

# Home in the Tower Block: High Modernism, Public Housing and Social Memory

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## Abstract

*This paper draws on historical and ethnographic research on one of the first high-rise public housing estates in inner-suburban Sydney, built in the early 1960s. This estate represented a high point of modernist social housing intervention, an outcome of slum clearance rhetorics and practices and large scale engineering solutions. Within ten years of its opening, however, both slum clearance rhetorics and the architectural form of high rise housing projects had been socially and aesthetically devalorised. Nevertheless, original residents continue to articulate a sense of inclusion and identification with a fragile and short lived project of 'high modernist' social housing.*

It is commonplace to pathologise public housing estates, to identify 'problems' (i.e. problem people) with stock representations and explanations, assuming determination of these problems either in terms of urban environments or social characteristics, whether concentration of poverty, 'social exclusion', criminality, welfare dependence etc. (see for instance Van Kempen 1994; Sennett 2003). Mass social housing projects are understood as an artefact of a misguided modernism. In this paper I draw on interview accounts of residents living in a particular high-rise estate – which I will call 'Project A' <sup>1</sup> – during the 1960s, a period which I will (provisionally) label as 'high modernism'. I will argue that this represents an historical moment in which residents could draw on a sense of social inclusion within the norms of a modernising project of housing Australians. However, this moment of inclusion was to be both fragile and short-lived.

## High modernism

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<sup>1</sup> This veiling of locations is maintained in the interest of the anonymity of informants.

By 'high modernism' I do not refer to a general, epochal or irreversible condition (modern/post-modern), but more narrowly to a specific historical trajectory in the state-facilitated provision of housing in Australia. In this account, 'high modernism' points to a brief moment of legitimacy of high-rise public housing developments, which arguably lasted only from the mid-1950s to the early 1970s. This entails first asking, 'what was modernism?' in terms of social housing. Modernist planning of social housing in industrialised countries has been understood as a convergence of aspects: the normalisation of residential environments, standardisation and the regulation of minimum standards, techniques of architectural mass production – all conducted with the active intervention of the state in reshaping cities and towns (Rowe 1993: 59-65).

Thinking specifically of the history of public housing in Australia, I equate the 'modern' phase with the burst of construction of government funded rental housing in the period from the end of the second world war to the 1970s. This modern growth phase has now effectively been placed in the past, with the decline of funding from the Federal government making it increasingly difficult to keep pace with meeting existing applicant needs, and maintaining old housing stock, let alone engaging in major new estate construction (NSW Department of Housing 2003: 33-35).

Greig (1995: 127) notes that the word 'modern' was established as a key 'operative' term in the spheres of architecture, planning and design by the early 1950s – operative in a broad sense of encompassing an ethic of rationality and 'scientific' calculation, with a stark, functionalist aesthetic to match. If the discourses and styles of this modernist approach to planning and urban development were to a large extent imported, they also had a specific national resonance with the material conditions in which they flourished most strongly. Housing shortages in the post World War II Australia provided a serious problem for governments and business, while unprecedented migration levels fuelled growth and an intensified 'production of space' (Lefebvre 1991). These contexts were experienced directly by early residents of Project A, a number of whom had been housed for long periods in emergency camps such as the one at Herne Bay (now Riverwood), in southern Sydney. Public housing had only recently been systematically implemented and coordinated on a national scale, with Federal funds flowing to state Housing Commissions. However, the increased scale of social housing construction did not necessarily imply generosity or commitment to high quality housing provision. The frugality and austerity of post-war urban development has been noted by various commentators (Powell 1993: 72; Winter and Bryson 1998: 61-62). The emergent public housing system went hand-in-hand with accelerated industrialisation on the one hand, and the

hegemonic establishment of the 'Australian dream' of suburban homeownership. As Greig (1995: 97) notes, the Australian real estate market in the period from 1945 to 1960 shifted from a relatively even balance of homeowners and renters to one dominated by home ownership. In spite of major growth in numbers of government rental housing, social housing would remain a relatively marginal sector. Winter and Bryson (1998: 60-65) point to the role of public housing in providing working class housing near industrial centres, coining a name for this specific configuration of capitalist development and government welfare – 'Holdenist suburbia'. They argue that post-war 'Holdenist' suburbs (a native version of Fordism) of cheaply constructed government-built tract housing now tend to form major concentrations of urban poverty in Australian cities (Winter and Bryson 1998: 69-72).

Public housing as a means of urban and industrial development and policies promoting higher levels of homeownership were closely interconnected in the post-war period. Everyday participation in Australian modernism in this period would seem to have been particularly focused on striving towards the dream of home as fostered by both state and private enterprise, and this collective aspiration was closely tied to employment and newly emergent practices of consumption. The owner-occupied 'quarter acre block' which came to dominate the 'urban fabric' was not the only representation and object of that striving. The modernist housing project produced a hierarchy of architectural styles and representations, which included a number of high-rise mass housing projects, generally located in inner areas of major cities.

The design, construction and political implementation of Project A can be directly related to the social and spatial imagining which informed the beginnings of state administered public housing in Australia. This vision of public housing was most clearly articulated in the final report of the Commonwealth Housing Commission (CHC) tabled in 1944, which set up the future policy parameters of post-war public housing, administered by state governments, but resourced largely through allocations from the federal government. The document is suffused with a modernist confidence in the rational efficacy of planning and engineering to overcome a myriad of social and environmental problems. It also sharply dichotomises social housing forms as distinctly different solutions for different social worlds within the topography of the Australian city (rural housing is largely absent) – detached houses in the outer suburbs, and multi-storey construction in the inner cities to replace slums slated for clearing. The CHC Report articulates a typology of housing forms, juxtaposing the suburban detached house as ideal homely space, with concentrated high-density housing seen as necessary for the inner city areas. These dichotomous housing forms were nevertheless presented as

complementary 'solutions': "In our large cities it is clear that large groups of multi-storey dwellings offer the only solution...to the mass migration of the rehoused population to the outer suburbs...it will be necessary for a fairly high density at the core" (CHC Report in Hanna 1991: 87).

The rhetoric of 'slum clearance' underpins the whole document, not surprising since it was an integral part of contemporary thinking of architects, urban experts and reformers. The term 'slum clearance' became an anachronism only after the 1960s, when inner city terrace housing associated with 'slums' came to be a desirable setting for gentrifying lifestyles, emergent heritage values, and the accumulation of cultural capital in the form of art galleries, theatres etc. These buildings and urban settings had become potentially homely, sites for new social narratives at variance with the old. The new housing estates too would undergo rapid changes in the way they were understood and represented – from a modern panacea for inner city 'slums' to a social and aesthetic problem in themselves. I want to look at the more specific history of one housing project, as a means of establishing a context to understanding the lived experience of its pioneering residents.

## Project A

Constructed in the early 1960s, Project A was an early example (for Australia) of a high rise housing project of relatively large scale, housing over 600 residents in several tower blocks rising to a height of 15 stories.

It was the promise of funds flowing from the federal government for public housing that encouraged the Sydney City Council's moves from 1944 to 'clear' a 'notorious' area of terrace housing, displacing perhaps a thousand tenants, few of whom were destined to be rehoused in the area, although this was the stated intention of the actions.<sup>2</sup> Local authorities had long been engaging in inner city resumptions and redevelopments, forcing out working people and especially abject groups such as the Chinese. Such 'clearances' were justified

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<sup>2</sup> The City Council motion that led to the mass eviction of tenants and clearance of hundreds of houses captures both the elements of the modernist planning discourse and the speculative nature of the Council's actions: "That with a view to assisting in overcoming the acute housing shortage and unsatisfactory living conditions in some areas of the city and ensuring that sub-standard and obsolete houses be eliminated in favour of modern housing, and of cooperating with the Commonwealth Government in this regard, this Council immediately proceed with the selection of sites suitable for the implementation of housing schemes with the object of submitting such sites to the Commonwealth Government for incorporation in the general housing proposals at present being investigated." (Sydney City Council minutes 1944: 932/44 )

in terms of the prioritisation of commercial and industrial interests close to the city over the needs of tenants in the most densely populated part of Sydney (Keating 1991: 77; Faro 2000: 112-114, 189-90). Yet slum clearance was pre-eminently a moral project, enthusiastically supported by a broad consensus of both conservative and left wing groups (Spearritt 1978: 43-76).

Slum clearance was integrally woven into the working discourse of planners and reformers of the time. The idea of 'slums' possessed an apparently objective existence for contemporary observers independently of any perspective of 'slum-dwellers'. There is little evidence of any consultation or dialogue with residents of the area that was cleared for Project A.<sup>3</sup> A rather dubious survey was carried out of the streets which were to be cleared enumerating numbers of houses without bathrooms or having leaky roofs, but with no mention of the views of the tenants, their needs or their situation (Sydney City Council: CRS 034). A repertoire of representations tied to a moral aesthetic served as proof enough and validation for slum clearance actions. The attribution of the status of an area as a slum was often based on little evidence – reports (such as Housing Commission Annual reports) were accompanied by 'documentary' photographs of anonymous abodes which signify slums. Signifying elements included terrace houses, washing hung in public view, laneways with urchin-like children and so on. Such images of the slum were typically juxtaposed with 'modern' housing – whether new tower blocks or suburbs – presenting 'a stark, binary choice' (Hartley 1999: 110). This slum imaginary and its repertoire of images was widely circulated and recognised – at both the bottom and the top of social scales. When Project A was blessed with a royal visit in 1963, Queen Elizabeth reportedly viewed the surrounding area from the rooftop, 'glanced down to the immediate neighbourhood, which is covered with terrace homes, factory buildings, tin roofs, backyards with washing, narrow streets, and one or two abandoned cars' and remarked 'you have a lot more slum clearance to do here' (*Sydney Morning Herald* March 5, 1963). The slum was recognised in terms of a specific stock of images and associations: the antithesis of the new, clean towers which had just emerged.

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<sup>3</sup> I could locate only one mention in the Sydney City Council records of the people who had lived in these 'slums'. An alderman who was familiar with the locale to be 'remodelled' provides a description of the residents. They were: "Mostly workers. There are some old age pensioners and young people with families. They are mostly men working on the waterfront and even in the Council..." (Sydney City Archives CRS 034 – 2<sup>nd</sup> box)

Project A, completed in the early 1960s, was one of the first high-rise estates in inner-suburban Sydney.<sup>4</sup> The largest single high-density development in Australia at the time, it was able to be represented (for a brief time) as a high point of modernist social housing intervention, an outcome of slum clearance rhetorics and practices. A glossy departmental brochure featured a montage of the tower blocks, captioned '2 ½ MILLION BRICKS, 1700 TONS OF STEEL', displaying a modernist faith in large scale engineering solutions. The text presented a story of a transformation, from 'shocking slums' to the most modern of housing developments:

The erection of large projects such as [Project A] have highlighted the slum clearance work. Designed and equipped for modern living, the multi-storey blocks bring new dignity and pride to the areas while providing homes for working couples and families with children...The 'Y' shaped project has high-speed lifts, parking spaces for 136 cars, lawns, garden rockeries, shops, groups of public telephones – and a resident manager. Above the third floor tenants have magnificent view of the city and harbour. ( NSW Housing Commission c. 1965: no page numbers)

The tower block enjoyed a brief spell of social and aesthetic legitimacy. This legitimacy would shortly come to an end, not only in Australia. The consensus on modern design began to fracture in the 1960s and the tower block itself became a negative image. At the same time sociological critiques of housing estates began to locate social pathologies and loss of community in the new estates (see Glendinning and Muthesius 1994: 301-318). The planned utopia represented by the tower block could flip over to become a dystopia of functionality and uniformity that came to be the dominant view of high rise estates by the 1970s. This was both a social and aesthetic judgement. This judgement also applied to publicly built suburban tract housing that had developed in parallel. Public housing dwellers came to be burdened with the stigma of the 'failure' of these utopian attempts to effect social change through engineering and design solutions. Nevertheless, as Hanna (1991:179) argues utopias and dystopias exist only in relation to one another – both are dependent on a modernist ideal of rational improvement.

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<sup>4</sup> Project A was not the first high rise public housing construction in NSW. For instance, 'Greenway' in North Sydney, comprising 309 flats up to eleven storeys, dates from 1951 (NSW Department of Housing 1996: 14).

Within ten years of the completion of Project A, both the rhetorics of slum clearance and the image of high rise projects in close proximity to city centres had become ideologically untenable, or at least deeply unfashionable.

## Homely Memories

In speaking of utopias and dystopias, we assume its currency in a somewhat generalised sphere of discourse, that is, we are at a remove from the everyday subjectivity of the resident, the ‘user’ of lived space. One does not inhabit a utopia, or a dystopia for that matter – the semantics of the word ‘utopia’ refers to a non-spatial imagining. On the other hand, inhabitants of a lived space are hardly impervious to powerful ‘representations of space’ (Lefebvre 1991: 38-42) in public circulation. In interviews with some of the original tenants who moved into the first high rise block in 1960 I sought to understand how residents experienced inhabiting inner city tower blocks given the dramatic shifts in perceptions of housing and the built environment.

The opportunity to conduct these interviews arose from my involvement with an ambitious community arts project – facilitated by Big (H)art and the NSW Housing Department – involving residents in telling stories of everyday life at Project A which are being developed as various film, theatre, writing and sound art productions. This strategy emerged out of a perceived crisis and the need for community ‘damage control’ after several traumatising murders and suicides had occurred. A community worker subsequently appointed to the estate recently described Project A as a ‘community that was hurting’. Of course Project A had not always borne such negative evaluations. But memories are typically conditioned by the ‘screen’ of subsequent experiences and social meanings.

From my interviews, there seemed little doubt that long term residents thought that there had been a change for the worse – this is ubiquitously expressed narratively in terms of the passage of time – a life trajectory – “things aren’t what they used to be”. A subject’s relation to a place, and especially to a dwelling, must be understood in terms of a flow of time and of memory. Common threads seemed to link typical narratives of decline in public housing, as artefacts of social memory, rather than purely individual accounts.<sup>5</sup> Early residents typically demarcate the time of first living at

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<sup>5</sup> Halbwachs (1942: 52) explains this convergence of narratives of social memory: “It is not because memories resemble each other that several can be called to mind at the same time. It is rather because the same group is interested in them and is able to call them to mind at the same time that they resemble each other.”

Project A from the present. As Susie <sup>6</sup> relates it, 'it was a different world'. Her friend Dulcie replies and reinforces this, 'it was a pleasure to be here, a pleasure.'

The pleasure of this settlement experience was perhaps the pleasure of the pioneer. Having been 'the first' at Project A is still valued. There is argument and conflicting claims about who was among the first residents, who was present at the opening ceremony, and so on. These people felt a certain privilege in participating in a new and significant social project. Accounts of the first inhabitants still bathe in the felicitous memories of these engineered communities:

Susie: When it built it was the first high-rise in the Southern Hemisphere, it was an experiment. And they actually hand-picked people from all different suburbs, we lived at Riverwood or whatever. But they handpicked people – I had a neighbour next to me that came from the north side, two on this floor were from the north side actually. .... And I think the idea at that time was a good idea, so they would perhaps get a happy mix. And we *did* get a happy mix, and it's only changed since rules and regulations that the government's brought in, and the new people... those people are here.

The 'we' suggests an identification both with the social mix of which Susie was a part, and with the project of construction of new communities. There was a valorisation of social selection, of the 'handpicked' communities constructed by government. Current problems are linked to a lack of control and selectivity over this mix. What was different between the 'world' of that time and life on the estate now is expressed in terms of the other people who came later. Newer arrivals are perceived as the primary cause of subsequent problems, rather than policy 'issues' such as funding, management or maintenance. Hell is other people, not because this is intrinsically so but because other people are the immediate and directly proximate 'symptoms' of decline in everyday conditions (see Sayad 1999: 23). Others in the estate are labelled, differentiated and problematised in many ways, as drug users, mentally ill, immigrants of specified nationalities, rowdy youth. But the primary differentiation made between the 'first generation' at Project A and the 'others' is based on an identification with the dignity of paid employment, or 'equating work with worth', as Sennett (2003: 111) puts it.

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<sup>6</sup> Pseudonyms are used throughout

When we all moved in most of us worked. The problems now are not because of you and me and the other decent people, but because of the ones that are doing the wrong thing, and think the world owes them everything.

I used the word ‘pioneer’ to describe the first residents of Project A. Pioneers tend to be displacers of others, although this is typically misrecognised in a romance of a new lives and social transformations. While the rhetoric of slum clearance policy was about rehousing original households and communities, to upgrade their housing standards, more usually their fate was displacement. The time lag between clearance and reconstruction was often many years. A contemporary newspaper article claims that only five people were actually rehoused in the new estate buildings (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 1960). Few of the early tenants of Project A had direct ties to the surrounding locality. Most had come from other parts of Sydney, and often viewed the area with a mixture of distaste and romance, perhaps informed by tabloid tales of the slum milieu.

Charlie: It was little narrow lanes and things like that. Some are still there. You see one across the road over there. There were nearly all those two storey terraces places. But now they’ve all been done up, they’re up market now, they’re worth a million dollars now, some of them. It was the slum area of Sydney. Kate Leigh, she lived over the road there, near the pub. She was the gangsters’ moll and that, you know, her and Tilley.<sup>7</sup>

Charlie expresses a fascinated distance from the surrounds, from the past world of the slum and its aura of criminality, and from the present gentrified inner city life with its galleries, cafes, and restaurants.

It’s good if you like that [eating in restaurants.] I just stick with the basics myself. I always cook me own meals, that’s one thing that I did when I was left on my own [by the death of his mother], I always cooked my own meals, I said to myself, even when I was working and getting my own wage.

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<sup>7</sup> Tilly Devine (1900-1970) and Kate Leigh (d. 1964) were renowned ‘madams’ and underworld figures associated with inner Sydney areas of Woolloomooloo, Darlinghurst and Surry Hills. Both have a largely mythic role in memories, since they were past their active careers by the time Project A was built.

This first generation of residents at Project A created a viable domestic life in what was initially an unfamiliar environment. 'A good place to live', 'a pleasure to be here' – these were phrases that intimated a shared memory of homely existence. I was most struck by Joan's reflection, 'even though we didn't have a garden, it felt like a home.' The 'even though' seemed to evoke a shared sense of affinity with the house-and-garden ideal of home, despite the lack of a garden. This ideal, embedded in both garden city planning ideologies and in everyday dwelling practice in Australian cities, was challenged by the tower block (see Hoskins 1994: 4-6). The authors of Commonwealth Housing Commission report felt the need to account for the wishes of high rise tenants to disavow access to a garden.

The persons or families for whom multi-storey dwellings are particularly suited are as follows:

...(b) married couples without children, or perhaps one child, *who do not wish to garden* and require more time to pursue other interests...(Commonwealth Housing Commission 1944: 94; my emphasis)

It is doubtful whether prospective tenants were consulted about these wishes: some people mentioned wishing for a garden and some managed to engineer access to small plots of land around their homes.

Interviewees accounts of first making a home at Project A – while common and shared memories – tended to focus primarily on individual work and family histories, rather than on any communal social life at the estate.

Charlie: I didn't leave till about six, and by the time I got home of a night, it was six again. So you didn't see anybody during the day here. So, people used to say, 'have you been here long', and I'd say, 'oh yes', and they'd say, 'how long you been here'. And when you'd tell 'em they'd so, oh God, you've been 'ere longer than me. Yeah, more or less – I've been 'ere longer than everybody.

Joan: I hear people say, 'Ohh, the Housing Commission'...well, I mean I don't know because I've never had anything wrong, I'm just happy with what I've got. I mean, it was enough for me, I mean enough for my husband and I. My son got married, both my sons got married from here. My son got married at T, and the other son, he got married at I. But they were living here until they got married, and then it was only

my husband and I. And then we were working all the time then, you know. And then, we were ...just happy to stay here.

Memories of happy dwelling on the estate were not dependent primarily on local communal engagement, but on but the conjuncture of social fields – work histories, social class and family trajectories. Older tenants typically perceived their lives in relation to the rest of the estate as private, discrete, and detached. The lived sense of dwelling, while defined by proximities with others, tends to be perceived as private, enclosed, and familial in nature. Lived space as a subjective state is related to one's social origins, aspirations and trajectories. Ghassan Hage, in a discussion of the ontology of 'migrant home building' that draws on Heidegger's notion of dwelling, argues that theorisations of home often miss out the dimension of home as an ongoing project, entailing a sense of possibility, advancement, and of hope for the future (Hage 1997: 103). Henri Lefebvre recognised this affective dimension of lived space which is not confined to the 'environment' of locality, but also draws on the hopes and possibilities developed in the context of other lived spaces, most notably those of childhood and family.

Lived space bears the stamp of the conflict between an inevitable, if long and difficult maturation process and a failure to mature that leaves particular original resources and reserves untouched. It is in this space that the 'private' realm asserts itself, albeit more or less vigorously, and always in a conflictual way, against the public one.' (Lefebvre 1991: 362)

Public housing policy and practice in the 1950s and 60s firmly espoused a familial ethic of privacy which drew on assumptions about women's role in the home and in managing sociality and social boundaries. This was perhaps more so even in the case of large estates, where residents tended to echo the virtues of 'minding your own business.'

Sally: We found that to keep to yourself, but to still converse with people, that's very important. You know, if you don't have people running in and out your house all the time...that's where you find you have trouble.

Charlie: People like their privacy, particularly here, this is the way you get on here, that's how you survive in a place like this, you know, you don't interfere with other people, and you mind your own business.

To mind your own business meant being aware of who was who and who you could trust. Neighbourliness, far from being an entirely affirmative

instance of *Gemeinschaft*, is often an exercise in surveillance, fact-finding and checking out neighbours to assess their compatibility and manageability (Peel 2000: 273). The management of risk, norms and the minimisation of unpredictability is valued by the older tenants who affirmatively and even fondly recall the strictness and authoritarianism of estate managers, who 'kept everyone under control'. This is contrasted with a perceived lack of control in the present.

Susie: You were instructed, he [the manager] would tell you that you had to have curtains on your windows within one month of you moving in – if you didn't – out. You've just got to walk around and have a look at some of the windows now...and goodness knows what is inside, what the interiors of some of the places are like. Unfortunately people think that they are owed this. ... We don't ask them to scrub and polish like we do, but they won't even keep them tidy.

Strategies – quite specifically gendered strategies – of constructing distinctive, private living spaces hinged on rigorous cleaning, decoration and maintenance of common internal areas such as corridors. This took place initially within a regime of surveillance and norms of respectability that were institutionally secured by managers. Typically, control and maintenance of domestic spaces serves as a measure of a good neighbour.

Now that lady next door, she's spotless, that's why I like her, she's so clean that lady. Her and I, we take it in turns, her and I, she washes out the front one day, and I do it the next, and she does it the next and so on. She gets down nearly every day, she gets it and she cleans it, she washes all the walls. She's been there five years, there's not a mark on it, she gets it and she cleans it and she washes all the walls, she does it herself. Her grandson won't do a thing for her – she does everything. She's spotless. But that's what I mean, there's some people that will do it, and some people that won't lift a finger.

Fond memories of days of order provide a foil for an experience of decline in the environment of the estate, and at times of a palpable danger and threat.

Susie: Now its quite a notorious place, its not a very nice address that you like to live now, because of the murders, and all the other things that happen, I mean you're likely to walk by in that street there and a TV set or a chest of drawers or a

wardrobe will come hurtling down in front of you. So it started off, it was absolutely well run and controlled, it's only about in the last nine years...

The temporal preciseness of the perception of this change (nine years) is of interest. Susie could not elaborate a specific event nine years ago in which a certain time ended, a different world of order and predictability. Nevertheless, a demarcation in the time of one's life serves to position oneself in relation to a trajectory, to a past as well as a future. A remembered home "exists in memory as a 'time' – or maybe a series of periods – as well as a place" (Hoskins 1994: 15).<sup>8</sup> The paper examines the conjuncture of the social memory of homeliness, and the normative discourses and practices generated in the state production of modernist housing.

## Concluding note

The accounts I have presented of life at Project A in the 1960s are based on a small number of interviews with now elderly residents. As such, this material is incomplete and partial, and can hardly be made to stand in for some direct and essential experience of public housing.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, I maintain that these interviews give voice to a living social memory of an engagement with the norms and forms of a fragile 'high modernism'. A particular envisioning of the modern home informed a national project of 'engineering' a specifically segmented urban space to achieve a range of social and economic ends. Older rhetorics of slum clearance were central to the task of eliminating a repertoire of 'pre-modern' styles of urban life and community. Within the continuities and convergences of their own lives, the first residents of Project A participated in this envisioning of modern life. They articulate a sense of belonging within a modernist project of fashioning the Australian home, even expressing an identification as pioneers of a modern social experiment, which although 'new' was also congruent with a normative vision of home, family life, labour and national citizenship.<sup>10</sup> Their sense of belonging and integration both within the housing estate and within the wider social space differs markedly from those who came at a later stage.<sup>11</sup> Subsequent narratives of decline, stigma, physical deterioration and danger are

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<sup>8</sup> Hoskins is writing of the Daceyville Estate, one of the earliest Australian suburban public housing estates constructed in line with Garden City principles.

<sup>9</sup> The research is also grounded in my own understandings gained by experience of living in public housing produced as slum clearance.

<sup>10</sup> Further research will focus on the differing modes of insertion within the lived space of the housing estate.

interwoven with a perceived loss of value, of normative recognition as part of 'modern' Australia. As such, these understandings are not specific to Project A, but more broadly relate to the marginalisation of public housing and public tenants' everyday sense of inhabiting a declining social sphere.

Perhaps I have presented too negative a story of life at the estate. In spite of perceived problems recognised by all, people I spoke to are not unhopeful: On the contrary, they were often at pains to let me know that they 'wouldn't live anywhere else' or that 'it was the best move they ever made'. They still perhaps draw on a shared memory of participation in a modern transformation, albeit a limited one that had its authoritarian aspects. Residents who moved to the estate in a later period when high rise social housing had lost its aura of modernity could not draw on memories of such a golden age.<sup>12</sup> The original tenants of 1960s high rise estates were for a short time able to position themselves within the homely space of the 'Australian dream', even to view their new housing as having certain advantages over the suburban bungalow. Social possibilities for upward mobility and a sense of centrality were instantiated in the 'high modern' social housing of the time.

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<sup>12</sup> One young resident, when I asked him how he found moving into the project responded simply, 'it's a shit hole'.

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