restoring antiques, Feng Shui experts, exotic plants, private schools and so on. The construction of the home as spectacle is again apparent.

Through mythical perceptions within society, the spectacular utopian space in the lifestyle program gives us the impression that the home is a place of harmony and inclusiveness. It is portrayed as an aesthetically pleasing place, where all sponge cakes rise and all do-it-yourself renovations and furniture are flawlessly completed. As has been demonstrated, it is an “unreal” and spectacular world, one that fails to consider alternate constructions and fosters one particular way of life.

CHAPTER FOUR

Changing Rooms and Hot Property

...the ordinariness of television, this very quality of banality which so infuriates critics in search of forms of cultural uplift, derives from its position between the great questions of life – who we are, how we should organise ourselves and what we should be up to, and the unanswerable questions – what is to be the future? (Cunningham and Miller 1994: 22).

The purpose of this chapter is to provide further evidence of how the media, specifically television programs, demonstrate the suburban home as spectacle. Two recent programs have emerged within popular culture that deviate from the usual “lifestyle show format” to which Australian television viewers have become accustomed. *Changing Rooms* (Nine) and *Hot Property* (Seven) deviate in terms of style, language and discourse to the programs subjected to analysis so far. Nevertheless, these representations continue to demonstrate the suburban home as spectacle.

Better Homes and Gardens and *Our House* present “exclusive” places – homes of interior designers, architects, or the rich and famous.

Occasionally a home is featured because it is inexpensive (as in the case of the \$25 Dream House story – *Our House* 17/02/99) but mostly the representation of the home is not located in the everyday, and are constructed as spectacle. *Changing Rooms* and *Hot Property* explicitly feature the homes of a wider cross-section of “ordinary” Australians.

While not concerned with the home and garden, other recent lifestyle programs have been obsessed with representing “ordinariness” on television. *Doing Time* (Nine) looks at the lives of women inside prison and *The Weighting Game* (Nine) weekly observes men and women aiming to lose weight. Although British, *Airline* (Nine) and *Ramsay’s Boiling Point* (Nine) are other interesting examples that concentrate on the “ordinary” and “the everyday”. The multiplicity of programs suggests that “ordinariness” is becoming increasingly popular on television, both in the UK and here in Australia.

While they are no less constructions, looking at the lives of “ordinary” Australians and watching the activities they are involved in, whether it be losing weight, renovating a room, or selling a house, allows for more diverse identity construction in terms of gender and class. This demonstrates how dominant and middle-class the ideologies are, in the programs discussed in the last chapter. It should be noted here that these programs are not without their faults in terms of construction. The discourse, tone, language and style of these programs are located more in egalitarian myths and ideologies, rather than in strictly middle-class ones. As opposed to “exclusionary” space in *Better Homes and Gardens* and *Our House*, everyday homes are the subject for representation. A struggle exists here between the representation of the home as spectacle and the

location of *Changing Rooms* and *Hot Property* within the “everyday”.

This concept requires some revisiting of the debates surrounding representation and reality, where comparisons are made between the media and “real life” (for example in relation to race representation, see for example Bogle 1989, Jhally and Lewis 1992, or gender, see for example, Artel and Wengraf 1990). All representations and realities are constructions that exist for the purpose of creating fictional notions of identity, but the popular media continue to make comparisons between representation and reality:

One of Australia’s most watched soap operas, *Home and Away*, may look like easy entertainment. But its message about how a community should work is serious...Summer Bay is still a place where there are right and wrong and happy endings found...that such faith continues to hold in a central part of Australian culture is something of the utmost importance (Keneally 1994: 41).

While it has been widely acknowledged that audiences are active (decoding and deciphering media messages) rather than passive,

Media penetrate daily life, creating the environment where identities are formed...media interconnect personal lives and public activities...and shape our consciousness (Real 1989: 15).

Thus, while we acknowledge that all “realities” and “representations” are social constructions, the representation/reality debate as popularly understood is essential to this argument. In understanding the space in which these “ordinary” lifestyle programs exist, specifically in relation to the suburban home within national culture, it is necessary to make comparisons between television and how most Australians live.

The spectacle is defined as, “the impoverishment, enslavement and negation of real life” (Debord 1994: 215). The construction of the home as commodity occurs not only through myth and identity formation already discussed, but also through the spectacular representation of the “real”.

New Direction in Australian Television?

The classification of these programs within the “banality” of everyday popular culture requires some evaluation. The term “banality” is problematic because,

Banality as mythic signifier is...always a mask for questions of value, of value judgement, and “discrimination” – especially in relation to how we distinguish and evaluate problems (rather than cultural “products”), legitimate our priorities, and defend our choice of what matters (Morris 1990: 40).

Lifestyle shows in general are associated with the banal because they are concerned with elements of the “everyday”. However, *Better Homes and Gardens* and *Our House* are not located in the same kind of “ordinariness” as *Changing Rooms* and *Hot Property*. The everydayness in these programs is paradoxically transformed into a spectacle. The positioning of the lives of “real” people and homes on television connotes a banality that can only be defined by what society considers as the “cultural norm”. Television encourages cultural norms in the society of the spectacle. So, ordinary suburban lives are treated like characters from a soap opera, or drama, where within one episode, or over a number of weeks, the program

follows the development of “real” characters.

This is not, of course, a new concept within the Australian media.

Suburbia has been a key element in a number of recent Australian films.

Films such as *Sweetie* (1989), *Strictly Ballroom* (1992), *Muriel's Wedding* (1994), and *The Castle* (1995) have celebrated “individuality” within suburbia. Generally these films rely on an “uneasy edge, a preoccupation with and questioning of the notions of the home and family, a certain sadness and toughness, a bad-taste aesthetic...and a crude and energetic fight by the underdog” (Mortimer 1998: 118).

Fascination with the “ordinary” is also previously evident in Australian television history. The controversial series *Sylvania Waters* (1992) aimed to follow an “ordinary” family around, filming their daily lives. This transformed the “ordinariness” of the suburban home into spectacle. *Changing Rooms* and *Hot Property* function in a similar way.

In Comparison...

Changing Rooms has appeared as an Australian television production in 1998 and 1999. A success in terms of ratings, the premise for the show is for two couples that are friends to exchange keys, swap houses and make-over a room within two days and with \$1200. The Australian television program derives from a British equivalent of the same name. This is

interesting in terms of the appeal of the closeness that viewers may find in relation to their own lives (it would be much harder, for example for an Australian viewer to relate his/her life to a British participant). When asked about the popularity of *Changing Rooms*, British producer Peter Bazalgette has a theory:

Our consumer behaviour partly defines our relationship with our partners, families and with ourselves. It is a self-definition. The show is really about watching other people in the raw and then deciding things about them like are they metropolitan or are they chintzy? (Bazalgette 1998: 22).

This appeal to the “raw” combined with the appeal to the banal encourages conflict in relation to the representation of the home as spectacle. The everyday “real” people that act as characters on the show are not located in the “banal”, but in the “raw”. This is similar to the basic premise for *Sylvania Waters* where everyday family life is filmed, edited and transformed into spectacle. This program provoked considerable debate about the notion of placing the “ordinary” on television:

Sylvania Waters was therefore hardly a “fly on the wall” documentary with the non-interventionist connotations of that appellation. The film-makers regularly intervened in the family’s lives, asking them to do things which they sometimes felt were out of character...*Sylvania Waters* is therefore, a melodrama masquerading as a documentary misrecognised as a soap (Turnbull 1994: 17-19).

Just as in *Sylvania Waters*, continual comparisons can be made in *Changing Rooms* between audience lifestyle and the lives of the “characters” on screen. While *Better Homes and Gardens* and *Our House* may exhibit elements of the everyday, the segmentation, abruptness and scripting in the programs makes them instructional, rather than narrative, driven and thus very different.

The notion of aesthetically renovating one room for the purpose of pure display in *Changing Rooms* encourages Boyd's concept of "Featurism".

Emphasis is not on changing the function of the room, although sometimes it can be about improving functionality (such as making more bench space in the kitchen). The majority of the time the aim is to make the room a feature that always features a feature.

No matter how successful it may be in pleasing the passing eye, no matter if it pleases to the extent of being judged beautiful, the entirely superficial, frivolous appeal of a Featurist object can never assist human awareness, wisdom, and understanding. It is for this reason alone it is as degrading to human nature as it is to art (Boyd 1972: 138-139).

Boyd blames featurism for "the Australian ugliness". However featurism is also essential in encouraging individuality and creativity, and a space within suburbia where individuals can, "make sense of their lives" (Fiske, Hodge and Turner 1987: 52). Featurism is inherent and encouraged in *Changing Rooms*. For example, in the home of an obsessive cricket fan, a cricket theme is used, with large plastic cricket stumps used as a wall feature and cricket bats as door handles (*Changing Rooms* 8/9/99). In another segment an American/mid-west theme is used for an American couple, with a papier-mâché cacti, and a ranch verandah installed as features (8/9/99). Signifiers of nationalism and belonging to a certain place are dominant in these programs, connoting strong notions of Australian nationalism. Rather than encourage middle-class taste and

desire, featurism is employed in *Changing Rooms* to construct each individual and ordinary home as spectacle.

In comparison to *Better Homes and Gardens* and *Our House*, in *Changing Rooms* things can go wrong and will. The utopia constructed in the other programs making work exciting, easy and inexpensive is reversed and the tensions of renovating and building are emphasised. A conversation from one episode succinctly illustrates these tensions:

Interior Designer: These people are just so not handy
 Suzie Wilks: In fairness, putting fabric on a wall is pretty tough
 ID: It's not that difficult, it's just that these guys just can't come to terms with it.
 It's going to look great and ultimately that is always the main thing (*Changing Rooms* 8/9/99).

The hard work ignored in *Better Homes and Gardens* and *Our House* is made overtly apparent in *Changing Rooms*. Statements reinforcing this are "...this is the worst bloody job, fair dinkum, gives me the shits" (*Changing Rooms* 25/8/99), "you've got a major job here" (11/8/99) and "...they just don't see eye to eye" (25/8/99).

Gender representations are more diverse in *Changing Rooms* with more allowance for role cross-over in comparison with the programs analysed in the last chapter, that position men and women in typical gender roles. Men are often "expected" to work on sewing machines, be creative, and help with craft. Women are often "encouraged" to construct furniture and to engage in functional work. The dominant ideologies of class and

gender in *Better Homes and Gardens* and *Our House* are not given the same amount of cultural power.

The gender role crossover is not spatially constructed within banality, but in the extraordinary, and thus the spectacular. One male participant while sewing remarks, "...sewing is a lot harder than I thought it would be. I'm not really enjoying this" (*Changing Rooms* 8/9/99). Similarly, women when participating in functional activities are surprised at how well and how much they are enjoying "men's work", and while acting initially daunted by the task, become delighted by their creations. These representations are hardly situated in the "ordinary". The "ordinary" becomes the spectacle.

Middle-classness versus Egalitarianism

The concept of locating class within these programs is an ambiguous one, demonstrating the difficulty of asserting economic and social class within suburbia:

Suburbia is...historically, the habitat of the social class with the lowest reputation in the entire history of class theory, the social class that attracts no love, support, advocacy or self-conscious organization: the petit bourgeoisie, the lower middle class, the class for whom it seems hardest (certainly it's very rare!) to claim pride of membership. Scholars scarcely venture into suburbia except to pathologize it, despite the fact that by some accounts intellectuals themselves occupy a petit-bourgeois speaking position (Hartley 1996: 161).

The first series of *Hot Property* aired on Channel Seven in 1999. It is also, if

not more so, located in the “ordinariness” of the everyday. It features the lives of Australians looking to buy, sell, rent or move their homes. While *Better Homes and Gardens* and *Our House* aim to instruct viewers, *Hot Property* carries more of a narrative element – surveying the lives of “ordinary” people and situations.

These “real characters” can not be described as just “ordinary”, they usually embody the ideology of the “battler” and must overcome some form of hurdle. Phil and Randa, for example, are in wheelchairs and are having trouble finding a suitable home and landlord (*Hot Property* 15/6/99). Jim and Donna are continually coming up against local council by-laws and they can not accommodate the do-it-yourself plans of their “dream home” (8/6/99). There is also an elderly lady who living alone in the family house since 1970 has to be re-located in a flat (18/5/99). Or the retirees – Hank and Donna off in a bus around what presenter Michael Caton refers to as “our great land, Australia” (29/6/99). Narrative devices rather than information and instruction are privileged. Like *Sylvania Waters* and *Changing Rooms* the appeal is to the “raw”, embodied in the “everyday” problems that “ordinary” people face.

While *Better Homes and Gardens* and *Our House* rely on middle-class, patriarchal and dominant discourses and ideologies through myth, asserting class in *Hot Property* is much more complex. Discourse and

language are located more in egalitarian orientations. It has been argued that the ideology of egalitarianism,

...springs from the reality of a comfortable standard of living, based on a close-knit family unit and high levels of home-ownership. The form of ownership that the working class has aspired to and largely attained has been the home and quarter-acre block in the suburbs. A nuclear family consisting of husband, wife and two children, has become the norm for an increasingly high proportion of Australians (Game and Pringle 1997: 191-192).

There is a direct conflict here between the middle-class notions of suburban life and the working-class myth of egalitarianism. This myth is encouraged in *Hot Property* through traditional working-class meanings pertaining to the suburban home. Evaluating these diverse representational versions of "Australianness" demonstrates that the question "Is this the way we want to be defined as Australians?" (Turnbull, 1996: 6) is indeterminate. Is there a specific way that "we" can define ourselves as Australians, when the constructions on television are problematic and vary considerably?

Egalitarianism is embodied in the presenter Michael Caton. Viewers of the program would be familiar with the "personality" Caton has created through his role as Darryl Kerrigan in the Australian film *The Castle* (1995), and his subsequent appearances in television advertising. While beyond the scope of this dissertation, *The Castle* demonstrates the cultural importance of "homes" in the 1990s.

The Castle is about a family trying to save their own "dream". In terms of

fictional national identity, the Kerrrigans could be described as “working-class Aussie battlers” (embodying the same “battler ideology” demonstrated in *Hot Property*). The film largely relies on satire to advocate the importance of the home in current Australian culture:

It's not a house, it's a home. A man's home is his castle. I mean it's Jack's castle, Ferouc's castle...you just can't walk in and steal our home...you can't buy what we've got...How dare they - an eyesore? I mean that just goes to show that they don't get it. I mean they're judging the house by what it looks like and if it doesn't have a pool, or a classy front or a big garden...because of that it's not worth saving. But it's not a house, it's a home. It's got everything, people who love each other, care about each other...memories, great memories...but that doesn't seem to matter as much as a big fucking driveway (Darryl Kerrigan, *The Castle*, 1995).

In a sense the fictional character of Kerrigan, articulates a profoundly important truth for “real” Australia - that the spectacle exists in the “individuality” of each person’s “dream”, representative of each individual “castle”. This is evident in *Hot Property* and *Changing Rooms*, where just like the homes of interior designers or the rich and famous in *Our House*, individual “real” homes are the spectacle.

Traditional “egalitarian” national identity emulates itself in *Hot Property* in getting out of the city, in having mates around for a “barbie”, in half-completing house-renovations, mowing the lawn on a Sunday and so on. This constructed Australian ideology is unitary, but is continually used in *Hot Property* to commodify the cultural importance of the home. For example, Caton introduces each program engaged in these types of activities. In a sense one definition of what it means to be Australian, is

used to “sell” both the advertising in between individual Australian lives advocating the cultural importance of the Australian suburban home:

Caton: But the work isn't over yet. Jim and Deb have still got the outdoor recreation area to build. And for Jim that's the icing on the cake...

Jim: At the end of the day we want to be able to just come home, kick back in the gazebo, fire the barbie up, invite a few friends 'round, a few frothy chops and Bob's your uncle (*Hot Property* 29/6/99).

Turner suggests that the problem with advocating this sort of traditional and unitary national identity, whether it is egalitarian or middle-class,

is that it still addresses a single national character and depends upon a singular version of history. It is incapable of incorporating, and is therefore implicitly hostile to, the multiplicity of identities and histories currently competing for representation within the discourses of nationality. Nevertheless, at the moment, the dominant discourses used in representing Australian identity are still those which derive from the old nationalism. It is not easy for competing constructions to break into the circuit and 'denaturalise' the established imagery - of the land, of the bushman, or rural communities and so on (Turner 1994: 10).

Hot Property continually appeals to singular and unitary notions of nationalism and identity for the purpose of commodification. In *Hot Property* characters do represent cultural difference, but mostly egalitarian “aspects of what it is to be Australian, especially the optimism and niceness, the lovable ocker, the larrikin, the rebel individualist” (Malone 1997: 12) are encouraged.

Not everyone living in Australia who attaches importance to their home can be defined as “the lovable ocker, the larrikin, the rebel”, for this automatically connotes a singular history and identity. The spectacle promotes a unitary Australian national identity for the purpose of commodification. “Australianness” is marketed and sold to fellow

Australians in a traditional, patriarchal and working-class manner.

“Aussie slang” is dominant in *Hot Property* for the same purpose. There is still room however, for the more articulate Australian as long as they embody in some shape or form the egalitarian ideology of the “battler”:

For eighteen long months they've been haggling, wrangling, waiting and working for the day when they can move out of their rented farmhouse and into the do-it-yourself dream home...Hank and Donna have found some hot property alright and there's plenty more where that came from, I reckon the whole country...we'd like to thank all the people who've shared their experiences with us over the months. We've certainly been through some ups and downs but in the end it's always worth it. Like they say – there's no place like home (Caton *Hot Property* 29/6/99).

Nothing about buying, selling and renting the “dream” is presented as simple, displaying the importance attached to the suburban home within society.

So it is no wonder then that direct attention is drawn to the fact that the individual Australian dream of the spectacular home, often requires life-savings. It is emphasised that homes are expensive commodities. Often young couples have trouble in initially finding their spectacle, and the ability to afford it. *Hot Property* emphasises that looking for the perfect home, even to rent, is a difficult, pain-staking and time-consuming process. This reinforces the representation of the home as an item of great importance and significance within popular culture. For each of the “battlers” represented, each individual “dream”, “each part of Australia”

represents their castle, their individual hard-found, fought for, or constructed spectacle.

If we consider then the suggestion by Waterhouse (1995: 200) in the last chapter that the, "importance of property, the superiority of the suburban environment, [and] the primacy of family and domesticity" are essentially middle-class notions, and Hartley's suggestions about the place of class within suburbia then there is some ambiguity between the suburban home and class. *Hot Property* connotes that all homes are spectacle, individual homes connote the Australian "suburban dream". Maybe its that notions of the importance of the home within Australian society are not restricted to class. Individual suburban homes, regardless of the class they imply, are constructed within the media and only when a diversity of representation exists will they break down the spectacle.

Changing Rooms and *Hot Property* are examples of the growing number of programs appealing to the "ordinary" on Australian television. Each home is not only constructed as a site of great cultural importance, but also as an individual spectacle for the owner. The analysis of the representation of the home within the popular media in reveals that the "suburban dream" is still dominant within Australian culture.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

This project has in a sense created more questions than could be answered within the scope of the dissertation. The place of the home within society and the cultural importance and meaning attached to it, call for further analysis. Many areas beyond the scope of this dissertation, not directly relating to the argument have also emerged. These include Real Estate discourse, many other newspapers lift-outs, the history of advertising for new homes and the development of names inherent in the advertising; further evaluation of the term “lifestyle”; continually emerging lifestyle television shows and their historical place in terms of Australian television; increasing examples of ordinariness on Australian television; and further debates concerning representation, reality, and national identity. These areas require separate and in-depth analysis.

This dissertation has not aimed to suggest that there is one specific mode for analysing the texts under discussion, or that my interpretation constitutes a privileged response. The argument utilises the perception of the commodification of the home in Australian culture in the form of “lifestyle”. The media demonstrate the emergence of the suburban home as spectacle.

The first chapter serves as an introduction examining the theory and key terms in relation to the argument. Debord (1994: 215) describes the spectacle as, "the acme of ideology" and that it "exposes and manifests the essence of all ideological systems: the impoverishment, enslavement and negation of real life". This provides the framework for the argument in that the construction of the spectacle specifically acts on "real" life.

"Real" life in this argument is embodied in the suburbs, and thus the notion and definition of suburbia is also considered in the opening chapter. Previous debates demonstrating positive and negative critiques of suburbia are important, but are no longer relevant in contemporary arguments about the suburbs. As suggested, suburbia can not simply be defined as "living in the suburbs". Discourse has ascribed negative emphasis to the term, and this definition has crossed over into popular culture. The term is thus associated with phrases such as, "conventional uniformity", "lacking sophistication" and "narrow minded" (Robinson 1996: 1409). On the one hand suburbia signifies conformity and control and on the other it is considered to be a site for the celebration of individuality.

Lifestyle television programs and newspaper advertising directly relating to the home exhibit the commodification of Australian culture to create the

spectacle. Thus, textual analysis of specific texts makes up the following chapters in the dissertation.

In the newspaper lift-outs 'New Homes' from *The West Australian* and 'Home' from the *Sunday Times*, the spectacle is the result of the attachment of identity inherent in the advertising. The names given to the homes by their designers offer an identity to potential buyers. This area requires more investigation and study in terms of how the names have changed and developed and what this reveals about the place of the home within popular culture. Emphasis on individuality and choice, and the segmentation and separation inherent in the advertising also operate to attach identities to the spectacular suburban home.

Chapter three examines the lifestyle television programs *Better Homes and Gardens* and *Our House*, in terms of the questions and comments raised by Sue Turnbull in her brief, yet important articles on lifestyle shows (1993 and 1996). Turnbull links the construction of national identity with the lifestyle program formulating the content for this chapter. The problematic notion of national identity in the lifestyle show is located in the encouragement of traditional myths already located within popular culture. These myths foster the concept of the Australian "suburban dream", largely formulated in the 1950s and 60s, embodying middle-class

and patriarchal ideologies and values. The spectacle privileges these dominant ideologies and values for the purpose of commodification.

Chapter four looks at two recent lifestyle shows that demonstrate a shift in the lifestyle genre. *Changing Rooms* and *Hot Property* are located in an “ordinary” space, where the aim is to show “real” people and “real” situations. These people and situations are representations of Australian society. A struggle occurs between “ordinariness” of this television, and the place of the suburban home as spectacle.

One must finally question the direction of Australian television in terms of lifestyle programming. Already we are seeing a number of programs which explore different and alternate “ways of life”. Thus, in *Hot Property* problems for the couple looking at an exclusive water-side suburb in Sydney are coupled with young teenagers looking for a flat with cheap rent. The place of the spectacle in these programs, if any, becomes weakened, with a multiplicity and diversity of constructed identities.

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May 18, 1999

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June 1, 1999

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June 15, 1999

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July 27, 1999

August 3, 1999

*Bright Ideas**Burke's Backyard**Changing Rooms*

August 11, 1999

August 18, 1999

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September 1, 1999

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May 18, 1999

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June 8, 1999

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June 29, 1999

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February 17, 1999

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