

**School of the Built Environment  
Department of Architecture and Interior Architecture**

**The Idealised Image of the Australian Home:  
A Myth in the Making**

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**This thesis is presented for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
of  
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## ***Declaration***

To the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person, except where due acknowledgment has been made.

This thesis contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

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## **Abstract**

This thesis questions and challenges the idealised image of the Australian home in the context of architecture and the media. In the Australian public's imagination, the house—as a social, cultural and architectural ideal—has a very important mythological role. This was especially true in the 1950s after World War II, when it was considered that a single-storey bungalow with its own garden and the constant presence of women in proper aprons, deftly wielding electrical appliances, were normative home ideals to which most Australians aspired. Stemming from a desire to expose and demystify the underlying idealisations of the Western home, this thesis questions the values and attitudes implicit in the variety of messages with which mass culture bombards society, with images that attempt to universalise and naturalise meanings and values. In a society avid for images, the concept of myth provides a basis for a critique of the 'naturalising effect' of ideology of the idealised image of the Western architectural home. By adopting the concept of myth as a theoretical position, this thesis speculates on the spectacle and images of the architecture, society and culture of the home. It does so by drawing on the main hypothesis that images represent no more than a constructed ideal that is drawn from various operations in the media, against which the perpetual norms of the home become appropriated and transposed into a myth.

By adopting the theoretical strategy of Roland Barthes's *Mythologies* and employing a semiotic approach, this thesis is structured so that elements of the idealised Australian home in the media are targeted and analysed based on four key themes: the 'modern' 1950s kitchen, the suburban 'quarter-acre and garden' home, the 'architect-designed' home and the twenty-first century 'Tuscan' home and 'home theatre'. The outcomes of the analyses reveal that the image of the home is a symbolic mediated fantasy that is intricately linked to mythology. This thesis concludes that, since the reality of the home is ultimately unapproachable, mythologies are used as a bridge to understand the home as a socially constructed reality that is accepted as being 'natural'. As such, images of the home are inherently mythological when the historically constructed power relations embodied therein are made to seem natural or eternal, and therefore unquestioned.

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## Main introduction

Advertising in its new version is no longer the Baroque, utopian scenario ecstatic over objects and consumption, but rather the omnipresent visibility of corporations, trademarks, PR [public relations] men, social dialogue and the virtues of communication. With the disappearance of the public space, advertising invades everything (the street, the monument, the market, the stage, language). It determines architecture (Baudrillard, cited in Baudrillard & Proto 2003, viii).

This thesis questions and challenges the idealised images of the Australian home, as seen in the context of architecture and the media.<sup>1</sup> The primary aim of this study is to speculate on the spectacle and images of the social, cultural and architectural home. This is done by drawing on the main hypothesis that images represent no more than a constructed ideal that is drawn from various operations in the media, against which the perpetual norms of images and ideals of the home become appropriated and transposed into a myth.

Since the nineteenth century, the Western concept of home has been subject to a range of normalising transitions in terms of what is meant by the ideal of the home.<sup>2</sup> These have derived from an array of social, cultural and economic forces that have affected the home's design, significance and ideal as a locus for the equally idealised concept of the family. For example, the term 'domesticity' refers to a set of ideas that only began to develop in reaction to the division between work and home. This division created the idea that the home is a place of consumption and rest for men, while, for many women, it is a place of production and entrapment. Henceforth, as Kim Dovey discusses, 'the single-family detached house established its position as the ideal house type through the weaving of a Western home myth that conflates it with a naturalised image of nuclear family, home, security, independence and individualism' (Dovey 1993, 7). However, for the most

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<sup>1</sup> For the definition of 'architecture' applied to this thesis, please see the section 'Definitions of terms to be used in this thesis' later in this chapter. The media is generally considered all those channels via which specialised groups employ technological devices to disseminate symbolic content to their audiences (Burgess & Gold 1985, 4). However, in this thesis, the media is taken to be comprised mainly of printed formats in the form of popular press, such as newspapers and magazines.

<sup>2</sup> According to the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, the term 'Western' is defined as 'connected with the west part of the world, especially Europe and North America' (Hornby 2000). Australia is also usually considered a part of Western culture and society, despite its proximity to East Asia (Mortensen 2011).

part, many historians—such as Forty (1986), Cieraad (1999) and Madigan and Munro (1991)—believe that domesticity is a construction that began with the conception of ‘Victorianism’—a set of social, moral and cultural values from which the ideals of the Western home first originated. Regardless of the changes that lie behind this concept, the idea of home as a physical, social and cultural character remains a profound and enduring ideal.

From another perspective, the house became an architectural obsession that was a focal point of attention for modern architects in the twentieth century.<sup>3</sup> It was a ‘test bed’ on which architectural expression and experimentation was carried out. This was apparent even from the early twentieth century, when it was said that, ‘architecture should basically be about the house and everyday living’ (Heynen, cited in Heynen & Baydar 2005, 15). Author of *21<sup>st</sup> Century House*, Jonathan Bell (2006, 9–10), highlights this profound and enduring aspect of the Western architectural home—or, more specifically, the architectural ideal of the Western house:

In architecture, as with all elements of culture, it seems inconceivable that a new era should be without its own ethos ... Of all genres and geniuses, the house is perhaps the most enduring symbol of change and innovation, a neat, self contained statement of intent that, when analyzed en masse, should reveal essential truths about aesthetics, social dynamics and that most obsessive of architecture’s obsessions, modernity ... Throughout the twentieth century, the single family private house was fetishised as the epitome of modern architectural achievement, an object desired by many yet achieved by few. In terms of Modernist propaganda, the house played a pivotal role, both as a means of architectural expression and experimentation and as a test bed for new forms, new materials and new spatial arrangements.

When the above quotation is applied to the local context of Perth, Western Australia, it may also be considered true because, as one scholar observes, in the decades after World War II, a coherent and consistent architectural modernism was first presented to the Western Australian public in the form of the family house. This notion received considerable acceptance. Duncan Richards (cited in London & Richards 1997, 43) concedes that, in the ‘modern’ era of the 1950s, ‘virtually every architect and architectural firm was involved with housing and the family house became the test bed for new

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<sup>3</sup> The distinction between the use of the terms ‘house’ and ‘home’ is outlined in Chapter Five of this thesis: ‘The “architect-designed” home’.

architectural ideas'. Thus, undoubtedly, the house is 'a distinct category of cultural production, a designed object; a laboratory of architecture where new and experimental ideas are tested and the art is carried forward' (Davis 2006, 11).

### *Home: A concept, an idea, an object*

For society as it exists today, the concept of the home can be perceived according to various dimensions, as identified by Hayward (1975): 'home as a physical structure', 'as territory', 'as a locus in space', 'as self and self-identify' and 'as a social and cultural unit'. This review suggests that affective qualities and human relations are equally important to, if not more important than, physical dimensions. In this sense, the fact that, over the centuries, the home's physical and social character has undergone few changes—despite the many social and technological developments that have occurred—suggests that the home is not solely a function of spaces needed for daily activities, but is also related to a psychological and environmental meaning (Sebba & Churchman 1987, 8). For this reason, there has been a considerable amount of literature devoted to investigating this area of research during the past 40 years or so, by notable scholars such as Altman and Gauvain (1981), Cooper (1974), Duncan and Duncan (1976) and Lawrence (1987), to name a few.<sup>4</sup>

One may go beyond the fundamental semantic qualification of the word 'home' by engaging its meaning from an ontological stance. There is a distinct difference when using the expression 'to dwell' as opposed to 'be at home' or 'feel at home'. As Andrew Ballantyne (2005, 59) notes in relation to Martin Heidegger's way of thinking about the home, 'one dwells when one is properly engaged with one's place in the world and having a sense of heavens and earth, gods and mortals'. The notion of dwelling does not assume that the physical unit of a house defines the experience of home. It points to a spiritual and symbolic connection between the self and the physical world. According to existentialist philosopher, Heidegger (1962), the

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<sup>4</sup> These studies inform the current study's background knowledge and are inherently significant to this research.

state of mind or state of ‘being there’ (*daisen*) is rooted in the culture of place.

In a phenomenological sense, Gaston Bachelard (1964), in *The Poetics of Space*, approaches the subject of home from another particular culture. For Bachelard (cited in Schaik, 2002), the house is a container and catalyst of memory and poetics. However, as Leon Van Schaik (2002) explains, in today’s constantly expanding metropolitan culture, Bachelard’s cultural unity—the notion of ‘being in space’ and a sense of habitation of place—seems precarious and has, for many, even been shattered. Attesting to Schaik’s position and in contrast to a subjective or idealistic interpretation of the home are the notoriously controversial theory and evocative writings of French critic, Jean Baudrillard (1983, 1993, 1996, 2003). Based on the belief that we now live in a world in which images have become a substitute for reality, Baudrillard’s theory (1983, 1996) alludes to a condition in which the image of home has been transformed into a replication or simulation of any actual state of home. Simulacra represent nothing but themselves—the reality to which they refer does not exist. In consequence, Baudrillard claims that Disneyland and television now constitute America’s reality and, even more provocatively, that the Gulf War of 1991 did not occur, but was merely a simulation (similar to a video game) (Sim 2005, 10). The below quotation illustrates Baudrillard’s (1988) view on architecture :

No, architecture should not be humanized. Anti-architecture, the true sort ... the wild inhuman type that is beyond the measure of man was made here—made itself here—in New York, without consideration of setting, well-being, or ideal ecology.

It is unsurprising that, in Baudrillard’s advocacy for hyper-reality and simulation, an apparent cynicism and lack of sensitivity to the human dimension led him to promote an architecture that disdained a ‘soft’ consideration for human scale and local setting. Based on the above quotation, it is difficult to imagine the kind of home that resonates with Baudrillard’s definition and perception of architecture. The powerful and thematically driven architectural works by Elizabeth Diller and Ricardo Scofidio (Hays 2003) also seem to suggest ways in which the qualities of the

home, as well as the individuals and families who inhabit them, have become increasingly subjugated to the global and market forces of a media and commodity culture. Hence, their architectural works are both responsive and reactionary to this crisis. In projects such as *The withDrawing room*, the architects' concern with the autonomous workings of architecture is folded into various discourses of context and exteriority, recalibrated according to what is sayable or thinkable in the idiolects of psychoanalysis, feminism and other theoretical systems that seek to analyse the hidden structures of domestic life (Hays 2003, 130).

Seen from the angle of today's rising global media age, this thesis emerges out of a need to examine images of the home that manifest in a specific body of representations, such as newspaper advertisements and home and women's magazines. More critically, this revolutionising media age compelled this study to question the 'idealised' home by paying particular attention to media's role in shaping and configuring the image of what the home means in the context of media advertising. However, having explored the above, the limitation and scope of the overall study of this thesis is informed by first asking how ideals of the Western home initially arose. As mentioned at the beginning of the introduction, understandings of 'home' in terms of what is considered 'normal' or 'natural' may be perceived as a construct that began with the conception of Victorianism—a set of social, moral and cultural values from which the idealised Western home first originated. Set against this historical and yet mythological context, this thesis seeks to discuss and address (in Chapter One) the Western home ideals as seen in the context of architecture and media advertising.

### *Objects of study*

It is important to emphasise at the outset that this thesis takes the objects of its study to be mythologies, rather than the actual houses in which people live. More specifically, the actual object examined here is the *image* pertaining to the home, as manifest in a specific body of media representations—namely, newspaper advertisements; home, garden and women's magazines; and even paintings and other modes of domestic living,

such as advertising pamphlets received in the post. Images that appear in architectural books, on websites and in professional architectural journals are also examined with specific relevance to the case study in Chapter Five. Part of the aim of this thesis is to demystify the process through which media images of the home become transformed into an ideal, rendering such ideals as natural, in an effort to replicate, invent, package or sell images of these ideals.

Drawing primarily on Barthes's theoretical writings, as well as on the writings of other prominent theorists such as Baudrillard and Pierre Bourdieu, this thesis deliberates the notion of myth. Alongside using various other literatures on consumer cultural studies and media ideologies as critical and interpretive frameworks, this thesis is concerned with exploring the mythologies surrounding the advertising and reception of the family home from the Victorian era to the mid-twentieth century and beyond. The focus is on the Australian context, with a partial emphasis on Perth.

Targeting various key images of the Australian home, this research focuses on the question: to what extent does the Australian home in the media represent no more than a constructed ideal, against which it becomes transposed into a form of a myth? This research seeks to pursue this question through critical modes of enquiry and theoretical synthesis, and through analysing a body of media representations, such as newspaper advertisements; home, garden and women's magazines; books; professional architectural journals; and other modes of domestic living taken from various archival sources, ranging from the post–World War II era of the 1950s to the present.

### ***Background to the study: Identifying research issues and problem***

#### *The meaning of the word 'home' is always subject to change*

Images of the home radically open up the meaning and representation of the 'home' to history and change. The meaning of 'home' is constantly changing and shifting. Part of what this thesis examines relates to the semantic networks of the home in media advertising. The significance of a

semiotic approach is justified by the assumption that, as all cultural objects convey meaning, they must use meaning, and, as all cultural practices depend on meaning, they must use signs. Insofar as they do, they must function in the same way as language, and be amendable to an analysis that uses Ferdinand de Saussure's linguistic concepts (signifier or signified and langue or parole distinctions) and underlying codes and structures, and the arbitrary nature of the sign (Hall 1997, 36). To connect images of the home with these semantic networks is 'to draw on these wider connotations and discourses to make sense of an object, to expand or specify its meanings; to bring new ranges of meaning to bear' (Gay et al. 1997, 15)—in this case, on understandings of the idealised home as a cultural object.

Since it is not possible to deduce culture from society, there exists a need to analyse the role of 'the symbolic' sphere in social life.<sup>5</sup> A critique that produces meaning through language is called 'signification'. Semiotics analyses signification by reducing all communication practices to their most basic unit: the sign. A sign can be a photograph, word, gesture, sound—any physical form that refers to something else. Within all signifying systems, signs are selected and combined with other signs in ways that are analogous to individuals' selection and combination of words in sentences and paragraphs in written language (Cunningham & Turner 1993, 220).

The basic linguistic unit, the sign, is assumed to be composed of two parts: the signifier and signified. The signifier is the physical form of the sign—the written word, photograph, sound and so forth. The signified is the mental concept referred to by the signifier. Both are culturally generated—the word 'home' refers to a culturally produced notion of 'homeliness' or 'homelessness'. The meanings from which the physical forms of a sign are generated emerge from the relationship between the signifier and signified; thus, it is not easy to discuss either in isolation. Their relationship is constructed, rather than natural, and will change (Cunningham & Turner 1993, 220). The concepts (signifieds) to which they refer also change historically, and every shift alters the conceptual map of the culture, which

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<sup>5</sup> In *The Imagination of the Sign*, Barthes (1972, 207) notes that, 'the word *symbol* has now gone a little stale; we readily replace it by *sign* or *signification*. This terminological shift expresses a certain crumbling of the symbolic consciousness, notably with regard to the analogical character of signifier and signified'.

leads different cultures at different historical moments to classify and think about the world differently (Hall 1997, 32). The words ‘modern’ and ‘efficient’ are good examples. As remains the case today, the words ‘modern’ and ‘efficient’ conjured different images for different people in 1934. A mock-Tudor home with its small dormer windows and long sloping roof may have appealed to many as the latest in efficiency, yet it was a world away from the box-like, glass-walled designs coming from Europe and America (Oliver 1999, 22).

If the relationship between the signifier and signified is the result of a system of social conventions specific to each society and different historical moments, then all meanings are produced within history and culture. They can never be finally fixed, but are always subject to change—both from one cultural context and from one period to another (Hall 1997, 32). This has important implications for this thesis in relation to what the ‘home’ is considered to mean, given that, as mentioned in the introduction, the concept of ‘home’ has been subject to change and a range of normalising transitions in terms of what the idea of ‘home’ means.

### *Media’s influence on the idealised perception of home*

Previous research claims that the mass media has had a tremendous influence on domesticity and private life (Aries, Prost & Vincent 1992, 132). Private life has been quietly, but effectively, subject to the influence of the media and advertising. People today insist on investing their social roles with individuality, while behaving privately in ways suggested by the media and advertising.<sup>6</sup> The controversy over the ‘shaping’ versus ‘reflecting’ of cultural values in advertising continues; however, overall, there seems to be more contribution to the hypothesis that advertising reflects values (Brown 1981, 12).

Considered in this context, advertising could be seen as the cultural language that speaks on behalf of the home image, which is really a reflection of societal values. Since advertising is designed for mass

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<sup>6</sup> This thesis adopts the view of Brown (1981) that the media and advertisements should not be interpreted as indicators of the actual way that people behave or of the attitudes that they share, but as indicators of the behaviours and attitudes considered socially desirable.

consumption, the advertiser is not concerned with individual values, but rather with the values of the part of the population comprising the largest segment of the buying public—the middle class (Brown 1981, 12). As such, in this thesis, the selected imageries of advertising and the media (with the exception of Chapter Five) should be seen to reflect the cultural values of a middle Australian society.<sup>7</sup> Further, it follows on that mass communication is directed towards the maintenance of an ongoing social and cultural structure, rather than towards its change, thereby reinforcing existing values (Lazarsfeld & Merton, cited in Brown 1981, 12).

A historic source reveals that, at the turn of the century, there was only one way for public opinion to breach the walls of the domestic fortress—via print media, primarily in the form of newspapers (Aries, Prost & Vincent 1992, 138). Advertisers were also intrigued by the success of women's magazines. For example, as early as 1937, manufacturers of perfumes and cosmetics discovered the virtues of advertising in French magazine, *Votre Beauté*. Refrigerators, washing machines, stoves and other major appliances were depicted in advertisements that made kitchens look like laboratories; second-hand furniture stores were filled with old cabinets that had been replaced by new Formica countertops. Soon, people were inundated with publicity touting a new way of life—perhaps even a new ethos (Aries, Prost & Vincent 1992, 135).

An Australian magazine renowned for its representations of ideals of womanhood and domestic life is the *Women's Weekly*. During the post-war decade of 1946 to 1956, the magazine's popularity reached new heights, being read by one in four Australian homes and having the greatest circulation per head of population of any women's magazine in the world. It represented everyday Australia to itself during the years of radical social change following World War II. This was the heyday of the suburban dream—of the new ideal of marriage, family, home and domestic comfort in

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<sup>7</sup> In this thesis, middle Australians can be regarded as those who aspire to wealthy lifestyles characterised by access to private education for their children, private healthcare, fancy cars, home theatres and whatever else marks them as having 'made it' (Hamilton 2003). It is also recognised that various class or social demographics fall outside this middle group, and are worthy of future research. It must also be acknowledged that 'middle class' or 'middle Australia' is a much contested term, with a persistent source of confusion surrounding the term deriving predominantly from there being no set criteria to define the term. For a more comprehensive definition of the Australian 'middle class', please see the section, 'Definition of terms to be used in this thesis', further in this chapter.

the post-war world. The magazine regularly provided coverage of issues that ‘packaged’ femininity and addressed ideals that constituted the ‘Australian way of life’ that was central to post-war attempts to ‘redefine’ the nation (Sheridan et al. 2001). Above all, the magazine offered women both advice on managing their domestic lives, and images and stories to furnish their dreams.

In contrast to this ideal, with a focus on Perth in Western Australia, as this city moved into the twenty-first century, the robustness of the economy fuelled a subsequent rise in housing sales, thereby rendering the home an increasingly vulnerable commodity.<sup>8</sup> Reading press advertisements and messages extracted from the current media housing scene—such as in the *New Homes* supplement from *The West Australian* Saturday newspaper or the *Home* magazine from *The Sunday Times*—permits reflection on the real-estate phenomenon (Gausa et al. 2003, 38). The idea of the home has become subjected to the intense forces of the media and consumption in the marketplace. Here, housing manifests itself as the standard product par excellence. Photographs and text descriptions capturing significant housing features of ‘signature range’ homes are deployed to present an image of the kind of affordable luxury and vanity lifestyle that homebuyers seem to crave. However, these images are arguably used to find and express the idea of ‘home’ for most middle-class Western Australians. As such, the promotion of the home in the media also reflects certain lifestyle choices of the rising middle Western Australian, and his or her willingness to spend on the basis of image credibility.

As encountered in the real-estate section of newspapers, homes are commodities produced and marketed in contemporary Western Australian society for financial profit within particular economic and technological constraints. However, the home advertised in newspapers is usually viewed differently to that advertised in a professional architectural magazine, such as a bespoke house. This curious condition exists when images of the architecture, society and culture of the home—images through which the

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<sup>8</sup> For examples, see *The West Australian* (2005a, 2005b). The term ‘vulnerable’ is used to imply the instability or precariousness of an object-sign relationship. Houses are vulnerable commodities in the marketplace because they risk becoming objects of consumption, in Baudrillard’s sense. Baudrillard’s theory of consumption will be further elaborated in the following chapter.

home is sold—become subsumed under the forces of a vibrant consumer culture and the operation of an economic process.<sup>9</sup>

From an architectural perspective, there is no doubt that the media has a tremendous influence on how the home is perceived. This view is emphasised by Bell (2006, 12):

Architectural publishing has a mania for categories and classifications: modern houses, small houses, extreme houses, experimental houses, houses on the edge, see-through houses, minimalist houses, vernacular houses, wooden houses, moving houses, each a neat peg upon which a number of glossy, even iconic, projects can be hung, their credentials based largely on their ability to impress in the space of a few transparencies. Magazines have a huge bearing on how we perceive the modern house. The past decade has seen the publishing industry swamp the consumer with publications about homes and lifestyle, a hazy morass of products, places and people operating at the supposed 'cutting edge' of domestic design, supplemented by expanded home, design and lifestyle sections in national newspapers and magazines. Even professionally targeted magazines such as *Architectural Record*, *Architectural Design*, *Architectural Review* and others, fetishize the single family house, devote page after page to the sharpest-looking—and newest—examples from around the world. There is also the explosion of architectural websites, a self published portfolio of increasing sophistication that provides firms with a platform upon which to fulfill their Corbusian/Koolhaasian fantasies.

This quotation suggests that, whether the idealised home is being portrayed in newspapers, home and women's magazines or professionally targeted architectural magazines, the popular imagery of the home—the visual panorama—is mostly presented in a form familiar to and consistent with prevailing cultural standards. Potential consumers must be able to 'see themselves' in the social world the advertiser has constructed around the product or object—that is, the idealised home in which to live. Therefore, the media is a conservative force encouraging consensus and consent with regard to existing conditions.

While this thesis does not attempt to address the role, influence and power of the media in the Australian housing market, it contends that the institutions and practices that comprise the media and advertising segment of the industry have a significance that demands attention. At the very least, it should be considered that the media reflects the status quo of Australians'

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<sup>9</sup> It is important to note here that this thesis acknowledges that there are key distinctions between the image of the home seen in 'popular' media constructions of architectural spaces and the image that exists in professional cultures of architectural spaces. The distinctions between these two spaces that inevitably also give rise to a distinction in the use of the terms 'house' and 'home' are discussed in Chapter Five of this thesis: 'The architect-designed home'.

aspirations and ideals of the home. If the role of the media is to negotiate a continuing acceptance of the status quo, it should be understood that the content of the media serves to reinforce specific ideological constructions of realities (Burgess & Gold 1985, 5).

### ***Research problems and contribution of this thesis***

It is via the above research issues that this thesis examines the way the home is represented in the existing Australian mass media culture. If the media is a reflection of the status quo of middle-class Australians' aspirations and ideals of the home, then part of the aim of this thesis is to demystify the process through which media images of home become transformed into an ideal, rendering such ideals as natural, in the media's effort to replicate, invent, package or sell images of these ideals.

The quotation below offers an explanation for how advertising is a cultural language that has the ability to normalise or standardise one's sense of the home:

each person feels or acts independently, but all these independent decisions add up to an expanding market for the latest mass produced ideal [home] design, product or feature ... People feel more individualistic, but meanwhile tastes and fashions continue to be more and more standardized. The illusion of independence does give rise to conformity (Aries, Prost & Vincent 1992, 135).

While this thesis asserts that meanings and ideals of the home are part of the cultural language of advertising, this is predicated on the belief that media has a tremendous effect on perpetuating and intensifying the home as an architectural ideal. To understand an advertisement is to mobilise an already-existing cultural knowledge. The meanings of the ideal 'modern' home of the 1950s are not produced in isolation from the reader's social experience; rather, the reader inscribes those experiences into the text. Without such a process, it would make very little sense. In conclusion, this thesis affirms that, quietly and subtly, advertising has the ability to shape perceptions of the home. This thesis confronts the view that advertising constantly manipulates and gratifies preconceptions of the home.

## ***Identifying gaps for research***

A number of international and local researchers have not examined the mythological aspects of the home, despite having used the media to conduct research on the home from an architectural perspective. This section identifies gaps for research on the idealised Australian home. Adrian Forty's (1986) interpretive-historical study on *The Home* uses different kinds of media to provide the basis for a study of the sociocultural revolution and design of the home in Britain, from the Victorian age to the 1950s. These media include written matter from the period (such as fiction, 'how to' books, advertisements and magazines), other scholarly commentaries, and photographs. The research strategy in *The Home* entails Forty using passages published in the 1930s, taken from a book on household management that contains a number of assertions—the most notable being that an efficient, well-run, harmonious home was a national asset. Other underlying themes of the passages suggest that the family was the basis of the nation, and that the duty of improving its condition rested on parents—particularly mothers (Forty 1986, 116). Such historical evidence from print media reveals and testifies how the home, as an object, has been represented in the media, from Victorian to contemporary times, taking on connotations of retreat, haven and an idealised realm, which brought about its transformations, revolutions and designs.

In *Moralism and the Model Home: Domestic Architecture and Cultural Conflict in Chicago 1873–1913*, Gwendolyn Wright (1980) explores the social conflicts for the creation of Chicago's domestic architecture from 1873 to 1913. In undertaking the research, the historian completed a thorough search of three kinds of media, each dealing with housing as form and social setting, and each written by and for a different group. These included architectural books and periodicals (the professional press); builders' trade journals and pattern books of house designs (the more resolutely practical press); and domestic guides, home magazines for women, and other middle-class family literature (the popular press) (Wright 1980, 4–5). These were used to draw a broad picture of the visions of the model household ideal

presented by the architects, builders, domestic scientists and social reformers of the late nineteenth century.

As indicated by Wright (1980), images and meanings of home for middle-class America were not only interpreted from the cultural context from which they first emerged. Journals and books that served to circulate model houses and disseminate house designs, advice on family matters and tips on running the household revealed a whole range of issues born of social disorder, economic inequalities, social pressures and political goals. Wright found that both authors and architects described standards for family harmony and mobility, wifely efficiency and neighbourhood organisation.

However, Chicago designers seeking to reform middle-class housing and family life often clashed over a wide range of ideological and stylistic issues. Their architectural proposals portrayed very different attitudes towards family, work and community. Although both Forty's (1986) and Wright's (1980) studies use the media to advance knowledge on the socio-historical and transitional state of the home as an idealised realm, their approach is limited to sociocultural and architectural perspectives. The manipulating effects of the media and the effect these have on the mythological state of the home in relation to architecture and the built environment have not been addressed.

Through a series of close readings of two major figures of the Modern Movement—Adolf Loos and Le Corbusier in *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media*—Beatriz Colomina (1994) argues that architecture only becomes modern in its engagement with the mass media. Colomina asserts that architecture is more than the buildings we experience firsthand, but also exists as a representation through drawings, photographs, writing, films and advertising. Where conventional criticism portrays modern architecture as a high artistic practice in opposition to mass culture, Colomina views the emerging systems of communication that have come to define twentieth-century culture—the mass media—as the true site where modern architecture was produced. In this sense, this thesis relates most closely and significantly to Colomina's proposition in terms of expounding the idea that the media is the site where the 'modern' home becomes an architectural ideal, and where the reader of consumer culture and mass

culture directly engages. One of the main arguments of this thesis is that the home only becomes an architectural object to be idealised via its engagement with the media (Chapter Five).

On a local scale, Kerreen Reiger's (1985) research centres on the Australian family from the 1940s to the 1980s, and is primarily preoccupied with the rise and role of the professional middle-class.<sup>10</sup> According to Carter, Reiger traces the emergence of a 'series of programs to transform family and domestic life' produced by a new class of scientific experts and social reformers (Carter 2006, 220). In exploring the ways reformers and professionals have tried to make domestic life more 'modern', 'hygienic', 'efficient' and 'rational', the author argues that there is a contradiction between an ideology that stressed the sanctity and privacy of the home and the naturalness of women's domestic role, and efforts to transform them according to the calculative rationality of business and industry. As Gilding (1991, 9–10) notes, Reiger's research was 'largely feminist in orientation and concerned with the regulation and ordering of family at the socio-political level, hence the sub-title, "Modernizing the Australian family"'.

Similarly, the work of Lesley Johnson and Justine Lloyd (2004) and Susan Sheridan et al. (2001) focuses on the modern Australian dream home and role of housewives and women in the 1950s, also from a feminist perspective. Johnson and Lloyd (2004) argue that a mass-mediated way of looking at domesticity in the 1950s created a contradiction in female domestic subjectivity, which actually saw women be more bound and attached to the home, thereby contradicting the state and market discourses, as well as the 'modern' challenge to remove traditional home designs. Sheridan et al.'s (2001) research focuses on the *Women's Weekly* magazine as a whole by highlighting how varied its components were, and how they interacted to produce ideals of femininity and domestic life that were rife with contradictions. The research also offers an overview of social change in the post-war decades, and its implications for women in particular. Even though Reiger, Johnson and Lloyd, and Sheridan et al. focus primarily on the post-war modern home and family of the 1950s—with Johnson and Lloyd

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<sup>10</sup> For a definition of the 'Australian middle class', please see the section, 'Definition of terms to be used in this thesis', later in this chapter.

examining the subject from a mass-mediated perspective—their work is largely feminist in orientation. In addition, they do not specifically consider images of the home, and the effect they have on the mythological state of the home in relation to architecture.

Perth scholars, such as Richards (1997) and Sian Supski (2003), have employed primary sources of historical evidence from the media to aid their research of the post-war modern home. Other Australian scholars, such as Judith Brine (1993), Alastair Greig (1995b), Sheridan et al. (2001), Johnson and Lloyd (2004) and Julie Oliver (1999), have also conducted research on the post-war Australian home using similar approaches. These scholars studied the media closely by delving into various archival sources, such as newspapers, advertisements, and home and women's magazines. Writing from very different research backgrounds and scholarly and disciplinary contexts, each of these Australian scholars have advanced knowledge and understanding of the social, cultural and architectural ideals embedded in the post-war modern home during the post–World War II era.

The one common and fundamental message emerging from the works of each of these scholars is that the ideal modern home was an enduring obsession among the middle Australian public, and this obsession was reflected and popularly represented through the media during the 1950s post–World War II. Although the media studies of these scholars demonstrate that the media reflects the status quo of Australians' aspirations and ideals of the home, the focus of these studies is primarily on the post-war home's social, cultural and architectural implications. The mythological state of the home and the architectural problem associated with the media's representations of the home are not considered.

In conclusion, the study of Australia's idealised home in the context of media and advertising, and the extent to which images are constructed via the more ephemeral instruments of publicity, has yet to form an area worthy of academic research and attention. With the exceptions of architectural scholars such as Brine (1991) and Richards (1997), few in the architectural discipline have dedicated any substantial research that draws on the popular press and mass media. Thus far, none have adopted a post-structuralist stance in an attempt to scrutinise and analyse the mythological state of the

home through the lens of architecture and architectural design. This study demonstrates such a contribution.

### ***Research hypothesis, objectives and significance***

Underpinning this research is the hypothesis that spectacle and images of the architecture, society and culture of the home represent no more than a constructed ideal drawn from various operations in the media, against which the perpetual norms of the home become appropriated and transposed into a myth. In exploring this hypothesis, this thesis aims to meet four central objectives:

- To question and challenge the idealised home primarily in the form of media advertising, and understand that ideals of home and home design are part of a socio-cultural and temporal entity that is always imbued and encoded with values or ideologies of a particular era and society.
- To interpret ‘ideality’, ‘reality’ and ‘myth’ within the theoretical frameworks of Barthes, and articulate how these concepts may inform an understanding of home in the media as a constructed ideal.
- To critically analyse and expose the underlying Australian home myths as they are portrayed in media representations from the perspectives of the following: the post–World War II ‘modern’ home and kitchen of the 1950s; the suburban quarter-acre and garden home; the home theatre room, coupled with the Tuscan and various ‘styles’ of home in the present twenty-first century; and the architect-designed home in the context of the architectural profession, via a case study on Denton Corker Marshall architects.
- To formulate conclusions with respect to the disposition of myths of home as they abound in the media, and underline the significance of the role of mythologies in informing past and future designs of the architectural home.

Based on the above objectives, the significance of this research is anchored on the belief that, until beginning to scrutinise and interrogate the meaning of media and advertising images and what society expects us to accept, the true and fundamental principles of architecture and architectural design cannot be implemented, and a new theoretical approach in the design discipline cannot be advanced. Thus, this thesis strives to revisit the many accepted tenets of architectural theories in conjunction with an analysis of the media construction of the home, specific to its own culture and time period.

### ***Definition of terms to be used in this thesis***

#### *The idealised home*

In this thesis, ‘the idealised home’ should be taken to mean the all-encompassing mythological construct and aspirations of the home that manage to uphold themselves in the reader’s imagination at a particular place and time. This thesis postulates that images of the architectural, social and cultural home in the media, which often appear as nostalgic and having an inevitable historical dimension, but also an irrevocable temporal dimension (Cieraad 1999, Forty 1986, Rybczynski 1988), have been constructed, reaffirmed and activated over again under the influence of the media. However, imagery is inherently and inevitably integral to mythology (Bell 2006, 11) and the object of study for this thesis is the image of the home that is considered natural or normal as manifest in a body of representations. Thus, this thesis is concerned with exploring the mythological nature of that ideality or the idealised aspirations attached to images of the home.

## *Architecture*

In this thesis, the definition of ‘architecture’ is not just driven by the belief in its nature of the real and the physical. This thesis follows the view of Kester Rattenbury (2002), who considers architecture a form of *medium*, as opposed to it referring simply to buildings. This is expressed in Rattenbury’s (2002, xxii) articulation of architecture’s relationship with its representations:

For ‘architecture’ is not just a broad generic name we use to describe the built or inhabited world. It’s a construction, a way of understanding certain parts of the built or inhabited world as being fundamentally different to other parts. It’s to do with a constructed understanding of quality, class, interpretation, intention, meaning. And this seems to be not just conveyed but actually defined by this complex system of media representations, by an elaborate construct of drawings, photographs, newspaper articles, lectures, books, films, conferences and theoretical book whose subject matter is often (albeit inadvertently) the representations rather than the things themselves ... But even in the most physical understanding of architecture, the media that describe it shape what we understand it to be, and the way we design and build it. This constructed representation defines what we consider good, what we consider fashionable, what we consider popular ... At several more complex levels, it affects how we interpret and value architecture. At the level of discussion, publication and reference, representation arguably surpasses the architecture itself.

Based on the above quotation, this thesis acknowledges that, although the term ‘architecture’ is fundamentally concerned with physical reality, architecture can be discussed and defined through an elaborate construct of media representations, such as popular home and women’s magazines, newspapers, books, paintings, photography and professional architectural journals (as opposed to buildings). Further, referring specifically to the professional cultures of architecture and architectural publishing *per se* (this will be explored in Chapter Five), Rattenbury (2002, 126) reiterates that:

In all cases books and journalism should not be perceived as passive recipients of representations but as active participants that shape ongoing work and thus, often for reasons of their own, identify and record exactly what is considered to be architecture.

Similarly, Colomina (cited in Stead 2004, 102–103) believes that, ‘Architecture has been produced not simply in the building site, but in all these other immaterial sites: the photograph, the magazine, the film, and then later the television programme, the computer, etc.’. Further, Colomina

(1994, 13) believes that ‘buildings should be understood in the same terms as drawings, photographs, writing, films and advertisements—not only because these are the media in which we encounter it, but because the building is a mechanism of representation in its own right’. Taking on the viewpoints of Rattenbury (2002) and Colomina (1994), this thesis highlights that the processes through which architecture is discussed, explained and identified via its representations create a critical picture of the construct of partial representations on which understandings of architecture are based.

### *Culture*

The term ‘culture’ is often regarded an imaginative construct used by scholars and intellectuals. This thesis is no exception, except that it expands this definition by including the perspective that all people have the capacity to find meaning in their own actions and in those of others in their society. The focus of this thesis is thus directly centred on the meaning-making function of a culture. As a working definition of culture, this thesis adopts Geertz’s (cited in Bailey 2000, 4) view that:

Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experiential science in search of law but an interpretative one in search of meaning.

This thesis also considers culture a process of information exchange:

Thus culture is understood as a process and a mechanism characterized by the struggle for information which is received, accumulated, preserved, and coded, decoded and translated from one system into another, as well as exchanged (Winner, cited in Bailey 2000, 4).

To add to the above quotations, culture should be seen as encompassing a system of norms that regulate actual behaviour, as opposed to behaviour formally prescribed in laws, moral positions, rules and so forth. In short, throughout this thesis, culture is understood as a ‘meaning-making device both in its function as a tool for interpreting data and as the communication facility by which this interpreted data is exchanged in society’ (Bailey 2000, 4).

### *'Home' versus 'dwelling'*

This thesis is conscious of the discrepancy in the terms 'house' (an economic and physical commodity), 'dwelling' (relating to design and construction, and to the ongoing personalisation of residential environments) and 'home'. Although these terms are used interchangeably throughout this thesis, depending on the context in which they are mentioned, the preferential usage is predominantly the term 'home' because its meaning can be understood in terms of a range of architectural, cultural, social and psychological variables that can be examined from a historical perspective.

### *'Representation' versus 'image'*

The word 'representation' originally meant 'to present again'; however, in late Latin, it acquired the meaning to 'stand for'—as a picture of a person 'stands for' the pictured person (Larsen, cited in Gripsrud 2002, 11). This latter meaning is applied when media scholars discuss 'representation' and 'forms of representation' (Gripsrud 2002, 11). It is important to clarify that, in this thesis, the terms 'image' and 'representation' are interchangeable. In explaining the nature of myth, Barthes (1986, 21) gives equal value to both terms, stating that, 'in certain mythical notion of life, the image *is* representation, i.e., ultimately resurrection and we know that the intelligible is reputed antipathetic to the experiential'.

Representation is the practice of constructing meaning through using sign and language. It is the link between concepts and language that enables reference to either the real world or imaginary world of objects, people or events (Hall 1997, 17). Representations can only be properly analysed in relation to the actual concrete forms that meaning assumes, in the concrete practices of signifying, 'reading' and interpreting, and these require analysis of the actual signs, symbols, figures, images, narratives, words and sounds—the material forms—in which symbolic meaning is circulated (Hall 1997, 9). This thesis is concerned with the visual and verbal language of advertising, and subsequently analyses the representational practices and strategies in operation. It continually poses the question: what are the

meanings (though sometimes contested) that surround representations of the home and the idealised home? It is worth emphasising that there is no single or ‘correct’ answer to this question.

Since there is no guarantee that things will have one true meaning, or that meaning will not change over time, work in this area is bound to be interpretive—a debate between equally plausible meanings and interpretations (Hall 1997, 9). Following Hall (1997), the definition of representation in this thesis is based on the constructionist approach. Hall (1997, 25) writes that, ‘Things don’t mean … we construct meaning, using representational system—concepts and signs’. The constructionist view understands representation as a symbolic practice through which meaning is given to the world (Brooker 1999, 1930).

Therefore, advertising is an economical and representational practice. While its aim is to make people buy a product in order to increase sales and maximise profit, it is also a cultural practice. This is because, in order to sell, it must first appeal, and in order to appeal, it must engage with the meanings the product has accumulated and try to construct an identification between the consumers and those meanings. The image of the home does not possess its own intrinsic meaning, and cannot express its meaning for the consumer. Thus, advertising is a cultural language that speaks on behalf of the idealised home. Therefore, this thesis asserts that meanings and the idea of home have always been part of the cultural language and representational practice of advertising.

In contrast, the media image accords with a common view of contemporary entertainment and politics as being all the matter of image or appearance, rather than of substantial content. In this sense, media image is associated with the world of publicity, advertising and fashion. This seems to reinforce the contemporary association between image and superficiality. However, it also suggests that image making is connected with profit making and identity making. In this connection, it may connote an imposed stereotype or alternative subjective or cultural identity (Brooker 1991, 115–116).

## *Language*

The principal means of representation in culture is through language. In this thesis, language is not interpreted to refer strictly to written or spoken words. Rather, language is interpreted to mean any system of representation that allows the use of signs and symbols to represent or re-represent items in terms of a meaningful concept, image or idea, such as via newspaper advertising, photography, writing and imaging through technology. Language is the use of a set of signs or signifying system to represent things and exchange meaning about them (Gay et al. 1997, 13).

## *'Australian middle class' or 'middle Australian'*

The terms 'Australian middle class' or 'middle Australian' used in this thesis indicate an important link between the Australian nation and its middle-class homes, as when Robert Menzies spoke about values and aspirations, at the centre of which home ownership and family are placed:<sup>11</sup>

The 'real life of a nation' is to be found in the homes of people who are nameless and unadvertised, and who, whatever their individual religious conviction or dogma, see in their children their greatest contribution to the immortality of their race. The home is the foundation of sanity and sobriety; it is the indispensable condition of continuity; its health determines the health of society as a whole ... One of the best instincts in us is that which induces us to have one little piece of earth with a house and a garden which is ours, to which we can withdraw, in which we can be among friends, into which no stranger may come against our will (Menzies, cited in Brett 1992, 7-8).

In light of this quotation from Menzies, this thesis adopts John Murphy's (cited in Carter 2006, 223) view of the Australian middle class or middle Australian that, 'the middle class were not really characterized by their position in social structure, but by their values and sentiments'. Those values were 'thrift, self-reliance, independence and responsibility' (cited in Carter 2006, 223). In effect, Murphy (cited in Carter 2006, 223) suggests that, 'anyone could be in Menzies' middle class, if they lived by the virtues and sentiments that made up its "way of life"'. By encouraging all Australians to identify with the middle class, Menzies was promoting the belief that

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<sup>11</sup> Menzies was the longest serving Prime Minister of Australia. He served from 1939 to 1941, and from 1949 to 1966.

Australian society was essentially classless, and that the core values of both individual identity and national belonging were to be found in the domestic sphere (Carter 2006, 223–224). Hence, against this background, it is important to emphasise here that when the term ‘middle Australian’ is used in this thesis, it is referring to the idea of a ‘classless’ Australia.

### *‘Middle class’ versus ‘bourgeoisie’*

For much of the twentieth century, historians used the term ‘bourgeoisie’ unselfconsciously to denote the vague middle group between the nobility and the masses of peasants and urban workers. The terms ‘middle classes’, ‘middling sort’, ‘*Bürgertum*’ and ‘bourgeoisie’ were all used to describe the merchants, guild members, pensioners and elite non-nobles (professionals, financiers and officials) who dominated much of the early modern urban landscape. They entered the European scene in the Middle Ages as the tradespeople and other urban figures who did not fit neatly into the idealised tripartite society of three orders: those who pray, those who fight and those who work (‘Bourgeoisie: history 1450–1789’ 2010).

### *‘Postmodern culture’ versus ‘postmodernity’ versus ‘postmodernism’*

Postmodern culture is characterised by a breakdown of high culture and popular culture, old and new, nostalgic and futuristic, and natural and artificial, and is distinguished by the pursuit of expressive and liberated lifestyles of the so-called ‘new middle-class’ (Lury 1996, 93). However, the term ‘postmodernism’ is often intertwined with postmodernity, and refers to cultural changes *within* capitalism (Alvesson 2002, 21). In this thesis, the culture of postmodernism is to be interpreted as a culture that is intricately linked with a culture of image, in which looking takes precedence over seeing (‘sensing’ and ‘knowing’). A number of commentators, such as Fredric Jameson (1984) and Mike Featherstone (1991), have linked the rise of postmodernism to consumer culture.

### *Consumer culture*

Consumer culture is notoriously awash with signs, images and publicity. Most obviously, it involves an aestheticisation of commodities and their environment—advertising, packaging, shop displays, point of sale materials, product design and so forth have a long history in commercial capitalism (Slater 1997, 31). The term ‘consumer society’ marked a shift from considering consumption as a mere reflex of production to conceiving it as central to social reproduction. However, the term ‘consumer culture’ indicates not only the increasing production and salience of cultural goods as commodities, but also the way the majority of cultural activities and signifying practices have become mediated through consumption, and consumption progressively involves consuming signs and images.

Hence, in this thesis, the term ‘consumer culture’ is to be closely associated with that used by critics such as Baudrillard (1983, 1993) and Jameson (1984) to point to the ways in which consumption has ceased to be a simple appropriation of utilities, or use values. It has become a consumption of signs and images, in which an emphasis on the capacity to endlessly reshape the cultural or symbolic aspect of the commodity makes it more appropriate to speak of ‘commodity signs’ (Featherstone 1995, 75).

### ***Strategy, approach and theoretical significance of this thesis***

Given that this thesis takes objects of study to be mythologies (and not actual houses) surrounding the advertising and reception of the family home, the main theoretical engine for this thesis is Barthes’s theory of myth. The strategy is to analyse the visual texts and images of the home in the Australian media by employing semiotics as an approach. Stokes’s (2003, 72) observation of semiotics as a method of approach is given below:

Semiotics is interpretive and, consequently, necessarily subjective. However, because it is so subjective, semiotics is not reliable in the traditional social science sense—another analyst who studied the same texts may well elicit a different meaning. But this does not devalue semiotics, because it is about enriching our understanding of the texts and images.

For this thesis, a semiotic analysis of the home provides a way to relate specific texts to the system of messages in which they operate. A semiotic analysis of the Australian media's representation of the home (see the third research objective) breaks down the content of texts into their component parts, and relates them to broader discourses. This strategy serves to provide an intellectual context to the content—it addresses the ways the various elements of the visual text or image of the home work together and interact with knowledge to generate complex meanings of the idealised home.

One of the main theorists who contributed to the knowledge of semiotics is Barthes. Barthes's (2000) *Mythologies* examines the wider universe of meanings that everyday objects can evoke, as well as the way meanings can be ideologically restricted. *Mythologies* is a compilation of a series of articles, most of which were published in the magazine *Les Lettres Nouvelles*, between 1954 and 1956. Their concern is with the values and attitudes implicit in the variety of messages with which mass culture bombards society, via advertisements; newspaper and magazine reports; photographs; and even material objects, such as cars and children's toys (Moriarty 1991, 19). Barthes shows that it is possible to read the 'trivia' of everyday life as full of meanings. Due to their topicality, the essays provide the contemporary reader with a panorama of the events that occurred in France in the 1950s.

### *Research approach: Structure and design of case studies*

This thesis is a theoretical and analytical study that analyses the extent to which the image of the home has been represented (or misrepresented) in its own cultural context and at a particular time period, as these images continually mythologise under the effects of mass culture and media advertising. Barthes's theory of myth is significant to this research because it is both an analytical and problematising tool. It assumes that media images have inherent specific signifying mechanisms that attempt to universalise and naturalise meanings and values for society. Seen in the context of a society avid for images of what constitute the normative sense of

the home, myth provides a basis for analysing the ‘naturalising effect’ of the ideology of the home. By adopting Barthes’s theoretical position, the so-called ‘duplicity’ in the home image may be analysed.

As aforementioned, this study arose out of a concern to work against the idealisations of the home portrayed in media representations. Thus, an immediate and obvious choice was to tackle the objects of the study at a local level—that is, media images that are pertinent to Perth, Western Australian. However, it should be made clear that this discussion is not limited to Perth. This study extends beyond this region by drawing examples and media images from other Australian states that are considered relevant and applicable to this study as a whole.

Like Barthes’s *Mythologies*, this thesis approaches this research by reading into the ‘trivia’ of the Western notions of the home seen from the perspective of Australian media and advertising. It stems from a desire to expose or reveal the underlying myths of the Western home by questioning the values and attitudes implicit in the variety of messages with which the mass culture bombards society, in a given place and time. Adopting a similar structure as set out in Barthes’s *Mythologies*, this thesis is a compilation of a series of case studies or snapshots specifically targeted at the topicality of Western aspects of the Australian home. It is by looking at a diversity of sites in local newspapers and magazines that these items, while seemingly disparate, can begin to combine to form a picture of the myth itself.

Based on observations of the Western Australian weekend newspaper media housing scene in the mid-twentieth century and early twenty-first century, there are ample Western home ideals found in relation to what is considered ‘natural’ or normal in a given time and place, in relation to the home and domestic way of living, and as propagated by media advertising. Thus, this thesis arose out of an interest to explore the home from the perspective of two key sites of idealisation separated by time: the 1950s and the twenty-first century.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The two key sites of idealisation separated by time can be established here. For example, it is observed that, in the Saturday edition of *The West Australian* newspaper, new houses in the 1950s and 1960s were only advertised under a single section headed, ‘Modern Living Architecture’. In contrast, in the early twenty-first century, new houses are now advertised under a variety of housing styles and themes, via a number of centrefold lift-outs, such as the *New Homes* supplement, *Premium Homes* and newspaper inserted magazines, such as *Habitat* (see Appendix A).

In the first time period of the 1950s, there existed a non-exclusive, modestly featured ‘modern’ style of home seen in the local media of Perth, which took pride in the fact that a vast number of these houses were actually architect-designed and built. This is unsurprising because, as conceded by Richards (cited in London & Richards 1997, 43), in the ‘modern’ era of the 1950s, ‘virtually every architect and architectural firm was involved with housing and the family house became the test bed for new architectural ideas’. In this 1950s period shortly after World War II, the ideal family home assumed a special place in the Australian imaginary. For instance, women predominated the front covers of home, garden and women’s magazines of that time, promoting the single-storey house with a front lawn or garden attached. Many of the images also portrayed women dressed in pretty dresses and aprons standing in the kitchen, while skilfully advertising various forms of electrical whitegoods. Women achieved a greater public presence in this context, reflected in calls to Australian ‘housewives’ to consider how their ideal home would look. American critic Colomina (2007, 6) describes this image of the 1950s to be an image of the good life: ‘the cars, the TVs … the furniture, the dresses and lawns’. She claims that this image of the 1950s and 1960s was ‘a desirable image, good enough to eat’ (Colomina 2007, 6).

In the twenty-first century, in the context of Perth, one can identify an entirely new set of images in relation to what signifies the home in this period. Perhaps the most noticeable and indisputable part of the imagery from this period is that there appears to be an explosion in the variety and eclecticism of home ‘styles’, as opposed to only the ‘modern’ style of housing advertised in the 1950s. Much of the built variation of housing styles—such as the ‘Tuscan’ or ‘French’ styles—are also likely to be mass-produced, project homes that are possibly also speculative and developer-driven (as opposed to the mostly architect-designed houses advertised in the 1950s). Nevertheless, what must be noted is that both of the home images that appear in these two different time dimensions represent a perpetual norm that most Australians would accept as natural.

In Perth, it is interesting to note that, in the twenty-first century, the images of the home still retain the values and attitudes that reflect the good life of the post-war 1950s. First, it is observed that the Western Australian’s

love for and attachment to the garden continues (from the post-war period) to be one of the most enduring images of the Australian home. Second, the image of the architect-designed home is also prevalent, proving that this phenomenon is not far removed from the media housing scene of the 1950s. Third, what was once regarded the ‘heart of the home’ in the 1950s, under the spotlight of the media, has now changed its focus in terms of what this ‘heart’ represents. In the past, the kitchen space undoubtedly constituted the ‘heart’ and was central to most home advertisements; however, in the twenty-first century, the home theatre room is heavily promoted and popularised across the local home section of weekend newspapers.

Based on the above readings of the ‘trivia’ and normative images of the Australian home, as identified in the local media, a case study approach was adopted in this research to investigate a particular situation or climate that corresponds to each of the four specific elements pertaining to the Australian home image. Thus, the structure of this thesis was informed by a combination of readings of representations or images of the Australian suburbia home and the architectural home in order to form a picture of the ‘Barthoneon’ myth.<sup>13</sup> The general analytical content in each of the four case studies covers either one or two of the following:

- a. the first time dimension, where images that are analysed are associated with the myths of the post-war 1950s
- b. the architect-designed home and its surrounding myths, which are examined in the context of the architectural profession
- c. the second time dimension, where images that are analysed comprise idealised home myths associated with the twenty-first century, such as the Tuscan style of home and home theatre space.

In this thesis, case study one in Chapter Three speculates only regarding the first time dimension (a). Case study two in Chapter Four encompasses both the first and second time dimensions (a and c). Case study three in Chapter Five does not have a specific emphasis on a particular time dimension, and thus can be considered a stand-alone chapter in the thesis (b). Finally, case

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<sup>13</sup> The term ‘Barthoneon’ is employed throughout this thesis to refer to concepts and theories related to French thinker and philosopher, Barthes.

study four in Chapter Six delves predominantly into the second time dimension (c).

As previously acknowledged, the meaning of home is constantly shifting and changing, yet it is not within the boundaries of this thesis to discuss or justify these shifts or changes. This thesis is principally concerned with speculating on the sociocultural motivations or basis for the images occurring in each of the above key sites (a, b and c), as aforementioned. More significantly, it attempts to analyse the idealisations or myths (and the persistency and timelessness of these) embedded in the spectacle and image of the home, which is the real object of critique. In doing so, this thesis asserts that it is possible to read into the ‘trivia’ or norms of the Australian home in the local media as being full of meaning.

However, what exactly is a myth? Barthes (1973, 109) states that a myth is ‘a system of communication … a message’, produced by a certain signifying mechanism. Moriarty (1991, 23) states that:

it is this formal aspect that characterizes myth, not its content. Although the content of a myth is ideological and therefore determined by history, the myth is something more than its content, and this something more requires formal, semiological analysis. Moreover, there is a history of forms as well as of contents.

In his essay, ‘Myth Today’, Barthes (1973, 109) provides examples that demonstrate exactly how representation is working at a second, broader, cultural level. This second, broader, cultural level is central to Barthes’s *Mythologies*, and central to the current study’s analyses of the idealised home, because it is at the level of secondary or second-order signification that myth is found. Barthes demonstrates that representation occurs through two separate, but linked, processes. In the first, the signifier and signified unite to form a sign with a simple denoted message. The first completed meaning functions as the signifier in the second stage of the representation process, and, when linked with a wider theme by a reader, yields a second, more elaborate and ideologically framed message or meaning. This second level of signification is the level of myth.

Importantly, in *Mythologies*, Barthes (1979, 11) wishes to account for a certain duplicity: the signification of a naturalness that somehow ‘dresses

up' the representation of a reality that is 'undoubtedly determined by history' or society—that is, not a fact of nature at all. The end product of his study is the conception of a structure of double-function in sign systems—the ability of one signification to generate a second. In this regard, Barthes presents this view of myth as a 'second-order semiological system' (Barthes 1973 114). It is from this perspective that this thesis examines the various discourses concerned with shaping the Australian home myth.

### ***Overview of the thesis***

Chapter One forms the background chapter that examines the origins of some of the significant aspects of Western home ideals. In reviewing the various literature concerning media representations and conceptions of 'home' ideals from the nineteenth century Victorian through to the twentieth century modernism era, this chapter aims to establish how representations and idealisations of the Victorian home were transformed and revolutionised through to the Australian social and cultural context.

Chapter Two explains and establishes the theoretical engine for this thesis. It establishes the research questions for the subsequent case study chapters, and explains the theory of Barthes's myth, which underpins the theoretical foundation for this thesis. Chapters Three, Four, Five and Six proceed to provide an in-depth case study and critical and semiological analysis of the image of the Australian suburban and architectural dream home in the context of media advertising.

Chapter Three examines and identifies various ideals of the Australian 'modern' home portrayed in media representations of the 1950s, immediately following World War II. This chapter analyses the 'modern' home as perpetuated in media representations in the form of home and women's magazines. More specifically, it establishes that the media's infatuation and preoccupation with images of 'kitchen spaces' during this period, especially with a woman standing in them, is intricately linked to the social, cultural and architectural ideals that were expounded in the nineteenth century Victorian home.

Chapter Four speculates on the representations and ideal images of the Australian suburban quarter-acre home with a garden attached. As in Chapter Three, the form of printed media analysed here consists mainly of home and women's magazines. This chapter argues that, while the utopian garden image remains firmly rooted in the Australian imagination, it serves to represent nothing more than a myth that exists in the Australian dreams of the good life, 'shaped by a cluster of related ideas loosely described as the suburban ideal' (Davison 2001, 4).

Chapter Five explores media's representations of the 'architect-designed' home as a mythological construction, by articulating and framing it within the perspective of the professional cultures of architecture. Focusing on the architect-designed home, the critique taps into images of houses published in professional architectural magazines and websites. Using Melbourne architects Denton Corker Marshall as a case study, this chapter seeks to analyse and problematise the extent to which the media—professional architectural magazines and websites—constructs a mythical realm within its own profession. By doing so, the media enables the architect and architect-designed house to be transposed. This chapter also identifies the key distinctions between the image of the home as seen in 'popular' media constructions of architectural spaces, and the image of the house that exists in professional cultures of architectural spaces.

Finally, Chapter Six questions the spectacle and image of 'Tuscan', as well as the many existing eclectic 'styles' of the home in media representations of the present twenty-first century. It further explores idealised images in association with the rise in popularity of the twenty-first century's 'home theatre' room, as advertised in newspaper inserted magazines (NIMs) from local newspapers and the *New Homes* supplement from local weekend newspapers, such as *The West Australian* and *The Sunday Times*.

## **Summary**

In summary, the home plays a particularly important mythological role in the Australian architectural imagination. This mythical role is attested to by Justine Clark (2007, 12) when she states that the home:

is where many practices start out; it is often understood as a site of experimentation, a place where architectural ideas may be explored before they are carried into larger projects. It is indeed true that the house as a building type, often conjures up a certain romanticized view what Australian Architecture really is—beautifully crafted buildings, preferably located in stunning bush or beach setting (or at least photographed as if they might be).

Hence, it is in this sense and within the public's imagination that the house embodies an important mythological role.

For example, during the 1950s after World War II, the ideal family home assumed a special place in the Australian imaginary. Women achieved a greater public presence in this context, reflected in calls to Australian 'housewives' to consider how their ideal home would look. This 'new look' required of the national home was articulated through government policy discourses and the popular media (Lloyd & Johnson 2004). However, unlike the language of advertising and representations in general, this thesis notes that, despite the house's mythological role, architecture does not and should not operate on fantasy and desire. For instance, statements that refer to an 'architecturally designed' or 'architect-designed' home in newspaper advertisements are highly problematic and contested because they do not conjure realistic representations of home, but imaginary ones. Using Barthes's myth as the main theoretical framework and analytical tool to unpack the spectacle and images of the idealised home exposes their underlying values and beliefs and what they connote about society in a given time dimension. Thus, this thesis builds on Barthes's theory and methodologies to challenge the perpetual norms of the Australian idealised home in the context of architecture and media advertising.

This introduction chapter has laid the foundations for the thesis. The research hypothesis, objectives, significance, strategy and theoretical position have been described, while the research problems and issues for the thesis were identified. Finally, the overview of the thesis was briefly

outlined. This thesis now proceeds with a background study of the origins of the ideals of the Western home.

## ***Chapter One: Origins of the Western home ideals***

Is there any other word in the vocabulary of nations that is so expressive, so suggestive, so gentle and so important in its wide significance, as that which heads our article? Home! What a talisman it is, what a spell, what an invocation ... Everybody has his or her ideal of somewhere, of some place of rest, of complete satisfaction, where the roar and din of the great world may not enter, or if heard at all would be esteemed for its contrast to the serenity within—a home, in fact, for without serenity there is no home ... (Grillier, 1979, 498).

### ***Chapter introduction***

Thus far, the review in the ‘Main introduction’ has demonstrated that advertising can be seen as a cultural language that speaks on behalf of the home, which is really a reflection of societal values. As such, a reading into the media is really a reading into a culture. However, while the home image may be considered a norm and appears natural in every sense, the review highlights that the media has a tremendous effect on perpetuating and intensifying the home as an architectural ideal. Further, in advocating the ability of advertising to shape individuals’ perceptions of the home, the review suggests that very few consumer choices are entirely rational and instrumental, as one can never be certain one has not been influenced, even in a vague manner, by the way the home has been imagined.

This chapter provides a background study into the origins of Western home ideals. It begins by offering a broad perspective of the review before narrowing down to give a more comprehensive coverage of the Australian and Western Australian context, focusing on attitudes to house and home from colonial to modern times. This chapter serves to demonstrate that domesticity is a construction that began with the conception of Victorianism—an idealised set of social, moral and cultural values from which Western home ideals first originated. This chapter begins to appreciate how representations and idealisations of the Victorian home in their normative sense were transformed and revolutionised into the Australian social and cultural context. Correspondingly, in establishing the important role of representations in facilitating the Australian home as a social and cultural construct, this chapter affirms that ideals of home and home design are part

of a sociocultural and temporal entity that is always imbued and encoded with values or ideologies of a particular era and society.

### ***Overview of the home based on Western ideologies of family, class and gender in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries***

From a macro perspective, the suburban ideology was founded in the nineteenth century's retreat from the urban excesses of individualism and capitalism. It constructed a gender-based division between home and work, and this division created a male myth that the home is a place of consumption and rest for men, while, for many women, it is a place of production and entrapment. The single-family detached house established its position as the ideal house type through the weaving of a myth that conflates it with a naturalised image of nuclear family, home, security, independence and individualism (Dovey 1993, 7).

However, even on a micro scale, architectural historians have demonstrated how a single dominant house form—such as the terraced house in England (Muthesius, cited in Madigan & Munro 1991, 120) and the tenement in Scotland (Worsdall, cited in Madigan & Munro 1991, 121)—was constantly reinterpreted to reflect the increasing differentiation of the class structure in the late nineteenth century. Historical referents (such as classical, gothic and regency) were deployed as status symbols to provide a subtle differentiation between classes. Matrix (cited in Madigan & Munro 1992, 120) argues that the design of the Victorian (late nineteenth century) 'gentleman's townhouse' reflected the internal hierarchy of the bourgeois family with the public masculine domain at the front of the house, and the private feminine domain confined to the rear. The artisan household enjoyed lower space standards than the middle-class home, yet maintained the same distinctions between front and back, public and private, masculine and feminine.

Lawrence (cited in Madigan & Munro 1991, 121) discusses the concentration of family life in the back room—the kitchen—in small working class terraced houses. Worsdall (cited in Madigan & Munro 1991, 121) comments on the way Scottish tenements—even modest households—

reserved a parlour for ‘best’ that was virtually unused, while the family lived at the back in the kitchen. The front of the house displayed the socioeconomic status of the household, while the back had a more utilitarian design and was often constructed in cheaper materials that reflected the demands of domestic labour (washhouses, bin shelters, trade entrances and so forth). Children—particularly young children—remained confined to the back regions of the female sphere. Hence, during the Victorian period, the ideal of the bourgeois family became crystallised as the norm of social propriety not only for the middle classes, but also increasingly for the working classes. It was a model that relied centrally on female domesticity (Madigan & Munro 1991, 121).

Although popular with the *avant-garde* of the 1930s, the architectural movement of modernism in the twenty-first century had a limited effect on the design of mass volume built housing in Britain (Gould, cited in Madigan & Munro 1991, 123). However, by this time, the ideal of family organisation no longer conformed to the hierarchical model of the nineteenth century, but was presented as a democratic grouping centred on marriage as a partnership between two equals (Fletcher & Mount, cited in Madigan & Munro 1991, 125). This is directly reflected in the provision of undifferentiated, common space presumed to be jointly used by the new democratic couples and their children. However, despite this ideological shift, the division of labour remained intact. Women’s role had changed, but this idealised model still refused to challenge the differentiation between the sexes.<sup>14</sup>

The 1950s saw a powerful reassertion of familial values and restatement of femininity as a role model for women (Wilson, cited in Madigan & Munro 1991, 125). The post-war period also saw a growth in consumerist ideology, in which the home featured as the major focus of consumption and women as the major consumers (Tomlinson 1990).

Indeed, the post-war expansion in home ownership and suburban development can be seen as part of a deliberate strategy to create the

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<sup>14</sup> Evidence of this can be found in Supski’s (2003, 6) research, which indicates that much has been written about the public/private distinction, arguing that women were aligned with the domestic sphere and men were aligned with the work/public sphere, and these distinctions were built into housing design.

consumer markets that fuelled the post-war economic boom (Castells, Harvey & Duncan, cited in Madigan & Munro 1991, 125). Despite the emergence of a new familial ideology that stressed the compassionate partnership ideals of marriage, inequalities between men and women persisted. Women were expected to be responsible for domestic labour, and child-rearing was also typically a woman's responsibility that was closely associated with the home (in both a symbolic and physical sense). Women were expected to shape the interior of the house so that it expressed their personality, enabled a comfortable family life, exhibited good taste and colour sense, and displayed their skill as a consumer (Madigan & Munro 1991, 127).

### ***Representations of the Western home in the nineteenth-century Victorian and twentieth-century Modernism eras***

When speaking about representation, one speaks about a subject and an object. Traditionally, the concept of the home has been approached as a subject—a diffuse and complex condition with a time dimension and continuum established in opposition to an object. However, because this thesis's principal focus is images of the home, the home is discussed in terms of an object. After all, the home is a 'construction' in all senses of the word. Until the early nineteenth century, the home was not a private shelter for the members of a small family, but a large structure that comprised both workshops and residential accommodation. It housed not only husband, wife and children, but also members of the extended family and servants (Heynen & Baydar 2005, 6–7). Before the nineteenth century, the house was far less part of the private/public dichotomy with which it is now associated, and did not bear the clearly gendered overtones that suggest that the house primarily belongs to the mother (Birdwell-Pheasant & Zuniga, cited in Heynen & Baydar 2005, 7).

Irene Cieraad (1999) concedes that the concept of home introduces not only an inevitable historical dimension, but also an irrevocable temporal dimension that is often clad in nostalgic images. For example, she notes:

the notion of domesticity is one of the most powerful images related to domestic space ... The image of primordial Dutch domesticity was said to be created in the nineteenth century, at the time of an almost international glorification of the arts and works of the Dutch seventeenth century. In the eyes of nineteenth century domestic beholders the life-like portrayal of the Dutch domestic scenes reflected the nostalgic domesticity and peaceful family life they longed for. This image of domesticity has haunted us ever since (Cieraad 1999, 3).

It has been discussed that nostalgic images of domesticity made by several scholars, including architect Witold Rybczynski, are often illustrated by paintings of seventeenth-century Dutch interiors (Mare, cited in Cieraad 1999, 13). These paintings are said to portray the increasing emphasis on privacy in the middle-class family, resulting in a clear division between the intimate, cosy, secure, indoor world of the home, and the public, perilous world outside. In his book, *Home: A Short History of an Idea*, Rybczynski (1988, 66) writes:

That we are able to know so much about the appearance of Dutch homes is thanks to two happy accidents ... the predominance of painting in seventeenth-century Holland, and the popularity of domestic scenes as a subject of these paintings.

Rybczynski's (1988, 55–56) research also reveals that scenes of mothers and children indicate that a more affectionate relationship was emerging between parents and children, with the nuclear family constituting the focus of domesticity. He also emphasises the role of the housewife and her maid in the practical organisation of the household. As such, he sees women's devotion to the home as a sign of the final feminisation of the domestic sphere and as a typical characteristic of Dutch domesticity. Thus, this all-embracing concept of domesticity proves to be a creation of the nineteenth century because it was during this period that domestic, bourgeois family life became a nucleus around which the nation was formed. These sentiments were then projected into the past and applied to seventeenth-century paintings, books and houses—and thus was born the wide-ranging concept of domesticity (Cieraad 1999, 14).

According to many historians, domesticity is a construction that began with the conception of Victorianism—a set of social, moral and cultural values from which the Western home ideals first originated. These values

characterised the white middle class in England and the United States (US) during the nineteenth century (Aries, Prost & Vincent 1992; Davidoff & Hall 1987; Forty 1986; Heynen & Baydar 2005; Reed 1996). The importance of domestic life was an extremely popular theme in both Britain and the US during the nineteenth century.

For example, a source discusses that by the second quarter of the nineteenth century, English writers such as Sarah Stickney Ellis, Harriet Martineau and John Loudon, in very different ways, were concerned with transforming the daily lives of middle-class families and finding ways to make domesticity a lived reality (Davidoff & Hall 1987, 180). Ellis's advice books and novels assumed a world in which the domestic sphere was occupied by women, children and servants, with men an absent presence who were there to direct and command, but were physically occupied elsewhere for most of their time. Similarly, Martineau assumes a world divided between political economy and domestic economy, while Loudon advises and instructs middle-class families how to build and furnish houses and design gardens that are suited to a purely domestic life, without manufactories or counting houses attached. It was recognised that men were preoccupied with business, and domesticity had become the 'women's sphere' (Davidoff & Hall 1987, 181). Writing in the troubled decades of the 1830s and 1840s in Victorian England, when political and social unrest at home and abroad was rife, these writers propagandised the family as a repository of stability and firm values (Davidoff & Hall 1987, 180).

The term 'domesticity' also refers to a set of ideas that only began to develop in reaction to the division between work and home. In the fourteenth century, the typical bourgeoisie townhouse still combined living and work, as documented in Rybczynski's (1988) book, *Home: A Short History of An Idea*. Building plots had restricted street frontages, since the fortified medieval town was necessarily densely constructed. These long narrow buildings usually consisted of two floors over an undercroft or basement, which was used for storage. The main part of the house that faced that street was a shop or work area. According to Rybczynski (1988, 25), the living quarters were not a series of rooms; instead, they consisted of a single large

chamber—the hall—that was opened up to the rafters. People cooked, ate, entertained and slept in this space.

According to the cultural historian Walter Benjamin (2002, 19), it was only in the early nineteenth century that, for the first time, the living space became distinguished from the space of work. This growing separation between living space and workspace also stressed the growing separation between the male and female spheres, which was justified by assumptions that pointed to the differences in ‘nature’ between the genders. For instance, historian Catherine Hall (1990) observes that women in the domestic sphere did more than just sew, cook and clean—they also functioned as moral and religious guides for their husbands. Hall (1990, 74) states that the:

division between male and female worlds had a religious connotation, for the marketplace was considered dangerously amoral. The men who operated in that sphere could save themselves only through constant contact with the moral world of the home, where women acted as carriers of the pure values that could counteract the destructive tendencies of the market.

This construction, which placed women firmly in the home and men in the marketplace, developed in the middle classes; lower class families who depended on two incomes for survival clearly could not conform to this construction. Hall (1990, 81) argues that, while working-class families could not operate according to the middle-class construction of the family, they did accept many of the ideals of middle class domesticity. The ideal that the home provided a moral centre and place of comfort for the husband was particularly popular with the working-class family. These ideals have gradually filtered down through various sources of printed media from the Victorian age, one of which can be seen in this famous quotation from the historian John Ruskin (1913, 107–108), taken from his book, *Sesame and Lilies*:

The woman's power is for rule, not for battle—and her intellect is not for invention or creation, but for sweet ordering, arrangement and decision ... But he guards the women from all this; within his house, as ruled by her ... need no danger, no temptation, no cause of error or offense. This is the true nature of home—it is the place of peace.

This quotation subscribes to the bourgeois construction of femininity and domesticity. Ruskin, like most Victorians, imagined men and women as having different, yet complementary, natures. The place where these two natures come together most ‘naturally’ is, of course, the bourgeois home. This idea of virtuous womanhood, as possessed of innate, God-given powers to uplift, regenerate and redeem, which is so ubiquitous in Ruskin’s writing, is inextricably bound up with his celebrated idealisation of the domestic. It is always in terms of personal relationships, especially in a family grouping, that the woman—for Ruskin and for most Victorians—realised her full moral and spiritual potential.

The vision of home as refuge and haven is found in countless poems and manuals of the Victorian period. For example, a book-length poem published in 1838, titled *Home: or The Months, A Poem for Domestic Life*, is said to have the opening line, ‘Home is the sacred refuge of our life’ (Player, cited in Davidoff & Hall 1987, 171). The author, John Player, made immediate connections to the division between public and private, the home as haven from the turbulent world outside, and the religious nature of the home as a foretaste of the heavenly home above (Davidoff & Hall 1987, 171).

By the 1830s and 1840s, middle-class families were increasingly living, or at least desiring to live, on premises that did not combine the workplace with living space, but were homes that were separated from work and away from the pressures of business, with the concomitant apprentices and employees. Writers on domesticity by the 1830s and 1840s all assumed either that this separation had taken place or, if it had not, that it was an unfortunate aberration (Davidoff & Hall 1987, 181).

### ***Representations of the Western home in the Australian context***

It is claimed that Australians are so inclined to equate suburbanism with the good life that they too readily assumed that sprawling cities were a simple proof of prosperity (Davison, cited in Johnson 1994, 104). Suburbia—an idea that first arrived in Australia with the country’s European settlers—

gave rise to the invention of that popular Australian institution: the quarter-acre suburban block.<sup>15</sup> Hence, a sprawl of homes and gardens were later shaped by the successive waves of immigrants who pioneered them (Davison, cited in Johnson 1994, 100). One of the few descriptions of suburbia in the early 1900s was recorded by an English visitor, EC Buley (cited in Archer 1996, 144), in 1905:

Here the houses are all single-storied bungalows, or villa, as the Australians prefer to call them, each standing in its own plot of garden. Glance over the fragrant pittosporum hedge, and you may see the lawn sprinkler pleasantly at work upon a grass plot bordered with masses of bright phlox and thriving roses and pelargoniums ... There is an air of roominess and privacy about these Australian suburbs that stands for a good deal of solid comfort ... The most arduous task of the amateur gardener is the constant use of the watering-can; the rest is done by Nature with a lavish hand. The vine and the fig tree are by no means impossible, and a rough erection of wooden laths makes an ideal fern-house. These things figure very largely in the life of the average Australian city-dweller, who leaves his city office at five, changes into an easy clothing as soon as he arrives home, dines comfortably about half-past six, and then potters about his garden until it grows dark.

Australian suburbs did not flourish all at once and, throughout the nineteenth century, the house and garden ideal had to compete with more traditional styles of urban living, focused on the terrace house, corner shop, pub and vigorous social life of the streets. However, nevertheless, the suburban idea was vigorously promoted by the state during the early colonial period (Davison, cited in Johnson 1994, 102).

Graeme Davison (cited in Johnson 1994, 101) also states that, like a colony, the suburb was a place of escape or refuge. Thus, it was shaped largely by the logic of avoidance. Davison explains that, while the slum that characterised the urban ills of the Old World in Europe was seen as dense, dirty, unnatural, disorderly and disease ridden, the suburb was seen as clean, open, natural, orderly and healthy.

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<sup>15</sup> As Davison (cited in Johnson 1994) reflects, the idea of the suburb as a place of peace and refuge drew inspiration from Romanticism—one of the four great contemporary ideologies (Evangelicalism, Romanticism, Sanitarianism and Capitalism) that strengthened the influence of the suburban idea on the minds of colonial Australia. The ideal suburb enabled the care-worn city man to repair his battered spirits through communication with the beauties of nature. Thus, the garden was as important a feature of the suburb as the cottage or villa, and the ideal suburb attempted—in its planning and architecture—to evoke something of the peace and solitude of the countryside (see further elaboration in Chapter Four: ‘The suburban quarter-acre and garden ideal’).

John Archer (1996) reveals that it was not until much later that the American books and popular magazines that began to appear in the early twentieth century led to the architectural influences of the Californian Bungalow that altered the face of Australian suburbia.<sup>16</sup> Prior to this, the first British settlers who arrived in Australia in 1788 styled their houses on the architecture they left behind in Britain. The vast majority of new Australians had been born in Britain, and British influence was very noticeable until the mid-1850s. This influence was reflected in the Georgian style of houses built. The earliest Australian vernacular house reflected the Georgian style, as a single-storey dwelling with only two rooms. The front door led into the main living room, which had an open fireplace. Opposite the fireplace was a door leading to the sleeping room, with a single window ventilating and lighting each room. The verandah was an Australian addition to the Georgian cottage that provided shade protection in the hot Australian summer (Vulker 1986, 52).

Regarding attitude towards the home, the Western home ideals—bound up with a set of values and ideologies based on the Victorian ideal (as previously discussed)—were also true for the new Australians. This was because ‘most adults were still overseas born at the end of the nineteenth century’ and ‘were settled too late to develop [their] own style as America had done’ (Serle, cited in Freeman & Vulker 1991, 20). As such, in colonial times, it was almost inevitable that the new country ‘remained economically tied to England’ and was ‘swamped by the products of the Industrial Revolution in Britain’ (Serle, cited in Freeman & Vulker 1991, 20). Subsequently, it can be said that the new Australians were disempowered by the extent of influence that the Western home ideals had on them, and these ideals were infiltrated and transposed through to Australia’s social and cultural context via both printed and visual forms of media representations.

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<sup>16</sup> As Archer (1996, 155) states, some positives of the bungalow were that it freed the small house from the drawing room of the Victorian era and introduced the idea of a living room connected to the kitchen by a door, the breakfast ingle and built in furniture. For the bungalow to exist, the domestic servant disappeared for most people and the house plan was adjusted. Archer (1996, 155) also states that, ‘The bungalow was not merely a style; it was the beginning of the creative marketing of housing. Articles on the bungalow began to evoke emotive images of a whole new stress-free lifestyle which would magically suffuse its occupants with a feeling of well being’.

For example, Jessie Serle (cited in Freeman & Vulker 1991, 11) notes in *British-Australian Domestic Interiors* that:

Surgeon Worgan brought the first piano. It was for long a matter of waiting for 'every pane of glass, every nail, every gain of paint, and every piece of furniture, from the kitchen copper to the drawing-room curtains' to come from England, although the armed forces and the traders were quick to seize opportunities.

On the above, Serle (cited in Freeman & Vulker 1991, 11) reiterates that:

English designs and John Macarthur was shortly to consign English textiles to his wife for sale. Upholsters were at work in Sydney by the early 1800s and in 1810 Ellis Bent's furnishings included a Wilson carpet, a set of dining tables, a cellaret and a four-post bed.

Importantly, Serle (cited in Freeman & Vulker 1991, 12) stresses that, 'A new Britannia was underway', confirming the strength of the British ties to the new colony.

In this sense, the Western ideals of the home had infiltrated to reflect nineteenth century colonial times in Australia's home interiors in terms of decoration, furnishings and furniture and room arrangement. These were prominently portrayed in the drawings and paintings of the time. For example, in Serle's (cited in Freeman & Vulker 1991, 13) description of one of the paintings entitled, *Major and Mrs Errington's Room in Van Deemen's Land, John on the Floor c. 1844*, she notes:

This room in the military subaltern's cottage at Port Arthur shows what an upper-middle class military family saw fit to bring to Australia. Besides the piano and the elegantly bordered cover on the Regency table, there is matting which may have been picked up at the Cape. Whether the mantelpiece was built here or imported the marbling on it is an imported technique. A portrait of Frances, Lady Sayers, hangs over a mantelshelf arranged with the same concern for symmetry as prevailed in English drawing-rooms at this date.

In another painting entitled, *Bishop Nixon's drawing-room, Hobart, 1845*, Serle (cited in Freeman & Vulker 1991, 14) documents that:

The pioneer bishop of Tasmania, Bishop Nixon, arrived with 52 cases of worldly possessions which ranged from ecclesiastical robes to tin footmen, brandy, port, marsala, and a chariot which proved

perfectly useless. There were French bedsteads, swinging cots and marble busts. Like so many migrants, Mrs Nixon was soon congratulating herself on the very English looking household she had established. Their manservant made extra items in Huon pine, but 'in the best English style'. A Guido hung in all its glory between marble busts, and was supplemented with watercolors by Varley and Hayter.

In another entitled, *An Evening's Gathering at Yarra Cottage, Port Stephens, 1857*, Serle (cited in Freeman & Vulker 1991, 14) states that:

Marcus Brownrigg's house at Port Stephens where he lived after the Australian Agricultural Company sacked him, demonstrates the classic mid-Century sitting or drawing-room which appeared in both Britain and Australia. There is the standard centre table, the encircling ring of chairs placed to take advantage of the source of light, and books and other objects arranged radially around a formal vase of flowers. Wallpaper, which appeared in quantity in the wake of technical advances in Britain, the method of picture hanging and the curtain treatment all look utterly English.

As these three quotations demonstrate, it is clear even from the descriptions of the paintings in homes of colonial times that there was a definite pattern in the 'new Australians' remaining very much tied to the Western sense of the home and attitudes towards home, specifically through the arrangement of furniture and use of interior furnishings and decorations. After all, as Serle (cited in Freeman & Vulker 1991, 20) states, 'as a dislocated people needing there-assurance of the familiar, [they] continued to measure [their] achievements by European standards'.

Meanwhile, more locally in Western Australia, in Tom Stannage's *A New History of Western Australia*, Margaret Grillier (1979, 497) states that:

family life was a recurrent theme in the mid nineteenth century colony's weekly newspapers—the *Inquirer* and the *Perth Gazette*. Both regularly extolled the virtues of domestic life, with sentimental little homilies on various domestic themes and quantities of marital advice to both sexes: pieces with such engaging titles as 'The value of Good Wives', 'How to treat a Wife', 'Hints to Ladies', and 'A little lesson for well Disposed Wives' appeared between 1850 and 1865. Such articles all emphasize their authors' belief in the vital socializing role of the family in building a stable, hardworking, Christian society in the raw western colony.

In this light, Grillier (1979, 497) argues that, 'at the core of the family they identified the colonial wife and mother, described in terms consistent with

English Romantic rhetoric of the early and middle nineteenth century, as civilizer *par excellence*'.

It is interesting that, in Western Australia, the ideal of marriage and the family was promoted vigorously, as Stannage (1981, 10) articulates, 'at least in part because of the enormous social disequilibrium produced by the presence of thousands of single male convicts drawn from the lower orders of the society'. In this context, it was highly encouraged in the mid-nineteenth century that women should marry men who were criminals or 'convicts' because it was strongly believed that women held the essential responsibility to improve the moral welfare of the community by 'promoting the good order and reformation of the convicts' (Grillier 1979, 497). For example, on 5 May 1854, the editor of the *Perth Gazette* wrote:

A mistaken notion prevails that convict women are the best possible mates for convict men, but the contrary is the case. Viewing the immense influence exerted by the gentler over the sterner sex, it will be apparent that woman who is untainted with crime, who is religious, sober and industrious, cleanly and saving, will exert that influence for good; while she who has rendered her subject for transportation, and is the vilest and most degraded of human beings, will exert that influence for evil (Grillier, 1979, 497).

Grillier (1979, 498) notes that such belief in the moral influence of wives and families persists in the writings of Western Australian historians which elaborates on the colony's social problems in the 1860s. For example, Griller invokes on the writings of a Western Australian historian by the name of Crowley and de Garis who commented that it was obvious that much of the increase in crime and immorality was due to the convicts' lack of female companions and of normal home life once they had been freed. This alleged responsibility of women for the moral welfare of the community did not accord them equal status with men, even within the domestic sphere, as Grillier states. Within the family, as without, women's subordination was both expected and enforced.

In this respect, Grillier (1979, 498) emphasises that the forum for woman's influence was the home, as represented in the middle decades of the century in a number of sentimental newspaper pieces as refuge from and moral bastion against the cares and temptations of the outside world. The

following article, printed in the *Perth Gazette* in 1859 and titled 'Home and Its Pleasures', is a testimony to Ruskin's (1913) view on the bourgeois home:

We now think that a man who is happy in his home, at his own fireside, with the partner of his life smiling gently upon him and his little children looking like smiling content ... is to all intents and purposes a 'Serene Highness' ... Home is the revivifying spell that braces many a heart to so its duty ... [it] is the kingdom of the heart; and in the thatched cottage through which the hollow wind whistles, as well as in the gorgeous palatial pile ... the home spell lingers and there is no place like it. The man who with humble means and quiet wishes, ... who has a home where envy and unthankfulness find no place, where dear domestic love and gentleness are the presiding angels, is indeed a Serene Highness; and long may he continue so, and may our happy country be ever celebrated as the land of Home and Hearts (Grillier 1979, 498).

Victorian ideals of the family life, with their romantic conception of home and hearth, can equally be traced in a historical record titled, *Westralian Voices: Documents in Western Australian Social History* (Aveling 1979). Such myths are revealed in the opening pages of the diary of Emma Thompson, a member of the colonial gentry. The entry is entitled 'Domestic Happiness' and was written in 1857, in Thompson's early married life:

In the pursuit of happiness ... we not infrequently overlook the source of the purest and most substantial of all Earth's joys. We roam far and toil hard for that which may most easily be obtained at our own firesides ... Home is the congenial soil of the purest affections of the noblest virtues of the heart. Why has God filled the Earth with these little bands of united individuals, called families if He had not in this arrangement designed to promote the virtues and the happiness of men? If there be anything that will soothe the agitating passions of the Soul, which will calm the turbulence of feeling which the din and bustle of the world so frequently excite, it is the soothing influence of a cheerful fireside. If you would find the noblest specimens of human nature—if you would find warm sympathy and overflowing kindness, most harmoniously united with unyielding integrity, with manly independence, you must look to the man whose affections lure him to the serene enjoyments of Domestic Life ... Home is the citadel in which we are to [prepare?] our weapons and gird on the armor which shall fortify us against the temptations of the world; and it is with utmost difficulty that anyone can acquire these feelings of sympathy, of generosity and of enlarged philanthropy ... if there be not the influence of home to give birth to these affections and to nurture them...You can hardly find an abandoned man who has not abandoned the joys of domestic life (Aveling 1979, 277).

The belief in the essential responsibility of the family for the moral welfare of the community is once again reinforced through Thompson's writings of the 'domestic life' and 'home'. Thomson's diary entry paints a vivid image of the family that is, as Grillier (1979, 499) states, 'cast in the dual role of sanctuary

and moral bastion'. It reveals an enduring, powerful and indomitable aspect of the ideal Victorian home within the social and cultural setting of Australian colonial times.<sup>17</sup>

An important characteristic of the Victorian home, derived from the gendered division of labour, was the ideal of the home as sanctuary. As noted in Thompson's diary, the hearth of the home was also acknowledged as the 'holy sanctuary':

There is something in the very atmosphere which surrounds the family hearth which will not allow vice to luxuriate there. If you wish to find the profligate and the degraded, you must turn away from that holy sanctuary and seek them in the haunts of revelry (Aveling 1979, 227).

The above quotation suggests an underlying assumption that the home, apart from being an antithesis to the environment of work, should also fulfil its purpose of being a place of sanctity. This was a recurrent theme of the printed media in its advice to home decorators of the time. For example, the ideal that the home should be a place of sanctity was aesthetically expressed through and reflected in the soft and luxurious furnishings and smooth, curved furniture and decorative patterns epitomised in drapery curtains and an abundance of cushions in the home of the Victorian era.

Work was central to a middle-class man's identity and was characterised as heroic toil in providing for a dependent family. To escape the harsh world of work, men needed a refuge from the public sphere—a compliment to the masculine space of the office or factory. This was a central theme in the construction of the home. The following quotation highlights the associated dichotomy between the home and the world, with the overarching categories of masculinity and femininity:

Women, like children, represented the innocence of the natural world which active masculinity must support, protect—oversee ... The romantic imagination indelibly fixed the image of a rose-covered cottage in a garden where Womanhood waited and from which Manhood ventured aboard: to work, to

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<sup>17</sup> Having said this, it should also be acknowledged that, for many Western Australians in the mid-nineteenth century, family life was chiefly characterised by overcrowding, overwork and varying degrees of poverty and violence. However, this does not mean that the discussed domestic ideology was irrelevant to the lives of most people. In fact, it was potentially highly significant because it was consistently and enthusiastically upheld by the other two major institutions of colonial society—the church and the law (Grillier 1979, 499).

war and to the Empire. So powerful was this dual conception that even the radical fringe subscribed (Davidoff & Hall 1987, 28).

The connection with the narrative of progress that men obtained at work was mirrored by women in the home through fashion. Being up to date with the latest ornaments and gadgets imported through expanding global trade networks took considerable time and expertise. Women were connected to the expanding economy in order to colonise the strange, the rare and the new through fashion, as well as being able to signify their distance from necessity through the obsolescence of their things. At the end of the nineteenth century, the decoration of the home, so imbued with virtues of respectability and gentility, was highly valued in displaying not just the taste of the wife, but also the status of the whole family. Central to this ‘feminine’ style were decoration, ornamentation, craft (accomplishment) and ephemerality (fashion) (Madigan & Munro, cited in Bell & Hollows 2005, 71).

In the Victorian era, arranging a beautiful home was one of few activities in which a middle-class woman could engage, thereby alleviating some of her boredom and signifying her virtuosity. Further, the level of devotion a woman gave to her family was assumed to be inscribed in her décor, with providing a harmonious and cultivated environment being central to a woman’s ability to ‘civilise’ her husband and children. Comfort was signified most powerfully in the chesterfield sofa, with ‘its buttons quite literally reining in the bulging upholstery, accentuating the depth of its padding’ (Madigan & Munro, cited in Bell & Hollows 2005, 70). The ideological connection between femininity, beauty, comfort and virtue held considerable sway in validating and elevating ‘feminine’ tastes in the bourgeois home (Madigan & Munro, cited in Bell & Hollows 2005, 71). In contrast, research has shown that, in working-class households, the social standing of the household appeared to be strongly reflected in the criteria of respectability, expressed as maintaining standards of cleanliness and tidiness, rather than an overt striving for ‘good taste’ or a sense of distinction.

The ideal of comfort in the Western Australian home is highlighted in the following excerpt from a letter written in December 1840 by Charlotte Bussell (an emigrant from England), in which she describes her new sitting

room at Cattle Chosen, one of the historic homesteads situated in the Western Australian town of Busselton:

You would not think there could be many hardships to contend with in this distant land, but as you cannot with your own eyes behold me I will endeavor to describe as accurately as possible my present habitation, which looks so thoroughly comfortable and so English-like that all strangers who visit us expressed the greatest admiration of it ... At the end is one very large window which overlooks our pretty river ... opposite this on the other end of the room is the most comfortable fireplace I ever beheld. You can never see the like in England, Emily. The fire is upon the hearth which ever burns so brightly with its beautiful blocks of wood mixed with blackboy which is exactly like Kennel coal and send out such cheerful blaze that is worth taking a trip to Australia to see ... Well, dear Emily, now for the furniture of this room. It is covered with my very large carpet which you no doubt remember. In width it fitted exactly ... crimson sofa couch, easy chair, sofa, work tables etc. etc. and two other large [chairs] besides my piano, all are so conveniently arranged that it gives them a most comfortable appearance without being overcrowded (Aveling 1979, 280–281).

This quotation indicates the priority given to comfort as part of the colonial aspirations at that time, which was also an important ideal in the Victorian home. In the letter, this ideal is conveyed by Bussell's specific references to the size and variety of furniture in the room. She particularly stresses the cosiness and companionship of the room—with the hearth featuring prominently—while her description of various people visiting emphasises the centrality of the wife-mother figure in middle-class Victorian family life.

The above section has provided an overview of the cultural and sociological readings of the home and what constituted the Western home ideals as this became transposed and revolutionised through to the Australian colonial context. To this end, it should be clarified that Victorianism is an idealised set of social, moral and cultural values from which the Western home ideals first originated. It characterised the white middle class in England and the US during the nineteenth century, and the Anglo model was also found in Australia. The next section examines the Western 'modern' home, alongside its architectural implications and its demise.

## ***The Western ‘modern’ home: Origins and architectural implications***

Modernism began with a comprehensive attack on Victorian values in the last decade of the nineteenth century (Wolff 2000). Its philosophy was initially situated in architecture in which the ‘bourgeois’ standards were castigated, and was seen as ‘decadent, rooted in the emulation of aristocratic taste, and thus fundamentally undemocratic’ (Bell & Hollows 2005, 72). Modern architecture—or the modernist style—has its roots in the mainstream of the Modern Movement, which involved the complete rejection of historicist ornaments and aesthetics. It emphasised that ‘adornment, ornamentation and display had no function’, and that anything in ‘the home excessive to the basic purpose of the room should be hidden away in plain cupboards or behind screens’ (Bell & Hollows 2005, 72).

In attacking bourgeois taste, modernism posed a fundamental threat to feminine tastes, which relied on display as a mechanism for producing identity and esteem. Within modernism, decoration was firmly equated with the uncivilised—the savage, childish and feminine. Modernism opposed a set of binary ‘others’—ornamentation, decoration, craft and ephemerality—which are typically mapped onto the masculine/feminine distinction (Leslie & Reimer 2003). The pre-eminence of the designer in modernism also produced an opposition between (feminine) consumption and (masculine) design (Attfield 1999).

### ***Women and gender roles in the ‘modern’ home***

Set against such an opposition between consumption and design, Christopher Reed (1996, 16) elaborates that the domestic home of this period also became the main arena for enforcing conventional divisions of masculinity and femininity; however, the ‘modern’ home was an area for rebellion against these norms. Mostly excluded from masculine realms of creativity, women were assigned roles as consumers, commonly as decorators of their own homes, and—for the wealthy—as patrons of the arts.

According to John Tosh (cited in Heynen & Baydar 2005, 8), the separation between work and home in early Victorian England first became a

reality for members of the middle class and professional men. They were appreciated first as a well-deserved ‘refuge’ for the breadwinner. Gradually, the home became the hallowed sphere of the wife and children, which coincided with a growing cult of motherhood and increasing focus on the child as the centre of family life. As Tosh observes, it was only towards the end of the nineteenth century that domesticity and masculinity began to be seen as oppositional. The values of intimacy, nurturing and comfort were increasingly perceived as threatening the reproduction of masculinity.

Therefore, Hilde Heynen (cited in Heynen & Baydar 2005, 9) explains that there was a double evolution towards the end of the century in Britain. On the one hand, there was a continuing growth of masculine domesticity among the lower middle class. On the other hand, there was a real crisis of domesticity among the professional and commercial classes, who began to become anxious about the diminished patriarchal authority and dominance of feminine ambience in the home.

Despite the ambivalent gender roles resulting in conflicting attitudes towards the home at this time, Heynen (cited in Heynen & Baydar, 12) argues that, ‘most females in the first half of the twentieth century did negotiate their lives around issues related to domesticity’. The author elaborates on the four areas where the effect of modernisation on women’s lives was most prolific:

Fist, increasing urbanization and the development of industrial production have led to the phenomenon of the suburb, widely seen as the ideal environment in which to raise the family. Second, the advancement of medical knowledge and technology has resulted in a remarkable improvement in basic living conditions. Better medical care, more hygienic environments, birth control, and improved nutrition brought about a situation in which life is far less brutish, short and violent than it was in the nineteenth century—certainly for the working class. Third, the shift towards a consumerist economy has meant a rise in opportunities for comfort, enjoyment, and self expression. Fourth, the success of scientific rationalism has charged the home with contradictory expectations. It permeated the cult of domesticity that centered upon love, family, and privacy with requirements regarding efficiency, and control, bringing about the exposure of the interior to the gaze of administrators, health workers, and domestic experts (Heynen, cited in Heynen & Baydar 2005, 12).

Notwithstanding such ambiguous positioning of women vis-à-vis modernity as reflected in the quotation above, it is clear that, for the majority of women

in the West, the home has been a place where modernity was effectuated. Further, Heynen (cited in Heynen & Baydar 2005, 12) highlights that, in the first half of the twentieth century:

modernity for millions of women was about working to create a space called 'home' in which violence, insecurity, disease, discomfort and pain were things of the past ... Most importantly working to create 'better' homes offered many women the opportunity to see themselves as having a central role in achieving what is believed to be the project of modern social existence, the right to define their own futures and the capacity to be in control of their lives.

In this sense, the 'modern' home for most of these women was not seen as constricting and narrow. Heynen (cited in Heynen & Baydar 2005, 13) concedes that, by this time in the twentieth century, many women and their organisations had altered their ideology of domesticity in such a way that it gave them access to public life and positions of substantial influence, rather than limiting them to the strict confines of their own household.

### *Architecture and the 'modern' house*

It is worthwhile to begin this section by recalling the modernist Loos (1985, 108) and his famous statement written in 1910, in which he delineates architecture from art, advocating that architecture be about the house and everyday living:

The house has to please everyone, contrary to the work of art, which does not. The work of art is a private matter for the artist. The house is not ... The work of art wants to draw people out of their comfort. The house has to serve a comfort. The work of art is revolutionary, the house conservative ... Man loves everything that satisfies his comfort. He hates everything that wants to draw him out of his acquired and secured position and that disturbs him. Thus he loves the house and hates art ... Only a very small part of architecture belongs to art: the tomb and the monument. Everything else that fulfills a function is to be excluded from the domain of art.

Loos subscribes to the opposition between modern art and the domestic, but makes explicit exception to architecture by expounding on the radical view that architecture should deal with domesticity. Thus, based on Loos's ideas, in the early twentieth century, architecture should essentially be about the house and everyday living, whereas artists should refrain from tampering or

interfering with the house (Heynen, cited in Heynen & Baydar 2005, 15). The house indeed became a focal point of attention for modern architects. In the 1920s, progressive architects and designers, such as the pioneering teachers at the Bauhaus in Germany, called on their students and colleagues to adopt a more detached, clinical and scientific approach to creating buildings and objects. Henceforth, they argued that objectivity and functionalism should be pivotal, and ‘factories and laboratories’ should provide the new models for the office and the home (Jackson 1994, 12).

Alongside the pragmatic elements of the scientific approach to human and technological engineering, the social aspects of the home and homemaking took on further technical aspects, priming the home for the introduction of industrial appliances and the conception of the home that led Le Corbusier to declare in 1923, ‘The house is a machine for living in’ (Corbusier 1946, 89). This statement was expounded several times in his book, *Towards a New Architecture* (Corbusier 1946), which was the first popular exposition in English of the Modern Movement in architecture that was gradually establishing itself on the European continent during the first quarter of the twentieth century. Of this movement, Le Corbusier was—and still is—one of the principal prophets. He states:

A house is a machine for living in. Baths, sun, hot-water, cold-water, warmth at will, conservation of food, hygiene, beauty in the sense of good proportion. An armchair is a machine for sitting in and so on. Our modern life, when we are active and about (leaving out the moments when we fly to gruel and aspirin) has created its own objects: its costume, its fountain pen, its ever sharp pencil, its typewriter, its telephone, its admirable office furniture, its plate-glass and its ‘Innovation’ trunks, the safety razor and the briar pipe, the bowler hat and the limousine, the steamship and the airplane. Our epoch is fixing its own style day by day. It is there under our eyes. Eyes which do not see (Corbusier 1946, 89).

The airplane is the product of close selection. The lesson of the airplane lies in the logic which governed the statement of the problem and its realization. The problem of the house has not yet been stated. Nevertheless there do exist standards for the dwelling house. Machinery contains in itself the factor of economy, which makes for selection. The house is a machine for living in (Corbusier 1946, 100).

As seen in the above words of one of the leading protagonists of the Modern Movement, the modern house and the workings of that machine were carefully formulated to meet the requirements of real human activities in a

changed and changing world.<sup>18</sup> However, as later discussed, Le Corbusier's aphorism that 'the house is a machine for living in' is no more than a myth. Paul-Alan Johnson (1994) emphasises that slogans and aphorisms are the simplest forms of myth, and are easily assimilated, so they become the most direct mode of disseminating ideas about architecture. Whether they are true is immaterial, as long as they seem convincing—they need only appear to be true to be used. If they seem to show a way to resolve difficulty, slogans and aphorism flourish, although their success is largely fortuitous. Building on this, Johnson (1994, 49) says that functionalism in the form of the aphorism that 'form follows function' is perhaps the most illustrious example of a professional myth that has achieved wide currency. Almost equal to this was the assertion that industrial emancipation would lead to egalitarianism—what Johnson (1994, 49), citing Porphyrius calls, 'the oracular myth of Modernism'.

Thus, in Le Corbusier's conception of the 'modern' home, the myth that saw the house as 'a machine for living in' seemed convincing for a while, but not for long. In Le Corbusier's grand architectural scheme, human needs were universal and could be universalised, and, consequently, his solutions were prototypical, not personal. The home was visualised as a mass-produced object to which the individual should adapt. The job of the designer was to find the 'correct' solution; once it was found, it was up to people to accustom to this. The idea that purity of form and minimalist design could streamline aesthetic experience by providing pure encounters with art also

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<sup>18</sup> With the so-called rise of the machine age also came the rise of the appliance, which coincided with the rise of scientific management in the household. In a discussion of household appliances in the early twentieth century American home, David Heckman (2008) ascertains that, although among the many electric novelties at the 1893 exposition was an 'all-electric kitchen', it was not until 1903 that an electric iron was developed by an electric power company in Ontario, California. Over a period of a few years, the iron was perfected, tested by housewives, and promoted to businesses first and consumers later. Once the power companies realised that electric appliances offered a substantial growth market, thereby changing residential electricity consumption from a nocturnal activity to a 24-hour affair, the drive to fill the home with all manner of electrical machines began, and it seemed that consumers were anxious to have them (Heckman 2008, 34). Heckman (2008) states that the many electrical appliances created to fill the home were surprising in both their number and specificity of function. For example, there were popcorn poppers that first appeared in 1907, house toasters in 1909, electric egg cookers in 1916, and waffle irons and electric mixers in 1918, in addition to numerous electric irons, coffeepots and casserole dishes that appeared throughout these years. Heckman (2008, 34) also acknowledges Christine Frederick by highlighting that electricity, the 'silent servant', was being adapted not only to small portable cooking devices, but also to the larger fixed equipment of stoves and ranges. On this basis, Heckman (2008, 37) emphasises that, 'in keeping with a culture preoccupied with technical advancement, it is appropriate that Freedom itself is Electrical. And the automated home, far from being integrated practically, enjoys a more persuasive form of integration as a fantastic ideal'.

entered the home (Heckman 2008, 27). All these ideals of the ‘modern’ home are explicitly stated and forcefully exalted by Le Corbusier (1946, 210) in *Towards a New Architecture*:

A great epoch has begun. There exists a new spirit. Industry, overwhelming us like a flood which rolls on towards its destined end, has furnished us with new tools adapted to this new epoch, animated by the new spirit. Economic law unavoidably governs our acts and our thoughts. The problem of the house is a problem of the epoch. The equilibrium of society today depends upon it. Architecture has for its first duty, in this period of renewal, that of bringing about a revision of values, a revision of the constituent elements of the house. Mass-production is based on analysis and experiment. Industry on the grand scale must occupy itself with building and establish the elements of the house on a mass-production basis. We must create the mass-production spirit. The spirit of constructing mass-production houses. The spirit of living in mass production houses. If we eliminate from our hearts and minds all dead concepts in regard to the houses and look at the question from a critical and objective point of view, we shall arrive at the ‘House-Machine’, the mass-production house, healthy (and morally so too) and beautiful in the same way that the working tools and instruments which accompany our existence are beautiful. Beautiful also with all the animation that the artist’s sensibility can add to severe and pure functioning elements.

In the above quotation, one not only senses an urgency and drive in Le Corbusier’s tone, but also an unwavering display of optimism as he presents a new architecture to the spirit of the age and face the problems of a centralised, modern metropolis.

The design of the modern house first began to take shape in Europe and America during the first 30 years of the twentieth century, led by pioneers such as Walter Gropius, Marcel Breuer, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Frank Lloyd Wright. The functional basis of the house was argued passionately in the introduction to the book, *The Modern House*, first published in 1934, by British architect, FRS Yorke (1994, 8–9):

We can no longer afford to build the house that makes bad use of space, or to employ ornamental devices to counteract weaknesses in basic design. Anything that is for use must be, above all else, efficient, and the design of the modern house is based on the principle of utility—it is fundamentally a thing for use ... Modern innovation have transformed the problem of life within the house. We are oppressed by the old-fashioned interior ... we do not use and we do not need, many of the old pieces of furniture. We need chairs that are light and mobile, simple and hygienic; built-in cupboards and wardrobes, designed and equipped to take our belongings, fitting exactly in to the space that is allotted to them; furniture that is strong, simple, light, mass-produced and of machine-dictated designed. We

demand a greater service from the things about us; they must serve a real purpose ... We cannot afford rooms that have no other function than to be decorative interiors, to impress the visitor.

As the above quotation suggests, modernist architects strove to create a ‘style without a style’ by casting off the oppressive influence of historical revivalism—or ‘eclecticism’, as it was known in the US. Although the somewhat austere, pared-down aesthetic of modern architecture did not prove popular with the general public during the early years, the advent of modernism at least drew public attention to the worst excesses of the nineteenth-century design.

The protagonists of the Modern Movement, especially the so-called ‘leftists’ within the *Congrès International d'Architecture Moderne* (CIAM)—a group consisting of mostly German and Swiss architects, comprising Hannes Meyer, Ernst May, Hans Schmidt and others—held the view that modern architecture would contribute to radical change in the structure of society. However, it first had to deal with social issues. Modern architecture was to provoke a revolution of dwelling culture by introducing themes and concepts such as the open plan, transparency between inside and outside, collective housing, rationalisation, hygiene, efficiency and ergonomics. Seen against this context, modernism was a progressive movement, with the ‘modern’ house being more interested in invention than in a tradition that was once governed by the cumbersome lifestyle and anachronistic values of the Victorian and Edwardian eras (Heynen, cited in Heynen & Baydar 2005, 15–16).

Despite its late arrival in the evolution of his style, Le Corbusier’s (Corbusier, Jeanneret & Boesiger 1937) (*Les 5 points d'une architecture nouvelle*’ (‘The five points of a new architecture’) (see Figure 1) was the first clear-cut, succinct and programmatic manifesto of the new architecture that cemented the archetype of the modern house. This manifesto left many with an imprint of what has been universally accepted as ‘modern architecture’. Below is a summary of Le Corbusier’s (Corbusier, Jeanneret & Boesiger 1937, 128) manifesto in his *Ovuevre Complete de 1910–1929 (Complete Works, 1910–1929)*, published in 1937:

The pilotis. Assiduous research finally achieved results that opened new perspectives in architecture and urbanism, and contributed something toward the solution of the great sickness of the cities ... Previously, the house had been buried in the earth and the rooms were often dark and damp. Reinforced concrete gave us the pilotis; the house in the air, far from the soil, with gardens stretching beneath the house as well as on the roof.

**The Roof Garden.** For centuries, the traditional saddleback roof had been the normal way of keeping out the winter and its snow, while the interior was heated by stoves. The installation of central heating made the saddleback obsolete. It was now possible for the roof to be flat rather than inclined and the water drainage occurred via the centre of the building instead of down the outside walls, thus avoiding the danger of freezing in cold climates. Reinforced concrete made the structurally homogenous roof possible ... Reasons of technique, economy, and comfort, and a touch sentimentality lead to the adoption of the roof terrace and roof garden.

**The free plan.** In the past, the plan had been the slave of the structural walls that started from the basement and were built up to constitute the first, second and third floors, etc. Reinforced concrete brought the innovation of the free plan in which the interiors were no longer rigidly determined by the structural walls. They had become free.

**The elongated window.** The window is one of the essential characteristics of the house, and progress brought liberation here too. Reinforced concrete revolutionized the window. It was now possible to place windows along the whole façade from corner to corner. The window became the standardized mechanical element of the house for all private dwellings, villas, workers' houses, and apartment blocks.

**The free façade.** The pillars retreated from the facades to the inside of the house ... The facades became no more than light membranes consisting of isolating walls or windows. The façade was now free and the windows could extend without interruption from one end to the other.<sup>19</sup>

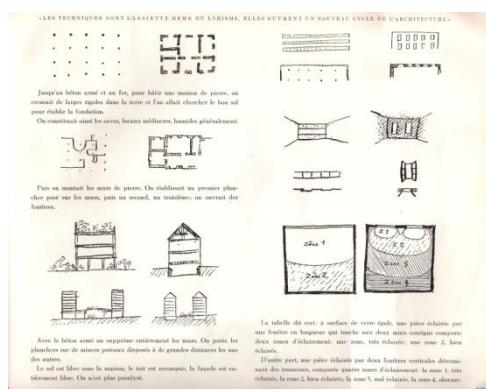


Figure 1: Le Corbusier's '*Les 5 points d'une architecture nouvelle*' ('The five points of a new architecture').

Source: Corbusier, Jeanneret & Boesiger 1937, 129.

<sup>19</sup> The present edition of *Le Corbusier's Complete Works (1910–1929)*, in which the 'five points' are found, is printed and illustrated in French. However, the summary of the English translations of the manifesto is found in Moos (2009, 80).

The purpose of the publication was promotional: to familiarise an international public with ideas underlying the new architecture. However, it is important to note that, at the time the ‘five points’ were coined, these conventions and paradigms had already begun a life of their own. This meant that these didactic abstractions needed to be brought to life with the help of formal conventions and stylistic paradigms that transcended the basic structural logic implied in this formula (Moos 2009, 87). The ‘five points’ manifesto is a universal style based on objective and scientific ‘facts’ that eventually led to a manifestation of some of the main physical characteristics that define a typical modern house: open plan, flat roof, curtain glass walls and concrete structure.

### *The Western ‘modern’ home in the Australian context*

Meanwhile, in the 1900s Australian house, as domestic help gradually became scarce and expensive, much attention was focused on the kitchen. As early as 1902, architect John Sulman (cited in Archer 1996, 153) ventured to predict that ‘middle class households will, in the future, have to dispense with servants altogether’. By 1914, the *Home and Garden Beautiful* magazine was discussing design details for ‘the servantless house’, emphasising compactness and convenience. The below passage indicates most Australians’ readiness by the early 1900s to accept the advent and advance of modernism:

Glance at the working part of every house (the kitchen) and you will find, in nine cases out of ten, a dismal place, badly lit and ventilated, badly arranged, very hard to keep clean, and a long tramp to the dining room. A kitchen needs plenty of light, and plenty of ventilation. The pantry must be close, handy, and also well lit and ventilated. White tiles should be placed around the stove, and, if possible, on the walls ... All wood work, shelves, etc., should be white enameled ... Add to these conveniences, such as power for electric iron, gas or electric stove, etc., and you have a kitchen that is in pleasure, in place of a constant eyesore (Archer 1996, 153).

This passage suggests that, by the early twentieth century, most Australians were eager to employ new technologies and adopt ‘the latest ideas’ and new ways of doing work to solve the servantless problems of the time. By this

time, the labour-saving devices designed to replace servants and make life easier for the ‘housewife’—including electric jugs, irons, toasters and stoves, gas heaters for water in the kitchen, and gas fires or electric radiators for interior heating—were beginning to be introduced to the Australian home.

Concomitantly, given the climate of the media advertising, as seen in the 1914 *Home and Garden Beautiful* magazine, it would be fair to assume that women in the 1900s would have been talking among themselves about the dubious benefits of an American culture, which ‘was a radical change from the influence of Britain’ (Archer 1996, 155). Building on this, an article in June 1920 in *Home* magazine—a modern Australian magazine for the new breed of housewife in the early 1920s—also confirms the coming of a ‘brave new world’, as Mrs Fred Aronsen summarises the changes that were occurring:

Scarcity of servants means their replacement in the average suburban home by the one-time mistress. It means also that the average young bride must spend a great part of her time in the kitchen. Thus has a revolution in Kitchendom been brought about, because one finds out by personal experience things that had not occurred to one before. One knows now, without a doubt, that when working and cooking in a kitchen one must have air, light, space, and more than usual convenience. To meet this demand the papers are full of advertisements of up-to-date labour-saving devices (Archer 1996, 170).

In retrospect, the discussion on the design details for the servantless home that appeared in the *Home* magazine was a sign of things to come. It was a promulgation to prepare Australia for its eagerness to embrace the ‘brave new world’ of modernity. Attached to this was a set of myths (see Chapter Three) associated with the ‘good life’ of the ‘modern’ home.<sup>20</sup>

### *Discussion on the modern home: A delusion?*

Before World War II, modernism was an *avant-garde* European style represented by a tiny fraction of total building output. After the war, corporate America adopted modernism, and its influence grew to become an orthodoxy, like Christianity after its adoption by the Roman Empire. The

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<sup>20</sup> It is interesting to note that it often seemed that a good ‘modern’ home must first be preceded by a well-equipped ‘modern’ kitchen. This was true at least for Australia, since, by the 1920s, the more ‘modern’ houses had well-equipped kitchens. As Archer (1996, 168) notes, ‘Sir Edward Hallstrom produced his first small home refrigerator in 1924, and by 1936 his kerosene powered models, independent of electric power, had spread throughout the country’.

machine and products of the machine were its inspiration. It wanted to re-found architecture on rational, functional grounds, and transform society by resolving the conflict between everyday life and mechanised industry.

This fascination with the mechanised industry led the motorcar to become an inherent theme of modern architecture. A large number of Le Corbusier's projects are subsequently stamped with the design concept of the automobile (Sbriglio 2008, 129). Aware that this phenomenon would completely change people's lives, Le Corbusier rapidly made it an integral component of his work on urban planning and architecture. For example, in his design of the Villa Favre-Jacot, built in 1912 in Le Locle (Switzerland), the curved approach façade was designed to delineate a courtyard, enabling cars to draw up to a flight of steps. However, in the design of the Villa Savoye, built between 1928 and 1931, the relationship between the car and the architect's design of the house assumed its purest expression. The ground-floor plan of the villa was determined by the notion of a continuity between automobile transport and pedestrian circulation. The turning circle of the car carved out the U-shape of the ground-floor plan. The path traced by the car was echoed by the ramp that rose up through the house as if in a continuous flow of motion, as reinforced by this quotation below:

The car leads right up to the door of the house—indeed, the measurements of the dwelling are based on the minimum turning circle of a car. The car slips beneath the pilotis, turns around the service zone, arrives in the middle, at the entrance to the vestibule, enters the garage and continues on its way for the return journey: such is the scheme's fundamental given (Le Corbusier, cited in Sbriglio 2008, 129).

The above words of Le Corbusier demonstrate that the movement of the car formed one of the fundamentals of the architect's architectural oeuvre. The Villa Savoye (see Figure 2) has rightly been called a seminal work of the Modern Movement. It explored yet another variation on the 'five points', while also evoking the theme of the 'house as a machine for living in'.

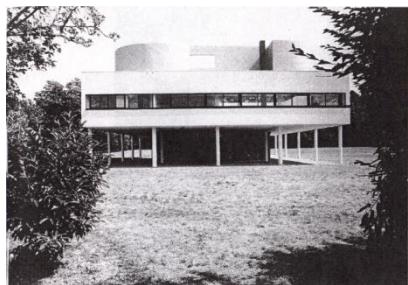


Figure 2: Le Corbusier's design of Villa Savoye, north-west façade.  
Source: Sbriglio 2008, 43.

Another factor explains Le Corbusier's interest in the motorcar: the concept of standardisation. The issue of standardisation, and hence of mass production, was taken up by Le Corbusier as early as 1914, with his creation of the Domino House, followed by the Citrohan House, the Loucheur House and a host of other major schemes. The underlying mission of this research was to rationalise all construction elements to reduce manufacturing costs and building time in order to achieve higher architectural quality (Sbriglio 2008, 129–130). In this respect, modernist architecture was consciously rational, geometric and masculine. It was also explicitly revolutionary and committed to overturning the entire apparatus of history in pursuit of a god-like 'truth' (Farrelly 2007, 95). Yet the house was and still is the last and strongest bastion of tradition. It is a reflection of the personality of its occupant and, as Viennese architect, Loos (1985), famously argued, it should be kept separate from architecture. Architecture's task should be to make dwelling possible, not to define it. Further, as Heynen (1999, 76) argues, living in a house is a personal matter related to the development of individuals in the context of family life.

In her essay, 'Domestic Differences: Edith Farnsworth, Mies van der Rohe, and the Gendered Body', Alice Friedman (1996, 187) discusses a house designed by one of the modern masters of the twentieth century that was not only 'unlivable', but posed 'a social threat of regimentation and total control'. Famous for his 1923 dictum or aphorism, 'less is more', van der Rohe designed the Farnsworth House in 1951 (see Figure 3), which tapped into the sensibility of modernist philosophy, with clean lines, open plans and flat roofs. The house was intended for Madame Farnsworth—a single, professional woman. However, in van der Rohe's design of the house,

situated in an isolated site and with a continuous glass walls, Friedman argues that issues of privacy, sexuality and social life were repressed, and concerns regarding family, gender and control of appearances—particularly in the domestic environment—were largely neglected.



Figure 3: Farnsworth House, designed in 1951 by van der Rohe.  
Source: If It's Hip, It's Here 2011.

Friedman (1996) claims that van der Rohe's goal was more attuned to developing a language of form that reflected universal, rather than particular, aspects of human activity and concern. Hence, the open plan, glass walls and freestanding partitions were more of an exercise in architectural minimalism. Consequently, it was unfortunate that the design process and outcome eventually caused much friction between the architect and client—a conflict that has raised broader issues of domesticity and gender. Friedman (1996, 184) states that, to van der Rohe, Farnsworth may have been more of ‘an entertaining companion and a committed partisan’ and, as a client, ‘represented a means to an architectural end’.

The work of van der Rohe is said to have been shaped by philosophical concerns—particularly a search for architectural order and ‘truth’ (Friedman 1996, 184). Similar to the Barcelona Pavilion, which was the perfect vehicle for van der Rohe’s thinking in 1929, the Farnsworth House was to be a pure expression of the ideas developed in his later career.<sup>21</sup> Van der Rohe’s thinking for the Farnsworth House rested on a concept of uninhabited open landscape. For him, the house was a place for contemplation—an ordered place free of distractions. However, the issue of privacy—of being seen from the outside—was not considered. Friedman’s (1996, 188) essay discloses what Madame Farnsworth stated on the subject

<sup>21</sup> The Barcelona Pavilion is another of van der Rohe’s works that is also considered a modernist architectural icon designed with no function other than to provide the King and Queen of Spain with a place in which to sign a guestbook, receive guests and drink champagne.

of her house, as published in the May issue of the 1953 *American House Beautiful*:

Do I feel implacable calm? ... The truth is that in this house with its four walls of glass I feel like a prowling animal, always on the alert. I am always restless. Even in the evening, I feel like a sentinel on guard day and night. I can rarely stretch out and relax ... What else? I don't keep a garbage can under my sink. Do you know why? Because you can see the whole kitchen from the road on the way in here and the can would spoil the appearance of the whole house. So I hide it in the closet further down from the sink. Mies talks about 'free space': but his space is very fixed. I can't even put a clothes hanger in my house without considering how it affects everything from the outside. Any arrangement of furniture becomes a major problem, because the house is transparent, like an X-ray.

This quotation demonstrates that the client was obviously displeased with her home. Much of what was said against the Farnsworth House and modern architecture generally focuses on its disruption of the typology of the family home (children, dogs, ample kitchens and numerous possessions) and the vulnerability of its occupant to the prying eyes of others (Friedman 1996, 188). Friedman's essay also states that Farnsworth had complained more than once about the problem of being looked at by people both inside and outside her home. On another account of an interview published by *Newsweek* on 8 June 1953, Farnsworth complained that van der Rohe had wanted to build the interior partitions five feet high 'for reasons of art and proportion', but that she had objected: 'I'm, six feet tall ... and I wanted to be able to change my clothes without my head looking like it was wandering over the top of the partition without a body' (Friedman 1996, 188).

Throughout Friedman's (1996) essay, issues of sex (in its broadest sense) are constantly highlighted, as it is in the home that people are constructed as sexual and gendered beings. What is maintained throughout Friedman's argument is that the arrangement of such a house for a single woman represents a repressed, rather than freed, sexuality, 'just as the doubling of the bathrooms suggests both social "propriety" ... and a desire to hide the female body and its functions' (Friedman 1996, 190). Although the focus of this essay was the way the house acted as a stage for Farnsworth's single life and middle-aged body, it demonstrates that, in a way, modernist architecture is regarded as having brutalised people in its attempt to rationalise—to impose a strict and systematic order on ways of living.

Unfortunately for the idealist, humans are not entirely rational, ordered or disciplined (Morgan, cited in Sim 2005, 74).

For all his propagandising about the machine age, Le Corbusier was an artist, not a technologist. In the morning, he painted Purist still life paintings, and in the afternoon, he designed houses that also came to be known as ‘Purist’. However, the house was a central preoccupation for Le Corbusier (Corbusier et al. 1987, 44). From 1905 until around 1929, the business of house building and interior decoration—from seeking sites and clients, to the final details of furnishing—consumed much of Le Corbusier’s time and provided most of his architectural income. Of nearly 100 projects, only 30 were built, and these constituted a major proportion of his output. Le Corbusier’s (1946, 210) own architectural style—industrial elements assembled with a mathematical precision drawn from classical ideas of proportion—aimed to create a new ‘spirit of living in mass-production houses’, appropriate to his vision of the modern age. The Purist houses in Paris of the 1920s were necessarily informed by the ‘machine aesthetic’ that Le Corbusier saw as the only means of understanding the modern world and predicting (and accelerating) its future.

Despite his ambitious schemes, the houses Le Corbusier designed were not so much machines for living as works of art for living. In these houses, the modernist style came into sharp focus for the first time. Open plans; reinforced concrete structures; and plain, geometrical forms were not entirely new in 1927, but it was new to use them in houses, rather than factories, art schools or office buildings (Davies 2006). The idea of standardisation—useful though it might be in business—is ill suited to the complicated and varied activities that are contained by the home. As a result, Le Corbusier’s ideas about domestic planning were less sophisticated than domestic engineers.

For instance, the cramped kitchen with minimal counter space in the New Spirit house that was co-designed by Le Corbusier and his cousin Pierre Jeanneret, from Geneva, was poorly conceived and its relation to the dining room inconvenient. The open study would have been noisy and impractical. The one room that could have benefited from standardisation—the bathroom—was treated sculpturally, to little benefit (Rybczynski 1988,

192). Similarly, Benton (cited in Corbusier, Jeanneret & Boesiger 1937, 50) reveals that all the houses Le Corbusier designed gave varying degrees of technical trouble. Most suffered from damp, whether due to water penetration through cracks (such as in Villa Besnus of Vaucresson), flooding from faulty drains (such as in Villa Savoye of Poissy) or porous stone walls (such as in Villa de Mandrot of Le Pradet). The flat (leaky) roofs were another problem (such as in Villa Savoye of Poissy),<sup>22</sup> while the houses also all suffered from severe condensation due to the six-inch uninsulated walls and large expanses of single-glazed windows. The central heating in most houses was considered inadequate, partly due to under-specifying boilers. There were also accidents involving workers unaccustomed to the precision and fragility of the construction methods and materials. For example, an electrician seeking a channel for a power cable in Madame Savoye's bedroom cracked the thin and brittle partition wall from top to bottom with a careless blow from his hammer. Meanwhile, the central heating plumbers used a concrete pilotis next to a down pipe in the garage as a convenient lever for pipe bending. Subsequently, the downpipe came away and a flood resulted (Benton, cited in Corbusier, Jeanneret & Boesiger 1937, 50).

In this sense, what Le Corbusier designed was not a modern home, but a home that looked modern. Rybczynski (1986, 193) rationalises that Le Corbusier was right about the need for domestic efficiency—even if that was not always evident in practice—but was wrong about its effect on the appearance of the home. Efficiency did not depend on how the interior of the home looked, but on how work was organised within it. Rybczynski adds that it was not the flat roofs, white walls, absence of wallpaper and large plate-glass windows that made a house 'modern', but the presence of central heating, convenient bathrooms, electric irons and washing machines. From this perspective, one must agree with Rybczynski's (1988, 193) critique of Le Corbusier's obsession with 'style' that, 'Like most architects, Le Corbusier did not understand or would not accept that the advent of domestic technology

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<sup>22</sup> As A. C. Antoniades (cited in Stevens 1998, 84) notes, 'a few days after the Savoies had moved into their famous house the roof of the living room started leaking. They became very upset and immediately called Le Corbusier'.

and home management had put the whole question of architectural style in a subordinate position'.

### ***Chapter conclusion and discussion***

The outcome of the review of the Victorian ideals of the home and domesticity reveals that the all-embracing concept of domesticity was a creation of the nineteenth century. During this period, domestic bourgeois family life became a nucleus around which the nation was formed. These sentiments were then projected into the past by being applied to seventeenth-century paintings, books and houses—and thus was born the wide-ranging concept of domesticity (Cieraad 1999, 14). From this, it is concluded that domesticity and understandings of the home in terms of what is 'normal' or 'natural' are derived from the conception of Victorianism. This construct is comprised of an idealised set of social, moral and cultural values that characterised the white middle class in England and the US during most of the nineteenth century (Aries, Prost & Vincent 1992; Davidoff & Hall 1987; Forty 1986; Heynen 2005; Reed 1996).

This review demonstrates that, attached to this construction, are a set of values and ideologies that are bound up with the home and family ideals that were transposed and revolutionised through to the colonial Australian and Western Australian social and cultural contexts. These values and attitudes of home and family life infiltrated to the Australian colonial context when British immigrants arrived and brought with them English culture, values and ideologies, which are reflected in paintings of Australian colonial times.

In Western Australia, the *Perth Gazette* often printed articles with titles such as, 'The Value of Good Wives' and 'A Little Lesson for Well-disposed Wives', and wrote of women as the principal guardians of future generations and as the most powerful humanising agents. In short, the ideal of home and family appealed powerfully to the leading colonists as a way of ordering their own lives and securing stability and humanity in the serving classes (Stannage 1979, 101). Pinned to this ideology, the Western home ideals

were heavily enforced, highly promoted and vigorously exerted in the social and cultural norms of Western Australian colonial times and context.

Following on from a literature review of the Western Victorian home and domestic ideals, the review leapt forward to the modern twentieth century. It conceptualised the ‘modern’ style of the home by contextualising it within the discourse of architecture, and framing it within historical episodes and attitudes to the house and home from the Australian colonial to ‘modern’ times. The review argued that, based on the social and cultural readings of home and its advertising of the day, by this time in the early twentieth century, Australians were eager to eliminate the ways of the past and embrace change defined by the coming of a new era of modernity.

The review established that modernism, as a twentieth-century movement, was a reaction against the rehashing of historical architectural styles. It was an attempt to devise a clean look that would break free from the past and take advantage of the modern industrial age. It was a ‘movement that would reject ornament and promote an unsentimental style that looked forward, not back; a style shaped by the possibilities of new materials and building technique’ (Wakely 2003, 59). Thus, modernism was a progressive movement, with the idealised ‘modern’ house being more interested in invention than in a tradition that was once governed by the cumbersome lifestyle and anachronistic values of the Victorian era.

As this chapter ends, it becomes clear that it is futile for the architect to impose any uniform ‘style’ on a house. The domestic realm is deeply conservative, which is why Le Corbusier’s concept that ‘the house is a machine for living in’ or van der Rohe’s aphorism that ‘less is more’ with respect to the design of the modern house remain provocative to this day. Hence, even though the stereotypical image of the mid-twentieth century modern house is a flat-roofed box of glass or white painted concrete, one may say that modernism, as a style of house design, is merely another stylistic coda. It represented a style suited to the twentieth century, a style for the ‘machine age’, and a style for more efficient living. Further, the dictum of ‘less is more’ is simply an idea or value pertaining to modernism that only serves to impose itself with the straightforwardness of an empirical fact but with which the message is enabled to conceal its identity as such. Based on

these foundations, this thesis proceeds with a theoretical articulation and detailed description of the research in the following chapter.

## ***Chapter Two: Theoretical stance and approach***

The starting point of these reflections was usually a feeling of impatience at the sight of the ‘naturalness’ with which newspapers, art and common sense constantly dress up a reality which, even though it is the one we live in, is undoubtedly determined by history. In short, in the account given of our contemporary circumstances, I resent seeing Nature and History confused at every turn, and I want to track down, in the decorative display of what-goes without-saying, the ideological abuse which, in my view, is hidden there (Barthes 1973, 11).

### ***Chapter introduction***

The previous chapter ascertained that realities of home and home design are part of a sociocultural and temporal entity that is always imbued and encoded with values and ideologies of a particular era and society. This chapter also demonstrated that there is no ‘natural’ reason why a ‘modern’ home should be closely connected to flat roofs, open plans, reinforced concrete structures, plain geometrical forms, streamlined designs or curtain glass walls. The connection between an idealised ‘modern’ home and its associated physical attributes is produced—meaning is made. This meaning is made when the house as an architectural ideal and artistic canon becomes subjected to certain styles and movements—sometimes disproportionately to their popularity or the extent of their influence at the time. For much of the twenty-first century, the architectural style favoured in this manner was modernism.

Given that this thesis arose out of a need to examine images of the home by drawing on Barthes’s myth as an analytical tool and theoretical framework, Chapter Two now explains and establishes the theoretical engine, research questions and approach for this thesis.

### ***Research questions for the case study chapters***

Clear research questions are critical to any research activity. Based on the issues raised thus far with respect to the strategy, approach and theoretical significance of the thesis (see the ‘Main introduction’), this chapter focuses on elaborating the theoretical stance for the forthcoming case study

chapters. Accordingly, this chapter identifies a set of research questions upon which the case study chapters will be anchored. These questions are:

- What are some of the idealised elements or aspects associated with the home?
- How are these aspects perpetuated and represented in the media?
- To what extent do representations of these idealised elements of the home enter into a form of signification—that is, myth?

The above questions will be implemented and applied throughout the four case study chapters (Chapters Three, Four, Five and Six), which correspond to the four main targeted snapshots of the Australian home (the ‘modern’ 1950s and 1960s kitchen, the suburban quarter-acre and garden, the architect-designed home, and the twenty-first century Tuscan and home theatre space).

These questions are significant because they introduce an understanding of the Australian home as a mythological construct. As this thesis is working under the assumption that media images have an inherent specific signifying mechanism that attempts to universalise and naturalise meanings and values for society, the above questions will help identify what the ‘idealised’ home means in the media. In this respect, in conjunction with adopting Barthes’s model of myth, which provides a basis for critiquing the ‘naturalising effect’ of ideology of the home, addressing the above research questions will demystify images of the home in their ideal form as having a ‘taken-for-granted’ nature in order to suspend consideration of their utilitarian function. In addition, it will analyse the so-called ‘duplicity’ that may be inherent in the images of the home.

The approach of this thesis is guided by the theoretical basis of Barthes’s book *Mythologies* (1973, 2000), which is relevant for exposing the various myths that are inherently embedded in the images of the Australian home as a suburban and architectural ideal. The following describes and justifies the theoretical stance for this thesis.

### ***Barthes's model of myth***

For this thesis, the term 'myth' is exclusively concerned with the 'collective representations of mass culture such as magazine illustrations, films, advertisements, newspaper articles' (Wasserman 1981, 28) and, encoded within them, the associated meanings that are fictitious, unproven or illusory. Barthes is concerned with analysing the myths circulating in contemporary society—particularly the false representations and erroneous beliefs in France in the post-war period. Barthes (1988, 174) claims that he wants to challenge the 'innocence' and 'naturalness' of the cultural texts and practices that were capable of producing all sorts of supplementary meanings—or 'connotations', to use Barthes's preferred term. Connotations are of a second-level sign where myth is found. Barthes distinguishes between denotation and connotation. Denotation can be described as literal meaning. In the case of an advertising message, denotation is the first message constituted by the sentence taken in its literalness, precisely setting aside its advertising intention (Barthes 1988, 174). In contrast, connotation is the second message of an advertising message. Barthes (1988, 174) describes it as a 'total message, and it derives this totality from the singular character of its signified. [It is] the excellence of the product announced'. Connotation is also the second-order parasitical meaning. The first-order sign is the realm of denotation, while the second-order sign is the realm of connotation and thus myth.

Although objects, gestures and practices have certain utilitarian functions, they are not resistant to the imposition of meaning. For example, there is no such thing as a car that is a purely functional object, devoid of connotations and resistant to the imposition of meaning. A BMW and Citroen 2CV share the same functional utility and do essentially the same job, but connote different things about their owners—a thrusting, upwardly mobile executive versus an ecologically sound, voraciously trendy person. Thus, cars can be discussed as signs expressive of a number of connotations. Likewise, from an architectural perspective, there is a stark difference in connotations between the owner of an eight-bedroom mansion with grand portico entrance and the owner of a small two-bedroom cottage.

Similarly, the ‘modern’ house (as will be further explored in Chapter Three) is far from being a purely functional object, devoid of connotations and resistant to the imposition of meaning. For example, the physical attributes of a modern house may connote the benefits of efficient living and transparency, and may be read as promoting gender neutral and universalist values with design characteristics that resist decoration and ornamentation. Trend-setting architects collaboratively adhere to this concept by opting to use full-length glass windows (‘curtain glass walls’), as opposed to the traditional ones in housing design; a flat roof, as opposed to a pitched roof; and an ‘open-plan’ or free plan design, as opposed to a floor plan design with the obstructions of walls and doors. Full-length glass windows, flat roofs and open-plan designs are the three most identifiable features of a modernist house design. As such, this new signification serves to promote an ideal and desirable way of domestic living, inscribed by the highly acclaimed dictum that ‘less is more’. All this seems ‘natural’, ‘obvious’ and to ‘go without saying’. However, as the review in Chapter One demonstrated, it is historically determined—in this case, by the threatening values of domesticity (see Chapter One).

For example, an architectural semiotician would know that modern domestic space is also implicitly masculine, defining and controlling, operating through surveillance and the ‘domination of the gaze’ (Colomina 1992). It may also be seen from another perspective that it actually serves to antagonise domesticity and suppress it. For example, in *Not at Home: The Suppression of Domesticity in Modern Art and Architecture*, the domestic is identified as ‘the repressed Other’ of modernism; its spectre defining opposite—an anxiety-provoking, contested realm that is perpetually invoked to be denied (Walker 1999, 50). Building on this, as discussed in Chapter One, when the values associated with domesticity—such as intimacy, nurturing and comfort—were perceived as threatening the reproduction of masculinity towards the end of the nineteenth century, domesticity and masculinity were beginning to be seen as oppositional. In this sense, such a transformation of history into ‘nature’ is the very principle of myth (more on this later). Viewed from the above perspective, the function of a modern house—to improve efficiency and so forth—is merely an alibi. It is a way of

naturalising the cultural order and making something as culturally arbitrary as a status symbol appear to have a natural and rational function (efficiency) that is motivated by reality. Function therefore mythologises—it is ideological.

Let us now turn to Barthes's (1973) own example in *Mythologies*. In one of his short essays, Barthes (1973, 15) tries to analyse the meanings of signs that surround 'The World of Wrestling'. Common sense would state that wrestling is a sport, yet Barthes asserts that it is not a sport, but a spectacle. Thus, the activity emits a message that belies its apparent nature. In a sense, there are two messages. There is a manifest message that can be rendered by a tautological or apparently self-evident statement (wrestling is a sport). This message is essentially that there are no messages: common sense is impervious to signs. Therefore, this primary message functions to conceal the secondary message, and thus facilitate its delivery (Moriarty 1991, 20). If one tries to understand it via common sense, wrestling as a sport is unintelligible: why would a wrestler freely express agony? In a real contest, a wrestler caught in a hold would struggle to conceal it because displaying pain would only encourage his opponent. However, instead, wrestlers choose to display it. Barthes claims that this is because the wrestler is not so much trying to win as fulfilling a role expected by the spectators. To visibly suffer is part of that role, and an invisible foul is useless because the function of a foul is to build up the perpetrator's character as a 'perfect bastard', spectacularly chastised by the 'good guy':

Thus the function of the wrestler is not to win; it is to go exactly through the motions which are expected of him ... Wrestling ... offers excessive gestures, exploited to the limit of their meaning ... in wrestling, a man who is down is exaggeratedly so, and completely fills the eyes of the spectators with intolerable spectacle of his powerlessness ... It is obvious, of course, that in wrestling reserve would be out of place, since it is opposed to the voluntary ostentation of the spectacle, to this Exhibition of Suffering which is the very aim of the fight (Barthes 1973, 16).

Physique is likewise dictated not by considerations of strength or fitness, but by this need to establish a recognisable character, in the theatrical sense. The whole exercise is a play—or even, as Barthes would say, a ritual confrontation between 'good' and 'evil'. The below quotations relate the

function of wrestling to that of a Greek or Elizabethan drama or theatrical performance:

This function of grandiloquence is indeed the same as that of ancient theatre, whose principle, language and props (masks and buskins) concurred in the exaggeratedly visible explanation of a Necessity. The gesture of the vanquished wrestler signifying to the world a defeat which, far from disguising, he emphasizes and holds like a pause in music, corresponds to the mask of antiquity meant to signify the tragic mode of the spectacle (Barthes 1973, 16).

It has already been noted here that ... wrestling represents a sort of mythological fight between Good and Evil ... What the public is looking for here is the gradual construction of a highly moral image: that of the prefect bastard (Barthes 1973, 23).

What is portrayed by wrestling is therefore an ideal understanding of things; it is the euphoria of men raised for a while above the constitutive ambiguity of everyday situations and placed before the panoramic view of a univocal Nature, in which signs at last correspond to causes, without evasion, without contradiction (Barthes 1973, 25).

Barthes (1973) is saying that we inhabit a world of signs that support existing power structures ('the ideal understanding of things') and that purport to be natural. It is as if Barthes sees wrestling as a genuine manifestation of popular culture, resting on a set of values shared by performers and audience. Barthes views the role of the mythologist as exposing these signs as the artificial constructs that they are in order to reveal their workings and show that what appears to be natural is actually determined and motivated by what society expects.

Seen in the above light, it is the secondary meanings or connotations that Barthes (1973) is interested in uncovering in *Mythologies*. Barthes wants to stop taking things for granted, to bracket or suspend consideration of their function, and to concentrate instead on what they mean and how they function as signs. In many respects, Barthes is interrogating the obvious, taking a closer look at that which is taken for granted, and making explicit what remains implicit (McNeill 1996). It is this same mode of interrogation that the current study applies to a particular type of architecture in order to attain a deeper understanding of how architecture is produced and certain ideas are perpetuated (that is, taken for granted).

### *The characteristics of Barthes's myth*

#### The ideological nature of myth

The common sense or natural view (that wrestling is a sport, but a bad one because it is not honestly competitive) is thus not the popular one because the popular one (that wrestling is a sport) would be glossed by Barthes (1973, 15–6) as more of a petty bourgeois reaction. *Mythologies* is thus a study of the ways in which mass culture (a culture that Barthes (1973) considers controlled by the petty bourgeois) constructs this mythological reality and encourages conformity to its own values. *Mythologies* examines the ways the petty bourgeoisie<sup>23</sup> in twentieth-century France naturalised and universalised its own values via specific mechanisms—the press, advertising, the legal system and so forth. Barthes examines the ways apparent activities—such as wrestling, the Tour de France, strip teases, drinking wine and eating steak and chips—are expressive of certain ideological positions. French culture appears to be natural, but it is actually deeply political (McNeill 1996).

Referring to wrestling, there is clearly a discrepancy between the primary common-sense message that ‘this is a sport (not a message)’ and the secondary message that ‘this is a spectacle’. However, Michael Moriarty (1991, 20) explains that this discrepancy is lucid and aesthetic in function. He further states:

Nobody is being fooled by a wrestling match; on the contrary, the duplicity of the event is part of the spectator’s pleasure. There is the pleasure of the spectator itself, the conflict of hero and villain, ‘Good’ and ‘Evil’, and the further pleasure in the fact of the spectacle’s masquerading as a sporting contest (Moriarty 1991, 20).

However, contrary to the above statement, with other messages, the duplicity is not aesthetic, but ideological. How is myth ideological? In Terry Eagleton’s (1991, 5–6) book, *Ideology: An Introduction*, the author defines ideology as:

a dominant power [that] may legitimate itself by *promoting* beliefs and values congenial to it; *naturalizing* and *universalizing* such beliefs so as to render them self-evident and apparently inevitable;

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<sup>23</sup> The term ‘bourgeoisie’ can be understood as an Anglo equivalent of the ‘middle class’, although the term does not translate comfortably to this day. For its definition, please see the ‘Main introduction’ section titled ‘Definitions of terms to be used in this thesis’.

*denigrating* ideas which might challenge it; excluding rival forms of thought, perhaps by some unspoken but systematic logic; and *obscuring* social reality in ways convenient to itself. Such ‘mystification’, as it is commonly known, frequently takes the form of masking or suppressing social conflicts, from which arises the conception of ideology as an imaginary resolution of real contradictions [author’s emphasis].

According to McNeill (1996), this particular definition of the workings of ideology is particularly relevant to *Mythologies* because, common to both Eagleton’s definition of ideology and Barthes’s understanding of myth is the notion of a socially constructed reality that is accepted as ‘natural’. This is actually an illusory reality constructed in order to mask the real structures of power obtaining in society. The opinions and values of a historically and socially specific class are held up as ‘universal truths’. Attempts to challenge this naturalisation and universalisation of a socially constructed reality are dismissed for lacking common sense, and thus excluded from serious consideration. The real power relations in society (between classes, coloniser and colonised, men and women and so forth) are obscured, while reference to all tensions and difficulties is blocked out and glossed over—its political threat defused (McNeill, 1996).

### Myth: A second-order semiological system

There is a central and particularly powerful image of myth as an alien creature inhabiting human form and profiting from its appearance of innocence and naturalness to complete its evil work (McNeill, 1996). Like a parasite that needs a host, a myth needs a first-order sign for survival. It needs the first-order sign as its *alibi*. It might innocently claim, ‘I was not being ideological, I was somewhere else doing something innocent’. This is central to Barthes’s (1973) intellectual preoccupation in *Mythologies* because it is at the level of secondary or second-order signification that myth is to be found.

Barthes’s (1973) discussion of the relationship between signs that constitute a myth is indebted to the Swiss linguist, de Saussure. Semiology derives from the work of de Saussure. The study of semiotics stems from the belief that ‘language does not *describe* reality, it actually *constitutes* it’ [author’s emphasis] (Cunningham & Turner 1993, 219). Further, ‘our

language system determines, delimits and shapes the way we understand the world. To examine the structures of our language is to examine the structures of culture in general' (Cunningham & Turner 1993, 219–220).

Barthes (1988) states in *The Semiotic Challenge* that, at the start of the semiological project, it was thought that the main task—following de Saussure's convention—was to study the life of signs at the heart of social life, and consequently reconstitute the semantic system of objects (garments, food, images, rituals, protocols, music and so forth). However, as semiology advances into the already vast project, it encounters new tasks, such as to study that 'mysterious operation by which any message may be impregnated with a secondary meaning, a meaning that is diffuse, generally ideological, and which is known as the "connoted meaning"' (Barthes 1988, 159).

For de Saussure, a sign is the union of a signified, concept and signifier, through which that concept is manifested. A bunch of roses is a sign when the flowers stand as signifiers of the signified 'passion'. A linguistic sign—such as the word 'tree'—unites a sound or, more precisely, a sound-image, to give the concept of a tree. Barthes (1973) uses de Saussure's theory of the sign and signification so that the mythical sign becomes a sign to the second power: it is constituted by the superimposition of a second tripartite schema on the one just analysed (Moriarty 1991, 23) (see Figure 4). As Figure 4 shows, in the second tripartite, the original sign becomes the signifier of a new sign by being attached to a new concept, or signified (Barthes 1973, 114). As such, what Barthes (1973) intends by this conception of the mythical sign is an intermingling of the signifier and signified—or form and meaning—into a 'mode of signification'—that is, a myth. The difference between de Saussure's linguistic sign and Barthes's interpretation of myth is made clear by such a diagram (see figure 4).

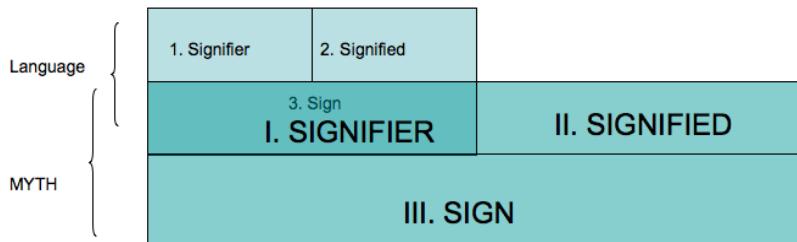


Figure 4: Diagram showing the derivative of myth.  
Source: Barthes 2000, 115.

As Barthes (1973) explains, myth is a peculiar system because it is constructed from a semiological chain that existed before it: it is a second-order semiological system. That which is a sign in the first system becomes a mere signifier in the second. Barthes asks us to recall that the materials of mythical speech (the language itself, photography, painting, posters, rituals, objects and so forth), however different at the start, are reduced to a pure signifying function as soon as they are caught by myth. Whether dealing with alphabetical or pictorial writing, myth wants to see in them only a *sum of signs*, a global sign—the final term of a first semiological chain (Barthes 1973, 114).

Importantly, in *Mythologies*, Barthes (1973, 11) wishes to account for a certain duplicity: the signification of a naturalness that somehow ‘dresses up’ the representation of a reality that is ‘undoubtedly determined by history’ or society—in other words, that is not a fact of nature at all. The end product of his study is the conception of a structure of double-function in sign systems—the ability of one signification to generate a second. In this regard, Barthes presents this view of myth as a ‘second-order semiological system’. Another of Barthes’s examples in *Mythologies* demonstrates this. Barthes asks the reader to consider the cover of the French magazine, *Paris Match*, upon which a young, dark-skinned person, dressed in French military uniform is saluting with eyes raised as if to the French flag (see Figure 5).



Figure 5: *Paris Match* cover showing a young dark-skinned person dressed in French military uniform and saluting with eyes raised as if to the French flag.  
Source: Chandler 1994.

Barthes explains that this is ‘the meaning’ of the picture. However, grafted onto this primary message is a second signification:

that France is a great Empire, that all her sons, without any color discrimination, faithfully serve under her flag, and that there is no better answer to the detractors of an alleged colonialism than the zeal shown by this ‘Negro’ in serving his so-called oppressors (Barthes 1973, 116).

What particularly irritates Barthes here is that this new signification seems ‘natural’, ‘obvious’ and to ‘go without saying’, when it is actually historically determined—in this case, by a threatening colonialism. He concludes that this transformation of history into ‘nature’ is ‘the very principle of myth’ (Barthes 1973, 129). Given that it comes from *Paris Match*, the image is clearly intended to show that, whatever malicious and unpatriotic people may claim, France is a great empire faithfully served by black and white alike (and not an oppressive regime—even though it is). Thus, the photographic sign has become the signifier of a new signified, and it is important to distinguish between the first-order system of meaning, the literal meaning, and the second-order system of meaning within which the myth comes into being.

On this note, an interesting architectural example involves the use of an image of the Angkor Wat building to appear as a nationalised symbol on the Cambodian flag (see Figure 6).



Figure 6: The Cambodian flag with the imprint of an outlined building of Angkor Wat.  
Source: MacDonald n.d.

The image of the building on the flag bears a second signification that the building Angkor Wat represents a totality of present-day Cambodia. This new signification seems so natural, obvious and taken-for-granted that Angkor Wat *is* part of modern Cambodia. Yet, to what extent is this really the case? The architecture of Angkor Wat was part of the Angkor (Khmer) civilisation that is *not* exactly the same as Cambodia, yet it has somehow become an appropriated symbol of Cambodia. Further, it is being accepted by society as natural. Again, such a transformation of history into ‘nature’ is the very principle of myth because it has no ground or bearing in reality. Thus, in the mythical message, a certain concept—social and historical in origin—seizes a certain sign for its own purpose, while sheltering behind the initial literal significance of the sign.

The image of the dark-skinned soldier saluting the flag communicates its factual nature to the non-factual concept of ‘French imperialty’. Thus, the French Empire, as an idea or value, comes to impose itself with the straightforwardness of an empirical fact, and the message is enabled to conceal its identity as such. It is this appropriation of a sign as an alibi for another message that Barthes finds ethically objectionable. As Barthes (1973, 131) states, myth is a ‘theft of language’, and it is ethically objectionable in another way: it turns an arbitrary or conventional sign into a supposedly natural one (Moriarty 1991, 24).

In attempting to explain the precariousness of myth as a second-order semiological system, Barthes uses an architectural example in *Mythologies*. When discussing walking in the Basque country of Spain, Barthes (1974, 124–125) states:

I may well notice a common style in the houses of the area which causes me to acknowledge the Basque house as a definite ethnic product. *This architectural unity* does not provoke *me into naming it*, nor does it impose itself on me. I recognize that it was here before me, without me. It is a complex product which has its determinations at the very level of a very wide history: it does not call out to me. But if I happen to see such a house in Paris, I feel as if I were personally receiving an imperious injunction to name this object a Basque chalet: or even better, to see it as the very essence of basquity.

In the above quotation, Barthes is expressing that, in the Basque country, the architectural style is the first-order sign. In Paris, it is a second-order signification or myth, while its signifier is the first-order sign (the architectural style deprived of much of its reason for being—its history) and its signified is the concept of ‘basquity’. Together, the two comprise the myth.

To provide a couple of local examples, a building such as the one in Figure 7, which appeared in 1960s Perth local newspapers, immediately calls on the reader to recognise it as a second-order signification or myth of a ‘modern’ building, deprived of history and reason for being. One of the most prominent features of the building that allows it to be recognised as a modern building is a series of random patterns of recessed windows. The words below the image read: ‘This tall block building with its random pattern of four-foot deep holes is to be a show room for modern furniture and furnishings’ (*The West Australian* 1965b).

In this case, the first-order sign is the signifier. This signifier could well have been the 1923 villa project for the Venice Lido designed by architect Loos, also featuring recessed windows (see Figure 8), or could have been architect Le Corbusier’s 1954 design of the chapel of Notre Dame du Haut in Ronchamp, with its famous recessed windows (see Figure 9). Whatever the signifier, one thing is certain: the signified building of the 1960s, as seen in Perth’s newspapers, represents the concept of modernity. Together, the two comprise the myth of modernity.

Similarly, in the twenty-first century, when browsing the home section of Perth’s local papers, one is bombarded with advertised images of an eclectic mix of architectural home styles, such as ‘French’, ‘Tuscan’ and ‘classical’ (see Figure 10), to name a few. However, such images of various

architectural styles do not convey the origins or actual essence of ‘Frenchness’ or ‘Tuscan-ness’ to the home because they are no longer first-order signs. In their country of origin, these architectural styles may be seen as first-order signs; however, in Perth, they represent a second-order signification or myth. This is because they have been taken out of their own time and cultural context and placed in a location that is totally unrelated to them. Thus, they are devoid of an architectural history or meaning (this will be discussed and examined in greater depth in Chapter Six).

The signified or concept of myth, as aforementioned, is both intentional and historical. Barthes (1973, 125) states that the designer of the style or builder of the house ‘comes and seeks me out ... in order to oblige me to acknowledge the body of intentions which have motivated it and arranged it there as a sequel of an individual history, as a confidence and complicity’. Barthes (1973, 125) explains this peculiar nature of myth further in the quotation below:

The myth ‘appropriates me’ as its reader; it has ‘an imperative, buttonholing character’. But at the same time it seems to do just the opposite of this. Because its signifier is not only a form (certain architectural specifications), but also a meaning (the association of these specifications with houses in the Basque country), this myth seems to exist quite independently of me, seems just to be there, innocently, naturally.

For Barthes (1973, 123–124), a thing is ‘naturalised’ when it is made to seem eternal—that is, it is not as a result of history. This is precisely what happens in myth. The ubiquity of the signifier is a constantly moving turnstile, presenting now an absent form that is full of meaning, and now a present form that is empty.



Figure 7: A second-order signification of a 'modern' building.  
Source: *The West Australian* 1965b, 35.

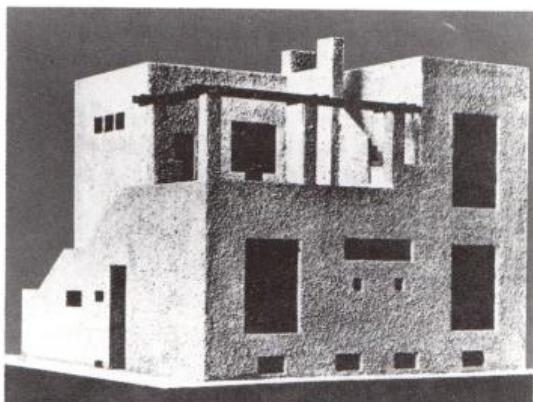


Figure 8: Loos's villa project for the Venice Lido, 1923.  
Source: Frampton 1992, 95.

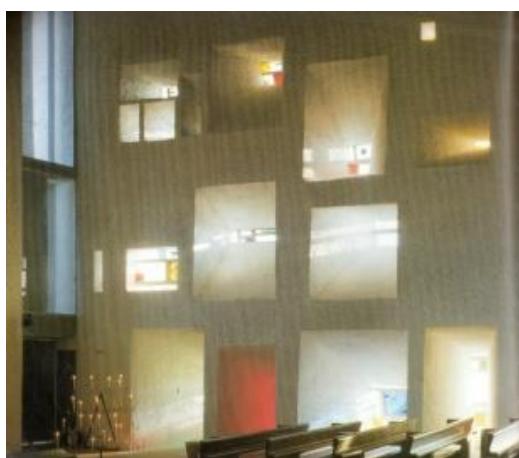


Figure 9: Le Corbusier's design (interior) of the chapel at Ronchamp.  
Source: Corbusier, Jeanneret & Boesiger 1987, 266.



Figure 10: Images of an eclectic mix of architectural home styles.

Source: left—*The West Australian: New Homes* 2006b, 41; middle—*The West Australian: New Homes* 2006c, 38; right—*The West Australian: New Homes* 2006a, 40.

In this regard, myth lacks the integrity of language. The meaning that should be generated in the system is taken at the beginning from outside the system. History supplies it, yet the consumer of myth is unaware of this. The consumer senses an excess of meaning (the loaded signifier); thus, the intentionality of the concept goes unnoticed. Barthes (1973, 129–130) states that the intention ‘can remain manifest without however appearing to have an interest in the matter ... everything happens as if the signifier gave a *foundation* to the signified’. As a result, the reader ‘lives the myth as a story at once true and unreal’ (Barthes 1973, 128).

#### Myth: A depoliticised speech

At the preface of *Mythologies*, Barthes (1973, 11) writes:

The starting point of these reflections was usually a feeling of impatience at the sight of the ‘naturalness’ with which newspapers, art and common sense constantly dress up a reality which, even though it is the one we live in, is undoubtedly determined by history. In short, in the account given of our contemporary circumstances, I resent seeing Nature and History confused at every turn, and I want to track down, in the decorative display of what-goes without-saying, the ideological abuse which, in my view, is hidden there.

The above quotation indicates that Barthes’s criticism of myth starts from a personal disgust with the way society accepts its own invented images of nature as nature itself. The same should be questioned with respect to architecture, which is what this thesis seeks to do.

However, in the language of Barthes, when does a myth become ‘ideological’? The criticism of myth becomes ideological when we recognise that the loss in myth of historical reality is a loss of *political reality*—using the term to describe ‘the whole of human relations in their real, social structure, in their power of making the world’ (Barthes 1973, 143). For this reason, myth is what Barthes (1973, 143) calls a ‘depoliticised speech’. What he means is that myth has an economic dimension—by simplifying reality, it saves on intellectual effort and, moreover, it simplifies to reality the most basic commercial relationship:

[Myth] has turned reality inside out, it has emptied out of history and has filled it with nature, it has removed from things their human meaning so as to make them signify a human insignificance. The function of myth is to empty reality: it is, literally a ceaseless flowing out, a haemorrhage, or perhaps an evaporation, in short a perceptible absence (Barthes 1973, 142–143).

In saying that myth removes things from their human meaning to make them signify a human insignificance, Barthes is really saying that myth obscures the role of human beings in producing structures they inhibit, and thus their capacity to change them (Moriarty 1991, 28).

Hence, in passing from history to nature, Barthes (1973, 143) states that myth, ‘abolishes the complexity of human acts … it does away with all dialectics, without any going back beyond what is immediately visible’. As articulated by George R Wasserman (1981, 34):

Myth reduces the world to a set of essences, social interaction to so many individual transaction, what is different to what is the same or to what is fundamentally alien, serves to ground the bourgeois world-view in an eternal Nature.

In this sense, myth is not just a message, but a message that is political by depoliticising. According to Barthes (1973, 138), political ideologies are themselves mythic in character, and he identifies this with that of the bourgeoisie, which he defines as ‘the social class which does not want to be named’. In *Mythologies*, Barthes (1973, 141) describes how intangible, nebulous and mythical a conception of the word ‘bourgeoisie’ is:

The same ‘natural’ varnish covers up all ‘national’ representations: the big wedding of the bourgeoisie, which originates in a class ritual (the display and consumption of wealth), can bear no relation to the economic status of the lower middle-class: but through the press, the news, and literature, it slowly becomes the very norm as dreamed, though not actually lived, of the petit-bourgeois couple. The bourgeoisie is constantly absorbing into its ideology a whole section of humanity which does not have its basic status and cannot live up to it except in imagination, that is, at the cost of an immobilization and an impoverishment of consciousness. By spreading its representations over a whole catalogue of collective images for petit-bourgeois use ... it is the bourgeois ideology itself, the process through which the bourgeoisie transforms the reality of the world into an image of the world, History into nature.

Barthes (1973, 138) asserts that the bourgeoisie ideology itself is a myth because it is constituted by the loss of historical quality of things: within it, things lose the memory that they once were made. The quotation suggests that bourgeois ideology does not wish to be recognised as an ideology at all, but as an order of nature—eternal and universal. That is, it is itself—in other words, it is a second-order signification. By putting aside its name, the first-order sign of its historical origin, ‘the bourgeoisie transforms the reality of the world into an image of the world, History into Nature’ (Barthes 1973, 141). For this reason, Barthes regards myth as the appropriate instrument of bourgeois ideology because he considers the French society to be still a bourgeois society and believes that he lives in a world that is ‘a privileged field of mythical significations’ (Wasserman 1981, 34).

The subject of the bourgeoisie illuminates the purpose and significance of Barthes’s (1973) *Mythologies* to this thesis, which is discussed in the section that follows. After all, the idea of home is a bourgeoisie construction. As established in Chapter One, the all-embracing concept of domesticity is proven to be a creation of the nineteenth century. It was during this period that domestic bourgeois family life became a nucleus around which the nation was formed. These sentiments were then projected into the past by being applied to seventeenth-century paintings, books and houses—and thus was born the wide-ranging concept of domesticity.

### ***Methodological approach of this thesis***

While Barthes (1973) examines a diverse range of subjects—such as The World of Wrestling, The Face of Garbo and Operation Margarine—and reveals that the so-called natural meaning is actually a delusional myth (Lane

2006, 16), this thesis seeks to analyse the ‘trivia’ and norm of the idealised home, as identified in various sources of local media—particularly in media advertising. Under such an analysis, images and representations of the home are believed to signify an idealised aspect of the home and are subsequently read as myths.

For example, advertisements seen as having an imperative character from the ‘modern’ period of the 1950s will be analysed. A typical home advertisement showing a happy looking woman dressed in an apron and standing in her open-planned, streamlined and ‘modern’ kitchen speaks directly to the viewer. It speaks as a magical object appearing in the present, without any trace of the history that produced it. Seen from this perspective, representations of such idealised images of the home could be seen to present themselves as an ideological abuse created by the mass media, whose historical-political features of the society have been masked, making it somehow appear ‘natural’ or unhistorical. The supposedly ‘natural’ meaning of the social and architectural ideals embedded in the image of the home, however loaded with social and ideological values, signify nothing more than a myth. It is at this point that Barthes’s (1973) theoretical stance is applied to decode or unpack the obviousness of the myth by reintroducing a historical and political dimension appropriate to that particular time dimension.

Thus, the immediate task involves deconstructing the alienating ideology of the home image by incorporating into it the order of an analytical language. The purposes of Barthes’s (1973) theoretical framework to the study are as follows:

- to provide a method to analyse the images of the home in media advertising
- to provide a tool to unpack and deconstruct the cultural texts or practices—that is, the mythological state of the home image.

These will help understand architecture and provide another means to understand the production and meaning of architecture.<sup>24</sup> To explore the

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<sup>24</sup> It was noted in the ‘Main introduction’ that this thesis takes the objects of its study to be mythologies, rather than actual houses in which people live. It must be emphasised that, in relation to this thesis, the term ‘architecture’ also does not refer to physical built houses. Although the term ‘architecture’ is

hypothesis and address the research questions outlined in the ‘Main introduction’, the case study approach is employed as a methodology to examine Barthes’s concept of myth. As articulated by Marilyn Lichtman (2014, 119), a case study approach ‘involves the specific and detailed study of a case or cases’. However, Lichtman (2014, 118) notes that, ‘instead of focusing on one individual, a case study often is identified as a particular program, or project, or setting. It is up to the researcher to identify the case and to set limits or boundaries’. Based on this knowledge, while the main theoretical underpinning of this thesis is driven by Barthes’s concept of myth, the case study approach was adopted for this research to investigate a particular setting that corresponds to each element of the idealised Australian suburbia and architectural home, as portrayed in media advertising at a given time and place. In addition, it should be emphasised that the methodological approach of this thesis is governed by a post-structural stance.

A post-structural researcher questions all aspects of the construction of reality—what it is, what it is not, how it is organised, and so forth (Merriam 2002, 4). Neil Leach (1997, 283) addresses the definition of post-structuralism in the opening paragraph of the subject in his book, *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory*:

Post-structuralism refers to an inter-disciplinary movement popular from the late nineteen seventies, which could be seen as a supplement to structuralism, and an attempt to problematize and challenge many of its assumptions ... Broadly speaking ... post-structuralism sought to redress the universalizing tendencies of structuralism by introducing a certain specificity into discourse. Thus against the universal and static models of structuralism, post-structuralism introduced notions of time and difference.

Another definition of post-structuralism is as follows:

In post-structuralism, the idea of an orderly, self-defining, self-regulating and self-transforming system is questioned ... Post-structuralism questions ontological value itself, suggesting that ‘reality’ is a

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fundamentally concerned with physical reality, it is discussed and defined in this thesis through an elaborate construct of media representations, such as popular home and women’s magazines, newspapers, photography, books and professional architectural journals. For a more elaborate discussion of architecture, see the ‘Main introduction’ section of ‘Definitions of terms to be used in this thesis’.

byproduct of 'discourse' and hence subservient to it. Any vestige of meaning as a substantive reality is denuded; discourse and not substance is the source of meaning (Groat & Wang 2002, 149).

In relation to the above quotation, this thesis presupposes that a cultural text of the media is subsumed within discourses (physical and ideological constructions) around which sociocultural meanings of the image of the home are embedded. It is thus predicated on questioning 'an orderly self-defining, self regulating, and self transforming system' by which meaning is never fixed, and is always subject to deferrals and play (Leach 1997, 283). Post-structuralism thus offers a method that enables a cultural text or image (that may appear to be orderly and self-defining) to be read and decoded with respect to the way the home is idealised in the media.

### *Characteristics of a post-structuralist stance*

The critical-analytical approach of post-structuralism entails the viewer actively constructing meaning (rather than decoding a pre-existing meaning) in the process of reading. In doing so, it 'seeks to understand how the meaning of a text is constructed within a cultural context' (Bertrand & Hughes 2005, 192). Whereas the structuralist seeks meaning in the textual structure, the post-structuralist seeks meaning constructed by the reader. Essentially, the more power over meaning attributed to the reader, the closer the reader is to the post-structuralist stance. Two characteristics and strengths of post-structuralist analysis are as follows, as defined by Bertrand and Hughes (2005, 192):

- it insists that meaning is ultimately constructed by the interaction of text with audience, rather than inherent within text alone
- it acknowledges that the researcher is not an objective observer of any textual phenomenon, but is actively engaged in meaning production in relation to the text.

Post-structuralists also deny that meaning is inherent in signs, and so deny the possibility of adequate categorising or measuring the signs and structures in a text. Post-structuralist textual analysis does not have a set of rules to follow. Instead, it has a philosophical position that is implemented

through each piece of textual analysis, establishing techniques appropriate to the question being explored, while sharing certain attitudes:

- The position of the researcher is acknowledged as part of the research, from asking the initial question to reaching the final conclusions.
- The result of the analysis is description (a restating of the content of signs, or the underlying structures), rather than prescription (talking about what ‘should be’ in the sign or structure).
- Such description from a viewing position is constant, necessary, contingent and relative, and never objective, fixed or permanent.
- However, it is still valuable and adds to the sum total of knowledge and understanding of the world. The fact that ‘truth’ is an impossible goal does not prevent us from seeing it.

In the spirit of a post-structuralist stance, Moriarty (1991, 26) states, in reference to the nature of myth, that to read is to be complicit. This is one aspect of the myth’s fundamentally aggressive nature—that one cannot help read it. In relation to this and referring back to the previous Barthes’s example of the soldier saluting the French flag, there is actually no flag in the picture—it is simply inferred by Barthes. We know what the image means, ideologically, but Barthes’s reading of it is, itself, a construction. Thus, the image postulates its imaginary continuation by the viewer in order to work its full mythical effect (Moriarty 1991, 26).

Moreover, a reading of the media is really a reading into one’s culture, as Barthes (1986, 18) reiterates in the following quotation:

any reading closely depends on one’s culture, on ones knowledge of the world; and it is likely that a good press photograph (and they are all good, since they are selected) readily relies on the supposed knowledge of its readers, choosing those prints which involve the greatest possible quantity of information of this kind, so as to ‘euphorize’ the reading.

Seen from the above perspectives and in light of the quotation from Barthes, a post-structuralist stance adopts techniques already discussed to understand signification (through semiotics). Given that the primary aim of

this thesis is to speculate and analyse the ‘obviousness’ of the myths embedded in the image of the home that correspond to a particular time dimension, and since the media reflect the cultural values of Australian society (see ‘Main introduction’), an interrogation into the idealised home in the media is necessary.

### ***Significance of the thesis’s theoretical stance***

Barthes’s theoretical framework is appropriate to this thesis because his intellectual theory of myth is a problematising tool that can be used to reveal the cultural meaning of the home, as propagated by contemporary modes of communications of the media. As stated in the ‘Main introduction’, this cultural meaning of the home has been constructed, reaffirmed and activated over again under the influence of the media, and is inherently and inevitably integral to mythology. Henceforth, this thesis is concerned with exploring the ideality or mythological state attached to images or representations of the Australian home in the media in relation to architecture, in order to understand architecture and provide another means of understanding the production and meaning of architecture.

Having said this, myth is just one of many devices used in a culture to reveal meaning. As a totality transcending the individual whose thoughts it shapes, cultural meaning revealed through a home image is much broader than the myths existing in any given society and communicating the ethos of that society. As Bailey (2000, 4) asserts, myths are always subservient to culture, yet the relationship between the two should be considered a symbiotic one. Culture provides myth with its content and the means (through various forms of narratives) of presenting culture, whereas myth mediates the content of culture. It does this in a manner that is persuasively comprehensible to people within the framework of their daily lives and long-term goals—goals that are partly shaped by and simultaneously shaping their daily lives (Bailey 2000, 4). Thus, to appear natural, the myth must connect with certain habits of thought that are so basic to the culture of its presumed recipients that their validity is taken for granted. However, the specific ideas and beliefs may be regarded less significant than the system

that produces them: the formal categories that shape the culture's ideas and beliefs in general.

It is on this basis that Moriarty (1991, 22) posits that the critical study of myth goes beyond the denunciation of particular ideological positions, by the analysis of how their messages are constituted, how they come to persuade. Although the content of myth is ideological and thus determined by history, the myth is something more than its content, and this 'something more' requires formal, semiological analysis. Moreover, there is a history of forms, as well as of contents. Below are some examples of the rules governing the production of a mythical from a literal message, which Barthes (1973, 109) attempts to list in the essay, 'Myth Today'. He calls the following rules the 'rhetorical figures' of myth. Rhetoric is defined by Barthes (2000, 150) as 'a set of fixed, regulated, insistent figures, according to which the varied forms of the mythical signifier arrange themselves'. Barthes describes these figures as 'transparent' and thus not affecting the form of the signifier, yet not completely empty. They are sufficiently conceptualised to carry their own ideological implications, while still being adaptable to the historical specifications of the concept.

### *The rhetoric figures of myth*

#### Tautology

A thing is defined by itself, thus excluding any possibility that its nature is complex or debatable. The same applies to platitudinous statements that are not tautological in a strict sense. For example, 'an architect-designed three-storey mansion on a private island offers an exclusive lifestyle' is a correct factual statement, but its factual truth serves to verify certain unspoken implications. The maxim is simply a prestigious example of the platitude.

#### Identification, privation of history

Differences and 'otherness' are reduced to a fundamental identity. Moriarty (1991, 26) elaborates by saying, 'Thus, to talk about the East without linking it to its history is to fix it in an essence of Orientalness, as the

eternal Other of Western civilization; in neither case do we have to understand it: we can either assimilate it or gawp it'.

### The statement of fact

This relates to proverbs, which are often used to eschew boldness in both thought and action. Barthes (2000, 154) provides an example of a rural statement of fact, such as 'the weather is fine'. However, he says that this is an implicitly technological statement—the word, despite of its general, abstract form—paves the way for its actions. It inserts itself into a fabricating order: farmers do not speak about the weather, they 'act it'—draw it into their labour (Barthes 2000, 154). Barthes (2000, 155) explains further that the foundation of the bourgeois statement of fact is common sense—that is, it is truth even though much of this truth remains highly doubtful or questionable.

### The inoculation

This rhetoric figure preserves the social order by acknowledging a few of its faults. Barthes (2000, 150) defines this figure as the injection of a contingent evil into the public domain in order to build society's immune system for use against an essential evil. This figure is evident for Barthes in the myths of 'Striptease', in which eroticism is absorbed into a reassuring ritual that is afforded the status of a sport and a career. It is also in the myths of 'Operation Margarine', in which doubts about this product's inferiority relative to butter are voiced in advertisements in order to enhance its acceptability.

### The quantification of quality

The title of this figure alludes to one of the laws of the Hegelian/Marxist dialectic: the transformation of quantity to quality. Mythical thought is profoundly anti-dialectical. It reduces reality to the juxtaposition of two readily computable values: like the (bourgeoisie) theatre audience that decides whether it is getting its money's worth based on the obvious exertions of the actor (Barthes 2000, 152). The whole of human behaviour, of social and political reality, is reduced to a simple exchange: what you receive

or undertake, you must pay for. Any form of behaviour that suggests that society is more complex and connected than this vision encapsulates must be denounced as an affront to common sense. By reducing any quality to quantity, intelligence is managed economically so that reality may be understood more cheaply (Barthes 2000, 153).

### *Theoretical articulations of contemporary myth*

Below is a summary of the theoretical articulations of the contemporary myth to further unpack these relationships for the reader.

1. Myth is read in the anonymous utterances of the press, advertising and mass consumer goods. It is something socially determined—a ‘reflection’.

Barthes (1973, 109) says that myth is not defined by the object of its message, but by the way it utters this message. He believes that everything can be a myth because the universe is infinitely fertile in suggestions. Every object in the world can pass from a closed, silent existence to an oral state that is open to appropriation by society because there is no law, natural or otherwise, that forbids talking about things.

2. Myth consists in turning culture into nature—or, at least, turning the social, cultural, ideological and historical into the ‘natural’. What is nothing but a product of class division and its moral, cultural and aesthetic consequences is presented (stated) as being a ‘matter of course’ under the effect of mythical inversion. The contingent foundations of the utterance become common sense, right reason, the norm and general opinion—in short, the *doxa*.

As a total of linguistic signs, the meaning of myth has its own value—it belongs to a history. The meaning is already complete; it postulates a kind of knowledge, past and memory—a comparative order of facts, ideas and decisions (Barthes 1973, 117).

As for the signifieds, the mixture of post–World War II modernism and historically determined domestic ideals are the drivers behind the myth, as will be further elaborated in the forthcoming chapter. Unlike the signifier, the signified is in no way abstract: it is filled with a situation. Through the signified, an entire new history is implanted in the myth. As for the signifier, its meaning is shallow, isolated, impoverished, as the signifier of post-war modernism and domestic ideals are tied to the totality of the world—to the general history of gendered values in the Victorian home, to European modernism and to architectural modernism. In other words, what is invested in the concept is less reality than a certain knowledge of reality (Barthes 1973, 119).

3. Contemporary myth is discontinuous. It is no longer expressed in long fixed narratives, but only in ‘discourse’. At most, it is a *phraseology*—a corpus of phrases (of stereotypes). Myth disappears, but leaves—the much more insidious—*mythical*.<sup>25</sup>
4. Contemporary myth is a type of speech that falls within the category of semiology. The latter enables the mythical inversion to be ‘righted’ by breaking up the message into two semantic systems: a connoted system whose signified is ideological and a denoted system (the apparent literalness of image, object and sentence) whose function is to naturalise language.

In light of the above theoretical articulations, contemporary myth cannot possibly be an object, concept or idea. It is a mode of signification—a form by which society is introduced to its historical limits and conditions of use (Barthes 1973, 109).

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<sup>25</sup> When referring to discourse, Barthes (1973) refers to passages of connected writing or speech. This is different to Foucault’s (cited in Hall 1997) definition of ‘a group of statements which provide a language for talking about—a particular topic at a particular historical moment’.

### *Other significant theoretical stances for this thesis*

Against Barthes's theoretical framework, the theoretical positions of this thesis are also pivoted around the views of two French philosophers: Bourdieu and Baudrillard. As shall be demonstrated, the theories of Bourdieu and Baudrillard work subtly to strengthen and sometimes challenge the concept of Barthes's theory of myth as appropriate to the context of the discussion of each specific site of the idealised home.

#### Bourdieu's theory of Symbolic Capital and the habitus

Bourdieu's socio-philosophical theory of symbolic capital is used in this thesis to reinforce Barthes's theory of myth, as set out in Chapter Five. By coupling Barthes's theory of myth with Bourdieu's theory of symbolic capital, this thesis argues that the 'architect-designed' home is embedded in a mythical structure, representing nothing more than a set of false representations and erroneous beliefs that construct a world for those other than its own profession—that is, the mass of non-specialists. Further, this thesis asserts that a myth is transposed when the signifying elements of the architects' signature buildings are captured and manipulated through photographic concerns—that is, via a construction and reproduction of an architect's symbolic imagery.

It is important to understand that myth 'naturalises' the idealised image of the architectural home into a mystifying entity, transmuting what is essentially cultural (historical, constructed and motivated—such as an architect perceived as the 'other') into something that materialises as natural (trans-historical, innocent and factual—such as a photographic image of an architect-designed home). However, this chapter also highlights that the symbolic imagery of the architect-designed home in the media can only be 'consumed' by cultured individuals, or those in the institutional boundaries of the profession who carry the correct mental schemes of appreciation. Thus, in asserting that only cultured individuals who possess the 'right' schemes of appreciation can access this layer of knowledge—while those who do not are denied access—Bourdieu's social theory of the habitus is also seen to have specific relevance to the discussion in this thesis.

### Baudrillard's theory of the sign and 'system of objects'

A significant amount of Baudrillard's work is inspired by that of Barthes. Thus, even though Baudrillard's theory of the sign eventually departs from Barthes's theory of myth, this thesis sees the importance of highlighting Baudrillard's position by framing it against Barthes. While Barthes's theory of myth gives historical intention a natural justification, in Baudrillard's 'system of objects', the home and functional objects within it—including home furnishings and interior design—are divorced from a past and stripped of their traditional sense. As such, the home in Baudrillard's system of objects is turned into a sign or commodity in which there is no need for the idea to bear any form of connection or relationship to a history or any past historical references. From this perspective, this system renders the idealised images of the twenty-first century home as new myths operating within the logic of the sign. Under such a system, the idealised image of the home as a commodity in the marketplace is given meaning through operating within this logic of the sign.

It has been claimed that Baudrillard's (1996) work, *The System of Objects*, effectively opens up a postmodernist avenue of analysis that views codes of advertising as depicting a certain quality of materials, objects and any spatial design and organisation entering into a state of the simulacra—or 'ambient order' (Gane 1991, 39). Objects and discourses under such an analysis do not have any firm referent or grounding. Instead, the real has given way to simulations, codes and hyper-reality, where meaning, significance, the message and the referent circulate so quickly that they are made to disappear. Under such a postmodernist analysis, signs are disconnected from opening a relation to the world, and the 'model' response to a 'model' world replaces responsive actions in an actual changing one (Alvesson 2002, 25). Signs reach a structural limit of representation by referring only to themselves, with little relation to any exterior or interior. Thus, Baudrillard's theory offers an interesting, albeit controversial, interpretation and analysis of the home in the context of Barthes's theory of myth.

Set against the above interpretive frameworks, both Barthes's and Baudrillard's approaches to the concept and subject of 'reality', considered among a number of problems associated with Baudrillard's theory, will also be deliberated in the thesis.

### **Chapter conclusion and discussion**

As discussed in this chapter, Barthes's interest in semiology centres on society's representation of reality, and his analysis has thus far shown that the goal of myth is to give a 'historical intention' and 'natural justification' to make 'contingency appear eternal'. In myth, things have no memory that they once were made. This forms the basis of Barthes's (1973) *Mythologies*. Barthes denounces the deceptive effects of myth as cultural phenomena that make them seem 'natural'. In reaction to this 'obviousness', Barthes holds up the 'mythical inversion' and deciphers its ideological foundations. He undermines what seems to 'go without saying' and attacks common beliefs that shelter behind myth. In terms of this thesis, it is on such theoretical bases of Barthes's concept of the myth that the media's portrayal of the home is critically assessed and examined in order to seek a deeper understanding of how architecture is produced and certain ideas perpetuated (that is, taken for granted).

Through semiotics, a post-structuralist stance is adopted for this thesis in order to question and challenge aspects of the construction of reality for the idealised Australian home. Given that the primary aim of this thesis is to speculate and analyse the 'obviousness' of the myths embedded in the image of the home that correspond to a particular time dimension, and since the media reflect the cultural values of Australian society, an interrogation into the idealised home in the media is necessary. In the Australian society, the image of the home remains anonymous, slippery, fragmented, garrulous, and available for both ideological criticism and semiological dismantling.

The next four chapters examine idealised images of the Australian home and the way these images have been perpetuated in various media representations. These four chapters form the critical and semiological

analysis of this thesis. Drawing on Barthes's theory of myth, each chapter critically analyses the way the home—pertinent to its own specific time dimension—is being transposed into a form of myth via the media.

## **Chapter Three: The ‘modern’ 1950s home and kitchen**

### **Chapter introduction**

Particular Australian home magazines performed a number of manifest functions during the early post-war period, with a significant priority being disseminating house-building information and interpreting the latest trends and designs (Greig 1995b). Focusing on a selection of advertising images from some of Australia’s popular magazines—such as *Australian Home Beautiful*, *Australian Woman’s Weekly* and *Australian House and Garden*—this chapter speculates on the ideal ‘modern’ home of the post–World War II period in Australia, and how this can be conceived as a myth.

Concentrating only on the 1950s, this chapter seeks to explore how modernity was projected through media’s representations of the home, and what qualities of the Australian post-war home encapsulated ‘modern living’. By exploring these issues, this chapter demonstrates that popular magazines during the post-war period, in an effort to sell and promote modern living and lifestyle to the public, played an important role in shaping the transformation of a normative sense of what is considered an ‘ideal home’ for middle class Australians.

Drawing on the various critical and theoretical positions of Barthes (see Chapter One), this chapter demonstrates how ‘modern’ notions of the home in general, and the kitchen in particular, are perpetuated in the media as myths. Through a series of advertisements, this chapter attempts to decipher some of the myths of modern living in the Australian post-war years. These myths include the visible kitchen, ingrained with the virtues of efficiency and cleanliness, and the happy housewife, attributed to the labour-saving kitchen. In doing so, this chapter notes that, while the modern home in the 1950s seemed to swiftly capture middle-class Australians’ aspirations and popular imagination, it represented nothing more than part of a Barthoneon mode of myth. Correspondingly, these myths were also driven by ‘real needs’ in modern housing design, fuelled by a dire economic situation.

## ***Setting the scene: The making of the ‘modern’ living myth***

In the early part of the twentieth century, much of the concern surrounding the idea of modernity was focused on the modern city. Australian cities were dramatically reshaped by newly emerging forms of culture, technology and expertise. Modernity, in this sense, was an international phenomenon characterised by the increased flow of ideas, commodities and technologies, with Australia very much ‘in the flow’ (Carter 2006, 210). However, in the post–World War II period, attention shifted from the modern city to the modern suburb. Modernity, in this sense, was less about novelty and rapid change than progress and prosperity.<sup>26</sup> As Greig (1995a, 6–7) notes:

The post World War Two environment has served to enhance the status of a modernist philosophy, which promised to lift the house-building industry and the growing appeal of modernism. The circumstances which elevated the status of modernization in house-building and which accelerated the rate of owner occupation were also exploited to promote modernist design. Visions of technological modernization, architectural modernism and a particular mood of postwar modernity coincided during the nineteen fifties and invested the word ‘modern’ with substantial evocative power.

The term ‘modern’ also became heavily associated with the so-called ‘spirit of the nation’, signifying Australian young men and women returning to civilian conditions after the war, building homes and starting families (Carter 2006, 230). The ‘Great Australian Tragedy’ was an expression used to signify the post-war housing shortage.<sup>27</sup> Before World War II, somewhere between 250,000 and 300,000 new homes were estimated to be required (Creek 1996, 251). To add to the problem, after the war, Australia’s housing

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<sup>26</sup> This thesis adopts the view of Berman (1983, cited in Greig 1995b, 4) and Soja (1989, cited in Greig 1995b, 4) that sees modernity as a dynamic concept. According to Stuart Hall (Hall & Gieben 1992), ‘modernity’, although usually regarded as having its roots in the Enlightenment period, has proved to be illusory. In each succeeding age—whether the Renaissance, Enlightenment, nineteenth century (the age of revolutions) or twentieth century—succumbed to the fantasy that it was the ultimate time for advanced living, in terms of material development, knowledge and enlightenment. However, each era’s version of ‘modern’ was superseded by something more current (Hall & Gieben 1992, 15).

<sup>27</sup> The post-war housing shortage at the end of World War II was partly attributed to a large-scale program of migration to Australia that resulted from millions of people in Europe being displaced from their homelands. At the same time, in Australia, there was a desperate shortage of labour and a growing belief that substantial population growth was essential for the country’s future. By 1947, a post-war immigration boom was underway, with a large and increasing number of arrivals, including those on government-assisted passage. Agreements were reached with the United Kingdom, some European countries and the International Refugee Organization to encourage migrants, including displaced people from war-torn Europe, to come to Australia. By 1950, almost 200,000 people had arrived (National Communications Branch 2007).

stock was severely depleted. At this time, the modernist style of architecture was viewed as an essential ally in tackling this momentous problem, with its concern for functionalism and economic use of space; scientific approach to human and technological engineering; and common-sense, rational exploitation of new building materials. Hence, as Greig (1995b, 1) summarises, 'from the late nineteen forties onward, the modernist philosophy struggled valiantly to meet the challenge of the post war housing crisis, and to enter the hearts, minds and especially the homes of every household'.

During this time in Australia, a new genre of magazines flourished, promoting the home.<sup>28</sup> The magazines were never solely women's magazines; a good deal of the advertising was directed towards men, with young couples the major target. For example, each issue of *Australian Home Beautiful (AHB)* featured a section on building and architecture aimed at those in the position to employ an architect or master builder to realise their dreams. The houses chosen were usually described as 'modern', 'contemporary' or 'unusual'. For houses that were already built, renovation to a 'modern' style was suggested (Lees & Senyard 1987).<sup>29</sup>

Similarly, a survey conducted at the 1952 home exhibition held by the New South Wales Chapter of the Royal Institute of Architects showed that three-quarters of visitors wanted a house that 'looked modern' and had 'a lot of glass' (Cuffley 1993, 122). While there are problems with the representative nature of this sample—as it was possibly the more 'interested and better informed' who attended—the sample also contained a higher proportion of the population seeking to build a house. By September of the same year, the *Australian House and Garden (AHG)* magazine could confidently state that the 'modern trend in home decoration has clearly influenced many practical homeowners who now favor the utilitarian comfort

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<sup>28</sup> It is interesting to note that, according to Davison (1993), although Australians followed and aspired to the British in their dreams of owning a house and garden, the US, not Britain, emerged as the standard for Australia. US architecture gave form to family togetherness by means of open-plan design and plate-glass. This is confirmed by the texts of the flourishing home magazines of this time, which illustrated a strong and unified position in favour of modernist design as they looked towards the US for assistance in the struggle against the conservatism of local tradition (Greig 1995b, 14).

<sup>29</sup> During the 1950s, the term 'Contemporary' was widely used in Great Britain and the US to describe the new fashion for modern design. The word 'Contemporary' was used to characterise buildings and domestic products that were consciously forward-looking, rather than traditional, reflecting a desire on behalf of society to avoid dwelling on the past, and instead reaffirm its faith in the future. Buildings and products designed in the 'Contemporary' style were thus confident, life affirming and optimistic (Jackson 1994, 9).

of contemporary design [over] the more elaborate style of traditional decoration' (Greig 1995b, 170). The socioeconomic climate of the post-war decade immediately became channelled into media representations that greatly influenced the way the home was to be perpetuated.

Research shows that, by the early 1950s, the term 'modern' had become the operative word in architecture and design. In the advertising profession, the term tended to justify itself and 'everything shiny and new was infallible' (Cuffley, cited in Greig 1995a, 127). Indeed, by 1952, an indication that 'the modern' was becoming more pervasive and acceptable throughout Australia was evident in the use of the term 'modern' in advertisements to catch a reader's eye, even if the advertisement had little to do with the concept (Greig 1995b, 14).

## **Research methods and analysis**

### *Methods and objective*

The research objective for this chapter is to revisit and identify the imperative nature of the myth associated with the word 'modern' and modern notions of the home or modernity, as projected through particular media representations of the home. The aim is to analyse how 'modern' ideals of the home in general, and the kitchen in particular, are perpetuated in the media as myths, and to what extent representations of the ideal home enter a form of signification—that is, a myth. The form of media analysed is drawn from influential and popular home magazines published around the post-World War II period—namely, *AHG*, *Australian Women's Weekly* (*AWW*) and *AHB*, with special attention given to *AHG* and *AHB*.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> *AHG* was first published in December 1948 by KG Murray. During its formative years (1948 to 1952), *AHG* ceaselessly promoted the superiority of modernist design in a rather didactic effort to purge Australian homemakers of their presumed 'stuffy' conservatism (Greig 1995b, 6). Nevertheless, it was one of the most influential and popular magazines that kept pace with modernity in responding and offering solutions to reshape Australian housing provision in the wake of World War II.

*AWW* was renowned for its representations of ideals of womanhood and domestic life during the post-war decade of the mid-twentieth century of 1946 to 1956. In the 1950s, *AWW* was enormously popular, being read by one in four Australian homes and having the largest circulation per head of population of any women's magazine in the world. It represented everyday Australia during the years of radical social change following World War II. The magazine regularly provided coverage of issues that 'packaged' femininity, and addressed ideals that constituted the 'Australian way of life' that was central to post-war attempts to 'redefine' the nation (Sheridan et al. 2001, iv). Above all, the magazine offered women both advice on managing their domestic lives, and images and stories to furnish their dreams.

As part of the research method for this case study, a limited number of issues of the front covers of the monthly *AHG* and *AHB* magazines taken from 1946 and from 1949 to 1952 were extracted and analysed. Only the front covers of the home magazines were examined because the most visible advertisement is the cover of a magazine (Croteau 2003, 188). Thus, it was believed that the imperative nature of the ideal ‘modern’ home could be readily and easily identified by referring to the cover. One feature article taken from the 1950 September issue of *AHG*, along with some advertisements taken from inside *AHB* and *AWW* from 1950 to 1952, were also analysed. This chapter relies on these advertisements to demonstrate how modernity was projected through media’s representations of the home.

As Greig (1995b, 159) contends, Australian home magazines performed a didactic role through introducing Australians to modernist concepts and ideas on design. In this sense, they seemed to not only reflect, but also dictate, the public’s tastes and desire for an idealised Australian post-war home. Seen from these perspectives, it is an obvious choice to examine these home magazines for aspects of the imperative nature of the myth that encapsulated modern living, which, due to its “buttonholing character”, seems to exist quite independently, innocently and naturally’ (Barthes 1973, 125). In examining the front covers of the home magazines, the intent was to identify the word ‘modern’ or any images associated with the hype of modernity that was used to catch the reader’s eye. For, as Greig (1995b, 14) concedes with reference to the post-war years, the word ‘modern’ had always been a powerful phrase for the advertising industry and, by 1952 until the mid- to late 1950s, it had assumed an unprecedented prominence (Greig 1995b, 14).

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*AHB* was first published in 1946. *AHB* and *AWW* were two popular Australian home magazines identified as ‘major agents of consumer faith’ at this time, according to an analysis of the performance of home magazines during the period of post-war consumerism (Blackburn, cited in Greig 1995b, 2). *AHB* developed a format in which most articles and all advertisements were directed to promoting products that embellished the home. The message carried throughout the magazine was that a successful marriage was based on the purchase of a new range of consumer durables (Blackburn, cited in Greig 1995b, 2).

### *Objects of study*

Based on the results drawn from extracting 20 monthly publications of *AHG* from 1949 to 1952, the word 'modern' appeared on the front covers of the magazine in about one-third of the data collected. The term was usually used to refer to the spatial living and content of the home, such as, 'Modernise your Bedroom' (*AHG* 1949a) and 'How to Build and Furnish a Modern Small Home' (*AHG* 1949b), yet it could also be used for living subjects, such as, 'Furniture for Young Moderns' (*AHG* 1950c) (see Figure 11). The target audiences were usually young couples or families looking to begin building, renovating or owning a home. Three examples of covers are presented below.



Figure 11: Front covers of *AHG* from the late 1940s to early 1950s.  
Source: Left—*AHG* 1949a; middle—*AHG* 1949b; right—*AHG* 1950c.

In the results drawn from examining the covers of the 12 monthly issues of *AHB* in 1946, the word 'modern' did not appear on any of the covers of these 12 issues. However, in one issue of *AHB*, the kitchen was the focus of the cover. On this cover, one immediately notices the contrast of pre-war conservatism with the modern outlook in the image of the two kitchens appearing directly on top of the other. The kitchen at the top depicts the traditional, Victorian, cluttered-looking kitchen of the past, while the one below depicts a streamlined, open-planned kitchen. The line of text below the image states, 'Kitchens of Tomorrow' (*AHB* 1946). By analysing this image, it is clear that, by the late 1940s, it was believed that traditional housing solutions were inadequate, given the strains of the post-war crisis. The

image suggests that the old, untidy, cluttered and enclosed kitchen had become a thing of the past. By this time, it was clear that modernist concepts—such as light, convenience, streamlined efficiency and open-planning design—were rising to meet the post-war aspirations, as *AHB* helped dictate and transform the tastes of the nation. The image seen on the front cover of *AHB* is presented below in Figure 12.

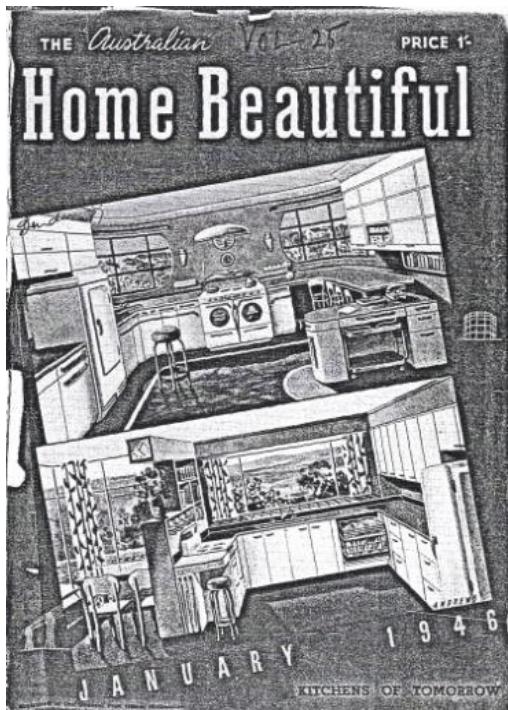


Figure 12: A front cover of *AHB* from the late 1940s.

Source: *AHB* 1946.

One advertisement drawn from *AWW*—entitled, ‘Bringing You Better Living’ (*AWW* 1951) (Figure 13) depicts a happy looking housewife who is seemingly relieved of difficult, tedious work due to a range of whitegoods—a food mixer, automatic washing machine and refrigerator. The print underneath the image reads:

Happy the husband who enjoys the restful atmosphere of an easily run home. Happy the wife who can run such a home—whose day is not a weary round of chores, who can find time to relax, see her friends and think of herself ... By taking hard work off the housewife’s hands and providing better living for the family, English Electric RITEMP appliances contribute to the happiness and, incidentally, the economic running of the whole household (*AWW* 1951).

Efficiency in the home was the topic of many advertisements and writings during the 1950s. As the above quotation suggests, the kitchen was particularly seen as a space well suited to promote such virtues.



Figure 13: The happy looking ‘housewife’ in AWW.  
Source: AWW 1951.

Similarly, in another example taken from a secondary source, an advertisement from *AHB* focuses on promoting and elevating the ‘modern’ status of the kitchen. The image reads, ‘Fitted kitchen is a joy to behold ... sparkling with cleanliness and modernity’ (Oliver 1999, 96) (see Figure 14).



**"fitted kitchen is a joy to behold...  
sparkling with cleanliness and modernity"**

Figure 14: An advertisement from *AHB* in the 1950s reads, 'Fitted kitchen is a joy to behold ... sparkling with cleanliness and modernity'.

Source: Oliver 1999, 96.

In another *AHB* advertisement also taken from a secondary source, 'Sunshine Kitchens' was promoted as leading the trend against filth. The image represents the ideal modern kitchen as a 'laboratory of the Home', to which was added:

Happily the old untidy workshop kitchen belongs to a past age ... unsightly, stained, chipped sinks have given place to gleaming stainless steel fitments of exceeding beauty, while shelves and hooks are replaced by uniform banks of genuine 'Sunshine' cabinets, hygienic and proof against dust, insects and vermin (Oliver 1999, 98).

The above quotation indicates that virtues of cleanliness and hygiene were also vigorously promoted. Further, as the new open-plan houses of the 1950s gained acceptance, this increasingly put the kitchen in the spotlight of many home advertisements.

### ***Analysis and discussion***

Figures 12, 13 and 14 clearly indicate that, in the years leading to the 1950s, the call for a 'clean, modern, streamlined work-saving kitchen' became a 'normal' and popular theme of many household advertisements.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>31</sup> The reference to a streamlined kitchen is significant because it was through the increasingly irresistible appeal of improved facilities that a proportion of the American public was eventually won over to the idea of the streamlined and fully 'Contemporary' house. The desirability of the 'Contemporary' kitchen partly accounted for the growing popularity in the 1950s of the 'Contemporary' house, both in the US and elsewhere. Further, it was undoubtedly the attraction of the American dream kitchen—with its Formica-topped built-in fitted units, generously proportioned fridge, and wealth of

Adding to this image was the ‘modern’ housewife, who was called on to ‘cut down her daily indoor itinerary, reduce the time now taken up by pacing to and fro, [so that] her working week [can shrink] without controversy or impassioned argument’ (Oliver 1999, 69). Moreover, there was the notion that the kitchen needed decorating—that one needed to make choices concerning the cupboard fascia, sinks, bench surfaces, flooring and wall colours. As another source states, ‘it had to be turned into a pretty room in which the woman of the house would be happy to spend a great deal of her time’ (Oliver 1999, 83). Further, the ‘modern’ housewife was encouraged to equip her kitchen with dozens of new appliances and gadgets.

A typical 1950s advertisement, such as that in Figure 13, would naturally suggest that women—specifically housewives—as represented in the media, were liberated by the machine age. The advertisement also suggests that, underneath the layer of myth that drove people to believe that they must have certain items in order to have a good life, lies another myth that caused the uprising of the machine age in order to cater and provide for a more functional, fully equipped and easily run home. Indeed, as the advertisement in Figure 13 shows, with the introduction of new technology that came with the changing shape and functional arrangement of the kitchen—especially with the advent of ‘consumer society’ after World War II, it was widely believed that the burden of housework could be lightened by labour-saving appliances. In addition, it was believed that the health of women would be improved by freeing them from ‘their continuous long hours of domestic work’ (Reiger 1985, 54).

However, while this may have seemed natural and normal at that time, it was far from being the reality. The reality is highlighted by Frederick (cited in Heckman 2008, 35) as she describes the shortfalls of the advent and advance of electrical appliances in the early 1950s American home:

Other electrical operated equipment, such as the vacuum cleaner, washer and dishwasher, will replace a large share of the work usually done by a permanent servant. Indeed, it may be said, that ‘the one way out’ of the servant problem in the future is the much wider use of power machinery in the home. The servantless household will have to be more of a mechanical household, where every possible

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labour-saving electrical gadgets—that made many Europeans (and Australians) so keen to emulate the American style (Jackson 1994, 43).

purely manual task is done by arms of steel and knuckles of copper ... And in the future it is believed that such machinery will be far more unified than at present. That is, instead of such small devices made by different firms and bought separately, there should be a larger installation or 'system' (scientifically) planned for a specific kitchen, with the various pieces related to one another.

In the above quotation, Frederick correctly forecasts an increase in the number of appliances and their widespread use, and a corresponding decline in the use of domestic servants. However, this study argues that the concept of liberation is nothing more than a mindset or 'modern' myth by which people choose to live. In fact, women were no more 'liberated' in the 1950s than they were in the Victorian era, before the introduction of new technology. Commenting on the fallacy that was inherent in the modern ideal of the mechanical servant, Forty (1986, 214) similarly states that:

The myth of the mechanical servant furnished people who had never employed a servant, and were never likely to, with the illusion of a substitute at least as good as a servant of flesh and blood. It allowed housewives to believe that what they found themselves doing was not really work at all.

In light of the above quotation, despite the sudden availability and seemingly 'convenient' technological kitchen appliances and gadgets in the mid-twentieth century, it is still possible to perceive women of the 1950s as equally, if not even more, bounded to the domestic arenas of the home as the women of the not-so-distant Victorian era. The only difference was that, in the Victorian era, human servants had been their fundamental source of aid, whereas, in the 'modern' era, they were replaced by mechanical servants. Forty (1986, 215) accentuates this in the quotation below:

In reality, nobody could have been entirely taken up by the idea that washing machines or vacuum cleaners were really substitutes for servants, but the illusion helped quell any uneasiness that people might have felt about their status in society and made it possible for almost all housewives, of all classes, to believe that they were the successors to the servant-employed mistress of the nineteenth century house.

This shows that underlying the layer of the 'modern' ideal that sees women being liberated from the burden of housework is a reality that renders the Victorian domestic ideal to be far from anachronistic. In other words, the belief that the burden of housework could be lightened by labour-saving

appliances, freeing many women from ‘their continuous long hours of domestic work’ was an ideality by which people chose to live. This ideality was especially potent in the 1950s.

Building on this, the 1950s in Australia is certainly remembered as the beginning of a new, exciting consumerist era, as captured in the following quotation:

It is exciting to look back on the period as a time when there were new things to buy and money to buy them with. The kind of life made possible by the Holden, nylons, and the baby foods was eagerly accepted by a generation brought up on the frugality of the Depression ... The Laminex table complete with chrome and plastic chairs brought a modern touch to every home, and the old scrubbed pine kitchen table was consigned to the shed ... So seductive was the memory of the first bite of that apple that often the fifties is remembered only as a parade of consumer items (Lees & Senyard 1987).

The advent of ‘consumer society’ in the period after World War II was a massive change that involved a revolution in mass production and marketing, and the social construction of a consumerist ‘ethic’ of spending, which had significant effects on domestic life. Women were represented as the major shapers of this process at the household level, and were the primary targets of the market researchers and advertisers whose task it was to persuade them to spend, rather than save, and to spend on new items that were previously considered luxury goods, such as washing machines and other consumer durables.

This ‘fairytale of bringing modern décor to the most barren interior’ (Lees & Senyard 1987, 60) was now within the scope of even modest budgets by buying things new and readymade. ‘Modern’ and ‘bright’ were highly desirable qualities. ‘Modern’ was associated with the growing availability of vacuum cleaners, good stoves, fridges, washing machines and so forth. ‘Bright’ emphasised letting in natural light, as well as being a reference to preferred colour schemes that could be achieved with new ranges of house paints (Sheridan et al. 2001, 82).

Even though responses to mass production and consumerism were mixed, opposition was mainly based on criticisms of materialism; however, these were swept aside by the media (Lees & Senyard 1987, 2). In the 1950s, the ‘modern’ housewife was rigorously promoted, identified and

targeted in new ways as the principal consumer on behalf of the household. In this process, both working class and middle-class women became not only objects of consumer ideology, but also its principal agents because they had to learn to spend, rather than save, and to buy new products, rather than make their equivalent at home (Sheridan et al. 2001, 5). In this context, a ‘modern’ way of living not only meant adequate housing, energy supplies, transport and community services. It also meant that owning a home and a car must be the ‘first on the shopping list’ (Lees & Senyard 1987). The post-war suburban home became a site of intense modernisation characterised by the media’s representations of the ‘modern’ family, ‘modern’ products and ‘modern’ housewife—all of which were especially evident in the kitchen.

Following the wide acceptance of open-plan living in the 1950s, and with the growing trend from the modernist idea that it was no longer considered necessary to erect permanent physical barriers between every room, the public’s perception of the open-plan, efficient and hygienic ‘modern’ kitchen suddenly became part of a general fascination. The ‘modern’ kitchen and its representations became one of the most common themes in the Australian popular press. These representations signified the kitchen as ‘The Most Important Room’ (*AHB* 1951, 47) (see Figure 15) and stated that, ‘Gone are the days of kitchen drudgery … [the kitchen is] now a room pleasant and easy to work in’ (Oliver 1999, 68) (see Figure 16).

Interestingly, it is worth noting that, in the increasingly servant-scarce society of half a century earlier, prominent progressive architect, Sulman (cited in Brown 2000, 114), was already advocating removing the division between kitchen and dining room. He promoted this as a challenge to ‘the intense conservatism of the average middle class man, and especially woman’, since servants were often associated with dark passages, draughty rooms and dirty kitchens (Brown 2000, 119).

As the advertisements from the findings suggest (see Figures 11, 12, 13 and 14), images or representations of the modern home and kitchen create an ‘already-ness’ that modernity and the ideal post-war home were ‘consumed in actual fact’ (Barthes, 1973, 121). However, to a myth decoder, the image of ‘modern’ is merely a type of speech or value system that is recognised as a concept or a familiarity proceeding from history and from

myth (Barthes 1979, 10). In the eyes of the mythical consumer, the intention of the concept can remain manifest without appearing to have an interest in the matter. What causes mythical speech to be uttered is perfectly explicit, but is immediately frozen into something natural. It is not read as a motive, but as a reason. According to Barthes's (1973, 109) definition, myth is 'a mode of signification, a form [to which one must] assign ... historical limits, conditions of use, and reintroduce society into it'.

By reintroducing society to the myths of the modern kitchen, one is inevitably faced with three key questions:

- how, in the collective dream of the post-war modern home, the kitchen became visible
- how domestic values, such as cleanliness, hygiene and efficiency, became a top priority
- how the 'modern housewife' became a target to promote such values.

The next section tries to decode these myths by discerning how political and historical situations and ideological alignments are grounded in the realm of the natural.



## THE MOST IMPORTANT ROOM

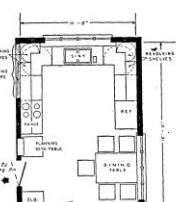
AMERICAN architects are treating the kitchen as the most important room in the house. They regard it as the most important room because it is the place to prevent household drudgery. American firms will plan individual kitchens, and show how their appliances work. Cupboards, stoves and sinks are just the right height, so you won't have to bend over to reach them with hands and knees. Long cupboards give you room to stand behind them, and if they are covered with brightly colored plastic, which is virtually impossible to stain, you can wash them away, for if you wished you could hose the place down.

Architects also advise the people that carpenters learnt years ago: the parts of your kitchen should be planned so that as many of them as possible are in plain view. This means that the cupboard and everything a whole cupboard just to find that wretched lid.

A kitchen expert discovered that work in a family kitchen takes about 80 minutes. So, he suggested a place for chairs, a in a rack on the wall like screw-down plates, and a deep, low seat. He also suggested a broad cupboard with all the utensils hanging free by chains from the top.

Tumblers and other mugs are in almost constant use. A kitchen expert suggested that you should buy a cupboard. Every time you set up the equipment it is necessary to open the door. This was a definite trouble solved the problem by building a little garage in the kitchen. You can get a garage door which opens from the inside. When you want to get in, all you have to do is slide it straight.

Please turn to page 47



*The U.S. Bureau of Human Nutrition and Home Economics evolved this small kitchen featured without the plan, in the April, 1950, issue.*

Figure15: The kitchen as the most important room in *AHB*.  
Source: *AHB* 1951, 47.

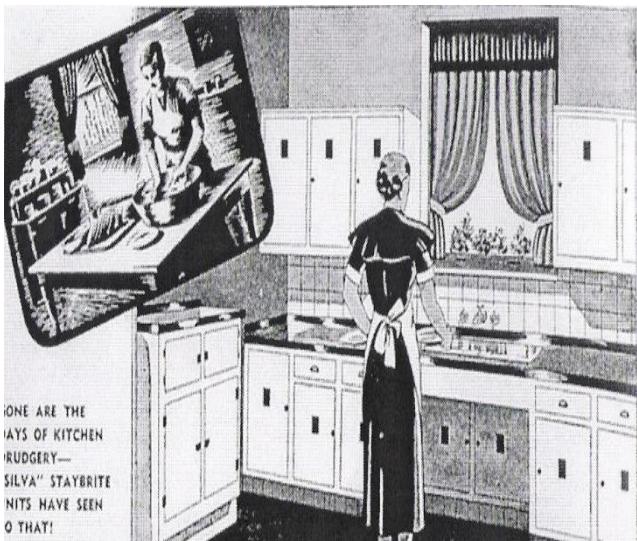


Figure 16: An advertisement from the 1950s reading, ‘Gone are the days of kitchen drudgery ... [it is] now a room pleasant and easy to work in’.

Source: Oliver 1999, 68.

### ***Reading the ‘modern’ home myth***

As demonstrated earlier, it was not until after the war that the media, retailers and professional groups took advantage of the public’s hunger for adequate shelter by involving themselves closely in housing provision (Greig 1995b, 159). The underlying argument of this chapter is anchored on the observation that, during the 1950s, the media was able to perpetuate a set of myths within which the sociocultural values and ideologies of modernism were embedded. This resulted because places such as Perth were undergoing a time of growth and restructuring of the economy and workforce, and post-war shortages of goods and services, particularly housing, were followed by an unprecedented growth in consumerism and home ownership.

Images in the media spread quickly during the post-war years, signifying the woman as the ‘modern’ housewife, whose primary duty was to serve in the home—especially in the kitchen. By analysing advertisements from Barthes’s perspective, the images reveal a second, more elaborate, cultural message or meaning. This message or meaning is intricately linked to a second set of signifieds: a broad, ideological theme about the division between home and work as being an integral part of capitalist industrial development, which causes the natural division of labour, as discussed in Chapter One. However, herein lies the problem: what has been ‘naturalised’

when the modern housewife is mythologised in these images is the whole set of ideology that justified a layer of *hidden* history that yields the separation of home and workplace, and bestows a new significance on the sexual division of labour.

Just like the case of the ‘modern’ housewife, the ‘modern’ kitchen is also able to mythologise within a set of ideologies that stemmed from a hidden history that led to the wide acceptance of the bright, space-saving and streamlined design of the 1950s. However, it is curious that it became ‘natural’ and ‘went without saying’ that the kitchen would be predominantly run by women, or, more typically, a willing and contented housewife. It is interesting that it was unnecessary to question the removal of permanent physical barriers between every room. Within myth, things forget that they once were made, but are still able to give ‘an historical intension, a natural justification’ to make ‘contingency appear eternal’ (Barthes 1973, 143).

From this angle, one sees how myth reduces the world to a set of essences, and reduces social interaction to so many individual transactions. Thus, myth is not just a message, but is a message that is political by depoliticising. It turns history into essence and culture into nature, and obscures the role of human beings in producing the structures they inhibit, thereby reducing people’s capacity to change these structures (Moriarty 1991, 28).

### *Origins of the ‘modern’ kitchen and housewife myth*

As emphasised in the chapter introduction and previously demonstrated by providing a broad historical overview of the origins of the Western home myth in the previous chapter (see Chapter One), there is no reason that the ‘modern’ home should be seen as ‘natural’. The same can be said for the widely accepted popularity and ongoing focus of the kitchen in the post-war years (see Figures 12, 13, 14 and 15). The visibility of the kitchen and its broader social and cultural meaning could be said to be linked to the layout of an open-planning modern interior—an idea that began to take hold during the 1930s and became standard practice during the 1950s (Jackson 1994, 19).

In the pre-war era, the kitchen was not regarded as the heart of the home; instead, it was placed near the dining room, perhaps connected to it via a serving hatch (Oliver 1999, 81). In fact, the Australian kitchen of the early 1800s was rarely a special purpose room, except in the homes of the wealthy (Webber 2000, 86). Moreover, research indicates that a famous homestead, the Lanyon Homestead, built near Canberra in the 1850s, had all bathing, cooking and washing facilities attached to it via a walkway or verandah (Vulker 1989, 54). The kitchen in the mid-nineteenth century sometimes served as a general living space, bathroom, classroom and bedroom. With little equipment, no running water and simple one-pot cooking, there was no need for a designated kitchen. Further, within the household economy, cooking was low on the hierarchy of work compared to more obviously productive tasks, such as spinning, weaving and dairying. Simple one-pot meals were prepared over an open fire, and, if baking was undertaken, it was done in a brick oven (Webber 2000, 87).

The equipment of Australian kitchens in the first decades of settlement was a modest, portable, basic collection of tools that had remained largely unchanged from those found in Europe in the twelfth century, when chimneys (and fireplaces set into the wall) had begun to replace a round hearth in the centre of the room (Rybczynski 1988, 77). A significant change occurred with the introduction of the stove, with its closed oven and hidden fire, since the general-purpose, open fireplace normally used by the entire household—not only for cooking, but for warmth, light and a hearth to sit around—had been replaced. The introduction of the stove initiated the process of room specialisation. This change challenged the ideal image of the Victorian family because the hearth was the heart of the Victorian home. Thus, the replacement of the open fire with such an obviously industrial product challenged the domestic ideal of the home as being removed from industry, and of the family gathered harmoniously around the home's hearth (Webber 2000, 87).

As the allocation of rooms became more specialised in the course of the nineteenth century, the dining room was no exception. Dinning assumed a new importance, and the image of the family gathered before a cheerful fire was increasingly replaced by a more formal portrait of them seated at the

table. In the eighteenth century, dining had been a casual activity that often occurred outside the home, while, during the 1800s, it became far more ritualised and, as such, a symbol of family life (Webber 2000, 89).

From an architectural perspective, many kitchens in the 1950s adopted modernist design simply because it was an expression of a set of highly valued architectural design criteria, advocating principles such as open-plan design, efficiency, hygiene and functionality in the post-war years, all of which were linked to the tenets of the twentieth-century European Modern Movement (see Chapter One). From a social perspective, the architectural design was attributed to a set of aesthetic and moral ideal principles that developed in mid-nineteenth-century England, where reformers began to advocate a design that was simple, economical and utilitarian as an antidote to the elaborate decoration in historic styles that the industrial revolution had made possible (Marcus 1998, 9). Globally speaking, the social change in the twentieth century, which led to the growth of the servantless middle class, was one factor that caused the kitchen to receive far more attention than it had before. Advocating efficiency can be seen to acknowledge this change, as domestic help was harder to attain than it had been, and the middle-class housewife was required to participate more in the manual work of the house. The kitchen subsequently came to be the focus of the home, since more time was spent in the kitchen (Brine 1993; Forty 1986; Jackson 1994; Rybczynski 1986).

Speaking from a more local perspective, by the late 1920s and 1930s, Australian architects had increasingly claimed the right to shape the average Australian home, although the role of builders and developers continued to be important (Reiger 1985, 51). As architecture was becoming more firmly established as a profession, a wider role was carved out for this new breed of specialists, and the domestic market was an obvious target. Although the search for the most suitable design for ‘the Australian house’ had been going since the nineteenth century, architects pursued it with special vigour in the interwar period, increasingly linking it to advice on domestic management. It was in their emphasis on hygiene and on rational, scientific and (most importantly) functional planning that the architects echoed and applied the sentiment of others—particularly the domestic economy advocates.

As Reiger (1985, 52) stresses, it was in the planning of rooms—most importantly the kitchen and dining areas—that architects supported the ideas of the domestic economists. Further, an architect in the *Real Property Annual* of 1917 (Alsop, cited in Reiger 1985, 52) stated that, ‘In short, a kitchen should be scientifically planned and treated as a laboratory which in fact it is’. As such, it became clear in the post-war years why the kitchen would become the highlight of attention—it was readily acknowledged that the demise of domestic servants necessitated a more functional arrangement of working areas for the middle-class housewife.

An explanation for why the kitchen was being advertised and promoted as the core of the house (see Figure 15) could be that, by the twentieth century, literature about the home and preoccupations with motherhood, children and hygiene had replaced instructions about needlework and Christian virtues. Forty (1986, 114) argues that, in practice, this was signified by a reversal of roles between the drawing room and kitchen as the core of the house. Further, the spread of industrialisation and commodity production, with its advertising and mass media, heralded a new style of consumerist culture associated with advanced industrial capitalism. In Australia, the first waves of this culture were discernible in the interwar years, but the major development occurred after World War II. By the 1950s, the promotion of the kitchen and bathroom as spaces of hygiene and cleanliness had been proliferated by the development of mass media and advertising, which was strongly linked to a growing emphasis on consumption during the twentieth century, created by the shift from industrial to advanced capitalism.

One might associate the ‘happy housewife’ myth to an ideological theme that also acknowledges what Brown (2000, 118) refers to as the ‘servant problem’ in the houses of England and the US for the more affluent after World War I. Regarding Australia, Reiger (1985, 20) states that a shortage of servants, even by the late nineteenth century, meant that most middle-class women were required to participate more in the manual work of the house. Australian women were swiftly encouraged to:

manage the household smoothly and not to worry about the husband with domestic trifles, as he had the cares of the business world on his shoulders; rather, [the women] were to turn the home into a place of refreshment and peace (Reiger 1985, 38).

The disparity between the roles of women of different classes was further reduced as the dominance of the ideology of woman as 'housewife' increased (Reiger 1985, 50). This trend continued after World War II, when the female head of the household often completed the housework, instead of employing a maid. When it became imperative for housework to be not only manageable, but also minimal, due to the scarcity of servants, the importance of efficient household management was precipitated by a great faith in the advantages of applying modern technology (Reiger 1985, 33). Regarding the myth of hygiene and cleanliness, this was certainly determined by a history that shows how such domestic values became a top priority. The myth could have been instigated by the fact that there was a time during which women's domestic role was threatened by their acquaintance with the outside world.

From a sociological perspective, Reiger's (1985, 40) research indicates that the years around the turn of the century and the 1920s and 1930s in particular were marked by a discussion of the 'woman's sphere'. In the latter period, there was a conservative reaction against the feminist stress on women's contribution to the public world. For example, whereas the Australian *New Idea* in the early 1900s carried a series of significant articles on women's work outside the home and interviews with prominent women, the domestic sphere was promoted more heavily than before by its successor, the *Everlady's Journal* in the 1930s.

Throughout the period, fears were expressed that factory and shop work, in particular, would make women unfit for the requirements of marriage and motherhood. It was frequently asserted that housewifery was the job most suited to the feminine nature. The perceived threat to women's domestic role presented by their acquaintance with the outside world led to a variety of 'remedies' being proposed. While the dominant ideology stressed woman's natural homemaking capacity, the principles of the emerging domestic economy movement emphasised modern scientific housewifery

and the need to teach women domestic skills. As in the US, the roots of this development in Australia lay in several health reform campaigns in the late nineteenth century (Reiger 1985, 40).

Formed in Melbourne in 1876, the attempt to improve public health was exemplified by the activities of the Australian Health Society. The society's members were engaged in an effort to reform the traditional role of women and were the main bearers of the earliest message of domestic science to Victoria. The society claimed that teaching hygiene in schools was important, but contended that the home was where sanitary habits had to be learnt, 'Hence its endeavors to secure the co-operation of the home-ruler, be she mother, wife or daughter, by interesting her personally in the work of health reform' (Australian Health Society, cited in Reiger 1985, 41).

Although working-class women were a prime target for their efforts, the health reformers of the late nineteenth century also saw themselves as engaged in a broad task of health education. The issues in which they were interested were various, including practical matters of diet and hygienic clothing, the management of infectious disease, the importance of fresh air and sunlight in the home, and drainage and garbage disposal problems. These were also viewed as moral concerns, and many attempts to transform the material conditions of the urban household were presented in a strong ideological message that 'cleanliness equates to holiness, which equates to citizenship' (Reiger 1985, 41–42).

Although the home was often marked as a woman's sphere, Brown (2000, 113) argues that the comfort of men emerged as central to the meaning of home by the end of the nineteenth century. This is supported by 'Mrs Beeton's' (Beeton & Aronson, cited in Brown 2000, 113) trusted household manual, lectured from 1861 onwards:

men are so well served out of doors—at clubs, hotels and restaurants—that to compete with the attractions of these places, the mistress must be thoroughly acquainted with the theory and practice of cookery, as well as the arts of making and keeping a comfortable home.

By 1900, 'Mrs Aronson' (Beeton & Aronson, cited in Brown 2000, 113) was advising in *Twentieth Century Cooking and Home Decoration* that the 'mistress' must take special care to provide congeniality for the 'sterner sex'.

In 1885, the *Australian Housewives Manual* recommended that a wife should build her domain out from the stove and around a regime of ‘self-denial’.

Further, it was stated that:

Her kitchen should be run so that, if the house lacked a dining room, she might still be capable of serving a meal neatly in the sitting room, then clear it away, wash up, and return to her husband’s side before he had finished his first pipe: she might then talk gently to him, or quietly sew, according to his mood (Beeton & Aronson, cited in Brown 2000, 113).

Seen in the above contexts, Webber (2000, 90) asserts that the success of the cookbook also provided a clear indication of the importance of the kitchen in family life. By reading through nineteenth-century domestic guides, Webber argues that it is surprising how often reference was made to the close links between a well-fed man and a happy home. If women wished to preserve their financial and emotional security, they must ensure that their households were well run and their meals worth coming home to. Concomitantly, it follows that the ‘modern’ kitchen in the 1950s should not only be ‘fun’ to work in, but also a place where the woman of the house should be ‘happy to spend a great deal of her time’ (Oliver 1999, 83). The image of the happy housewife thus conveys the significance of a new familial ideology—the ‘modern’ home as both a sanctuary and a woman’s sphere. This ideology is driven by the myth of a gendered division of labour and the servantless, aspiring, middle-class housewife.

The analysis and discussion thus far have demonstrated ways in which the normative ideals and images of the home associated with virtues such as hygiene, efficiency and the showcase of the ‘happy housewife’ manifested into idealisations and myths in the popular press of the 1950s. Moreover, this discussion has attempted to demystify these idealisations by providing a brief historical account of how such virtues came into existence as they became enmeshed with the modern conception of the ideal home. In other words, this discussion has provided both a semiological and ideological interpretation of the ‘modern’ home in order to extrapolate a ‘material existence’ (in Althusser’s (1971) sense) that led to the myth of modernity or ‘modern’ living. It is important to emphasise here that, in doing so, the researcher has participated in the role of a myth consumer (please see the

section ‘How a mythical speech is read’ later in this chapter for further explanation on how a myth is received).

### ***Myth and ideology: The modern home as a depoliticised speech***

Referring again to Figure 13, it would be ‘natural’ to look at the picture of the seemingly happy housewife and immediately believe that the burden of housework could be lightened by labour-saving appliances. This is because, being a myth consumer, one takes the signification for a system of facts. While myth should have been read as a semiological system, it is read here as a factual system. As Barthes (1973, 129) stresses, the principle of myth is that it transforms history into nature. Since myth is speech justified in excess, in the eyes of the mythical consumer, the mythical speech is immediately frozen into something natural—it is not read as a motive, but as a reason.

To further understand how myth is a depoliticised speech, this study again deliberates the historical significance that centres around the ‘modern’ home ideal. It is useful to understand first that the contrast between private life and work life, as being embedded in the very structure of modern cities and schedules, yielded a new set of ideology that justified the gender division between breadwinners on the one hand, and caretakers on the other (Aries, Prost & Vincent 1992, 27).<sup>32</sup>

This ideology is articulated in terms of gender, space, work and power. Aries, Prost and Vincent (1992, 29–30) assert that there was a time in history when the gender division of labour was not perceived as involving inequality or subjugation. Household chores were not despised because men and women witnessed each other doing tiring work. Men did their share of household chores, such as chopping firewood, making utensils and building

<sup>32</sup> It is worth noting here that it is incorrect to say that myths are ideological and that ideologies are the same as myths. Rather, the criticism of myths could be seen to be ideological. This criticism becomes ideological when it is recognised that the loss in myth of historical reality is a loss of ‘political reality’ (Barthes 1973, 143)—using this term to describe ‘the whole of human relations in their real, social structure; in their power of making the world’ (Barthes 1973, 143). This loss of political reality in myth is further reiterated when Barthes (1973, 142–143) describes that, in passing from history to nature, myth has turned reality inside out, emptied reality of history and filled it with nature, and removed from things their human meaning in order to make them signify a human insignificance (Bathes 1973, 142–143). As Barthes (1973, 143) states, ‘it [myth] abolishes the complexity of human acts ... does away with all didactics, with any going back beyond what is visible’.

furniture in order to avoid buying the equivalent in the marketplace. However, when homes and workplaces became distinct places, marital equality ended and women became servants. The stereotype of the man sitting in his armchair and reading the newspaper while his wife works assumes that the husband is the one who ‘comes home from work’—that is, who works outside the home. Work for hire—man’s work—takes on a new dignity, while the woman who stays home becomes her husband’s domestic servant. It is no longer of central importance that she works at home, but that she works for someone’s benefit. In this sense, the separation of home and workplace bestows a new significance on the gender division of labour—it introduces into marriage a master–servant relationship that was characteristic of the home of the bourgeoisie of an earlier period.

Tosh (cited in Heynen & Baydar 2005, 8) also concedes that, in early Victorian England, the separation between work and home first became a reality for members of the middle class and professional men. These people appreciated home primarily as a well-deserved refuge for the breadwinner. Gradually, the home became the hallowed sphere of the wife and children, which coincided with a growing cult of motherhood and increasing focus on the child as the centre of family life.

The ideology that understood the home to be a place for anything but work is believed to have begun around the early nineteenth century, when, as Benjamin (1999, 19) observes, ‘the private individual makes his entry on the scene of history at the moment that, for the first time, the home becomes opposed to his place of work’. This ideology prescribes rather precise norms about the essential requirements of family life; needs of children; proper ways to arrange food, clothes and furniture; care of body and health; best ways to balance work, leisure and family activities; and need for cleanliness and hygiene. The cultivation of such norms designated a way of life and standard of living that eventually assimilated architectural ideals into the interior organisation and spatial arrangements of the home and housing design.

For example, Forty’s (1986) research premised preoccupations with motherhood, children and hygiene that replaced instructions about needlework and Christian virtues as being significant factors that contributed

to the reversal of roles of the Victorian drawing room and kitchen as the core of the house. Through the reverberations of such norms and ideas about family life, an increasing emphasis on separating the public world of work from the private domain of home was ‘thought also to be a significant development of the urban family households in which most Australians lived during the period between 1880 and World War Two’ (Reiger 1985, 32).

### *How a mythical speech is read*

Scrutinising an advertisement inside an *AHG* enables illustration of an example of a mythical speech from the 1950s. The headline reads, ‘Don’t Be Afraid to Be Different’ (Clifford 1950) (see Figure 17). Accompanying this statement are two sets of sketches, arranged side by side and showing the entire layout of two houses’ interiors and landscape planning, as well as an artist’s impression of the projected three-dimensional sketches of the front and back view elevation of both homes. Also included in these two sketches are the front and backyards. A smaller insert at the bottom of the page reads, ‘Here on this page are two examples of today’s homes, one an example of good planning and the other an outcrop of the bad planning of the past’ (Clifford 1950).

Whether the reader is aware of it, mythical speech is already implied in the meaning of the picture, in the benefits of the new beginning and modernity versus the old and conservative pre-war planning of the past. However, whether naively or not, one sees very well what it signifies. First, the statement signifies that not being ‘afraid to be different’ is not being afraid of the prestige of change. Hence, not being afraid of the prestige of change is to revel in the beliefs of modernity. Second, the two sets of three-dimensional sketches indicate to the reader two very contrasting sets of architectural planning. The home on the left has a well-kept front yard, solid brick fence and shrubby backyard with an old shed. Its design highlights the bad taste of the ‘Californian Bungalow’ and is interpreted to be a ‘Model-Somewhere-Around 1926’ (Greig 1995a, 9). It is described as a ‘nice house’ and is fully walled-in with skillion windows and a traditional pitched roof. The home on the right is unfenced, has a flat roof and is full of glass.

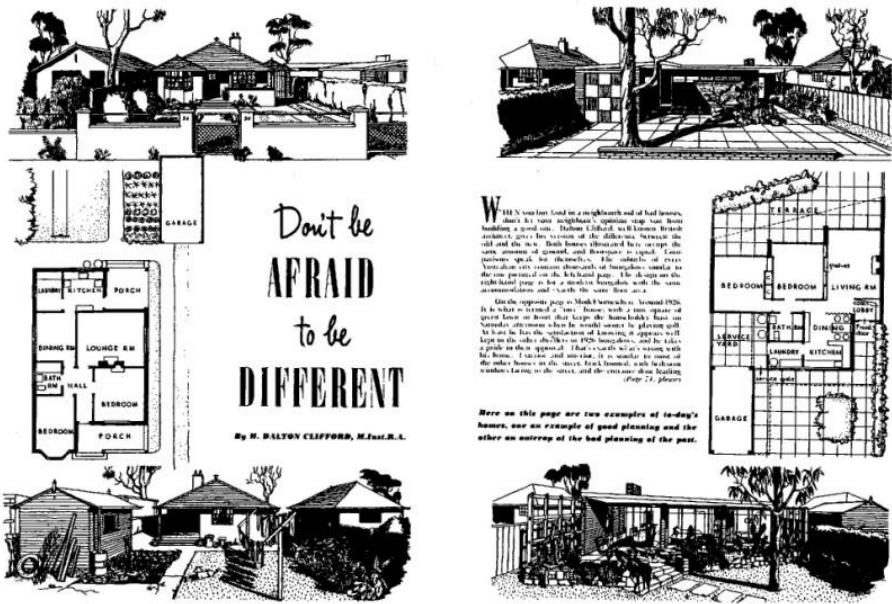


Figure 17: An advertisement from AHG in the 1950s reads, 'Don't Be Afraid to Be Different.'

Source: Clifford 1950.

Readers immediately associate the house on the right to be the ideal 'modern' home of the 1950s. Thus, they are again faced with a greater semiological system: there is a signifier that was already formed with a previous system (the planning of this house is open and spacious, whereas the other is rigid and enclosed); there is a signified (a purposeful mixture of progress, change and modernity); and the signified has made its presence throughout the signifier. Faced with this image, the reader is consumed by the 'modern' home myth and accepts it as normal and a fact. Concomitantly, he or she is impervious to the sins of the pre-war residential environment: the primacy of ornamentation, conservatism bred through familiarity, and thoughtless design that ignored function. All this suggests that the reader cannot help but feel subsumed into the myth as architectural modernism becomes ubiquitous and natural.

Barthes (1973, 127–31) explicitly states that there are at least three ways a myth can be received. Based on the advertisement just analysed, the points below are a summary of how myth is received:

1. How a myth is read hinges on the duplicity of the signifier. If one focuses on the empty signifier, and lets the concept fill the form of

the myth without ambiguity, one finds oneself before a simple system, where the signification becomes literal again: the open-plan and glass-walled house signifies Australian post-war architectural modernism. It is the symbol for it. *This type of focusing is, for example, that of the producer of myths—of the architectural journalist who starts with a concept and seeks a form for it.*

2. If one focuses on the full signifier, in which one clearly distinguishes the meaning and the form and consequently the distortion that one imposes on the other, one undoes the signification of the myth, and receives the latter as an imposture: the open-plan, glass-walled house becomes the alibi of Australian post-war architectural modernism. *This type of focusing is that of the mythologist—he or she deciphers the myth and he or she understands a distortion* (Barthes 1973, 128).
3. Finally, if one focuses on the mythical signifier as an inextricable whole made of meaning and form, one receives an ambiguous signification. *One responds to the constituting mechanism of myth—to its own dynamics. One becomes a consumer of myths.* The open-plan, glass-walled house is no longer an example or a symbol, and still less is an alibi; it is the very presence of Australian post-war architectural modernism.

Given the above, myth hides nothing and flaunts nothing—it distorts. Myth is neither a lie nor a confession—it is, as Barthes (1973, 129) states, an inflexion. Threatened with disappearance if it yields to either of the first two types of focusing, the myth gets out of this tight spot via a compromise. Since one is driven to either unveil or liquidate the concept, the elaboration of this second-order semiological system enables myth to escape the dilemma—it naturalises it. Thus, it is here that one reaches the very principle of myth: it transforms history into nature.

As such, what is removed is certainly not the cultural fact that Australia is in the midst of progress and change—since this is what must be actualised is its presence—but that it has transmuted the historical,

contingent and fabricated quality of architectural modernism into something that it materialises as natural and innocent. Moreover, the purpose of the headline, ‘Don’t Be Afraid to Be Different’, exhibits a contrast between post-war and pre-war house designs—efficiency and easy planning versus the inefficiency and cumbersomeness of walled-in and tucked-away living spaces and a kitchen that was once part of the Victorian era’s social universe. All these have been visibly captured in the plan drawing and sketches of the advertisement. Thus, the phenomenon of modernity and the ‘modern’ home is ‘naturalised’.

Therefore, in the eyes of the mythical consumer, the intention of the concept can remain manifest without appearing to have an interest in the matter. What causes mythical speech to be uttered is perfectly explicit, but is immediately frozen into something natural. It is not read as a motive, but as a reason. In contrast, the mythologist understands that myth is a value system. That is, everything happens as if the signifier gave a foundation to the signified. The myth exists from the precise moment when architectural modernism achieves the natural state. Myth is speech justified in excess. If the fully glazed house is read as a symbol purely of architectural modernism, the reality of the picture is immediately renounced.

As there are at least three ways of focusing the myth, Barthes (1973, 127) asked an essential question: how does one receive this particular myth today? For example, if the consumer in the 1950s does not see modernity in the Model 1950 house, or in the magazine covers and advertisements illustrated earlier, it was not worth weighing the latter with it. If the consumer does see it, the myth is nothing more than a cultural and economic proposition, honestly expressed. In other words, either the intention of the myth is too obscure to be efficacious, or the myth is too clear to be believed. The point is, whatever the dilemma, there should be no ambiguity contained in the myth. However, if one wishes to connect a mythical schema to a general history in order to explain how it corresponds to the general interests of a definite society—to pass from semiology to ideology—it is obviously at the level of the third type of focusing that one must place oneself. It is the consumer of myths who must reveal their essential function (Barthes 1973, 128).

One realises here that the idea of a myth is not exchangeable with ideology. However, in order for a myth to be consumed in reality, consumers must have placed themselves at the third type of focusing in order for the myth to appear ideological. What allows the reader to consume myth innocently is that he or she does not see it as a semiological system, but as an inductive one. Where there is only an equivalence, he or she sees a kind of causal process—the signifier and the signified have, in the consumer's eyes, a natural relationship. In other words, as Barthes (1973, 131) states, any semiological system is a system of values. The myth consumer takes the signification for a system of facts—myth is read as a factual system, when it is a semiological system.

However, with the above being said, the fact that it was hardly ever questioned why the kitchen suddenly came into the limelight of the media following the Australian post-war years, or why the happy housewife image, and themes of hygiene and efficiency made such frequent and popular appearances, constitute the drives behind the myth. The act of questioning would have negated the very existence and efficacy of the myth. This is supported by Barthes (1973, 122) when he states myth to be, 'at once stubborn, silently rooted there and garrulous'. To this end, one could say that the image of the happy housewife thus becomes transformed and 'naturalised' into a value system that 'raises housework above mere drudgery and makes the housewife as much a professional as her husband' (Webber 2000, 93).

Building on this from a local perspective, it is claimed that, in Perth, principles of modern architecture served as the dominant basis for housing design, and attracted and captivated a significant percentage of the public in the 1950s, who were persistently and steadily influenced by current architectural ideas through newspapers and housing journals (Richards 1997, 16). Housing aligned with the design principles of the Modern Movement, such as Perth's Empire Games Village, which compliantly reflected the technological and egalitarian modern ideals at the time (Neill & Lewi 2003). According to Richards (1997, 16), some architects and developers at this time were willing to go so far as to further reduce and simplify the profile of the front elevation of houses in newspaper

advertisements in an effort to sell their vision of the contemporary modern house. This was evident in a local newspaper's advertisement for the Hillcrest's village for senior citizens (see Figure 18).



Figure 18: Advertisement for Hillcrest's '£250,000 Village for Senior Citizens'.  
Source: *The West Australian* 1965a, 43.

Looking at the image in Figure 18, the mythologist cannot help but wonder why some developers and architects in the 1950s were willing to go so far as to reduce and simplify the profile of the front elevation of the houses in a deliberate attempt to make them look modern. There is clearly a problem in the way that the houses are represented, much in the same way that Barthes (1973, 129) finds it ethically objectionable to see history turning into nature. In the architects' and developers' deliberate attempt to make the houses look modern, what was left out—or deprived of the myth consumer at the very sight of that image—is the concept that is tied to the totality or ideology of the Modern Movement of architecture founded in Europe. Also left out are the cultural changes that accompanied this way of life, as well as the industrial and economic revolution that fuelled fundamental changes in households and discourses about the family and domesticity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Australia. Such is the character of myth. As Barthes (1973, 122) rationalises, 'it appears in a global fashion, it is a kind of nebula, the condensation, more or less hazy, of a certain kind of knowledge'. It is the way in which society accepts the signification of a naturalness that somehow 'dresses up' the representation of a reality that is

'undoubtedly determined by history' or society (or part of a value system) that Barthes (1973, 117–119) finds ethically objectionable.

Similarly, if the consumer views the Model 1950 house (see Figure 17) as a symbol purely of architectural modernism, one must renounce the reality of the picture—the picture discredits itself in the consumer's eyes when it becomes an instrument. Conversely, if one deciphers the two houses as an alibi of Australian post-war modernity of change and progress, one shatters the myth even more surely by the obviousness of its motivation. However, for the consumer, the outcome is different; everything happens as if the picture naturally conjured the concept—as if the signifier gave a foundation to the signified. The myth exists from the precise moment when architectural modernism achieves the natural state; myth is speech justified in excess.

Similarly, the imagination of the 'modern' home and kitchen, and the happy housewife of the 1950s did not require the myth consumer in the 1950s era to fill a rational, methodical and objective approach because the myth of modernity and the 'modern' home in the 1950s had firmly associated itself with the imagination of a better life. The meanings associated with these ideologies had become intricately packaged, transposed, interlaced and disguised under media's representations. Further, as established earlier (see Figures 11, 12, 13 and 14), the persuasiveness of images derives from the 'natural justification' of their purpose:

What the world supplies to myth is an historical reality, defined, even if this goes back quite a while, by the way in which men have produced or used it; what myth gives back in return is a natural image of this reality (Barthes 1973,142).

In the above quotation, Barthes (1973) emphasises that myth 'naturalises' speech, transmuting what is essentially cultural (historical, constructed and motivated) into something that it materialises as natural (trans-historical, innocent and factual). Myth's duplicity is thus located in its ability to 'naturalise' and make 'innocent' what is profoundly motivated. This leads to a point concerning the ability of myth to 'depoliticise' speech:

Myth does not deny things, on the contrary, its function is to talk about them; simply, it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification, it gives them a clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact (Barthes 1973, 143).

By asserting that myth depoliticises speech, Barthes (1973) argues that myth does not hide or conceal its motivation. Instead, by giving it a universal, trans-historical basis, and by stressing objectivity and its origins in nature, myth purifies its motivation.

### *The figure of the architect: Applying the rhetoric figures of myth*

This section refers again to the feature article, ‘Don’t Be Afraid to Be Different’, written by architect H Dalton Clifford (1950). Putting Barthes’s rhetoric figures of myth into practice (see Chapter Two), this section further analyses how the myth consumer is led to rationalise the signified by means of the signifier. The following analysis assumes the indispensable role of the expert—or, more precisely, the architect with which the myth consumer had already been made fully aware of during this time, when ‘the feature stories within the magazines rarely missed an opportunity to advertise the virtues of such professionals and their modernist solutions’ (Greig 1995b, 11).

Alongside the caption reading, ‘Don’t Be Afraid to Be Different’, is a smaller type that reads, ‘Here on this page are two examples of today’s homes, one an example of good planning and the other, an example of bad planning’ (Clifford 1950). The semiological schema involves the example being a sentence, with the first system purely linguistic. The signifier of the second system is suggestive of an aphorism—some lexical (the phrases ‘don’t be afraid’, ‘be different’, ‘today’s home’, ‘bad planning’ and ‘good planning’) and some typographical (bold type and uppercase to emphasise the words ‘afraid’ and ‘different’). The signified or concept is what must be called upon by a barbarous, but unavoidable, neologism: the architect presented by AHG as an essence of efficacy. The signification of the myth follows clearly from this: to own and live in the ‘modern’ home of good planning, one must dare to be different and seek change and progress in the name of modernity. Why is this the case? It is simply because the architect

has decided it should be. This is the only reason, and that is enough for the consumer to believe in the myth being both true and real.

In the ‘Main introduction’, it was acknowledged that, in Western Australia, the architect played an important and significant role in the midst of the post-war rise of modernism, since ‘virtually every architect and architectural firm was involved with housing and the family house became the test bed for new architectural ideas’ (Richards, cited in London & Richards 1997, 43). This was true also on a national scale, with Greig’s (1995b) research indicating that the promotion of experts—such as architects, interior designers and furniture designers—was detected as a recurrent theme during the early years of AHG. As such, one could say that architects were hailed as the agents of post-war change. On this basis, this study argues that the phenomenon that upholds the figure of the architect was exemplified and highlighted in the advertisement just analysed (Figure 17).<sup>33</sup> This phenomenon is reinforced in Greig’s (1996b, 12) research, in which he states that, in the post-war years:

An open mind was advised because the old prewar solutions to housing were no longer appropriate under postwar conditions and it fell upon the shoulders of the architect to discover new solutions. The consumer was advised to remain calm and retain confidence in the expert.

Following this, this study emphasises how ‘modern’ home advertisements refer to, invoke or inscribe into themselves already-existing social meanings—connotations or associations. These are ‘called up’ by a myth that is already culturally encoded into the entirety of an image. This myth is that the architect is a trusted and accountable figure in society. Thus, it is logical to believe the article because the heading was quoted from an architect—an expert whose advice and guidance was heavily recommended by the media as part of the response to shaping Australian housing provision in the wake of World War II.

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<sup>33</sup> The theme of the architect as a mythical figure will be further explored in Chapter Five: ‘The architect-designed home’.

## **Chapter conclusion and discussion**

This chapter leads to the conclusion that the advertising industry took advantage of the political and economic climate of the time, about a decade after World War II. A myth was perpetuated in the media, through which the normative ideals and images of the ‘modern’ open-planned and curtain-glass-walled family home became the idealised architectural home. As explained in the chapter, this myth was supported by an economic reality. This economic reality was reinforced by strict controls on building in the post-war 1950s, lack of building materials, frequently a lack of skilled trades people to undertake work, and a growing belief that substantial population growth was essential for the country’s future. The image of the idealised ‘modern’ home was also propelled by a large-scale program of migration to Australia that resulted from millions of people in Europe being displaced from their homelands.

Correspondingly, modernism, as a design philosophy, rose to the challenge in the 1950s when Australia was presented with the difficult material conditions of the early post-war period. Popular magazines such as *AHG*, *AWW* and *AHB* helped mobilise this effort. In so doing, they were able to propagate and disseminate a new style of living and new form of design that was supposed to reflect the mood of post-war modernity. These popular magazines, through their portrayal to post-war housing consumers of how a small house could be made desirable through channelling wartime dreams into feasible house-building and homemaking realities, played a significant role in dictating and transforming the tastes of the nation.

In this chapter, the researcher has partaken in the role of the myth consumer. This occurred by attempting to decipher how the kitchen—which had never before been regarded as the heart of the home—suddenly became central; how, in the 1950s, virtues such as hygiene and efficiency became a top priority; and how the ‘modern housewife’ became a target to promote such values. Importantly, one sees how the normative ideals and images of the post-war kitchen in 1950s Australia—as represented by the kitchen’s sparkling clean, white and streamlined design, and seemingly

ubiquitous and undeniable ‘happy housewife’s’ presence—began to transform into the ideological battleground of myth in Barthes’s sense.

By demonstrating that these mythical representations are intricately linked to a broader history in the wider semantic fields of Australian modernity and post-war domestic culture, one gains a deeper and richer understanding of how images of the ‘modern’ ideals of the home reflect and shape the Australian architectural, social and cultural values in various complex ways. In this sense, modernity and the normative ideals and images of the ‘modern’ home in the 1950s cannot be seen as separate entities. The two are intricately linked via a complex imaginary relationship that could only be designated as a level of signification—a level of myth. As such, Barthes’s notion of myth may be associated with what Colomina (2007, 6) describes as a well-packaged ‘consumable object’. This consumable object was portrayed in media’s representations of the idealised home as being as attractive and colourful as the other products of the ‘good life’: ‘it was yet another well-packaged, consumable object—a desirable image, good enough to eat’ (Colomina 2007, 6).

This chapter has also demonstrated how a mythical speech is read and deciphered. The headlines, sketches and drawings of advertisements from the 1950s adopt a factual, easy undertone where the image of a streamlined design and fully glazed home accords with the presence of modernity and with the ‘modern’ architectural home. In coming to terms with the advertisement, the consumer is inevitably consumed by the modern home myth, without the need to further question why it is so. This peculiar nature of myth is affirmed by Barthes (1973, 143):

in passing from history to nature, myth acts economically: it abolishes the complexity of human acts, it gives them the simplicity of essences, it does away with all dialectics, ... and organizes a world which is without contradictions because it is without depth, a world wide open and wallowing in the evident, it establishes a blissful clarity: things appear to mean something by themselves.

Barthes (1973) further postulates that what allows the reader to consume myth innocently is that he or she does not see it as a semiological system, but an inductive one. Since any semiological system is a system of values, the myth consumer will take the signification for a system of facts. Myth is

read as a factual system, whereas it is merely a semiological system (Barthes 1973, 131).

Following on from here, the next chapter is somewhat chronologically related. It examines the image of the indispensable quarter-acre garden represented as the idealised Australian dream home, which, this study argues, often conjures a mythical garden in Australians' imagination and dreams of the good life. Through analysing some media images of the mid-twentieth and present twenty-first century, and using Barthes's notion of myth, the following chapter seeks to demystify the signs and coding that subscribe to the utopian realm of the Australian suburban quarter-acre home and garden.

## ***Chapter Four: The suburban quarter-acre and garden ideal***

### ***Chapter introduction***

Shortly after World War II, the media was fervent in its quest to propagate the Australian ‘quarter-acre block’ ideal. Fashions or popular directions in gardening can also be broadly traced, with many less obvious influences, within the whole fabric of horticulture. Writers were in a powerful position to shape and direct popular taste. In books, magazines and newspaper columns, their words were inspiring, informative and, at times, critical. This chapter focuses on analysing a set of home and garden images that are separated by time—between the mid-twentieth century and early twenty-first century. It seeks to explore questions such as where the idealised image of the garden first originated, and how this ideal became so intricately bound to Australian suburban living and landscape.

In an attempt to investigate and revisit some mythologies that inform past and present images of the home garden, this chapter argues that the Australian ‘quarter-acre’ home with a garden represents an ideality that is tied to the Australian dreams of the good life and home. This ideal was vigorously driven by the media, especially in the mid-twentieth century, which depicted the suburban garden as an indispensable component of the post-war dream home. Further, this ideal has been deeply rooted in the Australian values of community and culture in the present twenty-first century. Most importantly, and perhaps most relevant to this thesis, is demonstrating how such an ideality becomes even more pronounced when analysed from the critical perspective of Barthes’s theory and semiology of myth, which expands on what was discussed in the previous chapter.

### ***Setting the scene: The making of the suburban quarter-acre and garden myth***

Suburbia was an idea that first arrived in Australia with the country’s European settlers, and led to the invention of that popular Australian

institution—the quarter-acre suburban block. Suburbs were a direct response to the English Industrial Revolution, and a reaction against the filth that the factory system generated. As such, they were a characteristically English phenomenon. A sprawl of homes and gardens were subsequently shaped by the successive waves of immigrants who pioneered them. The quotation below highlights the significance of the suburban garden in the context of colonial times:

It shows too much hindsight to credit Australia's first colonial governor with the invention of that popular Australian institution, the quarter-acre suburban block; but it is significant that, from the outset, Australia's founders anticipated a sprawl of homes and gardens rather than a clumping of terraces and alleys (Davison, cited in Johnson 1994, 100).

According to Peter Timms (2006, 19), it was not until the end of the eighteenth century that suburbs appeared. In Timms's (2006, 19) book, *Australia's Quarter-acre: The Story of the Ordinary Suburban Garden*, a 'suburb' is defined to be 'privately owned houses lined up along a network of streets just outside the city proper, each on its own small block of land and occupied by people who are dependent on a centralized infrastructure for essential services'. Timms (2006, 16) writes that it was 'in the United States and especially in Australia, with seemingly endless spaces and relatively egalitarian social organization that suburbia would eventually find its most complete and perfect expression'.

Australia had come into being as a European colony at the very moment when the suburb was emerging as a solution to the urban ills of the Old World. Davison (cited in Johnson 1994, 101) indicates that the suburb was thus a place of escape or refuge, and was subsequently shaped largely by the logic of avoidance. Davison explains that, while the slum—which characterised the urban ills of the Old World in Europe—was seen as dense, dirty, unnatural, disorderly and disease ridden, the suburb was seen as clean, open, natural, orderly and healthy.

There is little doubt that England exerted a strong influence on the way Australians thought about home.<sup>34</sup> In terms of the idea of having a

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<sup>34</sup> As noted in Davison (2000, 8), emigration to Australian cities in the nineteenth century was dominated by three broad streams from England, Scotland and Ireland. The largest group came from

garden in the home, it served as both a nostalgic reminder of the home the British had left behind, and a public statement of pride in the home they had found (Timms 2006, 32). This is further supported by Fanny Bussell's account, in which she proudly declares, when writing to England from Western Australia in 1836, that 'as you approach [the house], the garden, well fenced and productive in all English vegetables, would almost make you forget that you are in Australia' (Archer, cited in Timms 2006, 32). In this sense, since the early days of settlement, gardens have been significant not only for their production of food, but also for establishing the European presence in the Australian landscape.

Indeed, gardens were an idea the British brought with them when they colonised Australia. Australian suburbs did not flourish all at once and, throughout the nineteenth century, the house and garden ideal had to compete with more traditional styles of urban living, focused on the terrace house, corner shop, pub and vigorous social life of the streets. However, nevertheless, the suburban idea was vigorously promoted by the state during the early colonial period (Davison, cited in Johnson 1994, 102). By the early twentieth century, there is evidence that suggests that suburbia had well and truly taken form in Australia, as recorded by an English visitor, Buley (cited in Archer 1996, 144), in 1905:

Here the houses are all single-storied bungalows, or villa, as the Australians prefer to call them, each standing in its own plot of garden. Glance over the fragrant pittosporum hedge, and you may see the lawn sprinkler pleasantly at work upon a grass plot bordered with masses of bright phlox and thriving roses and pelargoniums...There is an air of roominess and privacy about these Australian suburbs that stands for a good deal of solid comfort ... The most arduous task of the amateur gardener is the constant use of the watering-can; the rest is done by Nature with a lavish hand. The vine and the fig tree are by no means impossible, and a rough erection of wooden laths makes an ideal fern-house. These things figure very largely in the life of the average Australian city-dweller, who leaves his city office at five, changes into an easy clothing as soon as he arrives home, dines comfortably about half-past six, and then potters about his garden until it grows dark.

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London, or originated in southern England and came via London. The English-born were the largest component of the mid-nineteenth century Australian elite, and more than half of these were from London or southern England. About half of the English exodus to Australia seems to have originated in London, or originated in the south-eastern countries of England, and migrated—often in stages—to London before embarking for the colonies.

Notwithstanding Buley's observation, research indicates that it was not until the decade following World War I—when the detached house on its own block of land became firmly entrenched as the norm—that the story of the Australian suburban garden really gathered momentum (Timms 2006, 38). Katie Holmes (2000, 164) supports this view by asserting that, at the beginning of the twentieth century and especially during the interwar years, Australian cities expanded and the appropriation of Indigenous land continued through the creation of suburbs and gardens. Thus, the space necessary for these suburbs was acquired by greater numbers of predominantly Anglo middle-class and lower middle-class workers. Holmes (2000, 164) adds that 'gardens did not lose their significance as markers of status and respectability, but greater numbers of people could share in their making and their meanings'.

Archer (1988, 228–229) states that it was in the suburban home with a garden that people pursued an equally important dimension of their existence—the realm of personal, individual development. The suburban home is thus closely associated with the private home, which makes it necessary to have a garden:

The home and its surroundings could do more than provide comfort and pleasure for the residents: To the extent that the suburban home was ... surrounded by large trees, lawns and plantings, it also projected an image of self-sufficiency and prosperity.

This quotation reinforces that the private home became a doubly important vehicle for both achieving and expressing the individualised character and personal fulfilment because individuality was considered a principal component of English character. To add to this, historian Alan Gilbert (cited in Timms 2006, 37) states that, 'for the proud suburban home owner, the suburban dream realized meant independence, security, pride and self-respect—all ancient, evocative yeoman values'. Enmeshed in all these virtues associated with the garden and suburban dream home, the suburbs have thus been described as 'cocooned from the city's degeneracy yet safe from the less predictable dangers of the bush' and as that which 'offered a life of modest comfort, safety and privacy' (Timms 2006, 37).

Thus, taken from the above perspectives, suburbs are understood in Australia as an embodiment of the ‘Great Australian Dream’ of affluence, independence, privacy and security (Davison 2005). By the 1950s, as asserted by Prime Minister Menzies (cited in Davison 2005) in the midst of the insecurities of World War II, this Great Australian Dream was founded on the instinct:

which induces [Australians] to have one little piece of earth with a house *and a garden* [author’s emphasis] which is ours, to which we can withdraw, in which we can be among friends, into which no stranger may come against our will.

From the growth of a new nationalism after the federation of states in 1901, and the disenchantment with Europe after two world wars, there developed a greater respect for things Australian, and a growing nostalgia for the landscape and native flora. Thus, in the early 1950s, the native garden movement began to grow, inspired by Edna Walling and led by such figures as Ellis Stones and Gordon Mackenzie, who placed new value on native species and learnt to use them effectively in garden designs by observing their growing habits in the bush (Trimble 1995, 14). Australia in the post-war years had the perfect combination of conditions for a great upsurge of interest in gardening. With secure employment, shorter working hours, increasing prosperity, greater home ownership and a proliferation of nurseries and gardening publications, the future was assured. A widening in the range of possibilities was also taking place, with groups and individuals forging directions that would enrich Australian gardening culture in the decades to follow (Cuffley 1993, 151).

It is interesting to note that architects in general in the post-war years were also sympathetic towards the need to have gardens in homes, and quite a few were keen advocates for the ‘native’ style of gardening. Ellis Stones was Australia’s most famous landscaper and garden designer, whose work in the 1940s, 1950s and beyond was an important contribution to the emergence of the ‘Australian’ garden. Stones designed a number of gardens for houses by Melbourne architects Grounds, Romberg and Boyd (Watts, cited in Cuffley 1993, 146). In Sydney in particular, architects built on bush

sites in suburbs such as Mosman and Killara, which were chosen for their natural beauty, with large rock outcrops, standing eucalyptus and native grasses incorporated into the garden. Peter Muller even built his house at Whale Beach around an existing rock that became the hearth, with a living tree branch entering the sitting room (Trimble 1995, 14). For the 1954 Richardson house, architect Robyn Boyd used large boulders to enhance the natural character of the site, and as a means to retain the soil on the steep slopes (Cuffley 1993, 146).

Set against such a context, it is unsurprising that, shortly after World War II, the media was fervent in its quest to propagate the Australian ‘quarter-acre block’ ideal.<sup>35</sup> Fashions and popular directions in gardening can also be broadly traced, with many less obvious influences interwoven in the fabric of horticulture. Writers were in a powerful position to shape and direct popular taste. In books, magazines and newspaper columns, their words were inspiring, informative and, at times, critical. Nevertheless, the uprising trends and popularity associated with gardening at this time only served to contribute to the potency of the quarter-acre suburban home and garden myth—the myth being that the garden was an absolute essential and fundamental component that must accompany the ideal dream home.

## ***Research methods and analysis***

### *Methods and objective*

The specific research objective of this chapter is to revisit and identify the imperative nature of the myth associated with the ‘quarter-acre block’, as projected through the post–World War II media’s representations of the home. The aim is to debunk and uncover the idealisations associated with the famous quarter-acre and suburban garden ideal of the Australian suburban home through the yielding of a history or origins of the garden ideal. In other words, by participating in the role of myth consumer, the researcher provides both a semiological and ideological interpretation of the

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<sup>35</sup> It is useful to add here that, for the majority of urban Australians in the post-war years, the ubiquitous quarter-acre site had been ruthlessly cleared for a new house to be placed on a typical suburban block, 50 × 150 feet deep. The habit was to fence these blocks on both sides and at the front and back in an English tradition of coveted privacy and territoriality.

mythical image of the garden that enabled it to be recognised as part of an indelible and indispensable feature of the idealised Australian dream home.

For the first time dimension, the form of media analysed was drawn principally from the publication of *AHG* following World War II.<sup>36</sup> As part of the research method for this case study, a limited number of issues of the front covers of the monthly *AHG* from 1949 to 1952 were extracted and analysed. Only front covers of the magazines were examined because it was believed that this enabled the imperative nature of the suburban and garden ideal to be more readily identified. To verify and substantiate the potency of the quarter-acre block and garden ideal, one painting from the late twentieth-century, four newspaper feature articles from the early twenty-first century (two from *The West Australian Sunday Times* and two from *The West Australian*) and an advertising pamphlet were also analysed.

During the 1950s, although the focus of post-war dreams centred squarely on the single-family house (Goad 2002, 246), Peter Cuffley (1993, 138) notes that many serving in the war dreamt of peaceful home gardens, and made plans for future schemes with images of a family life with both a house and garden. As such, in examining the front covers of the home magazines, the intent was to identify the word 'garden' (other than the word appearing in the magazine title itself) or any images associated with the garden ideal that were used to catch the reader's eye. As Greig (1995b, 159) contends, Australian home magazines performed a didactic role through introducing Australians to modernist concepts and ideas on design. In this sense, *AHG* not only seemed to reflect, but also dictate, the public's tastes and desire for a garden in the Australian post-war home. Seen from these bases, it was an obvious choice to examine the magazine for aspects of the imperative nature of the myth that encapsulated the famous quarter-acre and suburban garden ideal.

As aforementioned, in addition to the front covers of the home magazines, one painting from the late twentieth century, four feature articles

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<sup>36</sup> *AHG* was first published in December 1948 by KG Murray. It is claimed that, during its formative years (1948 to 1952), *AHG* ceaselessly promoted the superiority of modernist design in a rather didactic effort to purge Australian homemakers of their presumed 'stuffy' conservatism (Greig 1995b, 6). Nevertheless, it was one of the most influential and popular magazines that kept pace with modernity in responding to reshaping Australian housing provision in the wake of World War II.

from Western Australia newspapers and an advertising pamphlet from the present twenty-first century were also scrutinised. The purpose of analysing across different time periods and from a diverse range of media was to demonstrate how, even up to contemporary times, the image of the garden has prevailed, and the ideal remains inextricably bound to Australians' imagination and dreams of a good life.

### *Objects of study*

From examining 20 monthly publications of *AHG* from 1949 to 1952, it was found that the word 'garden' (other than the word appearing in the magazine title itself) or images invoking the garden ideal were portrayed on the front covers of the magazine in more than 50 per cent of the data collected. For example, the image entitled 'Dream House Come True' (*AHG* 1950b) (see Figure 19) captures the main entrance of a house, with accompanying front lawns and a footpath leading up to it. The accompanying front lawns, on both sides of the footpath, look perfect and natural as part of the picture. On another magazine cover, a woman is depicted deliberating the design of what seems to be her ideal future home. The capitalised words accompanying this image read, 'We built our own house shaping the new garden' (*AHG* 1950a) (see Figure 20). Similarly, two other covers of the *AHG* (see Figure 22) evoke the image and ideal of the garden as an integral and constituent aspect of the idealised dream home.

One painting seen to celebrate the home and garden nest of popular culture of the quarter-acre block is *House and Garden, Western Suburbs*—a painting by Howard Arkley (see Figure 21). Painted in 1988, this work captures the image of the indispensable garden in the Australian home in Melbourne.

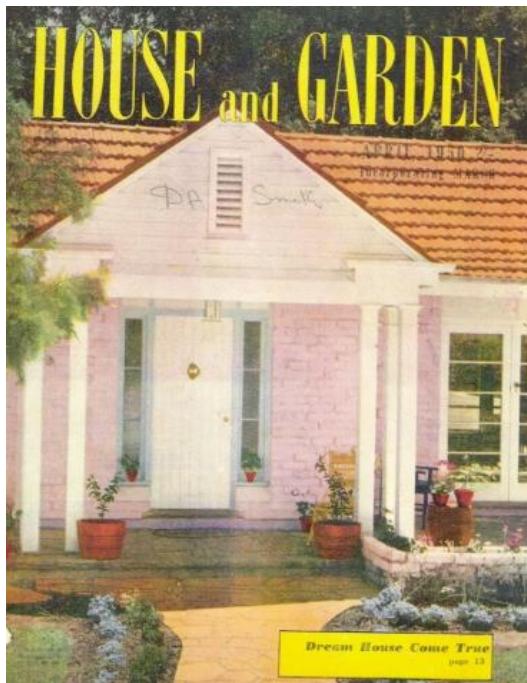


Figure 19: 'Dream House Come True' in AHG.  
Source: AHG 1950b.

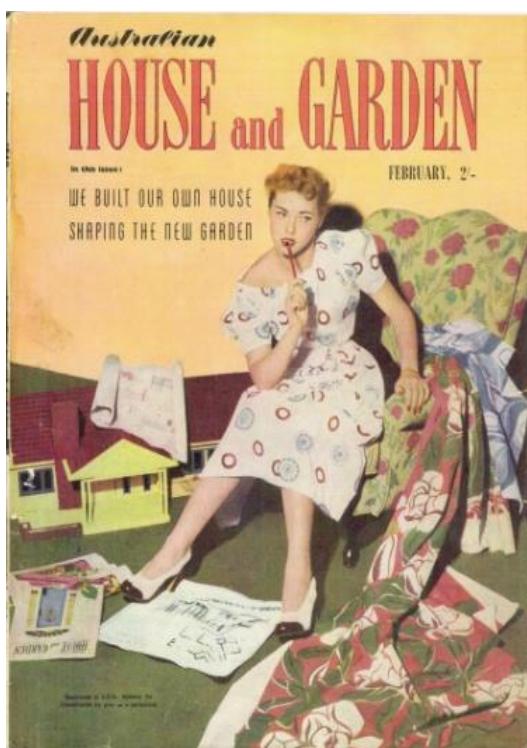


Figure 20: 'We built our own house shaping the new garden' in AHG.  
Source: AHG 1950a.



Figure 21: Painting by Arkley, *House and Garden, Western Suburbs*.  
Source: What House is That? 2009.

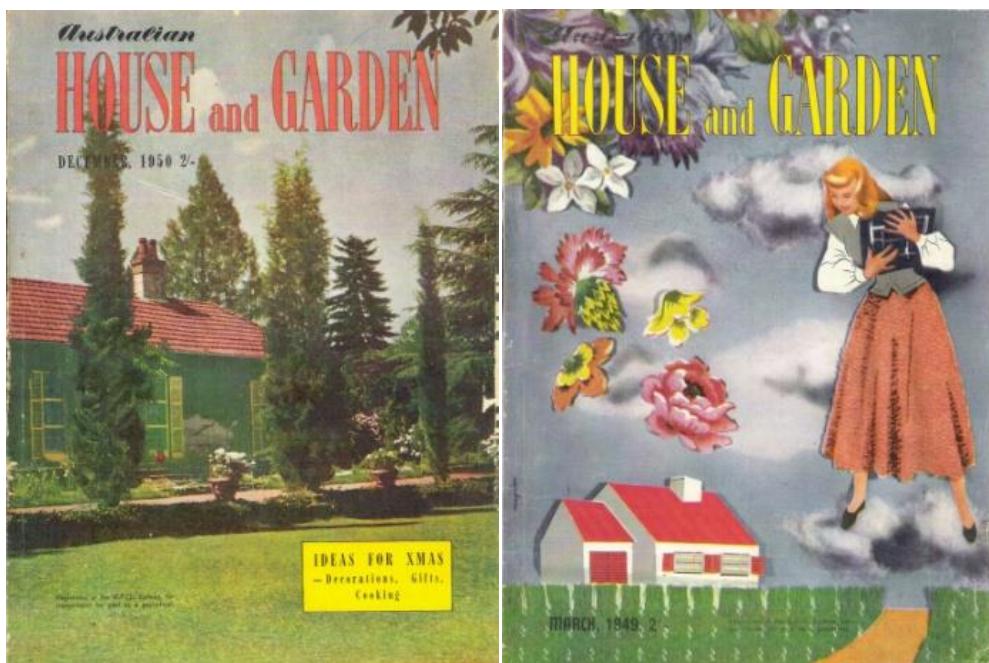


Figure 22: Front covers of AHG.  
Source: Left—AHG 1950d; right—AHG 1949.

During the twenty-first century, one is confronted with local newspaper feature articles with headlines such as, 'Garden Theme Lives On' (*The Sunday Times: Weekend Property* 2011) and 'Shared Garden Bloom' (*The Sunday Times* 2011) (see Figure 23), in which Kate Hedley writes:

Ellenbrook residents have a new reason to love their suburb with the opening of the Verdant Vista community garden. The joint venture between locals and the City of Swan has been met with enthusiasm by Ellenbrook residents, who say they appreciate the 'grass roots' nature of community gardening (*The Sunday Times* 2011).

In the feature article, one of the residents interviewed states that she loves the idea of their children continuing the garden in the future (*The Sunday Times* 2011).



Figure 23: 'Garden Theme Lives On' and 'Shared Garden Bloom' newspaper articles. Source: right—*The Sunday Times: Weekend Property* 2011; left—from *The Sunday Times* 2011.

In another feature article, the heading reads, 'Building Luxury Into Landscapes' (*The West Australian* 2011a) (see Figure 24). This was written to encourage and inspire readers to recreate rooms that extend to the outdoors so they can enjoy their garden. A landscape designer expresses his hopes that people will be inspired to rediscover their gardens. In the same issue of the newspaper, another headline of a feature article reads, 'Cottage Plot Has the Lot'. This article writes of Cynthia Mahony—a proud retiree whose 'wildlife paradise' garden took her 20 years to develop and has 'birds flitting in and out of trees and bees buzzing around numerous rosebushes'. Roses are a prominent feature of the front garden, and are 'spotted ... almost everywhere' (*The West Australian* 2011b) (see Figure 25).



Figure 24: 'Building Luxury into Landscapes' in *The West Australian*.  
Source: *The West Australian* 2011a.



Figure 25: 'Cottage Plot has the Lot' in *The West Australian*.  
Source: *The West Australian* 2011b.

Finally, an advertising mail pamphlet distributed in November 2012 was found inside a mailbox in the suburb of Attadale in Perth. This pamphlet advertises, 'Garden and Home Maintenance' (Attadale Prestige Gardening 2011) (see Figure 26).



Figure 26: A suburban advertising mail pamphlet from Perth.  
Source: Attadale Prestige Gardening 2011.

### **Analysis and discussion**

By looking at Figures 24 and 25, it can be seen that Australian gardens represent one of the key features of Australian suburban living, even in the twenty-first century. In fact, the ideals of a suburban home and garden have become so inseparably bound that 'garden suburb' is a phrase more commonly used to describe the Australian suburban ideal. According to Davison (2001, 4), the garden was as important a feature of the suburb as the cottage or the villa, and the ideal suburb attempted, in its planning and architecture, to evoke something of the peace and solitude of the countryside. As Robert Freestone (2000, 103) discusses, even this sentiment was conveyed on the cover of conference proceedings of the Second Australian Town Planning Conference and Exhibition in 1918, Brisbane, in which the detached single family cottage was universally regarded as the town planning ideal (see Figure 27). As such, it is unsurprising that the myth consumer, in coming to terms with such accepted media messages, is not motivated to question why the Australian landscape is associated with terms such as 'luxury' or 'cottage'. For it is only 'natural' that the garden suburban home ideal remains closely bound to Australians' imagination and dreams of a good life.

However, the myth consumer may be unaware of any reason and history. In the reader's eyes, the signifier and signified have a natural relationship. In other words, as Barthes (1973, 131) states, any semiological system is a system of values. The myth consumer takes the signification for a system of facts; myth is read as a factual system, whereas it is merely a semiological system. As such, when encountering words such as 'garden', 'grassroots' and 'community garden', the reader 'lives the myth as a story at once true and unreal' (Barthes 1973, 128).

Referring to Figure 26, it is no longer necessary to question why the garden has become integral to Australian suburban living, and why the suburban home must come with a garden attached, as suggested in the 'Garden and Home Maintenance' pamphlet. People do not ask these questions because, according to Barthes's (1973, 121–127) theory of myth, they accept this message as part of a norm with which their values and ideologies are imbued and encoded. The myth of the suburban home with a garden attached is already loaded with the signifier of the message. That is, consumers of myth sense an excess of meaning in the suburban garden—history supplies it, even though the form presented (as headlines and messages, such as 'Garden Theme Lives On'—see Figure 23—and 'Grass Roots Nature of Community Garden') is, nevertheless, empty.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> History has taught that the love of the garden is attributed to the fact that it enables people to retire from the cares and clamour of the city into the country, 'where man may approach the simplicity of nature and attain the enjoyments and pleasures of pristine innocence' (Davison 2001, 4).

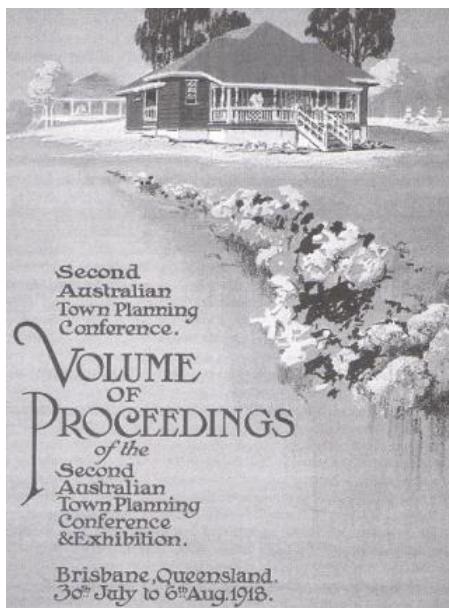


Figure 27: The garden suburb housing ideal.  
Cover of conference proceedings of the Second Australian Town Planning Conference and Exhibition, Brisbane, 1918.  
Source: Freestone 2000, 130.

Building on this, it is clear that, in the twenty-first century (see Figures 23, 24 and 25), the garden remains an indispensable and indelible feature of the Australian suburban home ideal. For example, with respect to the headline 'Garden Theme Lives On' (*The Sunday Times: Weekend Property* 2011), it is interesting to note that nothing was actually written in the article to educate the general public about the garden or the benefits of owning one, in relation to promoting the popularity and sale of a suburb. There is no need to provide such excess information because, as Barthes (2000, 155) would say, the myth of the garden is already part of the rhetorical figures of speech in which the headline is read as common sense—that is, 'truth, when it stops on the contrary order of him who speaks it'.

Thus, in Barthes's (1973, 154) sense, the advertisement headline 'Garden Theme Lives On' would be classified as a statement of fact under one of the rhetorical figures of mythical speech. The headline is worded solely to attract Landsdale estate homebuyers—especially those who are attracted to the domestic ideal of the suburban quarter-acre garden. Thus, this mythical speech is sufficiently conceptualised to carry these ideological implications, while still being adaptable to the historical specifications of the concept. However, even in the twentieth century, this myth had been

thoroughly established in the minds and imaginations of most Australians, as the following quotation indicates:

The proverbial quarter-acre remains a potent symbol of an Australian ideal that can be called upon, like mateship, to make people feel sentimental. Australian culture has been the culture of the suburbs. And just as the aberrant 1950s shaped our idea of ‘typical’ family life, so ... [the quarter-acre] has also shaped our idea of home and neighborhood (Horin 2005).

From a different perspective, Goad (2002, 249) inscribes the image of the post-war suburban quarter-acre and garden as follows:

The austere postwar bungalow almost always had its clearly loved manicured front garden and a rear backyard (rather than back garden), often ignored, and the repository of a rotary clothes-drying rack, the ubiquitous lemon tree, and a lawn to occupy the husband with mowing on the weekend.

As the above quotations demonstrate, the image of the garden was firmly rooted in Australians’ imaginations and dreams of a good life. This garden ideal was embedded in Australian values and culture even in the post-war years of the 1950s. In a speech given by former Australian Prime Minister Menzies, shortly after World War II, Menzies states that ‘one of the best instincts in us is that which induces us to have one little piece of earth with a house and a garden’ (Menzies, cited in Brett 1992, 7–8). This again testifies to the potency of the suburban quarter-acre and garden myth. It is a myth that, at the instant that it is pronounced, is consumed as fact.

Referring to the front covers of *AHG* (see Figures 19, 20 and 22), the principal message that these images are sending is clear: that the garden remains an indispensable and indelible feature of the post-war home ideal. Again, such advertisements conjure an ideality of the mythical ‘quarter-acre’. Everything in the picture happens as if the signifier (the lawns) gave a foundation to the signified: the myth exists from the precise moment when the quarter-acre block ideal achieves its natural state—myth is speech *justified in excess*.

Representational paintings capturing the essence and lifestyle of Australian domesticity serve as effective sites upon which the myth of the quarter-acre block thrives and proliferates. John Brack and Arkley are two

Australian painters renounced for instilling a large degree of irony in their paintings associated with the Australian dream of the 1950s. Brack's paintings often show the emerging tension of Australian obsession with a quarter-acre block, while providing green spaces for amenity (Wilson n.d.). Arkley's paintings both serve to criticise the dream and reinforce the artists' view of the deadening conformism and narrow-mindedness of those who aspire to the myth of the quarter-acre block. However, despite the irony in Arkley's (2009) painting (see Figure 21), the reader cannot help but becomes captivated by the blissful clarity of the garden myth. In other words, in the eyes of the myth consumer, the myth of the garden is still 'naturalised', in Barthes's sense. The myth of the garden suburb is naturalised because one automatically accepts without question that such is the utopian aspiration of Australian suburbia. Owning a detached (often single-storey) house in its own garden is the standard domestic comfort to which most Australians aspire.

However, in Barthes's (1973, 142–143) theory of myth, at the instant when the reader encounters the media's representation of the suburban garden—whether in *AHG* or Arkley's painting—the historical reality associated with the origin of the garden myth is at once simplified and reduced. By looking at these post-war advertising images, the loss of historical quality of things—and thus the loss of the origin and significance of the garden—saves the reader from any intellectual effort because things (that is, the origin and significance of the garden) forget how they came to be. In appearing to mean something by themselves, the images become eternal—that is, things have no memory that they once were made. As Barthes explains, this is because myth is a 'depoliticised speech' (see Chapter Two).

Reiterating this characteristic of myth, Wasserman (1981, 34) emphasises that myth reduces the world to a set of essences, reduces social interaction to individual transactions, reduces what is different to what is the same or to what is fundamentally alien, and grounds the bourgeois worldview in an eternal nature. Hence, the garden setting is integral to the house and home ownership. In this sense, the bourgeois view of the garden in the home has been grounded in eternal nature.

Thus far in this chapter, the researcher has acted in the role of a mythologist. The idealised image of the Australian quarter-acre block is understood as nothing more than a distortion. Now, in switching to partake in the role of myth consumer, this chapter seeks to decipher where the garden ideal first originated, and how this image remains such a powerful and potent symbol to the Australian suburban living and landscape. In doing so, the researcher is responding to the constituting mechanism of myth—to its own dynamics. In wishing to connect a mythical schema to a general history to explain how it corresponds to the general interests of a definite society—to pass from semiology to ideology—this chapter now turns to reveal the essential function of the Australian suburban quarter-acre block and garden myth.

The next section revisits some mythologies that inform past and present idealised images of the Australian landscape and suburban garden, while remembering that the idea of a myth is not exchangeable with ideology. However, for a myth to be consumed in actual fact, one must place oneself in the position of the myth consumer for the myth to appear ideological. Again, this is because what allows the reader to consume myth innocently is that he or she does not see it as a semiological system, but as an inductive one.

### ***Reading the suburban quarter-acre and garden myth***

A myth consumer is able to decipher the image of the suburban home with a garden attached as ‘a value system, recognized as a concept, or a familiarity proceeding from history and from myth’ (Barthes 1979, 10). In this sense, by Barthes’s (1973, 109) definition, myth is ‘a mode of signification, a form [to which one must] assign … historical limits, conditions of use, and reintroduce society into it’. By reintroducing society to the garden myth, one is inevitably faced with the questions such as: where did the idealised image of the garden first originate, and how did this ideal become so important to Australian suburban living and landscape? Thus, the aim of this section is to ground political, historical and ideological alignments in the realm of the natural. To do so, it revisits some mythologies that inform past and present idealised images of the Australian landscape and suburban garden.

### *Origins of the garden myth: Representations and reality*

Holmes's (cited in Troy 2000, 165) research indicates that gardens exist as both a physical and a metaphorical place—a place where nature and culture meet, such as in the Garden of Eden, where humankind began and order was created from chaos. Gardens can evoke paradise; signify a place of sensuality and sexuality, especially feminine sexuality; and harbour the phases of life and death—of regeneration. Biblical imagery revives the yearning for Eden as a quintessentially private desire for spiritual domestication, in which nature is performed as an authentic (origin-al) mirror of its benevolent creator. The spacious and open landscape—bathed in strong but soft light, and free of any untidy scrub—dubious wetland or urban grime project a vision of healthy vitality in which nature is performed as the archetype of cleanliness and order. The elevated and expansive perspective of gently rolling hills invokes the romanticist's performance of nature as flowing scenery for the detached viewer alienated by the satanic excesses of technology (Davison 2005).

Timms (2006, 27) states that, in Europe, God was generally sought in scripture and miracles, whereas the English sought Him in hedgerows, flowerbeds and the first cuckoo of spring. The English viewed nature as the embodiment of moral and spiritual values, which they expressed through a passion for gardening. Hence, Timms (2006, 37) believes that middle Australians inherited English values that recognised that it was chiefly by tending plants and observing the natural cycles that people would come to love God and value His work.

Judith Trimble's (1995) research traces the origins of the garden as far back as the Classical antiquity (c. 2000 BC to 475 AD), that is, the period of Persian, Greek and Roman domination, which 'associates the garden to Theocritus's leafy grove, described by the Greek poet in his *Idyll VII* (c. 280 BC) to be a place of pleasure—a garden to soothe the soul and rest the body'. It is also part of a larger landscape, and the harbinger of sacred spirits. The sacred grove of antiquity thus represents one image of a garden. Inspired by Theocritus's culture, Trimble (1995, 11) identifies the sacred grove as the romantic ideal. This is similar to the sacred landscape of the

Greeks before the fourth century BC, a ‘critical component for all Greek life and art’ that deified the landscape and marked the most sacred places with temples (Trimble 1995, 11).

Trimble’s (1995) research indicates that, from when the British colonisers first arrived in Australia after 1788, they stamped the landscape with their own mythology: the Palladian villa set in an English park.<sup>38</sup> The Governor’s house was built in this manner in Parramatta in 1800, and artists soon began to paint the landscape as a record of the new settlers’ successful establishment. In 1839, the painting *Elizabeth Bay and Elizabeth Bay House* by Conrad Martens presented an Arcadian dream revised and expanded, founded not on Italian humanism, but on the contemporary English Romantic ideal and the tradition of the picturesque in painting (Trimble 1995, 12).

During the nineteenth century, the Australian landscape was represented variously, according to European taste, as sublime, beautiful or scientific (Trimble 1995, 13). For instance, one of the landscapes most evocative of the ‘sublime’ in Australian romantic painting is Marten’s *Tempe, the Seat of A. B. Sparke*, 1838. Martens illustrates a broad prospect, capturing the atmosphere of the vista in seductive mood, exploiting the natural blue haze and distant, low horizon, and locating Tempe in a larger ‘garden’ that includes the long sweep of the Cook’s River and the vast sky. Rather than being the subject of the painting, the house and garden are the temple in an Arcadian paradise, and the natural wilderness is an extension of the garden, by implication tamed and manageable like an English park (Trimble 1995, 13). In this context, one sees that, even in the nineteenth century, representational paintings indicated that tastes for romantic beauty were popularly sought in the Australian landscape. By the middle of the century, such tastes also became increasingly fashionable in the Australian garden. Sweeping lawns, beautiful vistas, curving wide paths, flowering shrubs and lakeside landscape were introduced. Alongside these visions, there developed yet another interpretation of the landscape.

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<sup>38</sup> Andrea Palladio (1508 to 1580) was perhaps the most effective servant of the Venetian nobility’s dignified appearance in the countryside in the sixteenth century. He built for nobles their own sacred groves, where the house replaced the temple—even appropriating the temple front—and gardens with fountains and sculpture representing deities looked out over the countryside (Trimble 1995, 11).

For many occidental Australians, from the nineteenth century until the 1970s, the landscape and Australia were synonymous in Australian mythology—not as a source of plenty, but as a harsh, often cruel, challenge by which character and endurance are measured (Trimble 1995, 13). Hence, towards the end of the nineteenth century, the Heidelberg School of painters developed an intimate and poignant view of natural landscape that found its parallel in poetry and the sentiment captured in the ballads of Banjo Patterson and Henry Lawson. This literature described ordinary pioneer men and women in the bush as individuals striving against the odds, often separated from society, and overcome by natural events (Trimble 1995, 13).

There was no sign here of England's 'green and pleasant land' and the landscape was no Eden or garden of a Palladian landscape. These paintings tended to convey the Australian landscape in a melancholy mood, and their stories constructed a mythology that portrayed the bush pioneers as tragic heroes. Thus, Australians, regardless of whether they lived in the city or bush, began to discover a new identity based on this bush mythology. For example, Phillip Goad (2002, 242) observes that, by the 1930s and 1940s, acceptance of this 'other' landscape was also being explored by photographers such as Harold Cazneaux. For example, Goad (2002) notes that Cazneaux's *Spirit of Endurance*, published in 1937, depicted the eucalyptus as a timeless icon withstanding the ravages of time and erosion introduced by colonisers (Goad 2002, 242).

As such, in light of the above, it is fitting to discover that the first Australian suburbs were founded by Governor Darling in the early 1830s when he granted picturesque allotments near Woolloomooloo to wealthy merchants and public servants, many of whom were evangelicals. One source states that it was evangelicals who popularised the idea of 'separate spheres' for men and women, and of the suburban home as a kind of temple in which the wife ruled as the 'Angel of the Home' (Davidoff & Hall, cited in Davison 2001, 4). Another source asserts that the idea of the suburb as a place of peace and refuge drew inspiration from Romanticism, for the ideal suburb enabled 'the careworn city man to repair his battered spirits through communion with the beauties of nature' (Davison 1993, 101). As Aidan Davison (2005) notes, Romanticism emphasises the aesthetic and spiritual

importance of the garden as a sanctuary in which ‘people might seek refuge from the artificiality and noise of the city amidst the quiet and beauty of nature’. Incidentally, according to Davison (1993, 2001), the four contemporary ideologies that strengthen the influence of the suburban idea on the minds of colonial Australians are Evangelicalism, Romanticism, Sanitarianism and Capitalism. He adds that many of the more respectable colonists were touched by the influence of evangelicals and their call for a revival of the homely virtues.

Given such a strong influence by the British, it is unsurprising that a British architect and landscape designer had a strong influence on suburban garden design in Australia. John Claudius Loudon (1783 to 1843) was the father of the modern suburb, who declared that ‘suburban residence, with a small portion of land attached, will contain all that is essential to happiness’ (Davison 2001, 4). According to Loudon, gardening is a character-building activity that leads to morally upright citizens and healthy, cohesive societies (Timms 2006, 23). Freestone (2000, 128) argues that the garden suburb was also seen to embody the best suburban ideals: health, family life, social stability, respectability, and the moral and physical sanitation of working-class culture.

In 1901, when the six self-governing states of Australia formed to create the Commonwealth of Australia, the Federation style of architecture soon emerged to echo an overwhelming sense of nationalism and identity for the Australian people (Freestone 2000). The Federation style embraced family life and outdoor living, and its setting was the garden suburb (Stapleton & Stapleton 1997, 57). Federation style began to embrace the idea of suburbia. Even though suburbia was an idea that was initially heavily influenced by Britain and America, it soon became a reality in Australia. In this sense, one could also consider the twentieth century’s implementation and advocacy of the ‘garden city’ movement a powerful sign reinforcing the significance of the garden to the Australian suburban home. The essence of the garden city movement is captured in Raymond Unwin’s (cited in Freestone 1989) *Nothing Gained by Overcrowding*—first published by the Garden Cities and Town Planning Association in 1921—in which the author depicts the movement as seeking a ‘more harmonious combination of city

and country, of dwelling house and garden' (Unwin, cited in Freestone 1989, 10).

The garden city movement started as a social movement; however, its greatest success was as a planning movement. It was a method of urban planning developed by Ebenezer Howard, in which towns and cities were planned in proportional levels of nature and the built environment, with a strong focus on a social reform in which residents would interact as a community. The original goal was to realise a 'better and brighter civilization' by building compact new towns on community-owned land (Freestone 1986, 62). The garden city overseas was a hybrid phenomenon—a blend of domestic and imported influences. In Australia, as Freestone (1986, 66) observes, even though, by the early 1900s, the well-established pattern of suburbanisation and the ameliorative direction of urban reform were not conducive to Howard's revolutionary ideal, a general predisposition to the more moderate, eclectic agenda of the garden city movement could be discerned. While Adelaide was the first to implement the garden city movement, Canberra has a truly great garden city design. As Timms (2006, 43) notes:

As [one] sweep[s] around the generous curves of Canberra's older suburbs ... [one] will doubtless be struck by the seamless continuity of people's front gardens, whose immaculate lawns continue blithely across unfenced boundaries to become one with the nature strip. At least that is sometimes the case. Canberrans find various ways to thwart the official policy of 'no fences forward of a residence or building' with hedges, bushy garden beds, rockeries and the like—all of which, although permitted under the Act, tend to work against its intention 'to achieve pleasant, open streetscapes'.

Based on the above quotation, the ideal image of the garden suburb is considered an ambitious urban renewal scheme that is a testament to the importance of having a garden in the Australian home.

Incidentally, the garden's significance to the suburban home was also widely publicised throughout the twentieth century in the Australian media. For example, at the beginning of the century, garden writers placed enormous emphasis on the need for a garden to make a house a home: its value was practical and moral. Lady Hackett (cited in Holmes 2000, 168), in *The Australian Household Guide*, published in 1916, stresses that, 'The

house is a place to live in. To make it a home in the true sense of the word certain adjuncts are necessary, and among these none are more important than the home garden'. Building on this, the values of modernity entailed the necessity of having a garden in the home, with house and garden reflecting the concerns of social hygiene, efficiency, progressivism and environmental determinism. As the immediate environment within which a child is raised, the home was to provide the foundations for good citizenship, and the basis for a healthy, modern life. Gardening journals emphasised similar ideals. Holmes's (2000) research indicates that according to the journal of the New South Wales Horticultural Association, *Gardening Gossip*, published in 1928, gardens were crucial to creating a settled, domesticated citizenship. They were evidence of a 'civilised' society, where gardening instilled 'uplifting thoughts and refining influences' (Holmes 2000, 168).

Set against this context, since the beginning of the twentieth century, Australians were encouraged to garden more and children were often educated into a love of gardening. Again, as Holmes's (2000) research shows, this was explicitly reinforced by The Melbourne-based journal *Garden Lover*, published in 1925 in which it was stated: 'The love of horticulture implanted in the plastic years of youth will yield a harvest of public-spirited citizens with high ideals' (Holmes 2000, 168). To this end, one can see that, until the twentieth century, the garden was not only a highly regarded feature of the Australian home, but was also fervently promoted and chiefly desired by many. Concomitantly, the idea of having a garden in the home was equally, if not more, popular and attractive by the middle of the twentieth century. Thus, it is no surprise that many Australians continue today to aspire to owning a garden in the home: a utopian ideal of which the Australian concept of the quarter-acre is a part. In citing Jon Kellet, Kelly Stone (2011) accentuates the idealised aspect of the suburban quarter-acre block: 'The right to a barbecue, swimming pool and ample space for gardening is a cherished aspect of the Australian suburban dream'.

## ***Chapter conclusion and discussion***

By employing Barthes's (1973) notion of myth, and drawing on twentieth century post–World War II and contemporary twenty-first century media images and representations of the home, this chapter has sought to demystify the idealised and utopian realm of the Australian suburban quarter-acre home and garden. As myth is a value system, the obviousness of the myth or 'what goes without saying' testify to the fact that the image of the idealised suburban quarter-acre home and garden is firmly implanted in the Australian imagination and post-war dreams of the good life.

The ideality associated with the garden has since changed and evolved in various ways since its establishment in sixteenth century Italy, based on the gardens described in ancient texts. However, nevertheless, literature and painting throughout history—such as that discussed in this chapter—have helped form and change mythologies about people's perceptions of and relationships with the landscape and the garden. People's ability to construct mythologies appropriate to the times is persistent and, in terms of the idealised Australian image of the home, one could safely claim that the quarter-acre represents a lasting and enduring counterpart.

This chapter has demonstrated how the normative ideals and images of the suburban quarter-acre and garden can easily revert to the Barthoneon myth by which many Australians still choose to live. The image is not only deeply bounded by Australians' imaginations and dreams of a good life and home, but is firmly rooted in the Australian values of community and culture. Since World War II, when conditions were most favourable for the media to mythologise the quarter-acre ideal, the media have continued to propagate and aspire to the suburban garden myth. The diversity and range of media chosen for the analyses in this chapter were intended to testify to the prevalence and potency of the myth, despite it having been transpired through and across separate and different time periods.

Here, it is significant to add that, to the extent that myths always consist of language or images reworked—both of which predate the appearance of the mythic form—and are communicated in the form of self-contained narratives, myths are entirely derivative of pre-existing cultural

data. Their mode of presentation—language and pictures—already identifies them with the familiar. It would be difficult to speak of the production of a completely original myth because they are so full of symbols and images of tradition. Such is the familiarity of the kinds of plots shaping the idealised image of the Australian suburban quarter-acre and garden myth. By virtue of the richness of its content—or, in Barthes's (1973, 113) words, the 'fullness of its meaning'—anything new found in the mythic narrative will be mediated easily to the recipient of the myth because familiarity tends to collapse back into tradition. Further, elaborating on the structure of Barthes's notion of myth, Bailey (2000, 7) stresses that the reason myths are described as second-order creations is because they are dependent on language, 'which, itself, involves a prior organization of the conceptual world ... or signifying systems [that] organize data into meaningful patterns'.

Over time, gardens have been characterised by a clear sense of boundaries and a demarcation between the front garden and the larger, functional and more private backyard. Yet when Captain Arthur Phillip decreed that it was his aim that 'every family should have a separate house in a separate allotment', he can hardly have envisaged the extent to which this would become the hallmark of Australian suburban living. Just as Captain Phillip's vision was an expression of a set of values including order, decency and privacy (Davison 1993), so the normative image of the suburban quarter-acre home and garden ideal remains a myth that is firmly rooted in Australian values and culture.

Finally, to quote Trimble (1995, 16), this chapter ends by saying that 'a garden is what we *think* it is; the myth is reality; truth is what we believe it to be'. As the idealised suburban quarter-acre home with attached garden remains firmly embedded in the Australian imagination, it serves to represent nothing more than a myth that exists within the Australian dreams of the good life, 'shaped by a cluster of related ideas loosely described as the suburban ideal' (Davison 2001, 4).

## **Chapter Five: The architect-designed home**

Having done away with the classical models of academic training, [Col WA Starret] hailed the new generation of self-made *builders*—a new architectural breed, somewhere between engineer and architect. Preferably they were self-taught or at least had no brilliant academic career to boast of. The ideal must have come from the same material from which Ayn Rand had fabricated her unpleasant hero of *The Fountainhead*: strong, rugged, independent and sent away from school at least once (van Leeuwen, cited in Johnson 1994, 172).

### **Chapter introduction**

This chapter explores how media's representations of the home as a mythological construction are articulated in terms of building imagery and framed in the perspective of the architectural profession. Deviating from Chapters Three and Four, which are chronologically grounded and directly related to each other, this chapter is a stand-alone chapter in one sense, but also expands on understandings of myth from an architectural perspective. Some observations taken from the 1950s and early twenty-first century contribute to the discussion in this chapter.

Following on from previous case studies that demonstrate that the persuasiveness of the image of the 'modern' and quarter-acre garden home ideals derive from their natural justification of their purpose, this case study continues to articulate the idealised image of the home in the context of an 'architect-designed' home to be a myth that 'naturalises' speech. By doing so, it transmutes what is essentially cultural (historical, constructed and motivated) into something that it materialises as natural (trans-historical, innocent and factual). Drawing on the media's representations of the architectural works of eminent modernist Australian architects, Denton Corker Marshall (DCM), this chapter aims to explicate how the architect-designed home in the media can also be read as a myth, provided it is conveyed by a discourse.

Melbourne-based architects DCM were chosen for this case study analysis because, of the many potential options, DCM architects provide the most compelling and appropriate case to explore the question of myth, irrespective of geographical location due, not only to the architects' notable

reputation and media exposure, but also to the manner in which their works have been described, represented and reproduced in the media. In addition, on a personal level, the researcher finds that the images of their buildings in books, magazines, journals and websites—often accompanied by architectural reviews in the professional media—tend to come across as somewhat supernatural and mythical. This mythic quality of the image enables DCM's architecture to be subsumed into the imperative nature of the myth in the Barthoneon sense.

In establishing the key distinctions between the image of the house that exists in professional cultures of architectural spaces, as opposed to the image of the home seen in popular media constructions of architectural spaces, this chapter also draws on the socio-philosophical teachings of Bourdieu (1977, 1989, 1990). These affirm that the symbolic imagery of the architectural home in the media can only be consumed by cultured individuals—those in the institutional boundaries of the profession who carry the correct mental schemes of appreciation.

This chapter also considers the extent to which rushed judgement affects perceptions of what constitutes the idealised home. It challenges the thought that a reliance on photography can at times endorse or ratify the desire or sense of ideality, without the need for individuals to actually experience the space for themselves. In this light, this chapter argues that, at the instant when the home engages with the media, the image enters into and becomes subjected to the realm of the idealised.

### ***Imagery of DCM architects: A myth in the making***

DCM is one of Australia's most successful architectural design practices. In studying the normative imagery of DCM as a mode of architectural language that is so often seen in architecture books, journals and websites, this chapter argues that the media partake in a vital role of myth making of a professional image, popularly identified with colours and signified as sticks, blades, surfaces, scale and sculpture. By invoking Barthes's theory of myth, this chapter has three objectives. First, it seeks to explore ways by which the media, such as architectural journalists, has

presented the works of DCM. Second, it discusses and describes what makes DCM's architectural imageries in the media so believable and seductive. Third, it analyses how the discourse of DCM architecture enables a kind of myth to be constructed.

The aim of this study is to decode meanings that define DCM's constructed buildings' imagery. It should be clarified here that the terms 'image' or 'imagery' could carry the same meaning as 'symbol' or 'symbolism'.<sup>39</sup> In this chapter, their meanings indicate the overall impression that a building leaves on the observer, as represented in the media, and including specific associations and suggestions (Gibbs 1984, 6). Specifically, this chapter is concerned only with a building's exterior outlook—the external image that it projects to the observer. However, having dealt with the building's internals, some of the study questions can be also applied to the interior.

The DCM practice began in Melbourne in 1972, and remains operated by its founding directors, John Denton, Bill Corker and Barrie Marshall. The practice has since grown internationally to include other directors, such as Stephen Quinlan in London, Budiman Hendropurnomo in Jakarta and Adrian FitzGerald in Melbourne. The architects' stylistic devices (Beck & Cooper 2000) that have taken them 10 years to develop and refine have consistently been employed throughout the buildings as signatures of their professional image. A visit to their professional website immediately opens an array of DCM building images that reverberate the stylistic devices that define the signatures of their profession. Flashing slogans and catchphrases are accompanied by projects in the background to give the reader a sense of DCM's building imagery.<sup>40</sup>

Haig Beck and Jackie Cooper (2000) emphasise that DCM uses 'sticks and blades' in order to get close to sculpture, as an alternative approach to form making: 'Sculptural forms, composed of supremacist formal

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<sup>39</sup> It should be acknowledged here that a 'symbol', being a medium of expression, is by definition much more complex than an 'image'. While an image could simply refer to the literal meanings concerned with a building's exterior outlook, a symbol 'always points beyond its literal meaning and accordingly, in the act of comprehending a symbol, more than one level of meaning can always bring with it meanings arising from a variety of historical periods' (Bailey 2000, 8).

<sup>40</sup> For further information, see DCM, viewed 2 April 2014,  
<http://www.dentoncorkermarshall.com/default.aspx>

gestures—sticks and blades, set the basis of Denton Corker Marshall's architectural language'. The elements that signify their work are sticks, blades, dots, grids, three-dimensional frames and the use of primary colours—mainly red and yellow, and sometimes orange and green (see Figure 28).

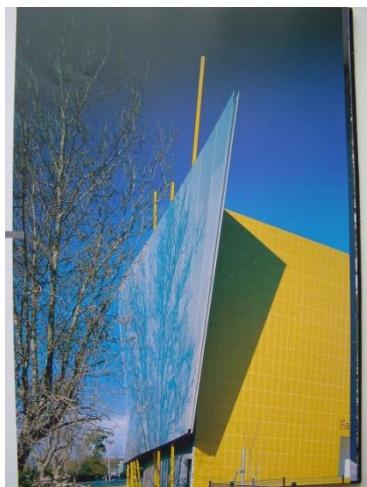


Figure 28: A gridded pattern, yellow colour and blade-like wall mark Melbourne Monash University's Art and Design Centre by DCM.

Source: Beck & Cooper 2000.

Two works stand as epitomes of the architectural firm's building imagery, yet neither is a building. One is a table centrepiece (designed in 1986) (see Figure 29), and the other is the monumental Melbourne Gateway (designed in 1995, built in 1999), a kilometre-long sculptural installation located on the expressway into Melbourne (see Figure 30). The centrepiece—a supporting tray comprised of various abstracted forms made from sheets of silver plate and anodised aluminium—was designed for a competition entry and provided one of the significant initial bases for determining the symbolic meanings inherent in the imagery of DCM's architecture. As well as being notable as the first distilled expression of 'sticks and blades' in their work, the centrepiece is also an expression of DCM's interest in proposing architecture that is not constrained by scale, by playing and experimenting with dynamic poetic shapes and cantilevering sculptural forms.

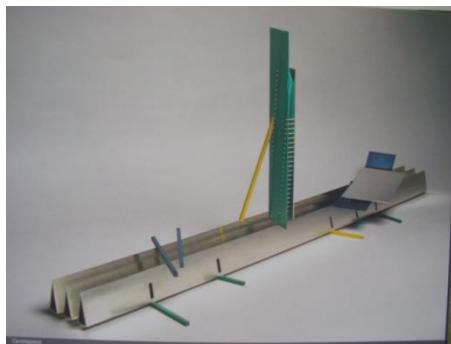


Figure 29: Table centrepiece designed by DCM.  
Source: Beck & Cooper 2000.

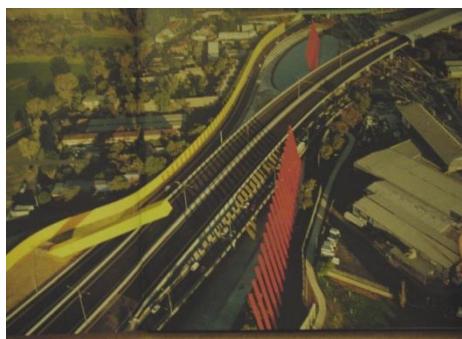


Figure 30: Melbourne Gateway designed by DCM.  
Source: Beck & Cooper 2000.

The design of the centrepiece was an exercise that, in the words of Beck and Cooper (2000, 34), ‘allowed DCM to test the extreme, deconstructing the objects formally and assembling them as components of abstract architecture’. To this day, they have continued to think about and create architecture through these concerns. The same signifying elements were applied in the design of the Melbourne Gateway—another project that stands as an expression of DCM’s architectural design philosophy and method, after the design of the centrepiece. These elements emerged more apparent than ever before with a giant yellow cantilevered beam, a row of red sticks (or columns) about 10 storeys high, and a sinuous orange wall that unmistakably marks the signification and imagery of DCM (see Figure 31). Beck and Cooper (2000, 34) state that, ‘The seventy-meter yellow cantilevered beam establishes a powerful tension, and the row of red giant sticks defines the space/time of work’. Principally, there is no formal distinction between the signification of the centrepiece and the Melbourne Gateway—the signifying elements that encompass the two are the same. The only difference lies in the gradation of scale.

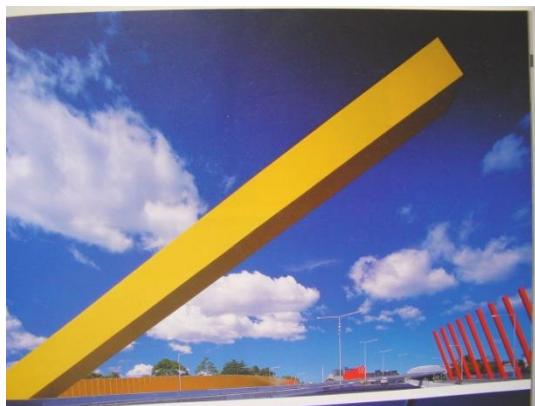


Figure 31: The Melbourne Gateway—depicting the colour codes of DCM's architecture: yellow, orange and red.

Source: Beck & Cooper 2000.

The image of the colonnade on the left in Figure 32, at the Monash University Caulfield campus (1992 to 1996) has appeared in books, in journals and on the architects' own website. Again, note its conveyance of what appears like a row of yellow light, and thin columns referred to as 'sticks' sheltering behind a 'blade' wall. As seen from the image, the 'sticks' do not appear to serve any function other than aesthetic. Yet, in many of the architects' projects, snapshots of 'the sticks' are captured in a massing of line to not only reinforce their decorative and structural intention, but also—perhaps more importantly—to highlight the architects' building imagery. As seen in the image on the right of Figure 32, the ideality of DCM's architecture is renounced: the blade roof of the Melbourne Exhibition Centre, which appears to be supported by the yellow sticks, is once again captured in the photographic image to draw close to a sculptural form.

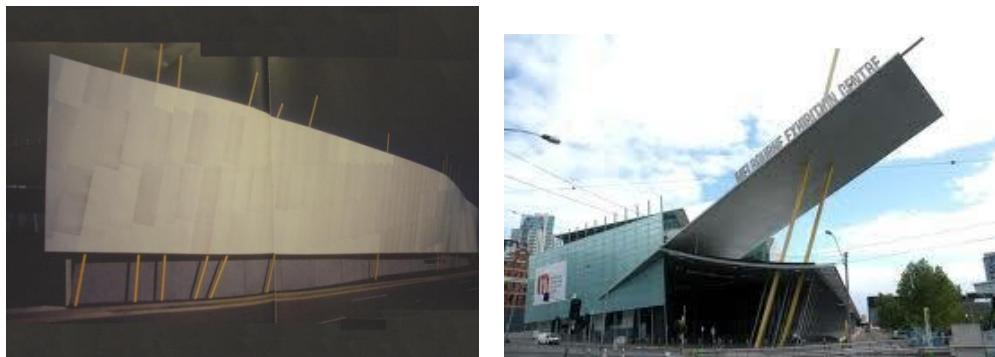


Figure 32: left—Colonnade at Monash University, Melbourne; right—Melbourne Exhibition Centre, depicting DCM's 'sticks and blades' design concept.  
Source: Left—Beck & Cooper 2000; right—774 ABC Melbourne 2010.

Apart from using sticks and blades as an alternative approach to form making, the architects have adopted the expression of a ‘stick’ to convey a primitive presence. ‘Sticks’ allow them to make the elements that hold up architecture increasingly invisible, while ‘blades’ are abstractions of walls and roofs, transmuting the ideas of enclosure and shelter into markers of identity (Becker & Cooper 2000, 34). In the architects’ design of the Melbourne Exhibition Centre (1993 to 1996), the following description accompanies the photographs of the building as illustrated in the book, *Denton, Corker, Marshall: rule playing and the ratbag element*: ‘Three parallel lines hold up the roof plane, and two giant sticks skewer the entry blade; the saluting blade announces the building and extends the physical presence beyond its actual volume so that it signifies effectively from the distance’ (Beck & Cooper 2000, 35). Another text description states that the building is ‘distinguished by a spectacular entrance with a sky-thrusting blade and a park side colonnade forested by three rows of tilted steel columns’ (Royal Australian Institute of Architects [RAIA] National Architecture Awards 1996). Strikingly similar in representation is the large tilting blade that also dominates the expression of DCM’s design of the Melbourne Museum, as captured in the images in Figure 33. Note the way these photographs have been taken as if to deliberately give the impression of an oversized roof, thereby amplifying the signifying elements of the ‘blade’ and ‘sculpture’ that so typically signify DCM’s architecture.

Given the above, this background raises two questions. First, what makes the imagery of DCM’s architecture in the media so believable and so seductive? Second, how has the discourse of DCM architecture enabled a kind of myth to be constructed? This chapter now progresses to analyse how the discourse of DCM architecture enables a kind of myth to be constructed.



Figure 33: The ‘blade-like’ roof in Melbourne Museum.

Source: Beck & Cooper 2000.

### *The pursuit of a symbolic capital*

Part of what this chapter examines is that, while authors and journalists discuss creating a ‘legibility’ of DCM’s architecture in the process of documenting (through print or photographic imagery), publishing and writing about their architectural language, the reality and material existence of the architecture is also destabilised and overlooked as it becomes disguised under a political and economic reality. This reality is the architects’ endeavour to pursue a corporate and professional image through cultivating symbolic capital that is ultimately to derive what is considered ‘good’ architecture. The purely economic cannot express itself autonomously, but must be converted into symbolic form. Therefore, there is ‘symbolic power’, as well as material or economic power (Swartz 1997, 90). Individuals and groups who are able to benefit from the transformation of self-interest into disinterest obtain what Bourdieu (1990, 118) calls ‘symbolic capital’. Symbolic capital is ‘denied capital’ (Bourdieu 1990, 118)—it disguises the underlying interested relations as disinterested pursuits:

Symbolic capital, a transformed and thereby disguised form of physical ‘economic’ capital, produces its proper effect inasmuch, and only inasmuch, as it conceals the fact that it originates in ‘material’ forms of capital which are also, in the last analysis, the source of its effects (Bourdieu 1977, 183).

Symbolic capital is thus a form of power that is not perceived as power, but as legitimate demands for recognition, defence and obedience, for the services of others (Bourdieu 1977, 171–183; 1990, 112–121). Symbolic

capital represents a way of talking about the legitimisation of power relations through symbolic forms.

Based on this, the symbolic capital of DCM architects can be understood in terms of a legitimisation of power relations through their symbolic imagery in the media. It is a form of ‘legitimate accumulation, through which the dominant groups [authors, journalists and architects] secure a capital of “credit” which seems to owe nothing to the logic of exploitation’ (Bourdieu 1977, 197). As cultural producers and authors, journalists and architects are themselves involved in weaving and creating myths in the manner that Barthes defines, as later discussed in this chapter. Incidentally, these cultural producers are inevitably also holders of symbolic power.

### *Professional cultures of architecture versus popular media constructions of architecture*

This thesis acknowledges that there are key distinctions between the image of the home seen in ‘popular’ media constructions of architectural spaces and the image that exists in professional cultures of architectural spaces. To establish a comparison and determine distinctions in this section, ‘popular’ media is discussed in terms of the print media (magazines and newspapers) because it is from this media source that the majority of material analysed was extracted.

The home portrayed in weekend newspapers (such as *The West Australian*) and popular magazines (such as *AWW*) exists in a completely different discursive and disciplinary space to the architect-designed house portrayed in professional architectural journals, since both operate within a set of structured oppositions and are motivated by differing budgets, cultural aspirations and design processes. The key distinctions between a home and a house are eloquently summarised by Garry Stevens (1998, 84) in his book, *The Favoured Circle: The Social Foundations of Architectural Distinction*:

We may start with the immediate observation that the former is called ‘home’ and the latter a ‘house’ (at least in my own country in Australia). The home is intended for sale to, typically, young couples with young families. Its very name connotes that the family is buying a place to live, not simply an object,

whereas the (architected) house emphasizes the objectified nature of the building, quite explicitly rejecting any connotation that people will inhabit it. The home, though it may indeed be designed by an architect, is intended for multiple replication, while the house is meant to be unique—its very appeal is in its uniqueness. A project home is successful if it is sold for the right price (from the point of view of both buyer and seller). This implies that the primary criterion of success is economic, since the standard home builder builds to satisfy market demand generated by a public of consumers. The builder who fails to satisfy client expectations goes broke. Architected houses are successful in aesthetic terms, not economic.

First, newspapers and magazines are read by and targeted towards a relatively large audience of usually anonymous readers.<sup>41</sup> Under the current system in Australia, newspaper and magazine readers are measured by ratings—a statistical estimate of the proportionate of readers based on demographic characteristic (such as age, gender and socioeconomic status), with independent audited figures so that advertisers know what they are buying (Cunningham & Turner 1993, 210). This system of operating broadcast media based on ratings ‘gives the people what they want’ and thus serves the public interest of a demographic society. The media and advertising in particular are constantly proposing images of identities and lifestyles that consumers can choose between and buy (if they have the money).<sup>42</sup> As such, shampoos, clothes, cars and homes are presented as ‘signs of lifestyles’. In this sense, it is important to realise that the home—in the context of a real-estate project home or ‘land and packaged’ builder’s home in the advertised section of weekend newspapers—is attuned to signs of lifestyles. Thus, ‘which of these signs are attractive to whom is decided more by social conditions than strictly individual factors’ (Gripsrud 2002, 74).

In popular magazines such as *AWW*, images that are suggestive or indicative of an idealised sense of the home are addressed to a specific

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<sup>41</sup> It is worth noting here that the term ‘reader’ is used rather than ‘audience’ because this thesis is primarily focused on the active role of interpreting the messages that are received by the audience. Reading implies actively interpreting media messages. Thus, in studying media, it is important to consider readers because they do not simply swallow the messages presented in the media (Croteau 2003, 7).

<sup>42</sup> Bourdieu (1989, 172) states that, ‘lifestyles are the systematic products of the habitus’. This is further defined by the ‘system of dispositions’ that are internalised through individuals’ backgrounds and experiences—that is, the habitus will largely shape people’s lifestyles, both in terms of the elements they do not choose and those they more consciously choose. The habitus leaves its mark on lifestyle through the aspect that Bourdieu (1989, 173) calls ‘taste’—defined as the ‘tendency and ability to acquire (materially and symbolically) a certain class of classified and classifying objects or practices’. Taste is the principle for the choices people make based on socially determined dispositions, and this results in the systematics of lifestyles.

social group, in which mostly women are identified as a consumption category with special product needs.<sup>43</sup> The magazines link an identity as a woman with a set of behaviours, making the latter the prerequisite for the former. As such, this ‘popular’ media space conveys the message that to be a ‘woman’ is to know what to buy (and this certainly does not exclude her presumably specialised knowledge in identifying an idealised sense of the home). The advertisement content in women’s magazines both displays the specific products (such as a seemingly happy woman wearing an apron and standing in a kitchen promoting a cooking range) and celebrates the pleasure and needs of consumption (Croteau 2003, 188). Thus, women’s magazines, in suggesting what women need and what constitutes that idealised sense of the home, use both direct and covert advertising to sell magazines and promote an ideology that celebrates the consumption of gender-specific products as a means to identify formation and personal satisfaction—the dream of the ‘good life’.

In contrast, architectural journals or books are read by and targeted mainly towards architects and an exclusively limited audience whose interests fall primarily within their own profession. In *Is it All About Image?*, Edwin Heathcote (cited in Iloniemi 1994, 6) discusses this realm of the professional cultures of architecture:

it is an extraordinarily incestuous culture: architectural magazines are read almost entirely by other architects who do not commission buildings and are, in fact, the competition. We know this type of publicity is important—after all, architects appear on juries, panels and advisory bodies—and this type of prestige counts. There is a very curious condition in architecture where peer status has an exclusively high value, but often at the expense of wider publicity. Architecture is alone in this approach.

Seen in light of the above quotation, the architect-designed home that appears in the professional cultures of architecture and specifically in printed

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<sup>43</sup> AWW is the highest circulating Australian magazine and one of the oldest. From its initiation, its concerns have delineated women’s interests. The chapter titles in Sheridan et al.’s (2001, iii) study of the magazine since 1946 list these interests as the housewife as consumer; sex, romance and marriage; motherhood; women’s work; house and garden; food and cooking; health; fashion; and beauty. With the exception of celebrity stories, all these concerns focus on the self and the private, personal world.

media, such as architectural journals and books, is more concerned with the production to satisfy symbolic demands of consumers in the field.

Correspondingly, the architect-designed house operates in a discursive field that is not only self-sufficient, but is also concerned with 'restricted production' (Stevens 1998, 86).<sup>44</sup> In other words, unlike 'popular' media constructions that normally would be speculative, developer-driven or tract houses seen in newspapers that rely on popular ratings and street credibility, the architect-designed (or 'architected' house, as Stevens [1998] calls it), operates in a distinct field that is unusually self-sufficient in making reputation. This is because this reputation is highly dependent on recommendations, juries and independent architectural advisers, many of whom source their view from the pages of trade publications and the like (Heathcote, cited in Iloniemi 1994, 14). The printed media is the most familiar and receptive forum for communication between architects and their clients and peer group. Above all, this communication is found in the pages of professional architectural publications, which are sometimes also referred to as the 'trade press' (Heathcote, cited in Iloniemi 1994, 10).

In this sense, it is inaccurate to state that, in the process of designing an idealised bespoke house, when dealing with the public, many architectural firms must establish status and reputation that will somehow benefit their corporate image. One way to establish this reputation is to take advantage of the printed media and publishing industry by having architectural works promoted and published in architectural books and magazines. Heathcote (cited in Iloniemi 1994, 6) highlights this:

Architects are like novelist. They regard the most important thing in their careers as being published. Buildings are all very well but they are somehow only truly complete when they have appeared in a glossy mag. This conception of the printed page as the final fix, as part of the finishing process, has given birth to an architectural culture obsessed with publicity, in which magazines jostle for exclusives from the most fashionable practices.

In this light, it may be true to say that in order 'to win contemporary fame and a place in history, architects ...' (and the professional cultures of architecture

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<sup>44</sup> The architecture field of restricted production is defined by the field 'which is responsible for producing those parts of the built environment that the dominant classes use to justify their domination of the social order' (Stevens 1998, 86).

in general) are constantly striving ‘to make it through a highly biased, highly self-referential publication system’ (Rattenbury 2002, 125).

Building on this, some architects, such as Frank Ghery, have even been guilty of exploiting their success by lending their names to product endorsements (as will be explored later in the chapter). This also works the other way as a form of self-advertising, although whether it results in further commissions is unclear (Johnson 1994, 174). On this note, Heathcote (cited in Iloniemi 1994, 10) discusses from a different perspective, that, in fields such as architecture, the notion of self-promotion is met with a far more complex set of inhibitions and concerns. These arise from real doubts about whether the profession should be seen to be promoting itself to potential clients.

Based on this, unlike ‘popular’ media constructions of architecture (the images of the ‘ideal’ home that appear in weekend newspapers), which are often targeted towards the broader interest of the general public, the architect-designed home seen in the professional cultures of architectural publications operates in a more insular and ‘incestuous’ realm. This realm is almost restrictive and legitimate only in the institutional boundaries of the profession. Serraino (2002, 135) offers an insightful view (that the researcher shares) on the practice of representation and how it is exclusive only to its own professional cultures, since the ‘conned still images’ are coded and accepted as legitimate only within the institutional boundaries of the profession:

Whether photographs are used as a vehicle for propaganda, a marketing tool or an educational aid, buildings rely on the technology of photography, and its built-in recording limits, to find their way in the culture of architecture. This diversity of representational approaches—and their internalization by consumers of design information—might be one of the concurrent lack of understanding between architects and the general public in architectural matters. Designers indulge themselves in the circular referencing of a repertoire of highly conned still images of new works. They scrutinize the portfolios of an exclusive group of peers, paying attention to their signature, to what characterizes their shaping of space. This mechanism perpetuates a practice of representation that is coded and accepted as legitimate only within the institutional boundaries of the profession. The mass of non-specialists (in other words, the users) absorb and evaluate images of architectural projects within the larger context of their own needs, desires and routines. Unable to partake in the design concerns of the practitioner, these users draw on a literature in which they can easily identify their value structure.

In the above quotation, Serraino acknowledges that there is a lack of understanding between architects and the general public in architectural matters because there is great diversity in the way the architect's design information is represented or under-represented.<sup>45</sup> However, the extent of this understanding between architects and the public naturally depends on the capacity of the public to internalise such design information.

It is worth highlighting at this point that photographic accounts of architecture for a readership of experts and for the general public can be strikingly different. Throughout the discussion of this chapter, it is assumed that the readership is centred on the experts—in this case, the architects who themselves constitute a body of myth consumers in Barthes's (1973) sense.

### ***Analysis and discussion***

Remember that DCM's signature colours are red, yellow and green. This chapter argues that a myth—as will later be explained—is transposed when the signifying elements of the architects' signature colours and sculptural quality of their buildings are captured and manipulated through photographic concerns—that is, through a *construction* and reproduction of DCM's symbolic imagery. Thus, this section's analysis and discussion focus on how DCM's buildings are represented through photography, and how, through that process, the images become subjected to the realm of the idealised.

Upon recognising the primary colour codes and sculptural quality of the building form that appear on the front cover of an issue of *Architecture Australia*, one is bound to associate the colour codes and sculptural quality of the building form to DCM's architecture to be a norm. The photograph shows the Art and Design building at Monash University Caulfield campus (see Figure 34, left). The photographer has captured the building in perfect

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<sup>45</sup> However, broadly speaking, as Serraino (2002) notes, different attitudes inform the taking of a picture according to whether the receivers of the photographic message are architects or the public. When photographers shoot for practitioners, the typical focus is a formal investigation of the artefact; for general viewers, the tendency is to capture human experience. Each perspective carries its own set of conventions and levels of signification. For example, objects placed in the frame provide a sense of scale and are clues to patterns of use for architects, while they become evidence of social status for lay people. By staging posing people in the set-ups, the photographer gives dimensional awareness to architects, while offering a societal portrait of the elite to the general spectator (Serraino 2002, 135).

weather, so that the blueness of the sky and greenness of the lawn and tree make the building look like a perfect artwork. Even the magazine title is printed in the same hue of green as the lawn and tree. It is unsurprising that these images of DCM's works through photographic concerns should be seen as a common endeavour in the professional cultures of architectural publication. Laura Iloniemi (2004, 163) deliberates the issue of photography as it applies to the profession:

Editors want to see good images. Some are even willing to alter these to make the magazines look good. Architects ... have been known to take out lampposts from streets, and the like, to give the perfect picture. Architectural photography is loaded with a desire to control and represent buildings in a certain way.

In light of this quotation and observations made of the front cover of an issue of *Architecture Australia*, one is inclined to think that the deliberate colour coordination is achieved to ensure and maintain an overall unity and congruency of magazine cover design to reinforce DCM's symbolic imagery.



Figure 34: DCM architecture on the front covers of *Architecture Australia*.  
Source: left—Jackson 2001; right—Jackson 1999.

In another front cover of *Architecture Australia* (see Figure 34, right), the contrasting effects of DCM's red and yellow sticks depicted against a bright blue sky are captured in a way that accentuates and highlights the symbolic imagery of DCM's codes: the primary colours of yellow and red. This constructed image successfully captures DCM's normative codes to provide yet another powerful visual for the viewer. In this image of the

architects' most famous work, the Melbourne Gateway, the yellow cantilever beam and red canted stick clarify the formal identity of the two sculptural elements set against the blurred context of a high-speed road and suburban context.

It is also interesting to note that human figures are rarely seen in these photographs to accompany the images of DCM's architecture. If it is true that magazines can evoke the temporal experience of architecture using narration (Croset 1988, 203), then, with reference to DCM's architectural imagery, the viewer has been denied such an experience. How does one account for such a seemingly deliberate omission of narrative? This thesis argues that this omission is intentional because it forms part of DCM's professional marketing strategy to commodify the architects' symbolic imagery. In *This is Not Architecture*, Jonathan Hill (cited in Rattenbury 2002, 87) writes:

The architectural photograph has a number of roles, one of which is to present the building as a higher form of cultural production to defend and promote architects and patrons. Many architectural photographs display similar characteristics, such as perfect climate and no people, because they mimic the perfect but sterile conditions of the artwork in the gallery. Based on art history, architectural histories often discuss the building as an object of artistic contemplation and imply that this is the familiar experience of the building.

Based on the above quotation, this thesis further argues that photography—whose primary role is to act as the mediator between the writer and reader (who is encouraged to assume that the experience of the photograph is the same as the experience of the building)—actually serves to elevate the normative ideals and images of DCM's architecture to another dimension. In exposing a quasi-surreal effect of DCM's imagery, the reader is called upon to perceive the building as an object of artistic contemplation, thereby transposing the architects' signifying architectural elements—the geometric, linear and sculptural—into the mythical, idealised realm.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> To cite a famous international example, consider the Barcelona Pavilion designed and built by van der Rohe. The building was originally built for an exhibition, however, it was through the 1929 photographs, rather than the 1929 building, that the Pavilion became one of the most praised and copied architectural projects of the twentieth century. The extent of this copying is due not only to the perceived quality of the design and van der Rohe's growing reputation, but also to the Pavilion's status as an artwork (Hill 2002, 89).

The notability of DCM architects began in 1972, when their experiences in dealing with small planning projects in Canberra allowed them to experiment with varying stylistics (signifying elements) and slowly equipped them to develop their own design methodology. Beck and Cooper (2000) write about how the firm's reputation has since skyrocketed because they were able to develop and commit to a set of 'architectural languages', 'formal themes' or 'repertoire elements'. Beck and Cooper also note that the architects' persistent use of 'sticks' and 'blades' has allowed them to push the limits of architecture to a point where it speaks of sculpture more than architecture. What is interesting is that Beck and Cooper (2000, 31) continually stress the importance of perceiving DCM's building imagery with the right emphasis or 'right pitch':

In Denton Corker Marshall's architecture, devoid as it is of a lot of outside ideological and symbolic cultural references and baggage, getting the pitch right is very important. Programmatic and other commonplace cues aside, the kind of cerebral, pared-down modern architecture that Denton Corker Marshall strives towards places spectators on a proverbial slippery slope when it comes to intended meanings and poetic content. Too much or too little emphasis on one thing or another, and comprehension will slide away. In broad cultural terms, such slides would be a pity, as they would deprive a public at large from appreciating and even genuinely admiring some of the very best that contemporary architecture has to offer in terms of aesthetic judgment, delight and insight.

Similarly, in an earlier publication, Beck (1987) writes that DCM are very particular about creating and delivering architecture that is 'legible' to users and the public. This suggests that, for DCM's architecture to be 'a matter of pitch'—to invoke the right schemes of appreciation so that it is 'legible' to the reader—there must be a 'correct' way of understanding or perceiving their architecture. Here, in Barthes's (1973, 129) sense, the moment that the authors' or journalists' description of DCM's architecture becomes believable and seductive to the reader is the moment at which their architecture becomes 'transformed into nature'.<sup>47</sup> It is at this instant that the mystical power and heroic figure of the architect—the novelty of the 'architect-designed' building—is evoked in the reader. As a myth consumer,

<sup>47</sup> Such is the principle of myth in Barthes's sense—it transforms history into nature (see Chapter One). From such a perspective, 'in the eyes of the myth-consumer ... what causes the myth to be uttered is perfectly explicit, but it is immediately frozen into something natural; it is not read as a motive, but as a reason ... [for] myth is speech justified in access' (Barthes 1973, 130).

reader and believer in DCM's architecture, the researcher is now promoted to ask: what myths are associated with the image of the architect figure?

DCM architects have also won many awards for built and un-built residential and commercial projects. Among many winning entries and public recognitions, a number of significant ones have been published in *Architecture Australia*. For example, the Adelphi Hotel in Melbourne was featured as a winner for a recycled building as part of the 1993 RAIA National Architecture Awards (see Figure 35, left). Subsequently, as appeared in another *Architecture Australia*, DCM was awarded the President's Award in the 1996 RAIA National Architecture Awards, and the Melbourne Exhibition Centre was honoured by the Sir Zelman Cowen Award for public buildings (see Figure 35, right). In that same issue of *Architecture Australia*, the RAIA bestowed its gold medal on the architects.

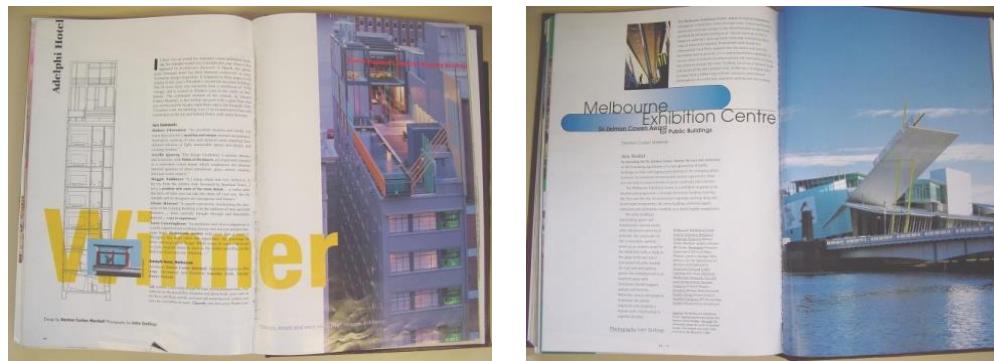


Figure 35: DCM's commendation, as published in *Architecture Australia*.  
Source: left—Jackson 1993; right—Jackson 1996.

The firm's participation in numerous design competitions in the past has also earned them much recognition. For example, the table centrepiece that became the epitome of the firm's building imagery was initially designed as the entry to a limited competition held among five Australian architectural practices in the National Gallery of Victoria in 1986, in which DCM won first prize. With such an impressive professional portfolio, it is fair to assume that the trio owe their popularity and success partly to acquiring honourable awards and winning design competitions.

Winning competitions and honourable awards are two powerful political means by which architectural firms can gain access to the accumulation of symbolic or cultural capital, offering them opportunities to

advance to rapid success. However, it is through competition winnings and receiving honourable awards that an architect's work is recognised by the media, thereby further transforming the image of architecture to an idealised realm, and into a level of myth from Barthes's perspective. One example of this is Zaha Hadid's drawing, *The Peak* (see Figure 36).<sup>48</sup> The Peak leisure club was a project that was never built, yet since Hadid's breakthrough in 1982 to 1983 with first prize in the international competition for Victoria Peak in Hong Kong, this image has appeared in numerous architectural books, magazines and websites. As can be seen from Figure 36, an image such as this is sufficient to conjure up the signification of the architect and his or her work as the 'other'.



Figure 36: Hadid's drawing, *The Peak*.  
Source: MoMA 1991.

A certain clarity and consistency is detected in the way that the building imagery and language of DCM architects have been represented in photographs. The same could be said for the architects' own sketches and drawings.<sup>49</sup> For example, the repetitive and rhythmic nature of the row of giant sticks and columns of the Melbourne Gateway is portrayed in the architects' own initial presentation sketches that appeared in *Architecture Australia* (see Figure 37). In addition to them being successful in representing a powerful aspect of DCM's symbolic capital, these sketches by

<sup>48</sup> The daring curves and arcs in the painting, *The Peak*, were governed by the 'huge, spectacular, coloured paintings that reinvented Suprematist geometry for the Deconstructive age; high-code art objects' (Rattenbury 2002, 71)

<sup>49</sup> See, for example, the latest publication of DCM's (Denton, Corker & Marshall 2006) hand-drawn works, *Espresso< Expressway: Denton Corker Marshall's non-architecture*, DCM. The drawings in this archival record were published to coincide with the exhibition espresso < expressway held at the National Design Centre, Federation Square, Melbourne, from 7 July to 13 August 2006.

the architects also allow the normative ideals and images of DCM's buildings to be further transformed to a level of myth, in Barthes's (1973) sense.

Upon encountering these sketches, one immediately understands them as far from ordinary. The fact that they are sketches of buildings that were designed, built and hand-sketched by the architects themselves designate them to a value of supremacy. Moreover, it heightens the aesthetic quality of the sketches for the reader or myth consumer because the sketches are equivalent to that done by an artist. In this light, the sketches transform the work of DCM architects to a level of myth because they intensify the mystic quality of the architects' work. Further, one could argue that they raise the work's status to that of a piece of artwork—similar to painting and sculpture—that is socially and financially desirable.



Figure 37: left—DCM architects' sketch of the Gateway; right—DCM architects' sketch of the centrepiece.

Source: Beck & Cooper 2000.

Drawings and sketches by the architects have been published in books and journals because they affirm the status of the architect as an artist, and architecture as a type of art. However, in terms of hand-drawn images, 'nothing reveals more the supreme importance of the symbolic aspect of architecture than the fact that drawings of buildings are at least as important as the objects they depict' (Stevens 1998, 97). Similarly, Colomina (cited in Stead 2004, 102) states that the drawings' appearance and publication in the immaterial sites of books and journals have allowed architecture to be transformed in ways that otherwise would have seemed difficult or impossible. This indicates how drawings and photographs are 'mechanisms of representation in their own right which should be understood

in the same terms as the buildings themselves' (Colomina, cited in Stead 2004, 103). As such, if architectural drawings are understood in the same terms as buildings, it is possible to also argue that architectural drawings or sketches inadvertently contribute to the mythical construction and reproduction of DCM's architecture.

### ***Reading the architect-designed home: Image of the architect as the 'other'***

By using DCM architects as an example in this case study, one of the principal aims of this chapter is to demonstrate how Barthes's (1973, 124) theoretical articulation of the contemporary myth calls upon and upholds the architect as a heroic figure, and how the idealised image of the architectural home came to be understood as having an 'imperative, buttonholing' character. That is, with myth, there is always some form of 'motivation'—some purpose, intent or rationale underlying its use (Hall 1997, 181), whereby the persuasiveness of myth is derived from their natural justification of their purpose. In other words, one does not question the validity of the myth associated with the mythic content of the architect-designed home image because one simply accepts it as being normal, 'natural' and at once real and true.

#### *Representations and origins of the architect figure*

The way the architect figure is represented by the media says a great deal about how the society is expected to receive this image. As Johnson (1994, 174) notes:

Professional images abound in the print media, featuring architects at work in the office or on site, and occasionally at leisure. Industry journals are filled with such images, and the architect is usually a *man*, with drawings under his arm, or with mouse under his hand jousting a computer screen filled with pretend-architecture lines, the architect looking ever-so-slightly tousled.

Within its own profession, an obsession and unwavering fascination with the architect as a hero has been long standing. This thesis argues that this obsession with the figure of the architect is tied to a level of myth, in Barthes's sense.

The myth of the architect as a heroic figure was popularly established and projected as Howard Roark's character in the book, *The Fountainhead*. Throughout the book, the architect epitomises the architectural hero: tall, handsome and poetic—the persona of which embodies the way a profession wishes to be known (Rand 1994). According to Miller (1988), the uneasy mix of petulance and solid entrepreneurial savvy in Roark's character is an acknowledgement of Daniel Burnham's role in creating an enduring professional identity. Miller (1988) argues that since the time of Burnham (1846 to 1912), this popular identity had grown closer and closer to the 'professional' persona that architects speak of in the privacy of their clubs and offices.<sup>50</sup>

While visionaries such as Louis Sullivan (1856 to 1924) and Lloyd Wright (1867 to 1959) were thought to be models for Roark, it was Burnham whose career and attitude towards the profession completed a century-long process of myth making that placed the architect at the centre of critical and social attention. Miller stresses that it was Burnham who combined the brilliance of a visionary with a businessman's will to get things done. Burnham appropriated the visionary heroic mode—as first expressed by Thomas Jefferson (and later by Sullivan)—and grafted it onto the dominant business ethic of the day. In doing so, the architect revised the stance of heroic architecture without abandoning its seductive power to persuade clients and provide a positive image.

Popular culture in the media genre of movies and television series has also had its share of stereotyping both the art and technical aspects of the architect figure. These media images have portrayed the architect as a mystical and quirky persona. Johnson (1994, 174–175) states:

media images of architects have shifted dramatically from Rand's rugged individualist to a more moderate and conservative portrayals. They range from the besieged and exasperated father-and-architect in the Australian soap *Hey Dad* to the sensitive lead in spike Lee's *Jungle Fever* to the shy but hard-working and creative, if slightly irresponsible, character portrayed by Steve Martin in *Housesitter*. The Martin character however, did have a hustling, sycophantic and opportunistic cohort,

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<sup>50</sup> As a nineteenth-century American architect and urban planner, Burnham's influence on American cities was substantial. He was one of the Chicago architects responsible for the earliest development of the American skyscraper, and was noted for his highly successful management of the World's Columbian Exposition of the 1893 and his ideas about urban planning (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2014).

and the partner of the firm was a blustery, crusty caricature of almost every corporate ‘boss’. Such are examples of the less conventional persona of the architect that tend to confound the more traditional role that architects are expected to play.

However, in light of the above, the celebrated myth of the architect as the ‘other’ and as a heroic figure is indeed enduring and perpetual. Such a view seems to be reaffirmed by Johnson (1994, 175) when he states that, ‘for all their flair and creativity, architects on the whole are expected to be level-headed, dependable, and above all, practical’.

Architects have been used by advertisers to project the image of success, affluence and confidence (Johnson 1994, 173). For example, Los Angeles architect Ghery was once used by TBWA\Chiat\Day—the advertising agency responsible for Apple’s ‘Think Different’ advertising campaign—to project the architect’s image of success. For most of 1998, the north side of the ‘Binocular Building’ sported a large banner with a head shot of Ghery in front of his new Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain, supported by Apple’s new slogan, ‘Think Different’ (see Figure 38).<sup>51</sup> As Elizabeth Hornbeck (1999, 52) interprets, the advertisement serves as a signature of Ghery’s work and an advertisement for the architect. In addition, due to TBWA\Chiat\Day’s status as a client of Ghery, the banner also advertises TBWA\Chiat\Day (Hornbeck 1999, 52).

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<sup>51</sup> Designed and built from 1986 to 1991 by Frank O Ghery Associates, the Binocular Building is owned by Omnicom—a parent company of the building’s original occupant, TBWA\Chiat\Day. The building is divided into three radically different exteriors. These are designed to suggest a ship on the north end and a tree on the south end which are separated by a pair of three-storey-high binoculars. The building stops traffic along this colourful section of Main Street (Hornbeck 1999, 52).

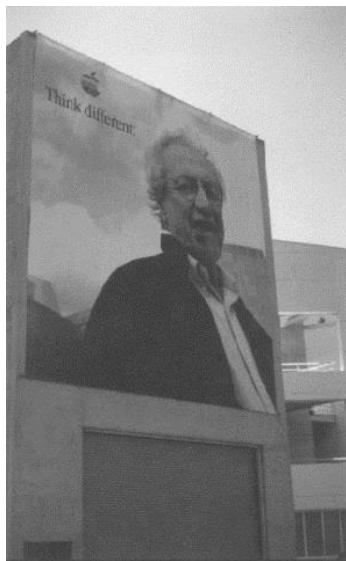


Figure 38: Ghery in Apple Computer's 'Think Different' banner advertisement, 1998.  
Source: Hornbeck 1999, 53.

Apple's advertising campaign, launched in 1997, featured a variety of creative individuals, including artists, scientists and great leaders. As Hornbeck (1999, 52) states, 'what these people have in common is not their use of Apple computers. Instead, as reported by the Wall Street Journal, Apple's goal is to celebrate "geniuses," defined as people who "push the human race forward"'. Including Ghery in this distinguished group of Apple 'geniuses' suggests that the image of the architect is generally associated with such people. Interestingly, Hornbeck (1999, 52) adds that the TBWA\Chiat\Day Emmy Award-winning television commercial for Apple included two more North American architects: Lloyd Wright and Buckminster Fuller. Hornbeck (1999, 52) further highlights that, 'Wright, of course, is the most recognizable figurehead of the architect-hero stereotype, the symbol of extreme individualism immortalized in Ayn Rand's *The Fountainhead*'. Noting that the use of architects and *avant-garde* architecture in advertising is not a new phenomenon, Hornbeck (1999, 54) emphasises that recent scholarly works have scrutinised the symbiotic relationship of early modernist architects, such as Le Corbusier and Richard Neutra, with advertising:

While manufacturers used *avant-garde* buildings to symbolize the height of modernity—then considered a strong, positive selling point in a world fascinated by the possibilities of the future—the architects used industrial products in their own discursive practices to heighten the appeal of their own work and social ideals.

Despite the failure of modernist architecture, one could argue that twentieth-century modern architectural pioneers—such as Gropius, van der Rohe, Le Corbusier and Lloyd Wright—inevitably spring to the cultured mind as heroes of the architectural profession. The fact that the image of the great architect has been so strongly and inseparably bound to the ‘makers of modern architecture’ is highlighted in Milne’s (1980) passage below:

For whatever one’s prejudices on the current debate concerning the failure of modern architecture, it is impossible to avoid being struck by the sheer scope and grandeur of the enterprise the ‘makers of modern architecture’ self-consciously undertook. Recent work into the historicism of the modernist movement in architecture has opened up, but not highlighted sufficiently, the high altitude giddiness that accompanied the leaders’ claim to be ‘makers of the age’. Looking back on the statements of modern architectural pioneers, we can now see that their incessant claims about single-handedly remaking the whole world and bringing in the millennium were literal, not figurative. And unless we are to write off the giants of modern architecture as outlandishly egotistical fools, this presents us with a puzzle: How to account for the fact that our finest architectural minds have harbored such patent delusions of grandeur?

The above quotation reinforces and attests to the indomitable image of the pioneering architects of the twentieth century. It supports the view that the ‘makers of modern architecture’ seem to have succeeded in harbouring a reputation and impression of ‘grandeur’ within their own profession.

Similarly, despite his less-than-perfect architectural reputation, the champion image of the leading figure of the Modern Movement, Le Corbusier, is to this day regarded dissoluble and timeless, as William Curtis (cited in Corbusier, Jeanneret & Boesiger 1987, 13) states:

Meanwhile, denigrators resort to caricature, finding Le Corbusier guilty for the disasters of ‘urban renewal’, dreary tower blocks and all, as if he had invented the ugliness of our cities all by himself. In Post-modernist folklore Le Corbusier emerges as a villain, a rootless functionalist who reduced architecture to a wilderness of mechanisms from its previous civilized state. History is twisted into strange shapes to suit the passing concerns of the moment ... Neither the tired myths of old orthodoxies nor the fresh distortions of recent criticism are much use in coming to terms with a figure of such dimensions. Even though the shibboleths of Modernism have now lost their force, Le Corbusier still stands, a sentinel of principle.

In addition to claiming that Le Corbusier's authoritative image still stands, Curtis (cited in Corbusier, Jeanneret & Boesiger 1987, 13) further adds that:

it is precisely Corbusier's extraordinary architectural persona which transcends fashion ... his superb control of light and space and form; his commitment to the reconciliation of man, machine and nature; his allegiance to fundamentals in tradition ... even though Le Corbusier's utopian world-view now seems out dated, his prodigious forms live on and they seem to possess the sort of symbolic power that guarantees longevity.

One cannot deny (and some would defend) the above statement. Being an architect and myth consumer, the current researcher constantly seeks the mythical signifier of the image of Le Corbusier as a great architectural figure as an inextricable whole made of meaning and form. As such, the above statement is read with an element of truth—at least by those in the architectural profession.

### *The image of the architect in the 'modern' era of the 1950s and twenty-first century*

Building on this, it is no coincidence that the 'modern' era of the 1950s was a time during which the image of the architect as a heroic figure was intensified in Australia. This was the time when the promotion of experts—such as architects, interior designers and furniture designers—was detected as a recurrent theme during the early years of *AHG* (Greig 1995b). As noted in earlier chapters (see 'Main introduction' and Chapter Three), architects at this time were hailed as the agency of post-war change. Shortly after World War II, the architect was considered an influential figure for the Australian public around the same time that the modernist home was considered an architectural ideal (London & Richards 1997).

For example, in Perth, acceptance of the *avant-garde* ideas of the early years of modernism founded in Europe placed many architects at the forefront of home design because, according to Richards (1997, 16), a significant percentage of the public were likely to commission an architect to design their home. As such, architect-designed homes that incorporated principles of modern architecture were regularly featured and served as a dominant basis for housing design. During this period, it seemed as though

architects had an important role to play in housing. However, a decade later, the newspaper advertisements revealed a different situation. Even though, by this time, the family home had become a sophisticated developer's product (Richards 1997, 17), newspapers were still offering variants on the architect-designed modern house.

In the present twenty-first century, the normative ideals and images of the architect as the 'other' continue to prevail and pervade society. Browsing local newspapers, one can still easily find an advertisement that seems to suggest that only architect-designed homes are worthy to be defined as 'extravagant' (see Figure 39, left). They also suggest that home advertisers are still using the term 'architect-designed' to their advantage in the sale of project homes, believing in the power of the word 'architect', by virtue of its prestigious title (see Figure 39, right). Advertisers believe that using the term 'architect-designed' will attract a better sale of project homes, since the 'natural' meaning of an 'architect-designed' home is usually associated with superior, remarkable and distinguished design.

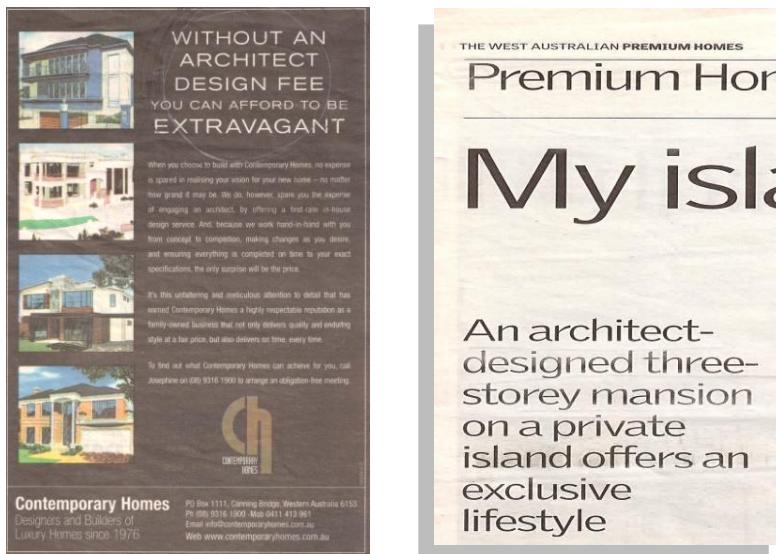


Figure 39: left—The power the word 'architect' holds by virtue of its prestigious title; right—An advertisement advocating the 'architect-designed' home.

Source: left—*The West Australian: New Homes* 2006d, 26; right—Eppen 2005, 28.

This phenomenon is supported by a quotation from sociologist Robert Gutman (cited in Stevens 1998, 86), in which he ponders what is known as 'the natural market' for architecture:

Rare is the building not designed by an architect that represents the supreme values of a civilization. This has been true for temples, palaces, libraries, and city halls in Greece, Rome, and Europe during the Renaissance; and for museums, university structures, government buildings, and corporate headquarters more recently. The design of the great seminal monumental buildings is the unique province of architecture, its 'natural market'. No other profession was able to compete effectively for this market in the past, or is able to now.

As this quotation suggests, it is only 'natural' for an architect-designed building to be regarded a building of power, of state, of worship and to awe and impress. Similarly, it is undeniable that the image of the architect signifies a superior and mystical figure in the public's imagination. This conversion into nature of the meaning of the 'architect-designed' home is similar to what is referred to as 'a major ideological phenomenon' that is intimately connected to the Barthoneon myth:

Meaning is always a phenomenon of culture, a product of culture, now, in our society, this phenomenon of culture is constantly naturalized, reconverted into nature by speech, which makes us believe in a purely transitive situation of the object. We believe we are in a practical world of uses, of functions, of total domestication of the object, and in reality we are also, by objects, in a world of meanings, of reasons, of alibis: function gives birth to the sign, but this sign is reconverted into the spectacle of a function. I believe it is precisely this conversion of culture into pseudo-nature which can define the ideology of our society (Barthes 1988, 189–190).

In the above quotation, Barthes (1988) clearly elaborates the definition of ideology, articulating how it is intricately linked to the way meaning (which ultimately gives form to myth) is informed and defined by culture. As such, a problem clearly exists when people start to accept it to be normal that an architect-designed home is superior to a mass builder's project home. Yet, to what extent is this really the case?<sup>52</sup> Thus, it is this transformation of the sign (the image of the architect) into a utopic, unreal function (the heroic figure) that represents what Barthes believes to be a major ideological phenomenon in society.

In the context of what would classify as one of the rules governing the production of a mythical speech (rhetoric figures of speech), based on the

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<sup>52</sup> As established in Chapter One, even houses designed by noteworthy architects have been known to be faulty. For example, the house designed by twentieth-century modernist architect, van der Rohe, was not only 'unlivable', but posed 'a social threat of regimentation and total control' (Friedman 1996, 187). In addition, there were houses with leaky roofs designed by pioneering architects such as Le Corbusier and Lloyd Wright (Antoniades, cited in Stevens 1998, 84).

advertisement headline seen in Figure 39, ‘an architect-designed three-storey mansion on a private island offers an exclusive lifestyle’ would be read as a platitudinous statement that is ‘transparent’. This means that the statement is completely and sufficiently conceptualised to carry its own ideological implications, while still being adaptable to the historical specifications of the concept that is tied to the greatness of the architect as a heroic figure. Thus, a myth consumer would read this as a perfectly correct factual statement, yet this truth serves to verify certain unspoken implications. The headline statement in the advertisement shown in Figure 39 could thus be seen as a prestigious example of the platitude. According to Barthes, the strength or supremacy of such a platitudinous statement is that it is defined by itself; thus, any possibility that its nature is complex or debatable is excluded.

This theoretical analysis has indicated the extent to which DCM’s architectural imageries and the image of the architect as the ‘other’ are constructions that seek ‘to persuade, to render “natural” or “innocent” what is profoundly ... “motivated”’ (Hall 1997, 179). The next section explores the image of the architect-designed home by referring to DCM’s residential projects. Henceforth, the aim of this analysis is to reinforce that the image of the architect-designed home is subsumed within a mythical entity in which the architectural home mythologises into an ideality with its engagement in the media.

### ***Reading images of DCM-designed houses***

As both an architect and true admirer of DCM’s architectural design, the current researcher is also a myth consumer in the architectural field. The researcher is equipped with a ‘cultural capital’ (more on this later) that enables discernment and appreciation of most, if not all, of what is advertised and publicised about architects and the creativity of their work in the media. This section examines architectural magazines and the firm’s website to analyse two houses designed by DCM: the Medhurst House and the Emery Residence.

### *The Medhurst House*

Designed in 2007, the Medhurst House (see Figure 40), is one of DCM's architectural domestic works.<sup>53</sup> In the photographs, one recognises the 'blade' in the form of an extreme cantilever roof, and the use of the colour green in the exterior cladding of the walls as a signifier and representation of DCM's architecture. The use of colour in DCM's architecture represents a strong identity in their work. The significance of the use of colour is that 'it serves to dramatize the disruptive and gravity defying spatial effects of the formal elements' (Beck & Cooper 2000, 37).

It was established previously that DCM architects adopt formal elements—such as random variations of sticks, dots, grids and a three-dimensional frame—as part of their hallmark and signature of building design. The hallmark and signature of DCM architects have since informed their architectural moves. They are not constrained by scale and appear just as strongly, if not more so, in various descriptive images depicted of the Medhurst House. The design concept is derived from the idea of the four 'gift boxes' and inspired from the four-box podium in Brisbane Square:

It takes the four 'gift boxes' at the base of Brisbane Square, transforming them into concrete bastions and shifting them their poetic towards the geographical. They are set across the long axis of a ridge that is a spur into Victoria's Yarra Valley from the Great Dividing Range (Schaik et al. 2008, 18).

Apart from the strong poetic inference in the above writing by the architectural journalist—which is inevitable and understandable in many cases—Schaik et al.'s (2008, 18) references to DCM's monumental and sculptural derivations are palpable<sup>54</sup>:

Above, positioned flushed with the ends of the bastion boxes just as the slab tower in Brisbane Square sits relative to its four-box podium, floats a form reminiscent of one of the Civil Justice Center's lateral glazed boxes. The flanges on this have been hugely emphasized, taking this form further towards the ethereal, the unscaled. From oblique angles, the box reads as if it were, indeed, an 'I' beam levitating from the black base below. To the West there is an extreme cantilever of around eleven meters—quite substantial when the whole box measures approximately fifty meters in length, and ten meters wide

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<sup>53</sup> This received its name due to being situated in the Medhurst Yarra Valley of Melbourne.

<sup>54</sup> Van Schaik is a professor of Architecture at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT).

across the extremities of the flanges, which are about one and a half meters out from the walls of the box.

In light of the above quotation, this section argues that the architectural home enters a myth and becomes ‘naturalised’ as the reader is drawn into the mythic content of Schaik et al.’s (2008) architectural writings. In Schaik et al.’s written description of the Medhurst House, DCM’s ambiguity and playfulness of form, liberated from architectural, programmatic, constructional and scale constraints are succinctly echoed. In this sense, Schaik et al.’s writing serves only to ground the myth of the architects as the ‘other’. It is by virtue of its metaphorical and mystical references—such as by referring to elements of the house as a ‘box’ and stating that the form ‘floats’—that a somewhat supernatural and even divine image of the home is evoked in the reader.



Figure 40: The Medhurst House.  
Source: Schaik et al. 2008, 292–293.

As Johnson (1994, 47) notes, it is difficult to say precisely when the mythic content of architecture was recognised, and harder still to say when architecture was perceived as the content of myth. For example, Denis Hollier (1989, 33) writes that Andre Felibien considers Noah’s Ark to be a work of architecture, and suggests a tight connection between this art and religion. This is because the Jewish people ‘held architecture in special esteem ... because this art has some divine element, and because God ... is called in the Scripture the sovereign architect of the Universe’ (Hollier 1989, 33). In this sense, Hollier (1989, 33) pronounces that, ‘the great architect is, by metaphor, God, or to use the rationalist litotes, the Supreme Being’.

Johnson (1994, 48) reiterates this aspect of architecture's association with divinity:

The ancient ziggurat and pyramid are symbols of an attempt to intersect with the divine, to recreate the Edenic garden atop the cosmic mountain, the desire of man to once again touch heaven, has been with us since recorded time. Of two methods of seeking paradise, the oral and the written, written tradition creates heaven through the use of language and requires architecture to establish its *metaphorical case*.

In *The Architecture of Exile*, Stanley Tigerman (cited in Johnson 1994, 48) claims that:

a divine ratio has been struck: the oral tradition is to the heavenly garden (the architecture of God) as the written tradition is to the ark containing the covenant (the architecture of man). Examples of both conditions abound throughout the history of architecture.

Tigerman (cited in Johnson 1994, 48) further adds that the fixity and placidness of architecture is equivalent to reading the divine text committed to writing, and to human parity with God: 'A heavenly union is joined and a cosmic intersection concretized. Architecture makes an offering gesture to God'. In light of the above, one could argue that reading Schaik et al.'s (2008) description of DCM's architectural houses is equivalent to reading a form of a 'divine text'. Instilling and conjuring a mythical discourse is precisely what Schaik et al. (2008) is trying to achieve in his written description of the Medhurst House. Of course, mythical consumers are unaware of this and, because they are unaware, the likelihood of them living the mythic content of architecture as a story that appears natural and 'at once true and unreal' (Barthes 1973, 128) is great. As Barthes (1973, 109) states, 'myth is a type of speech, everything can be a myth provided it is conveyed by a discourse ... [it is] not defined by the object of its message, but by the way in which it utters its message'. In this sense, the idealised architecture home designed by DCM architects subsumes into a level of myth because it is conveyed by a discourse that is clearly reflected in the undertones in Schaik et al.'s writings.

Moreover, this section analyses that the moment at which the Medhurst House engages with the media—with Schaik et al.'s writings

appearing in websites and journals—is the moment at which the house becomes an architectural object to be idealised. This is because the media has shaped the architect-designed home and its representations (by elaborate construct of drawings, photographs, newspaper articles and even lectures, books, films, conferences and theoretical books) to be what the mythical consumer understands it to be. The quotation below highlights this critical perspective:

This constructed representation defines what we consider good, what we consider fashionable, what we consider popular. At a simple level, it is the terms through which the architects themselves select what to represent and to privilege—composing the façade of the house, imagining the photo view of the house, making the image for the client, commissioning the photographer. At several more complex levels, it affects how the reader interprets and values architecture. At the level of discussion, publication and reference, representation arguably surpasses architecture itself (Rattenbury 2002, xxii).

This quotation also highlights two significant concepts previously mentioned in this chapter: the symbolic capital (in Bourdieu's sense) that architects are seeking in order to thrive in the field of their own profession, and the importance of the mythic consumer to attain the 'correct' mental schemes in order to appreciate, interpret and value architecture.

### *The Emery Residence*

The Emery Residence is another award-winning house designed by DCM. Built in 2000, images of the Emery Residence in Cape Schanck, Victoria, have appeared on architectural websites, such as Architecture Media (Architecture Media 2000) (see Figure 41). The house was the winner of the Robyn Boyd Award for Housing.<sup>55</sup> Much like the Medhurst House, the signifying and mythical image of the Emery Residence—conveyed and uttered through a discourse in the Architecture Media (2000) website that describes it to be 'sculptural', 'scaleless' and 'anomalous'—are governed by

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<sup>55</sup> The RAIA Robin Boyd Residential Buildings Award is not the only leading prize DCM architects have received, although it is Australia's most prestigious annual architectural residential housing award, and architects receiving this award are regarded the best in Australia. Other high-profile recipients have included Peter Stutchbury of Stutchbury + Pape, Glenn Mercutt, Kerry Hill and Gabrielle Poole, to name a few. The prize is awarded to houses that set new benchmarks in terms of meeting client's needs, responding to site, and providing shelter that is at the leading edge of house design.

the imperative nature of the myth. This message is stated in the description and jury's verdict that appeared in the Architecture Media (2000) website:

The orthogonal black form is very clear and simple, but there is something odd to it. The box tube is twisted in section, the cladding raked, the lower windows cranked and the chimney emerging from the wall is on the diagonal. The house looks nothing like a house, but rather like an object flying in from space and rotating along its long axis as it is about to land. The house is a dynamic enigma in the windswept setting ... The three bedroom, two storey beach house sits high and isolated in coastal scrub and takes in expansive ocean views: north-west along the Mornington Peninsula, south-west to Cape Schanck ... It is a starling improbable sculptural object at first sight, seemingly hovering above windswept dunes, as dramatic in its form as the wild landscape it habits ... The design and its resolution is another high point in the architects' continuing development of immaculate Suprematist form.

In the above quotation, to project a representation of the house as 'an object flying in from space', as 'a starling improbable sculptural object', as 'hovering above' and as a 'dynamic enigma' is again to appeal to the mythic imaginations of architecture. As such, it is by virtue of the media images and language through which the design has been uttered in architectural journals that the Emery Residence is read and received by the mythical consumer as a supernatural form.

Through cultivating a symbolic capital, the DCM architects have successfully managed to use an image production exercise to create yet another idealised architectural home for the reader. When architects design houses, it is often insufficient for these houses to eventually be physically manifested into inhabitable spaces. Heathcote (cited in Iloniemi 1994, 7) claims—in parallel to emphasising the significant need for architects to publicise or market their work to the widest audience possible—that, 'Good architecture is indispensable but it is not enough on its own'. He states that, 'Striving for publicity ... is rarely a waste of time in an age where the primary architectural experience for most people who will see your building comes not from a visit, but from the pages of a magazine' (Heathcote, cited in Iloniemi 1994, 7). Ultimately, DCM's professional interest, through making dynamic shapes and 'cantilevering sculptural forms', rests primarily on the way these houses are represented or published. Correspondingly, this thesis

argues that when houses are represented or published in a magazine, they are transformed into ‘desirable’ or ‘idealised’ architectural objects.



Figure 41: The Emery Residence.  
Source: Robin Boyd Award for Housing 2000.

### *The architectural home in the media: Significance of Bourdieu’s theory in relation to Barthes’s myth*

Barthes’s theoretical articulation of the contemporary myth calls on the myth that upholds the architect as a heroic figure and the architect-designed home to be understood as having a ‘buttonholing’ character. That is, with myth, there is always some form of motivation—some purpose, intent or rationale underlying its use (Hall 1997, 181), whereby the persuasiveness of myths is derived from their ‘natural justification’ of their purpose. In other words, people do not question the validity of the myth associated with the architectural home because they accept it as being ‘natural’ and both real and true.

In contrast, Bourdieu’s concept of symbolic capital is understood as ‘a sort of advance’ extended by what he calls ‘dominated’ or ‘cultured’ individuals (in this case, fellow practitioners who have the right mental schemes of appreciation) to the dominant (in this case, the architects as designers and architectural journalists who write about their works), as long as the dominated find that it is in their interest to accord recognition and legitimisation to the dominant. Thus, symbolic capital is a ‘collective belief’ and ‘capital of trust’ that stems from social esteem and material wealth (Swartz 1997, 92).

Thus, by coupling Barthes’s theory of myth with Bourdieu’s social theory, this thesis proposes that the image of the architect-designed home by

DCM is embedded in a mythical structure in the way that Barthes defines this. It represents nothing more than a set of false representations and erroneous beliefs that construct a world for those outside the profession—the mass of non-specialists or non-experts. It is important to understand that myth ‘naturalises’ the image of the architect-designed home into an idealised home, transmuting what is essentially cultural (historical, constructed and motivated—the mental image of the architect as hero) into something that materialises as natural (trans-historical, innocent and factual—photographs of a house designed by DCM). However, it is equally important to realise that the symbolic imagery of DCM’s architecture in the media can only be ‘consumed’ by cultured individuals—those within the institutional boundaries of the profession who carry the correct mental schemes of appreciation.

Barthes (1988, 188) acknowledges this by stating:

In other words, each of us has in himself, so to speak, several lexicons, several reservoirs of reading, depending on the kinds of knowledge, the cultural levels he possesses. All degrees of knowledge, of culture, and of situation are possible, facing an object and a collection of objects.

Adding to this, even those who do not have the right schemes of appreciation and may not be able to gauge the meaning of DCM’s architectural design do not in any way ‘weaken’ the meaning of the symbolic imagery of DCM’s architecture. Barthes (1988, 188) makes this clear by saying:

We can even imagine that, facing an object, or a collection of objects, we might have a strictly individual reading, by which we invest what might be called our own *psyche* in the spectacle of the object: we know that the object can produce in us readings of a psychoanalytic level. This does not weaken the systematic, the codified nature of the object. We know that even if we descend into the depths of the individual psyche, we do not thereby escape its meaning.

Thus, what should be understood—and what Barthes is trying to state in the above quotation—is that there are no objects outside meaning. The symbolic imagery of the DCM’s architecture, after being ‘assumed by a society’, functions at least as the sign of the insignificant—it signifies itself as non-signifying. As Barthes (1988, 188) states, it is the duty of the reader or myth consumer to ‘seek the meaning: there are objects before which we ask: *what is it?*’.

In affirming that only cultured individuals who possess the correct cultural capital can access this layer of history, and thus this layer of knowledge, and those who do not are denied access, Bourdieu's social theory of the *habitus* is thus seen to have specific relevance for the way people perceive the idealised architectural home. Habitus transforms social and economic 'necessity' into 'virtue' by leading individuals to a 'kind of immediate submission to order' (Bourdieu & Passeron 1990, 54). It legitimates inequality by providing a practical and taken-for-granted acceptance of the fundamental conditions of existence (Swartz 1997, 105), and thus informs perceptions of what is considered the idealised home.

Just as Karl Marx once claimed that it is not humans' consciousness that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness, Dovey (1991, 35) similarly argues that, as part of the taken-for-granted context of everyday life, architecture reproduces social structure and ideology more effectively than if it were brought to consciousness. In addition, Gary Stevens (1988, 58) argues that the social structure and ideology that are reproduced through the built environment without ever coming to consciousness have been internalised through the habitus.

On these grounds, this study interprets that the act of recognising or perceiving the architect-designed home in the media is, to some extent, determined by habitus. The act of recognising or perceiving the architect-designed in the media involves an active, albeit unconscious, set of unformulated dispositions of ways of perceiving and deciphering. Based on this proposition, much of the power to structure one's perceptions and interpretations of representations in the media derive from the thoughtlessness of habit and habituation that they produce. Thus, the habitus is a field of inclusion and exclusion that guides the way people appropriate knowledge, and learn to read and interpret the world with respect to their social position, education and experience. This provides a practical familiar mode of seeing that tells people 'instinctively' what to see. The dispositions of habitus thus represent an informal and practical—rather than discursive or conscious—form of knowledge (Swartz 1997, 163).

As habitus is the product of enculturation (Swartz 1997, 286–287), this component of Bourdieu's social theory provides an understanding that, unless people possess the right cultural capital, they may not be able to fully interpret or grasp the symbolic meaning or visual codes of DCM's architecture. Similarly, it is fundamental to understand that the ensemble dispositions that allow one to consume symbolic objects are also part of one's embodied cultural capital. This is the embodied cultural capital, by which Bourdieu means that it exists within individuals, as attitudes, tastes, preferences and behaviours.<sup>56</sup> Therefore, when it comes to discerning or interpreting DCM's architecture in the media, the symbolic imagery cannot be 'consumed' unless one carries the correct mental schemes of appreciation—unless these meanings are fully decoded by the myth consumer.

In the above light, one could say that each person's sense of what constitutes the idealised home represents a series of disorientated and disjointed views when it is solely being dictated and governed by the press (architecture books, journals and websites) and media's representations (in the form of photographs). Hill (2002, 87) attests to the likelihood of this vulnerable position for the 'uneducated' or 'uncultured' reader: 'the writings and photographic image act as the mediator between the writer and the reader, who is encouraged to assume that the experience of the photograph is the same as the experience of the building'.

Thus, with reference to this quotation, the reader or myth consumer would still hope to make the most of such an 'experience', even if this experience is possible only within the boundaries and parameters of the media. However, the extent to which such an experience can be enhanced depends largely on the way the building's imagery is perceived and understood by the reader. As Beck and Cooper (2000, 31) reinforce, 'complexity in architecture if not rightly gauged can become confused for intricacy, so that the expressive result is difficult to understand'. The reality and meaning of the architectural home in the media is dependent on two factors: whether its message is 'rightly gauged' and how well this message is

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<sup>56</sup> For example, higher education has particularly been acknowledged as probably 'the single most powerful factor' in the standardisation of taste and culture (Rubin 1979, 357).

received by the reader. The two cannot be mutually exclusive, or it may not be possible for the image of the home to begin to take form.

### ***Chapter conclusion and discussion***

This chapter acknowledges that there are key distinctions between the image of the home seen in ‘popular’ media constructions of architectural spaces, and the image of the house that exists in professional cultures of architectural spaces. However, it demonstrates that the imagery of DCM’s architectural houses is nevertheless capable of rendering the architect-designed home a naturally profound and mythic ideal, even within the architectural profession. As argued throughout this chapter, such a mystifying image of the home is inextricably tied to the myth of the ‘greatness’ of the architect and the heroic architect as the ‘other’. Through operating architects’ symbolic capital and manipulating photographic concerns, combined with the so-called ‘architectural language’ used to enhance and describe the normative ideals and images of DCM’s design, the image of the heroic architect as the ‘other’ postulates this imaginary continuation by the viewer in order to work its full mythical effect. DCM’s design ideals and images include ‘sculptural forms, composed of suprematist formal gesture [of] “sticks” and “blades”’ (Beck & Cooper 2000), the ‘sky-thrusting blade’-like roof (Beck & Cooper 2000) and the house as ‘an object flying in from space’ (Architecture Media 2000).

Such a myth is capable of sustaining itself without any need for justification because it is by virtue of a mythical speech—the way the houses have been expressed by architects and journalists, or the way they have been represented in books, on websites and in magazines substantiates them as idealised architectural objects. However, one must remember that, in the authors’ or journalists’ writings of the architectural home, they invest in words that describe this as less a reality than a certain knowledge of reality. In other words, the concept or meaning behind the mystical architectural home hinges on what the reader already knows—his or her possessed knowledge. This aligns with Barthes (1973, 125):

because the concept appears to the reader in all its appropriative nature: it comes and seeks [only those cultured individuals] out in order to oblige them to acknowledge the body of intentions which have motivated it and arranged it there as the signal of an individual history, as a confidence and a complicity.

Thus, to appear normal and natural, the mystical architect-designed home must connect with certain habits of thought so basic to the culture that their validity is taken for granted. Hence, the ‘modern’ period of the 1950s was a time in Perth during which the ideal of the architect-designed home was exploited in the media, which was exacerbated by a vulnerable economic situation and housing crisis following World War II.

It is important to understand that myth naturalises the idealised image of the architectural home into an mystifying entity, transmuting what is essentially cultural (historical, constructed and motivated—the architect figure perceived as the ‘other’) into something that materialises as natural (trans-historical, innocent and factual—a photograph of an architect-designed home). However, it is also important to see that the symbolic imagery of the architectural home in the media can only be consumed by cultured individuals or those within the institutional boundaries of the profession who carry the correct mental schemes of appreciation.

Since architecture belongs to a field in which the most valued form of capital is cultural (Stevens 1998, 94), an effective way for an architectural firm to cultivate and accumulate its cultural or reputational capital within the profession is through advertising and promotion via the media.<sup>57</sup> Therefore, in order for a corporate architectural firm to sustain itself within the field or be regarded high profile, a constant pursuit of a cultural capital must coexist with a voracious market that demands from architects new images to feed it. Dovey (1991, 35) further explains that this market for new meaning creates an appetite for distinction and thus for increased turnover in fashion.

Contemporary architecture, in this sense, often cultivates the quality of being *spectacular*. As Pierre-Alain Croset (1988, 203) states:

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<sup>57</sup> For indeed, quintessential architects with great amounts of reputational capital—such as Lloyd Wright, Le Corbusier and van der Rohe—are able to dictate their own terms and tell clients what is good for them because, in doing so, they define their client’s own symbolic superiority.

This quality both guarantees the selectivity of its photographic reproduction, thereby responding to the requirements of the magazine, and corresponds to a precise demand formulated by the market: that of visual novelty, which allows for the commercial promotion of the building by way of the circulation and diffusion of its image.

Above all, as this chapter ends, it emphasises how the imperative nature of myth lies in the manner through which the image of the architect-designed home subtly communicates its factual nature as a legitimately designed product to the non-factual concept of an idealised object. The greatness of the architect as a heroic figure (an idea or value) thus comes to impose itself with the straightforwardness of an empirical fact, and the message is subsequently enabled to conceal its identity as such. This appropriation of a sign as an alibi for another message is what Barthes finds ethically objectionable. Such transformation of history into 'nature' is the very principle of myth because it has no bearing on reality.

## **Chapter Six: The home theatre, Tuscan and various styles of the home in the twenty-first century**

### **Chapter introduction**

Having discussed the myth of architecture and architectural design, this chapter now moves to the present era, where the home centre of mythological focus has transformed from the kitchen of the 1950s to the theatre room, and from the ‘modern’ to the Tuscan. Delving predominantly into the twenty-first century, this chapter scrutinises the ‘Tuscan’ image of the home, as well as images of the many existing eclectic styles of the home as they appear in Perth’s contemporary weekend newspaper supplements. It also explores the myth associated the home theatre, with its apparent rise in popularity being reflected by an influx of images that appear in NIMs, such as *Habitat* in *The West Australian* and *Homes* in *The Sunday Times*. Arguably one of the most idealised spaces associated with the sale of homes in local newspapers in the twenty-first century, this chapter stipulates that the normative ideal space and image of the home theatre room now manifests as a site of idealisation, as this image also transcends the ideal image of the kitchen in the 1950s.

In light of Baudrillard’s analysis of the ‘new myths’ in interior design of the home as part of a desired collective imagery of ‘system of objects’, this chapter also examines and compares Baudrillard’s theoretical approach to that of Barthes. This thesis believes that it is worth highlighting and acknowledging Baudrillard’s position because a significant amount of his work is inspired by Barthes, even though Baudrillard’s theory of the sign eventually departs and diverges from that of Barthes’s theory of myth. Drawing on Baudrillard’s critical interpretive framework, this chapter argues that the references made in today’s papers with respect to the various existing ‘styles’ of home become mythical at the instant when a statement enters a new sign whose signifier is a complete fashion utterance. In other words, these advertising slogans have turned into signs where meanings are drawn ‘from an abstract and systematic relationship to all other sign-objects’ (Baudrillard 2005, 210).

## ***The ideal of the Tuscan and home theatre***

When browsing through the home supplements of Perth's two major weekend newspapers—*The West Australian* and *The Sunday Times*—one is bombarded with images of the twenty-first century's eclectic mix of architectural home styles, advertised in the form of 'Classicism', 'French', 'Tuscan', 'Italian' and even 'modernism' style. Of all the styles encountered, the Tuscan stands out as one of the most prominent. Many advertisements also feature numerous 'must-have' technological and in-built design features for the home. One of the outstanding 'must-haves' is the ubiquitous surround-sound 'theatre room'. Thus, this chapter explores the myths surrounding the normative ideals and images of the 'Tuscan' style of home and the home theatre room in the twenty-first century.

## ***Research methods and analysis***

### *Methods and objective*

Perth's only daily newspaper, *The West Australian*, produces a *New Homes* supplement every Saturday. This provides some indication of the public's housing dreams and aspirations, and the type of houses being built in Western Australia (Pegler, cited in Karol & Spanbroek 2006). On the first Friday of every month, the newspaper produces a NIM called *Habitat*—'a dedicated house and garden lift-out presenting the latest in DIY, home renovations or improvements, interior design, gardening and outdoor living' (*Habitat* 2013). *The Sunday Times* is Western Australia's only Sunday newspaper. This paper also produces a monthly NIM called *Home*. *Home* provides 'the ultimate guide for all those setting up a new home or improving what they've already got' (News Corp Australia 2014). Unless otherwise stated, the *New Homes* supplement from *The West Australian* and the two NIMs from *The West Australian* and *The Sunday Times* constitute the primary sources from which this chapter's objects of study (or images) have been drawn.

In examining the images, the main objective was to identify the imperative nature of the Barthoneon myth associated with the way

advertisement headlines of 'Tuscan' and various other 'styles' have been represented in the media. It seeks to analyse the extent to which these representations of the normative ideals of the home enter a form of signification as myths or idealisations. Images or feature articles that seem to highlight the 'home theatre' were also analysed. These images and articles were consolidated in the overall analysis to further determine whether there were any residual idealised elements of the home from the first time dimension (the 1950s) and, if so, to elaborate the extent to which these residual idealised elements were echoed in the second time dimension (the twenty-first century). The images and articles advertised in the *New Homes* supplement and NIMs were scrutinised by the researcher from January 2005 to January 2008.

### *Objects of study*

The objects of study for this chapter consist of idealised images of the home selected over a three-year period (consisting of advertisement headlines, feature articles and article headlines). These are tabulated and presented in the table below. Only the cited articles in the table have been referenced.

Table 1: Summary of the objects of study for Chapter Six

	<i>The West Australian New Homes supplement</i>	<i>The West Australian Habitat (NIM)</i>	<i>The Sunday Times Home (NIM)</i>
<b>2005</b>	<p><i>December</i>  - 'My island home: An architect designed three storey mansion on a private island offers an exclusive lifestyle.' (Eppen 2005, 28)</p>	<p><i>February</i>  - 'Timeless Appeal of Classical Architecture.'  - 'Home Front'—showing a woman (who looks like a homemaker) sitting on a couch on the front cover of magazine (<i>The West Australian: Habitat</i> 2006a).</p>	<p><i>January</i>  - 'An established sanctuary—by the water, near the city.' (<i>The Sunday Times: Homes</i> 2005a, 13)  - 'Great Communities are Built on Solid Foundations.' (<i>The Sunday Times: Homes</i> 2005b, 15)</p>
<b>2006</b>	<p><i>January</i>  - 'Opulence with Italian style.'</p> <p><i>February</i>  - 'Modern &amp; Minimalist.'</p> <p><i>March</i>  - 'Classical theme on the river front.' (<i>The West Australian: New Homes</i> 2006a, 40)  - "Theatre of dreams."  - 'A touch of French style.' (<i>The West Australian: New Homes</i> 2006c, 18)</p> <p><i>June</i>  - 'A touch of Tuscan.' (<i>The West Australian: New Homes</i> 2006c, 38)</p> <p><i>July</i>  - 'Without an architect design fee you can afford to be extravagant.' (<i>The West Australian: New Homes</i> 2006d, 26)</p> <p><i>August</i>  - 'French sophistication.'</p> <p><i>September</i>  - 'Tuscan's flavor to entertainer's delight.'  - 'Tuscan's storeys of spacious elegance.' (<i>The West Australian: Habitat</i> 2006d, 47)</p>	<p><i>February</i>  - 'Home Theatre—Looking the part: There's more to setting up a home theatre than installing a big screen.' (<i>The West Australian: Habitat</i> 2006b)</p> <p><i>July</i>  - 'Wonderful warmth of wood.' Magazine issue title: 'Totally Timber: Our Guide to Floors and Decks' (<i>The West Australian: Habitat</i> 2006c).</p>	<p><i>April</i>  - 'Home is where the theatre is'—feature cover story (Fenech 2006, 53).</p>
<b>2007</b>			<p><i>August</i>  - 'First homebuyers special: Big Dreams'—showing a woman on the front cover of magazine, in which it is stated that, 'women are our real customers and they work hard convincing men that cost is worthwhile' (<i>The Sunday Times: Homes</i> 2007, 11).</p>
<b>2008</b>			<p><i>January</i>  - Advertisement in <i>The Rural Building</i> range stating, 'Yes you can afford one' (<i>The Sunday Times: Homes</i> 2008c, 10), 'We understand the environmental issues' (<i>The Sunday Times: Homes</i> 2008b, 10) and 'We understand Solar Efficiency' (<i>The Sunday Times: Homes</i> 2008a, 10).</p>

This provides an overview of the home images found in local newspapers between 2005 and 2008. The kinds of images that were of

primary interest to the researcher were selected based on their references to various 'styles' of the home and home theatres. The majority of these are indicated by the advertisement headings shown in the above table in the 2006 year category. The author found that, although other styles—such as classical, Italian, modern and French—were the subject of many advertisements, the most frequently encountered style in the media was Tuscan.

Other home images that were observed as having an imperative character connoted ideals that corresponded to the Western home ideals of Victorianism. These included suggestive images or references that placed women firmly in the home and men in the marketplace, or connotative words used in home advertisement headlines, such as 'sanctuary' or 'community', which drew connections to the division between public and private, and were suggestive of 'the home as haven from the turbulent world outside' (Davidoff & Hall 1987, 171). Some of these are included in the above table under the 2005 and 2007 year categories.

For this study, the researcher found that ideal images of the home that referenced the word 'architect' and gave prominence to the architect-designed home were also plentiful. Two of these images are included in the above table, under the 2005 and 2006 year categories. These images are not discussed in this chapter because they were analysed and discussed extensively in the previous chapter (Chapter Five).

The researcher also found when examining the *New Homes* supplement and NIMs over the three-year period, many of the images of the advertised home for sale were governed by the popularity of serial production of house plans that were tailored to specific consumerist lifestyles or beliefs. The one example included in the above table is an advertisement for 'The Rural Building' range, shown under the 2008 year category.

### ***Analysis and discussion***

Regarding the listings in the above table, it is important to remember that these images of the media are what people accept to be normal, trivial and natural. At first, the images that appear in the newspapers do not invoke

anything extraordinary because they are part of the cultural language that speaks on behalf of the home image, which is really a reflection of societal values. As such, the selected images of advertising and the media are seen to reflect cultural values of middle Australian society. However, as this thesis believes that media images have inherent specific signifying mechanisms that attempt to universalise and naturalise meanings and values for society, and especially for what constitutes the normative ideals of the home, myth provides a basis for a critique of the ‘naturalising effect’ of ideologies and stereotypes hidden beneath the surface of these ideals. By adopting Barthes’s (1973) theoretical position, the so-called ‘duplicity’ in the idealised home may be analysed.

### *Reading the Tuscan home myth*

The form of the advertising headline, ‘Tuscan storeys of spacious elegance’ (*The West Australian: Habitat* 2006d, 47) (see Figure 42), in a purely linguistic system, finds a fullness, richness and history that plays a substantial role in Italian culture and identity such as that described in the New Itineraries Cultural Association (2004) website:

The Style of Tuscan architecture takes its cues from the sumptuous world of the Italian Renaissance, that is characterized by mosaic tiles, wrought iron gates and portals, distinctive bridges and architecture, all of which reinforce the unique Tuscan identity.<sup>58</sup> Indeed, Tuscan architecture prides its fundamental beginnings in Tuscany, and ‘history has fully demonstrated that in Tuscany more than in all the rest of Italy, one can breathe the taste and sentiment of Art—in the limpid atmosphere of the home of the Etruscans, who had their own matured Art when the primitive populations of the peninsula hardly knew what the word meant. Whether the Egyptians or Assyrians, Greeks or Phoenicians were the inspirers of Etruscan Art, it has been said that the people of Etruria astonished the world about a thousand years before the Christian Era, with the splendor of their monuments, the simple and original grace of their painting and sculpture and their wonderful skill in clay-modeling and iron-working. Of that first artistic period, so remote and the most glorious of Italy, there remains to us that form of Architecture called the Tuscan Style, said to have been invented and used by the Etruscan to modify the Doric Style, which then predominated in Greece’.

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<sup>58</sup> Other defining elements of this style include fireplaces; balconies; roofed porches; round support columns; brick and marble floors; detailed stone fountains; and wrought iron accessories, such as wall lamps and railings. Tuscan country villas are usually made of stone walls that are plastered and coloured with light browns, faded oranges, off-whites, soft reds and simple tans.

Notwithstanding the above historical fact, to a myth consumer, the actual form of the myth (the clause, 'Tuscan storeys of spacious elegance', as it appears in the *New Homes* supplement of *The West Australian*) hardly retains any memory of what is contained in the quotation. This is because the meaning of the headline already contains a whole system of values—a history, geography and morality. As Barthes (1973, 118–119) notes, 'The form has put all this richness at a distance: its newly acquired penury calls for a signification to fill it'. The story of Tuscan architecture must recede a great deal in order to make room for this idealised image of home design.

For the myth consumer who responds to the constituting mechanism of the myth, the headline, 'Tuscan storeys of spacious elegance' has been emptied of any Tuscan architectural history or meaning. The image of the Tuscan home has been reduced to a form of signification—a myth and ideality that subordinates the object to having a mere 'secondary' function through the manipulation of the media and advertising. The image of the Tuscan home would be classified as an 'identification; privation of history' (Barthes 1973, 151) as one of the rules of the rhetorical figures of myth. The otherness of the Tuscan image of the home—not unlike the otherness of the classical, French or even modern styles that are also frequently portrayed in the advertised home section of the local newspaper—has been reduced to a fundamental identity. They are all the same, but are turned into an alien essence. Thus, to discuss the Tuscan style, 'without linking it to its history is to fix it in an essence of otherness, as the eternal Other of Western civilization; in neither case do we have to understand it; we can either assimilate it or gawp it' (Moriaty 1991, 26).

The image of the Tuscan home is thus 'naturalised', in Barthes's sense, when it is made to seem eternal—that is, not due to history. This is precisely what happens in myth. Barthes (1973, 118–119) reiterates this peculiarity of myth:

the form does not suppress the meaning, it only impoverishes it, it puts it at a distance, it holds it at one's disposal. The meaning will be for the form like an instantaneous reserve of history, a tamed richness, which it is possible to call and dismiss in a sort of rapid alternation: the form must constantly be able to be rooted again in the meaning and to get there what nature it needs for its nutriment; above

all, it must be able to hide there. It is this constant game of hide and seek between the meaning and the form which defines myth.



Figure 42: The fullness and richness of the Tuscan form.

Source: *The West Australian: Habitat* 2006d, 47.

This section now considers the signified: this history, which drains out of the form, will be wholly absorbed by the concept. The latter is determined and is both historical and intentional; it is the motivation that causes the myth to be uttered. Grandeur of ancient architecture and fine Italian taste are the drives behind the myth. Unlike the form, the concept is in no way abstract; it is filled with a baggage—a saturated promise. Through the concept, an entirely new history is implanted in the myth because what is invested in the concept is less reality than a certain knowledge of reality.

In other words, the concept hinges on what the reader already knows and the knowledge they possess. This reaffirms the theoretical articulation of Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital—that only those who possess the 'right' cultural capital can access this layer of history, and thus this layer of knowledge. Those who do not possess sufficient cultural capital are denied access—or, rather, deny themselves access. In this sense, the fundamental character of the mythical concept is to be appropriated—the architectural idealised image of the Tuscan home must precisely appeal to a very specific cohort of homebuyers.<sup>59</sup>

Barthes (1973, 120) stresses that the knowledge contained in a mythical concept is 'confused, made of yielding, shapeless associations', so

<sup>59</sup> Unless stated otherwise, this chapter is written with the assumption that homebuyers are largely those people who are seeking to buy or build their first home.

there is no fixity in mythical concepts—they can materialise, alter, disintegrate and disappear completely. It is precisely because they are historical that history can easily suppress them. What the concept distorts is what is full—the meaning of Tuscan architecture—yet this distortion is not an obliteration. The essence of Tuscany (only for those who know how to appreciate it) is half truncated; it is deprived of memory, not of existence. It is silently rooted there—a speech wholly at the service of the concept (Barthes 1973, 122–123).

Remembering that myth is a double system (see Chapter Two), its point of departure is constituted by the arrival of meaning. As Barthes (1973, 123–124) emphasises:

myth is a value, truth is no guarantee for it; nothing prevents it from being a perpetual *alibi*. The meaning is always there to *present* the form; the form is always there to *outpace* the meaning. They are never at the same place. For the mythical signifier, the form is empty but present, its meaning absent but full.

Thus, the meaning and form of a myth can never be in the same place. The meaning and form alternate between arrival and departure, and converge at a point. This point becomes the myth (signification).

When asked to comment what they thought of the new prevailing trend of Tuscan home design, Perth designers Dorian Morelli and Guy Mattioli—both of Italian origin—described the design to be ‘bastardised Australiana’ and nothing more than ‘a fad, a design which dates homes and will soon pass’ (Smith 2001). This comment is interesting because, first, it is antithetical to the theoretical perspective of Barthes’s theory of myth because it implies a deliberate elimination or negation of the past, history and even memory with which the idealised image of Tuscan style has been vested (more on this later). Second, the phenomenon of having fad designs and coming to terms with the transient nature of the various images of styles of the home can be attributed to a form of lifestyle.<sup>60</sup> As Heckman (2008, 113) notes:

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<sup>60</sup> Following Bell and Hollows (2006), this thesis considers ‘lifestyle’ central to the organisation and experience of everyday life. Lifestyle is an alternative habitus—to acquire and desire to pursue a sense of one’s own self or interest in tune with the conformity of groups. Lifestyle becomes a way of drawing together ‘a range of concepts such as taste, income, health, status, diet, aspiration, subculture and

Because we live in a consumer society, in which things compete for our attention in the corporate struggle to win profits, it is natural that the conjunction between new technology and its promises becomes the site of competing narratives about technology ... The product must be made particular to the context which bespeaks meaning about its owner. Beyond that, this product must not be so ideologically obtrusive that it negates other products in the owner's menagerie and disrupts the unified system of objects. If it does this, the narrative is replaced with a new narrative and other objects are redefined, replaced, or reviled. This new narrative is called lifestyle.

The above quotation is significant because it provides an explanation of the basis for the narrative-seeking and transient nature of the image of the Tuscan style of the home in a ferocious consumer society, like the one in Australia in the twenty-first century.

To illustrate the thriving 'unified system of objects' within the wide spectrum of home images advertised in twenty-first century newspapers, an example is given of a myth consumer encountering 'The Rural Building Company' range while browsing the NIM of *The Sunday Times* to seek a suitable homebuilding company to have his or her first home built. Under the theme of 'affordability', the consumer sees that there are other design categories to choose from, such as 'The Franklin Farmhouse—\$173,760' and 'The York Farmhouse—\$169,578' (currency in Australian dollars) (see Figure 43). Under another theme of 'environment and sustainability', the consumer is confronted with more design choices, with either 'The Rivergum Skillion' range or 'The Capricorn Loft' range (see Figure 44). Under the theme of 'solar efficiency', the consumer can choose between 'The Meridian' and 'The Skillion' design (see Figure 45). This 'finite combinatory system or tablature [that] changes continuously in response to fashion' (Baudrillard 2005, 161) is what Baudrillard (2005, 153) terms the condition of 'secondary seriality'.<sup>61</sup> This is what arguably constitutes fashion.

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leisure in order to represent everyday life in advanced capitalist cultures as an accretion of personal style achieved primarily through consumption' (Bell & Hollows 2006, 2).

<sup>61</sup> In *The System of Objects*, Baudrillard (1996, 156–168) clearly distinguishes between 'models' and 'series' of objects. He asserts that, at present, society is witnessing an attempt to stylise serial interiors—to 'bring good taste to the masses'. Generally, the result is 'all in the same colour' and 'all in the same style'. What is presented as a 'style' is fundamentally a mere stereotype—the un-nuanced generalisation of a particular detail or aspect. The nuance (within a unity) has come to characterise the model, while difference (within uniformity) has come to characterise the series (Baudrillard 1996, 156–168).

The point is that all these ‘specific’ differences of home images are themselves picked up and mass-produced in serial form. The nature of this image of the serial object is not only parasitic, but is insidious to an architectural culture because the serial object is what remains stuck fast in its quest for uniqueness, and betrays a constrained culture, an optimism in the worst of tastes, and an empty-headed humanism (Baudrillard 2005, 161).

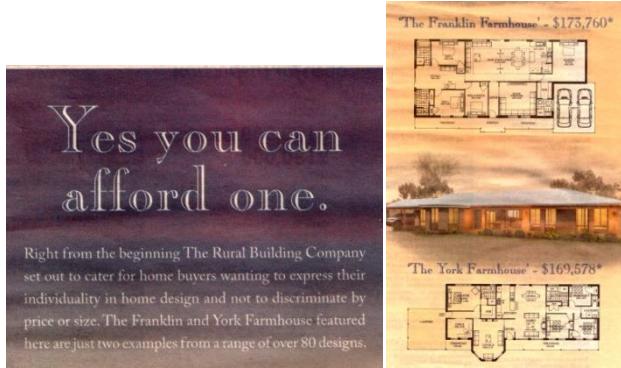


Figure 43: ‘Yes you can afford one’ from The Rural Building Company range.  
Source: *The Sunday Times: Homes* 2008c, 10.

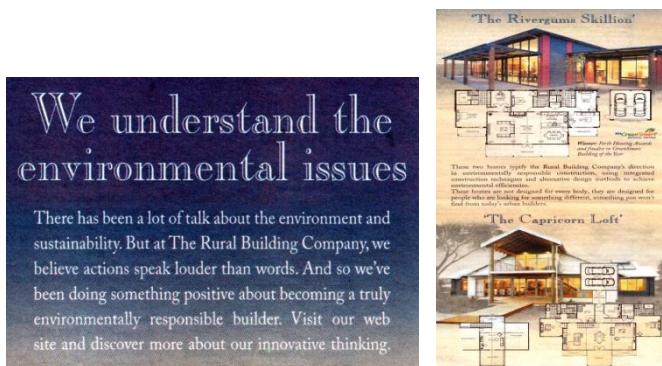


Figure 44: ‘We understand the environmental issues’ from The Rural Building Company range.  
Source: *The Sunday Times: Homes* 2008b, 14.

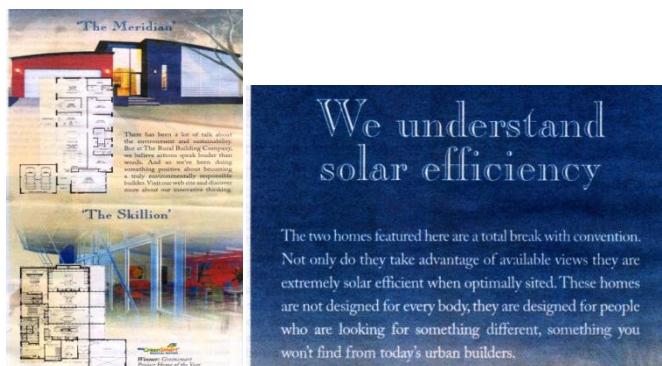


Figure 45: ‘We understand solar efficiency’ from The Rural Building Company range.  
Source: *The Sunday Times: Homes* 2008a, 17.

Fashion is the horror of architecture. Speaking in the context of housing design, Richards (cited in Greig 2000, 220) observes that even the suburban villa is the ‘despair of people with taste’. His remark characterises the cultural commentary on Australia as much as that on any other modern industrial society. Mass housing is seen as a reflection of mass society. Throughout this century, many cultural commentators have tended to dismiss Australian suburban dwellings as ugly, tasteless, alienating and soulless (Rowse, cited in Greig 2000, 220). Robin Boyd (1952b), an architectural writer and critic of history of the Australian home, also recognises the irrepressible nature of fashion cycles. He believes that the small functional European country cottage fell in with the bad company of ‘fashion’ and ‘jealousy’ when it lost its way in the Australian city (Boyd 1952).

The condition of ‘second seriality’ is not only a twenty-first century phenomenon. Boyd (1952, 7–8), who is known for a discriminating eye for stylistic change in the Australian house, argues that the first half of the twentieth century contained ‘at least seven hundred varieties of small houses’. However, if these derivative cottages were stripped to their essence, they bore a striking resemblance to each other, with there being ‘no more than four or five house types, within each of which were superficial variations like the individual contortions of a tree’s branches’ (Boyd 1952, 7–8). These plan types were the Primitive Cottage, Bungalow, Asymmetrical Front, L-Shape and Triple Front. Focusing more on structural continuity than historical change, Boyd (1952, 7–8) argues that the alterations in the plans through time merely ‘resulted in differences in the external appearance of both the structure as a whole and of its component parts’.

Nevertheless, Boyd’s stylistic variations became orthodoxy in classifying Australian historical fashions. These styles move from Georgian Primitive and Colonial Georgian to Gothic Revival, then to Italianate and Boom Style, to turn-of-the-century Queen Anne Revival, the interwar Californian Bungalow, Spanish Mission and Waterfall Front, and then to Post-War Austerity (Greig 2000, 220). In his 1968 preface to *Australia’s Home*, Boyd (cited in Greig 2000, 220) reiterates that, in small ways, the details have kept changing, but the pattern seems to remain the same.

### *A change in the ‘heart of the home’*

When browsing the local home section of newspapers in the twenty-first century, a homebuyer can encounter a feature article on the home theatre that reads:

Movie magic ... home theatre systems are increasing in popularity, with many modern homes having dedicated entertaining rooms. And improved technology makes the viewing experience as equal—if not better—than commercial cinemas (*The West Australian: Habitat* 2006b, 12).

To put the above into the context of Heckman’s (2008, 113) aforementioned quotation about lifestyle, the researcher observes that, while the need for an ongoing and continual shift and replacement of narrative-seeking and transient ideals of ‘lifestyle’ is necessary, much of this shift and replacement is already actively taking form in the media in the twenty-first century. This is reflected in the shift of the media’s focus on what is considered ‘the heart of the home’, as observed in the two key sites of idealisation: the mid-twentieth century of the 1950s and the early twenty-first century. The image of the ‘heart of home’ in these key sites reflects radical differences in lifestyle preferences.

In the mid-twentieth century, the kitchen was constantly highlighted and heavily promoted by the media as the heart of the home. In fact, according to Webber (2000), in 1996, the *Australian Magazine* published an article on the 1950s kitchen as the arbiter of social change. Titled, ‘The Heart of the Home’, the article promoted an ideality in the home that saw the kitchen as ‘the domestic indicator of our sense and sensibilities’ (Symons, cited in Webber 2000, 103). In the article, the owner of the home—architect, Irena Lobaza—explained her choice of fittings and equipment for her new kitchen: ‘I wanted a country-style kitchen that was inviting’ (Symons, cited in Webber 2000, 103). While much could be said about this choice of fittings and equipment, it is significant to note that, by the end of the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth century, the kitchen was no doubt enthusiastically embraced by the public as the heart of the home.

Thus, in the 1950s it was common for the kitchen to be regarded ‘the most important room’ (see Figure 47), in which a typical home advertisement

could read, 'Fitted kitchen is a joy to behold ... if you were proud processor of a kitchen fitted with "Silva" Staybrite Steel units from Myttons Limited' (Oliver 1999, 96). In contrast, in the twenty-first century, it is more common to encounter advertisements that read:

There's nothing quite like the magic of the movies ... Today's technology makes it even easier, and cheaper, to re-create cinema-like conditions ... other features of the home theater include smart lighting, ceiling star effects and electrical control of curtains and other devices that can all be controlled by one common interface (*The West Australian: Habitat* 2006b, 12).

As this quotation indicates, the image of the home theatre now represents the digital and technological hub of the family home. In the early twenty-first century, this home image has superseded and replaced the idealised image of the kitchen in the 1950s. In the first time dimension of the 1950s, the image of the kitchen was the idealised space of the home because this was the hub in which new technology was first being introduced. However, in the early twenty-first century, this image has transformed into the home theatre room. This transformation is confirmed by an advertising slogan from *The Sunday Times* newspaper that reads, 'Home is where the theatre is' (see Figure 46 and Appendix B).

# **Home is where the theatre is**

**STEPHEN FENECH**  
reports on the trend of  
homeowners turning  
rooms into cinemas



**Family fun  
and at the  
right price**

True feelings featured on this page are genuine. But if you would prefer to keep your feelings to yourself, there aren't too many people who will understand. So, if you're feeling around to build such an environment, here's how.

But the good news is you can build the home theater of your dreams and stay within budget. Here's how:

**Acoustic-Communications** acoustic consultant, Michael S. Morris, recently helped a customer he'd never met before build a home theater system for \$1,000. "Anything can be done for any budget," says Morris. "It's all about how you do it." He suggests starting with a small room size with a wide product range and then adding equipment as you go along.

Mr. Morris had a system that suited one home or family, but might not be right for another. "Building a home theater is like building a house," he says. "It's a process. You can have an uninvited construction on there, or you can have a well-planned one." It's the same sort of thing with a home theater system. You can add components together — and you can remove them as well. "It's a modular system," says Morris. "Knowledge gets a little bit more, but price goes down." And that's what makes it so great when building the bank account.

To start, you'll need to determine what you want to do with it. Will it serve as a movie room? Will it be used primarily for music? What are we doing to it? Is it going to be a combination of both?

These thoughts (perhaps you can come up with some of your own) will help you decide exactly what you can get.

across, then it's how much more you can add to it. We're just trying to take stock of what we have and continue on for a lot of people.

Improvements in technology have made manufacturing more efficient and accessible.

What was once the realm of the large corporation is now within the reach of the average consumer.

When you're building, it has a lot to do with the capabilities of the person putting it together," says Melvin. "So, if you're a good carpenter, you can do almost everything you're going to need in all experiments.

I'm currently building new homes with an ideal position if they see a theme/cluster in their layout.

"I'm currently building a house for my wife, building, getting in there," says Melvin.

"To call the cables correctly in interwoven structures, it's a very difficult task, but it can be pretty. Anything's possible - you just have to be creative."

Melvin's wife is helping him out in the family decision that involves not only the parents but also the children. "It's been a great experience, especially getting a big screen and we'll be letting them help us out with some of the decisions, like what colors we can choose from it, as well," he said.

**What is possible to buy relatively inexpensively?**

Figure 46: 'Home is where the theatre is' for the twenty-first century.  
Source: Fenech 2006, 53.



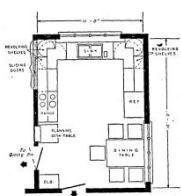
## **T**HE MOST IMPORTANT ROOM

**A**merican architects are treating the kitchen as the most important room in the house. They regard it as the center of the home, the principal problem of how to prevent household drudgery from crowding out individual kitchens, and how have their appliances been better fitted together. Let us, the right, begin. You will have to spend half your life cooking on the kitchen range, so make it comfortable. If you have space, make a place, and close, the hours, are not so long. If you have no space, make a place under the stairs. It makes cleaning easy, if you can open your cook door without getting up.

These modern kitchens also adopt the principle that the kitchen is a place for work, not for pleasure. It has its allotted space, and at many times in possibility employing a whole cupboard just for that "wretched" range.

A knife expert discovered last week that a family could save \$100 a year by buying a good knife. A brace for knives is in a rack on the wall like screwing a broom brushhead, with all the utensils hanging from it.

Toasters and electric mixers are almost present day necessities. The former is a great convenience of a cupboard. Every time you set up the equipment you have to clean it, and the more you use it, the more it solved the problem by building a little storage space for it. If you don't have a cupboard, though, it is needed, all we have to do is take a straight edge and draw a line across the floor.



The U.S. Bureau of Human Nutrition and Home Economics evolved this small kitchen featured without the plan, in the April, 1959, issue.

The Australian HOME BEAUTIFUL June, 1951 21

Figure 47: 'The Most Important Room' in the 1950s.  
Source: AHR 1951, 47.

### *Reading the home theatre myth*

The image of the home theatre in the twenty-first century represents more than just an entertainment venue. According to Stephen Fenech (2006, 53), who writes about the trend of homeowners turning rooms into cinemas

in the feature article, ‘Home is where the theatre is’, a home theatre is ‘a gathering point for the house’ and ‘[parents] like to know where their kids are and gathering in one place, watching a movie or playing their Xbox on the big screen’. Here, the myth of family grouping is evoked in the myth consumer. The concept of community and feeling of belonging implanted in the myth is a presumptuous and taken-for-granted value that is inscribed in most middle Australians’ imagination. Adding to this, Audio Connections Australia general manager, Adam Merlin (cited in Fenech 2006, 53), comments on the seating design of the room in advocating the importance of family grouping and communal values: ‘Cinemas are more of a family thing so rather than have individual seats they are installing two-seaters so that couples can sit together’.

According to Mitchell and Oakley (1976, 151), the potency of the myth of family grouping lies in its intricate ties to the ‘village community’, which the Victorian middle class looked on as a haven from the industrial world. Since then, the concept of community has been invested with such great emotional power that it connotes much more than mere locality—it has a greater sense of integration and meaningfulness, and a sense of being more attuned to the realities of living and simply of ‘belonging’. Against this historical background, it is no wonder, and is even natural, that the myth of family grouping and communal gathering should exist in the imaginations of most middle Australians. For the same reason, the ideal image of ‘community’ remains a much promulgated theme among home advertisements even in the twenty-first century (see Figure 48).



Figure 48: 'Great communities are built on solid foundations.' is an advertisement that perpetuates on the myth of communal gathering.

Source: *The Sunday Times: Homes* 2005b, 15.

Barthes's notion of myth states that, today, all the structures of society are inscribed in the reader's consciousness for owning the home theatre. From this perspective, the past is the guarantee of a kind of moral security—tradition is at once preserved and surpassed.<sup>62</sup> Building on this, history was what made home ownership possible and allowed for the home to proliferate as a site of sanctuary and showplace for success and refinement, similar to the palaces and castles of the past (Heckman 2008, 20). Further, in the

<sup>62</sup> At this point, this section draws attention to an important distinction in theory between Barthes's myth and Baudrillard's (2005, 182) 'logic of belief and regression'. The 'logic of belief and regression' refers to advertising's underlying leitmotif of protection and gratification—the intimation that its solicitations and attempts to persuade are a sign (indecipherable at the conscious level) that somewhere there is an agency that has decided to inform readers of their own desires to their satisfaction.

Unlike the 'suppressed' layer of history described in Barthes's (1973, 120) theory of myth, Baudrillard's logic of belief and regression and theoretical thought is an interesting diversion from Barthes, which entails that a history or past become completely nullified. Herein lies an important distinction between Barthes's and Baudrillard's theories in terms of their relevance and application for reading and analysing the home image in the twenty-first century. In myth, Barthes accounts for a duplicity: the signification of a naturalness that somehow 'dresses up' the representation of a reality that is 'undoubtedly determined by history'. In contrast, Baudrillard asserts that advertising seizes upon a 'logic' that is disconnected to any history with which this reality is grounded.

In light of Baudrillard's theory being applied to reading and analysing the home image in the twenty-first century, it means that whatever signifies the idealised image of the home carries, they have little or no bearing on the origins and development of domesticity and the birth of the home. Such a profound view is antithetical to the theoretical perspective of Barthes's theory of myth and may well justify the Italian Perth designers' interpretation of the 'bastardised Australiana' design of the Tuscan style of home to be nothing more than a fad that will soon pass (Smith 2001). Seen in the context of Baudrillard's theory, it seems that the notion of myth may be taking a radical turn since the entire course of history is at risk of being removed from the equation in reading the image of the home in the twenty-first century media.

context of the media, Australian advertising has always drawn from a narrow repertoire of pasts, and these usually have little connection to the product or brand (Dickenson 2012, 65). Jackie Dickenson (2012, 66) endorses Curthoys's argument that 'Anglo-Australian identity is formed in "histories, novels, feature journalism, painting, film and television, poetry, theatre, popular song, and in political debate"'.

Fenech's (2006, 53) article on the increasing popularity of the home theatre in the twenty-first century claims that, 'the reason why more and more families are putting together a home theatre system is because it is a sanctuary in which to escape the cares of the world'. Fenech (2006, 53) reports that it now appears that the modern family prefers to stay at home more, affirming the widespread behaviour of 'cocooning, the act of retreating into the seclusion of one's own home for privacy or escape'. An important point is the signification of words such as 'sanctuary', 'cocooning' and 'escape' used by Fenech. To a myth consumer in the context of Barthes's (1973, 142) myth, these words supply the home myth with:

the appearance of an artificial reality that is defined, even if this goes back more than a century ago, by the way in which men have produced or used it; and what myth gives in return is a natural image of this reality.

As such, it is unsurprising that words such as 'sanctuary', 'cocooning' and 'escape' are used frequently in the media to sell images of home in the twentieth century (see Figure 49).

For example, it is not difficult to find an advertisement in the home section of local newspapers that exploits the signification of the word 'sanctuary'—such as, 'An established sanctuary—by the water, near the city' (*The Sunday Times: Homes* 2005a, 13) (see Figure 49). Within the signification of the word lies a world of meaning that is tied to the traditional notion of domesticity that upholds the home as a place of safe refuge from the harshness of the outside world. The myth consumer responds fully to this constituting mechanism of the Victorian home myth and to its own dynamics, in all of its idealistic nature. The image of the home theatre room is capable of conjuring an intricate web of mythical significations in the myth

consumer—themes of escape, safety and refuge are all imbued in the signification of the word ‘sanctuary’.

The fact that the idealised image of the home theatre room in the twenty-first century has been used in conjunction with the word ‘sanctuary’ may encourage the myth consumer or reader to believe that the home theatre room is intimately connected with the idealised home image, which is firmly linked to another mythical signified. This mythical signified sees the home to be anything except work. In the Victorian era, the idea of home as an antithesis to work played a significant role in the domestic revolution, during which many entrepreneurs and professional men found the world in which they worked increasingly brutal and deceitful. Taken from the writings of a nineteenth-century historian, Ruskin (1913, 108), the following message highlights and affirms the quintessential reflection on this aspect of the bourgeoisie home:

The man, in his rough work in open world, must encounter all peril and trial; - to him, therefore, must be failure, the offence, the inevitable error: often he must be wounded, or subdued; often misled; and always hardened ... This is the true nature of home—it is the place of Peace; the shelter, not from all injury, but from all terror, doubt, and division. In so far as it is not this, it is not home; so far as the anxieties of the outer life penetrate into it, and the inconsistently-minded, unknown, unloved, or hostile society of the outer world is allowed by either husband or wife to cross the threshold, it ceases to be home.

As this quotation suggests, to the middle class in the nineteenth century, the home represented feeling, sincerity, honesty, truth and love. It involved a complete dissociation of all things good from the public world, and of all things bad from the domestic and private world.

Therefore, the bourgeoisie Victorian home came to be regarded a repository of virtues that were lost or denied in the world outside. These virtues were especially expected to be upheld by women or wives, whose sole focus was to be the pristine running of the household and keeping the place in a ‘divine’ condition for the husband to return to. Correspondingly, essential to the concept of the Victorian home was the presence and work of a woman’s body, which both produced and was partly produced by the home and its special atmosphere of domesticity, characterised by family life, cosy

intimacy, and a sense of comfort and wellbeing (Forty & Rybczynski, cited in Walker 2002, 826). The Victorian home itself was associated with the female body and its enclosed interior (Adams, Gordon & Garber, cited in Walker 2002, 826).

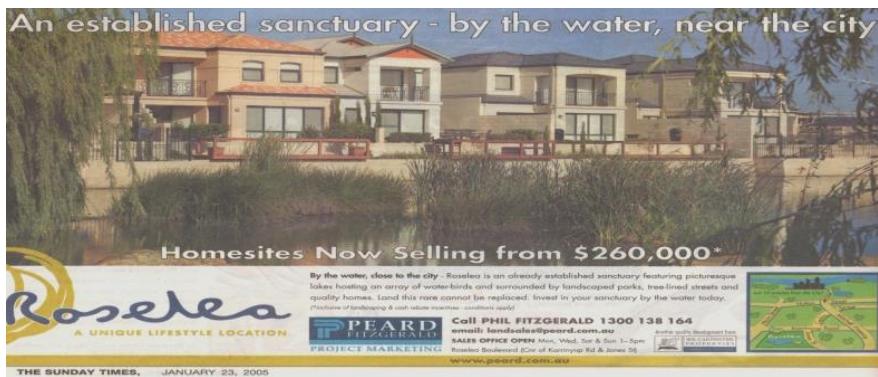


Figure 49: 'An established sanctuary—by the water, near the city.'

Source: *The Sunday Times: Homes* 2005a, 13.

Therefore, it is evident why, in the 1950s and twenty-first century, women were and still are often portrayed on the covers of popular newspaper inserted and home magazines (see Figure 50). In the image of a woman, the myth consumer readily identifies the role of wife and mother. This role sustains the:

keystone of the 'moral' regeneration of the bourgeoisie family home, whose children were taught, among other things, the necessity of adapting their demeanor, tempting their behavior, and developing a sense of duty and cordiality to their social 'inferiors' in order to adapt and survive the turbulent social and political changes of the Victorian era (Walker 2002, 826).



Figure 50: Images of women appearing on magazine covers.

Source: Left—AHB 1946; middle—*The West Australian: Habitat* 2006a; right—*The Sunday Times: Homes* 2007.

The home has long been regarded a place where the domains of male and female were well established—a place of unreality where illusions flourished (Forty 1986, 101). In this following passage, Benjamin et al. (1999, 19) discusses the emergence of the private individual in nineteenth-century France, under the rule of King Louis Philippe:

Under the reign of Louis Philippe (King of France, 1830–48), the private individual makes his entry into history. For the private individual, places of dwelling are for the first time opposed to places of work. The former come to constitute the interior. Its complement is the office. The private individual, who in the office has to deal with realities, needs the domestic interior to sustain him in his illusions. This necessity is all the more pressing since he has no intention of grafting onto his business interests a clear perception of his social function. In the arrangement of his private surroundings, he suppresses both of these concerns. From this derive the phantasmagorias of the interior—which, for the private individual, represents the universe. In the interior, he brings together remote locales and memories of the past. His living room is a box in the theatre of the world.

In this quotation, Benjamin et al. discusses the domestic interior and associates it with a place where illusions flourish in the living room, referred to as ‘the theatre of the world’. The quotation indicates that, as early as the nineteenth century, the domestic interior—which was precisely the living room—was already associated with a world of imagination, fantasy and dream. Thus, it is no coincidence that, in the twenty-first century, the image (and idea) of having a home theatre room should seem welcoming and keenly embraceable to the public—this idea has already been firmly embedded in an idealised entity in imaginations of the home. This image of the home theatre room is closely connected to the mythical signification that sees the individual and family indulging in the illusions and fantasy of a great film. Further, with reference to the phantasmagorias of the interior that Benjamin describes, given the in-built powerful digital technology of today, a home theatre system in the twenty-first century would deliver to its homeowners the pleasure of indulging in a world of imagination, fantasy and dream.

Building on this, in the passage written in 1929, Benjamin et al. (1999, 19) seems to be speaking from the subject of an individual. He seems to be alluding to a private sphere that gives rise to an idealised domestic interior that counteracts the harsh realities of the workforce:

The interior is the asylum where art takes refuge. The collector proves to be the true resident of the interior. He makes his concern the idealization of objects. To him falls the Sisyphean task of divesting things of their commodity character by taking possession of them. But he can bestow on them only connoisseur value, rather than use value. The collector delights in evoking a world that is not just distant and long gone but also better—a world in which, to be sure, human beings are no better provided with what they need than in the real world, but in which things are free from the drudgery of being useful (Benjamin et al. 1999, 19).

It is interesting to compare Benjamin et al.'s passage to Baudrillard's (1996) promulgation of the simulacra and loss of the use value and 'function' in the consumption of objects in his influential thesis, *The System of Objects*. As the above quotation indicates, as early as the 1800s, domesticity was already beginning to establish an intricate relationship with a consumerist culture, and individuals were expected to engage in a fervent consumer society. The quotation also seems to suggest that, during the nineteenth century under the rule of King Louis Philippe in France, a materialistic society was revelled and upheld by the individual. This is implied in the quotation stating that the contents of a domestic interior should be idealised and given a 'connoisseur' value, rather than 'use' value or 'commodity character'.

For private individuals as early as the nineteenth century, the domestic interior represented the only place where they could indulge in a 'decorative box'—within the four walls of their apartments—filled with objects of connoisseur and aesthetic pleasure. However, in the early twenty-first century, the image of the home—as set against a prevalent mass advertising and consumerist society—has turned into an object of consumption in a Baudrillardian sense. Speaking from a Baudrillardian perspective, the primary force of consumption of the image of the home in the twenty-first century is less a matter of material exchange than it is a matter of circulating images, signs and simulation. Thus, the logic of the image of the home consumption relies not on acquisition of objects, but on manipulation of signs. The next section explores Baudrillard's theory in depth and discusses in detail the 'new myths' of the idealised image of the twenty-first century home in light of his theoretical interpretive framework.

## **New myths of the twenty-first century home**

Seen from the theoretical perspective of French theorist, Baudrillard, the image of the Tuscan style home represents nothing more than an object of consumption. Unlike myths in the Barthoneon sense, which are structures, representations and constructions of a reality that still exists and by which some people still live, in Baudrillard's 'system of objects', the reality of the Tuscan style of home does not exist until there is proof to the contrary—proof that Baudrillard believes people give themselves.<sup>63</sup> The image of the Tuscan home appeals to individuals and their need and desire to own it and live it. Thus, in Baudrillard's conception of the 'system of objects', the Tuscan style image of the architectural home is the reassurance of an existence that belongs to one by right. Baudrillard (2005, 183) states:

There was a time when moral norms demanded that the individual adapt to society at large, but from the standpoint of an age of consumption—or a would-be age of consumption—such consumption belongs to the outmoded ideology of the age of production; nowadays it is society as a whole which must adapt to an individual.

Based on this, the idealised image of the Tuscan 'style' of home is merely a product of the consumer society to which the individual or consumer is gradually conditioned by their ceaseless consumption—'at once gratifying and frustrating, glorious and guilt-inducing—of the social body in its totality' (Baudrillard 2005, 185). In other words, the image of the Tuscan style of home design has turned into a sign that circulates endlessly—it has become a simulacrum that signifies nothing and is thus consumed.

### Baudrillard's definition of consumption

To better understand Baudrillard's view, his definition of 'consumption' must be underlined because this provides the theoretical basis to serve as a worthy site of debate in terms of how it may lend itself to other modes of application. First, Baudrillard's definition of consumption is disconnected to the association with material practice. For Baudrillard (2005, 218), the

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<sup>63</sup> At this point, it should be noted that this thesis considers Baudrillard's view on 'reality' highly problematic, especially in terms of its implications for the image of the idealised home. Baudrillard's concept on 'reality' derived from his theory of simulacra will be discussed in detail in the forthcoming section of this chapter.

nourishment people absorb, clothes they wear, cars they drive, and oral and visual matter of the images and messages they receive are not the objects of consumption—they are merely objects of needs and of the satisfaction of needs. He explains that, ‘from time immemorial people have bought, possessed, enjoyed and spent, but this does not mean that they are “consuming”’ (Baudrillard 2005, 217–218). To become an object of consumption, an object must first be converted to a sign. The conversion of object to the systematic status of a sign implies the simultaneous transformation of the human relationship into a relationship of consumption—of consuming and being consumed (Baudrillard 2005, 218).

The relationship is no longer directly experienced: it has become abstract, been abolished, been transformed into a sign object, and is thus consumed (Baudrillard 2005, 219). Thus, in Baudrillard’s (2005, 218) sense, consumption is defined:

by the organization of all these things into a signifying fabric: consumption is *the virtual totality of all objects and messages ready-constituted as a more or less coherent discourse* ... consumption means *an activity consisting of the systematic manipulation of signs* [author’s emphasis].

Thus, from the theoretical perspective of Baudrillard, the idealised image of the Tuscan ‘style’ of home design is nothing more than a sign object. It encompasses the systematic manipulation of all other sign-objects of a more or less coherent discourse—that is, the advertised image of the French style of home, modern style of home, classical style of home and so forth—into one whole signifying fabric. Their relationship is no longer directly experienced: they have become abstract, have been abolished and thus are consumed.

In the above light, Baudrillard’s rationale appears to be a major obstacle and antithesis to Barthes’s theory of myth in terms of an analysis to debunk the idealised image of the home. In terms of the application of Baudrillard’s theory, it seems that the image of each ‘style’ of the home in the twenty-first century is nothing but a sign object in Baudrillard’s sense. Every image of this ‘style’ of home reflects every other style in a theatre of dazzling simulations dominated by the proliferation of the sign and manipulated by

ever-hidden persuaders. Thus, presumably, desire itself is manufactured, and nothing possesses intrinsic value any longer, in and for itself. Meaning is produced by endless, symbolic exchanges within a dominant code, whose rhetoric is entirely self-referential.

### Problems with ‘reality’ and Baudrillard’s theory of simulacra

It is important to highlight here a problematic aspect of Baudrillard’s work: Baudrillard’s approach to the subject of ‘reality’. Baudrillard’s concept of reality springs from his theory of simulacra. For Baudrillard, a simulacra is a reproduction of an object or event characteristic of a specific stage in the history of the image or sign (Macey 2000, 353). He traces a series of stages in its emergence. Whereas the image was once a reflection of a basic reality, as in the feudal order, in which signs were clear indications of hierarchical status, it came to mask or pervert a basic reality when, in the baroque period that privileged artifice and counterfeit over natural signs, arbitrary or artificial signs began to proliferate. Such signs are described as the ‘first order of simulacra’ (Macey 2000, 353).

Baudrillard (1983) first establishes the ‘orders of simulacra’ in his book, *Simulations*. Despite problems of treating the past as a point of measure, perfection or truth, Baudrillard identifies the three orders of appearance that have followed each other since the Renaissance: Counterfeit, Production and Simulation. In the so-called feudal era, according to Baudrillard, a fixed social order established a hierarchy of signs of class, rank and social position. Signs at this stage were fixed, restricted and perfectly clear and transparent—in a word, ‘obligatory’. During this era, one could readily determine from an individual’s clothes and appearance his or her social rank and status. However, in the succeeding modern order, ‘counterfeit’ was the paradigmatic mode of representation, and a new order of simulacra began (Kellner 1997, 78). Haunted by the loss of the divine sanction and fixed value of the medieval era, the now arbitrary sign was ‘liberated’ and ‘emancipated’ by the bourgeoisie from the fixed medieval hierarchy, but sought to imitate nature and ground its signs in nature (Baudrillard 1983, 85).

Baudrillard (1983, 86) further describes this multiplicity of sign production and the counterfeits that emerged from this process in the Classical, Renaissance and Baroque Period to be a ‘simulacrum of symbolic obligation’ that ‘produces neutral values only that can be exchanged in an objective world’. To illustrate this, he uses the material stucco as an example. He states that the social life and architectural form of stucco in the Renaissance were entirely overtaken by the theatre, describing the ‘prowess’ of the Stucco and baroque art as embodying a significance that came to signify a ‘theatrical-like social life unified under the sign of bourgeoisie values’ (Baudrillard 1983, 87).

During the feudal era, signs proliferated, and the new rising class—the bourgeoisie—dreamt of creating a world in its own image. For Baudrillard, the new substance of stucco represented the potential for recreating the world due to its suitability for creating simulacra of natural building materials, objects or art (as in the architecture of stucco churches and buildings) (Kellner 1997, 787). This first order of Counterfeit, according to Baudrillard, was also indestructible because it was ‘a project of political and cultural hegemony, the fantasy of a closed mental substance’ (Baudrillard 1983, 92).

The second order of simulacra was Production, in which Baudrillard draws a parallel with ‘the Automation of the Robot’ (Baudrillard 1983, 94). He claims that the second order is characterised both in and by the industrial revolution, when infinite reproducibility was introduced to the world in the form of the industrial simulation or series of mass objects: exact replicas, infinitely produced and reproduced by assembly-line processes and eventually automation (Kellner 1997, 79).<sup>64</sup> With the introduction of photography and then film, even art was taken over by mechanical reproduction (Benjamin & Arendt 1992). This second-order simulacra predominated as ‘originals’ lost their mystic aura. Such simulacra signalled the absence of a basic reality (Macey 2000, 353), from a Baudrillardian perspective. Baudrillard claims that this second order is distinctive from the

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<sup>64</sup> It is important to state here that Baudrillard’s claim that mass production only began during the Industrial Revolution is inaccurate. Mass production and infinite reproducibility had taken place before the Industrial Revolution and had enabled literate society to develop. For instance, A source reveals that mass production in the publishing industry has been commonplace since the mid-fifteenth century around which time the Gutenberg Bible was published using a printing press (Gutenberg-Bible.com 2008).

first order because it is radically opposed to the first principle of theatrical illusion and there is no longer nostalgia for a natural order. Nature becomes the object of domination, and reproduction itself is a dominant social principle governed by the laws of the market (Kellner 1997, 79).

However, today, Baudrillard (cited in Kellner 1997, 79) claims that, ‘we are in the third-order simulacra; no longer that of the counterfeit of an original as in the first order, nor that of the pure series as in the second’. This is the stage of the ‘simulation proper’—the end result of a long historical process of simulation, in which simulation codes and models come to constitute the world, and overtake and finally ‘devour’ representation (Kellner 1997, 79). Baudrillard presents his theory in terms of suggestive analogies between language, genetics and social organisation. Just as language contains codes or models that structure how people communicate, and just as human cells contain genetic codes that structure how people experience and behave, so too society contains codes and models of social organisation and control that structure the environment and human life. For example, in a society of coded simulation, urban planners modulate codes of city planning and architecture in creating urban systems, in much the same way that television producers modulate television codes to produce programs. Models and codes come to constitute everyday life and relations in a society of simulations (Kellner 1997, 80). These third-order simulacra of postmodernity have no relation to reality, and are their own pure simulacra or imitations of imitations. The ultimate simulacrum is Disneyland. According to Baudrillard (1983), Disneyland is presented as imaginary—or simulating its own imaginary nature—in order to make people believe that the rest of America is real, rather than something belonging to the order of simulation (Macey 2000, 353).

Baudrillard (1983) suggests that the expansion of the imaginary and corresponding deflation of ‘the real’ is a recent historical event, marking a transition from industrial to consumer, or modern to postmodern society. Notwithstanding the theory that Baudrillard presented above, this thesis firmly attests to Chris Rojek and Bryan Turner’s (1993, 131) claim that Baudrillard’s argument is weak and has unacknowledged nostalgia for a kind of naïve positivism—the suggestion that humans once lived in ‘objective

'reality'. According to Rojek and Turner (1993) in *Forget Baudrillard?*, no human group has ever lived, as humans, in 'objective reality'. To be human means to live a symbolically mediated fantasy—to actually believe in the power of the office, the authority of the father and the law, the purity of maternal love and so forth. To speak in architectural terms, this is no different to believing in that most obsessive image of the 'modern' architectural home, or believing in the image that conveys the sanctity of the home or the mystical power of the architect. Thus, technically, from any human standpoint, 'the real' is only that which cannot be assimilated symbolically.

#### Ambience: Interior design of the home in the twenty-first century

In what Baudrillard describes as the 'system of objects', the image of a home and the functional objects within it—including home furnishings and interior design—are stripped of their traditional sense. In this realm, the image of home has turned into a commodity in which there is no need for the idea to bear any form of connection or relationship to history or any past historical references. He defines this realm in which any symbolic value is lost as the 'realm of consumption' (Baudrillard 2005, 220). He seeks to illustrate this by drawing an example of a text description of the interior décor of a house taken from George Perec's 1965 novel, *Les choses*. He explains:

despite the thick mellow nostalgia that envelops this 'interior', nothing in it has the slightest symbolic value any longer ... no human relationship has left its imprint on these things: everything in Pere's décor is a sign, and purely a sign. Nothing has presence, nothing has a history—even though everything is laden with references: Oriental, Scottish, Early American, etc. The only thing all these objects have is their uniqueness: they are abstract in their difference, which is their mode of referentiality, and enter into combination with one another precisely by virtue of that abstractness. For this reason we are indubitably in the realm of consumption (Baudrillard 2005, 220).

Baudrillard (2005, 221) also discusses the 'signifying configuration of objects' as being impoverished, schematic and closed, and dealing only with *the idea* of a relationship—not with a relationship that can be lived. Leather couch, phonograph, bric-a-brac, jade ashtrays and so forth only signify the idea of the relationship—an idea that is 'consumed' in these objects and hence

abolished as anything to be directly experienced (Baudrillard 2005, 221). This implies that consumption may be defined as a total idealist practice of a systematic kind that goes far beyond relations to objects and interpersonal relations and extends to people's sense of history, communication and culture (Baudrillard 2005, 221–222).

On the subject of advertising, Baudrillard then elaborates how the manipulation of advertising in its entirety only subordinates the object to having a mere 'secondary' function. He believes that advertising renders the advertised object a useless, unnecessary discourse due to the entire apparatus of personalisation and imposed differentiation:

Since its function is almost entirely secondary, and since both image and discourse play largely allegorical roles in it, advertising supplies us with the ideal object and casts a particularly revealing light upon the system of objects. And since, like all heavily connoted systems, it is self-referential, we may safely rely on advertising to tell us what it is that we consume through objects (Baudrillard 2005, 179).

Against this theoretical perspective, this section of the chapter is rooted in the understanding that the advertised image of the architectural idealised home operates within the logic of the sign because it is through this operation that homes—as commodities in the marketplace—are given meaning (Lury 1996, 69).

Baudrillard is not only a theorist of the sign. His first major work was a study of the new culture of consumer capitalism, in which he identifies a new ambience in the world of objects. This work, *The System of Objects* (Baudrillard 1996), was the beginning of a number of sociological investigations into the cultures of modern Western capitalist societies. As Mike Gane (1991, 5) states, 'it is the rigor, even the obsession, with which he persisted in these reflections which mark his work'. His radical analysis began with the fact that it was through consumer affluence that social integration in a class-divided society was being achieved. It was not predominantly through the physical power of the state or of work, but rather through the seductive power of an ambient culture that society's discipline was maintained.

*The Consumer Society* (Baudrillard 1970), combining semiological with sociological and psychoanalytic styles of analysis, was a theoretical

investigation focusing on the reconstruction of social theory to take account of a new affluent consumer society. Gane (1991, 5) states that:

The unity of Baudrillard's project is remarkable—from an analysis of ambience, of a change in the dominant forms of power into the object, his work moves to an analysis of changing forms of resistance that takes the very form of the subject as an object. In the final twist of his work, he broadens out the analysis of these forms of resistance into the world of objects in general: things themselves have silent strategies, and appear to offer to human action a vision of inhuman subversion.

In providing a deeper insight into the expositional order of *The System of Objects*, Gane (1991, 34) explains that this radical work of Baudrillard is marked by a profound influence from Barthes's semiology:

The expositional order of *The Object System* is formally marked by the influence of Barthes' semiology. The first two sections attempt to analyze, first, changes in practices of interior design starting from the point of view of arrangement of furniture and of interior 'ambience', then the 'antique' and other special collections. The third section is concerned with the 'meta-system' and the 'dysfunctional' system. This section, though short, has a valuable statement as a recapitulation of the main themes of the book, which explicitly draws on the ideas of Barthes and shows how they were put to work.

This suggests that, after analysing objects in their objective forms (the new functional forms of interior layout and ambience) and their 'subjective' forms (the collection), Baudrillard's (2005, 117) work then refocuses to consider what is known as the 'field of their connotations'. For Baudrillard (2005, 16), the new system offers what appears to be a new 'freedom'—an emancipation of interior design—and a new experience and new ambience, since the traditional milieu, with its limited, univocal relation of object, place and function, is broken down:

The function is no longer obscured by the moral theatricality of the old furniture; it is emancipated now from ritual, from ceremonial, from the entire ideology which used to make our surroundings into an opaque mirror of a reified human structure ... They are thus indeed free as functional objects—that is, they have the freedom to function.

Despite the many shortcomings of Baudrillard's theory, Gane (1991, 39) acknowledges that *The System of Objects* opens up a postmodernist avenue of analysis that see codes of the advertised image depicting a certain quality

of materials, objects and any spatial design and organisation entering a state of the simulacra—or ‘ambient order’.<sup>65</sup> Objects and discourses under such an analysis do not have any firm referent or grounding; instead, the real has given way to simulations, codes and hyper-reality, where meaning, significance, the message and the referent circulate so quickly that they are made to disappear.

Under such a postmodernist analysis, signs are disconnected from opening a relation to the world, and the ‘model’ response to a ‘model’ world replaces responsive actions in an actual changing one (Alvesson 2002, 25). Signs reach a structural limit of representation by referring only to themselves, with little relation to any exterior or interior. According to Baudrillard, this is true for the analysis of the transformation of materials in domestic design. For example, he first talks about the materiality of wood by drawing on its nostalgic qualities:

Wood draws its substance from the earth, it lives, it breaths, it ‘works’. It has latent warmth ... it keeps time in its fibers, it is the ideal container ... wood has its own odor, it ages, and it even has its parasites ... In brief this material has a being (Baudrillard 2005, 38).

In the above quotation, he describes the nature of wood and how it is supposed to appear in its most primitive, raw and natural form. However, he states that it is necessary to question whether this ‘warmth’ of wood has any meaning (Baudrillard 2005, 38) because something occurs in the new ambient order that contributes to its disappearance. Whether the material is plastic or concrete, the new order is disengaged, and its symbolism is polymorphic. The fundamental issue is no longer the quality of the presence of the object itself, but the value of the item in the ambient harmony of signs.

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<sup>65</sup> It should be noted here that there are a number of theoretical problems associated with the analysis of *The Object System*, of which Baudrillard is also aware (Gane 1991, 42). Of relevance to this thesis is the fundamental problem of Baudrillard’s analysis that renders it subordinate when compared to Barthes’s theory of myth. These problems arise from the fact that the precise role of semiological theory has never been explicitly defined or stated. Evidently, the object system comes to operate as a system of signs, and it is the sign, in its system, that is consumed. Yet Baudrillard never presents a formal analysis of this system. What he does is use these terms provocatively: the ambient system is presented only through a large number of thumbnail sketches or vignettes of the typical way the system operates, on materials, colours and lighting. These descriptive accounts, though written with wit and style, do not reveal the action of a rigorous system of analytic concepts. Rather, they demonstrate the specific phenomenal realisation of functions. In the end, the semiological system works for Baudrillard as a set of manifest rhetorical classifications or categories that are at work in the ordering of material in the study as a whole (Gane 1991, 43).

For example, it becomes a question of the abstract meaning of ‘oak’ or ‘teak’ in the domestic design—not whether it is real or synthetic ‘teak’ (Gane 1991, 39). However, as Gane (1991, 39) states, it is not simply a question of nostalgia, or even the critique of the artificial nostalgia of synthetic materials that produce a ‘pseudo-nature’. The contrast between natural and unnatural is irrelevant.

Applying this analysis to the image of the twenty-first century home—where timber is heavily advertised in the home section of local newspapers as one of the most desired choice of flooring materials—the colour and material of wood, as they are advertised, enter this logic not as concrete, but as abstract, terms open to mental manipulation. Thus, when people read that, ‘people love the more natural look for their timber floors’ (*The West Australian: Habitat* 2006c, 35) (see Figure 51) or, ‘With its blondish tint, the NSW [New South Wales] blackbutt is a similar color to Tasmanian oak, but is a much harder timber, which makes it more desirable’ (*The West Australian: Habitat* 2006c, 35) or, ‘Barnwood, a new product by Bamboozle, looks more like real wood than some other bamboos and is 73 percent harder than jarrah’ (*The West Australian: Habitat* 2006c, 35) (see Figure 52), the reader learns that, apart from being simply ‘traditional’, there are many colours and degrees of variation in wood (such as lighter or darker variations that may be varnished, lacquered or left deliberately unfinished).

The crucial point here is that the colour in question is always abstract—an object of mental manipulation, along with everything else. The entire environment is thus transformed into a sign system. These terms are not yet signs—they become signs as they enter the system. Under such an analysis, the image of wooden flooring that appears in *Habitat* in *The West Australian* enters a new ambient order in which the wood on a tree—wood in its most pure and natural form—is said to have disappeared. Baudrillard (cited in Gane 1991, 39) calls this a ‘new order of culture’—a new combinatory that is irreversible and, in principle, internally infinite: ‘no object can escape it just as no product escapes the formal logic of the commodity’.

out. With its blondish tint, the NSW blackbutt is a similar colour to Tasmanian oak, but is a much harder timber, which makes it more desirable.

In a blast from the past, Ms Bandy said the 130mm-wide boards which were all the rage in the 1920s had made a comeback and were the first choice for many people.

She said the ever-increasing size of new homes meant people were looking for big boards to complement the space.

Classique Floorboards offers hardwood flooring in a range of Australian hardwoods, including WA-

**People  
love the  
more  
natural  
look for  
their  
timber  
floors.**

Figure 51: 'People love the more natural look for their timber floors.'

Source: *The West Australian: Habitat* 2006c, 35.



Figure 52: 'Barnwood ... looks more like real wood than some other bamboos.'

Source: *The West Australian: Habitat* 2006c, 35.

In *The System of Objects*, Baudrillard (1996) elaborates on a theory of the basic transformation of the social meaning of objects. He upholds the view that there is a 'traditional' system (a view that is problematic since he is alluding to a 'better' past) in which form is the absolute demarcation of interior from exterior. Any container is fundamentally a fixed form, and substance can be said to be in its form, as described below:

the form is an absolute dividing-line between inside and outside. Form is a rigid container, and within it is substance. Beyond their practical function, therefore, objects—and specifically objects of furniture—have a primordial function as vessels, a function that belongs to the register of the imaginary (Baudrillard 2005, 26).

For Baudrillard, objects and furniture in particular have the primordial function of being material containers, beyond practical function. They reflect a meaning of the world and are part of a complete world of transcendent substances. Baudrillard argues that the house or home is always symbolic of the human body itself; the object is always anthropomorphised in poetic or metaphoric symbolism. The basic order revolves round the meaning ascribed to nature, which, through the fabrication of objects, is transubstantiated.

Baudrillard (2005, 27) states:

thus the house itself is a symbolic equivalent of the human body, whose potent organic schema is later generalized into an ideal design for the integration of social structures. All this makes up a complete mode of life whose basic ordering principle is Nature as the original substance from which value is derived. In creating or manufacturing objects, man makes himself through the imposition of a form (i.e. through culture), into the transubstanciator of nature. It is the passing down of substances from age to age, from form to form, which supplies the archetype of creativity, namely creation ab utero and the whole poetic and metaphorical symbolic system that goes with it ... So too with the form perfectly circumscribing the object, a portion of nature is included therein, just as in the case of the human body: the object on this view essentially anthropomorphic. Man is thus bound to the objects around him by the same visceral intimacy, mutatis mutandis that binds him to the organs of his body.

In the above quotation, Baudrillard is alluding to the platonic sense of the ‘perfect’ home that, according to him, has now been lost. Although this thesis challenges what seems to be a highly problematic grounding of the myth that there is such thing as a perfect home, the above quotation is nevertheless significant because it shows how the theorist of the sign attempts to later contrast this ‘order of Nature’ (Baudrillard 2005, 27) to the new order.

As the below quotation indicates, Baudrillard (2005, 27–28) explains that the order of nature is coming to an end in modern interiors:

What we glimpse today in modern interiors is the coming end of this order of Nature; what is appearing on the horizon, beyond the breakup of form, beyond the dissolution of the formal boundary between inside and outside and of the whole dialectic of being and appearance relating to that boundary, is a qualitatively new kind of relationship, a new kind of objective responsibility ... the project of a technological society implies putting the very idea of genesis into question and omitting all the origins, received meanings and ‘essences’ of which our old pieces of furniture remained concrete symbols, it implies practical computation and conceptualization on the basis of a total abstraction, the notion of a world no longer given but instead produced—mastered, manipulated, inventoried, controlled: a world, in short, that has to be constructed.

This implies that, to Baudrillard, there was a time of beginning when objects of the home were laden with heavy symbolism. However, the project of modern technicism puts genesis into question, since origins are cancelled, as are all the old dense, heavy ‘essences’ of the domestic milieu (Gane 1991, 37). Gane (1991, 38) uses the bed as an example to illustrate this point. He states that, previously, the bed was heavy with symbolism and meaning, but this has been complicated by the fact that there are now so many variations of the ‘original’ bed. For example, there is the so-called sofa bed which functions as both a sofa *and* a bed. As such, the sofa bed is not used primarily for sleeping but also sitting in. Other variations of the ‘original’ bed include the settee, divan and so forth (Gane 1991, 38).

Referring back to the image of the home theatre room advertised in the NIM of *The West Australian*, Baudrillard would say that the last thing advertising mentions about the home theatre room is what it is like to sit in the room. From the Baudrillardian analytical perspective, the focus has shifted away from applying analytical tools that see the myth of the idealised home theatre room as having an inherent signification of historical references or primordial meaning. What warrants far more critique is what Gane (1991, 41) describes to be ‘the irony of the regression of the human being in the face of technical progress’. This is something far more complex and technical, such as the theatre room’s positioning to the screen. Yet the effect of this is that interaction is transformed because no one is face-to-face any longer.<sup>66</sup>

From this perspective, it seems that any analysis must acknowledge that the new myths associated with the image of the home are severed from any linkage to the past. Instead, they must be more formally assessed by connecting this analysis to the means and methods decreed by the economics of the modern world, where the modern consumer is able to feel

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<sup>66</sup> Building on this, in the 1950s, the term ‘home entertainment’ conjured a limited array of images: a television and perhaps hi-fi equipment. In contrast, in the twenty-first century, the prevalent image of a fully equipped home entertainment theatre room is ubiquitous. Advertising slogans such as ‘Home’s the entertaining go’ and ‘How to turn your home into a theatre of dreams’ are contributing to promoting the home theatre room as a technological hub of the home that substantiates Australians’ aspirations of the home in the twenty-first century. It seems impossible to read the homes section of the newspaper without encountering the image of a state-of-the-art, in-built home theatre room, complete with a full plasma television screen and liquid-crystal display (LCD) surround-sound system.

at one with the technological society. Take this advertising statement from Perth's NIM in *The Sunday Times* for example: 'Audio Connections had put together theatres [that] include smart lighting, ceiling star effects and electric control of curtains and other devices that can all be controlled by one common interface' (*The Sunday Times: Homes*, 2007). Based on what has been discussed thus far, the myth decoder would read this image of the home theatre room in light of the fact that everything must be convenient, easy to operate and 'controlled by one common interface'. Similarly, Gane (1991, 37) states, on this basis of presenting Baudrillard's project, that:

the idea of function has been transformed into a systematic abstract culturalization: the domain of domestic labor is transformed in relation to a new technical regime of controls. Muscular effort is gradually displaced by other energy systems under cybernetic control, often remote.

Further, in such a world, says Baudrillard (2005, 56–57), objects appear to become more complicated in relation to the now more simplified—or, rather, less differentiated—humans who are supposed to be in control.

Despite the so-called 'project of modern technicism', there is a fatal logic in the quest of technology to produce a 'mimesis' of the natural world, according to Baudrillard (cited in Gane 1991, 41). He claims that 'the irony of the regression of the human being in the face of technical progress open to all the new myths of a perfect, omnipotent functional objects' (Baudrillard, cited in Gane 1991, 41). Moreover, he states that the inevitable logic of the new order is the production of compensatory reaction, 'a mental dynamic, a simulacrum of a lost symbolic relation ... trying to reinvent a purpose through the force of the signs' (Baudrillard, cited in Gane 1991, 41).

To illustrate this, Baudrillard (cited in Gane 1991, 41) provides an example whereby a publicity campaign is being used to sell a cigarette lighter in the form of a beach pebble. It is not advertised based on the superiority of its function as a lighter; rather, what is advertised is its new 'functionality' due to its fit in the hand—it being 'handy'. Gane (1991, 41) continues to explicate Baudrillard's analysis of the new myths based on the functional object of the lighter in the face of technical progress:

The pebble fits the palm beautifully, indeed the publicity stresses that it is the sea itself which has polished the stone so that it can fit so comfortably in the hand, to be manipulated by man. The connotation is two-fold, says Baudrillard. There is in this industrially produced object an attempt to signify a recovery of the qualities of the craft object, the direct extension of the human body and the object in hand. And the allusion to the sea reproduces the myth of the nature in the service of humanity, adapting itself to his least desire. In this myth, nature is transformed into culture—the role of polisher, a sublime artisan. This ancient mythological structure is thus combined with craft purpose in a ‘miraculous flint’: from the sea it is brought to fire.

In light of this, when Baudrillard’s theory is applied to analyse the contemporary advertising message in the context of the image of the twenty-first century idealised home, signifying references or connotations—such as the vocabularies used to justify a historical intention for the home theatre room ('cocooning', 'gathering point for the family', 'sanctuary' and so forth)—would not be read as having any relation to the idealised Victorian home. Rather, the home theatre room would be regarded the new myth in the twenty-first century and would be read based on its 'functionality' in the face of technical progress.

This analysis departs from Barthes's theory of myth. Barthes (1988, 177–178) believes in the power that humans have over language, and its intimate ties with a historical past, although he fully acknowledges that this ultimately depends on the receiver of the advertising message and whether he or she knows how to 'impart' this power:

the excellence of the advertising signifier depends on the power to which we must know how to impart, and link to its reader with the greatest quantity of 'world' possible, that is, experience of very old images, obscure and profound sensations of the body, poetically named by generations, wisdom of the relations of man and nature, patient accession of humanity to an intelligence of things through the one incontestably human power: language.

Barthes (1988) further adds that the language of the advertising message opens up a world of spoken representation with which people are already familiar and have been practising for a long time. Barthes (1988, 178) argues that, within this 'narrative', 'by swathing the product in advertising language, mankind gives it meaning and thereby transforms its simple use into an experience of the mind'. This view differs from that of Baudrillard (2005, 178),

who considers the language of the advertising message ‘a discourse on objects—a “pure” inessential connotation—which is consumed’:

Advertising in its entirety constitutes a useless and unnecessary universe. It is pure connotation. It contributes nothing to production or to the direct application of things, yet it plays an integral part in the system of objects, not merely because it relates to consumption but also because it itself becomes an object to be consumed.

In Baudrillard’s advocating of the so-called ‘ambient order’, the technologically ‘smart’ home reigns, and, in the technologically smart home, the modern unconscious begins to speak in a regressive modern fantasy of the image of the twenty-first century home. In light of Baudrillard’s quotation above, the image of the home in relation to the advertising message has no grounding in Victorian ideals—it is an active technical process. The reading of the image of the home becomes subsumed in the degradation of the advertising language into the sign. On one side is a simulacrum of nostalgic past (for the real nostalgia is hidden); on the other side is a regression to a self-indulgent, self-absorbed and egocentric envelopment of the experience.

Consider the example of an advertising heading in *The West Australian* that identifies the materiality of wood to be an idealised aspect of the home (see Figure 53). In Baudrillard’s (cited in Gane 1991, 42) analysis based on the new ambient order, ‘The wonderful warmth of wood’ (*The West Australian: Habitat* 2006c, 35) would suggest nothing more than a ‘false solution to the contradictory mode in which the object lives’ (Baudrillard, cited in Gane 1991, 42). This statement exposes the hypocrisy of the new order in its attempt to romanticise nature—or, in Baudrillard’s (2005, 66) terms, to ‘hide its obscenity’ by generating an ‘inoffensive naturalness of signs’. Taking this to another level, Baudrillard (2005, 61–62) argues:

In the new order, nature appears completely mastered: the human subject appears its master. But in so producing this new order, the new culturality disavows its own nature, conceals from view its actual, dramatic functional loss of human reality and power.



Figure 53: 'The wonderful warmth of wood.'  
Source: *The West Australian: Habitat* 2006c, 35.

Building on this, it is interesting to compare and contrast the new order to the materialistic society, as described in the passage by Benjamin (1999). During this time, the domestic interior was referred to as a 'decorative box' filled with objects of connoisseur and aesthetic pleasure. In the passage, the individual as a consumer was portrayed by Benjamin as a proprietor, simple user and enjoyer of objects of connoisseur and aesthetic pleasure of the domestic interior.

However, under Baudrillard's analysis, in the twenty-first century home, a new kind of homogeneity becomes the 'condition of inter-functionality' (Gane 1991, 36). Advertising reflects this change by calling into existence the consumer as manipulator and arranger. Gane (1991, 36) states that a new kind of personality is brought into existence: the designer. In this theoretical context, the modern consumer does not 'consume' objects in the conventional sense—he or she controls them and commands them in their new order. Indeed, as Gane (1991, 36) reiterates, advertising tends to suggest that, in such a modern system, the individual in the last resort does not fundamentally need objects—he or she is only required to act as a kind of technician. In light of Baudrillard's (1998, 200) reference to the home as part of a desired collective imagery of the 'system of objects', representations of such domestic ideals in the twenty-first century media are turned into signs, where meanings are drawn 'from an abstract and systematic relationship to all other sign-objects'.

### **Chapter conclusion and discussion**

This chapter has demonstrated that the normative ideals and images of the Tuscan style and various styles of the home are capable of subsuming

into the Barthoneon myth. From this theoretical perspective, the image of the Tuscan style has been emptied of any Tuscan architectural history or meaning, as the essence of Tuscany (only for those who possess the cultural capital to appreciate it) becomes half truncated—it is deprived of memory, but not of existence.

In its country of origin, the architectural style of Tuscany may have been seen as a first-order sign; however, in Perth, it represents nothing more than a second-order signification or myth. This is because it has been taken out of its own time and cultural context and placed in a context unrelated to it, thus making it devoid of any architectural history or meaning. For this reason, the image of the Tuscan style of home has been reduced to a form of signification—a myth or ideality that subordinates the object to having a mere ‘secondary’ function, through the manipulation of the media and advertising. The grandeurs of ancient architecture and fine Italian tastes are the drives behind the myth.

This chapter has also established that the phenomenon of the many existing images of eclectic styles of home in the twenty-first century reflect a narrative-seeking and transient nature of these images of ‘styles’ in a ferocious consumer society. However, this constant filtering of images, which ultimately leads to evolution and change in fashion, is necessary to meet the demands of ‘lifestyle’. Lifestyle, the alternate habitus, is closely linked to desire to pursue a sense of one’s own self or interest, which is in tune with the conformity of groups. Building on this, in a quest to meet the demands of ‘lifestyle’, the image of the home theatre room—or ‘media room’, as it is sometimes called—has become a representation of the normative ideal home space in the media of the twenty-first century. This image seems to have superseded the kitchen of the 1950s as the central technological hub of the family home.

By drawing on Barthes’s myth, this chapter has analysed the image of the home theatre space to be a myth that is tied to concepts of community and feeling of belonging—both of which are unspoken and intrinsic values that arguably still exist in most middle Australians’ imagination. Subsequently, the chapter has established that the use of phrases in advertisement headings such as, ‘Home is where the theatre is’ and words

such as ‘sanctuary’ and ‘cocooning’ create vital images upon which the myth of the theatre home is based. The advertisement heading, ‘Home is where the theatre is’ bears a striking resemblance to the advertising heading referring to the kitchen in the 1950s: ‘Home is where the heart is’. This chapter has argued that it is because of this similarity that the home image of the theatre space is intimately linked to the Victorian home myth. As such, it is unsurprising that advertisers have chosen to phrase advertisement headings in a way that enables the myth to appeal directly to general middle Australians’ imagination.

According to Benjamin et al. (1999), the home in the nineteenth century was a place already associated with the world of imagination, fantasy and dream. As such, seen from the perspective of Barthes’s myth, there appears a strong link between Benjamin’s observations and the normative ideals associated with images of the home theatre in the twenty-first century. This naturally gives rise to a myth that exists as a natural justification of a historical intention, whose goal is to make ‘contingency appear eternal’ (Barthes 1973, 129). By bringing to light the fundamental aspects of Baudrillard’s theory, this chapter also established that, in Barthes’s theory of myth, the image of the home accounts for a historical intention and natural justification. In contrast, in Baudrillard’s ‘system of objects’, the idea and thus the image of the home and the functional objects within it—including home furnishings and interior design—are divorced from a past and stripped of traditional sense. As such, the image of the home, in the context of Baudrillard’s system of objects, has turned into a sign or a commodity in which any connection or relationship to a history or past historical references of the home are severed.

The new myths of the twenty-first century home, in the context of Baudrillard’s system of objects, operate within the logic of the sign, as it is through this operation that homes—as commodities in the marketplace—are given meaning. Despite the many shortcomings of his theory of sign, Baudrillard’s *The System of Objects* opens up a postmodernist avenue of analysis into the contemporary idealised home in the media, which see codes of advertising depicting a certain quality of materials, objects and

spatial design and organisation entering a state of the simulacra—or ‘ambient order’.

As this chapter ends, the disparity between Barthes’s and Baudrillard’s theoretical approaches to the myth of home in the media becomes clear. In Baudrillard’s ‘ambient order’ in the system of objects, an analysis of the image of the home becomes at once subsumed in the degradation of the advertising language into the sign. In contrast, under Barthes’s analysis, the excellence of the advertising signifier depends on power, which the reader must know how to impart and link to the experience of language (Barthes 1988, 177–178). Barthes (1988, 178) argues that the advertising language exemplifies a spoken representation of the world—a world that humans have known and been familiar with for a long time. He affirms that, by swathing the product in advertising language, people give it meaning and thereby transform its simple use into an experience of the mind.

This chapter has ascertained that there is a great discrepancy between Barthes’s and Baudrillard’s approaches to the subject of ‘reality’, following a number of problems identified with Baudrillard’s theory. First, Barthes’s concept of myth stems from the understanding that there is a socially constructed reality that people accept as ‘natural’. This is an illusory reality constructed in order to mask the real structures of power obtained in society. As such, the opinions and values of a historically and socially specific class are held up as ‘universal truths’. Subsequently, attempts to challenge this naturalisation and universalisation of a socially constructed reality are dismissed for lacking common sense, and excluded from serious consideration.

In contrast, Baudrillard seems to be taking a different and more presumptuous approach to considering the subject on ‘reality’. First, in Baudrillard’s identification of the so-called three orders of appearance that have followed one another since the Renaissance (Counterfeit, Production and Simulation), he seems to suggest that humankind once lived in ‘objective reality’, and that everything that exists until the present day is an illusion. This places Baudrillard’s theoretical base on shaky grounds because no human group has ever lived in ‘objective reality’ (Rojek & Turner 1993, 131).

Second, the opposition that Baudrillard tries to establish in his work—‘reality’ versus ‘simulation’—does not form a self-sustaining dialectic because, unlike ‘real’ versus ‘symbolic’, the dialectic relations between ‘real’ and ‘simulacrum’ are not sustainable (Rojek & Turner 1993, 131).

Against this, it can be concluded that, ‘there is little that can be called “real” in the compass of human experience; real in the sense that it absolutely resists symbolic appropriation’ (Rojek & Turner 1993, 131).

Applying this logic to the context of the ideal image of the home, the only reality left with respect to all images being idealised lies in the thriving media advertising industry, and its endless endeavour to accommodate trends in housing design in order to ultimately achieve what it set out to do: satisfy and feed a hungry and vibrant consumerist culture. Bell (2006, 13) holds a similar view:

The market has been swift to exploit the desire for individualism in all things, and houses are no different, sustained by relentless representation in the media. The media’s portrayal of the idealized modern home is *thus* a compromise between individual and society as to what a home should be. It represents not reality, but ideality.

In light of this, if there is no ‘reality’ as such, it can be stated that, ‘everything else is experienced symbolically or as fantasy’ (Rojek & Turner 1993, 131). Thus, the image of the home is a symbolic mediated fantasy. Still, this image is only in reference to ‘the real’ that the symbolic emerges. This is the determinate dialectic relation of the symbolic to the real.<sup>67</sup> This study argues that there is no better way to express and define reality than that done by Rojek and Turner (1993, 132):

At the heart of every symbolic system lies a kernel of ‘the real’ which the symbols neither acknowledge nor express even though the entire reason for their existence is to strive toward acknowledgement and expression of reality. It is in this sense that ‘the real’ remains impossible for human kind condemned to approach it symbolically.

As such, ‘the real is ultimately inapproachable’ (Rojek & Turner 1993, 132), as is the ideality of the home image in the media, which constitutes forms of

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<sup>67</sup> The simulacrum, by definition and contrast, can exist with reference to anything—even other simulations—and thus has no particular relationship to the real (Rojek & Turner 1993, 131–132).

unattainable desire. However, precisely for this reason, the real resonates in every symbol (Rojek & Turner 1993, 132) and every image form.

To this end, when taking the Baudrillardian perception that there was once an objective reality, the ideal Tuscan style of home that exists in the media (as well as various other styles) is nothing more than an illusion that does not exist. In contrast, from the Barthoneon perspective, the advertising image of the Tuscan and various styles of home are bounded and determined by structures, representations and constructions of a reality that still exists, and by which some people choose to live.

## ***Concluding chapter: Contributions and recommendations***

If you don't create a vacuum, you'll never achieve singularity. You may produce remarkable things, but the heritage you have to deal with is such that you'll have to pass through a whole genetics of accumulation (Baudrillard 2002, 75).

### ***Chapter introduction***

This thesis has contributed to the knowledge of the mythical state of the Australian home image and media's representations of the home in the context of architecture. By drawing on Barthes's theoretical concept of myth, this thesis has argued that it is possible for the home image to 'naturalise', thereby transmuting what was essentially cultural into something that materialised as normal and universal. This thesis has also indicated that, while the image of the home is considered normal and trivial, the idealised home constitutes the mythic home.

The methodological approach and structure of this thesis was informed by a series of case studies undertaken to read into the trivia and norm of the images depicted of the ideal Australian suburbia home and the architectural home. An explanation of what makes research a case study is given below:

it is when a researcher sets out to investigate a particular person, program, curriculum, or technique. The case study can be described in detail, or the researcher can interpret the meaning. Either way is used. So when you read that a particular piece of research is a case study or uses a case study methodology, you might find a variety of ways of going about gathering data, analyzing data, and writing up the data (Lichtman 2014, 123).

Seen in the above light, the case study approach adopted for this research was relevant to investigate each of the four idealised targeted elements of the Australian home. Governed by a post-structural stance that questioned and challenged all aspects of the construction of reality, the methodological approach of this thesis drew upon the theoretical concept of Barthes's myth in order to work against the idealisations associated with the normative

images and ideals of the suburban and architectural home at a given time and place.

Stemming from a desire to expose and demystify the underlying myths of the Western home by questioning the values and attitudes implicit in the variety of messages with which the mass culture bombards society, this thesis arose out of a concern to explore the home from the perspective of two key sites of idealisation, separated by time: the 1950s and the twenty-first century. By looking at diverse sources in local newspapers and magazines, it was discovered that, while seemingly disparate, these images combined to form a picture of the Barthoneon myth. These myths were the ‘modern’ home and kitchen in the 1950s, the suburban ‘quarter-acre and garden’ home, the ‘architect-designed’ home and the ‘Tuscan’ style of home and ‘home theatre’ in the twenty-first century. By drawing on a series of interrelated, yet seemingly diverse, readings into the cultural text and images of the Australian architectural and suburbia dream home, complex, yet fundamental, relationships were found between the social, cultural and architectural home and the media, within which the home became transformed into the battleground of the Barthoneon myth. Thus, one of the principal aims of this concluding chapter, aside from providing a brief overview of the significance of the findings of this thesis, is to suggest ways to move forward in terms of how to think about the home as a discourse and as part of a creative process in the design of the architectural home.

### ***Significance of the findings: A brief overview***

This thesis has addressed the contested representations of the idealised home in the media by adopting Barthes’s theoretical position of myth. This position assumes two things. First, in a society eager for images, the idealised home plays a particularly important mythological role in the Australian architectural imagination. Second, media images have inherent specific mechanisms that attempt to universalise and naturalise meanings and values for Australian society. Myth thus provided a basis and served as a tool and vehicle for critiquing the ‘naturalising’ effect of the ideology of the

Australian home. Given the above, the nature of the idealised home in the context of architecture and the media was challenged.

Chapter One formed the background chapter that examined the origins of the Western home ideals. This chapter focused on the ideal images of the home as derived from two specific sociocultural contexts: the Victorian nineteenth century and modern twentieth century. The review of the Victorian nineteenth century and modern twentieth century shed light on the cultural and sociological representations and readings of the home as these became transposed and revolutionised through to the Australian colonial context. The outcome of this review revealed that domesticity was a construction that began with the conception of Victorianism. Victorianism was a set of social, moral and cultural values from which the ideals of the Western home first originated, and characterised the white middle class in England and the US during the nineteenth century—an Anglo model of which could also be found in Australia. Chapter One also established the important role of representations in facilitating understandings of Western home ideals in relation to what is regarded ‘normal’ and ‘natural’ for understanding the home.

The background chapter then moved on to examine the social, cultural and political motivations that paved the way for the creation of the ideal ‘modern’ style of Western home. This review was contextualised within the discourse of architecture and framed within historical episodes and attitudes to house and the home, from the Australian colonial era to ‘modern’ times. The outcome of this review revealed that, by the early twentieth century, Australians were eager to eliminate the ways of the past and embrace change defined by the coming of a new era of modernity. The study also established that modernism was a progressive movement, with the idealised ‘modern’ house more interested in invention than in a tradition that was once governed by the cumbersome lifestyle and anachronistic values of the Victorian era. Moreover, this review found no ‘natural’ reason why the ‘modern’ home should be closely connected to certain physical attributes, such as the free plan, flat roof or plain geometrical forms. The connection between the idealised ‘modern’ home and its associated physical characteristics was produced, and meaning was made. This meaning was

made when the house became an architectural obsession that was subjected to certain styles and movements—sometimes disproportionately to their popularity or the extent of their influence at the time. In twenty-first century architecture, the favoured style was modernism. Further, up to this point of the thesis, the background study helped demonstrate that ideals of home and home design were part of a sociocultural and temporal entity that were always imbued and encoded with value and ideologies of a particular era and society.

Chapter Two explained the theoretical stance of this thesis. It presented the research questions tailored to address the subsequent four case study chapters of the thesis (examining the home image of the ‘modern’ 1950s and 1960s kitchen, the suburban quarter-acre and garden, the architect-designed home and the twenty-first century Tuscan and home theatre space). The questions presented were:

- What are some of the idealised elements or aspects associated with the home?
- How are these aspects perpetuated and represented in the media?
- To what extent do representations of these idealised elements of the home enter into a form of signification—that is, myth?

Drawing upon Barthes’s myth as a theoretical and analytical tool to unpack the cultural texts and practices of the home as taken for granted, the nature of the Australian home in its image form—comprising mainly of print media and print materials—were addressed and scrutinised. In summary, the semiotic approach used to examine the media’s representations of the home was appropriate to this study. The following section describes the significance of the findings for the case study chapters (Chapters Three, Four, Five and Six).

### ***Significance of case study findings***

Based on the theoretical underpinnings of Barthes, Bourdieu and Baudrillard and the semiotic and post-structuralist approach set out in Chapter Two, the four case study chapters (Chapters Three, Four, Five and Six) sought to analyse images of the social, cultural and architectural aspects

of the Australian home. The main hypothesis was that images represent no more than a constructed ideal drawn from various operations in the media, against which the perpetual norms of the home become appropriated and transposed into a myth. In the overall study and analysis, the significance of the findings of the four case chapters are summarised as follows.

### *Findings of Chapter Three*

Chapter Three argued that modernism, as a design philosophy, became widely promoted and accepted by both the Australian public and government to tackle the economic problem known as ‘the Great Australian Tragedy’, when Australia was faced with difficult material conditions following World War II in 1945. Backed up by an economic reality that saw millions of people in Europe displaced from their homelands, popular magazines such as *AHG*, *AWW* and *AHB* helped disseminate a new ‘modern’ style of living. This new form of home living and design was supposed to reflect the mood of post-war modernity. Through their portrayal to post-war housing consumers of how a small house could be made desirable through channelling wartime dreams into feasible house-building and homemaking realities, popular magazines played a significant role in dictating and transforming the normative ideals and tastes of the nation.

Through partaking in the role of the myth consumer in Barthes’s sense, this chapter examined how the kitchen—which had never before been regarded the heart of the home—suddenly came into focus. It considered how, in the 1950s, virtues such as hygiene and efficiency became a top priority, and the ‘modern housewife’ became a target to promote such values. This chapter demonstrated the potency of the ‘modern’ ideal home myth as normative images and ideals of the post-war kitchen—in which the happy housewife’s presence seemed ubiquitous and unquestionable—transformed into the ideological battleground of the Barthoneon myth. Two significant findings for this chapter were that mythical representations were intricately linked to a broader history within the wider semantic fields of Australian modernity and post-war domestic culture, and that images of ‘modern’ ideals of the home reflected and shaped Australian architectural,

social and cultural values and ideals in various complex ways. In this sense, modernity and normative ideals and images of the ‘modern’ home in the 1950s cannot be considered separate entities. The two are intricately linked via a complex imaginary relationship that can only be designated as a level of signification—a level of myth.

### *Findings of Chapter Four*

Chapter Four demonstrated that the normative ideals and images of the suburban quarter-acre and garden could easily revert to the Barthoneon myth by which many Australians still choose to live. The natural image of the suburban quarter-acre and garden home is not only deeply bounded by Australians’ imagination and dreams of a good life and home, but is firmly rooted in Australian values of community and culture. Ever since World War II, when conditions were most favourable for the media to mythologise the quarter-acre ideal, the media has continued to propagate and aspire to the suburban garden myth.

The diversity and range of media chosen for the analyses in this chapter were intended to testify to the prevalence and potency of the myth, despite it having been transpired across separate time periods. This chapter also identified that myths are entirely derivative of pre-existing cultural data. Their mode of presentation—language and pictures—already identifies them with the familiar. It is difficult to speak of the production of a completely original myth because they are so full of symbols and images of tradition.

### *Findings of Chapter Five*

Chapter Five established the key distinctions between the image of the house that existed in professional cultures of architectural spaces, and the home seen in ‘popular’ media constructions of architectural spaces. Using DCM architects as a case study, this chapter argued that the imagery of DCM’s architectural works and houses is capable of rendering the ‘architect-designed’ home a naturally profound and mystifying ideal, even within its own architectural profession. Such a mystifying element of the architect-designed home is inextricably tied to the myth of the ‘greatness’ of

the architect, and the heroic architect as the ‘other’. This myth is capable of sustaining itself without any need for justification because it is mythical speech—that is, the way the houses are described by architects and journalists, or the way the houses are represented (in books, websites and magazines)—that substantiates them as idealised architectural objects. Above all, it was revealed in this chapter that the imperative nature of the Barthoneon myth lies in the manner through which the image of the architect-designed home subtly communicates its factual nature as a legitimate design product to the non-factual concept of an idealised object. The greatness of the architect as a heroic figure (an idea or value) thus comes to impose itself with the straightforwardness of an empirical fact, and the message is subsequently enabled to conceal its identity.

### *Findings of Chapter Six*

Chapter Six began by analysing the home image of the Tuscan style and the image of the home theatre space by drawing on Barthes’s myth as these images proliferated local Perth newspapers and NIMs, such as *Habitat* in *The West Australian* and *Homes* in *The Sunday Times*. This chapter demonstrated that, while these normative ideals and images are capable of subsuming into the Barthoneon myth, an analysis of the image of these home ideals nevertheless became at once subsumed into the degradation of the advertising language as signs in the context of Baudrillard’s ‘system of objects’ or ‘ambient order’. Following on from this, one of the highlights of this chapter’s findings was that, in Barthes’s theory of myth, the image of the home accounts for a historical intention and natural justification. In contrast, in Baudrillard’s ‘system of objects’, the idea and thus the image of the home and functional objects within it—including home furnishings and interior design—are divorced from a past and stripped of their traditional sense. As such, the image of the home, in the context of Baudrillard’s system of objects, turns into a sign or a commodity in which any connections or relationships to a history are severed.

Further in the chapter, it was found that myths in the Barthoneon sense are structures, representations and constructions of a reality that still

exists and by which some people still live. In contrast, in Baudrillard's 'system of objects', the reality of the home does not exist until there is proof to the contrary—a proof that Baudrillard believes people give themselves. Hence, towards the end of Chapter Six, the disparity between Barthes's and Baudrillard's theoretical approaches to the subject of reality and their application to the myth of home in the media was acknowledged, which led to identifying a number of problems in Baudrillard's theory.

First, Barthes's concept of myth stems from an understanding that there is once a socially constructed reality that people accept as 'natural'. In fact, this is an illusory reality constructed to mask the real structures of power obtained in society. In contrast, Baudrillard suggests that humankind once lived in 'objective reality', and that everything that existed until the present day was an illusion. This suggestion places Baudrillard's theoretical interpretation on shaky intellectual grounds because no human group has ever lived in 'objective reality' (Rojek & Turner 1993, 131). Correspondingly, this chapter established that the image of the home is a symbolic mediated fantasy, and that it is only in reference to 'the real' that the symbolic emerges.

### ***Contributions of the study***

This thesis has argued that the media has had a tremendous influence on perpetuating and intensifying the home image as a social, cultural and architectural ideal (see 'Main introduction'). What constitutes the ideal of the home is always changing. The shifting and changing meaning of the word 'home' makes it more difficult to understand the home as a cultural object. Therefore, this thesis confronted the view that media—especially in the form of advertising—constantly manipulates and gratifies preconceptions of the idealised home.

This thesis concludes that the theoretical basis of Barthes's myth and the semiotic approach were appropriate to demystify the media's representations of the ideal Australian social, cultural and architectural home. It assumes that media images have an inherent specific signifying mechanism that attempts to naturalise meanings and values for Australian

society, against which normative images and ideals of the home become perpetuated, appropriated and transposed into a myth.

New interpretations established from this study extend the existing knowledge of the effects of the media and advertising on the Australian dream home. For example, the work of Lloyd and Johnson (2004), Sheridan et al. (2001), Richards (1997) and Brine (1993) suggests that, in the 1950s, the popular media (magazines and newspapers in particular) played an influential part in shaping the suburban dream of new ideals of marriage, family, home and domestic comfort in the post-war world. Such ideals constituted the ‘Australian way of life’ that was central to post-war attempts to redefine the nation. Extending from this existing knowledge, using a semiotic approach, this research provided perspectives to challenge the ‘innocence’ and ‘naturalness’ of cultural texts and practices of the Australian home image that were capable of producing all manner of supplementary meanings or connotations about the society and its underlying values, beliefs and culture, in a given place and time. Building on Barthes’s theories and methodologies, this thesis purported that an image was ‘naturalised’ when it was made to seem eternal—that is, not due to history. Throughout the four case studies of this thesis (the ‘modern’ home and kitchen in the 1950s, quarter-acre garden suburban dream home, architect-designed home, and ‘Tuscan’ style and home theatre in the twenty-first century), Barthes’s theoretical and methodological stance was vigorously applied to reading the images of the Australian dream home. This was done to analyse the ideologies and stereotypes hidden within those images.

The review in the ‘Main introduction’ made explicit that the image of the home and house as a social, cultural and architectural ideal played a very important mythological role in the Australian public’s imagination. Through identifying what these idealisations or myths were (see Chapters Three, Four, Five and Six), this theoretical study added to the existing knowledge by debunking home myths by making explicit what remained implicit in the normative ideals and media images of the Australian home. Further, in bridging the gap between understanding the house as an idealised architectural object and understanding the home as an idealised social and cultural entity, this thesis added to knowledge by conceding that

images of the house and home were both vulnerable to subsuming into a myth or an idealisation. This myth transmuted what was essentially cultural (historical, constructed and motivated) into something that materialised as natural (trans-historical, innocent and factual).

The value of Barthes's myth and its semiotic approach to this study lay in its critical and analytical tool that forced and enabled the reader to question the values and beliefs implicit in the variety of messages that are embedded in the home image with which mass media culture bombards society. The significance of a semiotic approach was justified by the assumption that, since all cultural objects convey meaning, they use meaning, and, since all cultural practices depend on meaning, they use signs. Insofar as they do this, they work like language works, and are thus amendable to an analysis. As such, a semiotic analysis of the home image provided specific ways of decoding and deciphering signs in visual texts or images in relation to the system of media messages within which they operated. A semiotic approach allowed the content of the texts or images to be broken down into their signifying component parts in order 'to draw on these wider connotations and discourses to make sense of an object, to expand or specify its meanings; to bring new ranges of meaning to bear' (Gay et al. 1997, 15). In so doing, this thesis addressed the various mythical elements of the visual texts or images of the home in the media. The theoretical and analytical tool of Barthes's myth was implemented throughout the case study chapters by demonstrating how the texts and images worked together to inform existing knowledge of the home as these images in their normative form generated complex meanings for the mythic or idealised Australian home.

### ***The significance of the role of mythologies***

Patricia Dooley (1994, 52) writes about the enduring power of myths to interpret experiences, arguing that this can be seen as creative, imaginative or even divine, as their subjects are psychological, moral and metaphysical:

Myths that provide a complete and satisfying world view for believers today might be called 'living myths'. For some adherents the narratives may be literally or historically true; for others, they are more symbolic or metaphorical, but for all they are a source of truth about life's meaning. ... Whatever their current function and appeal, however, myths' original connections with the world of the supernatural, the idea of the divine, and the realm of the spirit leave behind the quality of the mystery and a sense of expansion beyond the merely domestic or terrestrial that can be survive even their severance from religious significance.

This describes the powerfully enduring nature of myths, which are understood to encompass a worldview and often speak about matters that are not literally verifiable. As Dooley (1994, 52) observes, 'myths convey many truths about human experiences [and] in addition to truths, they have always offered Truth'.

This thesis has established that the idealised home is a symbolic mediated fantasy that is intricately linked to mythology. However, it should also be emphasised that mythologies are necessary for people to live by. Since the real of the home is ultimately inapproachable, mythologies can be seen to act as a bridge through which many truths about human experiences of the home are conveyed. In this sense, it is possible to begin to appreciate the idealised home to be a symbolic mediated fantasy, as well as a socially constructed reality that people accept as being 'natural'.

For this appreciation to occur, it is necessary to understand that mythologies are instruments through which cultural data of the home image are given meaning. For instance, a strong cultural imprint exists when cultural texts and media images that depict the twenty-first century home theatre to be an idealised space into which the myth consumer can retreat and escape from the pressures of the workplace places, ultimately enables its mythic content to be read and identified similarly with those idealisations of the nineteenth century Western home. However, having said this, the myth consumer must also be familiar with the fundamental values, beliefs and ideologies of the particular era and society within which the cultural data of the media are embedded in a given time and place. Otherwise, it may not be possible for mythologies to operate or function fully as a symbolic mediated form. Dooley (1994, 53) expands on this significant point:

Myths that are living, that command belief, belong in a special way to their believers. Removal from their cultural context, however well meant, is a delicate and perhaps dangerous project. The danger lies in alienating them from the realm of the sacred, to which they still have a valid claim.

As instruments, myths perform a function beyond themselves because they are both ‘meaning’ and a creator of meaning. By giving shape to data, myth creates the conditions for meaning to be received and accepted (Bailey 2000, 7). In other words, myth filters cultural data in such a way that it provides media texts and images systems of meaning or semantic frameworks within which one’s fantasies and aspirations of the lived ideals of the home can be preserved and sustained.

### ***Recommendations for the discourse and design of the architectural home***

#### *The search for the singular home: Architecture as a resistance to the home image*

This thesis maintains that the media’s representations of the home image and the mythological state of the home established in this thesis offer a foundation upon which architects and designers can build to extend this body of knowledge to further the research and design of the architectural home. In addition, this thesis raises questions about how and why people design the architectural home.

It was stated at the beginning of this research that, until one begins to scrutinise and interrogate what advertising images expect society to accept by telling us to integrate ourselves totally into society, the true and fundamental principles of architectural home design cannot be implemented. To this, in reference to the theoretical view of Baudrillard, this study adds that, until one learns to resist and ‘defamiliarise’ one’s thinking of the home as an idealised cultural entity, a new theoretical approach in the design discipline cannot be advanced (Baudrillard & Nouvel 2002). That is, this thesis believes that, unless the creative artist leaves the clutter of culture behind, it is difficult—if not impossible—to create something profound and radical ‘because we cannot detach ourselves sufficiently from it to be able to talk “objectively” about it’ (Johnson 1994, 4). In this sense, this thesis

advocates that future research move towards creating the ‘singularity’ of the architectural home.

As defined by K Michael Hays (cited in Baudrillard & Nouvel 2002, viii) in *The Singular Objects of Architecture*, the singular object is not an object, but a way of access—an avenue. The definition of the ‘singular object’ is as follows

The singular object [is] anticipatory, inexhaustible, and shared; it must destroy culture (or what become of it) and redistribute the leftovers ... its model will be neither architecture nor philosophy freestanding, as traditionally practiced, but a productive enfolding of one into the other—an event more than an object, a constructional operation in which each discourse interprets the other but nevertheless produces a new, irreducible, singular thing: that thing we call theory.

As this quotation suggests, theory should be the diagram for the singularity of the architectural home. In its Latin and earlier Greek usage, theory originally involved the idea of a spectator contemplating an event (Johnson 1994, 3). However, this ancient view of theory is now obsolete because it seems to imply that matters are construed as if from outside a discipline or set of practices. Seen in a less restrictive sense, the idea of theory can now be deliberated in a much more fluid and practical light. Hays (cited in Baudrillard & Nouvel 2002, ix) provides an enlightening view on theory (that is shared by the current researcher):

Theory is ready to travel. Although at its best, theory will stay close to the historicity of its material, mediating between specific cultural practices and specific historical contexts, theoretical constructions also possess an uncanny capacity to cross over, to drift and expand across other disciplines, however much authors, institution, and orthodoxies try to confine them. Theory is autonomous ('inexchangeable'), but it is nourished by circulation—by borrowing and trading, by unconscious influence or wholesale appropriation. Through the accidents of discourse, a body of theory can also be dislodged and pressed into the service of a quite different one, reinvested with unpredictable content and refunctioned for unexpected vocations.

In the spirit of Hays’s view, this thesis stresses that practice and knowledge are important constituents within which the discourse and design of the architectural home must be framed. This requires that traditional ways of materialising the architectural home that ‘aimed to prescribe normative standards for design and layout methods and motives for implementation,

should give way to an emphasis on the production of architecture as a subject of knowledge' (Hays, cited in Baudrillard & Nouvel 2002, ix). Here, this study recommends that the discourse and design of the architectural home should expand beyond its traditional limits to include architecture theory. Hays (cited in Baudrillard & Nouvel 2002, ix) prescribes that such an architecture theory should involve 'the fusion of urbanism, semiology and certain strains of poststructuralist thought'.

Using Barthes's notion of myth as a type of speech to illustrate the significance of architectural theory to the creative process in architectural design, Johnson (1994, 49) invites contemplation of Barthes's mythical speech as 'a means of communication similar to the conception of theory as design-talk'. In other words, creativity in architecture is not the object created, but the record of the way it was created—of the decisions taken, its relational properties and the attitudes that enabled it. Johnson (1994, 49–50) promotes the view that the creativity of architecture is marked and defined by its elusive qualities and insubstantiality—a view shared by the current researcher: 'Just as it is myth's insubstantiality and formality that are important to Barthes' discussion, it is precisely the elusive qualities of architecture, its insubstantiality and its formality as a created work that marks its creativity'. Based on this, bearing in mind that theory must be considered part of the creative process in architectural design, it is also necessary to agree with Johnson (1994, 49), who regards theory as the story of architecture that guides practice as being one of its greatest myths: 'design-talk is its exegesis, and only in the meditative is partially recognized because that is the way concepts are integrated into the doing'.

In conclusion, this thesis has contributed to a discussion on the media's representations of the home in the context of architecture. It has argued that, throughout the ages, the concept of home has constantly evolved. Its ideal is a construct—the meaning of which is never fixed, but is always changing. Throughout the ages, the home brings with it an inevitable historical dimension, but also an irrevocable temporal dimension that is often clad in mythical, nostalgic images. This thesis has also contributed to a discussion wherein images of the home were subjected to the operations and influences of the media, which led to a distorted ideality being

constructed, perpetuated, reaffirmed and activated over again. In arguing that images of the home inevitably seize on metaphors, signs and signification to construct mythologies through the politics of representations in the media, this thesis has contributed to unveiling an imperative nature in the advertisements of the home. This research calls for future research to resist thinking about images of the home as an idealised, cultural form, such as those commonly portrayed through media and advertising. It is by following or thinking about these images that people perpetuate the idealised myth of the home.

If what Baudrillard (2002, 75) says is true—that ‘the ability to create a vacuum is undoubtedly the prerequisite for any act of authentic creation’—then the singularity of the home must be questioned against defamiliarising one’s own thinking and creating a vacuum in order to achieve this ‘singularity’. This must be undertaken in conjunction with partaking in the creative design process in architectural design.

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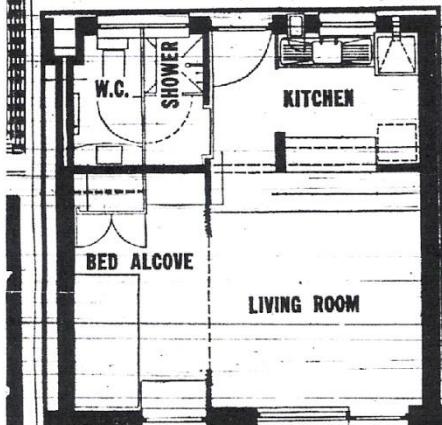
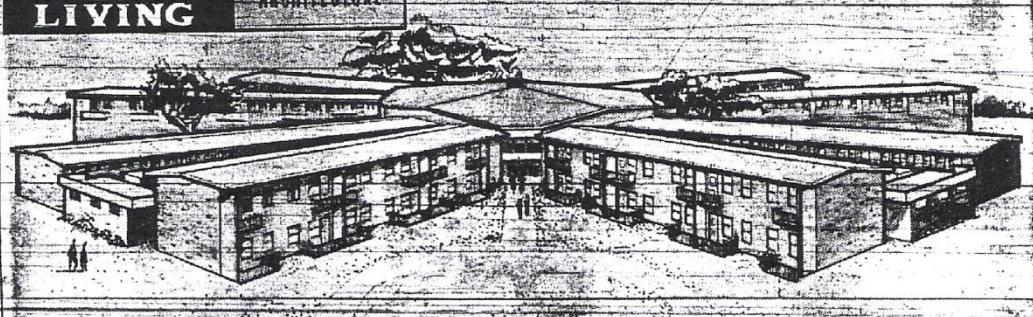
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## Appendix A

THE WEST AUSTRALIAN, SATURDAY, MARCH 13, 1965.

### MODERN LIVING

### ARCHITECTURE



\* A plan of a single apartment.

## £250,000 Village For Senior Citizens

The Salvation Army is embarking on a £250,000 project to extend its activities for the care of senior citizens at Hollywood.

The central feature of the development will be a two-storey block containing 95 flats.

Architects Forbes and Fitzhardinge have designed this block with four double wings radiating from a central core. Each of the double wings will enclose a courtyard giving access to the apartments and good through-ventilation.

In the central core will be amenities available not only to flat occupants but to all the elderly people in the Hollywood village. A lift is to be installed to serve the two floors of this core.

Amenities on the ground floor will include a dining hall where the main meal of the day will be served to those who want it.

There will be a big lounge and entertaining area with facilities for indoor games, a library, a servery and an office reception area. Upstairs will be an auditorium with change rooms, a coffee bar and further entertaining areas.

The wings will contain a total of 88 single flats and seven two-bedroom units. Laundry facilities will be provided in each wing.

The grounds will be laid out around the buildings to provide areas for games like bowls and croquet. Car-parking areas will be provided also.

A prototype of one of the single flats has been built at the village adjoining an information centre. These units have a combined bed-sitting room, a compact kitchen, a bathroom and a priv-

ate balcony in an area of about four squares.

The bed-sitting room can be divided by full-height curtains. In the bedroom area is a built-in wardrobe with overhead storage cupboard and a dressing table with chest of drawers.

Each flat will have an infra-red heater and space will be provided

for individual air-conditioning units. Hot water will be provided from a central system.

A telephone in each flat will be connected to a central switchboard which will allow residents to make free calls within the village. The flats will all have six power-points and an aerial outlet for television.

### "THE OLD PATHS"



RUDY WYATT

Recently in THE WEST AUSTRALIAN there have appeared some encouraging signs pointing towards "THE OLD PATHS". On our Saturday's "Church Page" an Anglican Pakistani priest described the recent baptism in the River at "A Thrill event". All the converts in his ministry, he said, were baptised by total immersion IN THE NEW TESTAMENT MAN-CHRIST. In the issue issued by the Anglican Primate of Australia, Archbishop Gough, was quoted as saying that the more he read and studied the world situation the more he realised that those who referred to the present age as the post-Christian era. He further stated: "There are vast numbers of people who believe Christianity has been tried and found wanting. He added: "We must see the hills of Despondom, that the Church would have to RETURN TO TRUE GOSPEL CHRISTIANITY, remove certain human practices and doctrines which were the accumulation of centuries."

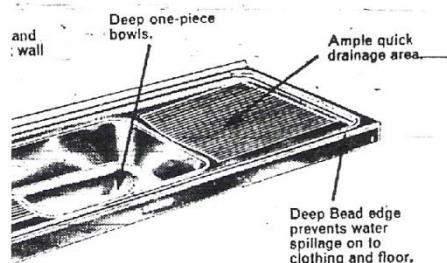
Two days earlier, there appeared an excellent letter to the editor by Mr. V. V. Venkateswara, titled "Paths to Real Church Unity" in which he pointed out that the way to real Christian unity is abundantly clear. He emphasised extolling the Bible and agreeing as one in authority and article of faith and practice in religious matters. He spoke of the practising of religion and following "THE EXAMPLE OF THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH EXHIBITED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT . . ."

In the days of the prophet Jeremiah, God exhorted His people to "ask for the old paths". Jesus Christ said: "Valley of the highway is the good way." The Anglican Pakistani priest, the Anglican Primate of Australia and Mr. Turnell were all pointing to the "old paths" of New Testament Christianity. What is the "old path" as a source of mankind to God's "old paths." Herein is to be found service pleasing to God and Christian Unity. A group of Christians meeting in the suburbs of Perth from all walks of life and with various religious backgrounds are seeking to follow the "old paths" revealed in your New Testament. It is their purpose to gather the church and Christians together therefrom in the spirit of brotherhood and unity. Why not begin such a movement in your community? It will work for men who dare to do God's will!

Send today for any of the three following booklets: FACTS CONCERNING THE CHURCH OF CHRIST BUILT. YOU CAN BE JUSTLY CHRISTIAN; and THE CHURCH OF CHRIST IS DISTINCTIVE. Sent FREE upon request—P.O. Box 16, Inglewood.

See Church Notices page "Other Services" under the heading of EMBLETON CHURCH OF CHRIST for a full schedule of services.

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— CITRA-TIDY —

**MODERN  
LIVING**
**ARCHITECTURE**

## Owner Ties In Home With Private Court

By FRANK PLATELL

This three-bedroom Attadale house with its low silhouette and simple, good proportions was designed by its owner.

The modest facade is set back behind native trees and gives complete privacy to the kitchen and living areas at the rear.

The house is tied in with a courtyard at the side, a seven foot screen wall of slate stonework being integrated into the facade. The courtyard now being developed with gardens is overlooked from the lounge and two of the bedrooms.

A break in the flat roof at the back of the double veranda provides a sheltered area for a small deck and a sunroom. Another deck is built in the stone at the rear of the kitchen.

Another feature is a separate bath room and shower room.

The family area has a large sofa and there is a recess for a built-in desk and storage cupboard.

In the kitchen, cupboards are finished in timber and capped off by the top in white laminate.

Mr Ted Parkes designed the "Tie-In" Stirling court of three living located in many display houses and in his home. Inspiration came from the architect's wife and was due to the fact that the construction of Perth's first tie-in section used to draw the architect's eye to the unique design of the house and the other way round.

The tie-in section is made from a single block of concrete and the central wall which acts as a partition for the rooms.

Mr Parkes' house is made of top quality materials forming a tie-in section of limited height so that there can be up to 10 ft. between the top of the walls and the ceiling.

A further advantage

is that the tie-in section

can be easily removed if required.

Mr Parkes' house is a

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well worth a look.

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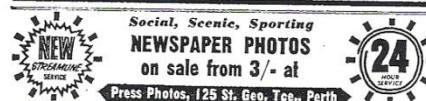
a modest one,

20  
Tested World-wide for 8 years!

## WALPAMUR LONG-LIFE ENAMEL



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**A rugged lightweight at  
only 1/7\* a sq.ft!**



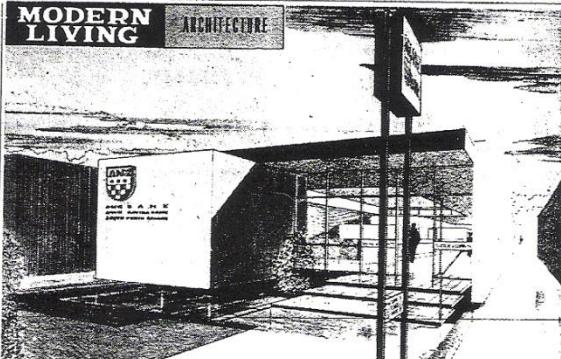
The ideal aluminium  
building sheet —

## COMALCO DOUBLE-RIB

Double-Rib is light, yet strong enough to withstand gale-force winds without damage. It's an ideal material for new homes.

## MODERN LIVING

### ARCHITECTURE



This architect's drawing shows the emphasis to be given to the strongroom of a new bank in South Perth. The room on the side is to a car park at the rear.

## Bank Strongroom To Project Into Garden

A strongroom will project well to the front of a £23,000 bank being constructed in Angelo-street, South Perth.

## Long Haul With £87,000 Project

Transporting building materials overland will be a major problem in a £87,659 project at the isolated lighthouse settlement on Cape Leveque.

The project includes a powerhouse and fuel

storage tanks, a generator building, a transformer, and steel

overhead power lines. The house will be raised eight feet above the ground and the space underneath used as a

fresh-food store, general

store and laundry. The

Broome is normally ser-

viced by the lighthouse

ship Cape Don. However,

the area screened

by mangrove walls the

main floor uppers

will have to be taken

in by road trans-

port. The road from Broome

extends to the Beagle

Mission and then the

area has been

selected for a customer's car park.

From there only a track

goes over the red sand

area country to the cape

The new road for the

radio beacon will rise

160 feet. Because it is

in single-room width

to take maximum ad-

vantage of the breezes

and two steel-frame

houses.

At the base of the mast

will be a ring of copper

extending out up to 300

feet. Because the mast

is 160 feet high, the

rooms will be built in

most of the furnish-

ings, including water-

tight rooms.

Each house will

have two 3,000-gallon

storage tanks, one at

each end.

Plans have been pre-

pared by the architectural

division of the Com-

monwealth Works De-

partment.

Elegantly  
styled, for  
homes of  
distinction



Super silent Caroma close-coupled, proven in over 95,000 homes. Every set of approval of the Design Council of Australia. They cost only £11.17.0. Matching Toilet seats 2/4/9 and Toilet Roll Holders 3/11 ea.



## Beach Site Bulldozed To Create Interest

The site of this two-storey, four-bedroom house at City Beach was relatively flat and uninteresting.

So the architect arranged one of the two bathrooms in Texas. Mrs. Anderson. After having a limestone retaining wall to be put in and sand bulldozed stairs underneath are the cold in winter and warm against it.

This way he created an intermediate floor level. The house in West which has been used for Coast highway was de-

ranged for a limestone room. In the main living rooms and down doors were found Perth carpet, the second bath had the fourth bed centrally heated.

A gas-fired oil-fired

unit has been installed with a fuel storage tank off the carpet. Other rooms were:

- An economical structure. It cost about £300 a square yard.

- Maximum advantage to be taken of an extensive view between sandhills.

- Mosaic tile finishes on most floors, except in the lounge.

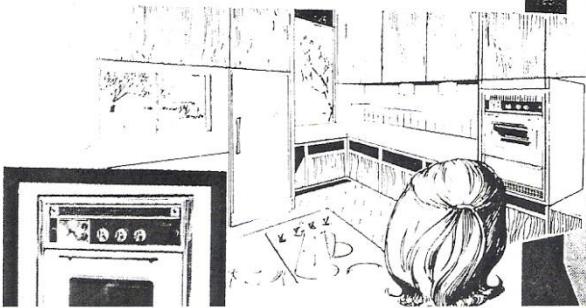
- The house is built of white sand lime bricks and has an asbestos cement roof which has been insulated. The eaves extend out above three feet all round for sun protection.

- The main roof supports are steel channels which are anchored to reinforce concrete floors and footings.

The plan shows the upper and intermediate floor levels.

**METTERS**

## Debonair



BEST FOR YOUR HOME!... AND YOUR BUDGET!

The all new 475 series ALUMINIUM WINDOWS  
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The only aluminum window specially designed and built to fit every type of construction, and every room in your home, from smallest openings to grand panoramic window walls. Sliding Vents are REMOVABLE from the inside for easy, safe cleaning.

Here is the ultimate in quality and economy, plus a wealth of new modern engineering features, including NEW Ball-Bearing Rollers for easiest operation — complete All-round Weather Seal — Fast, Easy Installation — New Glazing Technique and New Variable Height Security Lock.

• 475 cannot rust, warp or stick, requires no painting — no maintenance, stays new for keeps. Free quotations by return mail, together with free Dowell Technical Advisory Service.

475 is available in 37 standard sizes and composite windows may be formed by joining the standard units either vertically or horizontally to accommodate.

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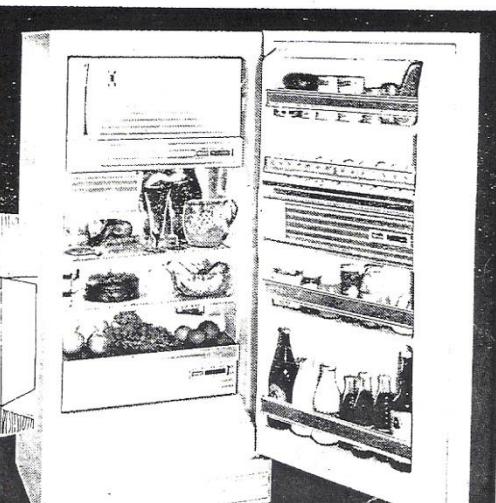
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**COASTAL CARNAC  
NEW DISPLAY  
P2-3**



**LUSH LIFE  
OUTDOORS  
P42-43**

# New Homes PLUS POOLS & SPAS

The West Australian

**BIN IT IN STORE. P11**

**BUILDING MATERIALS  
LIMESTONE. P14-15**

**GREENSMART HIA-LANDCORP  
AWARDS. P32-33**



## Scene stealer

New Deluxe shows its colours. P30-31

DISPLAY HOME GUIDE. P17-20

# Premium Homes

The West Australian

**MT PLEASANT**  
LUXURY HOME NEAR  
THE RIVER. P4



Sophisticated, contemporary and stylish, the home reflects French Provincial styling. Pictures: Gerald Moscarda

## French sophistication

### INGRID WALTHAM

You get the feeling you are entering somewhere special as you walk down the long driveway bordered by white roses. Then it comes into view—the vision of a French Provincial home, complete with more white roses in the white-paved forecourt, ivy on the limestone walls and antique white shutters.

Built by Riverstone, it commands attention without being at all self-conscious. Its subtlety is appealing.

Stepping inside is like stepping into the pages of a French magazine. It is sophisticated, contemporary and ultra-stylish, from the polished terrazzo floors to the clean white walls.

White is the theme throughout, creating a sense of peace and calm. It is two years old, but looks new.

The open-plan dining and living space features a wine-purple wall as a dramatic foil to all the white. The stunning terrazzo floors were done by the owner.

The kitchen is also white, right down to the integrated dishwasher. There are twin round sinks sunk into white Corian benchtops, a walk-in pantry and stainless-steel appliances.

Clever design has made maximum use of the rear strata block, compromising on nothing.

The laundry leads off the kitchen, which leads to a powder room and the bathroom. This is fully tiled and has a frameless-glass shower, spa bath and above-bench basin.

While the powder room is accessible from the laundry, the bathroom has ensuite access to the main bedroom, tucked away from the

living areas behind French doors. A discreet door off the living room presents the biggest surprise, an indoor-outdoor pool.

Under the main roof, it has limestone walls to chest height and clear cafe curtains above for year-round use.

Doors open the "pool room" to a paved terrace for poolside dining.

Dark chocolate carpet softens the stairs leading to the upstairs children's zone, which has Tasmanian oak flooring on concrete.

All three bedrooms have robes and they share a central activity room, tiled bathroom and separate toilet.

Other features include reverse-cycle, zoned and ducted air-conditioning, reticulation and a double garage with storage space.

The pool has a solar blanket and self-cleaning system.



### FOR SALE

ADDRESS: 31a Staton Road,  
EAST FREMANTLE

PRICE: \$1.2 million

AT A GLANCE: Luxurious near-new double-storey home in the French Provincial style with terrazzo floors, four bedrooms, two bathrooms and an indoor pool

AGENT: Shirley Baker, of Dethridge Groves Real Estate, on 9336 1166 or 0418 915 120

# habitat

INSIDE: YOUR GUIDE TO  
THE IDEAL HOME SHOW

VIN: \$20,000 TIMBER  
LOORING FROM  
VINTAGE HARDWOODS

PREMIUM HOMES

## Home front



