Houses built on sand: Rethinking cultures of homemaking, nature and finance in a coastal master-planned estate

Charles Gillon
_University of Wollongong_

Follow this and additional works at: https://ro.uow.edu.au/theses1
Houses built on sand: Rethinking cultures of homemaking, nature and finance in a coastal master-planned estate.

Charles Gillon
Bachelor of Science (Advanced) (Honours Class I) 2012

This thesis is presented as part of the requirements for the conferral of the degree:

Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

Supervisors:
Doctor Leah Gibbs
Professor Chris Gibson

The University of Wollongong
School of Geography and Sustainable Communities
August 2017
This work © copyright by Charles Gillon, 2017. All Rights Reserved.

No part of this work may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, transmitted, in any form of by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of the author or the University of Wollongong.

This research has been conducted with the support of an Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship.
Certification

I, Charles Gillon, declare that this thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the conferral of the degree Doctor of Philosophy, from the University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. This document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Charles Gillon

August 31, 2017
Declaration and Statements of Authorship

The following publications, completed during my candidature, are reproduced in this thesis. Each publication is accompanied by a statement of authorship to clarify the nature and extent of co-authorship with my supervisors, Dr Leah Gibbs and Professor Chris Gibson.

Chapter 4


Gillon was the primary author, responsible for conception and design of the research and the manuscript, the collection, analysis and interpretation of data, and handled the revisions process. Gibbs assisted with study design and development of argument and structure, and critically reviewed multiple drafts of the article as it went through submission and each round of revisions.

Chapter 5


Gillon was the sole author on this paper.

Chapter 6


Gillon was the primary author, responsible for conception and design of the research and the manuscript, the collection, analysis and interpretation of data. The idea for this paper developed through ongoing discussions between Gillon and Gibbs during the candidature. Gibbs contributed to study design, supervised the research, and critically reviewed drafts of the article.
Chapter 7


Gillon was the primary author, responsible for collection, analysis and interpretation of data, and the majority of conceptual development. Gibson critically reviewed drafts of the article for expression and editing, and also sharpened the conceptual framing.

The text in the original articles has been reproduced for results chapters in the thesis. Figure and section numbers have been altered to suit the flow of the thesis.
Abstract

Notwithstanding concerns about land availability and housing affordability, the Australian dream of a detached, family oriented home in low-density suburbs persists as a cultural desire. Overlaying this dream is the shared desire by Australians to live by the coast. These cultural norms magnify ideals of home and what they portend to include: how meanings for home are made in reference to tenure, cultures of nature, and relationships with finance, and with what consequences. The knotted yet discordant threads woven between certain types of housing, owner-occupation, understandings of nature and growing influences of finance, warrant critical scrutiny. This thesis responds to this task. In it, I ask: how does rethinking housing as a process contribute to understanding Australian home cultures, and the associated practices of homemaking, within the context of Australian cultural myths of owner-occupation and coastal lifestyle? Conceptually the thesis is guided by recent developments in critical cultural geography that view home as a product of relations: attending to practices, routines, emotions, temporalities, materialities, and more-than-human encounters.

At the same time, the thesis also draws upon concepts from cultural-economy that view such relations as mediated by governmental rationalities, calculations and subjectivities. Master-planned estates (MPEs) are sites that enable owner-occupation and a securitised living of the Australian dream, while they are also sites of economic performances: of accumulation, speculation and ‘rational’ financial decision-making. The thesis explores resulting tensions that emerge in time and space, between an idealised coastal MPE as a pre- eminent ‘calculative’ space of prestige and investment, and the ‘throwntogetherness’ of the lived experience of the place, as it is actually built and inhabited, dwelled within.

The coastal MPE, I argue, is a distinctive material-geographical place, shot through with calculation and governmentalities/ideologies, but also made in contingent ways (by humans, money, salt spray and sand). The coastal MPE is situated in a biophysical setting under stress and facing growing uncertainty, emotional resonances that also reverberate in the lived human experience of dwelling there. In this place, owner-occupation sets certain precursors, certain conditions, and these enrol together nature and money in distinctive configurations. The thesis draws critical attention to how such places are conceived, and homes within them made. It is attentive to cultural norms and calculations, but crucially, also focused on how prosaic place-making proceeds, at the home/household scale—how investing, building and
dwelling in this place actually unfurls, with all its resulting material-cultural and emotional entanglements.

This thesis is structured in a compiled format, with four results chapters taking shape in the form of four academic journal articles. As a result, the branches of the thesis stretch at different angles, and share collective roots in a critical framework of relational materiality. The four results chapters follow threads that emanated empirically, over a four-year period, from one coastal master-planned estate: Greenhills Beach, in southern Sydney. Research focused at the household scale, and the decisions, rationales, circumstances and everyday experiences of homemaking and place. Twenty-one households participated in semi-structured interviews, incorporating a ‘home tour’, that focused on purchasing decision, building a new home, and early homemaking practices. This methodology was buttressed with analysis of advertising material, place histories, and an interview with a developer representative.

As a new build housing development, in a prestigious coastal site, and in a strong housing market, Greenhills Beach is an exemplar setting for interrogating housing cultures in a distinctive geographic and socio-economic setting: residents are literally living the dream. This idealised context shapes two underlying themes. First, the thesis hones in on master-planned estates as a specific form of housing provision and delivery, seeking to better understand drivers and motivations, curbing well-established critiques of the lived experiences of modern suburbs. Second, the thesis explores the increasing suburbanisation of coastlines. The thesis consequently takes a particular focus on coastal nature, and how it is represented, conceived, planned for, and inhabited with, in housing cultures. With the onset of climate change and accompanying coastal vulnerabilities, these cultures compel urgent scholarly research.

Adding to the novelty of this thesis, the undertaking of the research coincided with the initial investment in, and establishment and building of the Greenhills Beach estate. The thesis structure flows chronologically, tracing the Greenhills Beach as it developed, and the homeowner experiences of this: from marketing, to homemaking and inhabiting, to premeditations of selling. Reflecting the compilation format, this thesis makes four distinct contributions. Specifically, in exploring home as a process the thesis: 1) questions the placemaking role of real estate advertising as representation; 2) attends to building and construction, and the milieu of life in building sites; 3) using coastal housing as a lens,
explores more-than-human encounter to expand the expertise of homemaking; and 4) analyses the infusion of financial logics in homemaking, and its consequences for emotional subjectivities of owner-occupation. Taken together, the four lines of inquiry presented in this thesis develop a critical understanding of the more-than-human, representational, and calculative-financial nuances that shape homemaking in changing cultures of home. Home is a variegated, and evolving achievement, laden with complex logics, and ambivalences. Conceived as a process, and enabled by a long-term ethnography of one site, attention is drawn to often unquestioned actions of homemaking, contributions of actors (human, nonhuman, governmental and material) and influences of axiomatic ontologies on form and function. In so doing, the thesis seeks to reveal complexities of modern owner-occupation as a tenure form, and how even ideal homes in premium locations are marked by compromised expectations and unanticipated entanglements.

To conclude, the thesis provokes further consideration of how we live in our homes, materially, financially, and emotionally, and just how flawed meeting dreamlike ideals of home can be. Specific attention is granted to possible avenues for cultural geographies of home, and what can be productively gained from recognising housing/home as a contested and contingent process. Beyond this particular coastal place, I advocate for broader debates around housing provision to contend with the paradoxes of owner-occupation, uncovering cracks in calculative reason, and delving beneath the Australian dream’s stubborn cultural veneer to acknowledge the exigencies of dwelling in place.
Acknowledgements

Thanks must first go to my supervisors, Leah Gibbs and Chris Gibson. It is difficult to capture Leah’s unfathomable support and generosity. She gave me the space to forge my own project, and supported this with reserves of patience, and critical careful feedback that challenged and encouraged. I looked forward to our coffees and our meetings. She personifies the things that make academia great, and it was a privilege to work with her. Chris I thank for his crucial role in the early development of the project, and for sage guidance when I needed it. His infectious enthusiasm for geography and research was pivotal towards me making the cavernous leap from Honours to PhD. I am endlessly thankful to them both.

This thesis is indebted to the residents of Greenhills Beach. I thank the households that took part in interviews: for inviting me into their homes, and their generosity and honesty in talking about how they came together during the mess of building and nesting in them. Their stories are the vitality of this thesis, and I hope that I have done them justice. I also thank the developer representative at Frasers Property, who was kind enough to agree to an interview and provide valuable insights on the case study.

I wish to extend warm thanks to the Australian Centre for Cultural Environmental Research (AUSCCER) at the University of Wollongong. Every staff member has expressed genuine interest in my thesis and my professional development. I thank them all for highly valuable conversations; your collegiality; being friendly faces at conferences; and opportunities to teach and expand my research horizons. I would like to single out three people for special mention: Catherine Phillips, Nicole Cook, and Pauline McGuirk. All three were outstanding mentors during my candidature: great soundboards for tangled threads, and thoughtful readers of draft chapters.

Enormous thanks to the HDR students at AUSCCER, who served in the trenches with me for the last four and a half years and became great friends. Imagining this without them all is a bleak picture. We had a blast tackling the highs, the lows, and the in-betweens. I particularly want to thank Shaun McKiernan, Alex Tindale, Ellen van Holstein, Vicky Ikutegbe, Steph Toole, Kiera Kent, Sophie-May Kerr, Susie Clement, Carrie Wilkinson, Justin Westgate,
Ananth Gopal, Ryan Frazer, Elyse Stanes, Chantel Carr, and Anna de Jong. For their contributions to the thesis, I thank Shaun and Ellen for being kind critics of early stabs at chapters, Elyse for technical support during fieldwork, and Alex for Census advice and his expertise in producing the stunning location maps. It would be remiss not to also thank AUSCCER’s super administrative staff, Renee Agostino and Liz Rowe.

I want to express my gratitude to the Australian geography community for their unconditional welcome at each of the last five Institute of Australian Geographers conferences in Perth, Melbourne, Canberra, Adelaide, and Brisbane. Each empirical chapter of the thesis was presented at these conferences. The support and feedback of session organisers, audience members and other HDR students were a welcome boost of energy, insight and confidence. Conference attendance was met with enthusiasm, not trepidation. I thank the IAG for the postgraduate bursary each year.

For the chapters published at the time this thesis was submitted (Chapters 4 and 5), I wish to thank the assigned editors, Robert Wilton and Hannu Ruonavaara, and the two sets of anonymous reviewers whose engaged and thoughtful comments contributed to greatly improved papers.

In September 2015 I was awarded a Global Challenges Travel Scholarship; I am grateful to the Global Challenges Program at the University of Wollongong for the opportunity. This trip culminated in a week-long visit at the University of Manchester, and a seminar slot that helped shape the direction of this thesis. I thank the audience that day. I also thank Noel Castree for his immense generosity: he made this trip happen, and the thesis would be a different beast without it.

I also dearly thank my wonderful parents, Meredith and Satch Gillon, and my sister Max, for their love and support over the last four and a half years. And to my friends—thank you for realising early on that my PhD was usually the last thing I wanted to talk about.

This research has been conducted with the support of the Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship.

Charlie Gillon
Wollongong, August 2017
# Table of Contents

Certification .......................................................................................................................... iii  
Declaration and Statements of Authorship ........................................................................ iv  
Abstract........................................................................................................................................ vi  
Acknowledgements ................................................................................................................ ix  
Table of Contents .................................................................................................................. xi  
Table of Figures ...................................................................................................................... xiv  
Table of Tables ......................................................................................................................... xvi  
Table of Boxes ........................................................................................................................ xvii  
Prologue: A view, September 2013 ....................................................................................... 1  
1  Introduction ....................................................................................................................... 2  
1.1 Houses built on sand ...................................................................................................... 2  
1.2 Aim and Research Questions ....................................................................................... 4  
1.3 Material Geographies of Home .................................................................................. 5  
1.3.1 Relational Materiality ............................................................................................ 6  
1.3.2 Housing, Home, and Homemaking ....................................................................... 10  
1.3.3 Homemaking and Nature ................................................................................... 14  
1.3.4 Homemaking and Finance ................................................................................... 17  
1.4 Australian Suburbs: three contextual concerns ....................................................... 19  
1.4.1 Contemporary reverberations of the ‘great Australian dream’ ......................... 19  
1.4.2 The rise of master-planned estates ..................................................................... 25  
1.4.3 Housing and coastlines ..................................................................................... 29  
1.5 Thesis Design, and Introducing the Research Papers .......................................... 32  
2  Methodology .................................................................................................................. 36  
2.1 Selecting the Case Study ............................................................................................ 37  
2.1.1 Discourse Analysis of Real Estate Advertisements ....................................... 39  
2.1.2 Case Study: Greenhills Beach, Cronulla ......................................................... 40  
2.2 Semi-structured interviews with Greenhills Beach residents ................................ 42  
2.2.1 Recruitment ....................................................................................................... 44  
2.2.2 Conducting Interviews ...................................................................................... 50  
2.2.3 Additions/infections left out ............................................................................. 56  
2.3 Semi-structured interview with developer representative .................................... 58  
2.4 Data Analysis and Coding Strategies ..................................................................... 59
# Table of Contents

2.5 Conclusion ................................................................................................................. 61

3 Profiling The Case Study ............................................................................................ 64
3.1 A place history: the ‘extraction’ of Greenhills Beach ............................................. 66
3.2 The Developer.............................................................................................................. 74
    3.2.1 Marketing and Sales ......................................................................................... 75
    3.2.2 Design ............................................................................................................... 77
    3.2.3 House design and regulation ........................................................................... 82
3.3 Introducing the residents and their homes ................................................................. 85

4 Selling Surf And Turf .................................................................................................... 90
    4.1 Introduction ............................................................................................................ 92
    4.2 Place, Representation and Real Estate Advertising .............................................. 94
    4.3 Shifting Coastal Cultures ....................................................................................... 98
    4.4 Selling the everyday: master-planned residential estates ..................................... 102
    4.5 Case Study and Methodology .............................................................................. 104
    4.6 Results and Discussion ....................................................................................... 110
        4.6.1 ‘Suburbanisation by the sea’ – families, opportunities, possibilities .......... 110
        4.6.2 From holiday homes to ‘home holidays’: coastal nature and everyday life ..... 113
    4.7 Conclusion ............................................................................................................ 121

5 Under Construction ...................................................................................................... 126
    5.1 Introduction ............................................................................................................ 128
    5.2 Literature Review: Houses, homemaking, materials, and money ..................... 130
    5.3 Context: construction and master-planned estates in Australia ....................... 133
    5.4 Case Study and Methods ...................................................................................... 136
    5.5 Everyday Homemaking and Unmaking ............................................................... 138
        5.5.1 Homemaking with dust, dirt and debris ....................................................... 140
        5.5.2 Homemaking with builders ......................................................................... 141
        5.5.3 Homemaking and landscaping ..................................................................... 144
        5.5.4 Building ‘in the same boat’ ....................................................................... 145
    5.6 Buying and Building, Risk and Reward ............................................................... 148
    5.7 Conclusion ............................................................................................................ 152

6 Coastal Exposure ......................................................................................................... 156
    6.1 Introduction ............................................................................................................ 159
    6.2 Home, cultures of nature, and more-than-human homemaking ....................... 161
    6.3 House materials, maintenance, and repair ............................................................ 164
    6.4 Water Worlds and Coastal Homes ....................................................................... 167

xii
# Table of Figures

All figures are credited to Charles Gillon, unless otherwise stated.

**Figure 1.1** ‘Danger: Do not enter’—the aftermath at Collaroy (July 2016). Picture credit: Chris Gibson..................................................................................3

**Figure 2.1** Broad location map of the study site, Greenhills Beach, showing its location respective to Cronulla, the Sutherland Shire Local Government Area (LGA), and its proximity to Sydney’s airport, and central business district. The inset map shows the study site location from a State/national perspective. Map credit: Alex Tindale (copyright OpenStreetMap contributors)..........................................................42

**Figure 2.2** A typical setting for the first phase of the interview schedule. This commonly took place over a coffee or a tea; accepting this offer was an important early way to establish a comfortable atmosphere (November 2014)........................................................................................................52

**Figure 2.3** Walking around with participants in their gardens, using these lived locations as visual prompts for discussion, and understanding their design through ‘knowing by showing’ (cf. Pitt 2015) (February 2015).........................................................................................................................53

**Figure 2.4** Interviews captured houses in various stages of progress. When I revisited this resident a year later, their backyard ‘project’ had been completed—and the house behind them, which was being built at the time, was ‘complete’ (December 2014; December 2015).........................................................................55

**Figure 3.1** Location map of Greenhills Beach (marked in red) and highlighted surrounds. Map credit: Alex Tindale (copyright OpenStreetMap contributors). ..........................................................................................................................65

**Figure 3.2** Sand mining operations at the sand dunes, Cronulla, New South Wales, ca. 1963. Picture credit: Jeff Carter, National Library of Australia, nla.obj-147925421..................................................69

**Figure 3.3** Crowd of people playing on sand dunes, Cronulla, New South Wales, ca. 1963. Picture credit: Jeff Carter, National Library of Australia, nla.obj-147925870.................................................71

**Figure 3.4** (a) The dune, present day; (b) in relation to Greenhills Beach (April 2017)...................73

**Figure 3.5** Billboards, roundabout at Captain Cook Drive and Trinity Street, Kurnell Peninsula (March 2014). ........................................................................................................................................76

**Figure 3.6** The sunken, amphitheatre-like landscape profile of the estate, as seen from the running/access track at Don Lucas Reserve, Wanda Beach (left) (June 2015)..................................78

**Figure 3.7** The sign labelling Greenhills Beach, located at the roundabout entryway on Captain Cook Drive (April 2017). ..............................................................................................................79

**Figure 3.8** The streetscape at Greenhills Beach, exhibiting characteristic features of MPEs: formal streetscapes, and uniform colours and facades on houses showing the influence of the design guidelines (April 2017). ......................................................................................84

**Figure 3.9** Variations in house design, which come largely down to the superstructure; (a) a project-built home (June 2014); (b) an architecturally designed home (February 2015). Both of these.
houses are ideal examples of adhering to the ‘coastal landscape character’: white, light colours, and façades with accent features.

Figure 4.1 ‘Build your castle here’: streetlight advertising flag, Seaside Fern Bay (Rawson Communities) (January 2014).

Figure 4.2 Coding of the dominant images of the 76 advertisements collected. The two most common representations of coastal nature were ‘family/children at beach’ (n=22) and ‘beach vista without people’ (n=12).

Figure 4.3 (a) ‘Enjoy’, ‘Surf’: streetlight advertising flags; (b) ‘Explore your home by the sea’: outdoor sign, both Shell Cove (Australand) (September 2013).

Figure 4.4 ‘Imagine this… just a short walk from your doorstep’: landscape billboard, Greenhills Beach (Australand) (September 2013).

Figure 5.1 Greenhills Beach as a building site, comprising of builders, residents, houses, and vacant lots (September 2013).

Figure 6.1 Different forms of material selection in coastal homes. (a) Claire’s backyard, with susceptible materials set up to selectively weather with the coastal conditions (February 2015); (b) Daniel’s backyard, with ‘timber-look’ tiles that stay true to the aesthetic, but not the work required to sustain it (November 2015).
Table of Tables

Table 3.1 Street names at Greenhills Beach, all named after famous Australian surf beaches (adapted from Sutherland Shire Council 2015). ................................................................. 80

Table 3.2 Selected socio-demographic characteristics for Greenhills Beach. Source: ABS 2017b. .... 85

Table 4.1 A selection of MPEs visited, location attributes, size, and tagline. ................................. 106

Table 4.2 The volume and type of marketing examples collected, organised by study site. ............ 108
Table of Boxes

Box 2.1 On a ‘break’ ................................................................. 46
Box 2.2 On being seen .............................................................. 49
Prologue: A view, September 2013

I walk from Cronulla train station, along the promenade, into a new land release: Greenhills Beach. Vacant blocks lay sold and dormant. Land is levelled for building—a *tabula rasa* of potentiality. Banner mesh screening surrounds the fence, with smiling children, green things, watery things. I’m at ‘Sydney’s newest beachside community’. The wind whistles and gyres through the site, kicking up plumes of dirt and sand. While walking around the empty streets, the sight of the sand dunes stops me in my tracks.

As the sales brochure beckons:

Welcome to Greenhills Beach: ‘the natural choice for your new home by the sea’.
1 Introduction

1.1 Houses built on sand

This thesis focuses on new homes and their inhabitants in a specific, pre-ordained developmental context: a master-planned estate; and a specific spatial location: the coastal zone/margin. To live in this place is, to many Australians, the ultimate ideal. Increasingly, it also functions as a site of affluence and financial calculation: a place to dwell by a beach, while enacting on financial ideals of savvy investment and future lucrative returns. This thesis follows what transpires, materially and emotionally, in living the Australian dream of owning an affluent, coastal home.

Two flashpoints emerged as this thesis took shape.

**Flashpoint 1:** Housing in Australia has assumed a monstrous, scandalous shape. It is unaffordable, especially in Sydney: one of the most expensive places to live in Australia, and globally (Demographia 2017). Prices are a national spectacle: they ‘surge’, ‘boom’, and ‘crash’. Homeownership is increasing inequalities between and within generations. Purchase prices are too high, and mortgages are stifling (Ong et al. 2017); our national stalwart faith in owner-occupation is being shaken. Where does this messy mixture of money leave those that ‘own’ homes, and those that are trying to?

**Flashpoint 2:** In June 2016, the north Sydney suburb of Collaroy experienced an extreme storm event—an east coast low that joined forces with a king tide—which caused significant, extensive beach erosion (Figure 1.1). Million-dollar waterfront homes were left dangling precariously on eroded shorelines (Hannam and Kembrey 2016). While it was an uncommon
confluence of natural forces, this event shook the foundations of a coastal home. Meanwhile, these problems are being energetically reproduced. Housing is worth enormous prices in the ‘boom suburbs’ that line Sydney’s coastlines. In a context of escalating environmental change, can we keep making the decision to build very close to the coast?

![Figure 1.1 ‘Danger: Do not enter’—the aftermath at Collaroy (July 2016). Picture credit: Chris Gibson.](image)

Owner-occupation sets certain precursors, certain conditions, and these enrol nature and money in different ways that require critical scrutiny. Irrespective of current growing concerns about the availability of land and the affordability of housing, the Australian dream of a detached, family oriented home in low-density suburbs persists as a cultural desire, overlaid with a coastal location as a status and lifestyle premium. To own a detached home near the beach, is for many Australians to have finally ‘made it’. Together these ideals and their material production as houses make up considerable landscape change: gathering, collecting, and reproducing in place. The intersections of cultures, natures and money are transforming our coasts in certain kinds of places that warrant critique. These houses are,
Chapter 1 - Introduction

figuratively and literally, built on sand. Research needs to sift through the sand, and see what lies within.

1.2 Aim and Research Questions

The overarching aim of this thesis is to examine home and owner-occupation as a lived process, amidst dynamic more-than-human relations and growing pressures to adhere to dictates of financial calculation and reason. The examination primarily occurs through a long-term case study of a new master-planned estate in southern Sydney, Australia. This context is a privileged and desirable example of housing in Australia: on the grounds of housing type (large, new, detached homes), housing location (coastal housing in Sydney), and housing tenure (owner-occupation). I investigate how dominant ideals of home and concomitant practices of homemaking are produced and take shape in these households, with close attention to materiality, relations, emotions, and more-than-human encounters. The intention of this approach is to highlight dilemmas, and suggest openings, for the fixities of domestic ideals.

With the above in mind, four research questions emerged:

1. How does rethinking housing as a process contribute to unsettling dominant understandings of owner-occupation, home and practices of homemaking in master-planned estates?

2. How does representation and discourse contribute to understandings of home, nature, and practices of homemaking?

3. What are the consequences of focussing on materials and more-than-human others for modern housing cultures and homemaking practices?
Chapter 1 - Introduction

4. How are competing values of modern owner-occupation changing the emotional resonances of home and domesticity?

This thesis is presented in a PhD by compilation format. It is introduced by the present chapter, and comprises of a methodology chapter, a case study chapter, and four results chapters in journal article formats. Each paper addresses a different aspect of home as a process, and offers implications for the owner-occupier subject.

This chapter aims to provide the reader direction to understand and interpret the following papers, presenting the conceptual framework, broad research context, and contributions of the project. Section 1.3 outlines the conceptual framework—relational materiality—and accounts for how the core guiding principles of this ontology have been applied to (urban) spaces, and housing and home. I then position the project within a more refined corpus concerned with material geographies of home, and outline homemaking as the set of practices under observation. This section concludes by honing in on two key epistemological and ontological drivers of homemaking practices, which this thesis closely attends to: nature and finance. In Section 1.4, I present three contextual concerns to which this thesis responds: the continued potency of the ‘great Australian dream’; the rise of master-planned estates as a form of housing provision; and the changing relationship between housing and coastlines in Australia. This introductory chapter concludes with an outline of the thesis design, and an introduction into the research papers that shape the results sections.

1.3 Material Geographies of Home

The thesis is grounded conceptually by recent developments in critical cultural geography that view home as a product of relations: attending to practices, routines, emotions, temporalities, materialities, and more-than-human encounters. Additionally, I draw upon cultural-economic concerns of finance, calculation and governmental rationalities, to explore
how money and investment infuse such more-than-human relatings. Preceding a specific discussion of housing and home, this section first canvases the uptake of relational materiality (broadly speaking) as a way to understand place in recent human geography.

1.3.1 Relational Materiality

Human geography’s ‘cultural turn’ in the last decades of the 20\textsuperscript{th} Century, inspired by post-structural approaches to place and declarations that ‘there’s no such thing as culture’ (Mitchell 1995), left materials in a puzzling position. As Philo (2000, p. 33) stressed, focussing on immaterial cultural processes (texts, signs, symbols, \textit{inter alia}) was leading to a \textit{dematerializing} of human geography: ‘I am concerned that, in the rush to elevate such spaces in our human geographical studies, we have ended up being less attentive to the more “thingy”, bump-into-able, stubbornly there-in-the-world kinds of “matter” (the material) with which earlier geographers tended to be more familiar’. In a parallel (but divergent) action, Jackson (2000) advocated for a ‘rematerialized’ social and cultural geography through material culture understandings of the relationships between people, things, practices and cultures (Miller 1998). Both Philo (2000) and Jackson (2000) struck a chord.\footnote{I recognise that these ideas, and these ‘rematerializing’ energies, existed beforehand. Indeed, Philo (2000) offers a useful short account of these earlier developments. I turn to Lees (2002, p. 109) to affirm the relative importance of these papers to what followed: ‘Jackson (2000) and Philo (2000) are not new in voicing concern over the dematerializing of human geography… what is new is that geographers might now be prepared to listen’.
}

What followed was a series of declarations to ‘rematerialize’, and guidelines for rematerializing, various sub-disciplines of human geography (see Lees 2002; Latham and McCormack 2004; Anderson and Tolia-Kelly 2004; Whatmore 2006; Anderson and Wylie 2009). As Latham and McCormack (2004, p. 702) explain: ‘human geography's newfound obsession with the “immaterial” seems to have made it inattentive to the actual, everyday
materiality of the places in which people actually dwell’. Consequently materiality becomes a means of exploring everyday practices and places of dwelling: ‘the vital connections between the geo (earth) and the bio (life)’ (Whatmore 2006 p. 601, emphasis in original). These ‘vital connections’ emphasise relations between humans and lively materials, by highlighting ‘what matter does rather than what its essence is’ (Anderson and Tolia-Kelly 2004, p. 672, emphasis in original). Further Kearnes (2003, p. 149) attests to a valorisation of ‘the ways in which matter acts independently of and upon the subject’, calling attention to what matter does, irrespective of human action.

Rematerializing efforts found enthusiastic purchase with urban geographers. Lees (2002) describes how ‘new’ urban geography was quick to take seriously the material and immaterial, through cognate ‘linguistic’, ‘interpretative’, ‘postmodern’ and ‘psychic’ turns. Resisting readings of urban space as pre-determined, Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift’s (2002, p. 9) influential theorisation of everyday urbanism required researchers ‘to get into the intermesh between flesh and stone, humans and non-humans, emotions and practices’. Latham and McCormack (2004, p. 719) describe how urban geography had presented ‘a remarkably emaciated view of what cities consist of’; a material approach expands the ‘imagination’ of urban living by ‘asking the vital question of just what material the contemporary city consists of’.

Material approaches also grasp the involvement of more-than-human others in decisions, and in placemaking. One impulse of rematerializing cultural geography is ‘to re-animate the missing “matter” of landscape, focusing attention on bodily involvements in the world in which landscapes are co-fabricated between more-than-human bodies and a lively earth’ (Whatmore 2006, p. 603). Refusing dualistic understandings of, and boundary-making between, urban and natural spaces (see Castree 2003; Braun 2005), nonhuman nature is to be included in our ‘urban moral reckoning’ (Wolch 2002, p. 726). Such a standpoint is furthered
by creative efforts recasting the politics of urban spaces so that they include ‘urban wild things’ (Hinchliffe et al. 2005) in ‘living cities’ (Hinchliffe and Whatmore 2006).

Similar intentions to ‘re-animate the missing “matter” of landscape’ have taken shape in geographical accounts of buildings and architecture, where the materiality of buildings and their component parts always exceeds their top-down design through relations (Lees 2001; Jacobs 2006). Focussing on materials ‘themselves’ reveals the ‘transitory and relational nature’ of materiality (Kirsch 2013, p. 440; Kearnes 2003). More recent developments in the field on the agency of ‘things’ have been largely inspired by Bennett’s (2010) vital materialism. For Bennett, things are always ‘potentially forceful agents’ (x), but this force—expressed as ‘thing-power’—is often shrouded in a lack of attentiveness, awareness, or respect by human users.

For Hayden Lorimer (2013, p. 34) materialities are an advantageous conceptual resource for future uncertainties: ‘arguably, it is the versatility and elasticity of “materialities” as a conceptual resource that makes it suited to new anticipative geographies, aimed at rethinking society-environment relations in the near future’. As such, material approaches will remain highly relevant for researching urban spaces, and exploring the causes and consequences of deleterious society-environment impacts.

Tolia-Kelly (2013, p. 157) warns against misaligned energies towards material approaches, which can result in ‘surface geographies’:

Surface geographies depoliticize and make palatable the material world. By embodying a ‘looking-onto’ rather than ‘being-with’ orientation in the process of research makes the encounter sterile, palatable and benign; the nature of ‘material’ politics becomes reduced to picturing a collage of materials observed, not felt.
Chapter 1 - Introduction

The depoliticising of space as a ‘surface’ is a key critique of a material approach—hence why it is crucial to look at materials relationally. A relational material approach explores ‘being-with’: unlocking how and why practices occur as they do, and the levers and barriers to these rather than other practices occurring.

A focus on material, more-than-human relations in practice helps get to temporality, place change, and decision-making, at the scales where these things have purchase and take shape. This approach aligns with what Doreen Massey (2005, p. 131) terms the ‘event’ of place: ‘as open, as woven together out of ongoing stories, as a moment within power-geometries, as a particular constellation within the wider topographies of space, and as in process, as unfinished business’. Conceiving place in this way provokes for Massey a relational politics of place, termed ‘throwntogetherness’: place takes shape through negotiation, between humans and nonhumans, in the ‘here-and-now’ (Massey 2005, p. 140).

This thesis thus engages with the ephemerality and immanence of place, set against the calculative, planned nature of the MPE, and seemingly fixed cultural norms of owner-occupation, suburban form and coastal location. I show despite this calculation and planning, throwntogetherness typifies MPEs. In question is how such homes come together, with materials, nonhumans, money and ideas, as well as how these houses anticipate future value, and physical configurations. Attentive to temporality, such an approach lends itself to studying one place over a period of time. Opening up places that appear controlled and planned, and exposing their ongoing formation (e.g. in building sites) and ambivalent inhabitation of homes for both comfort and investment, alters how they are seen and understood. Accordingly, the thesis is structured to flow temporally as this housing development took shape.
1.3.2 Housing, Home, and Homemaking

Housing and home are often held apart as disparate elements of domestic life: ‘house’ being the shelter and structure, and ‘home’ being the feelings and subjectivities that occur within. Jacobs and Smith (2008, p. 515) seek to articulate housing/home in a ‘revised rematerialisation of home’, which embraces ‘the coconstitutive relationship between the formal features of actual dwellings and the social life that inhabits them’. This thesis shares this intention, asking what rethinking housing as a process can contribute to understanding modern housing cultures, and the associated practices of homemaking. In doing so, I concentrate on two core elements which are imagined and performed in shaping the ideal home: nature (Section 1.3.3) and finance (Section 1.3.4). This section informs the following two subsections by summarising theoretical developments in housing, home and homemaking.

Home has been described as a place ‘saturated with the meanings, memories, emotions, experiences and relationships of everyday life’ (Dowling and Mee 2007, p. 161). There are no rigid definitions of home; rather there are multiple senses of home (Blunt and Dowling 2006). First, home is individual, as Easthope (2004, p. 135) highlights: ‘since “home” is a term imbued with personal meanings, different people are likely to understand “home” to mean different things at different times and in different contexts’. Second, and relatedly, home is informed by its context: ‘geography matters in understanding the building of and the experience of home’ (Dowling and Mee 2007, p. 164). Place, therefore, is crucial: informing where these meanings originate, and how they are sustained.

Home is a key site for social relations and identity formation. But in their hegemonic form, they are a key site for certain social relations, and the formation of certain identities: namely Anglo-European, heterosexual, nuclear families (Blunt and Dowling 2006; Gorman-Murray
Chapter 1 - Introduction

2007). At home, emotional geographies have unpacked prescribed domestic roles and identities on gendered, racialised and classed lines: revealing how ‘home’ and its referent ideals and values do not exist for all (Madigan et al. 1990; Gorman-Murray 2008; Morrison 2013). As much as houses can be ‘homely’ for their occupants, they can be equally ‘unhomely’ (Blunt and Dowling 2006). For example, domestic identities are fraught with post-War legacies of gendered roles and expectations of the wife and husband as ‘homemaker’ and ‘breadwinner’, respectively. Feminist approaches to home have interrogated these unequal and limiting power relations, which leaves home ‘unhomely’ for women (Blunt and Dowling 2006, p. 110; Mallett 2004; Madigan et al. 1990).

Notwithstanding changing social, cultural and demographic circumstances, the design of suburban homes has been historically consistent, and informed by these gendered divisions of labour (see Fiske et al. 1987; Madigan et al. 1990; Dovey 1992; Johnson 2006). Dowling (2012) highlights some modified characteristics in modern homes: an increase in size of the building envelope; alterations in domestic technologies that reduce physical labour but increase expectations of cleanliness; an uptake in technologies of surveillance; and a move towards open plan living in shared communal spaces. Such large, modern, new build homes—colloquially referred to as ‘McMansions’—are the housing form with which this thesis contends (see Nasar et al. 2007; Dowling 2008; Dowling and Power 2011; 2012; Section 1.4.1).

The personal, individual experiences of home, intertwined with the contextual and ideological drivers of housing, impel studying housing/home as a process. I draw upon Blunt and Dowling’s (2006) conceptualisation of a critical geography of home to interrogate home:

Home is a process of creating and understanding forms of dwelling and belonging. This process has material and imaginative elements. Thus people create home through social
Chapter 1 - Introduction

and emotional relationships. Home is also materially created—new structures formed, objects used and placed. (Blunt and Dowling 2006, p. 23, emphasis added; see also Dowling and Mee 2007)

Viewing home as a process uncovers moments that are previously glossed over, and draws attention to homemaking as ‘a significant social practice, absorbing considerable emotional and physical energy’ (Dowling and Mee 2007, p. 162). As Hayden Lorimer (2005, p. 86) identifies: ‘amid the juggling of domestic living, cultural geographers are finding an ideal environment to better understand the habitual practices, intuitive acts and social protocols that draw together humans, objects and technologies’. Homemaking, then, is tied to notions of dwelling (Ingold 2000), inhabiting (Hinchliffe 2003), and cohabitation (Blunt 2005), as a series of lived, practical engagements with our immediate surroundings. The intentions of these lived, practical engagements are underpinned by the display and performance of Western domestic ideals: senses of belonging, safety, security, and comfort (Dowling and Power 2013). Achieving these ideals is the (unachievable) goal of homemaking.

Linked to homemaking practices and their intentions are studies seeking to explore domestic material cultures, and homes as fundamental sites of consumption (see Greig 1995; Miller 2001; Noble 2004; Gregson 2007). Studies of households are finding purchase in troubling this consumption, exploring ‘the environmental implications of the culturally specific rhythms, routines, habits and practices of householders’ (Klocker and Head 2013: 46). The merits of researching the household scale gather around particular rallying cries: most notably, environmental sustainability. Edited collections by Ruth Lane and Andrew Gorman-Murray (2011) and Chris Gibson et al. (2013) attest to the quotidian attitudes, habits and practices of individuals and households being a central factor in exploring ‘bottom-up’ approaches to environmental sustainability. The reproduction of practices scale up, proliferated through neighbourhoods, towns, cities and suburbs. Consequently the everyday,
lived, practiced negotiations of households have a bearing on long-term global concerns: conservation, biodiversity and sustainability dilemmas, and broadly, the human response to climate change (Lane and Gorman-Murray 2011; Gibson et al. 2013). Embracing banality, experience, and the minutiae of everyday decisions is profoundly important for recognising the social and cultural dimensions of climate change—and how they may be changed (Head and Gibson 2012).

In honing a material approach to housing/home through homemaking, I productively bring together practices of homemaking with a growing geographical interest in opening up the humanist, top-down practice of architecture. Such ‘new’ geographies of architecture draw attention to the embodied practices of inhabiting built forms (Lees 2001), and the human and nonhuman work that sustains and condemns them (Jacobs 2006; Graham and Thrift 2007; Strebel 2011). As Jacobs (2006, p. 11) outlines, rather than just being ‘there’, black-boxed, a building is a socio-technical ‘building event’: ‘the socio-technical processes by which that there-ness materializes: the process of construction and use of the building, the various modes of authorship and ownership, the day-to-day complexities of maintenance and servicing’. The building event can be analysed instead as ‘practicing architecture’ (Jacobs and Merriman 2011), highlighting the intersecting energies of buildings and their occupants through, for instance, iterative practices of maintenance and repair (Graham and Thrift 2007; Strebel 2011; Jacobs et al. 2012). These banal practices sustain home in its current state and ‘momentum’ (Strebel 2011), resisting its ‘entropic destiny’ to decay and fall into ruin (Jacobs and Cairns 2011; Ingold 2000). Thus an approach to housing/home as an event extends homemaking to the lively components of the house and its materials (Ingold 2004; Edensor 2011), to nonhumans as ‘architectural practitioners’ (Jacobs and Merriman 2011), and to the varied skills and competencies of their human inhabitants (Cox 2016; Carr and Gibson 2016). Reflecting this growing affinity between researching housing and home (Jacobs and Smith
Chapter 1 - Introduction

2008), housing studies has started heading in cognate ‘post-humanist’ (Franklin 2006), ‘post-social’ (Gabriel and Jacobs 2008) and relational (Jacobs and Malpas 2013) directions.

Lastly, home as a process does not stay within the confines of the house. Cook et al. (2016, p.1) argue for ‘unbounding’ housing and home, exploring ‘the coproduction of the materials, meanings and practices of dwelling and worlds of finance, nature and power’. In ‘unbounding’ housing and home, key concepts and practices that bring meaning to home, and which mediate homemaking practice, need to be rethought. Cook et al. (2016, p.1) extend this thought: ‘this always processual site is a meeting ground in which intensive practices, materials and meanings tangle with extensive, financial, environmental and political worlds’.

This thesis uses a material geography framework to trace the processes through which modern owner-occupation is formed and sustained: planning, choosing, spending, constructing, waiting, inhabiting, cohabiting, furnishing, gardening and negotiating, *inter alia*. By attending to these processes, these experiences of dwelling and regimes of valuing as part of a ‘revised rematerialization of home’ (Jacobs and Smith 2008), homemaking is also opened up and outwards: to cultures of nature, and more-than-human others (Power 2009a); and to economic functions of home, and financial instruments (Smith 2008). The following two subsections thus explore nature and finance as fundamental to this ‘always processual site’, and allude to specific contributions of the results chapters.

### 1.3.3 Homemaking and Nature

The thesis explores how nature is understood in the confines of home, and how it is encountered. These two factors are not mutually exclusive. A fixed definition of ‘nature’ is no longer a bulwark for shaping space and understanding place; nature is instead ‘promiscuous’, captured by multiple socio-natures (see Castree and Braun 2001; Castree 2005). Yet ‘Nature’ and ‘nature-talk’ still matters: ‘ideas of nature remain remarkably
Chapter 1 - Introduction

widespread and influential in lay and specialist discourses’ (Castree 2004, p. 191). The fixity and fluidity of what nature is and portends to be leaves us in a tenuous negotiating space. Jamie Lorimer (2012, p. 593) reflects on this: ‘Life without Nature is proving confusing and there is a widely shared recognition of the need for new ways of thinking’. Hence the drive to understand socio-natures in lived, practical circumstances—through relations, and through encounters. This line of inquiry of the thesis is guided by more-than-human geographies (Whatmore 2002; 2006).

Dominant cultures of nature vehemently shape and define home in material expressions of domesticity (Dowling and Power 2013; Davison 2016). The remit for nature in an ideal home is to be neat, tidy and controllable (Kaika 2004; Blunt and Dowling 2006). Research has explored the terms by which certain types of nature are seen to belong, or not belong, in certain places. Borders and boundaries at home have been productive sites of inquiry for cultural geographers, particularly in gardens and backyards (see Hitchings 2003; Head and Muir 2006; Longhurst 2006; Power 2005; 2009a; 2009b; Ginn 2014; Gillon 2014). In Australia, nonhuman belonging is contingent on ‘native’ status (Head 2012; Gibbs et al. 2015; Power 2009a; Gillon 2014). Belonging is also shaped by human emotional and visceral reactions towards nonhumans: be it affection for ‘charismatic’ nonhumans (Lorimer 2007), or disgust for ‘uncomfortable companions’ (Ginn 2014). Garden maintenance practices are consequently shaped by these value-driven terms of placemaking: for instance, in pedantically maintaining lawns (Robbins 2007), through watering (Askew and McGuirk 2004), and planting species and removing others (Head and Muir 2006).

---

2 The delineation of ‘native’ nature status is highly contested, but is primarily defined by the presence of flora and fauna in a pre-1788 baseline (i.e. preceding imperial colonisation) (see Head 2012). This approach is similar to other colonial nations (see Longhurst 2006 on New Zealand).
Chapter 1 - Introduction

Homemaking is a more-than-human endeavour: ‘a distributed and processual relation in which humans and nonhumans, including animals, rhythms and objects, such as the house itself, are equally entwined’ (Power 2009b, p. 1031). I attend to the more-than-human home by knitting a productive alliance between cultural geographies of home, and ethnographic accounts of building maintenance and repair. Jacobs and Merriman (2011, p. 214-215) indicates that houses and buildings are beset by ‘nonhuman architectural practitioners’: ‘while non-human actors may be indifferent to a concept and thing called architecture, they do decisively act on it and with it, inhabiting and using buildings in more-or-less intentioned and territorial ways’. The cast of actors includes, but is not limited to, companion animals (Franklin 2006; Power 2012), native animals (Power 2009a; Gillon 2014) and plants (Head and Muir 2006; Longhurst 2006), and also to things less furry, plantly, and plainly obvious: for example, slugs (Ginn 2014), water (Kaika 2004), and those that are miniscule and invisible: decaying forces and chemical reactions (Power 2009b; Edensor 2011; Chapter 6).

I ground these concerns in coastal nature—in how it is represented, how it is lived with, and with what consequences. Chapter 4 considers how real estate advertising portrays lives with coastal nature as an influential—yet ephemeral—mediator in the throwntogetherness of changing coastal places (cf. Massey 2005). Advertisements for new housing developments were primarily orientated around nostalgic representations of coastal nature, setting perplexing lifestyle expectations for new residents. Chapter 6 focuses on salt weathering as a particularly coastal homemaking challenge, and traces its negotiation in material expressions of a coastal home. Such banal, inconspicuous human-nonhuman encounters at home require attention—particularly when this trend to move towards the coast (in this mode of housing and within this form of housing provision) shows little sign of slowing at present. Section 1.4 outlines coastal settlement trends further.
1.3.4 Homemaking and Finance

The second core element taken up by this thesis is how cultural-economic concerns of calculation, governmentality and financialisation establish frames within which the material relations for dwelling proceed. For homemaking is driven and constrained by finance. As Jacobs and Smith (2008, p. 515) outline: ‘the project of rematerializing home has an inescapably financial bottom line… [money] settles out into “things”, like bricks and mortar, that give it presence; that quite literally lend it form and value’.

Susan Smith (2008) has unpacked the fraught conditions sustaining owner-occupation as the dominant housing tenure in Western markets. Owned homes—‘a hybrid of money, materials, and meanings’—are enrolled in a ‘new financial order of housing’ where home is a crucial site of individual wealth as a financial asset and instrument (Smith 2008, p. 521). Housing is also packaged both by financial logics and political rhetoric as a sound investment choice. However, the ontological security surrounding ownership is paradoxically stationed in the normalisation of mortgaged debted ownership, and associated exposure to individual financial risk (see Smith 2015; Cook et al. 2013). This has had deleterious consequences, as witnessed during the 2008 subprime mortgage crisis in the United States (see Aalbers 2008; Reid 2017). The current housing climate in Australia portends to escalating homeowner risk (see Section 1.4.1).

Attention also turns to the home as a product, as a source of not just use value and consumption (to dwell, or shelter within) but also exchange value (as a source/site of personal accumulation). This is not just in terms of utility—i.e. that money enables spending on the home—but on the proliferation of financial logics in the home space, driving decisions and shaping homes materially. Such concerns broadly respond to the growing financialisation of everyday life (Martin 2002; Christophers 2015). The intentions and goals of homemaking are shaped by financialised logics. The Australian dream of owning a home is now increasingly
linked to governmentalities of owner-occupation and the performance of ‘rational’, financially-sound subjectivities (Allon 2008; 2010; Smith 2008; Langley 2006). Logics of calculation underpin the MPE as a pre-eminent site of developer investment, and homeowner accumulation (cf. Callon and Muniesa 2005). Typically managed by a single developer, they enrol owner-occupiers in rationalities of housing as both homes and investments: as opportunities to dwell, to express and broadcast elite status and identity, while collectively increasing property values and thus perform ‘rational’ financialised subject identities (see Section 1.4.2; Chapter 7). Against the pervasiveness of financialisation and cultures of calculation, this thesis interrogates how the lived experience of such places actually unfurls.

Chapters 5 and 7 focus on the contributions of finance, and logics of finance, to modern owner-occupation and homemaking practices. Through the pursuit of these ideals, home can become ‘unhomely’ (Blunt and Dowling 2006), and ‘unmade’ (Baxter and Brickell 2014), on emotional and financial grounds. Chapter 5 explores the lived experiences of building sites, where putting up with the vagaries of inhabiting a construction site is a calculative decision to potentially maximise profit. Chapter 7 explicitly focuses on identity and subject formation under conditions of financialisation, by framing subjects as ‘investor-occupiers’. Despite the recasting of housing/home financially, owner-occupation is always affectively charged, and housing as a market is as much influenced by emotional energies as it is by calculative, ‘rational’ decisions (Smith 2008; Munro and Smith 2008; Christie et al. 2008). By exploring the material and emotional performances of an ‘investor-occupier’ subjectivity, I reveal the emotional consequences of recasting the family home financially. Home as process takes the money spent, and the money to be spent, on a spectrum—as a series of snapshots. A long-term study of a master-planned housing development unveils the investments made, and
traces dispositions as they change. It also indicates how in such calculative spaces, shot through with financial considerations, dwellings and relatings actually unfurl.

1.4 Australian Suburbs: three contextual concerns

As Gill Valentine (2001, p. 64) reminds us, ‘we tend to take houses for granted, yet they are not merely neutral containers for our social relationships. They are designed and built by people and are thus the outcome of the society that produced them’. This thesis, and the homes to which it speaks, is grounded in Australia’s suburbs. This section highlights three concerns in Australian geographies of housing to which this thesis responds: the continuing, stubborn resonance of the ‘great Australian dream’ and its effect on housing tenure and form; the rise of master-planned estates as a mode of housing provision and delivery; and coastal housing as a coveted Australian desire—one which is becoming increasingly suburban.

1.4.1 Contemporary reverberations of the ‘great Australian dream’

Australia is the ‘first suburban nation’ (Horne in G Davison 1995, p. 40). The distinct, low-density suburban form of Australia’s major cities has been in place since European colonisation; this legacy persists today, with more than half of Australia’s population residing in the metropolitan areas of Greater Sydney, Greater Melbourne, and south-east Queensland (Hamnett and Maginn 2016, p. 5; see also Davison 2006). Australia’s housing ideals stem from this pattern. Housing in Australia is assembled around a core narrative image: an owner-occupied house in the suburbs, built on a quarter-acre block, designed to accommodate a nuclear family. This is referred to colloquially as the ‘great Australian dream’ (Paris 1993; Dufty-Jones and Rogers 2015). This dream-like state is shared in other homeowner-dominated societies: the United Kingdom, United States, Canada and New Zealand (Ronald 2008; Smith 2008).
In Australia, the ‘dream’ stems from a post-1945 context of housing provision, during which time there was both an urgent demand for housing to service an expanding population, and land available to build upon (Dufty-Jones 2018). People built their own homes, often austerely, using prefabricated houses that were quick and easy to install, using materials like fibrous cement sheeting³ (‘fibro’) that are now iconic to the suburbs (Greig 1995). Indeed, Pickett (1997) characterised Australia’s post-War suburbs as the ‘fibro frontier’. House building gathered pace—and size—towards the end of the 20th Century, following technological advancements in prefabrication: ‘brick veneer construction, concrete slab foundations, concrete roofing tiles, prefabrication of windows and other building elements’ (O’Callaghan and Pickett 2012, p. 182).

Homeownership is also institutional, avidly supported by the planning system, policies, and governmentalities. In post-War Australia, the Liberal Menzies government came to power on the back of Menzies’ 1942 speech, ‘The Forgotten People’, which put the suburbs and the forgotten ‘middle class’ in clear focus. Homeownership would give middle class families a ‘stake in the country’⁴, a place to be sheltered from anxieties and panics in ‘suburban dreams of refuge’ (Davison 2006, p. 207). Homeownership represented good, responsible citizenship (Dufty 2007). By the late 1960s–early 1970s, outright owner-occupation peaked at 71 percent of Australia’s housing tenure (Dufty-Jones and Rogers 2015; Ronald 2008).

The current housing climate has spawned from these antecedent origins. In spite of changing contexts and conditions, the Australian dream persists, compelling housing decisions in

³ ‘Fibro’ is not just famous for being an iconic building material in Australian suburbs. It is also infamous for its ‘toxic legacy’ of asbestos dust, an industrial contaminant that can cause mesothelioma (Houston and Ruming 2014). Asbestos is rearing its head again in a ‘third-wave’, entangled in processes of urban regeneration, and asset maximising post-War suburban homes: knockdown rebuilding (see Wiesel et al. 2013) and ‘do-it-yourself’ renovations (see Houston and Ruming 2014). The story of fibro is a sobering reminder of the importance of material approaches to home, and attending to the specific properties of materials that comprise them.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

Australia. As Cook et al. (2016, p. 3) explain, the normalising of owner-occupation in Australia means that its consequences tend to ‘resist critical inquiry’: ‘public acceptance of owner-occupied housing can exclude and mask vital questions about the resources, economics, politics and social differences through which such housing is sustained’. I focus here on two consequences of the ‘great Australian dream’ as a fixed housing culture: 1) propagating an unrealistic expectation of ownership as egalitarian, despite dramatic increases in property prices; and 2) a sustained desire for detached homes, despite shifts in family units and circumstances. I discuss each in turn.

First, homeownership is the ‘key tenet’ of the great Australian dream (Dufty-Jones and Rogers 2015, p. 7). This is despite real concerns about housing affordability and housing supply that flavour current commentaries on Australian housing. A 2016 study determined Sydney the second least affordable major housing market globally, only behind Hong Kong: homebuyers need approximately 12 times the median income in Sydney to afford the median house price\(^5\) (Demographia 2017, p. 46). Despite this being out of reach for most, owner-occupation remains the dominant form of housing tenure in Sydney and across Australia; approximately two thirds of occupied private dwellings are owned outright or with a mortgage. What is noteworthy here is the shift towards mortgaged ownership, as a function of this unaffordability. Mortgaged ownership is now the most common type of housing tenure in Australia, comprising 35 percent of Australian households in 2016 (ABS 2017a). These high levels of ownership are consistent with other Western ‘mono-tenurial’ homeowner societies (Ronald 2008; Dufty-Jones and Rogers 2015), establishing a normalised relationship with debted ownership (see Section 1.3.4).

\(^5\) A median multiple approach to housing un/affordability is a function of median house prices divided by the median household income (Demographia 2017, p. 1). A median multiple value above 5 is considered to be ‘severely unaffordable’; in 2016 Sydney’s was 12.2 – a median house price of $1,077,000 divided by a median household income of $88,000 (Demographia 2017, p. 46).
Chapter 1 - Introduction

The turn of the 21st Century saw a reprisal of homeownership as a political focus, led by the Liberal Howard government (Allon 2008). This signalled a return to insular, domestic politics as a backlash against globalisation (Allon 2014), supported by fiscal policies such as the first home-buyers grant, and negative gearing (see Blunden 2016). Negative gearing enables the purchase of multiple homes as investments, against which personal income tax liabilities can be reduced. Such mechanisms unsettle a politicised egalitarian narrative created around Australia’s suburbs, as the home of ‘battlers’ and ‘aspirationals’ (Gleeson 2006; Allon 2008). These policy and fiscal initiatives mask intergenerational and intragenerational inequities predicated on the advantages of owning a home—say, on the reliance of homeownership for asset-based welfare in retirement (Yates and Bradbury 2010; Murphy and Rehm 2016), or on the exclusion of young people from homeownership markets, consequently labelled ‘Generation Rent’ (McKee 2012).

In light of these underlying inequalities and unrealistic demands, housing has been recast as the ‘great Australian nightmare’ (Kemeny 1983; Paris 1993). The imaginary of the Australian dream is exclusionary for domestic identities which diverge from heterosexualised, Anglo-European, nuclear families. This fails to take into account the variety of domestic realities that characterise contemporary Australian suburbs: for example, the domestic identities of gay men and lesbians (Gorman-Murray 2007; 2008), co-habiting extended families (Klocker et al. 2012), and mixed-ethnicity partnerships (Tindale and Klocker 2017). There also remains a tenure bias towards ownership, stigmatising rental properties and renters, as ownership is purportedly one of the conditions for a ‘homely’ home (Easthope 2014; Blunt and Dowling 2006; Cheshire et al. 2009). On unrealistic demands, Chapter 7 of the thesis examines the dilemmas and stretched emotions of financialised owner-occupation.

A second consequence of the great Australian dream is the cementation of detached homes as a desired housing type. The contemporary retelling of the ideal home in 21st Century suburbia
is a detached, large, mass-produced home designed to accommodate families (Johnson 2006; see also Dowling 2008; Dowling and Power 2012). Wiesel et al. (2013) label this trend in new housing provision the ‘supersized’ Australian dream. As O’Callaghan and Pickett (2012, p. 182) describe,

The very large project house is a phenomenon of the past two decades: in 1985 the average new home in Sydney covered 160 square metres; by 2005 the average has increased by another 100 square metres.

The proliferation of large mass-produced family homes in Australia parallels with post-1945 housing production in the United States, the origins of which are commonly traced to Levitt and Sons and the community of Levittown, Long Island. Due to their common features and shared reputation, large homes in Australia are commonly labelled ‘McMansions’ (Nasar et al. 2007). The delivery of these houses as project homes is criticised for their mass-production, generic form, purported quality of work, and the lack of architectural variation and innovation (Gleeson 2006; Farrelly 2008). In part, this is due to the homogenous nature of new housing production, delivered by project home builders as variations on a theme (O’Callaghan and Pickett 2012; see also Burke and Hulse 2010). Architectural critic Elizabeth Farrelly (2008) despairs over these houses, calling the ‘bloated project home’ a materialisation of ‘archiphobia’. This visual critique resonates with Australian architect, and architectural commentator, Robin Boyd’s (1960, reprinted 2012) reprimand of suburban homes as being guilty of ‘Featurism’: in Boyd’s view, rather than being designed well, houses incorporate cherry-picked features from various architecture styles that purportedly display success and taste.

‘Supersized’ homes have emerged despite shrinking household size (Johnson 2006; Wiesel et al. 2013). In 2016, the average number of people living in each Australian household was 2.6
people, but occupied private dwellings in Australia most commonly consist of 3 bedrooms (41 percent), or 4 or more bedrooms (32 percent) (ABS 2017a). Rather than household composition, large modern detached homes are driven by different energies. Robyn Dowling and Emma Power have explored large homes in Australian suburbs on the basis of providing affordances of modern family life (Dowling 2008; Dowling and Power 2012). The modern home is also recognised as site for increased consumption, and consequently, identity formation (Noble 2004); this brings with it dilemmas around environmental sustainability as house size ratchets up consumption and maintenance (Shove 2003; Dowling and Power 2011; Gibson et al. 2013). The house is also a crucial site for increased financial exchange (Smith 2008), where purported financial return centres on increasing the building envelope of houses so as to ‘maximise’ the block of land (Wiesel et al. 2013). As Chapter 7 explores, these large homes are also bought and built to cater for the market that they will eventually sell to, rather than their own immediate needs.

But rather than remain critical of these houses from the outside—to appropriate an idiom, ‘judging a house by its façade’—this thesis enters large homes and explores their underlying motivations and ambivalences, at a time when these decisions are fresh in the minds of new inhabitants to a master-planned estate. This thesis shows how living the dream materially and financially come with tensions and stretched emotions. The reality is that circumstances that inform the Australian Dream (land availability, affordability, post-War population growth) have changed. Yet its legacies reverberate. Throughout this thesis, the stories of living and dwelling in a coastal MPE are captured are fed by such ideals. It is important, then, to account for their effects on dispositions and experiences of owner-occupation. In a modest way, the thesis seeks to fracture the Australian property dream, showing that the decisions made, and everyday lives in ‘ideal’ houses and locations, are always characterised by paradoxes (cf. Smith 2015), trade-offs and compromises, ambivalences and stretched
emotions. Homemaking is more complex, and exceeds control, more often than homeowners might expect.

1.4.2 The rise of master-planned estates

Master-planned estates (MPEs) are significant swathes of calculated urban space, a variety of urban built fabric stitched into the patchwork of contemporary Australian suburbs—and in some ways, a material consequence of both financialised rationalities and dreamy ideals. They are commonly defined based on common characteristics, as Cheshire et al. (2010, p. 359) explain:

- a comprehensive master plan accounting for all or most of the lived space within a development; a single developer or consortium responsible for delivering the plan;
- distinct physical boundaries; uniform design features and some sort of appeal to a communitarian ethic.

In a scoping audit of the extent of master-planned estates, McGuirk and Dowling (2007) identified at least 90 MPEs in the Sydney greater metropolitan region. This has not slowed: a quick sweep of new land estates in the same area in August 2017 found approximately 40 MPEs currently for sale, concentrated in the north-west and south-west growth corridors of Sydney’s current metropolitan plan (New South Wales Planning and Environment 2014). Depending on the size and scale of the project, which can range in size from a few dozen to a few thousand homes (McGuirk and Dowling 2007, p. 23), land releases are purchased by estate developers, or delivered in conjunction with government partnerships (McGuirk and Dowling 2009; Cheshire 2012). Larger projects, termed master-planned communities

---

(MPCs), can consist of populations of 20,000-30,000 people, and often come with a full suite of service provisions.

The growing presence and influence of MPEs in contemporary Australian suburbs has been met with sustained research attention in Australia in the last decade (see Gwyther 2005; Kenna 2007; 2010; Walters and Rosenblatt 2008; Cheshire et al. 2009; McGuirk and Dowling 2007; 2009; 2011; Thompson 2013), including in a 2010 special issue of Urban Policy and Research. In the editorial to this special issue, Cheshire et al. (2010, p. 361) suggest that their research appeal lies in ‘that the MPE in its present incarnation has become a fitting metaphor for social life in late modernity’. MPEs are oriented around marketed ideals of lifestyle, security and community (Cheshire et al. 2010; Dowling et al. 2010), which are exhibited materially in house designs adhering to a developer-led ‘code of pecuniary beauty’ (Gwyther 2005; Cheshire et al. 2009). Framed as such, Dowling et al. (2010) identify three themes to which research has attended, with an eye towards questioning the relevancy of these themes: privatisation (i.e. privatised modes of governance), privatism (i.e. a withdrawal of social interaction into enclaves, and into private homes), and middle class social distinction. While the first two themes were less straightforward, Dowling et al. (2010, p. 409) concluded that social distinction, ‘expressed in the symbolic and material properties of these residential environments’, was crucial to the appeal and uptake of MPEs. Indeed, in a housing market short on the supply of detached homes, MPEs are a setting to purchase new, large, detached homes, and express identity through household consumption (Cheshire et al. 2009). It is more likely that ‘community’, as a crucial referent underpinning MPEs, is expressed through material cohesion—‘co-presence’, rather than ‘co-operation’ (i.e. civic participation) (Walters and Rosenblatt 2008).

---

Chapter 1 - Introduction

MPEs are often spoken about with pejorative connotations in Australian suburbs—linked to their being collections of large project-built houses with shared design themes, as spaces of privilege and material responses to fear (Gleeson 2006; Atkinson 2006). This pre-empts particular referents for their character, and their effect on the urban fabric. MPEs are commonly paired with the same connotations as walled/gated communities. ‘Fortress’-style physically gated communities, predicated on sustaining socio-economic and ethnic divisions in the United States (see Blakely and Snyder 1997) and the United Kingdom (see Atkinson and Flint 2004), are less common in Australia (though see Kenna 2010). While MPEs may share similarities with gated communities, in Australia the context and character of MPEs has nuanced differences (see McGuirk and Dowling 2007). Lifestyle, rather than security, is the focus, and future realisation of accumulated property value the financial promise.

Accordingly, McGuirk and Dowling (2011) explain that MPEs—also referred to as Master Planned Residential Estates (MPREs)—are also a material response to Sydney’s booming housing market, where the terms of consumption and social reproduction have been financialised and ratcheted up to extremes. Residents are seeking to ‘secure’ their housing investment, in a setting where it is advantageous to do so:

Yet MPREs are also responses to new needs, demands and definitions of adequacy around social reproduction induced, in this case, by Sydney’s trajectory of unprecedented prosperity since the 1990s and its position as the most expensive housing market in Australia. The city’s wealth and escalating house prices have produced what some have interpreted as an embourgeoisment of the city’s residential spaces with ‘aspirational’ households demanding designed estates with lifestyle amenities as visible status signifiers (Gleeson, 2006). The turn to MPREs has been a development industry response to prospering householders’ desires to secure the value of their substantial investment by demanding amenity, services and design quality
uncharacteristic of prior development standards and certainly uncharacteristic of service levels produced in Sydney’s crisis of social reproduction (McGuirk and Dowling 2011, p. 2616).

This context of ‘unprecedented prosperity’ is central to the case study of the thesis: a new MPE in southern Sydney (see Section 2.2, Chapter 3).

This thesis makes two contributions to existing research on MPEs; driven in large part by McGuirk and Dowling’s (2007) suggested research framework. First, McGuirk and Dowling (2007, p. 34) suggest more research is required on ‘the nature of community and neighbourhood as lived and dynamic’, towards resisting a priori critiques of MPEs as sites of artificial constructions of community and lifestyle, civic disinterest, and placeless design (Farrelly 2008; Gleeson 2006). This has found purchase in various elements of everyday living in MPEs: in ageing (Walters and Bartlett 2009), childhoods (Shearer and Walters 2015), health and exercise (Maller et al. 2016), and transport and commuting (Nicholls et al. 2017). In studying one master-planned estate over the course of a PhD candidature, I have been able to chronicle the site from empty lots and early construction, to near-completion.

This thesis takes a temporal perspective on place, and seeks to account for the fluidities and fixities of residents’ houses, attitudes and routines in one master-planned estate, while it was being built. This space and openness accorded different lines of inquiry than anticipated. Chapter 5 explores the MPE as a construction site, and closer attention to the motivations and drivers behind moving in at the outset of these developments—when it is quite uncomfortable to do so. The intermixing of MPE aesthetic standards and calculative conditions of financialisation combine in Chapter 7, when I explore the emotional performances and socio-material expression in newly built homes.

---

8 This approach was also taken by two long-term ethnographies of new suburbs in Melbourne: Lyn Richards’ Nobody’s Home (1990), and Mark Peel’s Good Times, Hard Times (1995).
Second, McGuirk and Dowling (2007, p. 35) call for research investigating the MPE phenomenon in ‘distinct and unique Australian conditions’. The burgeoning implementation of MPEs in rural and coastal ‘greenfield’ locations, which is still possible in an Australian context, is worthy of research attention. I focus on MPEs in coastal places. Their consistent mode of delivery and suburban form invokes both a clash of cultures and resistance to development (NIMBYism), and dilemmas in the ways in which new residents make sense of their new domestic surroundings. Chapter 4 considers some of the dilemmas surrounding consistent representation for MPEs in coastal locations, and Chapter 6 examines the lived experiences of homemaking in a coastal MPE, and some of the ironies of ‘themed’ project homes and their integration into the surrounding coastal environment.

Both contributions illustrate the importance of financialised social distinction for the appeal of MPEs: MPEs shore up housing as an asset and investment in a regulated environment, which is taken to heightened levels in a coastal setting. It is to the appeal of coastal housing in Australia that I now turn.

1.4.3 Housing and coastlines

Not only is the Australian dream to own a home, but ideally to own one near the coast. Some 85 percent of Australia’s population live within 50 kilometres of the coast (Department of Climate Change 2009, p. 14). This trend is a legacy of colonialization and the (primarily) coastal location of Australia’s capital cities, the settlement of people around port towns linked to industry, and favourable climate conditions to the relative unfavourable conditions of the inland (e.g. limited water supply). The price premium of the coastal environment makes coastal housing highly lucrative. But this was not always the case; as historian Graeme Davison (2016, p. 3) indicates, ‘for much of our history the coastal cities were, in a real sense, a terra incognita, as unknown and as uncultivated as the “empty” inland’. Coastlines were once the preferred location for urban vagaries that needed to be out of sight and mind,
such as prisons (at La Perouse in Sydney), refineries and landfill sites (Botany and Kurnell) and sewage outfalls (Bondi) (Ford 2015; Hoskins 2013). Permanent settlement on the coastline has been a gradual shift, spurred largely by improved access to transport infrastructure, private car ownership, and an increasing prioritisation of lifestyle (Hoskins 2013). Australia’s coastline and beaches became a key site for national identity: surfing, swimming, tanned and bronzed bodies cultivating in a globally identifiable Australian beach culture, which reached gained eminence as part of surfing cultures in the post-war boom (Booth 2001; Metusela and Waitt 2012; Ford 2015).

Depending on context, the connotations of a coastal home exist in two forms. First, a coastal home is seen as a successful endpoint of housing tenure, entwined in rhetoric of making a ‘sea change’: a lifestyle-led downsizing of housing choice that commonly coincides with retirement (Burnley and Murphy 2004; Gurran and Blakely 2007). The sea change is associated with a certain housing vernacular: the ‘fibro shack’ (Shaw and Menday 2013). But the retirement and lifestyle-led ‘sea change’ does not tell the whole story of permanent coastal settlement away from Australia’s major capital cities. Chapter 4 takes up these concerns in further detail, outlining master-planned estates as a driver of suburbanisation on the New South Wales coastline. Coastal in-migration away from CBDs can also be a more economically pragmatic decision, particularly for families that are seeking large, detached, family-oriented housing.

Second, cultures of the beach also blur with city life—particularly in Sydney (Fiske et al. 1987; Ford 2015). As Fiske et al. (1987, p. 57) point out the Australian beaches that have international celebrity status (Bondi, Manly, Surfers Paradise) are all city beaches in cosmopolitan capital cities. The housing forms that take shape in cities are a world away from ‘fibro shacks’—much to the disdain of Farrelly (2008, p. 100):
Gone are the modest materials, the fibro, corrugated iron and weatherboard of gentler times. Even the humble beach-shack is all but extinct, aggressively out-maneuvred along our coastlines by vast, budget-bloated, glass-eyed dune-toppers, dimpled elbows jostling for the view.

Housing juxtaposed with urban natures, such as coastlines, have a price premium and underlying architectural logics (Cook et al. 2016, p. 5). In taking advantage of this price premium, the coastal environment is selectively incorporated into the design and appeal of new, large, modern homes—such as those in MPEs.

There is also a sense of urgency that brings my focus to the coast, and to coastal housing. With respect to climate futures in Australia, coastal environments are pivotal sites of analysis—active, ever changing natural systems simultaneously supporting extractive industries, tourism, and large-scale residential settlements. Residential movement to the coast in Australia shows no sign of slowing, compelling further scrutiny of the everyday, material groundedness of living by the coast. Indeed, coastal communities are in a position of imminent—and current—threat from inundation and increased storm activity (Department of Climate Change 2009; McInnes et al. 2016). A paradoxical relationship is growing between coastal housing as a ‘safe’ investment in terms of housing price, but a risky option in light of forecasted sea level rise and the anticipated effects of Anthropogenic climate change.

The coastal context here is therefore more than mere context: the infusion of the coast changes conventional theories of urbanisation, and challenges pre-given assumptions of modern coastal housing as a phenomenon. Studies of coastal settlement tend towards demographic studies, in trying to account for trends and drivers of in-migration and out-migration (see Burnley and Murphy 2004; Gurran et al. 2005). While research has debated why people move to and from the coastal fringe, less attention has been paid to what happens
when people live there: what happens in everyday, grounded, material encounters with place. This thesis takes up a particular angle on coastal housing, in looking at MPEs and the lived experiences of coastal homes and households there. As MPEs gain popularity as a means of housing sprawling coastal populations, it is timely to consider how development beside the coast is built, and how the built environment in turn informs what ‘living on the coast’ means. In the coastal MPE, homes, materials, money, sand and salt spray come together in distinctive ways.

1.5 Thesis Design, and Introducing the Research Papers

The format of the thesis, as mentioned at the outset of this chapter, is a PhD by compilation. Chapter 2 details the methodology of the thesis. Each results chapter has its own methods section within an academic journal article format; meanwhile this methodology chapter provides an overarching account of the method and methodology for the project. This overarching account seeks to personalise the project—focusing particularly on the research design, and its pitfalls and successes. This is the kind of reflection stifled in a journal article format, but which was essential to the development of the thesis and the future reproducibility of the study.

Chapter 3 proceeds in the same vein: a chapter providing immersion in the place at the heart of this thesis. Drawing upon a number of data sources, Chapter 3 details a historical account of the case study, Greenhills Beach, located on the Kurnell Peninsula in Cronulla, New South Wales, Australia. This chapter seeks to deepen the context of the thesis, accounting for its quirky status as both a post-industrial (‘brownfield’) and a prestigious coastal (‘greenfield’) housing location, by exploring core associations with the site that are important to understanding this place. The story told is corralled around a theme of ‘extraction’: from a
tertiary dune vegetation succession, to an expansive set of sandhills, to a lucrative housing development.

The thesis results are then spread across four chapters (Chapters 4-7), which are presented in the format of academic journal articles. Each independent chapter is either published, or currently under review (see pp. iv-v for details), and extends a specific line of inquiry. The papers are ordered chronologically, and in so doing, they mirror the unfurling advertising, building and inhabiting of the estate itself. Each chapter represents a specific point of inquiry, but contributes to the overarching thesis research objectives. Household experiences are traced from the development imaginary, to the selection process, to building, to everyday life in their new home, to considering selling the home and its future exchange value. Each results chapter is prefaced by a short ‘linking statement’, which help stitch together the thesis narrative, and ground each specific line of inquiry in the overall thesis aims.

Chapter 4 is derived from a scoping study of coastal master-planned estates along the New South Wales coastline, between September 2013 and January 2014. The paper presents a discourse analysis of advertising materials collected from 21 different sites undergoing land sales and house construction. By examining real estate advertising as representation, this chapter, then, addresses the beginning of the housing journey—the key influence of marketing materials in how housing choices are informed, influenced, and made. Chapter 4 explores the wider implications of how these advertisements represent coastal places, coastal nature, and the practices of everyday life there. By contending with the temporality of advertising and sales as integral to the ‘throwntogetherness’ of place (Massey 2005), this chapter considers how representation supports and contradicts consequences of coastal place change.
Chapter 5 is the first of three chapters derived from fieldwork at Greenhills Beach, and primarily, interviews with Greenhills Beach residents. This chapter explores the building site as a temporal space currently understudied in accounts of housing and homemaking, towards highlighting the impact of this timing on residents’ homemaking practices and early socialisation. The chapter also shows that in moving in early during construction makes the building site a setting of financial speculation—where residents are taking a calculated risk on projected financial gain.

Chapter 6 explores the everyday negotiation of homemaking and coastal environments, by conceiving homemaking as a more-than-human endeavour. The chapter examines how houses in coastal places are composed and sustained, through close attention to materials, homemaking practices, and more-than-human encounters. Maintenance comes with added pace by the coast; elements and conditions (salt-laden winds, water and sand, and increased storm activity) have an acute impact on buildings and structures, accelerating material decay. Moments of everyday interaction and everyday decision-making unveil a tension that underlies the expression of housing as ‘coastal’, and the function of a house to persist in a coastal environment. In keeping with the temporal progression of home, this chapter documents the ongoing relationship between houses, nonhumans, materials and their occupants in practice.

Chapter 7 seeks to contribute to recent shifts in material geographies of home that view the home as a financial asset and instrument. Chapter 7 directly addresses this financialised scripting of home, investigating emotional performances and accompanying socio-material expressions underwriting the figure of what I term an ‘investor-occupier’ subject. Master-planned estates are implicit in this financialisation. In this case, Greenhills Beach has become an elite setting for housing as an investment and asset vehicle, which made their value, and their potential future sale value, a priority for residents. I capture sentiments of sale as a way
to consider the future of these houses. In discussing investment, and considering sale, this chapter brings the thesis narrative full circle—to the exchange of housing.

Taken together, these four research chapters present a collective inspection into the figure of the modern owner-occupier. The ‘Australian dream’ is a ‘settled’ configuration of objects, people, nonhuman nature, technologies, finance, and politics. I interrogate this by exploring how dwelling proceeds, materially and emotionally, in a hyper-calculated coastal MPE that on the surface appears the ultimate Australian dream.

The concluding chapter, Chapter 8, summarises the narrative, combines the future research directions offered in each chapter, and points to implications of the thesis findings within and outside academic circles.
Chapter 2 - Methodology

2 Methodology

In seeing knowledge, practice, and its material outcomes as relational, fixed categories lack purchase and fall under scrutiny. This brings attention to the micro, to the banal, to the settings and scenes where everyday meaning-making occurs and is produced, reproduced, and (sometimes) revised. Enacting such a ‘more-than-representational’ standpoint in research methodologies involves ‘busy, empirical commitments to doings near-at-hand, in ordinary and professional settings, and through material encounters’ (Lorimer 2005, p. 84). It is the banal, everyday ‘busyness’ that takes to the researcher’s spotlight: phenomena that ‘may seem remarkable only by their apparent insignificance’ (Lorimer 2005, p. 84, emphasis in original).

The methodology for this project was qualitative, primarily employing an interview-based method to get to know the homes, their inhabitants, and the processes they went through together. I wanted to understand how people make home, and did so by working through the build process in a MPE—to attend to materials, relations and more-than-human encounters, to employ a temporal approach to place as throwntogetherness (Massey 2005), and to move beyond a priori critiques of MPEs. Reflecting a material focus on home and homemaking, these interviews took place in the homes of residents, and were conducted during the construction of the estate, and during initial, unfinished, inhabitation of their own homes. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 29 households at Greenhills Beach, Cronulla, and their responses form the bulk of fieldwork data for the thesis.

Other supplementary methods were employed, where appropriate, to meet the research aims. In addressing discourse and representation, real estate advertising, collected during case study
Chapter 2 - Methodology

selection along the New South Wales coastline, was analysed and is discussed in Chapter 4 (see Section 2.1.1). Honing a place-based understanding of everyday lives in MPEs was supplemented by my own walking around the site, and photographs and field notes taken during these walks. Additionally, one interview was conducted with a representative of the development company of Greenhills Beach, Australand⁹, which helps inform the case study chapter (Chapter 3).

This chapter has two objectives. First, this chapter presents the overarching methodology of the thesis. Second, it reflects upon the research dilemmas encountered across the project, which are not detailed in the individual chapters as papers. It is just as important to talk about what went wrong as well as what went right; what didn’t occur as well as what did. This chapter corrals around discussing the logistical challenges of conducting research in a new master-planned estate as it was being built. The structure of this chapter follows the chronological development of the thesis and its directions. Section 2.1 begins with a discussion of case study selection as the project aims developed and changed. Section 2.2 explains the conceptual impetus of semi-structured interviews as a method for the project, and highlights three important factors in how they occurred: recruitment, conducting interviews, and some elements proposed but left out. Section 2.3 details the interview with the developer representative. Following some reflections on data analysis, coding, and anonymity (Section 2.4), the chapter concludes with a brief reflection on the methodology of the study.

2.1 Selecting the Case Study

The methodological approach centred on a case study, to ground how these places take shape, how homes are inhabited, and the processes that comprise them. Case study selection began

⁹ During this research project Australand has changed its operating name to Frasers Property, but will be referred to as Australand in the thesis for consistency.
at the end of 2013 as an Australia-wide Internet search looking for house and land packages currently on sale\(^\text{10}\). National real estate websites were the first port of call\(^\text{11}\), which would help point to prominent developers and individual MPEs. This initial search also analysed newspaper archives, using the *Proquest ANZ Newsstand* database, to help identify sites which were particularly newsworthy\(^\text{12}\).

The project initially aimed to explore coastal housing as part of ‘sea change’ lifestyle migration (Section 1.4.3). As such, case study selection prioritised high growth regions along Australia’s coastlines. Following guidance from Burnley and Murphy (2004) and Gurran and Blakely (2007), the project was drawn to the New South Wales coastline and sites of ‘sea change’ migration: in particular, the Tweed Shire on the New South Wales–Queensland border. My intention was to visit, in order to understand how these MPEs took shape in changing coastal places. In January 2014, I conducted a one week drive scouting study sites along the A1/M1 highway, a 900 kilometre stretch from Wollongong to the New South Wales–Queensland border. Some 15 sites were visited; each visit involved a walk around the streetscape, where I took notes and photographs. Where possible, this included a visit to the sales centre to collect brochures and marketing material. I also spent time in the wider contexts of the MPEs, visiting nearby towns and checking real estate advertisements for anything I hadn’t canvassed.

\(^{10}\) As a short aside, the rapid residential expansion surrounding Perth, Western Australia had initially piqued my interest, but was quickly ruled out due to practical logistics (i.e. travel, research budgets). That context is something that could be taken up for a parallel research project.


\(^{12}\) This newspaper database search was conducted using a trial and error combination of search terms: ‘estate’, ‘master-planned estate’, ‘coast’, ‘beach’, ‘for sale’. State and National syndicated newspapers were particularly targeted (i.e. *The Australian*, *Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Daily Telegraph*). Results were confined to the years 2003-2013, and helped highlight some MPEs as a possible research focus.
Chapter 2 - Methodology

This trip was useful to gauge an understanding of the broad character of developments, but I was not convinced that any sites captured any unique lens on the problem. Field notes and photographs taken, and the promotional ephemera collected, form the empirical basis for Chapter 4. In it, I conduct a discourse analysis of this marketing material, considering how the narratives and images portrayed both represented and contradicted the consequences of this coastal suburbanisation.

2.1.1 Discourse Analysis of Real Estate Advertisements

Scouting possible study sites doubled as an opportunity to analyse real estate discourse. Nineteen MPEs were visited, and advertisements were collected at each site either as photographs (of roadside billboards, signs, and screens) or as physical brochures. A total of 76 real estate advertisements were analysed across the nineteen estates. Table 4.2 provides specific details on the advertisements collected. The process of selecting real estate advertisements was determined by their prominence in the landscape (i.e. as roadside billboards and signs) and in the case of print advertisements, their availability at sales offices. I visited nine on-site sales offices; sales offices for the other estates were either closed temporarily during the time and/or date of my visit, or had closed permanently following land sales. This magpie-like approach adheres to Massey’s (2005) conceptualisation of place as event; only those advertisements visible or available in the ‘here-and-now’ of the visits were photographed and collected.

The content analysis was conducted manually, guided by principles of a Foucauldian discourse analysis (see Waitt 2008; Dittmer 2010). Accordingly, the discourse analysis examined how the images and text of real estate advertising circulates a dominant ‘way of seeing’ (cf. Waitt 2008) suburbanised coastal living, and the position that this affords to coastal nature. Coding thus targeted how coastal nature was entwined within everyday life.
and prominent ‘lifestyle’ activities. First, the text and images were coded for common tropes of living in MPEs: namely ‘lifestyle’ and ‘community’ rhetoric (see Kenna 2007; Opit and Kearns 2014). The second theme analysed the representation of ‘coastal’, ‘natural’ lifestyles, encapsulating both the positioning and activities of humans within coastal nature, and the framing and portrayal of coastal nature in absence of humans. Coding of photographed advertisements focussed on the tagline and primary image. Coding of the nine hardcopy brochures—which ranged from two to 24 pages in length—focussed on textual description.

The discourse analysis is presented as Chapter 4, and examines the placemaking role of real estate advertising in the ‘throwntogetherness’ (Massey 2005) of modern suburbanising coastlines: blending coastal places, coastal nature, and new housing developments. Adhering to the principles of Foucauldian discourse analysis—that discourse creates subjects—the results chapters that follow seek to demonstrate how real estate discourse is performed: by institutions (i.e. the developer, project home companies) and in social relations, by ‘new coastal resident’ subjects.

2.1.2 Case Study: Greenhills Beach, Cronulla

I still needed a case study for a deeper, ethnographic phase. During this period looking for case studies I had been looking at local MPEs within 100 kilometres of Wollongong. One of these sites was particularly exciting, and the ethnographic focus of the project turned here: Greenhills Beach, a master-planned estate located in Cronulla, New South Wales. Selecting this case study became core to the trajectory of the thesis. In choosing a case study in the suburbs of southern Sydney, the aims of the project changed—from one focused on lifestyle migration to one that was dealing with a prestigious, elite housing context.

Greenhills Beach is a 236 lot, 33 hectare development located on the outskirts of Cronulla, southern Sydney (Figure 2.1). Greenhills Beach made a compelling case to be the site
selected for study, centred on two factors. First was its relationship with, and placement within, the surrounding coastal environment. The site is located in the Sutherland Shire Local Government Area, close to Kurnell (the site of Captain Cook’s landing place), the Cronulla sand dunes, Greenhills/Wanda beaches and surf culture, and its proximity to central Sydney (see Figure 3.1). Each of these locational elements will be examined in Chapter 3.

Second, choosing Greenhills Beach was based on timing. When I first visited the site in 2013, it was a brand new development: conducting land sales, and under construction. The site underwent a staged rollout of house construction for the entire fieldwork period, which allowed for a different register of appreciation for the imagined formation of housing practices and cultures, and the material expression of investments in new homes. The population doubled during fieldwork: from approximately 70 completed houses to 137 houses at the end of fieldwork in December 2015. Pragmatically the site was also chosen based on convenience: approximately an hour from Wollongong and accessible by train and car. This ease of access was central to being able to conduct a fine-grained, time-lapse analysis of one estate.

The following chapter will elaborate on the site history, underlying motivations, and context of Greenhills Beach.
2.2 Semi-structured interviews with Greenhills Beach residents

Notwithstanding purportedly ‘abstract’ theoretical impulses in current human geography, the conventional semi-structured interview remains central to the qualitative toolkit. Semi-structured interviewing is a ‘staple’, ‘backbone’ method of qualitative research (Davies and Dwyer 2007); DeLyser and Sui (2014) refer to interviewing as a methodology that ‘endures’. The semi-structured interview invites a conversational style, with a set of flexible questions (Dunn 2010). As such, the interview remains open to individual experiences, contingencies, and chance.
Relational ontologies directed how interviews were designed and conducted. As Dowling et al. (2017, p. 824) attest: ‘recognizing and acknowledging multiple more-than-human agencies challenges researchers to do geography differently—to perform, to engage, to embody, to image and imagine, to witness, to sense, to analyse—across, through, with and as, more-than-humans’. In engaging, embodying, and witnessing, interviews were augmented with a walking ‘tour’ element. Walking in the home environment asks interviewees to ‘show-and-tell’, consequently paying closer attention to the role of individual objects in homemaking (Tolia-Kelly 2004; Gregson 2007); to seemingly banal practices of homemaking that inform domestic identities (Shove 2003; Pink 2004; Gorman-Murray 2008); to logics underlying the design, use, and management of houses and buildings (Dowling 2008; Strebel 2011; Jacobs et al. 2012; Cook et al. 2013); and heeding the contributions of more-than-human actors and actions at home (Hitchings 2003; 2004; Power 2009a; Ginn 2014; Gillon 2014). ‘Talking whilst walking’—‘the embodied art of walking through particular co-ingredient environments for recollection’ (Anderson 2004, p. 259)—enrols the environment as a prompt for the participant, allowing the researcher access to memories and knowledge that would be ‘unseeable’ in a sedentary interview (Evans and Jones 2011). Similarly, Waitt et al. (2009) attribute habitual walking as a boundary-making, territorialising practice, where walking and talking with participants can reveal how people understand place, and where ‘suburban nature-talk’ can reveal regimes of belonging.

In asking participants about their attitudes towards domestic space, and the practices that shape them, in the places that they take shape, the interviewer can become attuned to varying levels of place engagement. For instance through walking interviews Head and Muir (2006) identified a spectrum of categories, from non-gardeners to avid gardeners, based on how residents discussed and showed gardening expertise. In the same sense, focussing on maintenance and repair invites participants to talk about how they manage domestic space,
which brings attention to dis/engagements with house materials, and latent skills of homemaking (Cox 2016; Carr and Gibson 2016). For the interviewer, inviting the participant to lead the walk allows an insight into how domestic space is used and comprised: ‘knowing by showing’ (Pitt 2015, p. 50).

The interview schedule incorporated a revisit interview. Interviewing people about everyday practices lends itself to a ‘serial’ approach, helping ‘respondents work through the reasons behind certain everyday actions and… [helping] researchers identify effective lines of further questioning’ (Hitchings 2012, p. 66). As such, a revisit allows time for reflection for both parties. The focus of the revisit was to form organically after coding the first interviews, as a way to respond to initial findings, and develop informed new lines of questioning.

The University of Wollongong Human Research Ethics Committee approved this research design in March 2014 as HE14/080. The following three subsections describe how these interviews took place during fieldwork: highlighting recruitment methods; how the interviews were conducted; and other methods with residents to augment interviews, which were proposed but not used in the project.

2.2.1 Recruitment

The recruitment period extended over 20 months, from March 2014 until November 2015, and overlapped with the interviewing schedule. The only rationale for participation was being a Greenhills Beach resident. It was very challenging to recruit in an under construction, unfinished MPE. Indeed, recruitment was one of the more difficult hurdles to overcome for this project. I began recruiting using letterbox drops, conducted between April and November 2014. Letterbox drops were decided upon as the initial approach method as it had been a successful strategy in my Honours project, also conducted in a master-planned estate (see Gillon 2012; 2014). In that study, letterbox drops served as a relatively inexpensive mode of
Chapter 2 - Methodology

introduction, and following two or three interviews residents helped recruit their neighbours. Consequently snowballing was the dominant recruitment source. For this project I conducted a series of letterbox drops, each time revising the script and the design of the flyer (see Appendix A). Despite my efforts and frequent visits, this technique recruited only one household. In hindsight these visits helped me to develop an understanding of Greenhills Beach as a place, and brought the presence of building and construction to the fore, an observation that became key to the research (see Chapter 5). Nevertheless, letterbox drops failed as a recruitment strategy.

Other recruitment methods were employed simultaneously. A colleague knew a family living there; this personal social network recruited another household. I had also put together a media release, which was picked up and published in the weekly local newspaper The St George and Sutherland Shire Leader on 17th June, 2014 (Trembath 2014). This newspaper article recruited one participant. Due to its newness, the paper was not delivered to Greenhills Beach households at the time, but newspapers were available in the nearby shopping centre at Cronulla.

Just as momentum was building around recruitment, I broke my ankle in July 2014. This necessarily delayed recruitment and fieldwork (Box 2.1). I returned in November 2014 and recruited one final participant while doing letterbox drops. This recruitment was different though—it had occurred organically, talking with a resident while they were outside gardening. It was becoming clear that letterbox drops were not working. Flyers were too distant, too impersonal, too easy to get lost and to be ignored. It was clear, especially for the type of research I wanted to do, that a personal touch was required for recruitment.
Box 2.1 On a ‘break’

My broken ankle was initially a major disruption. It certain put a halt on walking interviews for a while! In hindsight, this forced absence from the field ended up being serendipitous, and necessarily made me rethink the timing of the fieldwork. Interviewing didn’t have to be this one defined segment of the PhD candidature, but rather something that would—necessarily—take place over a longer time period. Staggering the fieldwork schedule captured participants at different stages of their own housing journeys, and also allowed access to households in different land release stages. This ‘break’ made me more attentive to the temporalities of place.

The strategy for recruitment necessarily became more direct. Rather than stopping at the letterbox, I started doorknocking as a recruitment method. There were three doorknocking walks: two in February 2015, and one in November 2015. In February 2015, development of Greenhills Beach had progressed to 128 completed homes. I knocked on each door over the course of two days, talking directly to approximately 40 households. The success rate was surprisingly high: eleven households agreed to participate. The intention behind staggering the second doorknock was to targeted houses that weren’t yet built in February, and recruited the final five households.

Doorknocking was something I initially approached with considerable trepidation. As Davies (2011) explains, doorknocking forces you to have to continually vouch for your project. This meant workshopping the dreaded ‘elevator pitch’. I approached residents with a brief, three sentence introduction:

    Hi, my name is Charlie and I’m a researcher from the University of Wollongong. I’m interesting in interviewing Greenhills Beach residents about their homes, general
impressions of the suburb, and the coastal environment. I was wondering if you had about half an hour in the next couple of weeks to be involved?

If I wasn’t dismissed at the outset, this introduction usually sparked a series of interested follow-up questions from the resident. Over time and with practice, I became more comfortable with this approach. I could predict and prepare for follow-up questions: whether it was on quickly explaining the research project, aims, or the conditions of involvement. This direct recruitment style was liked by participants. Seeing that I had ‘gone to the effort’, as one participant put it, contributed to residents wanting to help out. Direct contact was also crucial to confirm a date and time for an interview on the spot, rather than people agreeing and then never taking part. Residents who expressed interest would put their name, address, and contact details on a sign-up sheet for me to follow up. Residents were given two contact options to contact me: a phone number devoted to fieldwork, and my University email address.

Doorknocking has a negative stigma, associated with the nuisance presences of door-to-door salespersons or religious group representatives. Logistically it was crucial that potential participants quickly identified me as a University of Wollongong (UOW) researcher. I overtly presented myself as someone from the University with a UOW branded shirt and clipboard. This context as a student and as a ‘local’ (relatively speaking) worked in my favour. One alumnus remarked he was always happy to help out a fellow UOW student, while other households would talk about how their children had gone to the University, or were planning to in the future. This familiarity helped to ease the doorknocking process.

There were further logistical considerations: namely on the time of day to conduct doorknocking trips. I made the decision to confine doorknocking to weekday business hours, with the rationale that those who answered the door were more likely to have time to be
involved. Conversely, as I only doorknocked during the day, it meant that household members were not always home to respond to these cold calls. While going outside of work hours and knocking on doors may have reached the remaining households, it also risked burning bridges. There is a tentative balance between being assertive and becoming annoying, especially in a bounded case study with a constricted sample size. I decided to err on the side of caution.

There are added benefits to doorknocking recruitment for researchers—particularly in a project closely concerned with relations, materials, and place change. As Davies (2011, p. 298) explains, doorknocking adds depth to the researcher’s understanding and awareness of their study site:

…pounding the pavements around where one’s interviewees live is a multi-sensory, embodied experience that can alert the researcher to nuanced differences between adjacent streets and provide the opportunity for a more ethnographic understanding of the spaces and places occupied by participants, creating new meanings of place for the door knocking researcher.

In my case, doorknocking forced me to get up close and personal with houses and the people in them. I began noticing nuances in house and façade design from knocking on doors, as well as other different quirks: garden design, how garages were used, different doorbells, entry cameras, and excitable pets.

Research recruitment was also central to researcher transparency. Doorknocking meant I spent a lot of time walking around Greenhills Beach. I deliberately wanted to be recognisable. There were simple strategies underwriting this (see Box 2.2). Further, while the letterbox drops may have underperformed as a recruitment method, they were not in vain. While talking to residents, face to face, a few mentioned they had seen the flyers and had considered
being involved, but not acted upon them at the time, having been wrapped up in the moment of moving in to their new homes. The addition of a photograph to the flyer (Appendix A) made my face recognisable, and made me less of a stranger to residents I encountered.

Box 2.2 On being seen

Master-planned estates are designed deliberately to keep non-residents out. This can be designed to extremes: most obviously, by gating the community (for a case study, see Kenna 2010). Nuances in the design of streetscapes also ‘design out’ outsiders, presenting several logistical dilemmas for a researcher. First, public parking is not readily available, implying that people either live here, or are visiting someone who does. So, where do I park my car? Do I park in the driveway of the participant? Do I park on the street verge? I usually parked in the nearby carpark at the beach, a short walk away. The same dilemmas went for estate facilities. Greenhills Beach has a duck pond with a picnic area. Can I walk here? Can I eat my lunch here? Can I be here, at this time? I initially felt uncomfortable overtly performing a researcher identity, walking around streets with a clipboard, wearing a camera around my neck. To overcome such ambiguities, I decided to stick out like a sore thumb. My choice of clothing was always consistent, and as mentioned, highlighted my researcher-presence. Being headstrong while walking around the estate helped my own comfort in place as a researcher—and the confidence that came from this directly fed into recruitment.

Reflecting on recruitment, doorknocking was highly successful, and a manageable strategy for one researcher in a case study of this size. This helped to target a small sample size in a direct manner. While recruiting during the early stages of an MPE may be interesting from a research standpoint, it also limited each recruitment strategy: there were only so many letterboxes in which to put a flyer, and only so many doors that I could knock on. The longer recruitment period, brought about in part by my ankle fracture, meant that each time I visited Greenhills there was an increased sample size. Further, early bonds between residents were
not yet formed, which meant snowballing could not be an effective recruitment strategy at this time.\footnote{But there were positives to the lack of snowballing in recruitment. It helped increase confidentiality in a bounded study site, as participants had not been referred to me, making it more likely that residents would be less aware of which of their neighbours had taken place in the study.}

Research design had forecast a minimum of 20 households to participate in the walking interviews, with the expectation this number will halve when I ask for additional research input. This turned out to be the case. I interviewed 21 households, which at the time I completed fieldwork represented 16 percent of the sample (21 of 134 homes at November 2015). I returned to 8 of these households for a revisit interview.

\subsection*{2.2.2 Conducting Interviews}

I conducted 21 initial interviews with Greenhills Beach households (24 participants). These interviews were conducted in three phases, determined by recruitment failures and successes, my ankle fracture, and the overall momentum of the project: June-November 2014 (5 interviews), February-April 2015 (11), and November-December 2015 (5).

Regarding informed consent, the study utilised a combination of a Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form. Both documents were given to each participant preceding the interview. The Participant Information Sheet (Appendix B) provided a broad outline of what the research is about, the sorts of issues that will be explored in the interview, and how responses would be used. The Participant Information Sheet also set clear expectations of the participant’s role in the project. Contact details of the researcher, supervisors and the University Ethics Officer were provided on the Participant Information Sheet. I sat with the participant while they read the Participant Information Sheet to provide further clarification, and to answer any questions or concerns. Once read, and the participant verbalised their understanding of the terms of their involvement, I provided the participant with a Consent
Chapter 2 - Methodology

Form (Appendix C). The Consent Form detailed the terms of involvement, and allowed participants to opt in or out of certain stages of the study, and/or forms of data collected (for instance, taking photos that included them). Once signed, informed consent was formalised and present as a written record, making it easily accessible for further consultation. The Consent Form also established that participants could withdraw their consent at any time, with no repercussions. No participants withdrew their consent from this project.

The logistics of each interview centred on two elements. Household members were first interviewed in their homes, using a prepared interview schedule (Appendix D). Directed by the research focus on materials, homemaking, and place change, the interview schedule was grouped into three broad themes: life in a master-planned estate; the production and lived experience of homes and gardens; and attitudes and values towards the coastal environment. In a semi-structured format, the flow and direction of the interview was left open and conversational, determined by the interests and experiences of the participant (Dunn 2010; Davies and Dwyer 2007). Some questions were taken up with gusto, others were glossed over. Inside the home, the setting of the interview was also left up to the participant. This commonly occurred at the dining table of an open-plan living space—a useful vantage point to discuss overall house design (Figure 2.2).
The second element followed the completion of the prepared set of questions. Interviewees were invited to ‘show me their home’ (cf. Jacobs et al. 2012; Ginn 2014), focusing on exterior elements of their houses: the front and back yards and the house façade (Figure 2.3). This ‘narrated home tour’ (Dowling 2008) was conducted without prepared questions, allowing the setting to prompt questioning and direct the remainder of the interview. I would ask for explanation on house fixtures and finishes, and question the placement of these things—in effect, ‘knowing by showing’ (cf. Pitt 2015). The discussions stimulated in yards and looking at façades revealed the process of designing and building a project home, the choices involved in their material expression, and how they negotiated design guidelines. Walking around these places, I began becoming quite familiar with the shared similarities of their design, and could begin to anticipate how things would look, and how spaces would be utilised. These overarching similarities made any differences all the more apparent.
Figure 2.3 Walking around with participants in their gardens, using these lived locations as visual prompts for discussion, and understanding their design through ‘knowing by showing’ (cf. Pitt 2015) (February 2015).
Walks also drew attention to practices, how much people knew about their houses and gardens, and their dis/involvement and dis/engagement with homemaking. As I was interviewing people while their homes were being ‘completed’, the decisions, and the rationales behind these decisions, were fresh in the mind of residents, and on show materially. Residents were self-conscious about the progress of their homes, some ‘projects’ yet to be completed (Figure 2.4; see Chapter 7), and/or their routine homemaking practices (particularly, the condition of their lawn on the day of the interview). In showing me around they showed different levels of skill, expertise, and interest in their house as a process: in identifying plant types; discussing the work that went into creating this space; or deflecting questions about specific plant types and house materials, ceding that landscapers or contract builders had done this work. While walking around with participants, I took photos when something was particularly interesting, or to help contextualise a particular house feature or interview moment, aiding my recollection of stories and settings. Following the walk, interviewees were invited to ‘wrap up’ by reflecting on what they had discussed, and what they had shown me. Interviews ranged between 30 and 90 minutes in length.

All participants agreed to a revisit interview after the first interview, but as anticipated, there was participant drop-off. I returned to the eight households approximately 6-12 months after the initial interview. The revisit interviews took place inside residents’ houses. The focus of the revisit interview was temporal change: to their homes (Figure 2.4), to their attitudes towards Greenhills Beach, while also gaining a perspective on how the estate has changed over time. A line of questioning was also added exploring attitudes surrounding investment, as financial considerations of homemaking became a more central theme to the thesis overall. The duration of revisits was shorter, ranging between 20 and 40 minutes.
Figure 2.4 Interviews captured houses in various stages of progress. When I revisited this resident a year later, their backyard ‘project’ had been completed—and the house behind them, which was being built at the time, was ‘complete’ (December 2014; December 2015).
2.2.3 Additions/inflections left out

There were two elements I had proposed to add to the interview schedule, to try and bridge the perceived inadequacies of interviewing people about their practices (see Hitchings 2012), tapping into different registers of knowledge, and modes of interacting with the surrounding coastal environment. First, I intended that following the completion of interview questions and a house tour, the interview location would transition into an optional resident-led walk to the beach. I expected that this would take us to one of two locations: either the beach at Greenhills, or the Cronulla sand dunes (see Figure 3.1 below). The aim of this walk was to place participants within the beach environment, so I could see participants interact with the environment and see if this sparked discussion. These ‘fresh’ beach experiences would subsequently allow further inquiry into how the coastal environment enters the household.

Five of the early interviews incorporated a ‘beach walk’. The route of this walk was guided by the participant, ending at the beach, where they were asked to reflect on their feelings and dispositions towards the coastal environment.

This beach walk element dropped out of the interview schedule for two reasons. First, residents were not always willing or able to participate. While the beach was only approximately 5-10 minutes away, the walks added a significant amount of time to the interview—approximately half an hour—which some residents did not have available on the day. Also, as recruitment progressed I found myself talking more to parents at home with young children, who couldn’t interrupt naps and childminding for a walk. The second reason came from hindsight. After conducting ‘beach walks’ with the first participants, I was not convinced on their purpose. While it brought us both to the beach, residents often seemed perplexed by the connections I was trying to make, as they treated the beach and their homes as separate places with separate ideals. As such, it didn’t seem worthwhile to continue.
Chapter 2 - Methodology

A second addition proposed in the research design was a photo-diary element (see Latham 2010). Photographic diaries are one strategy used to better understand people’s everyday practices and routines, allowing ‘the researcher to “virtually accompany” her or his research respondent as they go about their day-to-day routines without the intrusiveness and significant time demands that actually physically shadowing an individual would entail (Latham 2010, p. 191). The photo-diary was intended to capture a more holistic sense of everyday routines, as a record of interactions with nature in the home over the course of one week, in whatever form these interactions took. The diary was planned so that participants would record a daily entry responding to a set of structured questions, with entries to be accompanied by photographs—as ‘an alternative means of communication for those who lack confidence, struggle with traditional written forms of data collection or were pressed for time’ (de Vet 2013, p. 203).

The photo-diary idea was proposed and approved in the project ethics application, but never used. This was largely a result of difficulties with recruitment. As I was struggling to recruit residents for the first stage of the project, I was wary of adding any more involvement to an interview schedule with a proposed revisit. Multi-methods approaches are risky, as they require significant amounts of time from participants, and can leading to participant fatigue (de Vet 2013).

To make up for the lack of these two additional elements, I adapted these concerns into questions as part of an expanded interview schedule. I asked participants questions about their week and about changes in their routine instead of a photo-diary, and I took photos on the participant-led home tours where appropriate. I also asked people about their attitudes and practices towards the beach while at home, instead of asking for residents to walk there. As a result, the focus of the coastal environment shifted from the shore to its impact on the house—which in turn informed the direction of Chapter 6.
2.3 Semi-structured interview with developer representative

I had intended that the project incorporate a second stage: a series of interviews with key stakeholders in the creation of Greenhills Beach, specifically Council, the developer, and prominent project home companies. A separate ethics application was prepared for this second stage, and approved by the University of Wollongong Human Ethics Committee in November 2015 as HE15/460. This was too ambitious, and proved beyond the scope of the time remaining in the PhD project—but attending to these perspectives is something that should form the basis of future work on MPEs and similar housing development projects (see Chapter 8).

Instead, this stage was scaled back to focus on two stakeholders: the Sutherland Shire Council, and the developer, Australand. The rationale underlying this interview was to better understand developer ‘narratives’ and ‘logics’, following the work of Ruth Fincher (2004; Fincher and Costello 2005) on apartment block developers in Melbourne. As Fincher (2004, p. 329) outlines:

…knowing these narratives is important, because they help to create (along with local economic and regulatory conditions) the forms of housing that are imagined and therefore are built. These are the logics through which developers understand the social world in which they are intervening with their housing.

Email contact was made with both the Council and Australand, using a formal approach letter. Despite showing initial interest, the Council was not forthcoming for an interview after multiple attempts. Document analysis takes the place of this perspective (Chapter 3). Australand was more forthcoming. This may have been because there was already a communication channel in place: I contacted an Australand representative preceding fieldwork via email, to flag my research presence at Greenhills Beach as a matter of courtesy.
Chapter 2 - Methodology

Following email correspondence with this same contact, I was put in touch with a development director who was involved in the Greenhills Beach project. An interview was conducted in April 2016 in a neutral location chosen by the interviewee: a café in Rhodes, New South Wales. The run-time of the interview was 40 minutes, and explored three broad themes: place making, community building, and home creation.

Due to being the sole interview of the proposed second stage, the purpose of this interview for the overall study was altered. Rather than being positioned as one authoritative voice in the study, which would raise questions as to hierarchies of expertise and knowledge, the interview is a stand-alone account of the developer motivations Greenhills Beach, offering some clarification and depth on how the design was justified. Responses from this interview are included in Chapter 3 to develop a history of the case study development.

2.4 Data Analysis and Coding Strategies

All interviews were recorded, and manually transcribed verbatim. The coding of interview transcripts was also done manually. Here I take guidance from Alison Blunt (2003, p. 84), where coding interviews by hand is a way to ‘interpret personal stories and memories in a more nuanced and sensitive way than computer coding would allow… reading, and re-reading, transcripts to identify and code themes and sub-themes, to quote extracts to illustrate certain points, and to explore points of conflict and contradiction’. The coding strategy can be broadly conceived as thematic coding, following guidance on coding qualitative data from Cope (2005) and Jackson (2001). Thematic coding can be grouped into four types of themes: conditions; interactions among actors; strategies and tactics; and consequences (Jackson 2001). Cope (2005, p. 226) suggests the development of a ‘codebook’, which begins as a series of ‘the most obvious qualities, conditions, actions, and categories seen in your data’.
Chapter 2 - Methodology

The early development of a ‘codebook’ began during manual transcription, which acted as a first pass for coding. Coding themes were not prescribed, but rather developed procedurally and organically. Interview design set out thematic ‘silos’ for participant responses. These silos became more and more porous as coding progressed: paying attention to shared or different experiences and reactions, and moments when interviewees met, exceeded, or subverted how I expected them to respond. Some codes automatically clustered: for instance, around responses to a specific line of questioning. Some codes ran their course, and ended up of limited relevance.

Transcripts were coded twice more. First was before the development of revisit questions, where initial interviews were coded as a group to develop lines of questioning, and then coded individually to identify specific follow-up questions with the household interviewed (for instance, if we were interrupted in a theme of questions the first time around, or if there was something unclear, or particularly interesting, that needed following up). The second coding was at the end of data collection, which coincided with the beginning of writing results.

A crucial ethical consideration for this project concerned the anonymity of participants in data presentation. Greenhills Beach is an identifiable community with distinct physical boundaries. While the project is not directly targeting sensitive issues, questions about everyday routines and activities concern participants’ attitudes towards, and negotiation of, estate regulations. In addition, participants may instigate conversations about their neighbours’ practices. To avoid the exposure of interview material to neighbours and other interested parties, it is important that participants cannot be readily identified. All participants were provided with pseudonyms\textsuperscript{14} in the thesis and any associated published material. In the

\textsuperscript{14} Pseudonyms were randomly generated using the website <http://www.fakenamegenerator.com/>
Chapter 2 - Methodology

case of the Australand representative, their quotes in the following chapter are labelled with an unspecified ‘development director’ label.

While all participants are overtly identified as from Greenhills Beach, all exact locations (i.e. street names and numbers) are withheld, and where possible photos were framed so as to not identify street names or numbers.

2.5 Conclusion

Researching in master-planned estates involves the negotiation of a number of logistical challenges. Most notable is the pressure put on the researcher to recruit within a constrained sample. There were definitely moments of doubt and contingency plans set up in the case of not getting enough households, which seemed likely in the middle of the first year of fieldwork. These challenges were heightened by the timing of recruitment: while Greenhills Beach was being established. Houses were not built, reducing the sample size, or incomplete and taking up the time of potential participants. Also residents hadn’t yet built strong social ties, reducing the likelihood of snowballing.

It was worthwhile persevering with researching uncomfortable, interstitial temporalities. Interviewing people during and directly after house construction, and as the estate was forming around them, resulted in distinct focal points for research: the timespace of the construction site, and experiences of living with building work, became a central concern of the thesis (Chapter 5), as did investment decisions around the material form homes took (Chapter 7). Overall, capturing homemaking in these ephemeral phases was incredibly beneficial, and resulted in more to say on new build housing and owner-occupant investment as processes.

In its methodological approach, the project advocates for researching using conventional, tried and tested methodologies, rather than being innovative for innovation’s sake: ‘for
enduring methods it is not a return to methods once thought deceased, but a recognition of the continued relevance of these approaches to critical questions of our changing world’ (DeLyser and Sui 2014, p. 297; see also Dowling et al. 2016). The semi-structured interview with a walking tour element met core concerns of a relational, material ontology: looking at practices, grounded in the places they occur, and surrounded by nonhumans and material things that direct and influence these practices.

The next chapter provides a profile of the case study location: Greenhills Beach.
3 Profiling The Case Study

Both ‘brownfield’ (post-industrial) and ‘greenfield’ (coastal setting) in its origins, Greenhills Beach has a fractured history. This chapter profiles the antecedent beginnings of Greenhills Beach as a highly lucrative housing site, and some of my experiences of place as it was constructed.

Greenhills Beach is located on the Kurnell Peninsula, Captain Cook Drive, approximately two kilometres South of the Cronulla business district (see Figure 3.1). It is approximately a 40-minute commute from Greenhills Beach to Sydney’s Central Business District, linked to Sydney by arterial roads (via the M1 highway) and a metropolitan train line (via nearby stations at Cronulla and Woolooware). It is adjacent to the towns of Woolooware to the West and Kurnell to the North, and the Pacific Ocean to the East. The site is located within the Sutherland Shire Local Government Area (henceforth LGA), an area colloquially referred to as ‘The Shire’ in popular discourse (Watt 2014). The estate is named after the adjacent beach, and located next to the Cronulla sand hills. The site was developed by Australand, a national development company specialising in delivering large-scale commercial and residential projects. In this case, Greenhills Beach is far from a large scale residential project—rather it was described on their portfolio as a boutique subdivision.
Figure 3.1 Location map of Greenhills Beach (marked in red) and highlighted surrounds. Map credit: Alex Tindale (copyright OpenStreetMap contributors).

This chapter consists of three sections, ordered chronologically. The first section provides a history of Greenhills Beach as a site preceding development, attending to its historical, cultural and environmental virtues through the theme of ‘extraction’. The second section introduces Greenhills Beach as a housing development and a master-planned estate, and outlines some key elements of marketing, site design, and house design. The third section brings Greenhills Beach into the present, and looks more closely at the time-space of the site during fieldwork. This third section includes a broad introduction to the participants and their homes, and works as a preamble to the four empirical chapters.
Chapter 3 – Case Study

The content of this chapter is primarily derived from analysis of planning documents (Development Applications and their appendices), documents produced by the developer for prospective and current Greenhills Beach residents (advertising material, design guidelines), and historical publications of the Sutherland Shire by local historians Daphne Salt (2000) and Bruce Watt (2014). Where appropriate the chapter is also interspersed with quotes from the interview conducted with the development director of Greenhills Beach, to affirm the intentions of the developer during marketing, sales, and design. My observations of the site during fieldwork are also incorporated, which includes notes and photographs of the site taken between 2013 and 2017 as it progressed.

3.1 A place history: the ‘extraction’ of Greenhills Beach

The Greenhills Beach site is an extensively modified dune system, centred upon extractive industries. A history of extraction sets the context for the site as it progresses through time from tertiary dune vegetation, to stretch of sand dunes, to a highly sought after residential location. This section is themed around ‘extraction’ as a process. In what follows I use three definitions of ‘extract’\(^\text{15}\) to focus on three lines of flight in this place.

\[
\text{Extract (verb).}
\]

\*

Remove or take out, especially by effort or force.

\*

The traditional custodians of the land upon which Greenhills Beach now stands are the Gweagal people, the northern-most tribe of the Dharawal-speaking people (Salt 2000, p. 13). As Watt (2014, p. 12) explains, prior to colonisation the Gweagal were a relatively settled group, due to the plentiful supply of fish in the swamps of Kurnell and Port Hacking.

\(^\text{15}\) As defined by the Oxford Dictionary, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/extract>
Archaeological evidence from middens and carvings indicate at least 8,500 years of Indigenous occupation in what is now the Sutherland Shire (Watt 2014, p. 12).

The first act of extraction at Greenhills Beach—removal of people by force—is wrapped up in British imperial colonisation. The Kurnell peninsula is a key site of British colonisation of Australia: the *Endeavour*, captained by Captain James Cook landed at Botany Bay on 29th April, 1770\(^\text{16}\). Imperial understandings and frameworks of property and land sovereignty, based largely on agricultural production, viewed Indigenous populations as ‘little more than rootless nomads without the claim to land or the legal consequence that came with tillage’ (Hoskins 2013, p. 87). Consequently, the peninsula was deemed *terra nullius*. This notion has, of course, been legally and socially overturned in Australia; not without tremendous struggle. However, as Whatmore (2002, p. 63) explains, *terra nullius* legitimised the annexation of ‘uninhabited lands’ through ‘two different moments of possession’: dominium (absolute jurisdiction) and jus (accordance of property rights).

Bruce Watt (2014, pp. 72-75) traces the colonial ownership of property following colonial seizing of land and waters, beginning the second ‘extraction’: the alteration of the landscape through failed attempts at pastoralism. The land rights for what are now Cronulla and Kurnell were granted to James Birnie in 1815, who intended to build a shipping and whaling station. Birnie was declared insane, and the Birnie Estate was sold to John Connell, a free settler ironmonger, in 1828. Connell and his sons began land clearing of the peninsula, selling timber (red cedar, mahogany, blackbutt, ironbark, turpentine) for building purposes in Sydney, and began the destabilisation of the dune system. When Connell died in 1849 he left the Estate to his grandsons. John Connell Laycock was the most prominent of these, and held the land until, in 1860, he was in financial default and forced to sell his mortgaged property.

\(^{16}\) This landing place is marked by an obelisk in the Kamay Botany Bay National Park (see Figure 3.1).
The site was bought at auction by Thomas Holt in 1861, a pastoralist (later, a member of the New South Wales Legislative Assembly and the first Colonial Treasurer) who had been acquiring land extensively since his arrival in Australia in 1842, and had made his fortune on land speculation. Holt bought the 4,600 acre parcel of Cronulla-Kurnell for 3275 pounds; at one stage Holt had accumulated over 12,000 acres of land named ‘South Botany Estate’—what would become the Sutherland Shire (Salt 2000, p. 30; Watt 2014, p. 89).

Holt began to use his land for clearing and attempts at sheep and cattle grazing, and oyster farming. This extensive land use began to denude the vegetation, degrading the landscape and exposing the bare dunes. As local historian Daphne Salt (2000, p. 32-33) writes:

> When James Cook in 1770, had looked down on what is today called Cronulla Beach from the sandhills, which covered over 1000 acres and rose to 200 feet, he had made no mention of any bare dunes. Less than 100 years later the scrub had been cleared and burnt, the trees had been ringbarked or cut down for the timber industry, and Holt’s grazing stock had eaten out the restraining grass cover. This intervention of man [sic] had unleashed the sands to produce an unstable transgressive dune sheet that moved north at the rate of at least 8 metres a year.

The Holt family retained title to the land. By the turn of the Century, the landscape was put to use for different extractive purposes.
From the 1930s, the sand hills were utilised for sand mining and extraction (Figure 3.2). Salt (2000, p. 34) suggests in excess of 70 million tonnes of sand have been utilised for Sydney’s post-war building industry. As Hoskins (2013, p. 410) notes, sand on Australia’s east coast contained a ‘rare abundance’ of rutile, zircon and ilmenite, important minerals for building and construction. Following the extraction of sand, the site was then used as an industrial waste tip (Salt 2000).
Amidst physical sand extraction operations, the sandhills landscape became a landmark and cultural mainstay for the region. The sandhills were a place for play and exercise, local residents sliding and skiing down the sand hills (Figure 3.3). The beach at Greenhills also has a strong connection with surf and youth cultures. Duke Kahanamoku visited Cronulla in 1912 as part of his tour to Australia, demonstrating surfing (Warren and Gibson 2014; Ford 2015). In Kathy Lette and Gabrielle Carey’s fictional novel about youth surf cultures in 1970’s Australia, Puberty Blues17, being a part of the ‘Greenhills gang’ was portrayed as the pinnacle of teenage life:

There were three main sections of Cronulla Beach - South Cronulla, North Cronulla and Greenhills. Everyone was trying to make it to Greenhills. That's where the top surfie gang hung out - the prettiest girls from school and the best surfies on the beach. The bad surfboard riders on their 'L' plates, the Italian family groups and the uncool kids from Bankstown (Bankies), swarmed to South Cronulla - Dickheadland. That's where it all began. We were dickheads. (Lette and Carey 1979 (reprint 2002), pp. 1-2)

The sandhills are culturally significant in other ways. The sandhills were used in films, as set locations resembling deserts. Charles Chauvel’s Forty Thousand Horsemen (1940) was filmed in the dunes, recreating the Australian light horse charge in Palestine in 1917. The sandhills were also used for scenes portraying dystopian wastelands in George Miller and George Ogilvie’s Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome (1985) (Watt 2014, p. 219).

17 The book was later adapted into a 1981 film, and a television show on the Ten Network which ran from 2012-2014. Both used the beach at Greenhills Beach as a location for filming.
Figure 3.3 Crowd of people playing on sand dunes, Cronulla, New South Wales, ca. 1963. Picture credit: Jeff Carter, National Library of Australia, nla.obj-147925870.

Today, one major exposed mobile dune remains, which was protected from sand extraction (Figure 3.4). This is a result of local resistance and activism, led by the Cronulla Dunes and Wetlands Protection Alliance. Their proposal for protecting the dune under the Heritage Act was met with unanimous public support: the Sutherland Shire Council received 642 supporting signatures in 1999 (New South Wales Office of Environment and Heritage 2003). As a result, the last remaining mobile dune was State heritage listed in 2003 for its historical, aesthetic, social and environmental significance, as the official heritage statement summarises (see Figure 3.4):

The Cronulla Sand Dune, Lucas Reserve and Wanda Beach as a landscape are of historical and contemporary cultural significance to the Aboriginal community. The dune landscape possesses historic, scientific, cultural and natural significance as a site of early European contact with Aborigines, a place of environmental transformation as a result of European agricultural practices, habitat for the endangered Green and
Chapter 3 – Case Study

Golden Bell Frog within a modified environment, and a location for significant Australian films. The dune and Wanda Beach possess social significance as a place of recreation and tourism since the late nineteenth century and community activism to protect the dune from sand mining in the later part of the twentieth century. As the last major exposed dune in a landscape degraded by 70 years of sand mining it has landmark and aesthetic qualities that are held in high esteem by the community (New South Wales Office of Environment and Heritage 2003).

~

**Extract (noun).**

A preparation containing the active ingredient of a substance in concentrated form.

~

As these accounts of ‘extraction’ have shown, Greenhills Beach is a place of rich and incredibly diverse histories and cultural connections. The landscape has been written over by colonial and industrial processes, decades of clearing, grazing, mining and waste disposal creating the impression of a ‘blank slate’. Greenhills Beach, the development, is an extract of these histories, where the sand hills are recast as a development site. The following section explores Greenhills Beach as a residential development, explaining the design of the site, and exploring the rationale for this design.
Figure 3.4 (a) The dune, present day; (b) in relation to Greenhills Beach (April 2017).
3.2 The Developer

Sand mining operations ceased in 1993; following this the site had been rehabilitated and prepared for industrial subdivision (McKenzie Land Planning Services Pty Limited 2010, p. 4). Australand had owned the 124 hectare site on the Kurnell Peninsula since the early 1950’s. Permission to rezone part of the site to residential use was granted by Sutherland Shire Council in 2004. The criterion to meet this rezoning centred on the following: environmental impacts (the presence of endangered ecological species: Kurnell Dune Forest, Sydney Freshwater Wetland); lack of infrastructure on Captain Cook Drive; and airport noise from Sydney International Airport in Port Botany\(^18\). This rezoning, and the agreement with Sutherland Shire Council, was shared between two parties: Australand, who were responsible for delivering Greenhills Beach, and Breen Holdings, who owned the southern-most end of the site and re-branded it as Shearwater Landing\(^19\). These developments were staggered; while Greenhills Beach has at the time of completion of this thesis completed land sales and the majority of houses have been completed, Shearwater Landing has, at August 2017, sold their final land packages, and building is only just commencing.

This section focuses on three elements of Greenhills Beach: marketing and sales, estate design, and house design. To help explain the rationale for the project, the section incorporates illustrative quotes from the semi-structured interview with the Australand development director, conducted in April 2016 (see Section 2.3).


\(^{19}\) Shearwater Landing is a 13 hectare, 160 lot development, and marketed more prestigiously than Greenhills Beach. Shearwater Landing is named after the migratory birds that visit the Kurnell peninsula.
3.2.1 Marketing and Sales

Akin to suburban estate developer narratives (Kenna 2007; Dowling et al. 2011), the marketing strategy centred on creating a place for young families. This place narrative was constructed on the referents of nature, security, and community. The development director suggested that their marketing narrative wrapped around the influence of Cronulla’s local coastal and sporting cultures:

Interviewer (CG): What was the influence of Cronulla’s local culture, if any?

Development Director (DD): Well, Cronulla’s local culture—it’s about sports. Well—that’s The Shire. It’s about family, it’s about sports, it’s about the beach—and there is a surfing culture, which is very very strong. Very much an outdoorsy community. The mere fact that in our location, I guess it embraces all of those things. We are close to the beach… We embraced that surfing culture, we had aerials of people, lifestyle imagery of people walking Cronulla Beach. The surf lifesaving club. In fact, we even sponsored the local club for a few years. You know, flying kites, going for walks, going for a jog, playing sports.

In this case, Australand based their marketing efforts, as expected, around ocean proximity (Figure 3.5). The glossy brochure package handed out at the sales office promoted a series of features prefaced by the statement ‘I am’: lifestyle, location, freedom, family, masterplanned, design, connected, nature, and green. Images portrayed young families and children out in coastal nature, at the beach, and sliding down the sand hills.

A sales office was set up by Australand in Cronulla Mall in 2011, and closed with the completion of land sales in 2014. Land sales were released and priced clustered into four themed precincts: coastal, beach, lake, and bay. On site, the estate was promoted via two main means: landscape billboards at the estate entrance (corner of Captain Cook Drive and
Trinity Street), and banner mesh screening, which covered the steel mesh fencing around the site as it was constructed. The following chapter, ‘Selling Surf and Turf’, will further explore the consequences of MPE marketing by the coast as representation more critically and in closer detail.

Figure 3.5 Billboards, roundabout at Captain Cook Drive and Trinity Street, Kurnell Peninsula (March 2014).

The rampant Sydney housing market meant a shortage of available land for building. At the time of land sales there was a notable shortage of detached homes in the region; in 2011 over 70 percent of the housing stock in Cronulla was a flat, unit or apartment (ABS 2011). This created significant demand for such a rare opportunity. Indeed, land sales were rapid, as local news coverage of land sales at the time can attest (Siagian 2012). The initial price point for Greenhills Beach—at the beginning, $700,000 was the minimum price for a block of land—was out of reach for most first home buyers.

As the development director explained, the expectation was that the majority of land sales would be sourced locally, within about a 5 kilometre radius of the site. This involved
understanding the character and the market of Cronulla, and responding in kind to the ‘catchment’ of potential buyers:

CG: So we mentioned marketing before. Was there anyone that you were particularly marketing towards?

DD: We decided that people, when they are moving—whether it’s further out from the city or towards the city—they kind of, they work out of a catchment. The catchment here was the Georges River catchment. So that, Georges River as it comes from the ocean and weaves its way through inland, was basically creating what we believed was our corridor of where the potential buyers were… We did a massive marketing campaign across the whole Sydney metropolitan area… So we had this longitudinal corridor that ran along the rivers and the estuaries… You know, St George, all the way through to Liverpool where the Georges River comes out.

The estimation of this ‘longitudinal corridor’ aligns with the origin of those households interviewed in the thesis.

3.2.2 Design

The site of Greenhills Beach is described as an ‘amphitheatre’ (McKenzie Land Planning Services Pty Limited 2010, p. 6). This is important for two reasons. First, the height of the visual barrier created by the dunes prevents houses gaining water views, prioritising the dunes as the visual centrepiece of Greenhills Beach. Second, the sunken profile of the estate makes roof profiles and colours a more important feature of design and estate character (see Figure 3.6).
Greenhills Beach shares the amorphous design characteristics of master-planned estates in Australia. The site shares characteristic features with what Dowling et al. (2010, p. 398) identify as ‘symbolically enclosed developments’,

…which evince primarily symbolic forms of gating. They are simultaneously open—with physically unimpeded public access and some wider community facilities (e.g. open space, childhood facilities) housed within them—and enclosed, through the presence of private roads, landscape elements and signage deterring public access.

Part of this symbolic enclosing is demarcation of the estate boundaries. A roundabout entry, and a prominent sign at the entryway, marks Greenhills Beach as a distinct territory (Figure 3.7).
Figure 3.7 The sign labelling Greenhills Beach, located at the roundabout entryway on Captain Cook Drive (April 2017).

The point of difference from other symbolically enclosed MPEs, in this case, is the coastal location. The vision for the design of Greenhills Beach sought to highlight and exemplify the merits of this location—within the guidelines of planning documents.

The overall design of the estate is tied up in the developer-led ‘vision’ for Greenhills Beach: predicated on creating a ‘distinctive special place’ with a ‘coastal landscape character’.

Australand describe their intentions for this ‘vision’:

The vision for Greenhills Beach is to create a coastal community that integrates architecture and landscape, setting Greenhills Beach apart as a special place to live. Greenhills Beach will be a distinctive special place defined by dunes, ponds, wetlands and a coastal landscape character. Streets will be informal, simply defined, and lined with street trees and native grass plantings. Houses will respond to this environment by embracing outdoor spaces, allowing light, breeze and climate to enter freely. Fences
Chapter 3 – Case Study

will be minimal and understated. A coastal lifestyle will be reflected in the houses which will respond to climate with generous overhangs, verandahs and indoor/outdoor places to relax and entertain. Materials and colours will be crisp and generally light (Australand 2012, p. 4).

The streetscape reflects this vision: characterised by native street plantings which discourage street parking, streets that are undivided by lines, and roundabouts that slow traffic. All roads are connected, and open out into ‘nature’ views (lakes, dunes, vegetation buffers). Consequently the coastal environment is visually present in public space. Notwithstanding the coastal location, the streetscape is still characteristically formal and homogenous, with tidy street verges, and uniform block sizes (Figures 3.8; 3.9). Adding to coastal placemaking, the toponymy theme of the subdivision is famous Australian beaches (see Table 3.1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Street Name</th>
<th>Origin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cable Street</td>
<td>Cable Beach in Broome, Western Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cottesloe Street</td>
<td>Cottesloe Beach in Perth, Western Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greenhills Street</td>
<td>Greenhills Beach in Cronulla, New South Wales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyams Street</td>
<td>Hyams Beach in Jervis Bay, New South Wales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shipstern Street</td>
<td>Shipstern Bluff in Hobart, Tasmania</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Torquay Street</td>
<td>Torquay Beach in Torquay, Victoria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trinity Street</td>
<td>Trinity Beach in Palm Cove, Queensland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wategos Street</td>
<td>Wategos Beach in Byron Bay, New South Wales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whitehaven Street</td>
<td>Whitehaven Beach in Great Barrier Reef, Queensland</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1 Street names at Greenhills Beach, all named after famous Australian surf beaches (adapted from Sutherland Shire Council 2015).
Considerations of the natural environment in estate design also related to its non-human inhabitants. One of the resonances of extractive sand mining in the site was the creation of artificial ponds that filled with water over time. The green and golden bell frog (*Litoria aurea*), an endangered species, established populations in these ponds; the Kurnell peninsula is now recognised as supporting a key population for conservation efforts (New South Wales Department of Environment and Climate Change 2007). Supporting a ‘key breeding habitat’ for the green and golden bell frog was one of the conditions for rezoning the site as residential, and became a key part of the environmental considerations underwriting estate design. This planning stipulation was delivered through the establishing of two lakes within the streetscape, paired with a sheltered picnic area. This prioritisation of the green and golden bell frog was reflected in the environmental consciousness of residents: one resident overwatered their gardens to purportedly make it more homely for frog visitors.

In addition to houses, the second design feature of Greenhills Beach is the Parklands, as a Voluntary Planning Agreement incorporated into the residential rezoning. Some 91 hectares of land was set aside at a cost of $25 million for ‘regional recreation facilities’: 10 playing fields, a skate park, 3 amenities buildings, walking and cycling tracks, picnic facilities and associated parking for over 400 cars. These costs are shared between Australand and Breen Holdings. At the time of writing, this project is still in fragmented states of construction. The Greenhills skate park was opened in October 2015. The expected completion date for the Parklands project is forecast for 2020.
3.2.3 House design and regulation

Following the rezoning of the site, Greenhills Beach was classed as E4 ‘Environmental Living’ by Sutherland Shire Council under SEPP\textsuperscript{20} Kurnell Peninsula 1989. Principal development controls under E4 zoning include:

- Minimum lot size: 55 square metres
- Maximum height of building: 9 metres
- Maximum floor space to land ratio: 0.55:1
- Minimum front building line: 6 metres
- Minimum landscape area: 40%

In addition, Australand imparted a further aesthetic control through the implementation of design guidelines (Australand 2012). These guidelines were enforced by a Design Review Panel, which acted as the first screening process for house designs. Once approved by this Panel, the Development Application could be sent to Council. The document handed out to residents included a checklist, stipulating expectations for the visual elements of the house and garden. These centred upon: roof forms and colours; façade materials (including colour, texture, and percentage coverage); articulation; garages and driveways; fencing; and an extensive list of proposed plant species (endemic, Australian native, and exotic) for the garden (Figure 3.8). This extra level of protection is common practice in MPEs, a ‘code of pecuniary beauty’ (Gwyther 2005) that helps to distinguish the estate from surrounding suburbs (see Chapter 7).

The development director described the house design considerations at Greenhills as centring on colour schemes and contemporary elements, towards creating ‘homes with a coastal character’:

\textsuperscript{20} State Environment Planning Policy
CG: Were there any different design considerations for Greenhills Beach that were completely new, or didn’t fit the mould of other estates?

DD: …the architecture had to talk to its location. So we went about imposing colour scheme requirements. The fact that we want all the homes to be articulated— with different shapes, so that they’re not all just boxes—that’s standard on all our projects… The fact we were looking for more contemporary elements is more attuned to its location. We wouldn’t necessarily be pushing for contemporary elements on estates further west, because people just can’t afford it. […] So homes with a coastal character is about a mix of materials. It’s about light colour schemes. We wanted to make sure that the palate talked to its local environment.

The negotiation of these design guidelines was one of the principle reasons underlying the walking element of the semi-structured interview (discussed in Chapter 2). The stipulation of ‘homes with a coastal character’, and its translation into the desires and designs of residents’ houses, is interrogated in more detail in Chapter 6.
Figure 3.8 The streetscape at Greenhills Beach, exhibiting characteristic features of MPEs: formal streetscapes, and uniform colours and facades on houses showing the influence of the design guidelines (April 2017).
3.3 Introducing the residents and their homes

Rather than profile the residents based on their specific socio-demographic characteristics, which would bring confidentiality under question in a bounded and named case study, this section highlights certain notable trends taken from the first Census taken at Greenhills Beach as a suburb\(^{21}\), in 2016, to introduce the residents and their homes (ABS 2017b, Table 3.2). Participants reflected these characteristics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selected socio-demographic characteristics</th>
<th>Greenhills Beach (SSC)</th>
<th>New South Wales</th>
<th>Australia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Median Age</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-14 years</td>
<td>26.3</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>18.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Composition (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couple family with children</td>
<td>80.8</td>
<td>45.7</td>
<td>44.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ancestry (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>23.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Weekly Incomes ($AUD)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household</td>
<td>3731</td>
<td>1486</td>
<td>1438</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dwelling Structure (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separate House</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>66.4</td>
<td>72.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Bedrooms (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 or more bedrooms</td>
<td>97.5</td>
<td>31.3</td>
<td>32.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenure (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owned with a Mortgage</td>
<td>81.8</td>
<td>32.3</td>
<td>34.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mortgage Monthly Repayments ($AUD)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median mortgage repayments</td>
<td>3900</td>
<td>1986</td>
<td>1755</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.2 Selected socio-demographic characteristics for Greenhills Beach. Source: ABS 2017b.

\(^{21}\) Australian Censuses are taken in 5-year cycles. For the previous Census in 2011, Greenhills Beach was not yet built.
A Place for Families

The median age of the suburb was 34 in 2016; the age of participants varied from 34 to 70. The population of Greenhills Beach primarily identifies as ‘Australian’ and/or ‘English’ ancestry. Some 80 percent of households at Greenhills Beach are couple families with children; this was reflected in the interviewees. Greenhills Beach also has a younger age structure than the broader State and National populations, further affirming the site as a cluster of young families. As mentioned in Section 2.2.3, navigating the interview process with young families was taken into account in the way that the interview schedule had been designed.

A Place with Large Homes

As expected, the dwelling structure of the estate is made up entirely of separate houses. Notably, 98 percent of houses had 4 or more bedrooms, well above the State and National averages, and reflecting calculating, ‘supersizing’ tendencies (Wiesel et al. 2013). While households were commonly families with children, the number of bedrooms generally exceeded the number of occupants. Chapter 7 considers the financialised underpinnings of this choice.

Residents’ motivations parallel with previous studies on MPEs that point to the opportunity to buy land and build something new as the primary motivating factor (Dowling et al. 2010). The homes of Greenhills Beach residents can be broadly categorised into two groups: project homes, and architecturally designed homes. Seventeen of the 21 households interviewed had built their home using a project building company (81 percent). Figure 3.9 shows some of the stylistic differences. While project homes (Figure 3.9a) are delivered as a standard ‘package’, with a level of malleability available in the layout and size of rooms, and further options available for buyers to upgrade fixtures and finishes (particularly in the kitchen and
bathroom/s), architecturally designed homes (Figure 3.9b) have more room for expression, but require more creative and financial input by the homeowner. Accent features and colours on house facades—including different textured finishes (i.e. wood panelling, stone work, render)—were common to both house types. Interview questions explored this in detail.

Pools were a common feature; 12 of the 21 households interviewed had pools making up part of their backyard space. As Chapters 6 and 7 will discuss, the pool was an anticipated—and thus expected—feature of a coastal home. Due to safety reasons, a pool was less likely when participants had young children at home. In the case of one family, they had installed a pool when I came back for the revisit interview.

A High-Income, High Risk Place

Lastly, certain financial circumstances of Greenhills Beach residents are also worth highlighting. The median weekly household income was $3731 in 2016, well above the State ($1486) and National ($1438) medians, indicating a high-income suburb. This sits alongside high mortgage repayments: median monthly mortgage repayments were $3900 in 2016, far exceeding the State ($1986) and National ($1755) medians. Mortgaged owner-occupation was the tenure type for over 80 percent of occupied private dwellings—more than double the State and National percentages. While Greenhills Beach may be high-income, it is also high risk.
Figure 3.9 Variations in house design, which come largely down to the superstructure; (a) a project-built home (June 2014); (b) an architecturally designed home (February 2015). Both of these houses are ideal examples of adhering to the ‘coastal landscape character’: white, light colours, and façades with accent features.
Chapter 3 – Case Study

The following empirical chapters explore these people, their homes and their finances in further detail. After a deconstruction of coastal MPE marketing in Chapter 4, Chapter 5 explores the implementation and building of these homes; Chapter 6 focusses on the design of these homes and their integration into the natural environment; and Chapter 7 considers the consequences of the chosen design of these homes and how they intersect with economic motivations.
Chapter 4 – Selling Surf and Turf

4 Selling Surf And Turf

From here the thesis takes a temporal route along the process of living in a master-planned estate. I have selected four moments or phases in which to ‘pause’, for critical scrutiny.

This first results chapter begins at the start of the housing ‘journey’ for buyers: when starting to make a decision about where to move and where to live. New residential development is transforming coastal places in Australia. This chapter untangles perceptions of coastal change by analysing representations of nature and lifestyles in marketing new residential developments on the New South Wales coastline. In this context MPEs are primarily a consequence of housing affordability and supply dilemmas in capital cities. Their form and character is derided as ‘suburbanisation by the sea’: vandalism of authentic coastal cultures (Burnley and Murphy 2004; Collins 2013).

The chapter draws on Massey’s theorisation of place as ‘event’ and a relational politics termed ‘throwntogetherness’ to understand the role of real estate advertising in blending coastal places and MPEs. Insights are drawn from visits to 19 MPEs for sale on the NSW coast (discussed in Section 2.1), and discourse analysis of 76 advertisements collected in situ (billboards, signs, banners and brochures). Advertising narratives for new MPEs both sustain and contradict the idea of coastal suburbanisation: portraying permanent settlement by young families as a culture shift and implicating ‘sea change’ configurations of coastal places to do so. This makes lifestyle expectations with coastal nature perplexing. In the throwntogetherness of contemporary coastlines, marked by landscape change and development pressures, real estate advertisements are pivotal in establishing, grounding and guiding change.
This chapter has been published as:

Chapter 4 – Selling Surf and Turf

4.1 Introduction

Coastal places in Australia are undergoing rapid change. One of the key drivers of change is new residential development. Settlement on Australia’s coastline—referred to colloquially as ‘sea change’—implies a profound lifestyle change driven by natural amenity (Burnley and Murphy 2004; Gurran et al. 2005; Osbaldiston 2011). This portrayal garners significant attention in popular rhetoric (Salt 2004), but clouds other motivations for moving to the coastline: namely, settlement driven by housing affordability and supply (Burnley and Murphy 2004; Collins 2013). Accordingly, coastal settlement is a discordant combination of different settlement types, different motivations and different values.

This paper contributes to untangling perceptions of coastal places in Australia by analysing the representation of coastal nature and coastal lifestyles in the marketing of new residential developments along the New South Wales (NSW) coastline. Specifically, the paper focuses on one settlement form gaining traction along Australia’s coast: master-planned residential estates (MPEs). MPEs are a prominent form of housing provision for inner and outer suburbia in Australia and other Western nations (McGuirk and Dowling 2007; Thompson 2013). Put simply, MPEs are residential developments where land and houses are supplied and sold collectively in stages by a developer. Their homogeneity in form and delivery incites sustained critique in Australia’s suburbs (see, for instance, Gleave, 2006). Despite their increasing adoption as a means of housing Australia’s coastal populations, MPEs are currently an understudied iteration of coastal development (though see Shaw and Menday 2013). In a coastal context master-planned estates are emblematic of critiques that portray new developments as ‘suburbanisation by the sea’ (Burnley and Murphy 2004), and are the type of medium-large scale development projects that provokes a ‘not-in-my-backyard’ (NIMBY) response from existing coastal residents (Carter et al. 2007; Kearns and Collins 2012).
We examine the changes to coastal places associated with MPEs by way of analysis of real estate advertising. Real estate advertising has a pivotal role to play in the trajectories of changing coastal places. The narratives used by developers to frame developments and target potential buyers are crucial not only to the primary objective of selling property, but to their wider public reception. As such, this paper builds on previous work exploring the advertising strategies of coastal real estate (see Collins and Kearns 2008; Perkins et al. 2008; Opit and Kearns 2014). Further, the sale of coastal property implicates representations of coastal nature. Building upon ‘sea change’ rhetoric, which positions coastal nature as the catalyst for a profoundly better lifestyle than can be achieved in urban locations, representations of coastal nature are distilled into a nostalgic imaginary of an undeveloped coastline. This is far removed from the current reality of coastal places. A focus on the developer-led narratives that establish place (Fincher and Costello 2005) contributes to better understanding coastal MPEs and how they are delivered and packaged on the coastline. This is a timely intervention; as contributions from this journal and elsewhere attest, oceans, coasts, beaches, and their entangled human and nonhuman populations are currently vibrant sites of research (see Carter et al. 2007; Obrador-Pons 2007; Evers 2009; Kearns and Collins 2012; Anderson 2013; Anderson and Peters 2014; Gibbs and Warren 2015). Within this, cultural modes of expressing the coast and coastal lives merit attention. Consequently, in exploring coastal representation the paper contributes to the social and cultural geographies of coasts and oceans—particularly, how we understand ‘geographies of the land-water margin’ (Anderson 2013, p. 954, see also Anderson and Peters 2014).

The paper draws on Massey’s theorisation of place as ‘event’ to understand the coming together of coastal places and new residential developments. As ‘events’, places are ‘a coming together of trajectories’: fluid, open and constantly in a process of becoming (Massey 2005, p. 141). Conceiving of place in this way provokes for Massey a relational politics,
termed ‘throwntogetherness’. Steered by this idea, the paper considers real estate advertising as one ‘negotiator’ of place-making: influencing both how prospective coastal residents see, appreciate and engage with their future environments—and, on the flip side of the coin, how current coastal residents will understand and view new residential developments.

The empirics of the paper derive from a series of visits conducted by the first author during 2013-2014 to nineteen master-planned estates under construction along the NSW coastline. Under construction, these sites are essentially cleared, flat land with indications of future form in the layout of streets and demarcated blocks for sale. Field notes and photographs of advertisements in these sites were collected in situ. A discourse analysis of 76 advertising examples was conducted, guided by identifying lifestyle themes and representations of nature to piece together ‘ways of seeing’ coastal places.

This paper is structured into four further sections. The first section outlines the theoretical approach, and reviews previous research on real estate advertising, Australia’s cultural attachment to the coast, and place-making strategies for master-planned estates. Second, the case study is outlined and the methodology is summarised. The third section draws on the discourse analysis to explore how advertising narratives of new residential developments both sustain and contradict coastal suburbanisation critiques. The paper concludes by reflecting on how these representations sit amongst evolving narratives of the beach and coastal nature in Australia.

4.2 Place, Representation and Real Estate Advertising

As a spatial concept, place is a foundation of social and cultural geography. Place is increasingly theorised not as static and fixed, but ‘as a gathering of materialities, meanings and practices… a coming together of things once and once only’ (Cresswell 2014, p. 6). In observing how coastal places are changing, and the ways in which different understandings of
nature are mobilised, a relational approach to place is pertinent in a context of rapid
demographic, cultural and landscape change.

Adhering to a relational, temporally specific conception of place, we utilise Massey’s (2005,
p. 140) theorisation of place as ‘event’: ‘the coming together of the previously unrelated, a
constellation of processes rather than a thing’. In their formation places implicate the
‘trajectories’ of multiple agents, human and nonhuman. To understand the consequences of
this framing Massey proposes a politics of place, termed ‘throwntogetherness’:

In sharp contrast to the view of place as settled and pre-given, with a coherence
only to be disturbed by ‘external’ forces, places as presented here in a sense
necessitate invention; they pose a challenge. They implicate us, perforce, in the
lives of human others, and in our relations with nonhumans they ask how we shall
respond to our temporary meeting-up with these particular rocks and stones and
trees. They require that, in one way or another, we confront the challenge of the
negotiation of multiplicity. (Massey 2005, pp. 141-142)

In posing ‘a challenge’, and asking us ‘how shall we respond’, throwntogetherness invites
attention to action, particularity and temporal specificity—the ‘here-and-now’ of place
(Massey 2005, p. 139). Places are political in the sense that they are collectively produced by
the practices of multiple actors, developing relations that require negotiation. In so doing,
throwntogetherness implicates representations of place. As Massey (2005, p. 155, emphasis
in original) contends: ‘imaginations of space and place are both an element of and a stake in
those negotiations [of place]’. Representations are a political ‘resource’, as ‘a simultaneous
speaking of (enframing and staging) and speaking for (serving as a proxy)’ (Castree and
MacMillan 2004, p. 473; see also Castree 2014). Indeed, as a precaution for a wholly non-
representational geography Castree and MacMillan (2004, p. 471) explain that representation
is ‘a powerful world-disclosing and world-changing technology… it is practical and performative; it is a tool and it assuredly has effects’. Accordingly, this paper explores the influence of real estate advertising in the relational politics of the current ‘here-and-now’, and future trajectory, of coastal places.

Real estate advertising is a highly selective process of place marketing—a developer-led ‘way of seeing’ that presents authentic and inauthentic notions of place, pairs intangible narratives with tangible property and links the material with the ideological (Wood 2002; Collins and Kearns 2008; Opit and Kearns 2014). For prospective buyers, advertising is a form of first contact when formulating a sense of place. As Perkins et al. (2008, p. 2062) outline, advertisements ‘help create meaning for places… because they are representations of houses and land which reinforce and establish recurrent themes about what it means to live in particular [locales]’. Marketing efforts are indicative of developer-led ‘narratives’ assigned to a particular housing form to instil cultural meaning. These narratives have a place-making effect, as Fincher and Costello (2005, p. 202) explain: ‘narratives are developed to make sense of what is occurring, and to guide actions towards anticipated futures’. Accordingly, real estate advertising carries a real world effect: establishing a developer-driven iteration of the present and future of a place.

This research builds upon previous work exploring the advertising strategies of coastal real estate. Residential housing development along the coast has come under sustained geographical enquiry in New Zealand (see Collins and Kearns 2008; Kearns and Collins 2012; Collins 2013; Opit and Kearns 2014). This work is united by a focus on contested meanings and place belonging. As Collins and Kearns (2008, p. 2921) attest, representations of coastal property have a dual consequence:
Chapter 4 – Selling Surf and Turf

In the first instance, the purpose of this advertising is to stimulate demand and increase the desirability of both the particular sites portrayed, and coastal property more generally. Beyond these immediate aims, advertising also contributes to legitimating certain forms and understandings of coastal property in the collective imagination. Advertising is, in some senses, an obvious focal point for such work: it not only deploys images of landscape, but also encourages particular ways of seeing.

Therefore, advertisements both create and foster demand for coastal property, and legitimate certain forms and understandings of it. In light of this, the paper considers how MPEs have been legitimated as a form of coastal property—and the ‘ways of seeing’ this inspires.

Enmeshed within advertisements of coastal real estate are, intrinsically, particular representations of coastal nature. Nature is a polysemic descriptor; hence nature’s representation is not consistent (see Castree 2014). For instance, in high-amenity locations Cadieux (2011) explores how nature is simultaneously central to marketing new developments and resisting new developments. Nature is packaged both as amenity and as a management domain in planning rhetoric. Representations of coastal nature used by epistemic communities, like the real estate industry, ‘have the potential to affect the world by changing (or affirming) how we think and feel about it’ (Castree 2014, p. 48). As Castree (2014, p. xvii, emphasis in original) explains, ‘nature is made sense for you, not by you’; there is more impetus in exploring ‘what [nature is] considered to be, as well as what the effects of this are’. Oceans and coasts are commonly marginalised in social and cultural geographies as an ‘empty space’ (Anderson and Peters 2014): as a backdrop for activity (Hoffman and Kearns 2013), and as a pleasant vista (Collins and Kearns 2008). Representations of oceans and coasts (and the placement of people in coastal nature) in real
estate advertisements are worth attention—particularly when these representations are prefacing permanent coastal settlements and lifestyles.

As Eyles (1987, p. 95) argues, ‘advertisements must build up significance from elements of an understood and shared meaning-system or cultural code’. This paper turns, then, to the cultural foundations of the representation of coastal nature in Australia. The discursive basis for these advertisements is twofold: the cultural capital of the beach in Australia, and the preconceived imaginary of life in master-planned residential estates. These contextual elements are central to the current coming together of place, representing the ‘stories-so-far’ (Massey 2005, p. 142) of coastal places.

4.3 Shifting Coastal Cultures

This section underlines the cultural capital of the coast in Australia—and its integration into particular iterations of coastal settlement. Australians are symbolically, and quite literally, attached to the coastline; approximately 80 percent of the population lives within 50 kilometres of the coastline (State of the Environment 2011 Committee 2011). The coast and the beach in Australia are strong national symbols (Booth 2001); entangled within this symbolism is a penchant for coastal property. As Hoskins (2013) summarises, a transition from temporary visits to permanent settlement has developed over time. In the 1900s, surf bathing formed an imaginary of the coast as a space of leisure and health. Increasing access, via improvements to the rail and road networks, led to beaches around Sydney becoming sites for weekend trips. Post-war, increased car ownership and social reform in NSW (including annual leave and working week structure) encouraged longer stays. Lengthier stays encouraged the building of caravan parks, and ‘weekenders’ fabricated in fibro and weatherboard (Hoskins 2013, p. 349; Shaw and Menday 2013). This magnified the extent of settlement up and down the coastline. In the 1980s, instigated by a surge in the tourist
industry, property development intensified (Essex and Brown 1997). Currently, a house by
the coast stands for ‘an obvious lifestyle choice, a sound investment and an enviable symbol
of wealth’ (Hoskins 2013, p. 364).

Permanent settlement on the coast in Australia is a vibrant source of debate. Post-1970s
migration to the coast in NSW was characterised as ‘lifestyle-based’ counterurbanisation
(Walmsley et al. 1998), driving the formation of ‘post-suburban landscapes’ symbiotically
linked to the growing tourism industry (Essex and Brown 1997). These trends were further
developed into more nuanced accounts of a ‘population turnaround’, due to the fact that
Sydney’s population has grown alongside the growth of coastal populations—refuting a
counterurbanisation thesis (Burnley and Murphy 2004; Gurran et al. 2005; Gurran, 2008).

Movements to the non-metropolitan coastal margins have also been likened to a form of
amenity migration referred to in Australia as ‘sea change’ (Gurran 2008). ‘Sea change’
gained widespread traction as an expression of lifestyle change, the term popularised by an
Australian Broadcasting Corporation television series of the same name that ran from 1998-
2000 (see Salt 2004; Burnley and Murphy 2004). Gurran and Blakely (2007, p. 113) offer a
definition:

Sea change… describes a major lifestyle shift, often literally involving a move to
the coast… it has come to represent the wider social and environmental
transformations resulting from rapid population growth and associated
urbanisation within coastal areas.

Indeed, research into the ‘pull’ factors for coastal in-migration indicate that movements are,
first and foremost, driven by lifestyle and natural amenity (Burnley and Murphy 2004;
Gurran 2008).
However, a spotlight on the lifestyle-driven pull of coastal nature imparts a narrow lens upon the sea change phenomenon (see Burnley and Murphy 2004; Gurran et al. 2005, Gurran and Blakely 2007, Collins 2013). As Burnley and Murphy (2004, p. 34) outline, in Australia sea changers fall under two broad categories: free agents, who move primarily motivated by environmental amenity and expectations of an improved lifestyle; and forced relocators, who are primarily motivated by comparably cheaper housing costs than in metropolitan areas. Irrespective of environmental amenity, there is an economic pragmatism to moving out of Australia’s capital cities. Indeed, unlike the more highly-priced, second-home driven coastal settlement in New Zealand, Collins (2013, p. 115) explains that ‘the Australian process is driven in large part by the lower cost of coastal real estate relative to metropolitan centres, and is principally about permanent migration’ (see also Collins and Kearns 2010).

Concluding their study, Burnley and Murphy (2004, p. 233-234) offer a refrain for classifying ‘sea change’ movements as solely motivated by a profound lifestyle shift; movements are equally associated with career cycle aspirations and finding better places to raise children. This is explained by Gurran (2008, p. 404): ‘coastal amenity regions have traditionally provided an opportunity for those able to leave the cities to achieve their dream of a large new house on its own land, often for a much lower price than would be paid within the metropolitan area’. Accordingly—in response to an increasingly exclusionary housing market in Sydney—the forced relocators group of sea-changers identified in Burnley and Murphy’s (2004) study would now consist of a broader range of homebuyers. This would particularly include young families, who may struggle to afford the type of housing in Sydney that would accommodate their lives, and are also moving motivated by job opportunities in the ‘amenity economy’ (Hu and Blakely 2013). Increasing settlement of work-age family units is reflected in national Census statistics: new residents in high-growth coastal regions have a younger age
profile—a median age of 32 years—compared to the Australian population as a whole (ABS 2004; ABS 2012).

What results from this complex mixture of voluntary movements based on environmental amenity, and movements motivated by comparably more affordable housing and employment, is a debate that contemporary non-metropolitan coastal settlement has become an extension of suburbanisation in both character and form. Wary of classifying new coastal settlement as akin to gentrification, Collins (2013, p. 122) contests that contemporary coastal development—largely built on new land releases rather than updating and/or replacing existing housing stock—‘remains quintessentially suburban’. Burnley and Murphy (2004, p. 219) have remarked on this as ‘brick venereal disease’—a physical manifestation of suburban sprawl, insensitive to local character and vernacular design (see also Essex and Brown 1997). Such criticisms of housing character can be traced back to high rates of population growth from the 1970s onwards: ‘growth was the pressing need, and aesthetics were beyond the world-view of planners and politicians’ (Burnley and Murphy 2004, p. 223).

Nevertheless the cultural weight of the ‘sea change’ is utilised by real estate marketing; as Osbaldiston (2012, p. 143) suggests, sea change ‘is now a buzz word here in Australia, used in the real estate markets to entice those with capital to find their coastal idyll’. As such, idyllic representations of the beach—and the coast more generally—are paired with coastal real estate. As Eyles (1987, p. 102) argues, locality creation is central to real estate advertisements: selling houses ‘through selling not only bricks and mortar but also a location and a style’. These representations are grounded in nostalgic associations with the coast—where access to coastal nature is positioned in stark contrast to the ills of urban life (Osbaldiston 2012). This is, paradoxically, despite similarities in housing form and character.
Chapter 4 – Selling Surf and Turf

One form of housing supply central to the suburbanisation of Australia’s coastline is master-planned estates—their current development described by Shaw and Menday (2013) as a ‘sea-change surge’. The following section summarises past research on this phenomenon, highlighting tropes central to their promotion.

4.4 Selling the everyday: master-planned residential estates

In this section we review the place-making strategies of master-planned residential estates. MPEs are increasingly prominent in the suburban fabric of Western nations. While they possess subtleties in settlement form and vision, MPEs are broadly recognised as bounded settlements (physically, symbolically or both) planned and delivered by a private developer (McGuirk and Dowling 2007; Cheshire et al. 2010; Thompson 2013). The developer imparts an overarching vision—‘master-plan’—for how the estate should look and function. This vision, generally, is a packaged version of lifestyle expectations: dominated particularly by tropes of ‘community’ amongst like-minded individuals (Dowling et al. 2010; Opit and Kearns 2014). When delivered in rural and coastal (‘greenfield’) locations, MPEs are increasingly promoted as providing a lifestyle connected to nature (see Shaw and Menday 2013; Gillon 2014).

Whilst place marketing is a method for showcasing the individuality of places, Kearns and Philo (1993, p. 20) infer that selling place is grounded in a sameness—the utilisation of ‘the same pleasant ensemble of motifs’. Master-planned estates are sold using the same script; studies of marketing materials for master-planned developments indicate that promotional material reinforces a broad appeal for ‘community’ and its referents: ‘good’ values, ‘safety’, ‘security’ and ‘belonging’ (see Kenna 2007; Cheshire et al. 2010; Opit and Kearns 2014). Extending this, Cheshire et al. (2010, p. 360) describe three ‘consistent’, ‘late-modern’ ways that MPEs are presented to future residents:
Chapter 4 – Selling Surf and Turf

First, MPEs are heavily marketed on a late-modern appeal to lifestyle and a sense of community, both in their aesthetic and material senses… Second, MPEs are presented as *fait accompli*; they are the embodiment of the market’s grand and all-encompassing vision of how the targeted consumer would like to live, with little remaining scope for the imprint of its end-users as a work in progress… Finally, in MPEs there is a preoccupation with security in all its forms.

Essentially, MPEs are presented as upholding values of lifestyle and community, presented as a finished product, and embellished with a sense of security. These taken for granted associations with housing estates are tailored towards certain types of consumers—namely, the appeal of ‘community values’ and a natural, safe living environment for young families. The articulation of these associations is a key role of real estate advertising; it ‘gives houses, gardens, natural areas, and neighbourhoods meaning which represents the nonmaterial things people also want’ (Perkins et al. 2008, p. 2063).

As one vehicle for the provision of lifestyle-driven housing stock, MPEs are increasingly paired with ‘natural’ lifestyles—where the everyday presence of surrounding nature is dovetailed with community ideals into a marketed lifestyle package (see Wood 2002; Gillon 2014). As Cheshire (2012, p. 198) explains, ‘the provision of housing, land and locally provided services are no longer sufficient for maintaining a competitive edge’. Wood (2002, p. 2) argues that enclave estates are both ‘landscaped’ and ‘mediascaped’ to enhance the presence of nature: ‘it is suggested that the wholesomeness of “community” as witnessed in the advertisements is concentrated not in the bricks and mortar but in “nature”’. Nature becomes conflated with ideals of community. Gillon (2014), for instance, showed how establishing native nonhumans as welcome afforded them a neighbour-like status for residents of a rural MPE. In this research, we expand on the community-building ‘role’ of
nature by exploring how coastal environments are represented in new residential
development, and what this means for how the coast is understood and consequently
choreographed into everyday routines.

The recent upsurge in MPEs beside the coast is currently an under-researched phenomenon.
A notable exception is Shaw and Menday’s (2013) study of Casuarina Beach in the Tweed
Shire, one of the first large-scale coastal MPE developments in NSW. Shaw and Menday
(2013) discuss how developers dovetail nature and community in ‘retro-modernist’ house
design. Building guidelines and covenants are guided by nostalgic expressions of coastal
nature and lifestyles, expressed via design homages to low-density ‘fibro shacks’. This they
term ‘fibro dreaming’: ‘an image of green, nature-oriented, architecturally sophisticated
housing that draws on an iconic “Australian” past’ (Shaw and Menday 2013, p. 2949). As
such, Shaw and Menday illustrate a ‘greenwashing’ of modern contemporary homes and
lifestyles. We explore similar frictions between representation and reality below.

4.5 Case Study and Methodology

Fieldwork for this paper involved a series of visits conducted by the first author between
September 2013 and January 2014 to nineteen MPEs located along the coastline of NSW,
Australia. Sites were chosen with the rationale that they were not yet fully established, and
were still involved in land sales. Each visit involved a walk of the streetscape. Field notes and
photographs captured each estate in their construction stage. These notes and photographs
form the empirical basis of the paper.

Morphologically, the majority of MPEs visited largely resembled what Dowling et al. (2010,
p. 398) identify as ‘symbolically enclosed developments’,

…which evince primarily symbolic forms of gating. They are simultaneously
open—with physically unimpeded public access and some wider community
facilities (e.g. open space, childhood facilities) housed within them—and
enclosed, through the presence of private roads, landscape elements and signage
deterring public access.

Under construction—in the ‘here-and-now’ (Massey 2005) of their place event—these estates
are essentially ‘templates’. As templates, the sites generally consist of symbolic gating
elements: a welcome sign emblazoned with the estate’s name, and a long, ‘boulevard’-style
entrance road leading to the first houses of the estate. Here, a collection of the first homes
would be built—commonly belonging to project home builders promoting their housing
designs. Accompanying these first homes is often a sales office. Besides these early
marketing presences, the estate is largely cleared, flat, empty space. Lots are demarcated,
given a number, and sold in stages. The streets, and street names, are on display but as yet
lead nowhere. Within the estate, banners and signs impart elements of the estate vision.
Outside the estate boundaries, roadside billboards entice passers-by. A selection of the estate
sites visited, and some general attributes, are detailed in Table 4.1.
### Table 4.1 A selection of MPEs visited, location attributes, size, and tagline.

A total of 76 real estate advertisements were analysed across the nineteen estates. A breakdown of the marketing type, and quantity of examples collected from each site, is expressed as Table 4.2. The marketing was photographed—or collected, in the case of brochures—and organised into five common types: (a) *landscape billboards*, commonly

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Estate name/Developer</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Driving distance from major centre</th>
<th>Estate size (in detached lots)</th>
<th>Tagline/brochure first line</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Light/ Villa World</td>
<td>Casuarina Beach NSW</td>
<td>1 hour 20 minutes to Brisbane</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>‘A rare opportunity has dawned’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greenhills Beach/ Australand</td>
<td>Cronulla NSW</td>
<td>42 minutes to Sydney</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>‘The natural choice for your new home by the sea’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miramar/ Villawood Properties</td>
<td>Casuarina Beach NSW</td>
<td>1 hour 20 minutes to Brisbane</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>‘Escape to the new Tweed Coast’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murray’s Beach/ Stockland</td>
<td>Lake Macquarie NSW</td>
<td>40 minutes to Newcastle</td>
<td>390</td>
<td>‘Your coastal haven’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearl at Valla/ Bellbird Park Developments</td>
<td>Valla NSW</td>
<td>44 minutes to Coffs Harbour</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>‘A rare find’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seabreeze/ Newland Communities</td>
<td>Pottsville NSW</td>
<td>1 hour 26 minutes to Brisbane</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>No tagline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seascape/ Cornish Group</td>
<td>Diamond Beach NSW</td>
<td>22 minutes to Forster</td>
<td>390</td>
<td>‘Sea views forever’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seaside/ Ray Real Estate</td>
<td>Casuarina Beach NSW</td>
<td>1 hour 20 minutes to Brisbane</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>‘Living by the beach is now within reach’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seaside Fern Bay/ Rawson Communities</td>
<td>Fern Bay NSW</td>
<td>23 minutes to Newcastle</td>
<td>950</td>
<td>‘Live where you play’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vantage/ Landcom</td>
<td>Corlette NSW</td>
<td>16 minutes to Port Stephens</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>‘Splash out on life’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
located along highway roadsides and the estate entrance; (b) signs inside the estate, commonly located along the estate boulevard entrance; (c) streetlight advertising flags, commonly located atop streetlights lining the boulevard entrance; (d) brochures, commonly located at sales offices; and (e) banner mesh screening, located along the estate boundary and utilised when sites are under construction. Nine on-site sales offices were visited; this is indicated in Table 4.2 by those where brochures were collected. For the other sites, sales offices were closed at the time of the visit. The reasons for this varied: day of the week the site was visited, for instance, or how far along the sales process was for each estate. Adhering to Massey’s (2005) conceptualisation of place as event, only those advertisements visible or available in the ‘here-and-now’ of the visits were photographed and collected.

The collected marketing materials were analysed using a Foucauldian discourse analysis (Lees 2004; Waitt 2008; Dittmer 2010). A Foucauldian post-structural approach to discourse analysis considers representation as an expression of power—and consequently, the formation of knowledge. Lees (2004, pp. 102-103) explains: ‘In Foucauldian terms, discourses are not simply reflections or (mis)representations of “reality”; rather they create their own “regimes of truth”’. Consequently, such analysis investigates ‘how discursive formations articulate regimes of truth that naturalise particular “ways of seeing” social difference… places, or bio-physical environments’ (Waitt 2008, p. 175). The ‘regimes of truth’ under scrutiny here are those articulated by developers, unveiled in the narratives of real estate advertising.
### Table 4.2 The volume and type of marketing examples collected, organised by study site.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Estate name/ location in NSW</th>
<th>Marketing type</th>
<th>Landscape billboard</th>
<th>Outdoor sign</th>
<th>Streetlight advertising flag</th>
<th>Brochure</th>
<th>Banner mesh screening</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Angels Beach/ Ballina</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bayswood/ Vincentia</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Rocks by the Sea/ Pottsville</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Light/ Casuarina Beach</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greenhills Beach/Cronulla</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haywards Bay/ Wollongong</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miramar/ Casuarina Beach</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murrays Beach/ Lake Macquarie</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Sapphire Beach/ Port Stephens</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Dunes/ Port Stephens</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearl/ Valla</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seabreeze/ Pottsville</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seascape/ Diamond Beach</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seaside/ Casuarina Beach</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seaside/ Fern Bay</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seawide Estate/ Lake Cathie</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shell Cove/ Shellharbour</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Village at Casuarina Beach</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vantage/ Corlette</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>29</strong></td>
<td><strong>25</strong></td>
<td><strong>10</strong></td>
<td><strong>9</strong></td>
<td><strong>3</strong></td>
<td><strong>76</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Coding was conducted manually, guided by identifying primary ‘ways of seeing’ offered via images and text. Coding of the 67 photographed examples of *in situ* advertisements focussed on the tagline and primary image. Coding of the nine hardcopy brochures—which ranged from two to 24 pages in length—focussed on textual description. Two themes became the focus of analysis. First, the text and images were coded for common tropes of living in MPEs: namely ‘lifestyle’ and ‘community’ rhetoric (see Kenna 2007; Opit and Kearns 2014). The second theme analysed the recurring expression of a specific coastal, natural lifestyle. This encapsulated both the positioning and activities of humans within coastal nature, and the portrayal of coastal nature as an entity on its own. As such, coding targeted instances in which nature was entwined within everyday life and prominent ‘lifestyle’ activities.

Following Collins and Kearns (2008), the real estate advertisements were analysed for their ‘promotional intent’, rather than an evaluation of their effectiveness as a sales device. This promotional intent is an expression of an idealised reality, as Perkins et al. (2008, p. 2076) clarify: ‘Advertisements contain poetic language, hyperbole, and evocative imagery that together have the effect of more or less abstracting or distancing buildings from their daily use and actual physical form’. The intertextuality of these advertisements was also targeted, focussing primarily on nostalgic, holiday-like associations with the coast in Australia. In this case, grounding in past coastal cultures is central to how advertisements establish their authenticity.

The remainder of this paper analyses the capacity of advertisements to negotiate the place-event of coastal places in flux. First, we explore how advertisements establish each master-planned estate in rapidly changing places. Largely, each estate is grounded in its reproducibility—a similar, consistent product with established connotations of lifestyle. Echoing the movement of families to the coast, motivated by affordability, land is sold using
tropes of opportunity and possibility. Second, the paper examines ‘ways of seeing’ coastal nature. Combined with a ‘shift’ in sea change trajectories—from temporary settlement to permanent settlement, and retirees to families—the presentation of coastal nature marks a shift from holiday homes to ‘home holidays’, where routine interactions with oceans and coasts are encouraged. Elements of both of these sales tactics incite a ‘suburbanisation of the sea’ critique (Burnley and Murphy 2004; Collins 2013). The conclusion considers the consequences of these advertisements for future coastal places.

4.6 Results and Discussion

4.6.1 ‘Suburbanisation by the sea’ – families, opportunities, possibilities

This section considers how the narrative surrounding sea change locations on the New South Wales coastline is shifting, focusing on the framing of family oriented permanent residency. This is different from the retirement-driven, temporary style settlement that lies at the heart of sea change rhetoric. Each advertisement was coded based on the subject of the dominant image\textsuperscript{22}. Of the 76 examples, 62 included an image (82 percent) and 33 of 62 (53 percent) included people as the subject of the image. As an expression of the demographic characteristics of the target market, the representation of young families in place is the dominant scene for advertisements. Fourteen of the 33 were nuclear family units (i.e. mother, father, son, daughter in various groupings), and 10 were scenes of children playing; the remaining nine advertisements portrayed couples, or people on their own—with just 3 of the 33 examples portraying couples with an older age profile (fitting the association between ‘sea change’ and retirement). This is consistent with contemporary coastal settlement also being

---

\textsuperscript{22} Some advertisements included composite images; the ‘dominant image’ was determined based on size and composition. For the nine brochures, the cover image was analysed as the dominant image.
economically pragmatic for families, forced to turn to outer metropolitan regions to seek certain forms of housing. Land is sold to families centred on two themes: the opportunity to buy; and the possibility for building a home. We consider each in turn.

First, the roadside billboards emphasise the opportunity to buy land. This opportunity is structured about a sales urgency. Remembering the primary role of advertising as a sales device, the brochures and associated marketing enhance the tentative ‘here-and-now’ (Massey 2005) of coastal places by presenting the availability of coastal land as a fleeting opportunity. As such, advertisements work to impart the opportunity of purchase—as these brochure excerpts illustrate:

Living by the beach is now within reach… Don’t miss this opportunity to live by the beach. Beachside lots are selling fast and will not last long.
Seaside (Ray Real Estate), Casuarina Beach NSW.

An incredible, once in a lifetime opportunity in a unique coastal residential enclave. Pearl is a rare find, and an opportunity that may never be repeated.
Pearl at Valla (Bellbird Park Developments), Valla NSW.

The rarity and urgency implied by this rhetoric is employed first and foremost to sell land, but also reflects the appeal for a house by the coast—something sought-after in the national consciousness.

Second is the possibility of building a new home. Houses are under-represented in the collected sample: only 5 of the 76 advertisements included a house or a house interior as the dominant image (see Figure 4.2). Prospective buyers are free, then, to imagine possibilities for their own ideal homes. Having an empty lot upon which to build a new house, that can be
designed with some input from the buyer, is central to the appeal of MPEs (see Dowling et al. 2010). A streetlight advertising flag at Seaside Fern Bay best encapsulates this; paired with a child building a sand castle, the advertisement urges prospective buyers to ‘build your castle here’ (Figure 4.1). At this stage of development—land sales—buyers are enticed by this opportunity to buy land, and the possibility that comes with owning a blank slate for a new house. Instead, it is exterior spaces of the estate, and of coastal nature, which are used to sell property (Collins and Kearns 2008). Building a new home becomes packaged around the lifestyle possibilities that these coastal settings will offer a young family; this underwrites the purpose of the image in Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1 ‘Build your castle here’: streetlight advertising flag, Seaside Fern Bay (Rawson Communities) (January 2014).
Place advertising written for families is consistent with examples of master-planned developments in outer suburbia (Kenna 2007; Opit and Kearns 2014). While the repetition and reproducibility of lifestyles is a source of critique for MPEs (i.e. Gleeson 2006), a consistent presentation of family images and scenes instils a familiar sense of place across each site. We argue this repetition helps build a collective narrative for new residential developments. The following section extends the collective narrative by focusing on the effect of real estate advertising on understandings of coastal nature.

### 4.6.2 From holiday homes to ‘home holidays’: coastal nature and everyday life

Despite advertising permanent settlement in a suburban-like housing form, moving to an MPE is still based around the aforementioned ‘lifestyle’ pull factors that implicate coastal natural amenity. Coding of advertising images of coastal nature is included as Figure 4.2. Of these image-based advertisements 79 percent (49 of 62) included a portrayal of coastal nature. Dissecting the 49 coastal nature based images further, coastal nature is represented in two main ways: as the scene of holiday-like family activities at the beach (22 of the 49 images; 45 percent), and scenes absent of people—including beach vistas looking from the shore (12 of 49; 24 percent), and aerial photos of each site looking from the ocean back to the shore (7 of 49; 14 percent). Each dominant portrayal utilises tropes of an ‘authentic’ sea change (Os baldiston 2012), to ground estates within a coastal setting. In so doing, setting the scene for a ‘sea change’ has a dual consequence in the throwntogetherness of place: it conflates the resultant lifestyle with coastal holidays, and portrays an undeveloped coastline, resulting in a disconnect from the present state of the coastline.
Figure 4.2 Coding of the dominant images of the 76 advertisements collected. The two most common representations of coastal nature were ‘family/children at beach’ (n=22) and ‘beach vista without people’ (n=12).

First, the dominant portrayal of coastal nature is as the scene for holiday-like activities at the beach (Figure 4.2). Contrasting the findings of Collins and Kearns (2008), where supporting images in coastal real estate advertisements tended to mask the ‘human imprint’ upon the coast through photographs taken towards the ocean, the images used in these glossy MPE brochures largely portray people and families active at the beach. Accordingly it is important to explore how these people and coastal nature are represented together; indeed the body ‘is the single most potent cultural symbol’ at the beach (Booth 2001, p. 8; see also Obrador-Pons 2007). As Kearns and Collins (2012, p. 947) summarise, emotional attachment to the coastal
landscape forms through physical engagements, where landscape is ‘an entity to be actively engaged with, respected, immersed in and enjoyed’. These brochures attempt to convey this ‘physicality’ through descriptive imagery. This excerpt from a brochure for Vantage, for instance, is indicative of the portrayal of feelings of immersion in the beach environment:

There’s something about feeling the fine sand between your toes, the gentle sea breeze on your face and the cool waters enveloping you that refreshes and re-energises like nothing else. But for most of us it’s a luxury we rarely get the opportunity to enjoy.

Vantage (Landcom), Corlette NSW.

Consequently, advertising presents a series of outdoor activities associated with Australian beach cultures.

Coastal nature is packaged as a space for family socialisation—reinforcing families as the target market, and a shift in sea change trends. Families are pictured at the beach smiling and splashing in the shallows, children are portrayed playing together in water and on the sand, and couples without children are pictured in romantic overtones, walking hand in hand. Such tropes hark back to cultural associations with the beach and summer holidays in Australia (Booth 2001; Hoskins 2013). The majority of advertisements are guided by activities eliciting a beach-infused lifestyle. For instance, the streetlight banners and outdoor signs lining the boulevard entrance to Shell Cove, for instance, portray beach scenes accompanied by an active description: ‘live’, ‘friends’, ‘explore’, ‘golf’, ‘enjoy’, ‘surf’ (Figure 4.3).
Figure 4.3 (a) ‘Enjoy’, ‘Surf’: streetlight advertising flags; (b) ‘Explore your home by the sea’: outdoor sign, both Shell Cove (Australand) (September 2013).
Chapter 4 – Selling Surf and Turf

As Figure 4.3 illustrates, a very particular type of family is represented: nuclear, heterosexual, ethnically homogenous, able-bodied families with young children. This representation of families is not unique to the coastal MPEs under scrutiny here; it is the overwhelming portrayal of families in MPEs (see Kenna 2007; Opit and Kearns 2014).

Children playing—either framed on their own or with a ‘parent’ figure—comprise the majority of family images (see Figures 4.1 & 4.3). Play is integral sales rhetoric: for instance, Seaside Fern Bay is presented with the tagline ‘live where you play’. Similarly, the collected brochure for Miramar describes the estate as ‘nature’s playground’:

Miramar is truly designed with families in mind. The beach, the mountain, the valley and the creek all combine to provide the best playground you could possibly wish for… Bring the family. Nature’s Playground awaits.

Miramar (Villawood Properties), Casuarina Beach NSW.

This holiday-based, play-centred lifestyle shift is further displayed by temporal elements of the brochure images. Often, the beach is presented with sunrise/sunset tones—associating the setting with romance and leisure. While consistent with retirement tropes, in the context of family settlement on the coast this could additionally be seen as a strategy to align the development with different affordances in normal working schedules; opportunities for coastal interaction exist outside the traditional 9am–5pm schedule due to proximity and ease of access. This ‘different’ working week is supported by excerpts encouraging a re-configuration of weekday and weekend:
Live every day like it’s the weekend… Imagine waking to the sounds of the crashing waves and enjoying a refreshing surf or stroll along the beach before work. It’s what lifestyle is all about.

First Light (Villa World), Casuarina Beach NSW.

Welcome to Greenhills Beach. A new suburb designed for those who desire the perfect lifestyle balance between work and play.

Casuarina Beach (Australand), Cronulla NSW.

…the only disadvantage is you might find it extremely difficult to find somewhere better to go on holidays…

Vantage (Landcom), Corlette NSW.

As such, advertising appeals to common desires that are unachievable in urban settings; a ‘perfect lifestyle balance between work and play’ (Casuarina Beach) is possible in these coastal MPEs, where the presence of coastal nature allows you to ‘live every day like it’s the weekend’ (First Light). Indeed, this reconfiguration of workday and weekend is being ‘holiday-like’ (Vantage). In so doing, this representation of coastal nature aligns with a ‘sea change’ lifestyle shift. Geared towards permanent family settlement, this marks a change from holiday homes to ‘home holidays’—where the environment affords you holiday scenarios as part of your daily routine.

Second, master-planned estates are sold supporting a discordant imaginary of an undeveloped coastline. Supported by stock ‘beach vista’ views without people and aerial location photos emphasising the coastline advertisements boost the status of each site as an intrinsically ‘coastal’ location, and harken to an ‘uninterrupted’ environment (Collins and Kearns 2008).
This is a common trope of marketing amenity migration locales, where ‘the notion of nature as pristine, genuine, and untouched is strongly represented’ (Osbaldiston 2011, p. 217). As Hoffman and Kearns (2013, p. 69) discuss in relation to tourist brochures, coasts are ‘glamourised’, summer scenes capturing their ‘most desirable guise’. There is an overlap in developer narratives, as indicated by Figure 4.4: a landscape billboard for Greenhills Beach. Here, the scene is one of sunny days, with stretches of uninhabited golden sand and a flat, calm, soft blue ocean. This is a standardised portrayal of ocean space, masking the ocean as lively and agential (Anderson and Peters 2014).

Figure 4.4 ‘Imagine this… just a short walk from your doorstep’: landscape billboard, Greenhills Beach (Australand) (March 2014).

Such idealised scenes are paired with ‘dream-like’ connotations; advertisements asking potential buyers to ‘dream’, ‘wish’, and in the case of Figure 4.4, ‘imagine’, they lived in these places. The two excerpts below from brochures indicate how modern ‘suburban-like’ developments are grounded in ‘halcyon days’; the environment supports an ‘organic and pure
Chapter 4 – Selling Surf and Turf

way of living’ in the case of Miramar, and conflates new development with surrounding ‘old beach towns of yesteryear’, as the description for Seabreeze suggests:

Living at Miramar harks back to halcyon days. A safe, uncomplicated beach lifestyle where being outdoors is everything. Where the tranquillity of the mountain views is balanced by the adventure of the coastline. An organic and pure way of living that’s good for the family and good for the soul.

Miramar (Villawood Properties), Casuarina Beach NSW.

The coastal township of Pottsville is reminiscent of the old beach towns of yesteryear with pristine beaches, peaceful village atmosphere and friendly locals. Seabreeze is answering demand for seaside land in this prime location, as people look to the area as a more relaxing and desirable location… One of the greatest qualities of Pottsville is its ability to retain its charming village atmosphere without compromising on important amenities, an aspect that many people look for when moving from the hustle and bustle of city life…

Seabreeze (Newland), Pottsville NSW.

Osbaldiston (2012) remarks that place marketing for sea change locales in Australia is grounded in an established ‘authenticity’—grounded in expectations of nature, culture, and ‘genuine’ community—which separates these places from ‘profane’ urbanism. These excerpts convey the importance of ‘authentic’ towns in fostering a coastal lifestyle.

However, considering MPEs as drivers of coastal suburbanisation, basing representations of the coast on ‘holiday-like’ interactions with nature in an undeveloped setting is at odds with both the ‘here-and-now’, and the trajectory, of coastal places (Massey 2005). As a result real estate marketing can be a source of disjuncture in place trajectories—nostalgia grounding the
present in the past. In reality, coastal towns—upon which an ‘authentic’ sea change is constructed—struggle to retain this authenticity and character in the wake of property investment (Carter et al. 2007; Gurran 2008).

These two sections have conveyed the dominant tropes and rhetoric imbued in the advertisement of coastal MPEs, and considered some of the consequences of these representations. Advertising narratives play a central orienting role in establishing tendencies with, and expectations of, the natural surrounds—laying the groundwork for a coastal culture that dovetails with this housing form.

4.7 Conclusion

This paper has argued for a consideration of the role of advertising narratives of new residential developments in the throwntogetherness (Massey 2005) of rapidly changing coastal places. Targeting the representation of coastal lifestyles and coastal nature in MPEs, we have endeavoured to tease out how advertising may negotiate the future trajectories of coastal places. This paper makes two conclusions for coastal places based on the analysis of advertising examples. First, the marketing materials collected are emblematic of a shift in the culture of coastal places. If contemporary coastlines have a ‘strongly suburban character’ (Collins 2013), new-build MPEs are key drivers. This ‘suburbanisation’ is a consequence of an increasingly inaccessible metropolitan housing market. The Australian dream of homeownership (and of a particular type of large, detached home) is more achievable on the coast away from the major cities—there is both the possibility to buy land, and the opportunity to build, that for many is unaffordable and/or unattainable in the city. The advertising materials collected are geared towards the permanent settlement of young families, reinforcing these shifting trends in coastal settlement (ABS 2004; Burnley and Murphy 2004). Scenes of family life here are similar across the collected sample, and
interchangeable with how MPEs are marketed in outer suburbia (Kenna 2007; Opit and Kearns 2014)—the difference being family activities occur against a coastal backdrop. There are advantages to this consistency. The collective narrative of advertisements contribute towards legitimating MPEs as a form of coastal property (Collins and Kearns 2008).

Second, MPE advertisements simultaneously contradict this culture shift, portraying coastal places and coastal nature in past and present configurations. The authentic culture of a coastal place is still wrapped up as something very un-suburban: as low density townships, and undeveloped coastlines (Osbaldiston 2012). ‘Sea change’ tropes are potent cultural foundations of coastal settlement, making them highly marketable signifiers. Coastal nature, conflated as a marker of community (Wood 2002), predicates the advertised lifestyle package on a ‘dream-like’ nostalgic vision of the Australian coastline as undeveloped. For instance, even when families are active at the beach, they are framed on an otherwise empty beach—which does not reflect population increase (see Figures 4.1 and 4.3). This empirical example illustrates the challenge of marketing and place creation for MPEs in non-metropolitan, ‘greenfield’ sites. Greenfield MPEs are interesting places, built from scratch with no settlement history. To compensate for this, developer narratives create place through reproducibility: establishing common, clear expectations of place that prospective buyers recognise and desire (i.e. lifestyle, community, security) (Kenna 2007; McGuirk and Dowling 2007; Cheshire et al. 2010; Gillon 2014). This character and aesthetic of MPEs sits in opposition to their low density, non-metropolitan surroundings. Further, ‘nature’ is more visible in greenfield sites—and, subsequently, more noticeable when altered. As such, the tendency to market the surrounding environment in a nostalgic, less inhabited form is problematic. While ‘nature’s’ presence is key to the aesthetic and lifestyle of MPEs, where this leaves nature in place—and in relation with new residents—is often left unclear. Such
representation, therefore, distances the reality that development triggers permanent environmental change (Cadieux 2011; Opit and Kearns 2014).

Real estate advertisements can play an important role in shaping narratives of the beach and of coastal nature. Visual representations of families at the beach are a prominent sales tactic, scenarios concocted by MPE developers as part of their *fait accompli* vision of everyday life and lifestyles (Cheshire et al. 2010). But, as Anderson (2013) attests, embodied human activity with coastal nature and oceans can translate to new appreciations and understandings of the environment. Encouraging this routine interaction could become something more important, and more profound. But the scenes represented require nuance and balance. The repetition of sunny days and calm oceans reinforces a dominant portrayal of ocean space as marginalised, flat, and empty (Anderson and Peters 2014, Hoffman and Kearns 2013). The ocean is either a flaccid setting for human activity, or a pleasant vista. If this is still how interactions with coasts and oceans are filtered, it distances people from the ‘physical liveliness of oceans and seas’ (Anderson and Peters 2014, p. 4). Coastal nature is oriented around activity, but portrayed as *inactive* itself. A clearer representation of the resulting settlement in developer narratives (while potentially less marketable) would deliver a more realistic portrayal of eventual, inevitable, landscape change. The changing character of coastal places, motivated by development, presents an opportunity to represent beaches and coastal nature differently.

Throwntogetherness provides a useful lens for theorising place change. Understanding place as event has a temporal premise—as Massey (2005, p. 139) asserts, ‘the returns are always to a place that has moved on’. Each of these sites will have continued their trajectories, with sales, construction, and resident settlement. Further research is needed to explore this transformation, including: how these representations translate to everyday practices of MPE residents, if at all (for a related case study in rural space, see Gillon 2014); and how current
coastal residents translate the place narratives of MPE advertisements (see Hoffman and Kearns 2013).

The coastal MPEs discussed in this paper are part of a shift in the character of coastal places in Australia. The reality of the NSW coastline, as a site of concentrated and sustained population growth, means that everyday nature relationships can no longer be tarred with a nostalgic brush. Ultimately, how lifestyles amidst nature are presented has repercussions. In the throwntogetherness of contemporary coastlines, marked by landscape change and development pressures, real estate advertisements are pivotal in establishing, grounding and guiding change.
Chapter 4 – Selling Surf and Turf
The second place to pause is at the temporal moment of construction—and at the place of the building site. This chapter deals with the beginning of the homemaking process—building—and with the resonances of living in a building site. This chapter was inspired by my first few visits to Greenhills Beach during its early stages of construction. The prominence and noise of building spurred me to add a line of questioning to the interview schedule about living with construction work, and living in an unfinished housing estate.

This chapter argues that researching building sites furthers understandings of purchase motivations, homemaking, and modes of valuing new homes. Master-planned estates are an advantageous (and pertinent) setting for exploring these concerns, because they are a current modus operandi of infill housing development in Australia. The reality of new build housing delivery like MPEs is that the building site is ongoing; this persistence challenges early occupants in ways expected and unexpected, brief and enduring. Occupants are challenged by this environment, by this time-space. First, sharing space with builders and new neighbours fractures some expectations of an ideal home. Homemaking proceeds by accommodating, both emotionally and physically, the challenges of building sites. The second section shows how residents weigh up homemaking challenges alongside anticipated financial reward. This reward is always speculative though, and the building site compounds this: residents take a risk at the outset, and manage fears and worries while others build. Building site experiences are both an example and evidence of home as a process, and are understudied. In light of the continued implementation and popularity of MPEs, experiences living with and within homes under construction are important additions to current and future studies of contemporary homemaking.
This chapter has been published as:

5.1 Introduction

Housing construction is visibly and audibly ubiquitous in contemporary suburbs. In Sydney, where this paper is set, 664,000 new dwellings are planned for the greater metropolitan region by 2031 (New South Wales Planning and Environment 2014). One of the primary means of delivering new-build housing in Australia is master-planned estates (MPEs): low density agglomerations of detached homes built from scratch on newly released or rezoned land (McGuirk and Dowling 2007; 2011). Construction persists in these spaces for years: settled residents co-existing with vacant lots, scaffolding and construction work. The continued implementation of MPEs, and popularity among home-buyers (see Dowling et al. 2010), compels research attention to better understand how people navigate these ongoing experiences of living with and within homes under construction. These experiences are not unique to MPEs, or to Australian cases; similar modes of staged new-build housing delivery—where the presences of construction linger—are manifold globally (for a review see Thompson 2013).

In response, this paper has two aims. First, I highlight the building site as a setting for the physical construction of houses, and the early development of ‘home’ in an ontological sense. I heed Kraftl et al.’s (2013, p. 198) call for greater attention to residents living during construction in large-scale housing projects, where building sites are a timespace for provisionally establishing meaning and routines, and engaging with ‘messy materialities’ of houses. In so doing, the paper contributes to a growing body of architectural and cultural geographies on settings and actors involved in house building (see Datta 2008; Sage 2013). Drawing on material geographies, I attend to home as a process, documenting the progressive making—and, paradoxically, unmaking (Baxter and Brickell 2014)—of home generated by building sites.
Chapter 5 – Under Construction

The second aim is to analyse how residents justify accepting the difficult scenario of the building site, exploring motivations underwriting the consumption of housing, and homemaking decisions. Home is a cultural site of meaning and identity formation (Blunt and Dowling 2006); at the same time the owner-occupied house is a key financial asset and instrument (Smith 2008). Rational and irrational motivations converge—insofar that Christie et al. (2008) identify housing as an ‘emotional economy’. As a setting the building site contributes to understanding how ‘modes of valuing’ home (Jacobs and Smith 2008) surface at the time of house construction and early inhabitation. More specifically, the paper outlines how financial motivations and pressures arise in the early stages of MPEs, as an increasingly important housing context for owner-occupation.

The paper is structured as follows. First, I review research on material geographies of home, specifically pausing on the acts of building and construction. The second section outlines context on house construction in Australia, and master-planned estates as a housing form. Following this, I outline the case study and the methodology: semi-structured walking interviews with 21 households living with construction work at Greenhills Beach, a master-planned estate located in southern Sydney, Australia. Results are presented in two sections. First, residents’ accounts highlight how sharing space with builders and new neighbours shapes material and social conditions of home. The second section explores how residents weigh up the uncertainty of the building site phase alongside anxieties of middle-class social reproduction. This uncertainty enables a potential opportunity for financial reward—saving money by building early, to maximize future house value—but concurrently, living in a residential setting under construction heaps uneasiness on the material performance of middle-class identities in MPEs and similar residential landscapes (Duncan and Duncan 2004; Atkinson 2006; McGuirk and Dowling 2011). In this frame, building sites are unexplored settings of owner-occupier financial speculation. Together these sections show
how residents balanced their purchase, and everyday life in a building site, alongside notions of risk and reward. Here, ‘risk’ and ‘reward’ are an expression of potential material and financial outcomes. The paper concludes by discussing building sites as an example and evidence of housing and homemaking as process.

5.2 Literature Review: Houses, homemaking, materials, and money

Houses are more than just shelter; they are ‘the material structures that provide the scaffolding for emotional investments, social relations and meanings of everyday life’ (Dowling and Mee 2007, p. 161). Through continued occupation, houses are infused with social and cultural meaning and can become ‘home’ (for reviews see Blunt 2005; Blunt and Dowling 2006). This value-adding—from house to home - occurs via an ongoing, active process of homemaking. The explicit goal of homemaking is creating a ‘homely’ home reflecting and upholding certain ideals and social relations. Blunt and Dowling (2006, pp. 100-101) identify the current hegemonic version of ‘homely’ as ‘belonging and intimacy amongst members of a heterosexual nuclear family, living in a detached, owner-occupied dwelling, in a suburban location’. But this is problematic: the house-as-home always has multiple forms and iterations. Properties of an ‘ideal home’—for instance, cleanliness, comfort, safety and belonging—are no longer given outcomes. Nor is home universal: the ‘house as haven thesis’ has come unstuck on feminist and postcolonial grounds (Brickell 2012, p. 225; see also Blunt 2005).

Home can also be critiqued using a materiality lens. A material geography of home explores the complexities of establishing and sustaining home, where homemaking is not a linear procedure to follow towards an idealized outcome. Influenced by these developments, housing researchers are beginning to open up home in ‘post-social’ (Gabriel and Jacobs 2008; Jacobs and Gabriel 2013) and ‘post-human’ directions (Franklin 2006; Power 2009a; Gillon
Framing buildings and homes as relational outcomes—for instance, as ‘organisms’ (Ingold 2004), ‘events’ (Jacobs 2006), ‘performances’ (Rose et al. 2010), ‘living buildings’ (Strebel 2011), or as an ‘assemblage of dwelling’ (Jacobs and Smith 2008)—speaks to the complexity of buildings as never solely human achievements, never stable, forever in the process of being made. This conceptualisation of home accounts for temporality, and changes in actors and their influences over time and occupation (see for instance, Blunt’s (2008) theorisation of ‘house biographies’).

Focussing on the multiple agents and varying degrees of labour that form and uphold building structures unveils a timespace largely absent from housing studies to date: building sites. Attention to building sites has arisen from a ‘new wave of ethnographically inspired geographies of architecture’ (Jacobs et al. 2012, p. 128), seeking to decentre the architect and ‘open the “black box” of architectural practice’ (Kraftl, 2010, p. 411). As Jacobs and Merriman (2011, p. 212) offer: ‘Seen in this way, the stable architectural object (architecture-as-noun) is the effect of various doings (architecture-as-verb)’. Developing this further, Sage (2013) proposed a critical agenda to research the ‘people, places and politics’ of construction industries, drawing attention to the role of builders and tradespeople (Datta 2008; Sage 2013), the phase of building sites, and houses under construction (Kraftl et al. 2013). This paper contributes to this research field by focussing on residents living during housing construction, extending Kraftl et al.’s accounts of ‘the diverse experiences of those who live with building work… those people whose inhabitation overlaps with the construction phase’ (Kraftl et al. 2013, p. 193, emphasis in original). Studying a newly released housing community in England, Kraftl et al. (2013, p. 194) characterise building sites as places requiring negotiation: ‘residents experience all kinds of delays, intermissions and absurdities, such as land parcels being cleared but becoming overgrown several times, houses left half-built or roofless for years, and lengthy disputes between stakeholders over responsibilities for
Chapter 5 – Under Construction

community infrastructure’. I examine some of these ‘delays, intermissions and absurdities’: first, by unveiling the ‘messy’ materialities of new homes and homes under construction; and second, exploring how residents negotiate builders and the building site as part of ‘the beginnings of group life’ in housing developments (Gans 1967; see also Richards 1990; Peel 2000). This is a pressing concern for housing studies; the analogous delivery of new residential housing developments means that the difficulties of living with building work will be shared in multiple contexts and multiple locations.

Homemaking is further complicated by the economic function of the owner-occupied house (Smith 2008). This paper interrogates a case where house purchase, as a substantial financial outlay and investment, also doubles as a family home: raising a number of collaborating and competing motivations that complicate purchasing decisions (see Jørgensen 2016; Levy et al. 2008). An owned home is a source of ontological security. At the same time, the financial value of houses can always only be speculative and insecure (Smith 2008). As Christie et al. (2008) outline the quest for ontological security is grounded within financial speculation, making housing markets inherently emotional: purchasers are both hopeful and fearful subjects. Following the subprime mortgage crisis, this uncertainty is raised: home is increasingly a site of anxiety and individualized financial risk (Colic-Peisker and Johnson 2010). Housing decisions are driven as much by financial logic and investment rhetoric as they are by financially ‘irrational’ cultural and emotional influences. To this end, Jacobs and Smith (2008) have argued for a ‘revised rematerialization of home’ that considers the incorporation of emotional and economic modes of valuing. I address this, adding to previous studies of early estate life by tracing how residents are navigating the competing emotions of housing markets by moving into a building site.
In approaching the house-as-home as a process, such a stance attends to how home is simultaneously *unmade* (Baxter and Brickell 2014). Home is made and unmade by the everyday obstacles, annoyances and nuisances of building sites. The material risks this entails for homemaking sit alongside anticipated notions of reward—a completed, settled, valuable home. The following section grounds these concerns, contextualising the home building industry in Australia, and master-planned estates as a specific mode of provision.

5.3 **Context: construction and master-planned estates in Australia**

Home building and the construction industry are integral to modern Australian suburbia. Strong demand for housing provision is driven by consistent national and international migration to Australia’s major cities, the growth of fringe suburbia to accommodate populations seeking a link to these major cities, and the interrelated need to replace ageing housing in middle-ring suburbia (see Johnson 2006). For example, Sydney’s current metropolitan strategy forecasts an additional 1.6 million residents by 2031 (NSW Planning and Environment 2014). While this need will be met largely by higher density living (i.e. apartments), there is still a widespread cultural preference for detached housing. Australia is a home-owning suburban nation; a ‘peaceful family life in a suburban house on a ‘quarter acre block’ is referred to as the “great Australian dream”’ (Colic-Peisker and Johnson 2010, p. 367). This ideal housing vision still holds significant influence, despite becoming increasingly dream-like in the context of unaffordable property markets, and alongside pragmatic calls to consolidate suburbs by increasing urban densities (see Gleeson 2006; Allon 2008).

Master-planned estates are a distinctive material context for exploring construction and homemaking. Commonly recognised in the suburban fabric as clusters of large, newly-built,
detached homes\textsuperscript{23}, MPEs are emblematic drivers of change in the form and aesthetics of suburbia (Johnson 2006). Cheshire et al. (2010, p. 359) identify MPEs by common characteristics: ‘a comprehensive master plan accounting for all or most of the lived space within a development; a single developer or consortium responsible for delivering the plan; distinct physical boundaries; uniform design features and some form of appeal to a communitarian ethic’. The rise of MPEs is a rational market response to land and housing provision in Sydney—namely, large developers are the only ones able to afford the high cost of available residential land (see McGuirk and Dowling 2011).

MPEs allow buyers to build a new house; which, as sprawling growth continues, is an increasingly rare opportunity. In an extensive survey of MPEs, Dowling et al. (2010) identified building a new house as the primary motivation for purchase. These houses are commonly ‘project homes’, contract-built by specialist building companies. Project home designs are delivered as a ‘base package’, applied with a degree of flexibility on the floor plan orientation and the size, shape, and placement of rooms. Burke and Hulse (2010) outline this process of housing production:

\begin{quote}
In Australia, the developers acquire land, obtain the necessary zoning, clear the land, subdivide and provide the appropriate infrastructure. The land is then sold to individual builders or, much more commonly, to households for subsequent construction. A consumer shops around the display village on a new estate (there may be up to 50 houses on display), chooses one and gets the builder to construct it on their own piece of land (Burke and Hulse 2010, p. 827).
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{23} While this is their most common form and character, MPEs can vary in the provision of housing types and styles (see McGuirk and Dowling 2007). For instance in brownfield, inner-city locations MPEs provide different housing options that cater for different needs and preferences (e.g. duplexes, townhouses).
Colloquially derided as ‘McMansions’, contemporary project homes are notably larger in size and surface area than existing homes—insofar that Wiesel et al. (2013) suggest the Australian dream is now ‘supersized’. Research is examining the everyday lives lived within contemporary large homes in Australia, and the motivations behind their purchase. Dowling and Power (2012) focus on the ‘familial affordances’ of large homes as central to their demand, allowing family members the ability to be together and apart under the same roof (see also Dowling 2008). Large homes are also a material expression of wealth, important for sustaining ideals of middle-class identity. Wiesel et al. (2013) explored the motivations of ‘knockdown-rebuild’ in middle-ring suburbs in Sydney. Building large houses in the place of older, smaller housing stock was primarily attributed to an assumed link between house size and resale value.

While there is a level of control and freedom over how a project home is delivered, large houses in MPEs are built under the guidance of covenants that limit design and material expression. In constricting house designs developers propagate an estate-wide aesthetic standard, one exhibiting exclusivity and social distinction (Dowling et al. 2010). Consequently, as clusters of newly built large homes MPEs typify a shared middle-class identity (Duncan and Duncan 2004; Atkinson 2006; Dowling 2009). As McGuirk and Dowling (2011, p. 2623) explain the upkeep of this identity is generally taken by MPE residents as common sense, ‘merely codifying the material and behavioural elements of middle-class respectability’. The material performance of this middle-class identity also pertains to a significant investment potential. Cheshire et al. (2009, p. 962) discuss how covenants are ‘investment protection’ for property values, making it seem less risky to buy and build in an MPE. This standard, ‘a contractually inflected micro-politics of the neighbourhood’ (McGuirk and Dowling 2011, p. 2624), concurrently adds pressure and culpability to residents’ everyday homemaking practices (Dowling et al. McGuirk 2010;
Chapter 5 – Under Construction

Rosenblatt et al. 2009). Studying MPEs helps better understand the practices and values of home that support and maintain the ideals of large houses, and spatialities of middle-class identity in urban spaces more broadly (Duncan and Duncan 2004; Dowling 2009).

Among other things, the packaged, pre-determined character of housing and lifestyle in MPEs obscures the timespace of the building site. Experiences during construction have been neglected in accounts of lifestyle and everyday rhythms (though see Gans 1967; Richards 1990). MPEs involve land releases that are staged over time, where construction is an enduring condition that frequently lasts years and directly influences homemaking and early inhabitation. It is an oversight to not account for these unsettling beginnings. I turn next to a profile of the case study. This is coupled with an account of methodology.

5.4 Case Study and Methods

Fieldwork took place between 2013 and 2015 and involved a case study analysis of Greenhills Beach, a new MPE located in Cronulla, southern Sydney, approximately 30 kilometres from Sydney’s Central Business District. The Greenhills Beach site consists of 236 lots, ranging in size between 550 and 800 square metres, designed solely to accommodate detached family homes. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with 21 households as part of a larger project concerned with the cultures and politics of master-planned estates in Australian suburbs. Residents were initially recruited by a series of letterbox drops. When this tactic yielded a poor response rate, doorknocking was undertaken, and became the primary recruitment method. The only requirement for recruitment was that the participant was living or currently building at Greenhills Beach. The households that participated can be broadly characterized as middle-class nuclear families. The most common number of household occupants was five: parents living with 3 young children under 12. Only 5 of the 22 households profiled had no children living at home. The age of participants
Chapter 5 – Under Construction

varied from 34 to 70, and the mean age was 47. All homes were owner-occupied, the purchase primarily motivated by building a family home. Interviews were conducted with seven men, eleven women and three (heterosexual) couples.

Interviews were between 30 and 90 minutes, and involved two elements. First, household members were interviewed in their homes, set commonly at the dining table of an open-plan living space. Interviews were guided by three overarching themes: motivations for purchase; impressions of lifestyle; and experiences of house building and construction. Following this interviewees were invited to guide me around their garden space and the home façade, as important sites of house design and display, to further explore homemaking decisions. This ‘narrated home tour’ (Dowling 2008) was conducted without prepared questions, allowing the setting to prompt questioning and direct the remainder of the interview. This helped unveil, for instance, building progress. Further, the addition of a walking element in interview conduct aligns with a materially inclined theoretical approach: walking in the home environment provoked interviewees to ‘show-and-tell’, consequently paying closer attention to the role of individual objects in homemaking (Tolia-Kelly 2004), design decisions and rationales (Dowling 2008), and the contributions of more-than-human actors and actions (Power 2009a; Gillon 2014). Eight of the 21 households also participated in a shorter revisit interview, approximately 12 months from the first interview, where themes of place change and investment were further explored.

All interviews were recorded, transcribed and thematically coded. To protect anonymity—particularly important in a named, bounded field site—the responses of interviewees are presented under pseudonyms. Interviews were paired with my own immersive walks around the estate site (some of which doubled as recruitment). Notes and photographs were taken, and these informed my impressions of the site.
Greenhills Beach was an ongoing construction site during fieldwork. Household interviews were staggered over three years: capturing homemaking in stages, and capturing the estate in transition through different land releases. As such, interviews chronicle the site from empty lots to houses, from empty streets to neighbours, and from purchasing land to house construction, homemaking, and settlement. While house construction was an auxiliary theme of interview questions, the everyday experience of living with construction emerged from coding as a theme worth further interrogation. Participants’ routines shaped responses to construction-related questions. Those who had more contact hours on the estate during the day—for example, parents with young children, or those that primarily worked from home—were more attuned to the experiences of construction. For other residents, construction was less evident, and consequently less discussed.

5.5 Everyday Homemaking and Unmaking

This section analyses homemaking experiences in the building site. During research, Greenhills Beach was characterized by vacant overgrown lots, skeletons of houses in wood and steel, windswept debris, excess building materials stacked like middens outside homes, dust and dirt that plumes on cleared lots, combined with the staccato of builders and machines, and the combined smells of work, concrete, soil, and used portable toilets (Figure 5.1). Residents’ narratives highlight conflicting expectations that surfaced when sharing the same space with builders and building. The section consists of four subsections, each highlighting a different challenge to homemaking, and documenting how people responded. Illustrated by residents’ accounts, there are varying instances of timing, progress and delay that surface in interesting ways.
The majority of interviewees were early buyers, moving into their homes between late 2013 and early 2014, as part of the first and second land releases. Participants identified two major market appeals for buying at Greenhills Beach. First, Greenhills Beach responds to a shortage of detached housing in the local market. Cronulla is a suburb dominated by apartment dwelling structures. Unlike the dominance of detached housing in Australia overall (75.6 percent in 2011), in the 2011 Census 71.2 percent of occupied dwellings in the Cronulla suburb were apartments, units or flats (ABS 2011). Keeping in mind current Australian cultural housing preferences (Dowling and Power 2012), there was significant demand for a site allowing the opportunity to build detached family homes in the area. Indeed, the majority of households (18 of 21) moved to Greenhills Beach from within the same Local Government Area. The second central appeal is the coastal location of the site. Greenhills Beach is located 500 metres from a beach of the same name. Historically, the site was utilized for sand mining, and rezoned for residential development in the late 2000s. This location influences
the design of this MPE. The streetscape facilitates direct beach access, with walking tracks to popular local surfing beaches.

The average length of occupation of participants in their newly built home was 11 months. Houses commonly comprised of four to five bedrooms, three to four bathrooms, and a double garage (see Figure 5.1). Aligning with the common design principles of project-built large homes, most had an open-plan living/dining space where the majority of household interactions took place (for more detail on open plan house designs, see Dowling 2008). All but four of the houses profiled were double-storey.

5.5.1 Homemaking with dust, dirt and debris

Perhaps most apparent for a building site, homemaking to create an ideal home is challenged on expectations of cleanliness. Building debris, dust and dirt invade home as a clean, ordered site, upsetting even the most mundane routines and behaviours. Audrey explained that the dirt from building was so extensive that she couldn’t hang washing outside:

Oh, it’s very noisy, and it’s very dirty, and I’m not happy with any of that at the moment. Unfortunately that’s because of the end that we’re at Greenhills [part of a later stage release], but the dust is unbelievable. I can’t even put whites on the line to dry; I have to hang them in my garage because they get dirty. It’s 6 days a week. It’s even difficult sometimes to get out of the driveway, because all of the tradies [tradesmen] are coming in. The water truck always parks in front of our house, so it’s a bit of a pain. I’m not happy with that—but what do you do? It’s a process; you’ve got to put up with until it’s all done. In two years’ time I’ll probably forget about it.

(Audrey, 50-54, 5-person household, interviewed 2/2015, length of residence 6 months)
Audrey indicates how the building site shifts expectations of space: even getting out of her driveway can prove difficult. Here, builders’ six-day work schedules are unsettling everyday home life.

Describing the estate as an ‘absolute pigsty’, Paige was particularly outspoken about the unsettling influence of construction on her home. Paige’s family bought into the first land release, and was one of the first to settle at Greenhills Beach. The material effects of building—dirt, dust and noise—are a constant presence two years after moving in:

Considering this was the first land they sold, look at us. We’re still surrounded in unfinished. I don’t think that one [house] will ever be finished. That one I think will be finished soon, but two years later we’re still putting up with noise every day. Every day. Never a day off. It’s just that whole process of finishing it; it’s been a long time. I don’t know how those people put up with it living behind that thing [the building site next door]. It’s the dirt and the dust. Even out here, I hose this [driveway] three times a week. This was done on Monday afternoon, and it’s already filthy. What can you do? Nothing.

(Paige, 45-49, 4-person household, interviewed 2/2015, length of residence 20 months)

Paige’s account shows that building site residents have to work harder, and for longer, in keeping their house and block clean. Residents are still attached to an ideal of cleanliness, despite the fact that the building site makes it more challenging to sustain a clean home.

5.5.2 Homemaking with builders

Home building sounds are an effect of the materiality of the site: a cacophony of builders’ conversations, power tools, hammering and loud radios. These sounds affect comfort for new
residents, who anticipated that once their houses were finished this would be a moment to relax. During an interview with Anna, her neighbour opposite was having a pool installed. While showing me around her backyard, she was interrupted by builders’ noises:

Because, you know, we might all get settled and everything’s nice, and then that starts with bulldozers and banging. I mean earlier, before you got here, they’re building a pool over there. You can just hear the radio out there—it was really loud! It’s a bit disrespectful. But anyway, it’s alright.

This is meant to be decking. So it would all be decked, and the same decking around the pool //Background: radio playing ‘Lay Me Down’—Sam Smith// you know what I mean about the music? … It’s bad. I said to my mum, if it was just a building site it would be fine!

(Anna, 45-49, 5-person household, interviewed 4/2015, length of residence 14 months)

Claire highlighted builders ‘screaming at young apprentices’:

When they’re all out, what you hear you just can’t believe—because it echoes… Some of the gangs that come along, they’re pretty foul mouthed. Screaming at young apprentices.

(Claire, 35-39, 4-person household, interviewed 2/2015, length of residence 5 months)

Anna and Claire’s quotes suggest that their notion of living in a building site excludes the sounds of builders’ conversations and radios, raising the question of what they consider a building site to be. Here, Greenhills Beach is not ‘just a building site’. It is also a setting where home is being established. While residents and contract builders are sharing space,
they have different expectations of conduct. Overall, residents tolerated these noises without complaint or confrontation; as shown in the above examples both air grievances with polite refrain: ‘it’s alright’ (Anna); ‘they’re pretty good’ (Claire). This scenario is accepted, but uncomfortable.

This acceptance can deteriorate. When asked if their house felt like home, Phil and Jenny described themselves as ‘trapped’ by a neighbour building. Their account reveals how construction can lead to the unmaking of home:

Interviewer: Does this feel like home to you right now? So you’ve been here for almost a year now.

Phil: Well, not a comfortable home, not relaxed.

Jenny: It did, before he [next door neighbour] started building. We’ve had builders next door screaming, swearing. It’s not been comfortable. I can’t even go out. So it’s not home.

Phil: So prior to that building there, it was good. And that come [sic] and we’ve felt a little bit trapped by it. You’re here and you’ve got this constant barrage of offensive behaviour, and language, and noise! Noise, and loud talking and that.

Jenny: It’s been every day of the week, that one, even on Sunday when you think you’re going to have a sleep-in.

(Phil and Jenny, both 50-54, 5-person household, interviewed 6/2014; length of residence 12 months)

The constant, unsettling presence of builders and building next door has ruptured feelings of comfort and relaxation at home. This is pronounced for MPEs, where houses are larger and lots smaller, elevating the need to be mindful of others. There was an expectation of noise and interruption; Phil and Jenny’s experience shows that when this is exceeded, home is
unmade during construction.

5.5.3 Homemaking and landscaping

To rebuff the ‘messy materialities’ of the building site (Kraftl et al. 2013), residents endeavoured to manage what was under their control: transforming their own work sites into landscaped garden spaces. The building site, then, is also a work place for settling residents.

David reflected on how homemaking can delay enjoying the house:

I haven’t had a lot of chance in the last year to sit down and enjoy it, because we’ve been doing all of the landscaping. But now I’ve only got two more tasks to do, and then we might get back to the reality of enjoying it [laughs].

(David, 70-74, 4-person household, interviewed 11/2014, length of residence 12 months).

These tasks may delay enjoying home initially, but help to establish feelings of home through physical and emotional labour (Blunt and Dowling 2006; Allon 2008). Daniel, who had just finished his landscaping, elaborates:

Virtually since I bought the block, I’ve done all the landscaping, and I’ve been here, just spent so much time here. So this [the garden] has only been like this for the last couple of weeks. Seeing it’s only just been like this the last couple of weeks, I can see the fruits of my labour as you say. Yeah—it very much feels like home, because I’ve built it.

(Daniel, 55-59, 5-person household; interviewed 11/2015, length of residence 5 months).

This feeling extended to the whole estate as construction continued. Progress at Greenhills Beach was a spectacle. As Anna puts it:
I like to see what’s come up since I last [walked]. Suddenly there’ll be two houses in the street, it’s amazing. Like a few months and then the whole street is there suddenly. It’s like, ‘Wow!’ I do love that—and I like just to look. I really like, I’m into what gardens look like and how people have done things and things like that. Because it gives you your inspiration.

(Anna, 45-49, 5-person household, interviewed 4/2015, length of residence 14 months).

As Anna suggests, living during construction could also be an inspiration for homemaking, where residents could learn from the examples set by the building and landscaping of others.

5.5.4 Building ‘in the same boat’

Lastly, this section profiles how construction manifests itself between new residents. This is fitting for large-scale housing developments like MPEs, where ‘community’ rhetoric is central to the promotion of lifestyles (Dowling et al. 2010). House construction experiences were discussed as important common ground for new neighbours. For Justin, having been able to follow neighbours on their respective housing ‘journeys’ allowed connections to develop:

Look, I think in a new estate—you know, you see the houses go up, you’re involved in it somewhat because we are so close. You do see houses develop, you get to talk to people. Your communication, you have an easier path for communication—where I’m not moving in here and I don’t know anyone, but I’ve seen all these houses go up and met all the people as they’ve been on their journey. So then you obviously have an easier way of communication, because you have a common goal really.
As Peel (2000, pp. 271-272) explains, the ‘pioneer phase’ of a new housing development creates a ‘shared conviction’, expressed by residents as being ‘in the same boat’ (see also Richards 1990). Early Greenhills Beach residents described their relationships in a similar fashion. Max expresses this moment as creating ‘camaraderie’:

Everyone has built—some of the people who have moved in bought [after homes were built], but not many. Most people have actually gone through the whole process. So you get a bit of a camaraderie type of thing, you’re all in the same boat.

(Max, 45-49, 2-person household, interviewed 2/2015, length of residence 14 months)

Max points to the potency of house construction—what Gans (1967, p. 45) calls the ‘nest-making period’—to bring people together through shared experience.

The result of this shared experience is that settled residents empathize with those currently building. For Tom and Hayley, this empathy was anticipated, and shaped part of their decision to purchase a house and land package in a new MPE:

It just ended up making more and more sense when we were looking at houses that were established and how much they were. Then what we could get here, and build without having to worry about neighbours complaining. Everyone was in the same boat. I guess that was a big problem, because a lot of our friends build and they always end up having problems with neighbours complaining about their build.
(Tom, 35-39, 4-person household, interviewed 12/2015, length of residence 11 months)

Establishing home during construction ‘made sense’ for Tom and Hayley, as everyone building avoids problems anticipated with buying and renovating existing housing stock.

David views construction pragmatically, a ‘fact’ integral to the delivery of MPEs:

You have to accept it. When you move in to a new estate like this, you know you’re going to get trucks and cranes and vehicles and things everywhere. It’s just a fact. If you’re not ready for that, don’t build in a new estate! [laughs] But it’s been pretty well adhered to, time-wise. People start on time, finish on time. A little bit of carry-over now, every now and again. As expected.

(David, 70-74, 4-person household, interviewed 11/2014, length of residence 12 months).

In this way, between neighbours in the ‘same boat’, construction delays are anticipated, empathised with and normalised—enacting a ‘construction inflected’ micro-politics of interaction (cf. McGuirk and Dowling 2011). The building site and the feeling of being ‘in the same boat’ provide residents a grace period for disorder, emotionally accommodating the challenges of building sites. Importantly, this grace period is contingent: those who build later, sitting outside this ‘same boat’, will risk the ire of now-settled residents.

These four subsections have presented the building site as a setting that challenges and delays homemaking. Building site experiences illustrate the importance of the surrounding environment to the house-as-home, materialising risk in residents’ homes. Qualities of an ideal home, such as comfort and cleanliness, are beyond the control of residents in this phase of development. Residents work harder, and for longer, to try and maintain and uphold their
ideal home during building. Some homemaking tasks (e.g. landscaping) had to be completed before home could be experienced. At the same time, residents spoke of being ‘in the same boat’—where construction interruptions were part and parcel of their decision to move in early. Eager for the opportunity to build, residents appear to be patient to realize their ideal home, and to realize the establishment of a collective middle-class ideal. This patience is contingent: a grace period for everyone ‘in the same boat’, but problematic when expectations of disruption are surpassed. Due to the challenges of building sites homes are being made, albeit in more fractured ways. This indicates that homemaking is not a linear set of practices that always guarantees predetermined, ‘good’ home qualities.

5.6 Buying and Building, Risk and Reward

This section extends residents’ accounts of material risk to home in building sites to financial dimensions of homemaking. Family homes are, simultaneously, a financial asset and/or liability (Smith 2008; Levy et al. 2008; Jørgensen 2016). Residents indicated shifting notions of risk and reward as an MPE develops over time, creating friction with the fixed, classed, expectation of maintaining aesthetic ideals (Atkinson 2006; McGuirk and Dowling 2011).

Ultimately the success or failure of a development is not predetermined, which makes purchasing early during building a risk (see Kitchin et al. 2014). Buyers may be presented with an idealized vision of the eventual product through marketing, but in reality, the site is an empty slate. This makes both the cultural values of home, and the financial value of the house, uncertain. Lauren vocalised how without the reassuring presence of other houses, the outcomes of a dormant housing development can feel ‘daunting’:

Well back then there were no houses yet. We did come quite late on in the piece, considering that people were buying off the plan, so to speak, before the land had been registered. But still, when we chose this block there was no one else here. In
that respect, it was a bit daunting to try and envisage what it would look like once it was an actual suburb and community.

(Lauren, 30-34, 6-person household, interviewed 3/2015, length of residence 11 months)

As the previous section showed, these notions of risking a collective ideal are prolonged throughout the construction phase. Whilst a vocal resident on the frustrations of living in a building site, Paige unveiled the financial intentions steering this choice:

Pretty much I think if you’re a clean living person—I mean you can see the way I live, I just literally shut all my doors and windows, don’t open them, and just live in air conditioning. It’s just the dirt, it destroys your house. It literally destroys your house. I haven’t enjoyed that [laughs]. But having said that, once that’s all completed it will be lovely to live here. [pauses] I suppose we’ve enjoyed paying a lot less when we bought. So in one way, in our heads, it’s a little bit of a trade-off. We came in really early; we bought one of the first blocks in the first release. We paid a lot less than what other people seem to be going to be paying here and we feel like we’re being compensated in a way for all that! [laughs].

(Paige, 45-49, 4-person household, interviewed 2/2015, length of residence 20 months)

Paige weighs up the difficulties of homemaking during construction as a trade-off. In buying a block in the first release and building early, she ended up paying much less for the house—ironically suggesting that her family has been ‘compensated’. There is a balance between finding it difficult to get established, and prioritising the price of house purchase. The vagaries that early settlers experienced—frustration, in Paige’s case, and the uncertainty that
Lauren recounts—are offset by the fact that the entry price was lower.

Consequently, living in a building site allows people to potentially achieve a more expensive home, where buying early can generate the maximum reward. In framing his purchase around risk, Luke likens purchasing into an unbuilt estate as ‘taking a punt’:

I think—because we were in the first release, this is the last block here of the first release that faces the beach that way. The next block is the second release. So those that have got in early, everyone kind of came in with a bit of, ‘Oh well, we’ll see how it goes’. So it’s been really positive. The neighbours have been fantastic, because everyone took a punt. I mean, when we bought this block of land we couldn’t even walk on the land because it was being contoured. We bought our piece of land off an A4 piece of paper, and we bought it before we even knew what this was going to look like. So we took a risk—a lot of people waited to see how it started to develop—but we’re glad we did, because we reckon we saved about $200,000 on the cost of the land. By the time people saw what was happening, the land went up—close to a million bucks by the time, for a block of land. It's really positive, yeah.

(Luke, 45-49, 6-person household, interviewed 3/2015, length of residence 18 months)

In this case, for Luke this ‘punt’ paid off: he suggests his family saved $200,000 on initial land purchase. Indeed, following construction, Greenhills Beach appears quite a lucrative housing investment. House and land packages at Greenhills Beach began selling for
approximately $1 million (AUD) in 2011. The current median price is $2.075 million\(^{24}\) (AUD)—residents effectively doubling their value in 6 years. Speculating on this site and building early appears to have potentially worked out well for these early residents.

While early residents are on the whole positive about the future value of their investment, estate-wide building progress can turn a hopeful setting fearful. Until the point of sale, house value is always speculative and insecure. Future house prices rely on an estate-wide building standard to mutually assure the ‘investment protection’ of MPE covenants (Cheshire et al. 2009). As such, settled residents also pay attention to progress on financial grounds. While neighbour’s houses are still non-existent or incomplete, residents grapple with an added uncertainty about the outcome. Tom is indicative of a growing worry expressed by some early residents:

> Some we’re like, ‘Did the Council really approve this, or?’ There were pretty strict guidelines. You know, you want everyone to keep some sort of high standard because at the end of the day if you want to sell—it’s in everyone else’s interest, they want us to get as much as we can, because then it benefits them for recent sales and all of that sort of stuff. So yeah, some are good, some are—not so good.

(Tom, 35-39; 4 person household, interviewed 12/2015, length of residence 11 months)

Even after building to the aesthetic standard themselves, Tom explains that as the building site progresses there are no guarantees that other residents will follow suit. Dovetailing the sentiment of being ‘in the same boat’ while building, Tom argues it is ‘in everyone’s interest’

\(^{24}\) This median house purchase price is current as of 29th May, 2017. Data supplied by RP Data Pty Ltd trading as CoreLogic. <https://www.realestate.com.au/neighbourhoods/greenhills%20beach-2230-nsw>
to build to a high standard for the purpose of selling. Building together, framed positively in
the previous section as a ‘shared conviction’ (Peel 2000), can also be a source of worry and
fear.

This section indicates that even when individual homemaking can be deemed ‘successful’,
when financial value is made more uncertain by external conditions home can be unmade
(Baxter and Brickell 2014). These notions of risk and reward manifest themselves as
homeowner anxieties. The undermined nature of houses in a residential development building
site threatens the material terms of middle-class social reproduction and distinction (McGuirk
and Dowling 2011), which directly overlaps with potential financial reward. As such, living
with building work suspends categories of ‘risk’ and ‘reward’, leaving residents to manage
their haunting presences.

5.7 Conclusion

The building site is both an example and evidence of home as a process. This paper
proceeded with two aims. The first was to extend accounts of the everyday experiences of
residents ‘living with building work’ (Kraftl et al. 2013), focussing on homemaking.
Homemaking proceeds by accommodating, both emotionally and physically, the challenges
of building sites. Homemaking challenges that risked qualities of an ‘ideal’ home—dirt,
delays and interruption—were anticipated, but there were moments when construction
exceeded these expectations and led to the unmaking of home (Baxter and Brickell 2014).
This highlights the building site as a paradoxical phase of a housing development: while
houses are being built, home can come under threat. Accounts of the additional work and
effort residents undertook illustrate how homemaking practices do not always guarantee
positive feelings of home. Homes are being made, but surface in different, more fractured
ways—where an ideal home seems even more tenuous as an achievement. This uncertainty is
compounded by the set, hyper-idealized expectations that are contingent to the social and material expression of middle-class identities in MPEs (Cheshire et al. 2009; Dowling et al. 2010). In part, living with these material risks to homemaking in MPEs is balanced by an expectation of being rewarded.

This addresses the second aim: speculation on financial reward helps to justify living in a building site. Moving into an MPE building site is advantageous at first glance, securing a comparably inexpensive purchase price. As such, building and buying early in MPEs can be viewed as a sound response to the hyper-competitive nature of the property market in Sydney (see McGuirk and Dowling 2011). However as residents’ accounts demonstrate, this comparatively cheaper purchase price imbues short-term feelings of discomfort, disruption and inconvenience, and risks long-term feelings and attachments to home, place and financial return. This scenario adds a dimension of uncertainty to lurking middle-class anxieties for residents in new housing developments (McGuirk and Dowling 2011), and to the financial stresses and anxieties of early homeownership (Colic-Peisker and Johnson 2010). Future property values in MPEs depend on other residents building houses of the same aesthetic standard, establishing ‘investment protection’ through covenants (Cheshire et al. 2009). Residents, then, are actively worrying about the building of others, whilst simultaneously trying to balance expectations of their own homemaking practices.

This case study indicates how modes of valuing home (Jacobs and Smith 2008) are not always cogent. A ‘settled’ site with ‘finished’ homes still perpetuates fearful owner-occupiers, unmaking a long-term ontological security of home, and a financial value, reliant on collective aesthetic expression. In saying this, this paper highlights a case where taking a risk on a new housing site, securing a cheaper entry price, has a high chance of working out financially. This is partly attributed to the coastal location of Greenhills Beach, and the
aesthetic premium this affords. There will be cases where a similar risk on a housing
development will be less likely to pay off—for instance, in less lucrative property markets
(i.e. middle-ring/fringe estates). These stories merit attention in further research (for an
extreme example, see Kitchin et al. 2014). Future research could also seek the narratives of
different home-owning identities. In this study all households interviewed were owner-
occupiers, and the majority of households had built to create a family home. Focussing on
investor-builders, for instance, would be an interesting line of future research. Moreover,
following Sage (2013), future research should engage with contract builders themselves, and
their experiences of building in an also-inhabited site.

While the MPE can be considered a peculiarly Australian case study, here it works as a fitting
representative to approaching the mundane but influential timespace of building and
construction for housing developments in diffuse contexts (see Thompson 2013). In light of
the continued implementation and popularity of MPEs in Australia, and kindred modes of
housing delivery globally, experiences living with and within homes under construction are
important additions to current and future studies of contemporary homemaking. The reality of
new build housing delivery is that the building site persists; this persistence challenges early
occupants in ways expected and unexpected, brief and enduring, materially and emotionally.
The building site broadens ‘home’ as a precarious, fluctuating, and ongoing achievement.
Housing studies should continue to pause at these interstitial moments, towards better
grasping the expectations and aspirations of homemaking
Chapter 5 – Under Construction
6 Coastal Exposure

Following building and construction, Chapter 6 explores the entanglements of dwelling and inhabitation in a coastal place. As Chapter 4 examined, Australia’s coastline is a principle location for housing: ideal, idealised, sought-after and lucrative (see also Section 1.4.3). Less understood are the material, more-than-human experiences of what happens in place, when people live there. The aim of this chapter is to examine how houses in coastal places are composed and sustained, through close attention to materials, homemaking practices, and more-than-human encounters. The chapter draws upon three clusters of literature to illustrate this aim: cultural geographies of home, which recognise homemaking as a more-than-human process; architecturally-inflected geographies of buildings and houses, which attend to socio-technical practices of maintenance and repair; and recent inquiries into oceanic places, and the placemaking forces of oceans.

Maintenance comes with added pace by the coast; elements and conditions (salt-laden winds, water and sand, and increased storm activity) have an acute impact on buildings and structures, accelerating material decay. This infuses with and directs homemaking practices, inciting human response: both proactive, in precise material selections, and reactive, in repair, maintenance, and replacement of fixtures and finishes. Residents displayed a number of strategies to deal with homemaking in a coastal environment: reflecting temporalities, budgets, and homemaking priorities. Analysis hones in on salt weathering as one potent and robust nonhuman ‘architectural practitioner’ (Jacobs and Merriman 2011). Salt weathering was both desired and undesired—its negotiation bringing contingent combinations of material investment and divestment, vigilant maintenance, selective entry, and reluctant endurance.
The chapter concludes with a discussion around how cultures of nature in display homes stifle the realities of homemaking: hiding difficulties, exertions and costs.
This chapter is currently under review as:

6.1 Introduction

Australia’s coast is a principle location for housing; approximately 85 percent of houses are located within 50 kilometres of the coastline (Department of Climate Change 2009, p. 14). Coastal cultures are fundamental to the natural psyche (Fiske et al. 1987; Booth 2001), buoying a robust appeal for coastal housing. Coastal houses are ideal. They are also idealised. While research has sought to capture the demographic patterns underlying increased rates of coastal settlement (see Burnley and Murphy 2004; Gurran and Blakely 2007), less attention has been paid to what happens when people live there: what happens in everyday, grounded, material encounters with place. The lived experiences of coastal houses are masked by the gloss of coastal living, and the ensuing exertions and costs of homemaking are concealed.

The aim of this paper is to examine how houses in coastal places are composed and sustained, through close attention to homemaking practices, materials, and more-than-human encounters. This is built around a relational approach to place (Massey 2005), where home is constantly revised as lived, practical engagements: of ‘dwelling’ (Ingold 2000), ‘inhabiting’ (Hinchliffe 2003) and ‘cohabitation’ (Blunt 2005). We draw primarily on cultural geographies of home that recognise homemaking as a more-than-human endeavour: as imagined, in Western domestic cultures that see home as a site for fastidiously masking, controlling and excluding certain forms of nature (Kaika 2004; Dowling and Power 2013; Davison 2016); and as lived and practiced, in recognising and following more-than-human encounters at home that work with and against these domestic imaginaries (Hitchings 2003; Head and Muir 2006; Power 2009a; Ginn 2014). In this paper these encounters are given voice by way of house design, material selection, and the everyday maintenance work that residents undertake so a coastal home can endure in place.
In narrowing this focus to maintenance work, we pair cultural geographies of home with a kindred conceptual approach to built form: architecturally-inflected geographies of buildings and houses, which recognise the essential socio-technical practices of maintenance and repair in urban space (Jacobs 2006; Graham and Thrift 2007; Strebel 2011, Edensor 2011; Cox 2016). Following Jacobs (2006, p. 11), built forms are ‘building events’: ‘conceived of in this way, a building is always being “made” or “unmade”, always doing the work of holding together or pulling apart’. The lived building is recast as a ‘living building’ (Strebel 2011) by attending to the distinct properties of building materials (Edensor 2011), and casting nonhumans as ‘architectural practitioners’ in their own right (Jacobs and Merriman 2011). The drivers of repair and maintenance always exceed human action, spurred by un/desirable more-than-human encounters: ‘the things that constitute urban materiality act of their own accord with other non-human things like water, air, wind, and gravity (weathering, wearing, tearing, breaking, falling)’ (Jacobs and Cairns 2011, p. 82). This work—on the performance of architecture and the processes that sustain this performance—helps recognise more-than-human homemaking from a congruous angle.

The coastal context compels a further layer of inquiry that we seek to contribute to in this paper: emerging research on human geographies of the ocean, maritime places, and ‘water worlds’ (Anderson and Peters 2014; Peters 2012; Lambert et al. 2006). Applying a more-than-human lens to homemaking in a coastal location—to the physical and material details of homemaking, and the lived experiences and felt practices of coastal residents—can productively contribute to this renewed focus. Lambert et al. (2006, p. 486) advocate that understanding the geographies of maritime worlds ‘requires consideration of the relationships between different elements and materials—water, wind, wood, salt, cloth, metal, coal, rope, plastics—and the cultures of nature that combine them within different practices and technologies’. By examining the materials that make up houses, and their relationship with
local coastal conditions, we respond to this call. Specifically, we profile maintenance and repair practices in response to salt weathering—an acute and zealous architectural practitioner, one that impacts materials and exposed surfaces in expected and surprising ways (Cole et al. 2003; Trivedi et al. 2014).

This paper is structured as follows. We first outline how home is given meaning by cultures of nature, drawing on more-than-human geographies to ground domestic ideals in homemaking practices. We then pair this approach with research on buildings, materials, maintenance and repair, and align these concerns with recent attention to human geographies of the ocean. The case study and methodology is then outlined: semi-structured walking interviews with 21 households in a new master-planned estate in coastal southern Sydney. Results are structured in two sections. First, the paper explores how home/coastal nature boundaries are ‘sustained’ through aesthetic material expression. The second section considers the exertions and excesses of sustaining a house by the coast, with specific attention to strategies of managing salt weathering. The paper concludes with a discussion of how cultures of coastal nature in ideal domestic settings stifle the realities of coastal homemaking: hiding difficulties, exertions and costs.

6.2 Home, cultures of nature, and more-than-human homemaking

Cultural geographies of home are tracing ‘the complex entanglements of nature and culture, and of human and nonhuman agency, in shaping the domestic sphere’ (Blunt 2005, p. 512). These entanglements are first imaginatively ‘untangled’, filtered through Western domestic ideals of safety, security, order and comfort (Blunt and Dowling 2006; Dowling and Power 2013). Cultures of nature in suburban homes, for example, sustain fixed boundaries between inside and outside, clean and dirty, ‘human’ spaces and ‘natural’ spaces (see Kaika 2004; Blunt and Dowling 2006). Nature is scripted as ‘the other’ in Western private home spaces;
the conditions of othering are framed on moral terms, as ‘good’ or ‘bad’. As Kaika (2004, p. 274, emphasis in original) explains: ‘by keeping outside the undesired (most of the time non-commodified) natural and social ‘things’ and processes, and by welcoming inside the desirable ones (filtered, produced and commodified), the modern home has acquired a *selective porosity* which is enabled by a set of invisible social and material connections’.

Indeed, Wilford (2008, p. 650) goes as far as to say that within this remit the house is ‘nature mastered’. Nature in (sub)urban space takes reproducible, managed forms—say, in the dominance of turfgrass landscapes (Robbins 2007; Head and Muir 2006). Nature is an embellishment: nonhumans are given a muffled role as an adornment, an accent feature, within the boundaries of home. Viewed through domesticated filters, nature purportedly only exists in domesticated forms.

Cook et al. (2016, p. 1) argue for the ‘unbounding’ of housing and home, interrogating ‘the coproduction of the materials, meanings and practices of dwelling and worlds of finance, nature and power’. Consequently home spaces should be engaged with as sites where domestic ideals of nature are (re)reproduced: ‘the conditions under which separationist views of nature and culture are reinforced, maintained or ruptured need much more detailed attention by geographers and others’ (Head and Muir 2006, p. 506). Davison (2016, p. 104) finds that owner-occupation and ownership cultures shape how urban natures are conceived and constituted: ‘In Australia, private home ownership is a hegemonic form of everyday life that does much to constitute the material arrangements, cultural meanings and political functions of nature, including urban natures’. In the large modern homes that characterise modern Australian suburbs, the expectations of comfort and cleanliness are ratcheted up to extremes (Dowling and Power 2011). Nature is also commodified to sell property, where attachment and access to nature is sought-after and prized. The role attributed to nature in modern home cultures is associative to community and lifestyle, as can be seen in the
Chapter 6 – Coastal Exposure

portrayal of everyday life in marketing and advertising new housing developments (see Wood 2002; Gillon and Gibbs 2017 [Chapter 4]). Access to nature is a site of privilege, where uneven social-nature relations are available to different groups (Panelli 2009)—in this case, coastal homeowners.

More-than-human geographies offer one way to unpack and ‘unbound’ (Cook et al. 2016) these stubborn modes of thinking about housing, home and nature. As Whatmore (2006, p. 603) describes, a more-than-human approach captures ‘the rich array of the senses, dispositions, capabilities and potentialities of all manner of social objects and forces assembled through, and involved in, the co-fabrication of socio-material worlds’. Home is an ideal site to study more-than-human encounter—the home space an everyday contact zone with nonhumans where routines and dispositions are formed and galvanized. Homes are intimate, practiced sites of dwelling (Ingold 2000), inhabiting (Hinchliffe 2003; Jacobs and Merriman 2011) and cohabitation (Blunt 2005) between humans and nonhumans. Power (2009b, p. 1031) discusses the more-than-human home as a ‘distributed and processual’ achievement between humans, nonhumans, and materials: ‘irrevocably bound to the various affordances and capacities of the materials, objects, animals and rhythms that inhabit and shape the house-as-home, as it is to the capacities, rhythms and cultures of the human resident’.

Studies attentive to more-than-human encounter at home expose nonhuman agencies as varying forms of collaboration with, and resistance to, human intentions (see Hitchings 2003, Head and Muir 2006, Ginn 2014). These interactions take shape as regimes of attachment and detachment: for instance, attachment with companion animals (Power 2009a), and with native animals that are portended to belong (Power 2009a; Gillon 2014); and detachment from ‘uncomfortable’ companions that subvert and disgust (Ginn 2014). Similar moral
classifications are applied to plants in gardens and backyards (Hitchings 2003; Head and Muir 2006). Householders become subjectified by these regimes of homemaking, and the work needed to ‘fit’ nonhuman nature within these domestic ideals, exemplified by Robbins’ (2007) study of ‘turfgrass subjects’. Vernacular regimes of individual homemaking can have profound consequences when scaled up and scaled out; research on household practices ‘helps to understand not only where dualistic nature talk is entrenched, but where more-than-human ontologies are already comprehensible and practiced’ (Head and Gibson 2012, p. 709).

Conceptualising home as a more-than-human process goes further than merely acknowledging that human intent can be challenged. Nonhumans and materials are each ‘creative presences’ (Whatmore 2002, p. 35), lively, inventive, and ‘recalcitrant’ (Braun 2008) working, keeping home in a tentative balance. Home’s borders are lived and complex: ‘they do not exist as clear-cut lines between inside and outside, but are multi-sited and porous’ (Power 2009a, p. 30). In spite of locations and local conditions, home naturecultures are iteratively reproduced, and it can become uncomfortable to think about home in terms other than the material realisation of these ideals. We seek to respond to Power’s (2009a, p. 50) call ‘for further research into the ways that experiences of home and homemaking are shaped by the necessarily more-than-human character of home’, in an evocative coastal context. Before attending to the intricacies of a coastal home, we briefly discuss the practices of homemaking that help sustain home: maintenance, repair, and replacement.

6.3 House materials, maintenance, and repair

Recent moves in architecturally-inflected geographies are attending to buildings as ‘events’, acknowledging the work involved in sustaining buildings and houses (see Jacobs 2006; Strebel 2011; Jacobs et al. 2012). Maintenance and repair are human endeavours needed to
resist ageing and decay, perpetuating the ‘momentum’ of buildings (Strebel 2011). As Jacobs and Cairns (2011, p. 82) indicate, ‘maintenance and repair is part of the social work that is required to offset the entropic destiny of the world’. The ‘preservation’ of built forms requires regular human input and effort: ‘once this human input lapses, leaving it at the mercy of other forms of life and of the weather, it will soon cease to be a building and become a ruin’ (Ingold 2000, pp. 205-206). Repair and maintenance are thus crucial activities for the smooth operation of urban places, but due to being banal, commonplace, and hidden, this crucial role has been overlooked (Graham and Thrift 2007).

Strebel (2011, p. 248) argues that buildings are ‘living’, as indicated through ‘the situated practices of those who live and work with buildings’. Building materials are also ‘living’; they have the capacity to act, alone or in allegiance with nonhumans, challenging and exceeding human intention (Ingold 2007). Materials chosen for building are selected based on their properties, capacities and/or virtues (Edensor 2011; Cox 2016). As Jacobs et al. (2012, p. 129) explain, studying the work involved in sustaining a high-rise unveiled ‘the potentialities that lie in steel’s strength, concrete’s insulating capacities, glass’s magical quality of transparency, but also the fate that is heralded by how steel rusts, concrete spalls, asbestos poisons, or windows need cleaning’. When materials succumb to this ‘heralded fate’, in their perceived failure to operate how we anticipate or expect, they demand human attention and response.

In bringing together these elements, the paper focuses materially on instances of repair, maintenance, and replacement at home (see Miller 2001; Gregson et al. 2009; Cox 2016; Carr and Gibson 2016). Interrogating maintenance practices unveils both the agency of materials, and the continued revision of our relationship with home and its components: ‘repair and maintenance are not incidental activities… they form a challenge to our ways of thinking
about things which is more than just an expression of their supposedly passive and banal presence’ (Graham and Thrift 2007, pp. 19-20). Working on homes, expressing skills and competencies in dialogue with materials, can be formative for homeowner identities: ‘the end result is houses which are not just made from materials, but from the materials and their owners’ responses to them—responses which are themselves situated within specific gendered, social and cultural expectations’ (Cox 2016, p. 578; see also Carr and Gibson 2016). These situated practices occur proactively, by maintaining, or reactively, by repairing and replacing. Gregson et al. (2009, p. 250) explain how replacement is a commodified act, taking place ‘by virtue of cost economies’, where repair is usually reserved for high-cost items, and lower-cost items are ‘jettisoned should they fail or deteriorate’.

Material decay and disrepair occur on different temporal scales. This aligns with Power’s (2009b) analysis of ageing and decay at home as ‘chronic effects’ and ‘acute events’. Power considers how home is shaped by ‘nature times’: diurnal cycles, seasonal changes, and ageing and decay over years. Edensor (2011, p. 240) explains that materials comprising buildings ‘endure at varying rates’, but as the temporal frame is extended even ‘obdurate’ materials like stone are exposed as fragile: ‘while a stone’s destiny is partly influenced by its own properties, a complex range of biological, chemical and climatic agencies continuously amend its capacities’ (p. 241, see also Wilford 2008). In this way, homemaking becomes a ‘multi-directional relation where the materiality of the house also shapes and potentially surprises, disturbs and alters residents’ sense of home’ (Dowling and Power 2011, p. 77). In reconsidering home long-term, homemaking cannot be viewed as anything other than a shared process: between humans, nonhumans, materials, elements, and cultures.
In opening up the ‘emphatically humanist’ view of the world that architecture imparts, Jacobs and Merriman (2011) develop a theorisation of ‘practicing architecture’, where nonhumans are also ‘architectural practitioners’:

…we might also think of other non-human architectural practitioners—pets, rodents, birds, insects, plants, moulds—who also inhabit and act with buildings in all manner of ways. There are also many other forces and actions involved in architecture—supporting, sealing, joining, weathering, peeling, rusting— which work to hold it in place or compromise its very presence (Jacobs and Merriman 2011, p. 211).

Jacobs and Merriman (2011, p. 212) explain how practicing architecture is a function of material matter and human mattering: ‘meaning and judgement to be sure (love, hate and indifference), but also affect and atmosphere (the felt and the ambient)’. How we respond to these challenges exposes the particulars of human mattering: an expression of relationships with, and expectations of, homes, their environments, and their various ‘architectural practitioners’.

6.4 Water Worlds and Coastal Homes

The coastal context of these homes is not mere context. Homes are infused with the coastal environment in two ways. First, the coastal context of these homes is central to their appeal, adoption, and construction. The appeal of coastal places in Australia is grounded in lifestyle and leisure pursuits: surfing, swimming, holidaying, and cosmopolitan bodies (see Fiske et al. 1987; Booth 2001; Metusela and Waitt 2012; Hoskins 2013). Imaginaries of coastal housing reflect nostalgic, underdeveloped coastlines—exemplified by modestly constructed ‘beach shacks’, made of timber, ‘fibro’ sheeting, and corrugated iron (Shaw and Menday 2013, p. 2944). These ‘shacks’, their material informality, and their lackadaisical homemaking practices, are distinct reference points for Australian coastal places (Hoskins 2013). However,
as a result of increased development and settlement, driven partly by ‘sea change’ migration (Burnley and Murphy 2004; Gurran and Blakely 2007), modern coastlines look quite different. This paper examines new, modern houses by the coast, where more ‘suburban’ housing forms and principles are challenging nostalgic imaginaries of coastal places and coastal lives (Gillon and Gibbs 2017 [Chapter 4]; Shaw and Menday 2013). As Crafti (2008, p. 11) explains, the idealised modern ‘beach house’ is predicated on low maintenance: ‘generally designed to age gracefully, with as little human assistance as possible’. Low maintenance principles of homemaking are at odds with the nature of coastal places.

Second, homes are infused coastally by intermingling with place-specific, coastal more-than-human encounters. Social and cultural geographies of water demonstrate that the ‘behaviour’ of water does not always match how it is enrolled and understood: ‘water is an agent and its materiality matters’ (Bear and Bull 2011, p. 2262; Gibbs 2013). In the emerging field of ocean geographies, the focus on the agency of water extends to the sea, and to ‘relations between the more-than-human sea and human life’ (Peters 2012, p. 1242). Anderson and Peters (2014) declare oceanic and maritime spaces as ‘water worlds’, paying particular attention to ‘more-than-human actors and the affects which arise when water and life coalesce’ (Anderson and Peters 2014, p. 13). Vannini and Taggart (2014) argue that ‘diverse’ water worlds need attention, in order to resist a return to geography’s ‘land-centric bias’. We contend that coastal housing is one such ‘diverse water world’, and as such, its ‘spatializing processes need to be examined in their precise physical and material details, and ideally in their lived experiences and felt practices’ (Vannini and Taggart 2014, p. 89). Indeed, the ocean is “felt”, experienced, imagined, and affective beyond its watery borders’ (Peters 2012, p. 1248). This research agenda asks for attention to materials and the ways they mingle with coastal conditions and cultures (Lambert et al. 2006; see also Phillips 2017). Coastal homes offer a distinct and timely vantage point.
As Anderson and Peters (2014, p. 9) outline: ‘in thinking of water worlds as more-than-representational spaces, we can be alerted to the many ways in which seas and oceans “come to life”; the nonhuman actors, materialities and natural states of water which all merge in this processual and fluid medium’. Coastal housing is one such venue where the ocean ‘comes to life’. Proximity instils affective, positive rhythms and routines at home. For example, Duffy and Waitt (2013, p. 473) highlight ‘sonic rhythms’ of living by the ocean—‘the volume, tempo and duration of breaking waves’—as formative to how coastal residents define their home spaces. At the same time as they are desirable, coasts are harsh environments.

Nonhuman, elemental, oceanic agency is implicated in homemaking, where the ocean is a ‘force and action involved in architecture’ (Jacobs and Merriman 2011; see also Steele and Vizel 2014). Prevailing salt-laden winds lay siege to exposed surfaces. Marine-grade materials, such as galvanised steel, are installed and tested by the conditions, while porous materials, like wood, warp and twist. Sometimes this material decay is desired, as part of an authentic coastal aesthetic (Power 2009b), but this is problematic when less resistant surfaces fall into disrepair. Wind gusts are potent. Increased storminess brings new challenges. Unsuitable gardens struggle to grow in saline, malnourished soils. In more banal ways, salt water and sand are tracked back from the beach by feet and bodies, becoming the bane of clean surfaces. Together these consequences echo Peters’ (2012, p. 1242) declaration that navigating oceanic forces in quotidian practices are frequently beyond management and planning, creating disorientation: ‘humans can only grapple with the power of the sea, harnessing its power and manipulating its affects, to use them to best effect’.

This paper focuses on the contributions of salt water to more-than-human homemaking. Specifically, it considers airborne salinity as a nonhuman architectural practitioner. When waves break, salty marine aerosols are created in a sea mist and are blown onshore (see Cole et al. 2003). When these aerosols meet materials, atmospheric corrosion can occur. Corrosion
rates are determined by the properties of building materials. For instance, porosity affects how prone materials are to salt decay: mortars and bricks more porous than stone (Lopez-Arce et al. 2009, p. 846). Such material-nonhuman entanglements demand human interventions, with a dual motivation. First, people are motivated practically: to arrest the acute, potent material decay that comes in a saline environment. Second, they are motivated aesthetically, by home cultures that ask for cleanliness, order, and the homemaking exertions of ‘good’ nature. We explore these motivations, their material manifestations and their consequences below.

### 6.5 Case Study and Methods

Fieldwork involved a case study analysis of Greenhills Beach, a master-planned estate (MPE) located in Cronulla, southern Sydney. The Greenhills Beach development is named after the adjacent beach. It is situated 500 metres from the active beach zone, separated by dune vegetation and a nature track, and built next to the last major exposed sand dune of the state-heritage listed Cronulla Sand Dunes, valued for its historic, cultural and natural significance.

The prestige of this setting is compounded by proximity to Sydney’s central business district. Houses at Greenhills Beach are highly lucrative; the current median house price is over 2 million dollars\(^{25}\) (AUD), as compared to a Sydney median price of 900,000 dollars (ABS 2017c).

MPEs are a widespread mode of delivering new housing in Australia. Through their relatively homogenous mode of delivery, and widespread appeal to an ethic of community, lifestyle, and security (Dowling et al. 2010), MPEs share roots with gated and planned communities. With the increasing development of MPEs along the coastal fringes (Gillon and Gibbs 2017)

---

\(^{25}\) This median house purchase price at Greenhills Beach is current as of 29th May, 2017. Data supplied by RP Data Pty Ltd trading as CoreLogic. <https://www.realestate.com.au/neighbourhoods/greenhills%20beach-2230-nsw>
(Chapter 4)), housing form is changing; the material geography of a more ‘suburban’ housing form grating against nostalgic coastal cultures. Here house design is commonly large, project-built, and underwritten by uniform design features. Uniform design is governed by developer-led regulations and covenants that reproduce ‘themed’ material expression—a ‘code of pecuniary beauty’ (Gwyther 2005), which helps distinguish MPEs from surrounding suburbs (Cheshire et al. 2009; McGuirk and Dowling 2011). Expressions of nature in MPEs principally adhere to formal, reproducible aesthetic expression, such as in façades, gardens and backyards (Gillon 2014; Head and Muir 2006).

At Greenhills Beach, developer-led design guidelines were implemented to invoke a ‘coastal landscape character’. These expectations applied primarily to the visual display elements of the house: the façade and the front garden. House colours were the general directive given to residents: painting façades in ‘crisp and light colours’ as opposed to ‘muddy colours’ associated with suburban sprawl (Australand 2012). Residents were encouraged to install accent features in their house façades deemed to ‘fit’ this design remit: ‘coastal’ materials and finishes included corrugated iron, white/light colours, and front façades without face brickwork, and with rendered and/or cladding finishes. Some of these features were suggested as loose nostalgic homages to ‘fibro shacks’ (see Shaw and Menday 2013). The design guidelines also attached an extensive list of garden planting suggestions, which were primarily endemic native plant species, instating a native sense of (floral) belonging (Head and Muir 2006). As much as was possible within the bounds of a project home template (see Dowling and Power 2011), houses were built with awareness of environmental context. Diurnal cycles of sunlight, seasonal change, and microclimatic factors (Power 2009b) influenced the placement of the house on the block, the positioning of windows, and in some cases consideration to heating and cooling technologies.
The primary methodology of the study was semi-structured interviews with twenty-one households (24 participants), conducted between June 2014 and December 2015. Seven men, eleven women, and three (heterosexual) couples took part. Households were recruited by a combination of letterbox drops and doorknocking. Interviews ran between 30 and 90 minutes, and involved two elements. First, residents were interviewed in their homes with a semi-structured interview schedule. Attention was focused on residents’ everyday homemaking practices, with some questions about the influence of context: how the coastal environment affected house design, and whether the coastal environment had any influence on home ideals, routines, and homemaking practices. Second, in line with methodological approaches prompting participants to ‘show us your home’ (Jacobs et al. 2012) and ‘show me your garden’ (Ginn 2014), interviews incorporated a resident-led walking tour of the garden space and house façade, with the intention that this would stimulate discussion around more-than-human encounters and regimes of negotiation, collaboration and contestation by householders (Hitchings 2003; Head and Muir 2006; Power 2009a; Gillon 2014). It was these walking segments that sparked the impulse for this paper: where salt weathering and its effects became visible.

All interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim, and thematically coded. To protect confidentiality—particularly important in a named, identified field site—quotes are presented under pseudonyms. Interviews were paired with walks around the estate (by the first author), some of which doubled as opportunities for recruitment. These walks increased awareness of the site and its conditions, and helped develop lines of questioning around homemaking practices.
6.6 (Dis)ordered coastal nature at home: sand, water, floors and showers

This section examines how the coastal environment affected regimes of homemaking at Greenhills Beach. Affects are illustrated by three different responses to the question: ‘What are your feelings about sand and water in the home?’ This question was asked to bridge a conversation around maintenance and domestic ideals. Through their responses residents began to reveal the interactions between their houses and the material specificities of a coastal location.

First, residents discussed how sand and water had influenced the design of their homes. This frequently started a discussion around floor surfaces. Tiles, laminate and hardwood floors were commonly installed, as they were considered hardy and easy to clean. But this was not always the case. For Lily, the material properties of her engineered hardwood floor demanded that sand and water remained outside the house:

Interviewer: What are your feelings about sand and water in the home? Bringing sand in, that sort of thing?

Lily: With these floors? No! [laughs] They’re engineered hardwood floors, and they just dent every time that you look at them. I’d be dying if there was either in the floor, especially water because that would affect the flooring. We’ve got an outdoor shower. But again, not going to the beach that much it hasn’t been that bad. We don’t really have the flooring for it. I didn’t even think of that—again, something I didn’t think of.

Potential negative consequences of the interactions between housing and coastal materials strongly shape Lily’s practices and emotions. The fixed imagined boundaries between inside and outside prompted residents to install specific technologies for boundary-making. Pre-empting the entry of ‘bad’ nature (cf. Kaika 2004), outdoor showers were common backyard
features. Adam discussed the plan behind his outdoor shower—making sure his grandkids ‘hose themselves off’ before coming inside:

Adam: It’s funny you say that. All of that side is made that we can go straight down and I’ve got a shower all ready to go in that corner. It’s all formed. But yeah, it’s a process-in-work. So when the kids do come, they don’t come trudging through the house—no, we’ve already spoken about that. Come around, hose themselves off, come out and sit on the balcony and then come in to the house.

Adam’s reasoning parallels Kaika’s (2004, p. 270) discussion of ‘purified water’ as ‘good’ nature, which keep homes and bodies clean: ‘part of (and a basic precondition for the construction of) the protected inside of the modern home’. In a coastal environment, with beach visits frequent, outdoor showers were an extra reinforcement against ‘bad’ nature—salt water, sand, and wet, sandy bodies—in the home.

Third, residents pointed to ways that they reacted to the inevitable, irksome presence of sand and water at home. To sustain cleanliness as a domestic ideal, routine maintenance was stretched to extremes. Luke explained that they hired a professional cleaner—‘for the first time in [their lives]’—as a result of these expectations:

Luke: [laughs] It drives my wife nuts! So much so she now has a professional cleaner for the first time in her life. So she was in here yesterday. We have, we built a door to access the downstairs bathroom so everyone can wash their feet before they come in. It’s just a fact of life. You just have to get the vacuum cleaner out a lot more. That’s life—it’s beach, sand. I can think of worse places to live [laughs].

There is an irony here in these new, modern coastal homes: that their aesthetic performance requires constant and extensive maintenance. These extra exertions are upsized by the size of
homes, and the ‘code of pecuniary beauty’ underpinning their display (Gwyther 2005, see also Gillon 2014). Justin explains how sustaining a ‘pristine’ aesthetic standard led to constant maintenance:

Justin: If we had free rein, I don’t know if we would have built to the extremes of this house… I think it’s—for two people it’s very big. I mean, you need a day just to look after that garden, and the back, and the pool. And it’s white, so you’re constantly maintaining it to look pristine. It’s such a major investment… This is all bright white, so it’s time consuming.

In the context of the coastal location, residents work with and against coastal materials and their properties to maintain domestic ideals and notional fixed boundaries. Residents are working in the remit of the ‘estate agency’ of large project homes (Miller 2001, p. 19), where homemaking practices ‘contend with the pre-given decorative and other ordering schemes of the house’. A large, white house may adhere to a pre-conceived ‘coastal landscape character’, but clashes with the practicalities of coastal living.

6.7 Salt, Material Selection and Homemaking

During the indoor stage of the interview, residents were asked to consider whether the coastal environment changed how they lived at home. Following this line of discussion, in home tours around the garden and façade residents showed how the coastal environment influenced homemaking practices. Their responses centred around: managing strong winds in backyards; saline conditions being harsh and prohibitive for plant growth; and salt weathering on exposed surfaces. We hone in on the latter: the ocean, by way of sea mist and salt aerosols, acting as a nonhuman ‘architectural practitioner’ (Jacobs and Merriman 2011) in coastal homes, and the various human and material responses to this constant encounter.
Greenhills Beach residents were keenly aware of salt weathering at home. But individual regimes of managing salt weathering tell a more fractured tale. When salt aerosols are allowed to settle on a surface, they have corrosive properties: speeding up the rate of material decay, and showing up on fixtures and finishes as blemishes and oxidised stains (Cole et al. 2003). Luke described one method by which salt weathering could be hindered—vigilant maintenance through surface cleaning:

Interviewer: Are there any differences that you’ve noticed living so close to the ocean?

Luke: Salt build-up on the windows—which validate my point about not having rendered houses. Look great now, see in about 5 years’ time when you’ve got to repaint, and you’ve got staining of the joins and stuff like that. Yeah, so you get salt, you get a lot of sand blast… Again, I think everyone has a Karcher, a Gerni, so I’m always ‘Gerni-ing’—[motions cleaning] shhhhhh. It does the windows, and it’s all done. So I’ve just done these actually.

As a nonhuman process imparting acute material decay, salt weathering demanded purchase of specific technologies—high-pressure surface cleaners—and routine maintenance. Another resident, David, referred to surface cleaning as something he did ‘religiously’.

Discussion of material selection and maintenance practices revealed the various terms underwriting how nature was framed, included and excluded in homemaking, and the human mattering (Jacobs and Merriman 2011) of inhabiting a coastal home. This is illustrated by two ‘snapshots’, each advocating for a particular maintenance strategy on value-laden terms, and each reaffirming the centrality of oceanic agency in homemaking, whereby the ocean ‘comes to life’ (cf. Anderson and Peters 2014). First, residents selected particular materials based on the terms of financial outlay. Material selection is a proactive maintenance strategy, based on installation of materials with specific properties (Edensor 2011). A larger initial
expenditure was required to construct a more durable house, finished with materials that have non-corrosive properties. Although it was more expensive, Hayley and Tom were careful to install marine-grade stainless steel on exposed house surfaces:

Hayley: The only thing we’ve had to worry about really is the rust factor. But we factored that in before we started building.

Tom: Yeah, a lot of stainless steel. A lot of other homes, people haven’t thought about it, it’s all rusted.

Hayley: It has to be a higher grade.

Tom: Yeah, stainless steel 318\textsuperscript{26}. So that costs a bit more money—but we’d rather spend the money than replacing things six months down the line.

Tom distinguishes their home from other homes, where ‘people haven’t thought about it’. But discussion with other residents revealed that this strategy was not available to all. Financial barriers restricted the extent of preparedness for a number of residents. Paige spoke to this friction by discussing their roof—determined on the grounds of price, rather than preference:

Paige: For us to buy a marine grade Colorbond roof in our upgrades was going to be $15,000. You could have put in a non-marine grade, but we didn’t want to do that because I think it isn’t going to last with the sea salt. I think it had to be marine grade. We didn’t want to spend 15 grand extra on a Colorbond roof. I probably like them better, but again it’s all down to money.

\textsuperscript{26}Different grades of stainless steel are produced for different building conditions, and ‘more demanding environments’. Homes built in salt marine environments within 1 kilometre of breaking surf require higher grades of steel to resist corrosion <http://www.steel.com.au/articles/article-17-effect-of-location-on-colorbond-steel>.
As a result, Paige’s house had a tiled roof—presumably deemed less ‘coastal’ than a steel roof, but practical and durable on the basis of expenditure.

Cost considerations factor not limited to the superstructure of the house. While walking around his backyard, Max pointed to fixtures in his outdoor patio that were already rusting. He discussed his strategy for managing this:

Max: For instance, you can see that’s fallen off [a light fitting], but these light fittings—see that’s marine grade and it’s still rusted a bit. They’re two or three times the cost of a normal light. The same with that fan. That’s not a marine grade—and I’ve put that there on purpose. That was 250-300 dollars. Marine grade would be over 900 dollars. But I said, ‘You know what? If it lasts for two years, I’ll get a different one—a marine grade—when I can afford it’.

In installing something that he did not expect to last, Max managed salt weathering through cycles of replacement. Lily shared this strategy, purchasing cheap outdoor furniture as opposed to spending money on something that would rust and corrode:

Interviewer: What does it mean to be next to the coastline?

Lily: I think it was far more desirable before I got here [laughs]… There’s certainly a big negative side to it; I certainly hope my car doesn’t rust out. I’ve heard people talking about those sorts of things. I mean even to the point when we were buying furniture for outside we went, ‘I’m not going to buy expensive’, because if it rusts or corrodes you’re just going to chuck it and buy new stuff. So it’s a lot to think about, whereas if you live ten kilometres further in you don’t have to worry about it. It’s really [pauses], it’s good and bad.
Chapter 6 – Coastal Exposure

Lily indicates that the coastal environment becomes a ‘lot to think about’ for homemaking practices. For Max and Lily, lower cost items were ‘jettisoned’ (Gregson et al. 2009) rather than being maintained. Viewing replacement as inexpensive and rational prioritises initial expenditure over other ‘costs’: for example, the time and effort of finding and fitting new fixtures, and the larger environmental ‘costs’ of materials discarded in replacement.

A second set of terms upon which salt, materials and homemaking collided was authenticity. Allowing salt weathering to take hold of some material surfaces was desirable for the same residents, and a material expression of embracing coastal living. Claire and her partner, an owner-builder, deliberately used susceptible materials to invite weathering in certain aesthetic forms. When touring her backyard, Claire pointed out a number of material-specific features that were installed to be affected in predictable, desirable ways (Figure 6.1a):

Claire: [preceding the walk] We’ve used a lot of copper and everything—I’ll walk around and show you all of that. A lot of the rawness. The salt will sort of do what we want to do, the salt air and everything. All good…

[walking on the deck] He’s [husband owner-builder] tried to use a lot of the—because we’ve got a lot of cedar. A lot of houses won’t use cedar because they’re worried that it’ll warp from the salt. But if you look after it, it’s a beautiful feature…

[standing at the pool] Yeah, even we’ve got all of this galvanised. See how the copper sort of turns green? You can see the deck sort of becomes a little weathered, but he wants that look…

Claire pointed to the ‘rawness’ of materials, and how this careful selection resulted in the salt doing ‘what we want to do’. For Claire’s husband, the house was a statement of his skill and expertise, showing how porous, malleable materials can be managed (Cox 2016). Here,
Claire invited ‘chronic decay’ into her home, allowing fixtures and finishes ‘to age and weather in location specific ways’ (Power 2009b, p. 1030), and visually displaying a coastal material authenticity.

But not everybody had the desire—or the skillset—to carefully attend to and maintain susceptible materials with acute ‘entropic destinies’ (Jacobs and Cairns 2011). There were ways to overcome this, whilst still adhering to the remit of a ‘coastal landscape character’.

Installing ‘faux’-coastal materials was a way to comply with the aesthetic, but bypass the work required to sustain a needy surface. Daniel, who had designed his garden with a ‘tropical feel’ in mind, was vocal about the difficulties of growing plants in this microclimate. He pointed to a paved section of the garden as we walked around the backyard (Figure 6.1b):

Daniel: Out there, we put in that additional slab. I didn’t want maintenance, so I’ve used timber-look tiles.

Similarly, Tom pointed to elements and particular materials in his house façade that provided a coastal impressing. Wood panels were used to mimic weatherboard finishes, in a modern homage to a fibro beach shack. The rest of the façade was made up of ‘timber-look’ tiles:

Tom: Also with the shorea, the timber [panels]. It’s more of a coastal sort of thing we thought. We’ve got the hebel with the render on there, and the timber broke it up a bit… But the columns being the statement, the tile that we chose to put on there is more like a timber look.
Chapter 6 – Coastal Exposure

Figure 6.1 Different forms of material selection in coastal homes. (a) Claire’s backyard, with susceptible materials set up to selectively weather with the coastal conditions (February 2015); (b) Daniel’s backyard, with ‘timber-look’ tiles that stay true to the aesthetic, but not the work required to sustain it (November 2015).
This second set of terms negotiates the different ways in which a house can be made authentic in a coastal environment. Timber-look composite products may not be ‘authentic’ materials, based on a nostalgic imaginary, but durable materials might be considered authentic, in terms of responding to the challenges presented by coastal more-than-human encounters. More-than-human encounters are always implicated in homemaking, maintenance and repair. Attention to materials reveals contested notions of what ‘coastal’ means: whether being ‘authentically’ coastal means adopting materials that take shape with environmental processes, or taking a more defensive approach, installing durable materials to delay maintenance and allow the built structure of home to last longer. Perhaps this is a modern iteration of being authentically coastal: durable, low maintenance, with coastal proximity and access.

At the time of our interview, Lily and her family had only recently moved in to their home. Lily discussed how for her the maintenance required had taken the gloss away from coastal living:

Lily: I’ve sort of started to say that I don’t know whether living near the beach is as attractive as people talk about, because we’ve got light fittings corroding already. Just—maintenance. It’s going to be a lot. It’s a full time job. We’ve only been here six months, and already things need doing. So whereas in a normal home—our last home was brand new. We moved into it, you weren’t looking at maintenance for five years—whereas the timeline for this maintenance will be a lot earlier.

Lily wearily describes how the coastal environment demands more from the household: its structure, and its inhabitants. Salt is one active agent in this place and is implicated in homemaking in filtered, varied ways. People had different intentions for homemaking, and different capacities and thresholds for dealing with this environment and its nonhuman
architectural practitioners. Regardless, the conditions made people work, and in shorter timeframes than expected. It is important to account for how this takes shape.

6.8 Conclusion

Seeing home as a process, and one that is inherently more-than-human, lays bare the effort sustaining housing culture and may offer inroads to subtly subvert ideal homemaking intentions. Ideals of domestic space can employ rigid cultures of nature, stifling the lived realities of homemaking, and hiding difficulties, exertions and costs. This paper explored these concerns through materials, maintenance and repair, and how practices were a material reflection of attitudes towards more-than-human encounter. As Cox (2016, p. 584) explains, ‘people work on and with the materials, define them as appropriate, understand them as part of houses, choose or reject them and it is this interaction of people with materials that produces both culturally appropriate homes and particular identities’. Residents displayed a number of strategies to deal with homemaking in a coastal environment: reflecting temporalities, budgets, and homemaking priorities. In this case, salt weathering was both desired and undesired—its negotiation bringing contingent combinations of material investment and divestment, vigilant maintenance, selective entry, and reluctant endurance.

There is purchase in ‘interrogating the familiar’ (Kaika 2004) to understand how nature is valued in domestic spaces, and how this translates into lived experience. Looking at coastal homes as a way to express these ideas was advantageous for two reasons. First, this coastal context was a distinct example for showing how home is always a process, and how built forms are always ‘building events’ (Jacobs 2006). These houses are not permanent; but houses are never permanent. Even brand new homes, as in the case profiled in this paper, are instantly a site of encounter and heightened negotiation. The ‘entropic destiny’ of houses (Jacobs and Cairns 2011) is sped up, in a context in which aesthetic display was paramount.
Extending the implications of these connections and encounters, the consequences of cycles of replacement are especially acute in this housing context of uniform design and implementation (see Dowling and Power 2011). Further, skills of maintenance and repair have been framed as strategies that need to be honed and fostered in order to deal with uncertain futures (see Carr and Gibson 2016).

Second, examining this context was important on its own terms. In particular, as MPEs gain popularity as a means of housing sprawling coastal populations (Gillon and Gibbs 2017 [Chapter 4]; Shaw and Menday 2013), it is timely to consider how development beside the coast is built, and how the built environment in turn informs what ‘living on the coast’ means. Coastal housing is frequently idealised, but attending to the lived experiences of coastal homes unveils times when it is not. The context of coastlines impels management urgency. Current projections of Anthropogenic climate change effects in the coastal zone (i.e. global sea level rise, storm surges, more frequent extreme weather events) merit concern of coastal houses and structures (see Department of Climate Change 2009). Masked by their hidden nature, their banality and their constant presence, marine aerosols fly under the radar of these concerns—less hazardous and dramatic in the short term than extreme weather events. Trivedi et al. (2014) predict increases to atmospheric corrosion rates on coastal infrastructure as a result of climate change. In keeping with place as an event (Massey 2005), and housing as an event in its own right (Jacobs 2006), it is worth thinking about temporality: how these places will change, and how unwanted change can be arrested. This invites future consideration of warranties, insurance, and the long-term viability of houses on coastlines.

This paper presented a series of provocations for how home can and should be composed and sustained in coastal locations. Durability as a material property is necessary, but cannot
always be achieved in ‘authentic’ material forms and styles. Coastal places demand distinct forms of homemaking and vigilance. Salt is a good place to start.
Chapter 7 - Calculated Homes, Stretched Emotions

7 Calculated Homes, Stretched Emotions

Owner-occupation is axiomatic in Australia and other Western housing markets (Smith 2008; 2015; Ronald 2008). Amidst financialisation imperatives, the owned house is dually cast as a financial asset and instrument, while simultaneously persisting in its domestic role as ‘home’. While considerations of home-as-asset lurked in the background in the previous chapters—driving decisions to move into a building site in Chapter 5, and decisions around negotiating coastal conditions in Chapter 6—Chapter 7 directly addresses this financialised scripting of home, investigating emotional performances and accompanying socio-material expressions underwriting the figure of the investor-occupier subject. Master-planned estates are implicit in this financialisation. In this case, Greenhills Beach has become an elite setting for housing as an investment and asset vehicle, which made their value, and their potential future sale value, a priority for residents. I capture sentiments of sale as a way to consider the future of these houses.

Following the stories of new residents, three themes emerged, around which analysis is structured: how households articulated overlapping domestic and economic ideals of home; the emotional performance of a calculative investor subject; and how ideals of opportunity and competitiveness became reflected materially in newly built homes. The chapter explores moments of suppressed emotional complexity surrounding matters of financial expenditure—unmasking the ‘rational’ investor-occupier. Chapter 7 concludes by exploring what is potentially lost or gained from rewriting financially the emotional cues of the family home.
This chapter is currently under review as:

7.1 Introduction

Property acquisition is an investment. Something calculated, maximised. Taking risks is lauded: high risk, high reward. People are competitive, entrepreneurial, ‘rational’. But such investments are also homes. People—families—are living in them, making memories (Rogers 2013). They are falling in love, or—perhaps—resentful. They are hopeful, fearful, anxious, confident. In this article we sketch the uneasy subject performance of the schismatic subject identity that is the investor-occupier.

Everyday life has been declared financialised (Martin 2002). Prosaic acts of calculation and investment have become normalised, captured in the figure of the ‘citizen-speculator’ (Allon 2010, p. 366) who ‘is now required to view housing as a site of accumulation and object of speculation, not only for debt-fuelled consumption in the present but also as a source of asset-based welfare in the future’. Under such imperatives, an ‘investment culture’ has formed around housing (Allon 2012). This mixes curiously, and we contend, precariously, with the material exigencies of owner-occupation, the most common form of housing tenure in Western markets. Homeowners are simultaneously ‘investor figures’ (Smith 2008) or ‘entrepreneurial investor subjects’ (Langley 2006) while occupying homes as fleshy bodies with ongoing needs for shelter and emotional comfort. A home for habitation has also become a space for personal capital accumulation (McCabe 2016). The consequences of the shift to investor subjectivities for homemaking and for identity formation require exploration. As urged by Cook et al. (2013, p. 295): ‘better understanding the assemblage of borrowings, money, meaning and materials into home is a project whose time has come’. It is to such calls that this paper responds.

We delve into these concerns by way of emotional geographies. Refracted through an entrenched divide between ‘emotion’ and ‘reason’, emotions are often overlooked when
comprehending ‘rational’ economic decisions (Davidson et al. 2005; Smith et al. 2009). Yet owner-occupation is always affectively charged: a ‘mix of moods, dispositions, materials, and money’ (Smith 2008, p. 530). Drawing upon Christie et al.’s (2008) account of housing as an ‘emotional economy’, the emotional complexities of household financial subjectification are increasingly being explored—particularly, the combinations of mortgages, indebtedness, homemaking, and family life (see Levy et al. 2008; Cook et al. 2013; Hall 2016; Jørgensen 2016; Soaita and Searle 2016; Reid 2017; Waldron and Redmond 2017). Suppressing emotions as a mode and a means of apprehending housing stifles the understanding of the diverse elements through which dominant tenures and housing norms are sustained and potentially challenged, recognising nuance, highlighting difficulties, and sparking resistance in dominant readings of housing cultures.

This paper contributes to this nascent research agenda, illuminating the performance of a financially calculated family home, materially and emotionally. We address this in a distinct, Australian housing culture: large homes in master-planned estates (MPEs). MPEs are prevalent in Australian suburbs as distinct tracts of new, large houses, built in a designed, manicured environment and delivered by a private developer (for an overview see McGuirk and Dowling 2007). As McGuirk and Dowling (2007) have argued, closer ethnographic attention to everyday workings of master-planned estates is required. Beyond a priori critiques of MPEs as proliferating homogenous design and hyper-consumerist lifestyles (see Farrelly 2008; Gleeson 2006), more fine-grained analyses are needed of homemaking choices and accompanying emotional registers.

The paper begins by reviewing two strands of relevant literature: the financialisation of housing; and the emotional, material geographies of home, indicating how these two elements coalesce in performing investor-occupier subjectivities. We next outline large homes and
master-planned estates as a distinct housing culture, before turning to the case study and research methods: semi-structured ‘home tour’ interviews with twenty-one households at Greenhills Beach, a new housing development and increasingly affluent coastal setting in southern Sydney. Interviews focused on purchasing decisions, experiences of building a new home, and the development of homemaking practices and routines. Focusing on stories of new residents, the paper presents findings organised around three themes. The first results section indicates how households articulated overlapping domestic and economic ideals of home. Second we establish the emotional performance of a calculative investor-occupier, showing how ideals of opportunity and competitiveness—as emotional performances themselves—become embedded materially in and as newly built homes. Buying homes and building them in particular ways feeds competitive, profit-maximising tendencies, but brings with it an emotional toll by continuing to reside materially and emotionally in less than ideal homes. Irrespective of recognising emotions, the financialisation of housing disavows certain emotional responses in favour of performing ‘the rational’. The third theme explores moments of suppressed emotions of financial expenditure, unmasking this ‘rational’ investor-occupier, and revealing the emotional investments that sustain investor-occupation. We conclude by exploring what is potentially lost or gained from rewriting financially the emotional cues of the family home.

7.2 Owner-occupation and financialisation

A core principle of family-orientated domesticity is ownership (Dowling and Power 2013). Owning a house is historically partnered with responsible citizenship, purportedly the platform for being a positive contributor to society (Smith 2008; Dufty-Jones 2015; McCabe 2016). These ‘ideologically convergent features’ are manifest in the politics and housing policies and of Anglo-Saxon homeowner societies: Britain, the United States, and Australia (Ronald 2008, p. 162). The Australian diagnosis of this case—the ‘Australian dream’—was
built on widespread provision of, and access to, land and housing. Successive phases of governmental management of land and housing supported such rationalities: first in response to housing ‘crises’ in the early twentieth century, and then in reaction to rapid population growth post-World War II (Allon 2008; Ronald 2008; Dufty-Jones 2017). Despite increasing unaffordability and decreasing availability in metropolitan settings, detached houses remain the dominant cultural ideal for suburban Australian housing (Cook et al. 2016).

Financial concerns are central to owner-occupation. As Cook et al. (2009, p. 133) identify, ‘home purchase is the single major item of consumption in many people’s lives’. After purchase housing is a consumption sink. Improvement and betterment is achievable through prestige consumption and renovation (Allon 2008; Smith 2008); buttressing purchase and consumption with a mortgage enables and accentuates this (Cook et al. 2013). House purchase is also extensively mortgage based: mortgaged owner-occupiers are the prevailing tenure form for occupied private dwellings in Australia (ABS 2017a) and Britain (Hall 2016). Currently, housing purchase in Australia is buoyed controversially by negative gearing: a tax policy incentivising (multiple) home-ownership and establishing investment portfolios (see Blunden 2016).

Financialisation is a multifarious term, defined here as ‘the processes and effects of the growing power of financial values and technologies on corporations, individuals and households’ (French et al. 2011, p. 799). Analysis tends to filter into three ‘influential versions’: processes of capital accumulation and profit generation; the realm of corporate motives and governance; and the ‘version’ to which this paper responds: the pervasive influence of financial cultures and identities in everyday life, inasmuch that credit and debt are now ‘lived realities’ (Christophers 2015, pp. 185-186, emphasis in original; see also French et al. 2011). Evoked by Martin (2002, p. 106), daily life has fused with financial
logics, establishing a ‘routinisation of risk’ in decision-making and identity formation. Langley (2006; 2008) outlines one scenario through a case study of Anglo-American pensions. Building on Foucauldian theories of governmentality, Langley (2006) characterises everyday investment as a neoliberal calculative technology of the self. Self-disciplining, liberal values of prudence and thrift are displaced by new financial subjectivities encouraging being active, calculative, and reward-seeking (Langley 2008; see also Hall 2016; McCabe 2016). Characterised by an individualisation of responsibility and risk, people become ‘entrepreneurial investor subjects’: ‘the financial future is cast as an opportunity that can be taken up by the investor subject, who appropriately calculates, measures, and manages risk’ (Langley 2006, p. 931). Within a financialisation script, the owned house is Janus-faced: bringing heightened notions of risk, and reward.

Value shifts marking the financialisation of housing also result from institutional changes. Owner-occupation was seen in market societies as a way to offset housing costs in old age, but increasingly is seen as an asset and investment (Smith 2008). Such shifts align with the securitisation of home equity mortgages, making housing wealth fluid, and connecting individual homeowners to global financial flows (Cook et al. 2009; Reid 2017). While propagating high rates of ownership, such exposure has been seen to have dire consequences—as evidenced by the failure of subprime mortgages in the United States which catalysed the 2008 Global Financial Crisis (see Aalbers 2016; Smith 2015; Reid 2017). In taking shape as an investment, financialisation also shifts home temporally. The core function of home shifts from use value to exchange value (Smith 2015, Aalbers 2016). Owner-occupiers are urged to look forward to future returns, encouraging debted spending and altering the goals of homemaking (Cook et al. 2013). How this is realised in the material-emotional practices of building home, and everyday lives within, remains largely unexplored.
7.3 Emotional and material geographies of home: becoming investor-occupier

The financialised owner-occupier is an investor-occupier subject. The identity formation home invigorates is increasingly wrapped up in an ‘investment culture’: ‘function[ing] less as a space of shelter and refuge and more as a site of financial calculation, able to be viewed dispassionately as one of many other potential savings and investment vehicles’ (Allon 2012, p. 406). Made calculative, the domestic roles of home shift. Smith (2008, p. 529, emphasis in original) expands: ‘this shift—phrased as it is around freedom, choice, autonomy, and opportunity—is not just about privileging the figure of investor: it is about shaping the whole character of owner-occupiers’. We seek to account for this ‘character’, bringing economic drivers and decisions into focus alongside emotional and material geographies of home.

The recent upsurge in emotional geographies is tasked with nourishing what Davidson et al. (2005, p. 2) proclaimed the discipline’s ‘emotionally barren terrain’, by revealing ‘a sense of emotional involvement with people and places, rather than a detachment from them’ (see also Anderson and Smith 2001). Home is an exemplar site for emotional enquiry. As Blunt (2005, p. 506) defines: ‘the home is a material and affective space, shaped by everyday practices, lived experiences, social relations, memories and emotions’. These identities cluster around socially reproduced ideals of domesticity: ‘senses of belonging, safety, security, and comfort’ (Dowling and Power 2013, p. 290). At home, emotional geographies have unpacked prescribed domestic roles and identities on gendered, racialised and classed lines: revealing how ‘home’ and its referent ideals and values do not exist for all (Blunt and Dowling 2006; Gorman-Murray 2008; Morrison 2013).

As Mick Smith et al. (2009, p. 3) identify, ‘emotions have often been deliberately excluded from, or habitually suppressed within, many geographical discourses, especially those which understand geography as an attempt to provide objective, narrowly scientific, and quantitative

Emotions help explain how subjection settles, and can be unsettled: ‘it is hardly surprising that we continue to be puzzled by the dynamics of housing market competition and its cycles of boom and bust, when its most intimately relevant (emotional) logics are so routinely set aside’ (Anderson and Smith 2001, p. 8).

Emotional performances are sustained by and informed by materials. Materials and objects comprising home have marked emotional effects: as a ‘materialisation of memory’ (Rogers 2013), sustaining connections to relatives (Rose 2004) or homeland (Tolia-Kelly 2004), and/or by informing and sustaining the performance of (domestic) identities (see Gorman-Murray 2008; Jacobs and Malpas 2013; Morrison 2013). A focus on household materialities harnesses attention to practices, decisions, and relationships that emerge in everyday life. Jacobs and Smith (2008, p. 515) declare that ‘the project of rematerializing home has an inescapably financial bottom line’ (see also Langley and Leyshon 2012).

Emotional and material geographies can help unpack fixed, ‘rational’, economic identities. Such forays into housing studies are surfacing. Studying the post-2000 ‘housing boom’ in Edinburgh, Christie et al. (2008, p. 2301) argue that housing markets are ‘saturated’ with emotions: potential buyers navigating ‘an emotionally charged arena in which feelings of anxiety and desperation, or of exhilaration and excitement, infuse rational economic judgements about price’. Hope and fear are two emotional registers ‘saturating’ the conduct of housing markets. Munro and Smith (2008, p. 360) explain further: ‘hope is a quality
mobilising the affective ties that bind households to the structures of neighbourhoods, to the architectures of housing, and to the (potential) homeliness of individual properties’. Buyers respond accordingly, emotionally: ‘an emphasis on competitive individualism and economic efficiency sets up markets as places where particular kinds of emotions help buyers to succeed’ (Christie et al. 2008, p. 2302). In exploring experiences of owner-occupier households in a context of financialisation, we seek to identify a suite of emotions successfully mobilising the ‘rational’ investor-occupier.

Meanwhile, contradicting emotions surface that challenge and exceed the ‘successful’ investor-occupier subject. Financialised owner-occupation is forged with a comfortable, normalised relationship with debt: mortgage repayments are seen as ‘good’ debt constructively securing an asset; consequently people experience ‘debt amnesia’ (Soaita and Searle 2016). The emotional and material exertions of debt financing home remain largely hushed. By way of response the stresses, fears, and anxieties of everyday investor-occupiers are receiving scholarly attention: owner-occupation and subjective well-being (Searle et al. 2009); families performing austerity in Britain (Hall 2016), ‘subprime subjects’ in California (Reid 2017), and ‘stressed mortgagors’ in Ireland (Waldron and Redmond 2017). Intersecting domestic conditions of family life further complicate this (see Colic-Peisker and Johnson 2010; Jørgensen 2016). Recognising these exertions and the ‘suppressed’ emotions underwriting them is potent for unpacking the paradoxes of owner-occupation (Smith 2015).

Before we embark on unpacking such paradoxes here, we first briefly contextualise the investor-occupiers under investigation: master-planned estates in Australia.

### 7.4 Context: master-planned estates, owner-occupation and investment

Master-planned estates are ‘the now-dominant form of residential provision across Australia’s cities’ (McGuirk and Dowling 2011, p. 2613). MPEs are designed and sold by a
private developer, guided by sentiments of ‘community’, ‘security’, and ‘lifestyle’ (McGuirk and Dowling 2007; Kenna 2010). Houses are primarily constructed by contract building companies, taking shape as variations of ‘project homes’ (Gillon 2017 [Chapter 5]).

Contemporary tendencies of suburban housing supply are typified in these ‘project homes’: large, open plan houses delivered in homogenous forms and designs, and packaged as ‘family’ homes (see Dowling 2008; Dowling and Power 2012). As Dowling and Power (2012, p. 616) explore, large houses are preferred for their assumed ‘familial affordances’, where having multiple living spaces purportedly suits modern family dynamics. MPEs are therefore an appealing proposition for families seeking to build large homes in suburbia.

These large homes are also met with sustained critique—the ‘bloated project home’ a contributor to negative interpretations of sprawling suburbia: architectural loss, sedentarism, and a decline in neighbourly relations (Farrelly 2008).

The uptake of MPEs is catalysed by a certain calculative relationship with money and materials. Developers install design covenants to assure an aesthetic standard; the social and material reproduction this fosters doubles as a form of investment protection (McGuirk and Dowling 2011). As Cheshire et al. (2009, p. 655) explain, this governmentality of master-planning self-motivates residents to ‘voluntarily [engage] in desirable acts of housing consumption’, regulating material expression and fostering a certain standard. The scrutiny surrounding house design amplifies pressure on residents, creating teething problems for homemaking and the development of ‘community’ tropes (Gillon 2017 [Chapter 5]).

Financial anxieties around mortgage-debt are thus overlaid with insecurities concerning neighbours’ scrutiny and judgements.

Building large homes is also calculative. Wiesel et al.’s (2013) research on knockdown-rebuild households in suburban Sydney pointed to a correlation assumed between house size
and anticipated return. A lack of capital gains tax on owner-occupied homes in Australia encourages owner-occupiers to ‘supersize’. This motivation was ‘primarily financial’, in some cases stretching finances (Wiesel et al. 2013, p. 321). We seek to extend this observation, interpreting how particular kinds of subjects are cultivated, how this shapes MPE development materially, and the emotional, lived responses therein. MPEs typify a certain contrived moment in the Australian dream of home-ownership, and as such are ideal sites for inspecting such concerns.

7.5 Case Study and Methods

Greenhills Beach is a master-planned estate neighbouring Cronulla, approximately 30 kilometres south of Sydney’s Central Business District (CBD). Greenhills Beach comprises 236 lots, ranging between 550 and 800 m², all designed to accommodate large detached dwellings. The appeal of this estate among purchasers is partly this close proximity to Sydney’s CBD, but also its prestigious coastal location. Previously a sand mining site, and subsequently rezoned for residential development, the site was touted as the first beachside release in Sydney for 30 years, and is within walking distance to popular surfing beaches.

Houses were commonly comprised of four to five bedrooms, three to four bathrooms, and a double garage. Aligning with common design principles of project-built large homes, most had an open-plan living/dining space where the majority of household interactions took place (for more detail, see Dowling 2008). All but four of the houses profiled were double-storey. In this location, house designs needed to satisfy a developer-led design committee before submitting to Council. Criteria varied, but concentrated on the display features of the house (i.e. the façade and the garden) towards propagating a ‘coastal landscape character’, and reflecting coastal prestige.
Research commenced in 2013, during the ‘under construction’ phase of Greenhills Beach, and spanned across three years of estate progress and a staged rollout of land sales and house building. Some 21 households at Greenhills Beach participated in semi-structured walking interviews, clustering around three overarching themes: motivations for purchase; impressions of lifestyle; and house building and construction. Interviews ran between 30 and 90 minutes, and consisted of two elements. First, participants were interviewed in their homes, commonly set in an open-plan living space (i.e. the dining table). Following this they were invited to guide the researcher on a ‘home tour’ around their garden spaces and the house façade. Free of prepared questions, this ‘show-and-tell’ style of interviewing sparked conversations organically, drawing attention to material engagements with things/home (for studies with cognate methodological intentions, see Tolia-Kelly 2004; Dowling 2008; Gorman-Murray 2008; Dowling and Power 2012; Cook et al. 2013). Eight households were revisited approximately 12 months after the first interview. Return interviews looked more closely at themes of investment and house life cycles, capturing homes as they progressed (or stalled) in line with residents’ plans and intentions. Interviews were manually transcribed verbatim, and thematic codes iteratively developed. Coding did not begin with an emotional lean; rather this developed organically whilst participants recounted their financial decisions. Pseudonyms are used throughout this paper.

Over 80 percent of the Greenhills Beach population is Anglo-Australian; reflecting this, families interviewed were mostly Anglo-Australian (ABS 2017b). The age of participants varied from 34 to 70 (the median age of the suburb was 34 in 2016; ABS, 2017b). Mortgaged owner-occupation was the tenure type for over 80 percent of occupied private dwellings, just over 15 percent owned outright (ABS 2017b). Drivers to move to Greenhills Beach broadly filtered into two types: young families upsizing their dwelling to accommodate new members, or retired couples seeing an uncommon opportunity to build a house next to the
beach near Sydney—a hallmark of Australian cultural life (Booth 2001). This was typically not a first home purchase. In what follows, we unpack in turn the three themes that emerged from interviews: how households articulated overlapping domestic and economic ideals of home; the emotional performance of a calculative investor subject; and how ideals of opportunity and competitiveness were reflected materially in newly built homes.

7.6 Family home/family asset

The first results section analyses how residents grasped dual domestic and economic values of home. As a provocation for gauging satisfaction with home purchase, residents were asked to consider if they felt temporary or permanent in their new homes, and if they thought they had made a ‘good investment’. This unveiled financial deliberation: most residents saw themselves as long-term, but expressed a consideration of rewards that would come with sale. Claudia articulated a common line: while ‘permanent’ now, future sale was a ‘retirement fund’. Claudia (40-44), is retired and lives with her husband and her teenage daughter. Claudia attributed their move to Greenhills Beach to ‘lifestyle’, discussing how following years of renting this was the first time feeling ‘settled’ in a house in Sydney. During the interview Claudia repeated her ‘love’ for her house; they could build something they wanted, and she was ‘proud’ of the result. Selling would come in the future—when it would be impractical to live in a large home:

The way we look at it is that this is our retirement fund. We know one day that we will have to downsize, and we are prepared to do it. We’re going to try to stay in this area when we do—because there are quite a few units and things down in Cronulla by the beach. So we’ve got a plan for the future, but we won’t move any time soon. We’re still young, we can still keep it up and maintain the house.
Being house proud mixed with self-responsibility, where making a ‘plan for the future’ was central to a financialisation narrative. In absence of State support, housing is one way to self-generate a retirement fund: ‘put simply, the self-governing individual who takes responsibility for his or her retirement is necessarily an investor subject under neoliberalism’ (Langley 2006, p. 923).

For others who stated that they were ‘permanent’, there was hesitation in labelling the house as an investment. Luke (45-49) lives with his wife, and four daughters. The beach was the major factor in their move. After 2 years, Luke described their home as ‘comfortable’. Like Claudia, Luke distanced the family home from an investment label:

It’ll be, if things turn to shit one day, then there is an option to sell. You’re sitting on significant equity; you can go and buy in the same area… and have no mortgage. But right now we don’t look at this as an investment. You go to sleep at night thinking, ‘Oh, that’s kind of a cool thing that just happened’.


Hayley (30-34) and Tom (35-39), parents of two boys under 3, indicated their central motivation was the comparative affordability of building new rather than buying an established home. They describe themselves as ‘very lucky’ to live by the beach, they love the house, and their boys love the backyard. But their mortgage makes it a ‘stretch’ to live at Greenhills Beach. After 11 months, their house was already on the market. We discussed this decision:
Chapter 7 - Calculated Homes, Stretched Emotions

Hayley: For what we’ve seen our neighbours get, we could potentially make a lot of money that we could then buy another property and have a much lower mortgage. So that’s our reasoning.

Tom: Yeah, we want to lower our outgoings. Better lifestyle and security around the family and kids.

Hayley: We love this area, I don’t really want to move out of this area, but if it makes our lives less stressful then that’s what we’ll do.

Despite loving the house and their location, sale could provide ‘better lifestyle and security’, towards resolving a ‘stressed mortgagor’ subjectivity (cf. Waldron and Redmond 2017). Here, mortgage anxieties rule their decision, as they may well should, but the result suppresses strong emotional attachments: their ‘love’ for the area. Being investor-occupier requires becoming detached.

Unseating emotional ties to ‘place’ and to ‘home’ takes its toll. Lily described buying and building as ‘craziness’—often repeating ‘it was a risk’. Navigating this risk is the responsibility of an investor figure (Smith 2008; Langley 2006); this is clouded when that investment is a family home. Lily (45-49) explains with sadness that her family is temporary:

Yeah [temporary]. Which is sad—because it’s lovely living here. It really is. And I mean, you take the good with the bad. But it certainly would be nice to think that you could live here forever... But look, we’ll look at a couple of years. What we’ve waited for, we’re going to enjoy for a while before we do. But we’ve always had the intention of never staying here permanently, to buy, and obviously look towards being mortgage free.
Lily unveiled how emotional attachments to home and place—something they’ve ‘waited for’—are supplanted by the possibility to be mortgage free. Putting the family on a better financial footing is discussed as the end goal. The house is prioritised as a financial asset and instrument, disturbing developing emotional bonds between family, place, and home. The family home becomes a short-term stay, an opportunity to be free of mortgage stress, and a way to perform prudence. In Lily’s case, home is something ‘to enjoy for a while’. It is a long-term plan, a parachute in a worst-case scenario, a way to navigate a stifling mortgage.

7.7 Competing, maximising, and materiality

We now focus on how ‘rational’ investor subjectivities shaped the material form of newly built houses. There is a sense, with housing recast as a financial opportunity, that the market creates ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ based on entrepreneurial capacities and expertise (Langley 2006; Allon 2012). MPE covenants encourage this becoming of opportunistic, competing, maximising subjects: those seeking to best express ‘desirable acts of housing consumption’ (Cheshire et al. 2009).

Competition surfaces as a culture of comparison. Interviewees verbalised this comparative tendency when reflecting on their neighbour’s homes. Max, (45-49), is self-employed. He was motivated to move from a beach view apartment to a house so he and his partner could have more space, a dog and a pool. Max described himself as ‘settled and comfortable’; after a few ‘scuffs’ and ‘bumps’ the new house was starting to feel like home. While sympathetic to a point, Max imparted a cold view that some homes fell short of his anticipated standard:

Some of them are spectacular, some of them are really nice. Other ones, especially a lot of the two storeys, they’re very, very basic. So you get the impression that they’ve spent a fortune on the land, and they’ve really stretched themselves and put the house on with not much to spare. But some of them are spectacular. Some are shit.
Owen (65-69) expressed a similar stance. He is retired, and lives with his wife in a four bedroom home. They were motivated by building a house ‘that we wanted’. Unlike the majority of those interviewed, Owen’s house was architecturally designed; this point of difference was visually apparent through a modern form and façade. Choosing an architect over a project home was based on attaining set specifications, like four bedrooms, each with en suites for accommodating visitors. For Owen:

Most of them I like. There are a few which surprise me, they put such a cheap house on such an expensive block of land. I say that when maybe I don’t understand—maybe it’s a monetary thing. But if you’ve got the money to buy a block of land here, which was very expensive, then you should be able to put on a decent house. There are some here that are not decent homes. I am surprised about that.

Max and Owen’s appraisal of neighbours’ houses comes across as calculating, and cold: where houses are ‘not decent’.

This culture of comparison is bedded in financial exposure. The quality of neighbours’ houses reflects upon the distinction of their own houses (McGuirk and Dowling 2011; Gillon 2017)—and concurrently, resultant property values. Returning to Tom, such concerns were immediate with their house on the market:

There were pretty strict guidelines. You know, you want everyone to keep some sort of high standard because at the end of the day if you want to sell—it’s in everyone else’s interest, they want us to get as much as we can, because then it benefits them for recent sales and all of that sort of stuff. So yeah, some are good, some are—not so good.

Here, concerns surrounding other houses are rooted in desires to be seen to perform financial calculation. Despite leading with sympathetic tones, here residents are prioritising being quite
emotionless, supporting their own negotiation of a strong housing market as a ‘landscape of fear’ (Christie et al. 2008). Above all this opportunity needed to be seized.

The ‘rational’ investor subject then performed individual financial aspirations materially. Adam and Kate (both 45-49), who live alone without their adult children, used ‘keep up with the Joneses’ rhetoric to justify the size of their four-bedroom home. Moving was motivated primarily by lifestyle, but with undertones of investment opportunity. As Adam explained, building on coastline property would end up being quite lucrative: ‘you don’t have to be Einstein to work that out’. It would be ‘silly’, then, to not maximise this:

Adam: The four bedrooms are probably wasted, but we have our children in a little bit. We needed to have something available for them. And you wouldn’t put a little two bedroom house on this block of land. It’d be silly. So you had to, I don’t like the terminology but you had to keep up with the Joneses. You had to build something-

Kate: And for resale too, you had to have a bigger house.

Adam: A single storey house would do us, there’s no doubt about it.

Here, market logics enter the home space, push the building envelope, and are prioritised. Residents were careful to create home spaces with upgraded features and finishes, echoing Wiesel et al.’s (2013) observation that those building new homes had a tendency to ‘supersize’. The material form and function is designed not explicitly for immediate needs, but a future imagined buyer. In effect, this builds a house in absentia of its current occupants.

Returning to Lily, immediate worries—the ‘craziness’ of building, as she called it—were supplanted by rationalising this decision on selling ‘potential’. To manage risk, their home design was immediately calculative:
Chapter 7 - Calculated Homes, Stretched Emotions

It’s 3 living rooms, 5 bedrooms. Good-sized bedrooms, bigger than your average. Again, that was one thing that we looked at. Enormous bedrooms, realistically. Three bathrooms. Double garage. Plenty big for us [laughs]. We could live in a two bedroom flat, really, but again the potential to sell. Sell to families. We thought that was probably the market. We designed our backyard along those lines—for families—and the house.

Lily’s suggestion that her family could live in a two-bedroom flat indicated that the house was not built on the terms of her family life, but the assumed future life of another family (cf. Dowling and Power, 2012). Lily went on to call this ‘not a forever home’. ‘Home’ was designed with selling potential prioritised, the temporality of home accordingly stretched. Home is a financial instrument, where maximising is exhibiting investor-occupier acumen.

These homes, and this real estate market, have coastal prestige—an added dimension to profit maximisation (Booth 2001). This coastal location is an extra guarantee against ‘losing’, as Lily explained: ‘Even if there is an economic downturn with real estate, we don’t feel like we’re going to lose here, being so close to the beach’. Consequently there was a heightened sense of calculation in this location, to build a home in accordance with a coastal premium. One common feature was a backyard swimming pool; installed by 12 of 21 houses. Despite not really wanting a pool, Claudia felt it necessary for maximising future exchange value:

We wanted to put a pool in. We originally didn’t want to do that, but because we obviously want to sell in a few years’ time when we decide to downscale of whatever, we want to put the value up as far as we possibly could. We decided to put in a pool because that’s the kind of thing these houses have, most of them. You have to compete, so that’s what we did.

205
Chapter 7 - Calculated Homes, Stretched Emotions

There were consequences. Although ‘you have to compete’, Claudia’s pool engulfed her small backyard. Residents were anxious and fearful; this emotional response hidden in judgement, and performing rationality. The refrain of keeping up with the Joneses was transformed to competing with the Joneses in imagined property markets, cultivating a particular kind of calculating subject who allowed future exchange value to override immediate use value. At times, the association with their homes seemed emotionless—creating subjects that at times came across as reticent and callous.

7.8 ‘Feeling fine-ance’: Suppressing stretched emotions

This final results section seeks to explore suppressed emotions of the investor-occupier. Acknowledging emotionally charged relationships with personal finances unmasks a ‘rational’ entrepreneurial subject. Participants discussed stretching finances—and themselves—too far, or not far enough, revealing a tension between being prudent in the present and calculative for the future.

Some residents expressed regret that emanated from building with prudence, clashing with ‘rational investment’. Paige (45-49) lives with her husband and their two teenage sons. Building a large home was motivated by her children. One son plays the drums. This caused issues with neighbours in their last home, a duplex. Paige also attributed purchasing to future practicalities: ‘for the boys to stay at home with us for as long as they need to’, after secondary school. Paige described external pressures she felt to conform to more grandiose material statements, almost apologetically discussing her base package project home as projecting a ‘pauper image’. Paige lamented her family could not afford a ‘greener’ home:

> There was a really nice house that I wanted; it was all solar built and energy efficient. It was really nice—but it was 650,000 dollars. I mean if I had the extra money—seriously, it was 250,000 dollars, a lot of money—I would have built the energy
efficient home and not this one… For people who have endless budgets I suppose they get exactly what they want. I love my house, and I’m happy, and I feel very fortunate—but if I had endless money to do whatever I want, I’d pick different.

Building within a predetermined budget meant compromising on housing ambitions. Similarly, when asked about her feelings towards other houses Claudia looked inward at the lack of ‘extras’—despite her aforementioned house pride. As Claudia admitted, this was a practical choice: ‘We obviously could only do what we could afford, so we couldn’t do lovely garage doors, the modern façades and all these things’.

Material satisfaction could, however, be achieved through pushing the confines of a budget. Other residents characterised their financial situation as ‘stretching’ (cf. Wiesel et al. 2013), exceeding comfort in search of betterment. When home is extended temporally from short-term use to longer-term exchange, initial overspending becomes calculative. For households interviewed in early stages of inhabitation, overspending effects were acute. For Max, his mortgage created a scenario where for the first few years, he was just trying to get through. It’s expensive, it’s not cheap. Everyone is in the same boat. You’ve spent a lot of money on the land, then you’ve got the house... But that’s like with any mortgage, you’re just trying to get through the first couple of years—but hopefully the money will go up by then.

If a core ideal of home is comfort (Blunt and Dowling 2006), then Max’s refrain of ‘just trying to get through’ sounded decidedly uncomfortable, resonating with Searle et al.’s (2009) findings that prioritising financial returns can be costly for personal well-being. Similarly Tom indicated that, having ‘outstretched’, the family was homebound for the near future: ‘to be honest, too, a lot of people have spent an absolute fortune like we had. You can’t really afford to go here, there and everywhere because people have outstretched
themselves’. Such accounts add a financial layer to common critiques of MPEs, and modern suburbia more broadly: private people retreating to big homes, rather than participating in civic life and activities (Farrelly, 2008), may actually just be people hamstrung by debt. In these early stages, which this case study captures, there is a sense of being a martyr for investment potential: performing a certain kind of ‘heroic stoicism’, where stretching is entrepreneurial.

But ‘stretching’ nonetheless has an emotional resonance, and material consequences. For example, gardens and landscaping were left unfinished and dormant—especially in early stages of homemaking. Anna, 49, lives with her husband and three teenage sons. Their family had been renting locally since moving from England. For her husband, a builder, it was ‘his dream to build his own house’. This was an opportunity to get what they wanted, but personal finances were always tight. Anna was quite open about the financial pressures of her house at this early stage, vocal on feelings of embarrassment and shame while walking around her garden:

If we could finish it, it’d look a lot nicer, and I wouldn’t have this crappy furniture. See that barbecue—down there at that end, see that gap? There’s meant to be a built-in barbecue, but again its finances. […] The water’s getting in to [the shed]—I don’t know, it looks a bit blistered doesn’t it? I’m so embarrassed!

Anna’s ‘embarrassment’ suggests the stop-start process of homemaking that comes with overspending affects her performance as a new homeowner. Shame comes from feeling inadequate, and thus ‘out-of-place’ (Probyn 2004). On return to revisit Anna later in the year, her backyard had dramatically changed. A newly landscaped garden and a pool were a material riposte to previous shameful feelings. Her vigour in showing the landscaped garden laid bare the tenuous balance between homemaking, identity and money:
We’ve got the pool, we’ve got the decking. We’ve had the fireplace, the fire. I’m trying to think what else we’ve done. Shutters—we haven’t finished the blinds here, but we’ve got shutters and blinds there. Shower screens. Some furniture out there [alfresco]. So yeah, we borrowed some more money.

Not only does this invigorate satisfaction, getting closer to the ‘dream’ home, improvements are being actively entrepreneurial. A ‘home improvement’ culture pervades a financialised relationship with home (Allon 2008); this debt is productive—and forgotten (Soaita and Searle 2016). But competing emotions arise from living in a more ambitious, but indebted, home. Homemaking can just as quickly become ‘unhomeliness’ as indebtedness creates stress (Cook et al. 2013; Waldron and Redmond 2017).

Paige, exasperated, tried to restore the family home to its core emotional function:

I suppose there are some people that don’t get perturbed by million dollar mortgages, but I like to go on holidays and spend money on my kids… Life’s not just about a house, because at the end of the day you just come home, switch on the telly, make dinner and sit down on the couch. It’s just a house… It’s nice enough. It’s a house for your kids to grow up in, and you to come home to, clean and tidy. I don’t quite get this new age thing where people think that you have to have sensational solid gum flooring throughout, you know, 100ml stone benchtops… but I think people get caught up in that moment… If you’re happy in your marriage, with your kids, in your home, it doesn’t matter how big your benchtops are. It is so unimportant! But that’s just me, a realist [laughs].

Paige’s quote acted as a poignant reminder for home as primarily a place for family: ‘it’s just a house’. At the same time, can being calculative and maximising be ‘so unimportant’, as Paige laments? Rather than a nostalgic withdrawal, an affirmation for bygone suburbia, these
residents indicate difficulties in balancing multiple purposes, uses and exchanges of home. The financialised family home is a complex battleground of values, aspirations, and limits. The investor-occupier subject cannot rest on their laurels—and is encouraged and incentivised not to: via, for instance, tax breaks such as negative gearing (Blunden 2016), or various sources of debt financing, including mortgage equity withdrawal (see Cook et al. 2013). Emotional excesses may be habitually suppressed (Smith et al. 2009), but worry, anxiety, fear, disappointment, compromise and regret, unmask the ‘successful’ investor-occupier.

**7.9 Conclusion**

‘Home’ is a relational achievement, woven by materials and money, both comforting and uncomfortable (Smith 2008; Cook et al. 2016). Recasting the family home financially accentuates this. Shifting gauges of competing and betterment, supported by greater access to debt finance, makes home an ongoing achievement, and when cast as an opportunity—never wholly satisfying or fulfilling. This feeling of chasing satisfaction is core to the lived experience of money and materials. Risk is routinized in the everyday (Martin 2002); as a consequence winning and losing constantly drives action.

Not only is home a process, but subjects formed by this housing scenario are always in an active process of becoming (cf. Gibson 2001). Emotions are one way to explore various avenues of this subject becoming. This paper has contributed to nascent research on stresses and anxieties of financialised home ownership. Emotional energies were not benched as a ‘rational’ investor script would have it; rather they were highlighted in their role in homemaking and their influence on financial decision-making. Internal emotional conflicts surface, involving the suppressing or devaluing of some emotions, and allowing others to take over. We have highlighted certain emotional cues for being ‘the rational’ investor-
occupier: detachment, callousness, betterment, competition. These seek to make the family home ephemeral, sellable, tradeable. But home is also a ‘labour of love’ (Munro and Smith 2008). These ‘rational’, ‘calculating’ subjects are shot through with emotions. Investment-occupation requires emotional effort. An emotional take helps show causality in decisions and should be applied more liberally, to understanding housing markets as an emotional economy (Christie et al. 2008).

Being investor-occupier shapes new domestic ideals. First, on temporal grounds: a long-term setting to raise a family becomes ‘home for a while’, for the length of becoming tradeable, and being comfortable with a mortgage. Second, house design is shaped by opportunity logics and competitive cultures, maximising irrespective of current needs (Wiesel et al. 2013), and propagating large family homes (Dowling and Power 2012). This leaves people stretched, stressed and anxious—trying to both avoid risk, and grapple with it (Langley 2008; Searle et al. 2009). The family home—something waited for, dreamed about, desired—is differently conceived, where attachment to place and belonging is sidelined.

Master-planned estates are cultivated by—and cultivate—the emergence of distinctive owner-investor subject identities. This is wrapped up in consistent, mutually assured material expression. Residents tended to build a house they deemed competitive in Sydney’s current housing market: large and family oriented, with upgraded features marking coastal prestige. Building a home for exchange relies on a growth imperative of housing value, and on consistent market desires. MPEs are already beginning to vary housing types and styles (e.g. duplexes, townhouses) to cater for different needs and preferences (see McGuirk and Dowling 2007). Alongside forecasted decreasing family sizes in Australia, and increasing house prices, any purported balance between investment and return may unsettle market maximising.
Beyond our analysis, future research is needed to continue to paint a broader picture of how investor-occupation is navigated: for instance, through fixed- and flexible-mortgage repayments, borrowing for betterment (i.e. renovations), establishing investment ‘portfolios’—or, perhaps, as Hall (2016) explores, subverting the narrative through an austere financial approach. A longer-term ethnographic approach would offer further insights, tracing the progression of these dispositions and emotions to sale, to see whether hope and fear were well placed. There are other perspectives in this financialised milieu requiring attention: policy-makers, planners, developers, housing companies, real estate agents, policy-makers—as well as accounting for global flows and fluctuations (cf. Rogers and Koh 2017). Attention to the workings of financialisation, as well as the lived experiences, is one avenue for absolving what Christophers (2015) identifies as analytical limits of the term.

This paper sketched emotional and material outcomes of financialisation imperatives, in a rare coastal new build site within metropolitan Sydney: the suburban dream, ‘supersized’ (cf. Wiesel et al. 2013). As the property dream becomes more fantastical, there is productive potential in staying with these narratives that complicate the investor subject. Shedding light on emotions, as a too-long suppressed register of understanding housing decisions, could help shift home cultures—or at the very least, help to clarify inherent paradoxes of modern owner-occupation.
8 Conclusions

The final chapter reflects on the contributions made by the chapters in this thesis individually and collectively, and concludes with suggestions for possible directions of future research.

8.1 Revisiting the research questions

This thesis has embraced the process of housing and home, through particular expressions of one dominant housing form in Australia: large homes, built in master-planned estates. In following the process of home through its materials, humans, nonhumans and financial flows (Smith 2008; Cook et al. 2016), practices, motivations, and moments of collaboration and contestation could be explored. A relational material approach was a lens to unveil attitudes and practices that underpin homemaking, towards showing how other relations and interactions surface that trouble and exceed ideal housing forms and home ideals. Through interviews and home tours, I resisted ‘judging a house by its façade’ and showed the material and financial realities of homemaking. Interviews with homeowners in their houses captured the conditions and terms upon which things are valued (Jacobs and Smith 2008). Through the four results chapters homemaking is revealed to be a product of more-than-human relatings, and a set of practices shot through with cultural-economic subjectivities and governmentalities.

Taking housing as a process, and considering homemaking as a series of practices, means taking the mess of building and inhabiting a house as also meaningful. This thesis has explicitly sought to explore lived experiences of home, and interrogate moments that are usually overlooked—the banal, the fleeting—which shape and inform routines, home cultures, towns, suburbs. Rather than waiting until the house was complete, and the estate
Chapter 8 - Conclusions

was complete, I made a deliberate effort to undertake my research during these interstitial, transitional phases. This led to four lines of inquiry that sought to provide productive inroads into rethinking things overprescribed and taken for granted. These four chapters were ordered chronologically, to mirror the trajectory of place, and the process of home. First, Chapter 4 accounted for placemaking strategies in coastal MPEs, as places packaged with idealised lifestyles and human-nature relationships (Cheshire et al. 2010; Wood 2002). I considered the enduring influence of ephemeral real estate brochures: a first point of contact for prospective buyers, where the journey begins. Throwntogetherness (Massey 2005) unpacked this assumed path dependency of an ideal coastal lifestyle and showed how the portrayal of everyday lives was Janus-faced: both suburban, and grounded in coastal nostalgia.

Chapter 5 argued that although a passing moment in the process of housing, experiences of building sites and construction endure. I explored how first residents of Greenhills Beach, whose homemaking practices overlapped with building and construction, managed dilemmas of inhabiting an unsettled, disrupted place. Consequently, I delved deeper into motivations for doing so. Moving in to a building site also says something about the changing values of home and drivers of homemaking, in that the opportunity to build early portends to increased financial return. While the vagaries of building and construction risk the unmaking of home (Baxter and Brickell 2014), it is still savvy and calculative to do so.

Chapter 6 then focused on the lived experiences of inhabiting coastal homes, examining homemaking as a more-than-human endeavour. How residents negotiated salt weathering was an evocative snapshot into this approach. There is something important in revealing the ironies of ‘themed’ housing developments, via the hidden material, emotional and financial work that is needed to maintain them. Nature and finance, as key referents and influences in homemaking, are always entangled—and interestingly and evocatively so in a coastal
Chapter 8 - Conclusions

housing context. Here, the coastal location magnifies the price of housing—yet simultaneously makes the house a more costly product to maintain and sustain.

The lived experiences and emotions of calculated homes were taken up in earnest in Chapter 7. Chronologically, this chapter considered the importance of future sale, driven by conditions of financialisation. The priorities of domesticity have changed, making home tradeable and sellable. In exploring the emotional consequences of building and living in a financially calculated family home, this chapter sought to unmask the ‘rational’ investor-occupier. Together, by examining these homes and how they were made led to ‘unmaking’ them: on the terms of home being settled and comfortable, resistant to coastal forces, and ‘good’, calculated, savvy investments.

Crucially, these elements—home building, inhabiting and investing—entangle and take shape in place. The thesis explored tensions between the ‘calculative’ character of MPEs and governmentalities of the Australian dream (including the financialised owner-occupier subject), and the ‘throwntogetherness’ (Massey 2005) of the lived experience of place, as it is actually built and inhabited, dwelled within. Against the calculative and controlled character of MPEs, as unfurling places they are made, longitudinally, in a more iterative, relational fashion. Greenhills Beach is the ultimate site for the Australian dream, the preeminent ‘you’ve made it’ place, within this dominant mythology. That this place has unfurled as it has, infuses the degree to which owner-occupiers invest in material additions, act in a calculative fashion about future gains, and become so anxious about it all.

Through the four lines of inquiry extended via these chapters, this thesis has investigated the temporal passage of a developing and evolving place, through a set of moments that proved productive, interesting, and exciting to pause in residents’ housing and homemaking journeys. Attending to temporality in research practice and fieldwork caused different things
Chapter 8 - Conclusions

to show up. Each interlude I presented in the process of home is not less important or crucial because they were fleeting, nor were they forgotten as the trajectory of place (Massey 2005) continues towards ‘completed’ homes, and a ‘completed’ development. They resonate, they leave legacies. For instance, each chapter revealed how an evolving place drove the evolving formation of identities: identities oriented around families and couples through homemaking practices (Blunt and Dowling 2006; Gorman-Murray 2008; Morrison 2013; Cox 2016), but as each chapter displays, residents were forming identities as discerning buyers; as respectful neighbours; as authentic coastal residents; and as savvy ‘investor-occupiers’. All of these characteristics are central to the homeowner figure.

Theorising housing using relational materiality provides a lens for understanding housing concerns differently. I highlight four inflections that this thesis framework provides. First, viewing home as a process, the outcome of which always exceeds the exclusive control of its owner, allows an increasing awareness of how we live with, and within, our environments (in this case, the coastal margin). Second, this awareness brings the suitability of housing into question: thinking more carefully about how we live now, and ways that we can live differently. Third, expanding the responsibilities of home’s creation on relational, material and more-than-human axes can trouble understandings of investment. This project explored investment in terms of time, effort, emotional energies, and finances. Fourth, approaching home as a process lays bare risk: be it risk financially, and what lurks underneath the normalisation of bearing risk; or the tenuous place of housing once it is understood as porous and malleable—particularly acute in a coastal setting.

8.2 Revisiting the contextual concerns

This thesis explored tensions that are muffled by dominant cultures of housing in Australia. These things—owner-occupation as a dominant tenure form despite unaffordability, and the
appeal of coastal housing despite environmental concerns and increasing risk—are still hegemonic, and their power will take some diluting. This study met these tensions by way of an ideal, elite site of housing. Greenhills Beach was an exemplar site to explore these concerns: a context that sustains this housing culture, and interviewing those with an avid interest in sustaining it.

I briefly return to the three contextual concerns. First, the *Australian property dream* frequently goes unquestioned as a collective ideal, which sustains the ideal owner-occupier figure, and sets certain precursors and conditions for housing that enrol nature and money in certain ways (Cook et al. 2016; Davison 2016). For instance, an owned house is an egalitarian rite of passage despite restrictive, unaffordable purchase prices. Ownership is attained through a reliance on mortgage instruments (see Table 3.2). This can have deleterious consequences—both chronic, in the everyday stresses and anxieties of debted ownership (Colic-Peisker and Johnson 2010; Cook et al. 2013), and acute, in the exposure to market forces when property bubbles ‘burst’ (Aalbers 2016; Reid 2017). The thesis looked at trade-offs, ambivalences and compromises that come with mortgaged ownership. Homemaking was enabled and constrained by money, where varying budgets and comfort levels with debt set the terms for initial design (Chapter 5), being resistant and durable in coastal conditions (Chapter 6) and potential sale value (Chapter 7). The thesis showed how these financial decisions resonate; they have significant material consequences and emotional affects.

In its current script, the property dream is focused on exchange, where homemaking practices are inseparable from the house as an asset and investment. Financialised owner-occupation brings us to the second contextual concern: *the rise of master-planned estates*. MPEs are a consequence of these ideals: financial calculation drew people to MPEs, made them act in certain ways (i.e. moving in early) made them feel certain ways (stretched and anxious, but
comforted and assured), and made them design their homes in ways that continue to sustain the reverberations of the Australian dream (large, detached, family-oriented homes despite their current needs). Such cultures are not resisted, but things are stuck with, and this has certain consequences. While immediate priorities for housing in Australia’s urban centres are high density and high rise (for Sydney see NSW Department of Planning 2014), appeals for detached housing remain—and due to this appeal, make calculative financial sense. While land remains, the market desire remains, and while the financial returns remain, MPEs will remain.

As McGuirk and Dowling (2011) explained, master-planned estates are a market response to Sydney’s rampant property market, appealing to a heightened sense of social distinction. Here middle-class social distinction was based on materially expressing these financialised logics, reinforcing hyper-idealised domestic ideals and maximising tendencies. This thesis scrutinised the lived experiences of an ideal MPE, honing in particularly on how nature and finance wrote the terms of subject formation. Collectively, each chapter seeks to address a central concern of McGuirk and Dowling’s (2007; 2011) research on MPEs: the need to resist essentialising and generalising the consequences of this housing form and delivery, and instead attend to place, and to lived experiences. Viewing these homes as a process was an effective vehicle to take up these concerns.

Third, this thesis highlighted MPEs as one contemporary vehicle for housing on coastlines. Coastal places are changing fast, adopting a certain suburban character; ‘authentic’ coastal cultures (Osbaldiston 2011), less so. Examining the representation of coastal nature and coastal lifestyles in real estate advertisements (Chapter 4) impels further thought on how modern coastlines can be more ‘authentically’ represented, and how these representations translate into eventual place change.
Indeed residential movement to the coast in Australia shows no sign of slowing, compelling further scrutiny of the everyday, material groundedness of living by the coast. The thesis grounded the lived experience of coastal places, and the *in situ* performance of coastal homes. In examining these lived experiences, the lifestyle affordances were not always ideal. While it may only be a micro-level, everyday example, the extra effort and application required from residents to maintain their homes from salt corrosion unsettled connotations of lifestyle (Chapter 6).

Paradoxically, coastal housing is a ‘safe’ investment in terms of housing price, but a risky option in light of forecasted sea level rise and the anticipated effects of Anthropogenic climate change (Department of Climate Change 2009; McInnes et al. 2016). This risk is laid plain in events like the Collaroy June 2016 storms, where shorelines literally shifted, homes were destroyed, and insurance premiums consequently skyrocketed (Hannam and Kembrey 2016). Living by the coast is highly desirable, and highly lucrative, but these investments are highly vulnerable.

### 8.3 Future research directions

Studies of home and domesticities have been a productive avenue of research in cultural geographies. Their prominence is due to housing as a universal human need, and home as a material and emotional setting for the formation of attitudes, values and ideals. In this sense, homes are a reflection of the society from which they emerge (Valentine 2001; Blunt and Dowling 2006). But society is ever-changing; consequently dominant cultures of housing are under perpetual pressure and (re)formation. As such, studies of housing and home will continue to hold sway and prominence in geography and other fields.

Complementing the future research directions suggested at the end of each chapter, this section points to three broad future directions. First, approaching housing as a process
Chapter 8 - Conclusions

requires accounts of the practices and experiences of a wide range of actors and institutions. As Cook et al (2016, p. 1) explain, ‘unbounding’ housing and home not only unbounds lived experience, but ‘makes visible the continuities and inter-dependencies that exist cross the diverse range of professions and disciplines that participate in the design, construction, investment, exchange, management and representation of housing’. Understood as a multi-sited and multi-scalar process, attention turns to the other actors that make home. Further research that gave voice to a wide range of perspectives would offer interesting insights, and complement accounts of lived household experiences and practices in rethinking housing as a process. This includes, but is not limited to: construction workers and contract builders (Datta 2008; Sage 2013); landscape gardeners (Hitchings 2007); architects (Jacobs et al. 2012); developers (Fincher 2004); and real estate agents (O’Neill 2001; Perkins et al. 2008); as well as project home companies, Councils, environmental groups, banks and lenders, inter alia.

In addition perspectives of culturally diverse homeowner identities and experiences are required. The findings drawn from this data are admittedly socio-demographically specific, as a reality of this housing development. The homogeneity of the sample tends towards the imagined figure of suburban homeownership as ‘ordinary, middle-class suburbia, safely Anglo-Saxon’ (Allon 2014, p. 31; Blunt and Dowling 2006). But ethnic diversity characterises contemporary Australian suburbs (see Klocker and Head 2013; Tindale and Klocker 2017). Particularly at a time when foreign investment in Australian housing is such a (poorly understood) flashpoint (though see Rogers and Koh 2017; Rogers et al. 2017), perspectives of owner-occupiers and investor-occupiers that deviate from Anglo-European socio-demographic characteristics are sorely needed.

Second, a continued focus is needed on homemaking practices, particularly those overlooked practices which are intended to delay the ‘entropic destiny’ (Jacobs and Cairns 2011) of
Chapter 8 - Conclusions

houses. More attention is required to practices of maintenance, repair, and renovation at home. In the context of Sydney, for instance, this attention is spurred by the ageing ‘demography of houses’ (Paris 1993) in middle-ring suburbs. Ageing post-War housing supply requires urgent renovation and renewal (see Randolph and Freestone 2012). At the same time, the financialised character of housing drives impulses towards home improvement, through renovation (Allon 2008; Houston and Ruming 2014; Cox 2016) and upgrading and replacing, via knockdown rebuilding (Wiesel et al. 2013; see also Nasar et al. 2007). Combined these motivations result in house building, and maintenance and repair practices, being a long-term presence in Sydney’s suburbs. These homemaking practices garner attention towards understanding the priorities—financial or otherwise—that currently drive the navigation of housing markets.

Third, the focus on master-planned estates in Australia is far from complete. One of the core research gaps informing this study was the need to ground individual MPEs as unique, and to recognise differences and nuances in form and function (McGuirk and Dowling 2007; 2011). In this case, the distinctly coastal location of Greenhills Beach and interpretation of this location by the developer brought a number of specific features to the fore, which reared their head in purchase, inhabitation, and future exchange. Future household scale studies of large homes in MPEs are needed to further understand the various drivers and motivations underwriting their continued implementation. This case study was a particularly lucrative, ideal, scenario for housing in Sydney. It would be interesting to study MPEs in a middle-ring and outer-suburban greenfield sites to see where similarities and differences lie in how these places are experienced. Inroads have been made: on provision of infrastructure health outcomes (Maller et al. 2016), and commuting practices (Nicholls et al. 2017). Also, in resisting the purported path dependency of MPEs as calculative, pre-empted places, there are other directions that could add to understanding lived experiences—highlighting their
inherent throwntogetherness. For instance, a productive line of future research could be exploring the affective experiences of people ‘house hunting’: whether this is at auctions, project home villages, and/or sales offices.

A return to Greenhills Beach in the future, once there is some sales turnover, would be interesting to ground the legacies of these house choices, and whether or not the decisions made for financial gain rang true (Chapter 7).

The title of this thesis is ‘houses built on sand’. This was to be taken quite literally: these houses were, indeed, built on sand. But at the same time, this has a deeper meaning: the uncertainty, the tenuousness, which comes from interrogating housing as a process, and the fractured subjects produced through trying to retain fixed housing cultures and dispositions.

The thesis sought to modestly trouble the performance of the Australian dream in its current form, by way of studying an idealised example of housing tenure, form, and location. Taken together, each chapter provides an example of how an ideal visage is actually a complex, varied setting of negotiation: pulled in different ways by advertising, emotions, materials, builders, neighbours, budgets, more-than-human encounters, and financial decisions. This project doesn’t jolt the dreamer awake, but starts to nudge a sleeping figure by highlighting ambivalences and uncertainties.
I returned to the site one last time, in April 2017. This return marked a special event: the last block of land was being sold at Shearwater Landing. I arrived to an anticipatory atmosphere: onlookers, blow-ins, neighbours, bidders, real estate agents. I watched the dramatised performance of this sale: the repartee of bidding, the stalling of the auctioneer, the cheer at the gavel.

This block of land, alone, sold for $3,000,000.

A nation obsessed. At whatever the cost.
Appendices

Appendix A. Example of recruitment: letterbox drop flyer.

“LIVING ON THE COAST”

LOOKING FOR GREENHILLS BEACH RESIDENTS!

Hi! My name is Charlie Gillon. I’m a Geography PhD student from Wollongong Uni, and I’m looking for Greenhills Beach residents to participate in my research. You may have seen some flyers earlier on in the year.

I’d like to talk to you about building your house, general impressions of the estate, and how you spend time in the coastal environment around you.

WHAT DOES IT INVOLVE? Participation involves an interview at your home, followed by a short walk around the estate and to the beach. I understand most of you are busy getting your homes and gardens together, so this should only take 30-60 minutes.

WHO? Anyone living or currently building at Greenhills Beach.

WHEN? I am back interviewing residents right now. The time and date is up to you!

I’d appreciate your help! To organise an interview please contact me at cwg317@uowmail.edu.au or

---

Australian Centre for Cultural Environmental Research

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG
Appendices

Appendix B. Participant Information Sheet for Greenhills Beach residents.

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET FOR RESIDENTS
Sifting through the sand:
exploring human-nature relationships in coastal master-planned estates

RESEARCHERS
Mr Charles Gillon  Dr Leah Gibbs (Supervisor)  Prof. Chris Gibson (Co-Supervisor)
PhD Candidate  Lecturer  Professor
chw317@uowmail.edu.au  leah@uow.edu.au  cgibson@uow.edu.au

Australian Centre for Cultural Environmental Research (AUSCCER),
University of Wollongong, NSW 2522 Australia

AIMS/PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH
How do humans interact with the natural environment in their households and everyday routines?
This is an invitation to participate in a PhD project conducted by researchers at the University of
Wollongong. The aim of the research is to gather stories and understand the everyday lives of
residents in master-planned estates beside the coast—in particular, their interactions with nature.

The information collected from this research will be used in a PhD thesis, academic journal articles
and conference papers.

METHOD AND DEMANDS ON PARTICIPANTS
The requirement for your participation is that you are a resident of Greenhills Beach. You will be
asked to take part in two activities during the research process:

1. A walking interview, lasting approximately 40 minutes, which will be recorded as an audio
   file and transcribed. This involves touring your house and garden, followed by a short walk to
   the surrounding coastal environment. Typical questions include: What drew you to
   purchasing? Could you tell me about your home design? How do you maintain your garden?
   Why do you come to the beach?

2. Future participation in a revisit interview (approximately 6 months from today), where themes
   from the interview will be explored further.

To protect your identity, all responses from participants will be given a false name in any published
material. Please talk to me if you need any further clarification at this stage.
POSSIBLE RISKS, INCONVENIENCES AND DISCOMFORTS

Due to the number of methods required for this research, there is a risk you may become fatigued due to the amount of time each task takes. In this instance, you do not have to undergo all stages of the methodology.

Your involvement in this research is voluntary and you may withdraw your participation from the study at any time and withdraw any data that you have provided to that point. Refusal to participate in the study will not affect your relationship with the University of Wollongong.

USES AND BENEFITS OF THE RESEARCH

How humans conduct themselves with nature is one of the most pivotal questions facing modern societies. This research project is contributing to furthering understandings of how humans interact with coastal environments, and how living beside the coast influences their everyday lives. In Australia, where our population is concentrated—and growing—the everyday outcomes of residential development beside the coast are important to explore. Greenhills Beach is a timely example for considering these questions.

The information collected from this research will be used in a PhD thesis, and associated journal articles and conference papers. During research, all data collected from these methods will be stored on password-protected computers in locked spaces, and will only be accessed by myself and my supervisors.

ETHICS REVIEW AND COMPLAINTS

If you need further clarification or have additional questions at any stage of the project, please do not hesitate to contact myself (cwg317@uowmail.edu.au) or my supervisor, Dr Leah Gibbs (leah@uow.edu.au).

This study has been reviewed by the Human Research Ethics Committee (Social Science, Humanities and Behavioural Science) of the University of Wollongong. If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the way this research has been conducted, you can contact the UOW Ethics Officer on (02) 4221 3386 or email rso-ethics@uow.edu.au.

Thank you for your interest in this study. This participant information sheet is yours to keep.
Appendices

Appendix C. Consent Form for Greenhills Beach residents.

CONSENT FORM FOR RESIDENTS

Sifting through the sand:
exploring human-nature relationships in coastal master-planned estates

RESEARCHERS

Mr Charles Gillon  Dr Leah Gibbs (Supervisor)  Prof. Chris Gibson (Co-Supervisor)
PhD Candidate  Lecturer  Professor
0478 187 940  +61 2 4298 1547  +61 2 4221 3448
cwg317@uowmail.edu.au  leah@uow.edu.au  cgibson@uow.edu.au

Australian Centre for Cultural Environmental Research (AUSCCER),
University of Wollongong, NSW 2522 Australia

I have been given information about ‘Sifting through the sand’ and discussed the research project with Mr Charles Gillon who is conducting this research as part of his PhD research, supervised by Dr Leah Gibbs in the Department of Geography and Sustainable Communities, University of Wollongong. I have had an opportunity to ask Mr Charles Gillon any questions I may have about the research and my participation.

I have been advised of the potential risks and burdens associated with this research. This includes giving approximately 40 minutes of my time to participate in a semi-structured walking interview. My involvement may include a revisit interview, about 6 months from today, where themes can be further explored. I have been advised there is a low risk that I may become overwhelmed or inconvenienced due to the number of tasks required of me.

I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary. I am free to withdraw from the research at any time. My withdrawal of consent will not affect my relationship with the University of Wollongong.

I understand that the data collected from my participation will be used for a PhD thesis, associated journal publications and conference presentations, and I consent for it to be used in that manner. I understand that my personal details will remain confidential and the only people who will have access
Appendices

to any data containing my identity will be Charles and his supervisors Leah Gibbs and Chris Gibson. To protect my identity, all responses from participants will be given a false name in any published material.

By signing below I am indicating my consent to (please tick):

☐ A semi-structured walking interview, lasting approximately 40 minutes, which will be recorded as an audio file and transcribed.

☐ Future participation in a revisit interview (approximately 6 months from today), in which the themes from the interview will be explored further.

I give Charles permission to use photographs that he has taken that (please tick one):

☐ Include myself

☐ Include myself but where my face has been blurred

☐ Do not include me

If I have any further enquiries about the research, I can contact Mr Charles Gillon or his supervisor, Dr Leah Gibbs (on 4298 1547 or leah@uow.edu.au). If I have any concerns or complaints regarding the way the research has been conducted, I can contact the Ethics Officer, Office of Research, University of Wollongong on 4221 3386 or rso-ethics@uow.edu.au.

Signed

Date

______________________________ / / /

Name (please print)

______________________________
Appendices

Appendix D. Semi-structured interview schedule for Greenhills Beach residents.

**INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR RESIDENTS (ver. 4/2015)**

Thanks for being involved. The interview will be structured into three sections: general impressions of Greenhills, the building of your home and garden, and how you spend time in the coastal environment around you. This may involve a short walk.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THEME</th>
<th>QUESTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Background &amp; Reasons for purchasing</strong></td>
<td>To start, could you state your name and age please?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Can you tell me a bit about yourself and your family?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Who do you live here with? Household Demographics—everyone!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What is your occupation/what do you do?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>When did you move to Greenhills?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Where did you live before you moved here?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What did you move here for? NB: Job, lifestyle, location...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MPRE Questions</strong></td>
<td>Tell me about your first experience of Greenhills Beach.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>You would have come here to look at lots?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What drew you to purchasing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How do you feel about how the estate is marketed? How much of an influence did this have? Was there a memorable feature of marketing that you remember? Is this an accurate representation of life here?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How do you feel about how the estate has been designed? Probe further—if they mention a certain feature, why does this one stick out?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tell me about the public facilities at Greenhills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Do you walk around the estate? If so, where do you go?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tell me more about community facilities at Greenhills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Are these features important to you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is there anything that you would like to be here that isn’t?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How do you feel about nature and the environment at Greenhills? The estate and the surrounds/the beach? What animals do you see in the estate? Plants? Anything else of merit? What would you like to see?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Do you feel a sense of community here? Why is that/why not?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Do you feel a part of Cronulla? Elsewhere? Why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Material Cultures/Building &amp; Dwelling in Homes</strong></td>
<td>Lots and homes I thought we’d focus for a bit on how the home building process went. So first, why did you choose this block? positives/negatives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Project Homes Did you choose the home design? Do you remember what the design was called? Why this design? Where did you first see this design? Did you change the design at all? Tell me a little more about the design. What does it offer/specs?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Architecturally designed homes Why have you designed the home in this way? What were the main inspirations? What are the major features? Why did you choose an architecturally designed home over a project home? Tell me a little more about the design. What does it offer/specs?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Could you tell me about the build?</strong></th>
<th><strong>Routines</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How did you go with the regulations? Would you do anything differently if things were less strict?</td>
<td>I’d like to ask you now about your usual routine. So, you mentioned you were [occupation/retired]…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You’ve only recently moved in [or not]. Does it feel like home? If not, when will this house feel like a home for you?</td>
<td>1. Tell me about your daily routine. Leads into a discussion of weekend activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the main difference between this house and homes you’ve had previously?</td>
<td>2. Comparatively, would you spend more time inside than outside?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What was the timeline with you and your neighbours?</td>
<td>Why is this? Are there times when you consider changing this balance?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How has it been living in Greenhills with so much construction around?</td>
<td>3. Where do you go for leisure time/exercise? What about entertainment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is your opinion of other people’s homes? [either here or on the walk]</td>
<td>When you go to the beach, do you go to Greenhills or elsewhere?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know that the regulations are trying to achieve a coastal home. Do you think they’ve achieved that?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you think a coastal home is?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Gardens</strong></th>
<th><strong>Gardens</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘Show me your home’.</td>
<td>Why have you designed the garden in this way? Is this your design, or someone else’s?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thanks—I was wondering if we could go outside and have a look at the garden? [or, could you let me know what you have planned?]</td>
<td>What kind of things have you planted here? Is there a reason for this?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did the garden go in at the same time as the house?</td>
<td>NB: Design guidelines.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you use/are you planning to use the garden space for?</td>
<td>Could you tell me about your garden maintenance activities?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Are there any challenges you’ve come across in the garden? Any differences compared with other places you’ve lived?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gardens and being on the coast.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Prompts: wind, salt, soil, animals and plants.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Are there any differences gardening here compared to other places that you have lived?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Front garden—façade choice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Also, chance to reflect on the neighbours.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How do you envision a coastal garden? What would be your ideal garden?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Ocean/Beach Connections</strong></th>
<th><strong>Ocean/Beach Connections</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did you know about Greenhills Beach before this development?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often would you usually come to the beach/dunes yourself?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why do you go to the beach?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are your feelings here?</td>
<td><em>Follow up—get some clarification on whatever they say.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Follow up—get some clarification on whatever they say.</em></td>
<td>Are there any differences you’ve noticed living close to the ocean?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NB: sounds, smells, animals, lifestyle changes…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If dogs: dogs on the beach?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If a ‘local’ (NB: from the Sutherland Shire originally), ask about any past encounters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>NB: What are your feelings here?</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Back to house**— I expect that these discussions will begin organically.
| looking for leads. | What are your feelings about, say, sand & water in the home?  
Do you swim/surf? Show interest > Surfboards, “beach rooms”?  
Does living by the coast affect how you live at home?  
*Prompts: Coastal breezes, storms, salt?*  
Do you have any concerns about living so close to the coast?  
*Only begin a discussion of climate change if they instigate it.* |
|-------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| In Sum/Wrap-up    | Can I take a photo of you in front of your home?  
Is there anything else you would like to add?  
Do you know anyone else that I could follow up with?  
*Prompts for revisit:*  
Do you have any plans for the home in the next 6 months?  
Thankyou for participating. |

---

232
References


References


References


References


Davies G & Dwyer C 2007. Qualitative methods: are you enchanted or are you alienated? Progress in Human Geography 31(2), 257–266.

References


Department of Climate Change 2009. *Climate Change Risks to Australia’s Coast: A first pass national assessment*. Canberra: Department of Climate Change.


References


References


References


References


References


References


References


References


Obrador-Pons P 2007. A haptic geography of the beach: naked bodies, vision and touch. Social and Cultural Geography 81, 123–141.


References


Reid CK 2017. Financialization and the subprime subject: the experiences of homeowners during California’s housing boom. *Housing Studies* 32(6), 793-815.


References


References


References


