GRiffin’s Capitol

It’s Place in the Design of Canberra and the Connection with the Ideas of Louis Sullivan

Rosemarie Elizabeth Willett
March 2009

A Thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Built Environment by Research
Surnanme or Family name: Willett  
First name: Rosemarie  
Abbreviation for degree as given in the University calendar: M5Env  
School: Graduate Research School  
Title: GRIFFIN’S CAPITOL, ITS PLACE IN THE DESIGN OF CANBERRA AND THE CONNECTION WITH THE IDEAS OF LOUIS SULLIVAN

Abstract 350 words maximum: (PLEASE TYPE)

This thesis argues that Walter Burley Griffin’s Capitol as a place of popular congregation on a prominent city site had a critical place in his design for Australia’s Federal Capital. It offers an intensive and critical reflection on the nature, origin and cultural implications of the Capitol in the context of Canberra’s subsequent planning and development. The Capitol represented the essential idea from which he constructed an organic design, integrated with the site conditions and following Sullivan’s famous dictum Form follows function. It signified organic democracy, ‘a grass roots view’ which Griffin shared with Sullivan, rather than the ‘top down view’ of the mandated power of Government. In order to provide an understanding of how these principles informed Griffin’s design, Sullivan’s and Griffin’s published and unpublished writings are critically reviewed for evidence of the convergence of ideas and agreement on fundamental principles. Resonance with these principles was found in the Competition Drawings and the Original Report entered in the Competition by Griffin. The analysis also drew upon an extensive critical review of sources such as Marion Mahony Griffin’s Magic of America, parliamentary papers, archival records, personal papers, and the published literature of Australian and American scholars on Sullivan and Griffin. Sources pertaining to historical movements in architecture and town planning and narratives on architecture for government also formed part of this critical review. The conclusion is that when the desires of the Commonwealth Government were focused by its chief architect on Griffin’s Capitol site as the place which should be occupied by Parliament House, the nadir was reached for Griffin’s original concept. The vision supplanted, the unraveling of Griffin’s organic city plan, with its connections with the ideas of Louis Sullivan, began. Other ideologies began to be introduced with other relationships of form and function, and cost to the organism which was Griffin’s city.

Declaration relating to disposition of project thesis/dissertation

I hereby grant to the University of New South Wales or its agents the right to archive and to make available my thesis or dissertation in whole or in part in the University libraries in all forms of media, now or hereafter known, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968. I retain all property rights, such as patent rights. I also retain the right to use in future works (such as articles or books) all or part of this thesis or dissertation.

I also authorize University Microfilms to use the 350 word abstract of my thesis in Dissertation Abstracts International (this is applicable to doctoral theses only).

Signature: [Signature]  
Witness: [Witness]  
Date: 4.05.09

The University recognizes that there may be exceptional circumstances requiring restrictions on copying or conditions on use. Requests for restriction for a period of up to 2 years must be made in writing. Requests for a longer period of restriction may be considered in exceptional circumstances and require the approval of the Dean of Graduate Research.

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY

Date of completion of requirements for Award:

THIS SHEET IS TO BE GLUED TO THE INSIDE FRONT COVER OF THE THESIS
ORIGINALITY STATEMENT

'I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and to the best of my knowledge it contains no materials previously published or written by another person, or substantial proportions of material which have been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at UNSW or any other educational institution, except where due acknowledgement is made in the thesis. Any contribution made to the research by others, with whom I have worked at UNSW or elsewhere, is explicitly acknowledged in the thesis. I also declare that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work, except to the extent that assistance from others in the project's design and conception or in style, presentation and linguistic expression is acknowledged.'

Signed  R. Whitch

Date  4.05.09
COPYRIGHT STATEMENT

'I hereby grant the University of New South Wales or its agents the right to archive and to make available my thesis or dissertation in whole or part in the University libraries in all forms of media, now or hereafter known, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968. I retain all proprietary rights, such as patent rights. I also retain the right to use in future works (such as articles or books) all or part of this thesis or dissertation.
I also authorise University Microfilms to use the 350 word abstract of my thesis in Dissertation Abstract International (this is applicable to doctoral theses only).
I have either used no substantial portions of copyright material in my thesis or I have obtained permission to use copyright material; where permission has not been granted I have applied/will apply for a partial restriction of the digital copy of my thesis or dissertation.'

Signed: R. Wheat

Date: 4.05.09

AUTHENTICITY STATEMENT

'I certify that the Library deposit digital copy is a direct equivalent of the final officially approved version of my thesis. No emendation of content has occurred and if there are any minor variations in formatting, they are the result of the conversion to digital format.'

Signed: R. Wheat

Date: 4.05.09
I wish to acknowledge the valued contribution to the management of my thesis by my supervisor Professor Robert Freestone, Planning Program, Faculty of Built Environment, UNSW, and co supervisor Professor Jon Lang, Architecture Program.

I also wish to acknowledge advice from the late Professor Paul Reid and from Professor James Weirick, Urban Development and Design, Faculty of Built Environment, UNSW. Professor Dustin Griffin, the Department of English, New York University assisted me with introductions during my Chicago study tour in 2005. I feel honoured by the interest shown in the examination of my thesis by American Professor Paul Kruty, University of Illinois, and thank him for his advice and encouragement to perfect detail.

At the Faculty of Built Environment UNSW, the Director of Research Students, Associate Professor Patrick Zou, his administrative assistant, Chrisanthi Emmanouilidis, and Built Environment Computer Unit have provided valued assistance.

For my research I am indebted to Andrew Sergeant and the team in the Petherick Room at the Australian National Library, to the staff of the National Archives of Australia and to Mary McDonell, UNSW library. I have been encouraged by the Griffin Society, Canberra Chapter, Louise Dann, Fayne Mench, Haddon Spurgeon and Christopher Bettle.

Rosemarie Willett.
## CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

INTRODUCTION

### SET IN CHICAGO:

CHAPTER 1 DESIGNING THE CAPITOL, FOCUS OF THE FEDERAL CAPITAL CITY  29-71

CHAPTER 2 LOUIS SULLIVAN AND HIS IDEAS  72-108

CHAPTER 3 THE GRIFFINS, THE CHICAGO PROGRESSIVES AND SULLIVAN’S KINDERGARTEN  109-146

### SET IN AUSTRALIA:

CHAPTER 4 THE STRUGGLE FOR AN IDEAL  147-182

CHAPTER 5 THE STRUGGLE FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE IDEAL  183-213

### CONNECTIONS

CHAPTER 6: CONNECTIONS, THE CAPITOL AS SIGNIFIER  214-248

CONCLUSION  249-257

BIBLIOGRAPHY  258-269
INTRODUCTION

Walter Burley Griffin is widely known to Australians in association with the national capital, Canberra, and specifically acknowledged in the naming of Lake Burley Griffin. While many ordinary Australians know that Walter Burley Griffin won the Federal Capital Competition and was the original designer of Canberra, most have no idea that he planned something other than Parliament House for Capital Hill. After European settlement, Capital Hill was first named Mt Kurrajong, after the native Kurrajong trees which grew there, then named Capitol Hill by Griffin and later renamed Capital Hill by planners in the Federal Public Service. Those who knew Canberra before the construction of Parliament House, remember Capital Hill as bush covered, with a scenic lookout and a flag mast carrying the Australian flag. Few know of the building, conceptualized for Capitol Hill, which Griffin named the Capitol.

The immediate idea of a Capitol is as the locus of political power exemplified in the Capitols of the United States of America. In the United States there are 51 cities that have Capitols and they usually house the government’s lawmakers. Griffin said the Capitol was not purely an American idea and referred to the Capitol at Rome. In the Roman Republic this was the Roman equivalent of the Greek acropolis or upper city – a gathering place for the citizens on occasions of great importance.

Although the Capitol has slipped from the public mind and is not generally associated with Griffin’s design, this thesis engages Griffin's plan with the Capitol. It is believed that this engagement shows the plan in a different light.

Engagement, it is argued, shows that Griffin’s Capitol was the focus of an organic plan and the signifier of democracy, an organic values system which Chicago architect Louis Sullivan referred to as ‘Natures law for man’. In planning a city for a democracy, the beauty of an organic plan is that functional relationships are determined by human needs and respect for the natural environment, not dictated by powerful sectors to promote their interests and raise their profiles. Griffin’s organic plan was democratic in essence. The Capitol was arguably the critical concept of Griffin’s life’s work for its impact as the signifier of the vision which inspired his Federal Capital plan and his
struggle for its implementation. The vision interpreted the needs and purposes of Australia's national capital, but subscribed to a set of ideals in so doing.

Griffin as a young man renounced the processes for architectural design taught in the Schools, which he referred to as 'the mill'. He accepted Louis Sullivan's retraining of the mind with 'nature as teacher' and refocused his professional development on an individual, ideologically democratic and organic architecture. Sullivan's architectural theory encompassed three main areas of thought: the nature of architecture as an art which reflected society, but could also influence it; the organic process of creative thinking for architectural design; and the development of a new democratic architecture for America, which would reflect the organic growth of a perfected form of democracy in the individual and society. Griffin took his professional direction from this architectural theory, extended the theory on the much larger scale of town planning, and perfected its application in the design of Canberra.

In the thesis, the writings of Griffin and Sullivan are sought out for the convergence of ideas and the principles which enabled Griffin to create a democratic organic, city as a work of art:

Unity, essential to the city, requires for so complex a problem a simple organism...organism is the significant term of Planning, implying unity, and simplicity, but requiring a degrees of comprehensiveness in an equation of the site conditions and the functions to which they are to be adapted sufficient for a logical place and setting for every need that ay eventuate.’

The Approach

Griffin’s Capitol and its engagement with the plan is the subject of the thesis argument. Dismissed as something that never could have been realized, it is an important concept in Australia’s political and social history and deserves considered interpretation. There are three aspects to the Capitol which are essential to the discourse, the Capitol as a place, the Capitol in relation to the Government Group, and the Capitol as signifier of the vision and focus and animus of the organic plan. None of this has been built – neither the Capitol building nor the Government Group ensemble; and Griffin’s plan has not
been followed as an organic construct. The engagement of Griffin’s Capitol with the plan is in all its aspects, an academic study and a study which relies on a visual imagination.

The essential connections which support the argument - that Griffin’s Capitol as a place, its relationship with the Government Group and its place as focus of the design of Canberra were informed by the ideas of Louis Sullivan - can be reliably found in three works. These works were available to Griffin between 1900 and 1905 and there Sullivan explicates his theory which provided Griffin with the frame work for his practice of ‘landscape architecture’ and ultimately the development of his organic plan for Canberra. The three works by Sullivan which have been selected for detailed scrutiny for convergence with the expressed ideas of Griffin are: *The Young Man in Architecture*, *Kindergarten Chats* and *Natural thinking: A Study in Democracy*.

There are no stylistic connections in the architecture of Griffin and Sullivan and no evidence of Griffin copying Sullivan – or anyone else.

The approach taken has been to test the convergence of Sullivan’s theory in all his important writings, and in Griffin’s writings which refer to Canberra, and those writings which contain themes common with Sullivan’s writings. Griffin’s fidelity to his concept of the Capitol is tested in his struggle for his ideals with the Australian government and bureaucracy.

In the final analysis the three works listed above, *The Young Man in Architecture*, *Kindergarten Chats* and *Natural Thinking: A Study in Democracy* were the essential three works needed to establish the convergence with the ideas and principles evident in Griffin’s writings. They are the works and principles used to make the connections put forward in the argument and assiduously made in the final chapter.

Background

Walter Burley Griffin was an American architect who described himself as a ‘landscape architect’. He meant that he created the forms and details of architecture and urban and community plans in response to the site conditions or environment as well as the human
requirements. It could have been another way of saying ‘organic architect’, which was used as a descriptive term by Sullivan and the Chicago progressives, but not widely used as a generic term in the profession of architecture until Frank Lloyd Wright identified his work with it in the 1930s.

Griffin has been better known in Australia than in America, but that appears to be changing, with American scholars such as Paul Kruty believing that Griffin should be accorded a place near Sullivan and Wright. In Australia, as well as his design for Canberra, Griffin left major works in architecture and town planning, a few examples being: the original wing and refectory for Newman College and the Capitol Theatre in Melbourne, the original town plans for Griffith, Leeton and Port Stephens and the original development of the Sydney Suburb of Castlecrag.

Walter Griffin was born at Maywood Illinois, an outer suburb of Chicago, on November 24, 1876, nine years after the birth of Wright in Wisconsin and twenty years after the birth of Louis Sullivan in Boston. Marion Mahony Griffin, nee Marion Lucy Mahony, was born in the year of the fire, 1871, which burnt down one third of the city of Chicago. After the fire her parents moved to Hubbard Woods an outer suburb of Chicago, taking baby Marion in a clothes basket. The fire’s destructive power became the catalytic condition drawing together progressive talents and creative energy for rebuilding Chicago. Led by Louis Sullivan’s vision *form follows function*, and ideas on *organic architecture* Wright, Mahony, Griffin and others became Sullivan’s successors in creative architecture.

Marion Lucy Mahony, as an architect known for her skill in interpreting architectural design in beautiful drawings, influenced in style by Japanese wood block prints, was Frank Lloyd Wright’s ‘most capable assistant’ at his studio in Oak Park, Chicago, when Walter Burley Griffin joined the practice part time in 1901\(^5\) and full time in 1902. Griffin left in 1906 to establish his own practice and was eventually joined by Marion after Wright left Chicago for a sojourn in Europe. They married in June 1911 prior to commencing work on the competition for the Federal Capital City of the Commonwealth of Australia in September 1911.

Their marriage developed as a meeting of minds and a dovetailing of abilities - although early in their relationship, Griffin ‘didn’t feel the need of her’.\(^6\) Marion must have given
that particular information with some irony for her particular gift of communicating the essence of architectural and urban planning ideas in beautiful drawings may have been indispensible to Griffin in winning the Federal Capital Competition. For the Competition, her role was the management of the presentation team for the completion of the drawings. She claimed no other contribution and to attribute anything more is conjecture, except to say that the one who draws must have some effect on design development. Paul Sprague (1998) deals with the question of Marion Mahony as Originator of Griffin’s Mature Style: Fact or Myth?

Griffin, having established his own practice, at Steinway Hall, became associated with the group of architects considered the most progressive in Chicago, adopting the slogan ‘Progress before Precedent’ and referred to as the Chicago Progressives. Griffin’s work in America falls into categories of domestic architecture and neighbourhood development, of which there are many examples, with the most highly accomplished and best example of Griffin’s mature American work being Rock Crest Rock Glen, a community development involving organic planning and architecture, designed in 1912.

The term Prairie School has largely replaced the term Chicago Progressives although it did not fully cover the work of the Chicago Progressives. The nature of Griffin’s work in America placed him among the Prairie School architects. As the most famous architect of the Prairie School, Frank Lloyd Wright, overshadowed all others and the term implies leadership by Frank Lloyd Wright. Louis Sullivan was the leader acknowledged by the Chicago Progressives and Wright’s mentor in architecture with whom he stayed until 1893, a total of almost seven years. In 1894 Wright completed his studio addition at Oak Park and established his own practice there, but for a few years also kept downtown studios in Chicago – notably at Steinway Hall. There, he claimed in his Autobiography, he interpreted Sullivan for the architects at Steinway Hall. Wright became famously associated with organic architecture but in the development of those ideas, there is evidence that Griffin, whose interpretation of Sullivan was certainly not second hand, and who was well versed in Sullivan’s writings, may have played an unacknowledged role, even reinterpreting Sullivan for Wright.

Louis Sullivan, born approximately 11 years before Wright, began training at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in Boston and the Ecole des Beaux Arts in
Paris but rejected traditional architectural education in favour of learning from experience and nature. He admired the honest approach of engineers and rejected the application of traditional styles of architecture to new buildings, which otherwise used the new technology. A load bearing idiom, developed under different social and cultural conditions was not suited to framed buildings and so he sought new architectural ways of expressing the steel frame and the tall building. Although currently sidelined as a designer of ornament by some eminent Post Modern academics, he has been celebrated in the past as a major figure in the development of modern architecture. In partnership with Dankmar Adler he produced many icons of late nineteenth century American architecture, and his skyscrapers still have architectural currency. He devoted the latter part of his life to the theory of architecture, an organic architecture focused on humanity, and specifically democracy as ‘Nature’s law for man’. His writings and delivery of speeches at professional assemblies made a deep impression on many, including the young Griffin.

Griffin emerges as a man of inexhaustible energy, optimistic, idealistic and ambitious in his profession. A clear, rational thinker, he was a man totally dedicated to ‘landscape architecture’. His abilities apparently provided a source of continuous amazement to Marion – being in creative problem solving, a three dimensional imagination, mastery of geometry, technical knowledge and inventiveness and the pursuit of his profession as an art. In character, from various sources including Marion, Walter has been described as even tempered, an independent thinker and tenacious in the pursuit of his ideals. As committed democrats, there is evidence that the Griffins consciously sought to perfect democracy in themselves. Although it has been said that he had the ideas and she had the will, she said that he tested her mettle. Marion was not a woman to buckle under a challenge. She was an exotic creature, fiery, intellectual, disciplined and possessed of creative artistic talent. Together they reached the heights most nobly expressed in their Canberra design, but in that pursuit they also shared the depths of disappointment.

The Objectives
The primary objectives are to reaffirm the importance of Griffin’s Capitol as a ‘place idea’ which is Griffin’s centerpiece in the Canberra design; and by examining the ideas of
Louis Sullivan, to unpack the symbolism of the Capitol and to show why it was an irreplaceable symbol in the organic unfolding of Griffin's city. The organic design process described by Griffin and the acute interpretation of Griffin's vision enabled by the examination of Sullivan's ideas, support the objectives and the nature of the Capitol as focus of an organic plan.

For Griffin, the Capitol was the most important concept of his life's work and it was a concept worthy of somewhat more attention than it has received. It was a concept more specific than the widely held romantic interpretations of the beginnings of Western democracy and the sporadic development of 'human rights' in the journey of Western civilization. In this view of the relationship of the people to Government, the iconography of the Capitol was interpreted as the expression of the will of the people with its placement above Government as a symbol of democracy. This view of democracy has been reinterpreted in Australia's Parliament House, which security permitting, allows public access by means of the grassed ramps extending over the roof of the Member's Hall to the 'hill' beneath the flag mast. Democracy has not been given an interpretation based on the organic approach to the individual in society in which both Sullivan and Griffin believed.

There are two sub themes. The first sub theme questions the widespread and erroneous interpretation of Griffin's plan as the flowering of the 'City Beautiful' movement. As an organic plan emanating from Griffin's democratic vision, it is not in the genre of the 'City Beautiful' Movement. Such propositions are self contradictory. Griffin's beliefs in democracy and organic planning required different mental planning processes and involved different plan relationships. Secondly he shared Sullivan's belief that the desire for revival styles, typically used by the City Beautiful Movement, was 'feudalistic' rather than democratic. One of Griffin's earliest motivations as a young architect was to get rid of revival styles. The symmetry and the geometric structure of his plan were derived from numerous sources from ancient times in Eastern and Western understanding and also from nature. Beaux Arts methods taught at American Universities made most architectural graduates well versed in geometry and Griffin was a master geometrician in terms of planning skills. However these were simply instruments which Griffin utilized for design control, and not evidence of philosophical or stylistic commitment to the City Beautiful Movement.
The Federal Capital Advisory Committee which replaced Griffin also replaced his vision and took up the City Beautiful influences favoured by the senior Commonwealth architect John Smith Murdoch, who was more influential on the outcome of the central area of Canberra than even the eminent Australian town planner and chairman of the Federal Capital Advisory Committee, Sir John Sulman. The different design ideologies of Griffin and Murdoch had an important bearing on their relationship. A different perspective on their relationship, based on detailed research of the Minutes of Evidence from the Royal Commission into the Administration of Canberra, is presented from that of David Rowe.¹³

Another objective which emerges from the sub themes is to strip away the myth that the Australian bureaucracy continued to build Griffin’s plan after his termination as Federal Capital Director of Design and Construction.

As senior Commonwealth architect, Murdoch’s design ideology reflected his knowledge of Government requirements and policies as well as his preferences for neoclassical architecture or ‘Modern Renaissance’ and City Beautiful planning. He consequently had a different approach from Griffin as to which buildings should be placed on Mt Kurrajong. Murdoch was the instrument in harnessing the Government’s will. The need to resolve the issues around the building of Parliament House for the post war move to Canberra cost Griffin the control of his plan and his vision. The final sub theme highlights the convergence of Murdoch’s and the Government’s ideologies in regard to the location of Parliament House. This was the reason for Griffin’s termination as Federal Capital Director of Design and Construction. This reason is above and beyond earlier claims against Griffin of inefficiency in other areas, against which he was largely exonerated by the Royal Commission.

The Argument: The argument is that Griffin’s Capitol as a place, its relationship with the Government Group and its place as focus of the design of Canberra have a connection with the ideas of Louis Sullivan.

Canberra is a planned city and while it may seem an oxymoron in planning terms¹⁴, Griffin’s Canberra was an organic plan. Sullivan was the original thinker and teacher of organic thinking in Kindergarten Chats.
In describing his aims for the plan, Griffin said ‘There must be a vision’. The Capitol was the signifier of Griffin’s vision – a vision of democracy itself, as a grass roots development of the human psyche, told as a story of the Australian spirit in a dedicated building. In broad terms, in Griffin’s vision of democracy the individual’s first relationship was with his own independent thought processes, then with his responsibilities to the collective and universal relationships. This organic vision of democracy emanated from the focus, the Capitol, using the iconography of the radial avenues named for the State Capitals, to the rest of Australia and the world. The relationship with government was part of an order which was participatory rather than hierarchical. This connects with Sullivan’s concept of democracy which Sullivan defined in *Natural Thinking: A Study in Democracy* (1905).

The vision embraced the central idea for a national capital, the relationship of the people to the state, and it generated an organic plan for the city in accordance with the process for creative thinking which Sullivan described in *Kindergarten Chats* (1901).

**Data Sources**

Exhibitions of the *original drawings* for the Federal Capital Competition have formed an inspirational background, over the years, for the writing of this thesis. They include:

*The Ideal City* which was an exhibition of the drawings for Entry No 29 as well as original drawings representing 46 other entries, some for the first time in over 80 years. The exhibition was organized by Professor Emeritus John Reps, the Department of City and Regional planning Cornell University New York. A book followed (Reps, 1997). A memorial exhibition of Griffin’s work instigated by the demolition of a loved Sydney landmark, Griffin’s Pyrmont incinerator\(^{15}\), was brought together by the Powerhouse Museum under the auspices of an advisory committee of Griffin scholars. The exhibition included the Canberra Competition drawings. A book followed (Watson, 1988). *The Vision Splendid*, an exhibition of the drawings in Canberra in 2002, was organized by the National Archives of Australia in consultation with Christopher Vernon. Again a book followed (Vernon 2002)
While the original drawings for Entry 29 have been viewed on the above occasions, reproductions now hang at the National Archives where they are accompanied by a film telling the story of Griffin’s Canberra, presented by Anna Rubbo, James Weirwick and Christopher Vernon.

The research materials for the thesis fall into the categories of unpublished archival material, the published writings of Sullivan and Griffin and academic literature reviewing their works.

Unpublished Archival Material:

*Magic of America*, the magnum opus by Marion Mahony Griffin now has an illustrated on-line version. It was accessed for this thesis from a copy, without illustrations, held in the papers of Donald Leslie Johnston, particularly two of the four battles, *The Federal Battle* and *The Individual Battle*. Jeffrey Turnbull aptly describes it as ‘going into battle with the human family, especially the bureaucrats.’ Not withstanding that Marion had no direct dealing with the bureaucrats. *Magic of America* has been an indispensable source for this thesis in providing important biographical information and important insights in regard to the Griffins’ personal and professional relationships. It was an important source for their early impressions of Australia and Marion’s impressions of society and Australian democracy were frequently unfavorable, but insightful. She described Griffin as Louis Sullivan’s true follower in creative thinking and the first to use landscape planning as a starting point for the design process. Marion reproduced most of Griffin’s essays and lectures in *Magic of America*, in some cases overwriting parts of Walter’s material.

*Natural Thinking: A Study in Democracy* an unpublished paper by Louis Sullivan was accessed from the Burnham Library, Chicago, because of the likelihood of Griffin being present for Sullivan’s reading of the paper before members of the Chicago Club in 1905. It is a discourse on Sullivan’s concept of democracy.

The Commonwealth’s brief and invitation to competitors, Griffin’s Original Report and other information in regard to the Federal Capital Design Competition and the 1913 Report Explanatory, were accessed from National Archives Australia (NAA). In regard to Griffin’s 1913 visit to Australia, and his relationship with the officers of the Department, in
particular with the Commonwealth architect John Smith Murdoch, the main sources were the papers of King O'Malley, the papers of Donald Leslie Johnson and The Royal Commission on Federal Capital Administration – Minutes of Evidence, 1917 (NAA: A1203). Other sources included NAA series A110, the Jenny Dean Report and the Ph.D. thesis of David Rowe. A copy of Research into J.S. Murdoch, First Commonwealth Architect (1987) by Jenny Dean was acquired upon the abolition of the Department of Administrative services and its library in Architectural Construction Services in 1996. The report was used to check background information on Murdoch. The Ph.D. thesis written on John Smith Murdoch by David Rowe was accessed on microfilm at the NLA. A different perspective on the Murdoch Griffin relationship has developed in this thesis from that developed by Rowe.

The Royal Commission on Federal Capital Administration – Minutes of Evidence, 1917 was used extensively in regard to Griffin's difficulties as Federal Capital Director of Design and Construction in relationship with the Government. Again NAA series A110, the correspondence files with respect to the Federal Capital from January 1910 – March 1917 provided information on the Parliament House Competition and Griffin's brief including Murdoch's critique of the brief for the Minister (May, 1915) and his postscript stating his preference for Parliament House to occupy the focal point of the plan on Mt Kurrajong.

The papers of Charles S. Daley (NAA) and Charles E.W. Bean (War Memorial) [using A guide to the Personal Family and Official Papers of C.E.W. Bean by Michael Piggott, Australian War Memorial] were looked at for evidence of meetings involving Griffin in regard to the location of General Bridges tomb and the idea of a war memorial. There appears to be no evidence that Griffin met with Bean to discuss these matters.

The papers of Donald Leslie Johnson were the source of a copy of Magic of America prior to its availability on line. They contain a wide range of documents e.g. Box 4 contains American research including Griffin's partnership with Barry Byrne 1913 and notes on Griffin's influence on Frank Lloyd Wright and includes a letter from Griffin to Purcell showing his disappointment with Barry Byrne as American partner 1914-1917. Other documents are The University of Illinois 1867-1894 by Winton Solberg, University Press 1968, providing information on Nathan Ricker's school of architecture and
engineering and a copy of Author H. Allen Brooks, Jr., Ph D. (1957) thesis entitled The Prairie School, The American Spirit in Midwest Residential Architecture, 1893-1916. The Johnson papers also contain a copy of Peter Harrison’s chronology of events in Griffin’s life and include copies of many of the most important reports, items of correspondence and journal articles relating to the Federal Capital e.g. Western Architect XVIII, 9th Sept 1912, a comprehensive article on the Federal Capital. Copies of Parliamentary papers included documents tendered for the Royal Commission - from which it was understood that from late in 1915 Griffin was aware that Murdoch was consolidating Government support for Parliament House to replace the Capitol on Capitol Hill. There is also a collection of Building with editorial backing for the establishment of a Committee under the leadership of Sir John Sulman for the ongoing development of Canberra.

The Peter Harrison papers were also looked at, but primarily for the copy of the Nancy Price Thesis (1933) which was hand annotated by Griffin. The first thesis written on Griffin was by Nancy Price who was completing fifth year architecture at Sydney University. She had worked in the Griffin’s practice and provided some insights on working for Griffin -- used by Wanda Spathopolous in The Crag – basically as to Griffin’s clarity of thought and generosity towards the ideas of young people working for him. Griffin made corrections on Price’s draft and endorsed the thesis, so it must be taken seriously in its claim that Louis Sullivan provided the theoretical underpinnings which gave Griffin his direction in the profession of architecture. Price named Sullivan’s address to The Young Man in Architecture as the turning point for Griffin. Its importance is borne out by Griffin’s personal copy of the address, which must have been given to him by Sullivan, and is conserved in the papers of Eric Nicholls held at the Australian National Library (ANL). The address is therefore an obvious subject for a detailed critique, which does not appear to have been done, and is done in this thesis to establish the foundation of Griffin’s connection with Sullivan.

The papers of Eric Nicholls also hold Griffin’s personal scrapbook of press cuttings covering the Federal Capital. It is inscribed inside the front cover with Griffin’s signature. This item (in Box 8 Item 1A1) was searched for specific references to the Capitol and that none were found is testament to how little attention the concept received in the public press.
The Published Writings of Sullivan and Griffin:
The source for the 51 public papers of Louis Sullivan was Twombly (1988). This was the source for all the short papers written by Sullivan, 44 of which were written and published or delivered to audiences before 1911. The most important papers which mark the development of Sullivan’s theory between 1886 and 1911 have been selected for discourse.

Sullivan’s other writings included the serialized version of Kindergarten Chats (1901) which he wrote to retrain the mind of the young architect in creative thinking. The thesis uses Kindergarten Chats and Other Writings (1947), which Sullivan revised in 1918 for publication in book form.

Both Natural Thinking: A Study in Democracy (1905) and Sullivan’s revision completed in 1908, Democracy A Man-Search and published in 1961 with an Introduction by Elaine Hedges, were the source for Sullivan’s theory on democracy. While Democracy A Man-Search (1908) was not published until 1961 it has been studied because it is entirely possible that Sullivan may have shown it to Griffin in manuscript form. It has substantially the same message as Natural Thinking: A Study in Democracy.

Sullivan’s ideas were fully developed prior to his last works, A System of Architectural Ornament According with a Philosophy of Man’s Powers’ (1922-1924) and The Autobiography of An Idea (1924)

Walter Burley Griffin began lecturing, giving interviews and writing after he won the Federal Capital Competition in 1912 and continued to do so throughout his professional life. He gave his first interviews in America and continued from 1912-1914 for nationwide journals and papers – Construction News, Architectural Review, The Contract Record, The Western Architect. His interview in the New York Times is quoted in the thesis. His first interviews and reported lectures took place in Australia from 1913 and were published in Salon, Advance Australia and Building. The most significant of Griffin’s writings in regard to Canberra were his official reports for the Government, the Original Report and the Report Explanatory, correspondence with Government, his letter to Minister O’Malley and the termination letters, and his brief for the Parliament House Competition. Griffin spoke to professional organizations and wrote several published
essays, e.g.: ‘Building for Nature’, ‘Town Planning and its architectural essentials’, and such sources provide additional evidence for connections between his thought processes and the ideas of Louis Sullivan. His grand nephew Dustin Griffin, Professor of English at New York City University, has researched and assembled these writings in a beautiful book *The Writings of Walter Burley Griffin*, (2008) which provides a much more convenient source than the many publications which had to be tracked down for this thesis. Dustin Griffin’s book has been the finalizing source confirming the earlier sources used.

The Academic Literature:
The main sources for information on Sullivan were Morrison (1935), Paul (1962) and Twombly (1986). All provided factual information. Morrison and particularly Paul probed the intellectual content of Sullivan’s writings. From the 1930s until the 1970s Sullivan was considered an important figure in the development of modern architecture. The ‘debunking’ of Sullivan began with the yearning for eclecticism, and the ‘memory’ of classicism at the onset of Post Modernism, with two papers by Crook and Tselos on Sullivan and the Chicago Fair published in *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 1967). These papers were taken up by Menocal (1981) and others e.g. Lewis, Weingarden, so that Sullivan’s ornament, or a metaphysical interpretation of his work, became mandatory for any Post Modern text e.g. Van Zanten (2000).

In Australia after the 1955 Senate Inquiry into the future of Canberra, some study of Griffin began, fostered by Peter Harrison at the National Capital Development Commission. Birrell (1964) covered Griffin’s Chicago connections as background to Canberra and Griffin’s Australian practice. Contemporaneously in America Peisch and Goldberg (1968) were sources for information on Griffin’s education with Nathan Ricker. Peisch (1964) included Griffin in the work of the Chicago Progressives and Maldre and Kruty (1996) published a further study on Griffin’s work in America.

Weirwick (1988) in a series of papers and lectures began to show the difference between Griffin’s Canberra and the Canberra that is. He and others, e.g. Turnbull (1998) and Vernon (1995) have provided source material on Griffin’s underpinnings and approach to landscape design. Reid (2002) provided the comprehensive modern text which was used extensively as a reference book for the thesis.
There is an often repeated story that Walter Griffin read Henry George’s treatise on the single tax at age 14 years. His grand nephew, Dustin Griffin, Professor of English at New York University, and scholar in Griffin’s writings, has shed more light on Walter’s early interest, judging Henry George, the eminent American social economist and proponent of the single tax, to have been Walter’s earliest intellectual influence. *Social Problems* which Walter read at 14 years, nourished his early interest in social economics and his developing social conscience and he sustained a lively interest in the ideas of Henry George well past the Canberra period. Griffin Scholar James Weirick, in noting the influence of Henry George, has said that the Australian Government’s leasehold policy for the Australian Capital Territory provided confirmation for Griffin that the Australian Competition for the Federal Capital was worthy of entry.

Peisch (1964) together with the Johnston Papers [source for Winton Solberg (1968)], the Harrison Papers, Harrison (1995), and Kruty (1998) provided the material on Griffin’s university education at Nathan Ricker’s School of Architecture at the University of Illinois.

Dustin Griffin, as well as sources like Jeffrey Turnbull, also include in Griffin’s reading material well known writers Herbert Spencer, Louis Sullivan and Rudolph Steiner and others now only available from library archives, James Ferguson, Ernest Crosby, Edward Carpenter and Franz Oppenheimer. The larger works and philosophical material seems attributable to Griffin’s boyhood and student days; once he became involved in his professional practice he had less time for reading. To keep abreast of technical journals and the architectural critiques, his reading became more of a practical nature, in magazines such as *Architectural Record, Landscape Architecture, City Planning,* and the Georgist-inspired weekly *The Public.*

James Weirick acknowledges the connection with Sullivan but highlights the climate of ideas in nineteenth Century America provided by the American Transcendentalists, essayists, preachers and poets such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Walt Whitman. He gives weight to the views of liberal Protestantism, as background to Walter and Marion’s formative ideas – the conservative Congregationalists of the Griffin family’s allegiance who were, nevertheless, focused on issues of social justice and the freer thinking Unitarians led by men like the Reverend Jenkins Lloyd Jones, the
uncle of Frank Lloyd Wright. In his essay ‘Spirituality and Symbolism in the work of the Griffins’, James Weirick says: ‘At the time they planned Canberra, both Walter and Marion were political idealists, American progressives imbued with a Jeffersonian commitment to freedom and democracy. Their Canberra was conceived very much in the American tradition of liberal and progressive thought’.\(^ \text{19} \)

Of all influences, Louis Sullivan was Walter Griffin’s greatest intellectual influence\(^ \text{20} \) in regard to Griffin’s direction in architecture, and possibly Griffin’s spirituality during the period from 1900 until the late 1920s. There is ample confirmation of Sullivan as mentor in Griffin’s published writings, now compiled as *The Writings of Walter Burley Griffin* edited by Dustin Griffin. \(^ \text{21} \) even to the point of regarding himself as one of Sullivan’s ‘pupils’\(^ \text{22} \).

Sullivan was a forceful writer on spirituality and the intuitive side of human nature. His focus on attentiveness and training the mind in the present has resonance with Eastern spirituality, currently assuming more importance in Western awareness where religious ideas formerly provided the focus for meditation. Sullivan’s major connection with spirituality is with nature as the source of inspiration and universal nature as the space of the ‘Life Force’.

**Griffin and Sullivan in the Literature**

Following Griffin’s authentication of the Nancy Price’s thesis (1933) and its claim that Griffin

‘was deeply and sympathetically impressed with the basic nature of Sullivan’s principles and he quite consciously based his own attitude to his profession on them’\(^ \text{23} \)

there could be no doubt about Sullivan as an influence. Yet the connection with Sullivan has never been at the vanguard of study or used to dispel other theories and connections with other ideologies with which it is fundamentally incompatible.

More than forty years ago, Birrell (1964) wrote the first major Australian book devoted to Griffin. In his chapter ‘In Sullivan’s Kindergarten’ he took up the connection with Sullivan claimed in Nancy Price’s thesis, adding his own intuitive leap with the statement that
Griffin was one of the young men to whom Sullivan addressed his *Kindergarten Chats*. I have found no evidence that Sullivan particularly had Griffin in mind, but *Chats* was dedicated to the young graduate and Griffin, as a then recent graduate, fitted the bill perfectly. Birrell’s book is not a dedicated work to the Sullivan/Griffin connection. It is an early discourse on Griffin’s overall contribution and has compelling and unsurpassed insights into the strength of unity in Griffin’s plan for the Federal Capital and its inbuilt capacity for growth.

Also more than forty years ago, Peisch(1964) found that Sullivan was not interested in town planning so that there could be no connection with Griffin’s Canberra plan and Sullivan. Instead Peisch emphasized connections with Griffin and the Chicago Fair; and noted that the German Planning Journal *Der Stadtebau* wrote on the similarity of Griffin’s Canberra plan and the Court of Honor in the plan of the Chicago Exposition.

This appears to be the beginning of side lining the Sullivan connection and replacing it with Beaux Arts connections with L’Enfant and Washington by Bacon (1976) Vernon (1995) and by Van Zanten (1987) and with the City Beautiful Movement by Fischer(1988), Harrison (1995), Reid (2002) and Freestone (2007). Fischer said that Walter Burley Griffin’s plan merged British Garden City and American City Beautiful ideals in a highly artistic masterpiece of great town planning expertise. Chapter 4 of Reid (2002) is headed *A Work of Art: The Organic City* but the design process described in the chapter is not organic. Reid summarized his analysis of the plan, under the heading *A Comprehensive vision*, ‘as a final flowering of the City Beautiful Movement’ and takes in Garden City influences, recollections of ancient Greece and the pre-Columbian cities of central America, and the Prairie school. ‘That Walter and Marion in nine short weeks could have drawn all these ideas into one comprehensive vision is little short of a miracle’. Reid is probably echoing the way most city planning has been designed, at least in bureaucracies, with rather less synthesis than achieved by Griffin.

Such was the confusion over Griffin’s plan as a Beaux Arts, City Beautiful plan that the Government itself became confused: Senator Wood expressed at the Senate Inquiry into the Development of Canberra in 1955 that Griffin’s plan was un-Australian:

‘I have always felt the Canberra town plan, which is designed in a now discarded geometric system of French origin, is un-Australian. It was a
design created so that French Kings could by stationing their guns on the pivotal point shoot straight down each of the streets radiating from that point and so quell the rebellious mobs. It is therefore an Imperialistic design. It does seem strange that people want to cling tenaciously to such a design, when Canberra is such a young capital, which should express in its designing a truly modern democratic outlook, because it is the Capital of a young democracy.'

The early literary critiques of Sullivan as architect and theorist provide favourable, even admiring assessments, by Morrison (1933) and Paul (1962); but much of Sullivan's impact was lost in the ascendancy of Wright and the visual success of his domestic architecture. By the 1970s Sullivan was no longer written about as the visionary of organic, democratic architecture, and his own writings no longer read. It was forgotten that he had taught architects how to think and synthesize – to relate functions to each other and to form, and to 'justly' subordinate detail.

Robert Venturi's *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (1966) marked the beginning of the professional reassessment of the history and theory of modern architecture. Post Modern literature shows why Griffin would not now be more strongly associated with Sullivan, despite Griffin's acknowledgement of him. The Post Modern reassessment of Sullivan began in 1967 with the Crook (1967) and Tselos (1967) papers on the subject of the Chicago World Fair. In critiquing the Transportation Building, they accused Sullivan of eclecticism and of failing as a functionalist for an exhibition design. Menocal (1981) took up the Crook and Tselos papers and reassessed the Adler & Sullivan practice with Adler as the architect and Sullivan simply a decorator of buildings with a transcendental idea of incorporating ornament as nature. Lewis (2001) and Weingarden's PhD dissertation on the metaphysics of Sullivan's design viewed Sullivan as an eclectic and an artist. Ornament became the means which enabled Post Modern academics to claim Sullivan as one of their own. Strangely it also coincides with the view promoted by Frank Lloyd Wright who only praised Sullivan for his ability to draw and for his mastery of ornament, and it is noted that Twombly and Menocal have written about Wright. It can be appreciated where this left a historical association with Griffin who could not approach Sullivan's ability to draw and who at no stage tried to assimilate the efflorescence of Sullivan's ornament into his designs. Or did he? Van Zanten (2000)
thought so and likened Griffin’s Canberra plan, *the City and Environs*, with its starbursts, to a spread sheet of Sullivan’s ornament.

In the 3-dimensionsal shadings of Sullivan’s ornament Van Zanten saw the spatial relationships of a surrogate city, for Sullivan at that time could not get real work. With this clever twist in Van Zanten’s narrative the academic wheel is now full circle from the 1964 comments of Peisch, that Sullivan was not interested in town planning.

Griffin’s connection with Sullivan was kept alive in Australia, with the acknowledgements of Birrell (1964), Johnson (197?), Weirwick (1998), Turnbull (1998) and Headon (2003). Turnbull (1998) and Weirwick (1988,1998) have established the connection along the lines of a ‘classic Utopian democracy’, the development of equity and democracy identified with American transcendentalism. While some references to Sullivan have been made in powerful language, there is not a dedicated, comprehensive published pronouncement on the connection between Griffin’s plan for Canberra and Sullivan’s ideas.

What this Thesis will Provide on the Sullivan/Griffin Connection that the Existing Literature has not Provided: The difference between the connection with Sullivan established in the literature and this thesis is in the impact of Sullivan as providing a theoretical and experiential framework which guided and moulded Griffin’s thought processes – retrained his mind in the creative thinking which ensured the organic unity of his Canberra design.

The creative thinking or organic design process had three arms – architecture as an art, nature as inspiration and teacher, and democracy as nature’s law for man. This provided the structure for Sullivan’s address to *The Young Man in Architecture* and as Griffin acknowledged this address to be so life changing for him, a critical analysis of the content of this address for the purpose of understanding Griffin’s approach to design seems overdue. It is the foundation of the study of Sullivan’s and Griffin’s written material, their built work and the connections made in this thesis.

Griffin developed his powers of creative thinking, and designed as a democrat of the people and for the people, as Sullivan said. For Canberra, he sought out his vision and
followed it through in a scheme which the mind could grasp; it was a 3-dimensional vision for the life of a democratic city of modern times, complete in detail but not overburdened by detail, and a living organism with inbuilt capacity for growth. In achieving the organic relationships between all the functions of his city he showed he had learned Sullivan’s lessons well:

‘The importance of classifying the purposes of the city lies in the fact that only by proceeding from generals to particulars, from the more essential to the less essential and from the ends desired to the means for obtaining them are natural relationships established.’

Natural organic relationships were the hallmarks of Griffin’s city; Hierarchical relationships and the impacts of vested interests came post Griffin, with ideologies which were incompatible with Sullivan’s and Griffin’s ideals.

Through the connection with Sullivan’s ideas, the thesis seeks to deepen appreciation of the life and vitality which Griffin’s natural organic relationships brought to the city. Griffin’s city was a people’s capital, whereas Canberra has become the Government’s city, or so many Australians feel. Yet at the heart of Griffin’s city, Government had a very large, consolidated presence with high visibility – but it was an organic presence, of the people, and as organic as grass roots democracy.

The Capitol in the Literature

What does the literature say about the Capitol and are connections made with Sullivan? And what does this thesis say?

Birrell (1964) does not say much about the Capitol except to note its position on top of Capitol Hill, and its function, in words similar to Griffin’s, as the spiritual and sentimental heart of the nation.

There was very little attempt to come to terms with the Capitol by advocates for a Beaux Arts or City Beautiful lineage for Griffin’s plan. Van Zanten (1987) was an exception: he placed the design in the Beaux-Arts Style, which he in turn linked with the Chicago World fair (1893), the City Beautiful movement and Daniel Burnham and noted that Burnham’s plan for Chicago was published in book form in 1910. But his essay also
showed some discomfort with the prevalent trend. In dealing with symbolism and monumentality, he contrasted the Beaux-Arts plans of New Delhi and Pretoria with the Canberra plan. Van Zanten found that the Canberra plan didn’t fit the mould, for in New Delhi the expression of ‘the orientalized power of the British King’ contrasted with Griffin’s scheme which ‘seems profoundly and unselfconsciously democratic.’ Van Zanten described the Capitol as ‘an archive and hall of fame, a remarkable belvedere, completely commanding the city. As a ceremonial hall, its interior would be visible to an immense crowd in the park and along the axes. … [but then returning to his Beaux Arts theme] Griffin’s plan for Canberra is open and festive, in the manner of the American world’s fair complexes of Chicago and Stylus.’

Some of the fears of Government about the Capitol were in fact perpetuated in the literature interpreting the design of Australia’s permanent Parliament House e.g. Weirwick (1983), Vale (1994), Turnbull (1998), Reid (2002). The grassed ramps which continue over the roof of the public spaces and, baring the present security measures, were meant to allow pedestrian access beneath the flag mast and above the Members Hall have been interpreted in a reversal of the Orwellian theme as representing the dominant powers of the people in democracy – the powers of the ballot box. Griffin certainly did not see it like that.

Weirick (1988) became a strong advocate for the transparency which Griffin gave to the democratic process with his design for the entire city and in particular the ensemble of the Capitol and Government Group. He gave the Walter Burley Griffin Memorial Lecture in 1998 entitled The Potency of the Griffin Myth, an expose of bureaucratic policy cloaked in the guise of Griffin’s plan. Weirwick (1998) described the vision behind Canberra:

‘What Walter Burley Griffin was offering was a Rousseauist dream, ‘the dream of a transparent society, visible and legible in each of its parts, the dream of there no longer existing any zones of darkness’. But in the great scheme of things there would be one mystery. In a landscape offering everywhere the possibility of transcendent experience, there would be one place of immanence. The inner space of the Capitol would suggest the possibility of unity, of oneness – it would offer above all, a place of psychic repose and resolution.’
He described the Capitol:

‘Sited in the most prominent position at the apex of the triangle between the two official residences, Griffin envisioned this building to be a place of popular assembly, a repository of the national archives and an institution commemorating national achievements. Shown in Marion's drawings as a stepped pyramid with a vast vaulted interior, the Capitol was conceived as a temple dedicated to the national spirit, an expression of the collective genius of the Australian people, a creation of the imagination and will of the entire community. The Capitol would stand at the focal point of the city plan and become the focus of national consciousness, a physical embodiment of all that was unique and distinctive in the Australian experience.’

How had Griffin come to devise a vision such as this? Sullivan had suggested pristine nature as the place of immanence, where humanity could meditate on its oneness with the Infinite, Inscrutable Serenity, the Universal Spirit or the Life force. He had suggested that Democracy was a religion – a religion without the power structures and politics of the churches. He also said that it was ‘Nature’s law for man’, that within the self imposed restraints of universal democracy humans would develop their full beneficent powers. Sullivan’s ‘natural thinking’ seeded Griffin’s vision and the Canberra landform provided the means for Griffin to create a secular temple, a semi translucent structure in perfect harmony with surrounding nature. Radiating its beneficence to the Australian State Capitals and the world it would draw its pilgrims into a renewal of their humanity, the individual recognizing and taping into the Universal values which, as part of Nature, are part of all humanity.

The drawings too are closely examined for the physical attributes of the design which enabled Griffin’s intentions to express the democratic organic nature of the Capitol and its essential role as animus of his city.
The Structure of the Thesis

The first three chapters of the thesis are set in Chicago.

Chapter 1, Designing the Capitol, the Focus of the Federal Capital City, concerns the gestation of the design ideas and the unfolding of the organic design process followed by a critical review of the finalized Competition Entry and the Capitol building from the design perspective. The Capitol is considered as the focus of the design; as encapsulating the vision for a democratic city in harmony with nature, and providing the animus for setting in progress the organic process of ‘Form follows function’. An architectural as well as ideological description of the Capitol is given.

Chapter 2, Louis Sullivan and His Ideas, summarizes Sullivan’s ideas, quoting his literary works to capture his idealism and passion. Form follows function is an organic vision and ‘self-government’ as ‘Natures law for man’ is central to Sullivan’s organic theory; Sullivan is founder of a complete theory of organic thinking expounded in Kindergarten Chats and he brings to his organic theory the realization that democracy is the core position to be taken up by ‘man’. His theoretical contribution is focused on the practice of architecture.

Chapter 3, The Griffins, The Chicago Progressives and Sullivan’s Kindergarten, provides information in relation to Griffin’s formal education, under the Beauakademie influence of Nathan Ricker at the University of Illinois, his certification as an architect, followed by his choice of Steinway Hall and the Chicago progressive movement for the beginning of his practice. The observation is made that he chose the Chicago progressives instead of the classical revival movement led by Chicago architect Daniel Burnham. In this environment Griffin gained exposure to Sullivan’s ideas, met Sullivan and adopted Sullivan’s ideas for the future course of his development and direction in architecture and neighborhood planning. This environment was the polar opposite of the contemporaneous movement started in Chicago by
Burnham and disassociates Griffin from an established status quo opinion that his ideology was strongly influenced by the Chicago Fair and that his plan for Canberra represented the flowering of the City Beautiful movement.

**Chapters 4 and 5 are set in Australia.**

In Chapter 4 *The Struggle for An Ideal*, Griffin visits Australia to explain his plan and takes on the position of Federal Capital Director of Design and Construction. He returns briefly to Chicago and then he and Marion move to Australia to implement his plan. Perhaps the best testimony of the commitment to an ideal is the struggle for its achievement.

In Chapter 5, *The Struggle for the Implementation of an Ideal*, the nexus develops between Griffin’s idealism and the Governments requirement for the Houses of Parliament to have a dominant position. The Capitol and the integrity of the ensemble with the Government Group were the objectives at the heart of Griffin’s struggle. John Smith Murdoch, the Commonwealth architect reveals in evidence at the Royal Commission (1915 - 1917) his 3 attempts to change Griffin’s essential vision to a concept expressing Government power within the Westminster system. He is shown to be responsible for the introduction of ‘City Beautiful’ themes into the central area of Canberra. Griffin’s struggle with the government and bureaucracy was largely directed towards the prevention of hierarchical, traditional eclectic and finally ‘City Beautiful’ or Washington inspired interpretations of his plan by the Commonwealth bureaucracy. The ‘City Beautiful’ movement, which Sullivan called ‘feudal’, was incompatible with Griffin’s vision of organic democratic urban planning and architecture.

**Chapter 6 draws together the argument; Chapter 7 is the Conclusion.**

Chapter 6, *Connections: the Capitol as Signifier*, draws together the connections between the important principles and idealism shared by Griffin and Sullivan. The means of making the connections with Sullivan’s theory is to compare the principles articulated in the writings of the two architects.
From the research it is found that the three main areas of thought developed by Sullivan were fully expressed in the two lectures delivered in Chicago, *The Young Man in Architecture* (1900) and *Natural Thinking: A Study in Democracy* (1905) and the series *Kindergarten Chats* published in serial throughout 1901. Marion refers in *Magic of America* to Mr. Griffin as Mr. Sullivan’s successor in creative thinking. Creative thinking was the design process outlined in *Kindergarten Chats* which is termed the organic design process. Griffin accepted Sullivan’s organic design process with democracy at its core, and, as Nancy Price claimed, directed the practice of his profession accordingly. The full scope of the philosophy and process was of greatest benefit to Griffin when he adapted it to the design of Canberra. The organic plan failed because in the final analysis the Government had never really committed to the same set of ideals. Government was attracted to a different set of metaphors, different functional relationships, policies and programs.

Chapter 7, *Conclusion*, focuses on the Capitol, its symbolism and place in Griffin’s organic plan, as the perfection of the organic vision to which Griffin adhered. It is taken from the standpoint that Griffin’s city, with the Capitol et al, was an organism which was designed to effect a reciprocal engagement with the individual lives of the Australian people. It is concluded that Griffin, through his discipline in the processes of creative thinking expounded by Sullivan, was able to reach a pitch of creativity, for the first time in the field of city planning, which realized a city as a natural organism, maintaining its unity while living and growing in harmony with nature, for the benefit of humanity.
End Notes

1 The 1925 gazetted plan was followed by the plan in the final report of the FCAC in 1926 which included the 3 buildings on Capitol Hill which were then designated Capitol Centre. In 1928 the FCC changed Griffin’s street nomenclature from being place and nature based to being Empire and culture based. Capitol Circle is changed to Capital Circle. Capital Hill replaces Capitol Hill on the 1933 Plan. See Reid, Paul, ‘Canberra Following Griffin’ National Archives of Australia 2002, p181


3 It will be argued in Chapter 5 that in Griffin’s letter to King O’Malley, Australian Minister for Home Affairs, he plainly stated that the ideals which his plan represented were his motivation for further involvement with the implementation of his plan. He was seeking Government’s confirmation.


5 Peisch, Mark L. The Chicago School of Architecture - Early Followers of Sullivan and Wright, Random House, New York, 1964, p. 38


8 Although Sullivan mentored Wright for six years, Wright claimed he never read anything Sullivan wrote. It seems from Marion’s evidence that in discussions with Griffin and in planning houses such as the Thomas House, Griffin was able to reinterpret Form follows function for Wright to include taking more advantage of site conditions. (However by the 1930s Wright had arrived at a different interpretation for ‘Form follows function’ from that intended by Sullivan. Wrights interpretation, ‘Form and Function are one’ applied the theory to the human body where the skin covers the skeletal structure, and is focused on the aesthetic interpretation rather than an interpretation of the creative process. It does not explain ‘Form follows function as a design process which parallels the creative process of nature in Darwinian terms. It may be that Wright was seeking to distance himself from the purely functionalist interpretation of ‘Form follows function’ – again neither Sullivan’s meaning nor Griffin’s interpretation. Now to compound the problems of interpreting Sullivan there is the Post Modern, purely metaphysical interpretation. This is a useful interpretation where it is realized that Sullivan intended them all.))

9 This term is given a full explanation by Marion Mahony Griffin, notably correlating with Sullivan’s theory : ‘Landscape architecture does not mean gardening as an afterthought to a building but means a consideration of the external elements before starting to plan or build. Not only natural conditions but the character of the surrounding buildings has sometimes to be taken advantage of, sometimes to be overcome. And we must consider not the more personal point only but must look to the advantage of everyone affected, for it is curiously true that if a thing is to be real and permanent, advantage to one must be an advantage to everyone. Just as in animal or man a sound organ is of vital importance to all the organs. Human society is an organism, and the individual can benefit only from what is of benefit to all since all are interdependent as root and branch and flower and fruit tree.’ Quotation from “ Architecture & Town Planning Inseparable: The Importance of Location on a Lot” Magic of America, The Individual Battle Vol. IIB, P 175 the papers of Donald Leslie Johnson, Box 19 National Library of Australia.
After Griffin lost control of the Canberra plan, he was not free of the architectural design aspects of the Capitol; it resurfaced in projects like the Capitol Theatre and the Jolimont Railway Hall.

Griffin’s plan is referred to as the ‘flowering of the City Beautiful Movement in Reid (2002) It has been associated with the City Beautiful in academic critique from Bacon (1992) to Reid (2002)

The term Feudalism was used by Walt Whitman in contrast with Democracy. From reading Whitman Louis Sullivan took it up, using it to contrast the power structures of historic feudalism, external to the self, with the self empowerment of democracy. Sullivan characterized the corruption of power in democracy as democracy tainted with feudalism and believed this corruption of power was reflected in the use of revival styles in architecture, replacing an honest democratic architecture 'of the people, by the people, for the people’.

The other planned city at that time, New Delhi, though not with neoclassical buildings has a plan designed to reinforce a colonial power. It is a different kind of plan from Griffin’s plan of Canberra.

In planning terms, organic usually refers to cities which grow naturally and not to planned cities.

Griffin’s Pyrmont Incinerator became targeted for redevelopment in the early 1990s. The Sydney City Council entered into a contract with a development company, Meriton Apartments, for the demolition of the incinerator and the construction of apartments. With the initial intention of building a memorial to Griffin, a sum of money was negotiated into the contract to be paid by the developer. When this idea was seen to be inappropriate, the expenditure of the money was rethought against a background of academic activity in Griffin studies and projects. The money was spent in 3 ways 1) Melbourne University sought funding for a catalogue raisonné of Griffin’s work in Australia, the idea taken from very significant work for a catalogue raisonné of Griffin’s work in America, undertaken by the University of Illinois; 2) research symposia involving the University of Melbourne and the University of Illinois and also Professor James Weirick from UNSW; and 3) the Powerhouse Museum exhibition in Sydney. Prior to the Powerhouse Museum exhibition the University of Illinois held an exhibition on the work of the Griffins in India. There was a free intellectual exchange on the Griffins between the University of Illinois, Melbourne University and the committee of Griffin Scholars for the Powerhouse Museum exhibition. This input into the advisory committee of Griffin Scholars and the free exchange of information which benefited the Powerhouse Museum exhibition is acknowledged.


Griffin, Marion Mahony. “The Childhood of Walter Burley Griffin”, Magic of America, The Individual Battle, from Donald Leslie Johnson papers Box 19, Vol. IVA p.86. Marion claims that the US Government was sending out pamphlets on Henry George when Griffin was 11; and that he read Henry George’s Social Science from the library when he was 12 years, ‘which awakened his social conscience and powerful will’.

Griffin, Dustin. The Writings of Walter Burley Griffin, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2008 Introduction. This book was released in Canberra in mid May 2008 and the Canberra book launch was held in the foyer of the High Court of Australia on June 23 2008. The Minister for the Australian Capital Territory, Mr. Bob Debus spoke with appreciation of the intellectual content of Griffin’s writings and of his design for Canberra as a work of art, frustrated by Government, but sufficiently realized to allow appreciation of its great benefits.


21 Ibid

22 Ibid xxiii


24 Reid, Paul. Canberra Following Griffin National Archives of Australia 2002, p.81

CHAPTER 1
DESIGNING THE CAPITOL, FOCUS OF THE FEDERAL CAPITAL CITY

Canberrans or visitors to the National Capital who view the city from the same vantage point as Marion Mahony Griffin’s perspective ‘View from the Summit of Mt Ainslie’, (Figure 1), need the specific knowledge and visual imagination to ‘see’ Griffin’s city. The alignments of the ‘land’ and ‘water’ axes impact on the viewer and the avenues that focus on the apex of the triangle are immediately visible, but Griffin’s Capitol and ensemble of Government buildings are not there. They must be imagined in place of the buildings that are there; an array of unconnected monumental edifices to government, the law, the arts and science, set amongst lawns and gardens, the composition dominated by the Parliament House on Capital Hill. Elsewhere too, it is not Griffin’s city. Griffin’s city can best be accessed through the 1911 Competition Drawings and accompanying Design Report. These documents convey the most about the functions and physical design properties of the city and alert our instincts to the idealism of the design.

Jacqueline Taylor Robertson calls the design as a whole ‘clearly the work of analytical and intuitive genius combining formal, contextual, symbolic, programmatic, and functional considerations in a single, clearly perceived order of the whole and on a scale unprecedented in the history of urban planning.’
It was an ‘ideal city’, conceived with unity of composition as a work of art, and reflecting the tendency towards the perfection of democracy which he perceived as an important national goal for Australia. The city was designed with loving care for Australia’s natural environment. Democracy and nature were at the heart of the vision and the design process was organic, avoiding arbitrary outcomes dictated by powerful sectional interests. The Capitol as signifier of the vision was the progenitor of the design for the city. Geometry provided the basis of its planning structure, focused on the Capitol. The network of axes, radials and stellar forms was, as well as an ordering geometry, an organic structure responsive to the land form, the functional relationships of the city according to the wants and needs of the people and future growth.

Why did Griffin ascribe the name ‘Capitol’ to the building he placed at the head of the Government Group, as the climax of the ensemble and the focus of the city? Griffin gave a clue to the answer, but not until 1923 in evidence before the Parliamentary Committee on Public Works for the Provisional Parliament House. He said ‘The idea of having a Capitol is not purely an American idea. There is a Capitol at Rome.’ In discussing the ties which connect ancient and modern cities and which remain relevant Lawrence Vale in *Architecture, Power and national Identity* quotes Lewis Mumford: ‘The first germ of the city… is the ceremonial meeting place that serves as a goal for pilgrimage… and in Vale’s quotation Mumford goes on to describe the supernatural patina which accrues to the buildings which are the places of pilgrimage. Although Lewis Mumford had published nothing at the time Griffin designed the Capitol these words synchronize with the vision of how Griffin hoped the Capitol would be experienced. He hoped it would be experienced as the wellspring of Australian democracy and a place of visitation for all Australians.

For organic design there must be an essential idea, the vision from which all emanates. Mumford called it ‘the first germ of the city’. Griffin said: ‘In Town Planning as in architecture there must be a vision. There must be a scheme which the mind can grasp, and it must be expressed in the simplest terms possible.’ In terms of this statement Griffin’s plan reached perfection.

Griffin’s Definition of Organic Architecture: The design is perceived from the perspective of the organic design process of ‘Form follows function’.

‘The definite idea of architecture to my mind lies in the organic, systematic way of creation that nature shows in filling an infinite variety of means to as many ends with perfection of form for every function – to recall Louis Sullivan’s alliteration: - Form follows Function’
Chapter Structure

Chapter 1 is set in Chicago and provides as intimate a reconstruction of the design process as possible given that no evidence remains from the ‘cutting room floor’. The objectives are to survey the Capitol as a place, the focus and animus of Griffin’s organic design. The narrative ends with the dispatch of the crated Competition entry to Australia.

The Chapter proceeds as follows:
‘A Long Gestation’ outlines the long period of lead up to the Competition, when Griffin formed his approach to the design and its essential vision.

‘The Invitation To Competitors - Getting Started’ deals with the detail of the period immediately prior to commencement of the design

‘The Creative Experience from the Theoretical Perspective’ attempts insights into the 9-week period of the creative experience, the vision and the application of the organic design process

‘Review of Competition Entry No. 29 and Its Creative Achievements’ considers the completed drawings in detail and reviews the Original Report, especially in regard to the design of the Capitol and its critical place in the design.

In this chapter the design can be perceived from the standpoint of Griffin’s design methods, the organic design process of ‘form follows function’ ‘The definite idea of architecture to my mind lies in the organic, systematic way of creation that nature shows in fitting an infinite variety of means to as many ends with perfection of form for every function – to recall Louis Sullivan’s alliteration: -’Form follows Function’. Griffin was the first to interpret these design principles for town planning.

A Long Gestation

‘While still at the University this youth took note of the fact that the Australian States were federating into a continental nation and then and there decided to enter the competition for its capital city, for to his logical mind it seemed obvious since there was not as yet an established profession of Landscape Architecture the choice of such an Architect could be made only through competition’ 7 This is the family story, told by Marion.
Walter undertook his university studies from 1895 to 1899. The Australian States federated and became the Commonwealth of Australia in 1901 and newspapers around the world carried the story. As a student, it seems that Walter may have read, before 1901, of the State Conventions where the separate Colonial States of Australia organized themselves for the drafting of the Federal Constitution throughout the 1890s. State rivalries called for the need to establish a Federal Capital Territory with its own Federal Capital city for the seat of Federal Parliament. This requirement was defined in the Constitution in 1901. Later when the Australian Government adopted the leasehold system of land tenure for the Federal Capital Territory, similar to that promoted by Henry George, Walter was especially pleased.

Figure 2: WALTER GRIFFIN GRADUATE IN ARCHITECTURE

Walter, from the age of 12 or 14 years, was a reader and admirer of Henry George, an American famous for the promotion of Free Trade and the Single Tax. Henry George, on such a promotion, visited Australia in 1890 on a lecture tour, coincident with the gathering movements in the States for Federation. Walter was then 14 years old. Walter also was interested in the social advances made in Australia in the nineteenth century and came to regard Australia as in the vanguard in issues of equity.
Griffin's father, George Griffin, corroborates Marion’s story with the information that:

‘While Walter was still a student at the University of Illinois, he read of the consolidation of the Australian states and their necessity for a new capital. He then decided he would like to build it. So when the international contest for a city plan for Canberra was announced, he entered it. A large room in our home in Elmhurst served as his studio. As details of his vision of the Capital City were completed, they were placed on the walls of his studio in correct relationship, position and direction with the topography and natural conditions of the site. Thus he lived with the city of his vision and grew with it’.  

The necessity for a new capital was discussed and reported throughout the Australian colonies but when the necessity for a new national capital city was formally announced in January 1901, Walter was a young graduate architect working at Steinway Hall.

Marion also tells us that he used to scribble city designs, with skyscrapers, on the fly leaves of his school books. As a 16 year old high school boy, he watched the development of the site for the Chicago World Fair and this first impression of the effects of architecture within landscape planning was deep and memorable. His attendance at the University of Illinois provided an architectural education on more modern, technical lines than the traditional Beaux Arts. He developed skills in critical analysis and applied them to his passion for the study of city design; he became familiar with the famous plans such as Christopher Wren’s plan for the rebuilding of London after the great fire in 1666, the plan for the French Court at Versailles, L’Enfant’s plan for Washington, etc., reading all he could on the subject from the ancients to modern German planning ideas – and dreaming of designing the Federal Capital of Australia.

It seems that Walter designed a Capitol building as a student project, but unfortunately nothing further is known about this project. It would be interesting to know more about this ‘capitol’; whether, with acute powers of analysis already formed, he was then separating the functions of that building type into two essential ideas - ‘symbolic’ for commemoration and celebration and ‘working’ for political representation, deliberation, debate and legislation. We do not know. Many years later, speaking to the Parliamentary Standing Committee in Public Works and defending the idea of the Capitol against association with Washington he said ‘The idea of having a Capitol is not purely an American idea. There is the Capitol at Rome’. As he attempted to explain the purpose of the Capitol, perhaps he recollected his early understanding of genius loci, perhaps linked with the student project.
The milestone in the gestation of the Canberra plan, which eclipsed all others, was Griffin’s meeting with Louis Sullivan. With exposure to Sullivan’s ideas, Chicago Tribune published the news of Australia’s act of Confederation, only six months had passed since Sullivan’s lecture ‘To the Young Man in Architecture’, the lecture which is said to have changed Griffin’s life. During the next 10 years Sullivan’s writings on democracy and organic architecture were circulated in Chicago’s architectural world and he lectured in many venues including the Chicago Architectural Club. Marion provides the information that Walter watched the professional magazines for those ten years between 1901 until 1911, when the competition was announced and entries were invited; she says that Walter’s early diagrammatic drawings for the Federal Capital were used in preparation for the Competition. 13

When the characteristically democratic and independently minded Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Lucy Mahony met in Frank Lloyd Wright’s studio both had already been spiritually enriched by childhood intimacy with nature. The Frank Lloyd Wright studio was imbued with ideas for the creation of modern democratic and organic architecture, on the design principles Wright had ‘imbibed’ from Louis Sullivan. Barry Byrne described the atmosphere in the studio14 - Marion as a ‘rather fiery, spectacularly brilliant person’, witty in her engagement with Wright; and Walter as ‘a thoughtful, placid, sweet-natured being’ whom Wright held in high regard and affection and between whom there was an almost continuous dialogue clarifying architectural issues. Marion had an exceptional ability in drawing, a gift which Walter did not have. She was impressed by his clarity of thought on design issues which resulted in improvements to projects in Wright’s studio. They formed a friendship over several years and when Marion wanted them to draw closer she suggested they buy a canoe. Whenever they could, they set out in the canoe together to explore the pristine wilderness of streams and backwaters and the loveliness of nature, where few explored. They also saw the results of industrial pollution. ‘The ‘master’ would have smiled’15 and not been surprised at the artistic union and outpouring of creativity which followed these trips of intensive communion with nature.

The years from 1900 -1911 were the years when Walter Burley Griffin developed his special abilities and direction as an architect and landscape architect, as he preferred to call himself. He completed many successful highly original projects in domestic and community architecture and neighbourhood planning. He also prepared himself for opportunities in larger scale planning, while looking forward to entering a competition for Australia’s Federal Capital. Apart from the overview of the Australian Competition and site published in 191016, until 1911 there was no specific site information and no brief. It was
not until after their marriage and receiving the competition kit from Australia that Walter and Marion could begin rearranging the early diagrams on the walls of Walter’s home studio. But ideas had long been ‘brewing’ in Walter’s head.

In Australia during the ten years from 1901 to 1911, the Government was busy selecting the site for the Federal Capital and preparing for the Competition. On the heels of the 1908 decision in favour of Yass-Canberra,

‘in 1909, officers from the Department of Home Affairs, largely ex-army engineers and cultured along the lines of the British public service, traveled from Melbourne by steam train and, for the last leg by buggy, to the new Federal Capital Territory. They walked about the plains, climbed the hills for outlooks and spent days exploring and discussing where it would be best to locate the city. They discussed the location of buildings. They felt that responsibility for planning the city would ultimately fall to them, but they were also responsible to conduct an international competition for Australia’s Federal Capital City which would award premiated designs. Departmental surveyors set up camp on the slopes of the hill which they called Kurrajong Trig., naming it after the fine old trees which stood near the summit. Consultant artists were called in to paint panoramas, engineers etc, to give technical advice to complete the information for competitors. The Departmental officers noted the prominence of Kurrajong and deemed it the highest land suitable for building on; they included this information in the Conditions for the Competition. They discussed whether Parliament House should be built there, but decided that it was too windy and that a more suitable site would be on the lower prominence of Camp Hill.’

Paul Reid noticed that the Commonwealth surveyor, Charles Scrivener’s gridded contour plan, upon which Competition entrants were asked to place their explanatory layout, gave prominence to Kurrajong Trig by placing it symmetrically about the centre of the north-south grid.

The Invitation to Competitors - Getting started

For overseas competitors, the first indication that a competition was at hand was given to the press in London by Sir George Reid, Australia’s first High Commissioner to Britain. ‘On 7 May 1910, The Builder, a British weekly journal of architecture and building widely read throughout the Commonwealth and beyond, published an informative map of the site
in an article reporting that ‘a competition for the designs of the general lay-out will shortly be announced.’ The map is shown of the central area and indicates the possibilities for ornamental waters. Black Mountain and Mount Ainslie are not shown on the map but Mt. Kurrajong is shown. Only 2 weeks later, still May 1910, the American professional journal *Engineering Record* informed its readers ‘A Great town planning Competition will be announced before long by the High Commissioner of Australia’ and provided similar information with the additional information of the intention to develop the Federal capital through leasehold tenure. It is most likely that Griffin read this journal in 1910, saw with interest the leasehold system for land tenure, similar to that advocated by Henry George, digested the site information included and began to anticipate the federal capital design.

The Competition was officially commenced in Australia, with an Invitation to Competitors, at the beginning of May 1911. The official document inviting competitors, dated 31 April 1911, was 8 pages long, prepared by the Department of Home Affairs, under the auspices of Colonel David Miller and the Departmental officers who were responsible for the preparation of the information for competitors, and went straight to the press in Melbourne. In the conditions of competition the prize money was nominated and the conditions included detailed instructions for the competition entries regarding presentation and anonymity. The conditions also revealed that ‘the Government by its own officers will give effect to the design.’ The final adjudication, after the advice of the expert board of adjudicators, was to be by the Minister. The document then, in several pages, provided historical background and a detailed description of the site, with an exhortation to ‘bear in mind that the Federal Capital should be a beautiful city… embracing distinctive features which will lend themselves to the evolution of a design worthy of the object, not only for the present, but for all time…’ For a project so large and so close to Government, the conditions were probably not surprising, but they could have constituted a warning for competitors; there were objections from the professional Institutes to the final decision-making power being in the hands of the Minister, a non-expert.

The timing of the arrival of this document in Chicago is not conclusively known. It is believed that it may have been as late as August, although it surely could have been more quickly dispatched for publication using diplomatic channels. However Professor Jon Reps, known for his scholarship on the Competition, believes that one of the first notices in US professional journals was in *Engineering Record* in August 1911 and this notice included the information from the official document that entrants could register upon the production of bona fides at the British Consul-General in Chicago and receive the additional information in the Competition kit.
The Department of Home Affairs had begun dispensing Competition kits, information in wooden boxes, world wide from May 1911. Chicago was one of the centres which were recipients of a scaled model of the site. We do not know the date when the kit arrived in Chicago and was collected by Walter Burley Griffin, but by this time there would have been quite a number of diagrams on the walls of Griffin’s ‘studio’ at the family home at Elmhurst.

Walter and Marion had married on 29 June 1911 and were living with Walter’s parents at Elmhurst. Imagine the intense interest with which Walter, probably in the company of Marion, must have opened and examined the Competition kit. The diagrams were ready, but now there was a site and a brief. With their adherence to organic principles, mastery of the site information would be the next step.

The Competition kit contained the following information:
Historical notes; Map of Preliminary Contour Survey of country about Canberra; Map of Contour Survey of site of Federal Capital at Canberra; Topographical map of Federal Territory of about 900 square miles; Map of State of New South Wales; map of south-eastern portion of Sate of New South Wales; Geological map of the site and two reports by the Government Geologist of New South Wales; Map showing rainfall and temperature statistics of the Site for he Federal Capital and surrounding district; Report by the
Commonwealth Meteorologist on the climate of the Yass-Canberra district; Reproductions of landscape sketches taken from points within the City Site.

In addition the cast of a model of the City Site on a horizontal scale of 400 feet to 1 inch with a vertical scale of about 100 feet to 1 inch was made available for inspection in centres such as Chicago. Griffin was later to say that the two scales gave the initial impression that the ground was much rougher than the reality of the slight slopes of the Molonglo valley.

From the end of June, after their marriage, Walter and Marion lived with Walter’s family at Elmhurst, although they planned a home in Winnetka, Illinois, in the Trier Center Neighborhood designed by Griffin. Somehow with a marriage and a busy practice, time slipped by towards the closure of the competition. They did not commence work on the drawings for entry until possibly October 1911.

Marion describes the start:
‘Owing to a busy practice in 14 states, the months slipped by and nothing was done about it, though doubtless the matter was brewing within, till finally his wife, performing that valuable function of the Xantippis of the world, flew into a rage and told him that if he didn’t start on the design that day she wouldn’t do a stroke of drafting on the thing. The design was begun that day…’
Perhaps it was one autumn morning at Elmhurst, with Walter well versed in the site conditions and with the plan ‘brewing’ in his head, that Marion decided it was time to take down the diagrams and introduce the project to the design development and drawing stage at their office at Steinway Hall. It was she who well knew how long it would take to do the drawings. She recalled that Walter said nothing but went outside to cut wood for the stretchers.

It seems from what each of them has said that the period for the execution of the Competition drawings was between 6 and 9 weeks, spent on the drawings boards at Steinway Hall. 28 Roy Lippincott, who worked on the drawings, told Mark Peisch ‘Up in the penthouse Robert Spencer and Horace Powers had an attractive office which was shared with Walter Griffin and in which the Federal Capital drawings were made. 29 All good friends, including Purcell and Elmslie [not at Steinway Hall]; Walt got his start by taking on work that some of these others were able to pass on to him which for one reason or another they were unable to handle at the moment’.

**The Creative Experience from the Theoretical Perspective**

This perspective looks at the fundamental decision making processes which take place early in the design process, when the fundamental values are laid down.

Creative organic design begins in a process of assimilating the brief, functional requirements, associated knowledge and ideas, and an evaluation of site conditions. From such pursuits into the nature of the problem, its complexities are possibly expanded before there emerges an essential design idea. The ultimate goal in organic design is a design synthesis. Griffin’s vision for Australia’s national capital had a long gestation in the formation of ideas on the nature of democracy, informing himself about Australian democracy and in acquiring a new creative approach to town planning based on organic thinking. Griffin’s father revealed that this process extended over a considerable time frame, perhaps quite generalized at first and growing more specific even from 1910 when the decision on the location for the city was publicized, and continuing for a time after receiving the Competition kit and site information. Griffin’s vision grew first in diagrammatic form like the bubble diagrams which architects use for site and functions analyses and to test and define relationships. With the assimilation of the Competition brief and site conditions, Griffin’s diagrams became ready for the next stage of creative expression.
Griffin later explained the necessity of the essential idea in city planning terms: ‘In Town Planning as in architecture there must be a vision. There must be a scheme which the mind can grasp, and it must be expressed in the simplest terms possible.’ To achieve this simplicity of expression and legibility Griffin employed a 3-dimensional system of spatial and formal geometry as an organic functional framework, responsive to the site and the wants and needs of the people.

It is possible to confirm his use of the organic design process from his own words, with which he later described his search to achieve harmony between the essential idea (his vision), the functions of the city and the landscape. Allowing Griffin’s words to explain his process:

‘Since the special requirements of this city is the housing of the Government one looks for the most desirable location of the group of Government buildings which shall best meet present requirements and offer ample facility for expansion in future. The site conditions of this valley are a somewhat extensive level stretch on the north bank of the river enclosed by hills and mountains, those in the distance to the South West rising to the summit of Bimberi often snow covered. Touching the boundaries of the area determined for the city site are three minor mountains. The most conspicuous peak is the conical Ainslie to the North East. To the North West is Black Mountain, and to the South East is Mugga Mugga with the foothills clustered about it opposite from the mountains to the South West.’

He noted in passing that ‘The plain recommends itself for the business district of the city’ Black Mountain as backdrop occurred to him as one of two possibilities for the siting of the Government Group.

‘There are two possibilities for the location of the Government group, the slopes of Black Mountain looking up the river, or the terrace on the Southern bank rising from the level to Kurrajong, to Red Hill, to Mugga Mugga, to Bimberi’.

Close attention to this description of the design process by Griffin, reveals that he was looking for a sloping site for the Government group, with the implication of a tiered design, climaxing at the highest level, already in formation as part of his ‘vision’. In Canberra the local mountains could provide a backdrop of nature at the highest level. This then was integral to Griffin’s vision; this was an organic expression of how Griffin saw the functions of democracy and its power relationships expressed in architectonic form – *form follows function*- against the backdrop of nature. Undoubtedly the form created would have
been seen differently on the slopes of Black Mountain; Mt. Kurrajong offered Griffin its own unique potential. Although apparently struck by the beauty of the Black Mountain location, the evidence was building for Mt Kurrajong.

The transcendental moment, the moment of truth for Walter Burley Griffin must have been when, from the topographical information provided, he saw the possibilities of a landform alignment and chose Mt Kurrajong as the site for the Capitol. In the Competition Design Report he said:

‘In the panorama Ainslie with its distinct conical peak stands out first and forms one terminus of the “land” axis which running from it to “Kurrajong”, the Capital, (sic) after passing directly through “Camp Hill”, produced 30 miles extends directly to the peak of Bimberi the highest in the entire region, a series of coincidences marking it distinctly almost without the assistance of man’s handiwork.’

The backdrop would be provided by the distant mountains with Bimberi Peak. Any thought of using the slopes of Black Mountain was quickly eclipsed when he found this land form alignment and the climatic benefits of its orientation for building. ‘This line was determined upon as the main axis of the city and all the public buildings throughout the city are set on this axis.’ None of the other competitors suggested such an alignment. The transforming moment of creative inspiration was undoubtedly the moment of this observation which brings the power of the natural order to the whole plan, never achieved on such a scale in Western Civilization since the Hellenic Greeks. The built form and land form were united.

The whole concept quickly developed from this point. Located on Kurrajong the Capitol could be viewed from all directions from within the city, as the focus of the city; equally it could radiate in all directions, the animus of the city and the environs, where it could be seen from many locations.

‘The importance of such an orderly arrangement is always very great and can be especially appreciated in a city surrounded by heights so that from a bird’s eye view one is repeatedly presented with the spectacle of the whole city. One of the chief pleasures we get in the contemplation of any work of man is the consciousness that results are intentional. We rejoice in evidence of intelligence.’

It is as if at this stage, the creation of Canberra came to life—in the symbolic life of the relationship of the people to the government and in the realities of the daily life and values of individuals and society. Like the best creative writers say of their characters in a novel, they take on a life of their own. It seems so from that point with Griffin’s city.
Having located the Capitol and already observed the flat plain as the place for the city, the city was obvious as a symmetrical composition again ordered by the ‘land’ axis, or as he later called it ‘the garden frontage’. The next steps for Griffin were perfectly logical steps in the organic design process. For climatic amelioration, as a solution to the flooding of the Molonglo River and following the suggestion in the Competition brief, Griffin grasped the opportunity for ornamental waters. Spatial geometry again stepped in to render ‘a scheme which the mind can grasp’ - the ‘water’ axis crossed the ‘land’ axis, extending from Black Mountain to the native wetlands, a ‘nature’ vista. The slopes of Black Mountain, in the organic continuance of design detail, became the logical place for the botanical gardens and its base an arboretum.

Using geometry with logic, the maximum opportunity for focus is provided by the circle, the focal point being the centre, and the triangle, with focus on the apex. Griffin used both in his design of the central area and the Capitol occupies the focus of both systems. The third geometric tool used by Griffin, the radial, provides the most direct means of communication. In the Competition plan the circle pertains to the essential ideas of the vision, nature and democracy, so it is used for Capitol Hill, which is defined by circular roads and for the central basins of the ornamental waters. From the centre of Capitol Hill the arc of the central basin of the ornamental waters and the arcs enveloping the 3 basins are projected. Circular forms are used within the nature park on the lower slopes of Mt Ainslie. It is an apt symbol of vision with its inward looking focus.
The radial and triangular geometry organizes the city fabric; within the triangle, the public buildings are monumentalized by orientation to the land axis. From the moment of choosing Mt Kurrajong, the site offered splendid opportunities for the use of spatial geometry and the Griffins must have shared great excitement while no opportunity was missed to strengthen the focus on the Capitol and to render the city legible.

In gestating the plan Griffin may already have recognized three functions essential to the operation of a national capital – national, municipal and commercial – apart from the necessary areas of habitation and recreation. If the equilateral triangle linking these functions was already one of his diagrams, then it coincided remarkably well with the site he was given to work with. Looking north west from Kurrajong was an elevation, Mt Vernon dominating the flat plain assigned to the city and suitable for the city administration group; from Kurrajong looking to the north east was a depression at Russell which could be utilized for the construction of an above grade plaza, an arrival point to the city from the railway station below, at grade. This would be the centre of commerce for the city. These three centres were approximately a mile apart easily communicable by direct traffic avenues and visually communicable for legibility of the city.

The Plan was symmetrical about the ‘land ‘axis, obviously the ‘controlling axis ’ and the ‘garden frontage’ of the plan, The ‘water’ axis crossed the ‘land’ axis distinguishing the national heart to its south from the urban heart of the city. ‘This whole garden frontage of the main buildings of the city starting with the peak of Ainsley [sic] to the North is terminated by the Capitol building itself on the top of Kurrajong some 60 feet above the Parliament House.’

Griffin was interested in the ancient civilizations and aware of their use of axes and the use of axes by the Renaissance, the Baroque, the Beaux Arts and the City Beautiful. His use, similar to that of ancient civilizations, is marked by the natural termini of the ‘land’ axis, the Mountains Ainslie and Bimberi and the ‘water’ axis with the natural termini of Black Mountain and the wetlands. They are markers of the plans conceptual origins in organic design and his practice of ‘landscape architecture.’

In this extraordinary burst of creativity, the genius loci of the Capitol site was embedded in a simple equation for the functions of a city (national and municipal) and its systems of communications laid out organically in unison with the natural features of the area. In all, this was an engagement which monumentalized the land form; and was intended to
integrate democratic life with life in harmony with nature, producing a transcendent energy to liberate human creativity.40

Later examination of Sullivan’s ideas in Chapters 3 and 7 throws more light on Griffin’s theoretical interpretation of the Capitol, as does Griffin’s later Report Explanatory (1913) and the struggle he entered into to preserve the Capitol as focus (1914-1920). (And confirmation of this interpretation) But it can be seen in the Competition Entry itself that there were issues in the creative period, once Griffin decided to place ‘the one isolated building’ on Mt Kurrajong. There must have been discussion between Walter and Marion about the Capitol and how to present it for the Competition.

The need, in the organic design process was to establish the essential idea. As a national capital, for a democracy, the essential idea was the reciprocal relationship of people to government, distinguishing the city from other capital cities and other cities in the nation. Griffin’s city was moulded by Griffin’s vision of the role of democracy as a natural state for humanity benefiting the individual and society – a vision shared by Marion. This concept created some hurdles for the Competition.

Griffin realized that following his vision might place his entry at jeopardy. (He expressed this later in his reaction upon winning, by saying that he had not expected his ‘ideal city’ to be accepted by any Government.) While he focused on the Capitol solution, and Marion drew only it, Griffin was sufficiently pragmatic to include a scenario with Parliament House on Mt Kurrajong in the original design report. He critiqued the unsuitability of this arrangement by saying that the hilltop position was unsuited to the expression of bicameral chambers. He was not aware that at the time (but not later) in Australia this scenario had been ruled out because the exposure to cold winds was thought unacceptable. (The site conditions of Canberra always seemed to comply with Griffin’s wishes)

The Capitol building as form and focus was undoubtedly already in Griffin’s mind, both as individual icon and as part of the ensemble with the Government Group, at this stage when he and Marion finally determined to follow the vision. Griffin, with acute powers of analysis, separated the functions of the Parliament House as a building type into two essential ideas - ‘symbolic’ for commemoration and celebration and ‘working’ for political representation, deliberation, debate and legislation.41 Again the site conditions helped him out. The irregularities of the hill permitted three buildings; two much smaller were suited to residences for the Governor General, the Representative of the British
Crown, and the Prime Minister of Australia. These two buildings made little impact on the visual composition and the Capitol remained the signifier of the vision, the monument in the wider landscape and the climax of the Government Group. It would fulfill the functions of State occasions and popular celebration. The three buildings would fulfill the symbolic characteristics of the Executive function required by the brief.

It is clear what Griffin did not want: the expression of an external authority over the people in a building embellished with the accruements of power as the focus of his design, and especially elevated on Capitol Hill.

In allocating the executive function to Capitol Hill, Griffin was thinking in terms of symbolism. The office of the Governor General could be executed within the accommodation of the residence, as indeed it is today from The Governor Generals residence at Yarralumla. The office of the Prime Minister and Cabinet could be executed within the first tier of Departmental offices in the Government Group, with perhaps the Cabinet Room within the Parliament House, which has been its location since it moved from the Government Secretariat West Block, in the 1950s.

The decision to follow his vision was very important to Griffin. He knew that it was not beyond his wit to resolve the expression of the bicameral chambers on Mt Kurrajong – a pyramidal superstructure over a central reception hall between the two chambers was a solution which could have been achieved with a physical appearance not greatly different from that of his preferred vision. But the meaning would have been different – and it was the meaning which compelled him. For Capitol Hill as a place, the issues of identity and ownership were markedly different for the Australian people, depending upon the determination of which building occupied it, the Capitol or the Parliament House. With Parliament House, which was a symbol of Government Authority even though a mandated power, there were restrictions of identity, ownership, freedom and liberty that were not present when the genius loci was the spirit of Democracy. The Executive solution appears to have been a partial compromise, accommodating the isolated hilltop site and removing any aggrandizement from the Authority of Parliament and sharing the symbols of State with the people. With the Capitol on Capitol Hill, the way was also open to further development of the vision.

Also the isolated hilltop site presented Griffin with an opportunity to develop the Capitol concept in the manner organically developed for the growth of ancient cities as described by Mumford. Griffin himself said of the Capitol 'It is not a purely America idea. There is the
capitol at Rome’. The functions on the Capitoline Hill, the citadel, the temple and the archives correlate with Griffin’s Capitol – the gathering place of the Australian people, the temple to democracy and nature, and the archival storage and displays demonstrating the achievements and values of the nation.

How far the design was resolved, whilst ‘brewing’ at Elmhurst, how far it advanced with preliminary drawings worked on by both Walter and Marion at their office at Steinway Hall is not known. We know the time period was at most 9 weeks. The competition drawings show the city as a complete organism, so it barely occurs that, aside from knowledge of Griffin’s diagrams, there were likely to have been intermediate stages, trial drawings of planning and architectural ideas. None remain. There were 14 drawings – almost all with definitive input from Marion – and the final drawings may have been completed within 6 weeks. This meant that Marion and her band of helpers had to average more than 2 drawing per week. Among the helpers, it was a part family affair with Walter’s two sisters and the young architect and graphic artist whom they later married. Walter wrote the design report, and was otherwise totally engaged with the progress and finalization of the entry.

Marion, although she described it as hard work, must have exalted in this creative experience, and, with her art used every opportunity to convey the meaning in the concept. She has recorded nothing to recall collaboration or discussion of the presentation of the concept but the drawings speak for focus on the vision – democracy and the harmony of the city with the natural landscape. The magical drawings depict the landscape setting with simplicity and accuracy, exhibiting the same intimate knowledge of nature as the artists of 18th and 19th century Japan and use similar techniques. For the building fabric of the city she reveals an individualistic architecture, harmonizing with the landscape and subservient to the splendid presence of the Capitol. There is no depiction of the vibrancy of the urban life of the city – the less immediate but none the less concrete contribution in Griffin’s vision, built into the design at inception, to be fully realized over time.

In 1938 Marion described the finalization of design for the competition entry: ‘…… after 9 weeks of driving work, toward midnight of a bitterly cold winter night, the box of drawings, too long to go in a taxi, was rushed with the doors open and the men without their coats- no time to go up 16 stories to get them - across the city to the last train that could meet the last boat for Australia, the imperturbable Mr. Griffin himself the only one not quite frantic by this time because to his mind if Australia was serious about the matter of their Federal Capital they wouldn’t let the
moment of the arrival of the plans be the determining factor in their choice and, to his land planning mind they couldn’t but be serious in such a matter. 

She went on, concluding with this uncannily prophetic warning to Australia:

‘In planning Canberra every detail of the natural conditions was thoroughly studied in order to preserve them and to make the most of each and everything so that the City can indeed be a living thing, a healthy growing thing. Such reverence for our Mother Earth is acutely necessary now for the rate of destruction is increasing so rapidly that even a century or two may make the earth incapable of supporting life, the conclusions of geologists speaking in terms of former long geological periods to the contrary not withstanding. Their theories fall down before actual facts. And the continent of Australia would do well to learn this lesson from its Capital’.

Review of Competition Entry No. 29 and Its Creative Achievements

The box which was sent to Australia, contained the entry in the name of Walter Burley Griffin, comprising drawings and the design report simply titled ‘Original Report’. (In Australia, Griffin’s name was removed and the box was given the identification Competition No 29). There was a Description of the contents of the box, with a full summary description of the content of the drawings including buildings and site conditions and an Explanation under headings of Site Characteristics, Site Adaptation, General, Occupation, Public, Federal, Municipal, Private, Communication, External, Internal, Circulation and Distribution. The report listed the following drawings:

- Plan of City Central District Scale 400’ = 1”
- Plan of City and Environs Scale ¼ mile = 1”
- Sections through City Scale 100’ = 1”
  - Axis - AB Black Mountain into Upper Lake.
  - Axis – CD “Ainslie” to “Red Hill”
- Perspective – Scale at intersection of the Axis AB and CD 1340’ = 1”
  - ‘View from Summit of Ainslie’
Figure 7: CHART OF THE FULL SET OF THE 1911 COMPETITION DRAWINGS FOR ENTRY NO. 29.

- Plat of City Central District
- City and Environs
- Section AB: Water Axis, Black Mountain to Upper Lake
- Section BA: Water Axis, Central Basin, Government Group
- Section CD: Land Axis, Ainslie to Red Hill
- Perspective View from Summit of Ainslie
Figure 8: THE COMPETITION PLAN
Nla.pic-vn3821-v
Figure 9: SECTION BA
nla.pic-vn 3821696-v

Figure 10: SECTION CD
nla.pic-vn3821-v
The Drawings: The Capitol appears in the following drawings: the plan, ‘City and Environ’, the sections, ‘Section B-A Southerly Side of Water Axis Government Group’ and ‘Section C-D Easterly Side of Land Axis: Ainslie to Red Hill’ and in the perspective ‘View from Summit of Mt Ainslie.

The competition drawings afford the best opportunity for the study of the Griffins’ design at first hand. The sections and perspective, taken with the plan, reveal the order of the city in
three dimensions. Techniques are used in the drawings, which, apart from making them exceedingly beautiful, render the ideas logically and with strength and vitality.

![Figure 13: ENLARGEMENT OF THE CENTRAL AREA
Taken from 'City and Environs'.](image)

In Plan: The plan drawing, ‘City and Environs’, is a study in geometric form with the exception of the naturalistic forms of the two lakes at either side of the three central formal basins. The circular form of Capitol Hill is almost centrally located in the drawing, although Capitol Hill is not located at the centre of the design. This technique ensures the understanding that Capitol Hill is the locus of the vision. The radial avenues of communication both focus on and emanate from Capitol Hill. Nature is depicted in spiritual terms, the mountains treated with a blaze of light of intensity only eclipsed by the luminance of the ornamental waters. The overall effect seems to tap into eternal and timeless laws.

Of all the buildings blackened in on the plan, a group of three on Mt Kurrajong stands apart from the rest and the central one on the “land” axis is the focus of all the radiating avenues and for all the city vistas. It is not the Parliament building, but it is the obvious icon of the city, expected to express the relationship of the people to Government and the
values characteristic of the nation. It has an ephemeral sense of being a human mark in balance with nature; a timeless quality both of antiquity and the future.

The geometry of the plan is a compelling art form, of scarcely credible perfection in its reference to natural land forms – e.g. In addition to the ‘land’ axis and alignment of built form with land form, two equilateral triangles, sharing a common base from Russell to Mt Vernon, separate Capitol Hill from Mt Ainslie so that the high street of the city is half way between the Capitol, the national symbol, and the nature reserve of Mt Ainslie. Such perfection bestows on the city an almost surreal quality. But it is soundly based on Griffin’s concept of a series of direct communication routes to centres, of polygonal form, for major city functions or habitation; radial avenues crossing streets of polygonal plan form to facilitate subdivisions without acute angles. The geometry of the axes, the circle, the radial and the triangle, renders the city legible as well as providing a foundation for its beauty.

The Third Dimension: Both the section B-A, and the perspective, ‘View from Summit of Mount Ainslie,’ show the Capitol on the southerly side of the water axis, against its background of forested ranges, the terminator of the Government Group, and the ranges the terminator of the entire vista. The drawings show with striking effect the splendid presence of the pyramid of the Capitol. But why choose a stepped pyramid for the icon of the National Capital of Australia? Two reasons are given in the Original Report – one, that it is a form which has been selected by civilizations at their peak and the other as ‘avoidance of the inevitable dome’. Others have suggested it was a gesture to Australia’s location in the Asian pacific region. The form gives rise to the suggestion of a secular temple to Democracy. However from the creative design perspective the most satisfying explanation comes from looking at the drawings.

Surely the pyramid was an organic conceptualization of form – the pyramid, an image the same from each of the cardinal axes and the perfect solid to complete the plan form of the triangle at its apex. In the vision which was fulfilled in Griffin’s Competition entry, the national triangle, the space of all the public buildings, oriented by the ‘land’ axis, was a great terraced landform. At its base was the premier avenue of the city, the location of the national cultural institutions, opening onto a public park and looking across a central reflecting basin towards an integrated composition of terraced gardens and Government buildings rising towards the apex of the triangle. What more appropriate form could be considered for the acceleration to the climax than the Capitol’s superstructure of a stepped pyramid? The terracing was a means of articulating the functions expressed in the
ensemble. Observed from the slopes of Mt Ainslie and the base of the triangle, looking to the south of the lake were the judiciary, the government departments, the legislative and the executive, distinct and necessary functions of the Westminster system of Government. Again the amphitheatre-like properties of the Canberra site were as if ‘ready made’ to compliment Griffin’s vision.

The ‘one isolated monument’ on the Capitol Hill site required an iconography equally recognizable from all directions, which was afforded by the pure geometry of the pyramid form, the more inevitable as its apex was centered over the apex of the great triangle. The perfect geometry of the plan was thus completed in the third dimension. It provided the perfect organic form for an organic vision of democracy.

Figure 14: ENLARGEMENT OF THE CAPITOL IN ELEVATION
Taken from ‘Section BA’. 
The Capitol Building: The drawings provide an indication of Griffin’s concept for the building, a more fully explicated concept than for other buildings in the city, for it is shown in section as well as in plan and elevation. Griffin perhaps hoped to design this building as the crowning edifice of his career but as the intention for the Parliament House was to obtain a design, and more importantly an architect, by international competition, for all the major public buildings, he possibly would only have offered this conceptual material.

The approach to the building by road sweeps directly up from Capitol Circle along the ‘land’ axis. The road rises from State Circle and penetrates a deep band of gardens and native trees between Capitol and State Circles, much as exists today. A monument and garden at the Capitol Circle intersection defines the special nature of the place. Arced roads (the Vesica 49) separate off the official residences which have discrete settings separately accessed from Capitol Circle.

Griffin was fond of outdoor-indoor spaces and one imagines that for the entrance to the Capitol there would have been a geometrically designed forecourt and transition space.
defining the entrance, which would have been on the ‘land’ axis facing Mt Ainslie. This would have been the focus area of a formal garden setting, its design based on an integrated geometric structure.

The building is silhouetted rather than articulated in Marion’s elevation drawings so both plan and section need to be studied to understand the building form. In plan, the building is a cruciform with the pyramid superimposed over the Great Reception Hall at the intersection of the arms and body of the cross, the arms and body seeming to be of the same length, i.e. a cruciform of proportions defined by a circle. The height of the Reception Hall appears to have a golden mean relationship with the square plan form, so that each wall has a horizontal expression of golden mean proportions. The Reception Hall is surrounded by a three storied loggia of rooms, balconies and roof terraces, possibly of cubist proportions of which Griffin was fond, extending out beyond the base of the pyramid, then stepping down to two stories and ultimately to the raised platform on which the building appears to be carried. There appears to be the possibility of access to the lowest levels of the Pyramid superstructure itself from services areas at the corners of the Reception Hall.

Griffin thought it could be a magnificent building. The reception hall itself with the crowning pyramid offers a splendid opportunity for magnificence. Recalling the arched dome forms of Newman College over the refectory and the interiors of the Capitol Theatre, both in Melbourne, would probably be inadequate to imagine the treatment the Griffins would have wished to lavish on the interiors of this building. Yet its national importance would also suggest a simple integrity of outstanding quality. The structure is a double shell concept, the outer form weathering and the inner structural. Looking at the section drawing, the outer structure of the stepped pyramid is complimented by an inner structure of arched domes rising tier upon tier towards the apex of the pyramid. The outer pyramid is reinforced concrete, marble dusted or marble faced, and has large glazed ‘window bays ’ of a form characteristic of Griffin, on all sides, at each level. Each corresponding internal dome, again reinforced concrete, has an aperture open to the dome above and all are perforated by arched openings, admitting light from all directions and creating an intricate, ‘tracery’ above the Great Reception Hall. The space would be illuminated with such pure light of prismatic quality that the form and detail of the uppermost members would be as clear from the Hall below as are views to the distant mountains on a perfect day. Night lighting could have been arranged with extraordinary effects. The overall effect from below would have been the appearance of a traceried crystalline structure of pyramidal form with its apex over the centre of the Reception Hall.
Griffin's intention was that the Reception Hall would be used for national ceremony and celebration. In the Original Report he did not elaborate on the uses for the halls in the extensions of the cruciform. From later descriptions e.g. The Report Explanatory (1913) they can be seen as intended to house displays from the national archives and to celebrate Australian achievement. As well as in these uses in the main halls archival storage, and display, could have been arranged in basements below the building platform.

In Griffin’s city this would be the place to which all visitors to Canberra would come. Australians would come as individuals to pursue their own interests and there they would find immanence in a collective national spirit. The Capitol and the city below would be in harmony with the natural environment, the proximate mountains, the outcropping hills, the distant ranges and snow covered peaks.

From there the ‘pilgrims’ would be able to cross the land bridge over State Circle to go down to the Parliament, at the head of the Government Group, to the public galleries of the chambers and committee rooms, to see the functioning authority of Government.

The Relationship of the Capitol with the Ensemble: Those discrete functions of the Westminster System comprising the Ensemble followed the landform in its discrete levels – Kurrajong Hill, dropping to Camp Hill, and then dropping to a plane of gentle slope towards the lake. In the foreground on land rising gently from the Water Gate and central basin of the lake, the Judiciary and the Government Departments formed a symmetrical arrangement on either side of a grassed court, the buildings probably rising on cut and fill or with partial basements. On a terrace some 25 feet higher, the buildings face a ‘Court of Honor’ reservoir. On the 1911 Competition Drawings only one reflection pond is clearly shown, set in a garden half way along the Government Group, but in the Original Report, Griffin refers to the long axis of the ‘Court of Honor’ reservoir. Three distinctly expressed ponds are shown in the 1913 plan. Changes of surface level could have been intended, with the buildings on cut and fill, but the Original Report appears to indicate otherwise. The composition was terminated by the Parliament House situated across the land axis and at the much higher level of Camp Hill. The best vantage point for a closer view of the Parliament House as both a discrete building and the climax of the Government Group would be at the south end of the uppermost pond where the roadway crosses the ‘land’ axis to connect both sides of the triangle. There, the height of the Parliament building would cut off all view of the Capitol and the Parliament House would be seen as the head of the Government Group. Moving back towards the lake the Capitol would come into view and the Parliament House would provide a platform for the composition, with the Capitol
building contained by the chambers at each end of the Parliament building. We are accustomed to seeing the chambers quite close together, separated only by a large reception hall. Providing the Reception Hall at the Capitol, Griffin did not have this requirement for Parliament House. The building is a ‘working’ building, its façade expressing the repetitive office functions and provides greater flexibility of occupancy with the Chambers at each end. There is no intention to express a hierarchy of occupancy with this ‘democratic’ building.

From the Lake’s edge and from the City, the National Cultural Edifices and the parks across the lake the populace could view the complete ensemble, the Capitol in relation to the Government Group, as an expression of the spirit and functions of the democracy in all their transparency.

Final comments on the Drawings: Elevations of the exterior of the pyramid emphasize its form with strong profiling and thereby convey the importance of the Capitol as focus and signifier of the vision. The silhouette also conveys the organic design achievement of the completion of the terraced form of the triangle vision and perhaps Griffin’s gesture to the culture of the Asian Pacific region. It also suits the character of Marion’s presentation drawings. The building appears rather heavy, which is a predilection of Griffin’s. This would be true of the lower levels of the building, very much weighted to the ground. But looking at the glazing on all sides of the pyramid, and knowing the open structure of the tiered domes of the interior, in the reality it would have been seen as a faceted form of transparent glazing held aloft in a stepped crystalline marble superstructure. Faced with marble, or in marble dusted concrete, the pyramid would have presented a light, shimmering and crystalline imagery, an organic structure as ephemeral in the landscape as the present Flag Mast.

Even in the drawing, section C-D from Ainslie to Red Hill looking east, neither the large cluster of Military buildings on Mt Pleasant nor the elevation of the Cathedral depose the almost mystical presence of the Capitol. The drawing, section A-B looking at the city to the north is dominated by Mt Ainslie. Although as buildings they are distinctive, the cathedral and the military buildings are not elements which dominate the composition. From the drawings, the Capitol is clearly the icon of the city and the Molonglo Valley. Although its presence as focus is so powerfully accentuated at the centre of an impressive geometry which engages with the natural landform, from these drawings it is equally conceivable that this pyramid is a symbol of the dispersion of power back into the land from whence it came, in the natural life cycle.
As drawings, much of their magic relies on the simplicity and accuracy of the depiction of the landscape setting, exhibiting the same intimate knowledge of nature as the artists of 18th and 19th century Japan and using the same techniques. The design and the drawings are works of art.

The Design Report – Explanation and Diagrams: The report although with evidence of preparation in haste provides a logical analysis of the design and contains brilliant passages which convey vivid pictures of the harmony achieved between the design and the site conditions.

It is a very methodical document beginning with a list of the drawings and decoding presentation techniques which qualify arrangements. Then Griffin lists the site characteristics, before introducing his planning concepts, thereby illustrating his organic design methodology.

‘The natural individual characteristics of the Site, which is the purpose of this plan to take advantage of by all means, are –

1st The sheltering forested ranges and distant snow capped peaks. South and West for background.
3rd The lesser hills, “Kurrajong”, “Camp Hill”, “Vernon”, “Russell”, “Shale” and others unnamed which are utilized as termini of radial thoroughfares, sites for the most important structures.
4th The waterway for architectural effect, recreation and climate amelioration.
5th The generally flat valleys for the general purposes of industry and habitation.’

Using the 1-5 referencing system above Griffin then elaborates on his intentions for adaptation of these natural site conditions for the broad purposes of his design – further revealing its organic nature

1. He suggests a “stage setting” for the government group, the background scenery provided by the forested ranges and the distant snow capped peaks. He notes it will be observable from the northerly portion of the central district of the city and ‘from the closest adjacent flat lands of the opposite side of the basin used by the Public Gardens, a “parquet” for this theatrical whole and from the commercial portion of the city, next beyond and above occupying the “dress circle”.'
2. The mountains are to be retained as parks, as nearly as possible in their natural state, and nature provides termini for as many vistas a possible.

3. The hills which occur within the regular fabric of the city are to be used for the dominant utilitarian buildings – the Capitol, the Parliament House, the Railway Station and the Mercantile Centre, the City Hall, the Citadel and the First Church. Otherwise the hills are to be avoided by the geometric arrangement and allowed to ‘crop through’.

4. The Molonglo is to be preserved in, or restored to primeval condition at the bottom of Black Mountain as a feature of the forestry and botanical gardens located there. The outer lakes are impounded in naturalesque forms but the inner architectural basins reflecting the Government Group have an urban character and form part of the ordering geometry. They improve the humidity conditions in the heart of the City. ‘At the same time because of their largeness of scale and severe simplicity they conform to the architectural character of the center of the City with its monumental groups and throngs of busy people.’

5. The ‘sheltered flat areas’ are used for the general purposes of habitation and industry, being most economical for development and infrastructure.

The Structure of Griffin’s report proceeds from the general to the particular. In dealing with the functions of the city Griffin begins by establishing the general principles, the site conditions and functional locations. In general the design of the city has to be resolved around problems of Occupation and Communication. In the particular, Canberra is not like an ordinary city with one centre and so the problem becomes one of communication between centres. Also in organic design he must take care of the requirement for growth to take place as part of the essential idea. This results in the stellar patterns, polygonal centres of greatest activity, and the polygonal avenues of habitation connected to radial ‘through’ avenues of communication. So by logical process the Original Report reveals the city as a living organism.

In relating the City functions to the site conditions Griffin uses a series of diagrams.

The Diagrams: The first diagram in the report sets out the fundamental order of the city using the “land” and “water” axes. It also introduces a third axes the ‘Municipal’ axis. The government functions - executive, legislative and judiciary- are separated from the recreation functions – assembly, public gardens, casino and nature park by the “water” axis. They are organized along the “land” axis as the “garden frontage” to the city, expressing the dialogue between democratic life and life in harmony with nature. Commerce, recreation and Municipal Administration gather the throng for the daily
activities of the city leaving the deliberations of government- and also the functions of the military and the university - to quieter less trafficked areas.

Figure 16: SYSTEM OF CO-ORDINATE AXES AND GENERAL GROUPING. THE ORIGINAL REPORT. Taken from Appendix B to the Report from the Senate Select Committee, 1955.

The primary axis is allocated to the Federal group, the secondary arm to the Municipal.

‘The principle axes of this Federal Group co-ordinate system are determined by the most important natural features of the site, since they furnish the fundamental basis of a Capital city at this particular location.’

It is interesting to observe that Griffin did not bother to reflect the geometry of the city and its relationship to the natural features in this diagram: he has not proportioned the diagram to indicate that the municipal axis is half way between the Executive and Ainslie peak; he has not indicated that the Municipal axis is the base of the equilateral triangle which sets out the most important centres of the city. The great triangle is not featured in any of the diagrams for the report. Which of these diagrams, and whether or not any diagram shows evidence of associations with Griffin’s early diagrams, is impossible to say.
The Report requires careful reading and assimilation for it appears to offer some ambivalence, even contradictions, which are difficult to reconcile with all the other evidence of Griffin’s intentions and the associations of his ideas. What seem to be equivocations, with careful reading can be clarified, and they are not repeated in the Report Explanatory of the Preliminary General Plan, completed in Australia in 1913.

E.g. In the text of the original report the following reference is made to the Columbian Exposition at Chicago:

‘Possibly the fullest scope for this tendency has been given designers in the numerous exposition projects, typical and best of which may have been the Columbian Exposition at Chicago, where the restriction to one colossal scale and single type of design around a rigidly formal enclosed court produced an impression outliving those of all subsequent experiments, or perhaps any architectural ensemble of modern times.’

This text is often quoted to support the view that the Chicago Fair was a strong influence on the Canberra plan particularly the Court of Honor, the water court and buildings of the Parliament House and Government Departments. The Court of Honor has been used to justify Griffin’s plan as a ‘City Beautiful’ plan. In the sentence preceding the above quotation from the report, Griffin noted on the one hand, ‘the tendency of our civilization towards the ultimate development of its architecture’, but cited the contradictory tendency of ‘rehasing the completed Roman expression’. He continues to say that he would not recommend an adaptation of any historical style ‘which different requirements will inevitably render a caricature’. While it might serve for exposition buildings it would not be dignified for the ‘life and government of a great modern commonwealth’. He is clearly saying that while the use of classical revival style in white rendered buildings may have achieved a memorable, monumental and integrated design for exhibition buildings, a real building programme achieves dignity, integrity and monumentality by using the organic principles of form and function and a single modern material, such as concrete, handled in a plastic and imaginative way.

The first illustration of the Government Group in diagrammatic form, shows the Capitol (which in this diagram he calls the Administration Building and at other times the Executive or the Capitol) as the point from which all is directed out along lines of sequence of function. This diagram reflects the ideas expressed in the drawings – plans elevations sections and perspective.
The Parliament House becomes the legislative, working building, below on Camp Hill, heading the machinery of Government and separated from the ceremonial, iconic building which generates the organic arrangement of the city.

‘With the parliament in two “Houses” it would seem that the fact should be recognized architecturally, so herewith is suggested an organic arrangement with the “administration “ as a focus and dominating feature comprising the general executive offices and official head-quarters for popular official and social functions and ceremonials.’

Figure 17: THE GOVERNMENT GROUP HEADED BY THE CAPITOL (ADMINISTRATION BUILDING)
Taken from Appendix B to the Report from the Senate Select Committee, 1955.

The next diagram contradicts the vision which Griffin later described as his ‘ideal city’ and leaves him open to an interpretation of ambivalence and indecision. But it complies with the expectations in the Commonwealth of Australia’s brief for the Competition and Griffin felt it had to be addressed. He says in the Report that Parliament as Representative Government could take the place of the Capitol were its bicameral chambers not a design problem for the hill top site:

‘Were the Parliament in one house, the following alternative arrangement would be adaptable to the same site conditions, and in that case, preferable, which it may be anyway, as a logical sequence from the general and fundamental representative
course of government, parliament, through its principle attributes to its least important subdivision. The architectural development of this latter formula would differ only in a few details from that of the other suggested.'

As has already been pointed out, the Griffins found it necessary to take the decision to follow their ideals even though it placed the entry in jeopardy. But acting pragmatically, Griffin tried to close this loophole by a deliberate, reasoned preference for the Camp Hill site. As it turned out, his presentation of an alternative site for Parliament House probably encouraged the Commonwealth architect John Smith Murdoch, who from 1914 onwards brought on the ensuing struggle for the identity and symbolism of the focus of the city.

For Capitol Hill as a place, the issues of identity and ‘ownership’ would be markedly different for the Australian people, depending upon the determination of which building occupied it, the Capitol or the Parliament House. With Parliament House, which was a symbol of Government Authority; political power even though a representative mandated power. There were restrictions of identity, ownership, freedom and liberty that were not present when the genius loci was the spirit of grass roots democracy.

This diagram was not represented in the Competition drawings and never in any subsequent drawings, or in any subsequent reports, lectures or writings. Between the two diagrams in the report, Griffin chose the function that was outside the brief, and stood by that choice. It was obviously of the greatest importance to him.

![Figure 18: THE GOVERNMENT GROUP HEADED BY THE PARLIAMENT HOUSE](image)

*Figure 18: THE GOVERNMENT GROUP HEADED BY THE PARLIAMENT HOUSE*

*Taken from Appendix B to the Report from the Senate Select Committee, 1955.*
The report continues with an explanation of the characteristics of Kurrajong Hill:

‘Kurrajong Hill being as high a point as available for natural water supply, for tall structure and accessibility, is, through its central location and isolation from other heights, the dominating building site with possibilities in a skyline. The irregularity and variety of this hill affords an ideal setting for the one isolated building and most appropriate setting for the two official residences. Moreover, while thoroughly sheltered by the “Red Hill” region its view not only commands the entire city, but through gaps looks into the beautiful Yarralumla lands, and beyond onto the snow cap mountain chains of the Cotter and Murrumbidgee water sheds the most spectacular feature of the entire landscape.’

The scene Griffin paints of the Government Group features the Capitol. The report gives no further information on the reasons for the preference but abandons the idea of Parliament as the iconic form and continues with the merits of the preferred diagram. The Parliament is located on Camp Hill:

‘The Parliament building on the edge of camp Hill stands forty feet above the succeeding plateau and is approached therefrom by a wide ramp around the fountain and of a basin that take advantage of possibilities in a gravity ware supply. From this court the Parliamentary Structure has a lofty setting stopping the long axis of the “Court of Honor” reservoir; is crowned by the Capitol building beyond and supported on the flanks by the lower Departmental buildings. The ensemble from the court presents possibilities for an impression difficult to surpass.’

The vista described is from the end of the Court of Honor nearest the lake. The court terrace of the Government group is ‘some 25 feet ‘ above the lowest terrace, on which rest the buildings of the Central Basin water frontage, and which forms the roof top a still lower terrace which juts into the basin as an open colonnade, the “Water Gate”, which Griffin suggest may be used for something more than a terrace.

The scene viewed from across the lake against the backdrop of the sheltering forested ranges and snow capped peaks confirms Griffin’s design intentions for simplicity through integration of form and massing. The stepped massing of the government group, which follows the changing elevation from the Water Gate at the lake shore, to the Court of Honor and then to the Parliament House on Camp Hill, climaxes in the apex of the pyramid of the Capitol and fits perfectly with the geometry of the Triangle. It is unity born of a seamless, organic conceptualization of form.
In the Original Report there are other reasons given for the choice of the pyramidal form. Griffin’s explanation is:

‘A suggestion of stepped pinnacle treatment in lieu of the inevitable dome is no adaptation or innovation although fully direct an expression of the construction of any double shell dome and it is an expression that was the last word of all the longest lived civilization hereto whether that be of Egypt, Babylonia, Syria, India, Indo-China, China, East Indies, Mexico or Peru’.

The Pyramid has no historical reference in Western architecture and seems foreign to European Australians, although it has been a significant form in Eastern civilizations and would have been a significant gesture to the Asia Pacific region where Australia is located geographically.

The Original report explained the design in all areas of the city. It explained that

‘By this arrangement [the ‘land axis and the triangle] all the public buildings of whatever group are built on parallel lines so that, as the predominant feature because of numbers size, scale and open and elevated situations from any general view point of the town they will work together into one simple pattern into which other groups must merge subordinately to maintain the fundamental simplicity.’

The buildings Griffin regarded of second importance to the most important Government Group were the Recreation Group, which included the cultural buildings, and which he saw the necessity of locating ‘more directly in communication with the congregation centres’ - the city rather than the Government Group.

As would be expected the Original Report conveys the same message as the drawings. The message is the importance Griffin gave to the vision, the Capitol as signifier, as the generator of the design and the importance of design integration with the natural surroundings. The design evolved from the organic design process, confirming Griffin’s intent that ‘The definite idea of architecture to my mind lies in the organic, systematic way of creation that nature shows in fitting an infinite variety of means to as many ends with perfection of form for every function – to recall Louis Sullivan’s alliteration: - “Form follows Function”.’ Griffin was the first to use these principles for organic design in architecture for city planning.

The judges who awarded the three premiated prizes to Griffin, Saarinen and Agache seemed to have the requirement for a vision in mind as well – and Griffin’s winning vision was recognizably about the Australian environment.
As Marion said:

‘Griffin touched Australia’s native beauty with loving hands. The plan, as an Australian writer puts it’ fits the location like a glove’. None of its beauty has been attained at the expense of nature.’ 53
End Notes

He is Dean of the School of Architecture at the University of Virginia and a principal of the New York City-based firm of Eisenmann/Robertson. Eisenmann an urban planner, Director of the Office of Midtown Planning and Development in New York City, wrote a formal report to the NCDC in Canberra, from which this article is adapted.

2 To the Romans the Capitol was the equivalent of the Greek Acropolis. During the time of the Roman Republic, the Romans constructed several buildings on Capitoline Hill with a mix of functions: the Aix or citadel, Temples to the Gods and the ‘Tabularium’ or archives; it was associated with the legend of the foundation of Rome and became the symbol of the Republic and the ‘centre’ of Empire - the high place above the forum and the centre of the Caput Mundi. It retained its symbolic importance as the secular spirit of Rome as the Campodoglio, its focus turned away from Pagan Rome towards Christian Rome by Michael Angelo. With temple, citadel and archives Capitoline Hill was the quintessential gathering place, which fits very well with Mumford’s place of pilgrimage. Lawrence Vale answers the question ‘What is a Capitol in Architecture, Power and National Identity pp.11-14.


7 Griffin, Marion Mahony. “Canberra- Its Designer and Its Plan.” The Sesquicentennial Anniversary of the founding of Australia, talk delivered over the radio by Mrs. Walter Burley Griffin, 1938. Reproduced in 'Magic of America, The Federal Battle, Vol. 11C p 433. Donald Leslie Johnson papers Box 18


9 Kruty, Paul. “Walter Burley Griffin and the University of Illinois,” Reflections 9 (1993): 32-42 Professor Kruty informed me in an email exchange 12 March 2008 that nothing more is known about this project.

10 I am asking this question because this is precisely what he did with the Parliament House, for deliberation and counsel, and the Capitol, for commemoration and celebration.


12 Latin for a Greek concept meaning the guardian spirit of a place.


14 Reid, Paul. Canberra following Griffin, National Archives of Australia, 2002, p. 41

15 This quotation from Robert Twombly is used in parody of Twombly’s comment on the setting and introductory speeches of the Second Convention of the Architectural League, where Frank Lloyd Wright made his salutation to Sullivan, referring to him as ‘the master’. It obliquely refers to the master and student relationship in Sullivan’s Kindergarten Chats.
16 See below note 17

17 Unfortunately there is no record of these as such, but some may have been simple diagrams like those reproduced in the Design Report.


19 In conversation with Paul Reid.


21 Ibid p. 58.

22 Ibid p. 59.

23 Ibid p. 60. Jon Reps indicated that the information did not travel via Britain in that time frame, but must have been supplied directly by Home Affairs. Could it have been supplied to Australia’s diplomatic mission to Washington?

24 Invitation to Competitors, Competition for the Federal Capital City of the Commonwealth of Australia, Melbourne, 30 April 1911, clause 23.

25 Ibid Historical and Introductory, paragraph 4 (III).


28 Ibid. Marion said the drawings were completed in 9 weeks; Caswell (Griffith Coulter Caswell were awarded the 1st premiated design by the dissenting Judge) reported that Griffin told him that the drawings took 6 weeks. And were done by his wife! Coulter fought hard against Griffin’s plan particularly in regard to grades of the main avenues and supposed ‘vandalism’ to the young mountain, Kurrajong. Caswell wrote a history of the events in which he took part – reproduced in part in Conference papers Urban History/Planning Conference June 1995


31 Ibid. p.408.


33 Ibid, p.409.

34 That Griffin appears to have been looking for a sloping site for the Government Group appears to me to be conclusive evidence that the tiered structure to express democracy was an integral part of Griffin’s ‘vision’. With a sloping site, he would never have placed an external governmental authority above the spirit of ‘authority from within’. The isolated Capitol site was therefore the perfect gift for the realization of his vision.


36 Proudfoot, Peter R. The Secret Plan of Canberra, UNSW Press, Kingston, NSW. 1994. Proudfoot’s correlations between Canberra and ancient city designs have been noted with interest particularly as Griffin was most interested in the ancient civilizations. Proudfoot claims that ‘The Vesica controls the geometry of Canberra both in the overall concept and in the structure of Capitol Hill…the true geometric symbol of the Theosophical idea of the mystical state of the spirit, ‘the womb of the universe’ from which all processes
It is considered that neither Marion or Walter had embraced Theosophy at that time and their interest in geometry was architectural, derived from architectural connections, the reading of Sullivan, Carpenter and Crosby as well as Griffin’s personal study of all the milestones in the history of city planning.

Marion said that the early diagrams were used in the final plan. There is an indication in this quotation from Griffin’s essay “Architecture”, (a transcript from a lecture perhaps delivered at the City Club of Chicago.) “Translating diagram into plan, (my emphasis) the Parliamentary group, the Municipal group, and the main Railway Station become the chief centers for radiating avenues all of them so located as to give fine vistas with marked terminal These avenues are all 200’ wide, a magnificent system and at the same time a necessity because of the high speed traffic unknown 50 years ago.’ Source is The Magic of America, The Federal Battle Vol. II C, p. 411 Donald Leslie Johnson papers Box 18

There is a connection with Sullivan here in that Sullivan said that the ancient civilizations maintained connection with the natural order and were creative in putting forward original solutions instead of copying ideas as was the practice following the Renaissance.

Griffin believed that the great advantage of Henry George’s leasehold system for town planning was that it freed the citizens of a town from the greed engendered by land speculation, so that they would be more able to concentrate on social and creative advancement. He expressed this precisely in his letter to King O’Malley, January 1913, which followed a previous letter in 1912 of congratulations to the Government for adopting the leasehold system for the Federal Capital Territory.

I am asking this question because this is precisely what he did with the Parliament House, for deliberation and counsel, and the Capitol, for commemoration and celebration.


Vernon, Christopher. Marion Mahony Griffin, Drawing the Form of Nature, Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art and the Northwestern University Press, Evanston, Illinois p 11. Christopher Vernon implies that the major part of the work was done at Elmhurst. He supposes it to have developed in communicative dialogue and to have been committed to paper when almost complete. Walter’s father refers to ‘details of his vision’ rather than drawings. We also know from Marion, Magic of America that the drawings were completed at Steinway Hall. The most practical time for the transfer would have been for the first design development drawings at the beginning of the presentation period.

This could refer to the final presentation drawings, if it is true.


Reid, Paul. Canberra following Griffin. National Archives of Australia 2002 p 92 Paul Reid quotes a letter from Caswell, ‘Mr. Griffin personally told me that his design was completed in less than 6 weeks’…

See also Endnotes 36 and 47.

51 All quotations in this section, unless separately referenced, are from the Original Report which Griffin wrote to accompany the Entry in the Federal Capital Competition.


CHAPTER 2
LOUIS SULLIVAN AND HIS IDEAS

So too when you, in turn, use words, make sure you possess the wherewithal to charge them – lest you be a bow without an arrow - a seedless husk from which no living thing can sprout

Louis H Sullivan 1901

Louis Sullivan passionately promoted his ideas in more than 51 published papers and 3 major published works: Of the major works—Kindergarten Chats, is the most widely known, serialized in The Interstate Architect and Builder, Cleveland Ohio, from February 16 1901 to February 8 1902. It was redrafted in 1918 with the intention of publication in book form, but not published until 1947. In overview, Sullivan’s writings show a remarkable integrity with each of his major essays lifting a veil on the complexity of his theory, which was not expressed fully in a single document until his revision of Kindergarten Chats in 1918. The revised Chats gathers together Sullivan’s main preoccupations: architecture as an art, nature and the relationship of ‘Man’ and the built environment to nature; and democracy as the natural order for ‘Man’s’ well-being. These themes were introduced almost chronologically in Sullivan’s papers between 1886 and 1910, most of which were published soon after they were written, or given as lectures in professional forums. His ardent promotion of this material during the period from 1900 – 1910 and his last works in 1924 can be attributed to Sullivan’s sense of commitment towards architectural education, which after 1900 became a theme of itself and was expanded to include the education of the public on the subject of architecture. His public papers were collected and edited by Robert Twombly and published in book form in 1988. Natural Thinking: A Study of Democracy (1905) is the exception and has not yet been published. Democracy: A Man-Search completed in April 1908 was not published until 1961.

Sullivan’s last work, The Autobiography of an Idea, became his first book to be published, just prior to his death in 1924; this work is really an autobiography of the development of Sullivan’s mind, always at work on architectural theory, concerned with architecture as an art and as a reflection of society.

In his buildings, lectures and writings the issues he presented were: the nature of architecture as a professional service but equally importantly as an art; the preclusion of
eclecticism or the re 

representation of past styles of architecture, in favour of an American architecture of original creativity; the cultural role of architecture, which reflects the true realities of society and provides one of the most enduring records of civilization; the value of experience and the scientific method; the development of a complete theory of *organic architecture* which reflects the relationship of humanity to nature and models solutions for the built environment on the natural laws for life; his design law, *Form follows function*, as the centerpiece of the organic theory; the *nature of power*, its abuse or beneficent use, for which he advanced arguments using the terms *feudalism and democracy*; the idea of beneficent power in an organic democracy, its values in harmony with nature and, as he put it, with the first democratic societal values, those of the Nazarene; democracy as an overarching religion, to uplift society, and be reflected in its architecture. He had a love of *ornament*, a plasticity structured by geometry, organically conceived as an enrichment of form. It was his signature.

Certain facts about Louis Sullivan's life have come out through the testimony of his contemporaries and later academic research, yet he was a private person and sought to publish only his ideas. His closest writing to an autobiography, *The Autobiography of An Idea* (1924), is not an autobiography of his personal life; it was written to reveal the development of his mind in creative thinking and democracy; it is, as the title reveals, the story of a spiritual journey towards an idea which amounts to the beneficent aspect of man's powers. The climax of this work was the recognition of the idea of democracy as beneficent power. *Autobiography* has been examined by biographers and writers of academic papers for the detail it reveals about Sullivan himself and for clues to further research.

**Chapter Structure**

This chapter is divided into a brief biographical overview of Sullivan followed by a detailed review of Sullivan’s writings and the ideas they conveyed.

A short outline sketch with biographical details suggests Sullivan’s persona and the milestones of his life; This information is taken from Sullivan’s *The Autobiography of An Idea* (1924) and the major American biographers such as Morrison who carried out interviews with Sullivan’s contemporaries and more recently, Twombly who has picked up missing detail through documentary research. Material has been found in the writings of contemporaries such as Frank Lloyd Wright, George Elmslie, William Gray Purcell and
William Steele, all of whom worked for Sullivan at one time, and Claude Bragdon who knew Sullivan and wrote the forward to Autobiography.

The review of Sullivan’s writings and ideas is structured around considerations of:
Papers before 1900: Sullivan’s first objective was the development of an architecture rooted in the American soil and culture, - and in his papers before 1900, delivered at conventions or clubs or published in journals, he began the development of the theory of organic architecture, if not the pedagogical work of the organic design process.

His famous published essay The Tall Office Building Artistically Considered (1896) expounded his organic principle of architectural expression, Form follows function, in application. In 1887 Sullivan read Leaves of Grass which forged in him a deep admiration for Walt Whitman, and confirmed his belief in the organic nature of democracy. Emotional Architecture as Compared with Intellectual: a Study in Subjective and Objective (1894) was followed by a series of short essays, promoting the development of democratic American architecture. He reacted against the revivalist styles copied by American architects calling them feudal and associating them with the power structures that were invading American democracy. Sullivan was active in professional organizations. These papers were delivered at conferences or professional gatherings to share his ideas with other members of the profession; or they were written for publication in response to critiques of his work.

Pedagogical Papers directed at Young Architects: The Young Man in Architecture (1900) and Kindergarten Chats (1901 revised 1918) reflected Sullivan’s disgust with the established profession of architecture and the system of architectural education in the Schools. Adler & Sullivan had demonstrated the way ahead, with advanced individual American architecture and technology, but, following the Chicago Fair of 1893, the established profession had turned its back on progressive architecture in favour of cladding steel framed structures with European classical facades. In 1900, Sullivan turned to the young of the profession with the challenge, delivered at the closing banquet of the second convention of the Architectural league of America, for them to carry forward a democratic American architecture and to expect nothing from the established profession. He followed this with a serialized pedagogical work, Kindergarten Chats, to retrain the minds of young architects in organic thinking.
Papers after 1901: By this time Sullivan blamed not only the profession of architecture, but society at large, for was not architecture a reflection of society? His writings from this period, again delivered at conventions or clubs or published in journals, are frequently directed to the American people and his message is a both warning of the weakening of American democracy and a vision for what it should be.

Throughout his life Sullivan remained committed to the art of architecture; but what did this mean for Sullivan? He said it meant “doing things right”³. His writings reveal his engagement with ideas and the inspiration involved in “doing things right”.

Sullivan’s Persona

Figure 1: PENCIL DRAWING OF SULLIVAN BY HIS MOTHER, 1884.
Louis H. Sullivan was born in Boston in 1856, a contemporary of Emerson, Whitman and Thoreau, and died in Chicago in 1924. The details of his childhood are provided in The Autobiography of An idea to illustrate his belief in the importance of childhood experience in preparation for later capacity in thought and creativity. Some insights, probably not intended by Sullivan, into his persona and later life experiences, may be drawn from the information provided in Autobiography (henceforth used as abbreviation of The Autobiography of An Idea). In his memories of infancy his maternal grandparents' presence is more pervasive than that of his parents, giving him abundant love and care while his parents built up their dancing academy. The grandparents acquired a farm outside Reading to where the little boy of 5 moved and commenced school. The farm fostered his great love of nature but a period of truancy had him returned to his parents care, only to return to the farm for his summer holidays. The psychologically formative experiences of parental absence may have conditioned his personality. He was a demanding child, and later in life very demanding of those he loved, with an incapacity to cope with personal rejection. This is revealed in his reactions to perceived disloyalty both from Frank Lloyd Wright, perhaps a surrogate son, and more importantly Dankmar Adler, perhaps a surrogate father, in contrast to an otherwise generous attitude in personal relations. It may also have pre-conditioned him towards an addictive personality, particularly in times of rejection, as his mid-life crisis dependencies (a period of uncontrolled alcoholism) suggest.

There are widely differing views of Sullivan most of which have surfaced years after his death. Eminent historian, David Gebhard, expressed the extraordinary view that ‘dispassionate perusal of Sullivan’s writings reveals a forceful passionate eclectic who was incapable of arriving at anything approaching a coherent ideological view of life’ Passionate idealists are possibly, or are seen by some as a little unbalanced. Sullivan too wrote from a specialist viewpoint; he wrote from an architect’s perspective, architecture being the driving force of his life. He saw architecture as intimately connected with life and spoke of it as a ‘living art’. So he sought to understand the motivations and needs of human beings and to see the relationships between life in the built environment and the natural world, in order to express a creative, democratic and environmental architecture. When Sullivan is read from that perspective then his ideology is consistent and thought provoking for the creative architect.

Sullivan was lieber meister to his apprentice Frank Lloyd Wright with whom he shared many of his ideas in a master apprentice relationship. Various descriptions combine to form a picture of an immaculately attired, self-disciplined, gentleman with a confident
stride and ‘magnificent brown eyes that “saw you”’ the latter according to Frank Lloyd Wright. He was certainly a man of enormous emotional energy and mental activity, a supremely idealistic, passionate and talented individual who straddled the heights of professional glory at the end of the 19th Century.Apparently he had great physical energy, liking vigorous exercise and travel (he was the traveling partner of Adler & Sullivan for their widely spread commissions), and was undoubtedly a workaholic.

After two years of formal education in architecture, at the Boston MIT and The Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris, he rejected formal education in favour of experience and the ‘primeval animus’ of his own land, America. He returned from Paris and spent 5 years gaining experience in practices including that of Frank Furness in Philadelphia and William Le Baron Jenny in Chicago. Sullivan was 23 when he went to work for Dankmar Adler, an ex-army engineer with an architectural/engineering practice. He began as Adler’s architectural draftsman. He was almost 25, in 1881, when Adler invited him into partnership, and a principal of a firm on its way to becoming one of the two foremost architectural firms in Chicago, the other Burnham & Root.

Figure 2: DANKMAR ADLER, FOUNDATION PARTNER OF ADLER & SULLIVAN From The Auditorium Building, The Chicago Foundation
Sullivan tells in *Autobiography* that with the creation of the firm Adler & Sullivan in May 1881, when he was not yet 25 years old, he found his foothold from where he could now begin to experiment, to ‘make an architecture that fitted its functions – a realistic architecture based on well defined utilitarian needs.’ Thus began a great period of growth for Sullivan – a growth in experimentation and ideas; a search for truth, as he put it, in accordance with *The Scientific Method*, ‘the instrument he wanted’.  

The firm *Adler & Sullivan* was respected in America and achieved early fame in Europe for avant-garde architectural solutions, such as the origins of the architectural expression of the tall office building, the innovative architecture, structural engineering and acoustics of Chicago’s famous Auditorium Building, and the striking individuality of the Transportation Building at the 1893 Chicago World Fair.  

When Sullivan returned from the Beaux Arts, familiar with its theory which to his mind ‘settled down to a theory of plan’ he already had formed the view that American soil and culture should produce a different architecture from Europe. He found his ‘primeval animus’ in Chicago, in ‘its great and very wonderful lake’, in its enterprise, in telling its new story of rebirth after the great fire, and in his discernment ‘that engineers were the only men who could face a problem squarely’.
Figure 4: POST CARD, MICHIGAN AVENUE VIEW OF AUDITORIUM BUILDING From The Auditorium Building, The Chicago Foundation

Figure 5: Auditorium Building Arches
Detail from The Auditorium Building, The Chicago Foundation
Adler & Sullivan completed over one hundred commissions, including several skyscrapers - famously The Wainwright, St. Louis (1890) (fig. 8), Chicago Stock Exchange, (1892) (fig.9), The Guaranty, Buffalo (1895) (fig.11). They contributed their talents and
experience to elevate the profession of architecture in matters of ethics and standards of practice through professional organizations, where both were active members. At the peak of their fame the partnership broke up. Sullivan was then 39 years old. In his own Autobiography Wright said, that while Adler and Sullivan earned good fees, their outgoings were high to achieve the quality of work, so they never made money. Their partnership failed through the depression which followed the 1893 Chicago World Fair, and Adler’s acceptance of a business partnership with the Crane Elevator Company; by 1896 both men were practicing on their own and Adler died four years later, in 1900.

(Pictures from Sullivan’s City, Van Zanten (2000))

Figure 4: WAINWRIGHT BUILDING

Figure 5: CHICAGO STOCK EXCHANGE
Adler & Sullivan’s expertise and client base were in commercial architecture dealing with what has been referred to as ‘the big end of town’. Even after the breakdown in the partnership, Sullivan continued in that field of architecture, bringing to it fresh creative thinking and democratic expression. Sullivan, practicing as sole principal, continued to design successful buildings, including the New York Bayard Building, which Sullivan thought his best skyscraper, the Schlesinger & Mayer Department Store, (Fig.12. - otherwise referred to as the Carson Pirie Scott Store) Holy Trinity Cathedral and a series of rural bank buildings.
Throughout Sullivan’s years of architectural practice he was intent on founding universal principles to guide the process of design and to achieve the creation of architecture as an art. He embraced the benefits of the new technology and saw it’s most successful and honest expression through engineering, but lacking the cultural force of architecture. With ‘Nature as teacher’ he sought to express architecture as a ‘living art’ not tied to ‘the dead styles of the past’ and not violating them by using them as ‘decoration’. On reading Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*, he felt confirmation that the universal principles of democracy must reside at the core of his perceptions of organic thinking and be expressed in democratic American architecture.
For the 1893 Chicago World Fair, Daniel Burnham, the architect appointed in charge of the exhibition design had gathered together a coterie of Eastern States architects to express en masse a ‘white city’ of classical revivalism. Sullivan’s effort for the Fair, to create exhibition architecture with his polychromatic Transportation Building, stood apart and was both highly praised and reviled. In the aftermath of the Fair and recovery from the economic recession ‘modern renaissance’ and other revival styles became the popular symbols of capitalist success.

During the early years of the twentieth century in America, Britain and Australia, classical revivalism was the language of commercial and public architecture. Sullivan’s ideas, in the vanguard of democratic individuality and organic creative thinking, lost their appeal for the ‘big end of town’ in favour of entrepreneurial flair and Daniel Burnham’s large scale thinking using the classical orders with modern building and engineering techniques. Sullivan received only small commissions and not sufficient of those. He, who had always favoured honest engineering and faithful architectural expression, countered, trying to rally the profession. He hoped, by publishing his theory, that his ideas would turn the tide and that democratic, organic architecture would triumph. Even publication of his ideas became increasingly difficult for Sullivan, for the times were only ripe for an undercurrent, mainly in Chicago’s domestic architecture.

Frank Lloyd Wright described Sullivan’s end in his own autobiography, *An Autobiography* (1932)\(^{10}\). In 1924, Sullivan, aged 67, was living alone in a room at the old Hotel Warner; Wright’s last visit found him with the first bound copy of his *Autobiography* ‘just come in, lying on the table by his bed’. ‘I was sitting by him, arm around him to keep him warm and steady him. I could feel every vertebra in his backbone as I rubbed my hand up and down his spine to comfort him and feel his heart pounding. This heart, his physician said, twice its natural size owing to coffee and bromide, was bulging through his ribs.’\(^{11}\) Sullivan gave Wright that first copy of *Autobiography*, which Wright confessed he never read. It was lost in the fire at Taliesin. After Wright left, Adler’s son spent some time with him and he died soon after.

Although *Autobiography* his last work was written in dire circumstances and the tragedy of his deep frustration as an architect, it is not an attempt to justify the record but only a last passionate effort to communicate his ideas.
‘In 1946 The American Institute of Architects awarded posthumously to Louis Sullivan its Gold Medal, highest honor of the architectural profession. The following citation, prepared by Hugh Morrison, was read at the Annual Dinner of the Institute on May 9th, and the medal was received by Sullivan’s most faithful disciple and friend, George Grant Elmslie’.

‘To Louis Sullivan we render honor:
His profession of architecture was a lifetime dedication of all his energies of mind and spirit.
By esteeming practical requirements as esthetic responsibilities he unfolded a new discipline of design.
He believed that the dimensions of American architecture are the dimensions of American life, and thus directed us to an art of, by, and for our own people.
He approached each task afresh, believing that each problem contains and suggests its own solution.
He demanded of himself an emotional and spiritual expenditure to endow each building with its own identity of beauty.
He attacked entrenched beliefs.
He repudiated false standards.
He scorned the stylistic gods of the market-place.
He fought almost alone in his generation, lived unhappily, and died in poverty.
But because he fought, we today have a more valiant conception of our art. He helped to renew for all architects the freedom to originate and the responsibility to create. The standards he set have contributed much to the achievement of today and will augment the promise of tomorrow.
We render to Louis Sullivan this grateful tribute, highest honor of our profession, the Gold Medal of the American Institute of Architects.’
The Ideas Expressed in Sullivan’s Writings

The Pre-1900 Papers:

A broad cross section of these papers includes: Characteristics and Tendencies of American Architecture (1885); Essay on Inspiration (1886); ‘What is the Just Subordination, in Architectural Design, of Details to Mass (1887); Subcontracting – Shall the National Association Recommend That It be Encouraged? (1890); Ornament in Architecture (1892); Emotional Architecture as Compared with Intellectual: A Study in Subjective and Objective (1894); The Tall Office Building Artistically Considered (1896)

Sullivan’s first foray into the expression of his ideas was a speech in October 1885, at the second annual convention of the Western Association of Architects in St. Louis. Characteristics and Tendencies of American Architecture argued that a national style could arise from the architectural expression of the ideals and culture of the American people. It was the tentative beginning of a quest for an American architecture, an architecture which was democratic and as original as the individual creations of nature.

Sullivan saw Chicago as a booming democracy, its commercial energy a catalyst for creativity and although designing urban development, his great sources of inspiration were in nature itself. His first important treatise was his Essay on Inspiration, read in 1886 to the third annual convention of the Western Association of Architects, held in Chicago. He was in his 30th year. This prose-poem, in his most effusive use of language, opens in tones reminiscent of the nineteenth century metaphysical poets, to the joys of nature in spring and to the nature of man’s affinity with nature – ‘Of such are we.’ It progresses through the cycles of birth, bloom and decay in nature, demonstrating the recurrence of creation in nature as a metaphor for creativity in man, who also must respond to growth and change. Sullivan links nature and humanity as sharing the same rhythms of birth, bloom and decay and the same sustenance for inspiration and creativity; sustenance by the ‘wholly inscrutable essence, [which is] manifest as wonderfully elusive mobility and abiding serenity’. In later essays later this essence is described as the Function of all Functions or the life force and comes closest for Sullivan to a concept of Divinity. It is a deeply felt message, which he reiterates many times, based on personal experience, for to Sullivan it is fundamentally necessary for an architect to create. For architecture he claims:

‘That to arrest and typify in materials the harmoniously blended rhythms of nature and humanity indicates the deepest inspiration and the most exalted reach of art.’
Here he is seeking to establish a new paradigm in the creative art of the architect - a professional architecture which is organic. He promised it would be as fresh as the vernacular, or the original creativity of Gothic or of ancient civilizations. He was well aware that this essay was not understood. The year 1886 marks the beginning of Sullivan’s journey in the re-education of the architect in design from first principles. As with nature, a building should be charged with life, ‘...a building should live with intense, if quiescent, life, because it is sprung from the life of its architect.’

He meant by that to charge the architect with all the diverse responsibilities arising from the human need to build, and to highlight the need for architecture as an art to be the product of individual creativity. Sullivan never spoke of collaboration at that ultimate level of control which he believed to belong to the architect.

‘What is the Just Subordination, in Architectural Design, of Details to Mass (1887) is the foundation paper for the practice of organic architecture, which he builds on in the later paper The Tall Office Building Artistically Considered (1896) with the articulation of the principle Form follows function. In the earlier paper, Sullivan speaks of

‘...an expansive and rhythmic growth, in a building, of a single, germinal impulse or idea, which shall permeate the mass and its every detail with the same spirit…’

Referring to a tree, he asks:

What are the just ratios of leaves, branches and trunk? Should the leaves be large and hide the branches, as in the horse chestnut, or should they be frivolous and dainty things…’  

‘That the materials of construction should largely determine the special form of the details, and above all, that there shall effuse from the completed structure a single sentiment which shall be the spiritual result of a prior and perfect understanding and assimilation of all the data.’

And draws to a close with the observations that creative design only comes from the ‘contemplation of nature and humanity’.

At this time Sullivan had not long completed the final design for the Auditorium Building and was working on designs for the interiors; in this paper he was not speaking of exterior detail only. Detail is not to be confused with decoration or ornament. In dealing with ornament Sullivan was also concerned with the architectural whole. In regard to the decoration of the Auditorium Sullivan said ‘The plastic and color decorations are distinctly architectural in conception’.
In the text, ‘Ornament in Architecture’ (1892), ‘...a building, quite devoid of ornament, may convey a noble and dignified sentiment by virtue of mass and proportion.’\textsuperscript{20} He says that it can be beneficial to an architect to refrain from the use of ornament to concentrate on buildings ‘well formed and comely in the nude’.\textsuperscript{21} If used, ornament should be considered integral with the building design and should redouble its power ‘like a sonorous melody overlaid with harmonic voices’\textsuperscript{22} Sullivan loved to use ornament and a great deal has been written about his mastery of the design and use of ornament. His important message was its organic nature – growth from the building form itself. It is important to note that Sullivan’s ornament was designed over a Cartesian grid,\textsuperscript{23} which could be allowed to modulate in its own way, and to stress the importance of proportioned structure in his design. In this way ornament was organically integrated into the mass and proportion of the building itself. Recognition of the principles annunciated by Sullivan is very important to understanding his control of the fluidity, plasticity, which he sought to express in his architecture. Not least, Sullivan’s ornament was his individual signature.

One of the most famous and influential of Sullivan’s essays is ‘The Tall Office Building Artistically Considered’ (1896) in which he introduced and explained his famous principle ‘Form follows function’ - his Clapert Demonstration\textsuperscript{24} - his search for universal laws to guide architectural design. This was a major development of his organic theory, then still in process of distillation. Sullivan himself had not grasped the full significance of the architectural nature of the tall office building until his design for the Wainwright building in 1891-2. Architects had been confounded. In this essay a rational analysis of the problem and a solution were presented for the first time. Sullivan considered the analytical principles for the design of the tall office building applicable to the specific individual problems of other buildings – and to all creative expression. He began this essay by posing the problem for architecture as a creative art:

‘How shall we impart to this sterile pile.....the graciousness of those higher forms of sensibility and culture...’\textsuperscript{25} His answer was one of his most important and influential statements:

‘It is my belief that it is of the very essence of every problem that it contains and suggests its own solutions. This I believe to be natural law.’\textsuperscript{26}

For the tall office building he presented a logical analysis of the conditions of the urban site and the functional requirements which formed the problem to be satisfied in the design. These were: the commercial value of the site; the functional needs which can be met in the below ground basement(s); the spatial requirements of the ground floor and first floor above, which have ready access from the street and special commercial
applications; access to the main elevator lobby; the spatial requirements and cellular
nature of the offices, repeated over several floors; the specific requirements for light and
ventilation; and finally ‘the attic’ the space at the top of the building for reticulation of
services.

After this analysis of individual functional requirements and site conditions, Sullivan
arrived at the important question of the architectural expression of the building as a whole
- the answer to the ‘sterile pile’. The answer lay in the essence of the problem – the
tallness of the building – and this must be expressed architecturally in form and detail.

This essay was written as a response to published critiques of the Wainright Building,
which revealed a failure to understand correctly how Sullivan had arrived at the design. In
answer to the critics, he took his essay a step further to reinforce his point. He dissented
from the critical interpretations, including the idea which he acknowledged as the cleverest
- the analogy with the column; its base, shaft and capital. (Although the ancient Greeks
and Egyptians followed the principle form follows function when they designed the
column, for it too had 3 functions to accept load, transfer it and spread it onto the
foundation material, unlike the office building the column was a device bearing external
load.) Other interpretations included the mystical value of the trinity and the design logic
of beginning, middle and end. These ideas did not follow the analytical process Sullivan
applied to the 3 separate functions of the building – the lower two commercial floors
connected with the street, the repetitive nature of the upper office floors with the needs of
light and ventilation and the uppermost floor for the reticulation of services. As Sullivan
pointed out, the theories of the critics had not provided a universal principle for design,
whereas his principle followed the natural law, inviting correlation with Darwinian Theory.
‘…the heart is ever gladdened by the beauty, the exquisite spontaneity, with which life
seeks and takes on its forms in an accord perfectly responsive to its needs.’

Papers Directed at Young Architects (1900, 1901)
In the final years approaching the 20th Century, Sullivan despaired of the established
profession of architecture. A complete theory of organic thinking had been demonstrated
in his designs for the tall office building and explained in published essays, all of which
were widely acclaimed and brought Sullivan fame. Yet the established profession was
following the trend of repeating the aesthetics of ‘load bearing’ classical revival facades for
steel framed buildings. Sullivan turned to the young practitioners; he, himself was 43 years old.

On the first day of the second Convention of the Architectural League of America, held at the Art Institute of Chicago in June 1900, the architect rose to his feet and stepped up to the podium to accept the accolades of his peers and the public attribution of ‘master’ by Frank Lloyd Wright.28 This was not a prepared speech for Sullivan had walked over from his office at the top of the Auditorium Tower to listen, but he spoke from the heart, from his long search into the role of architecture as an art inspired by nature, and from his perspective at the dawn of the twentieth century. His message concerned the fundamental rhythms of nature as the source of inspiration; he stood against the application of revival styles of past ages en lieu of an architecture of democratic America in modern times; he spoke of the value of the individual and ‘the expression of one idea, solely and organically unfolding itself to the smallest detail’. 29 Later, at the closing banquet of the Conference, in the banquet hall of the Auditorium Building one of the most splendid spaces Louis Sullivan had ever created, he addressed ‘the Young Man in Architecture’.

The Young Man in Architecture (1900): Sullivan’s theme for the talk was education in architecture but he began by challenging his audience of the American Architectural League, young men and established practitioners, to consider the state of the art of American architecture; he told them bluntly to expect nothing of value from established practitioners. This address brought together the tenets in which he believed, and by which he had come to live his professional life, to pass on to the next generation.

He opened his address from ‘the viewpoint that architecture should be practiced as an art and not strictly as a commercial pursuit’ and assumed his audience agreed. He spoke of brief periods in history when the sun shone on the works of architecture – and periods ‘wherein the blind sought much discourse of color (sic)’ and ‘the mentally crippled wrought fierce combats in the arena of logic’. The styles of the past could afford no inspiration for the present. The young must prepare their minds; source their capacity for understanding and synthesis in personal observation of the rhythms and functions of Nature.

Sullivan concluded his address:

‘We live under a form of government called Democracy. And we, the people of the United States of America, constitute the most colossal instance known in history of a people seeking to verify the fundamental truth that self-government is Nature’s law for Man. It is the essence of Democracy that the individual man is free in his
body and in his soul. It is a corollary therefrom, that he must govern or restrain
himself, both as to bodily and mental acts – that is, in short, he must set up a
responsible government within his own individual person.’…

‘A great opportunity is yours. The occasion confronts you. The future is in your
hands – will you accept responsibility or will you evade it’…Do you intend, or do
you not intend…to become architects in whose care an enfolding Democracy may
entrust the interpretation of its material wants, its psychic aspirations?

Kindergarten Chats (1901): With George Elmslie and possibly a few draftsmen, as the
sole principal alone in the Auditorium Tower with few commissions, Sullivan had time to
write. Following his address to The Young Man in Architecture in 1900, Sullivan began
his major pedagogical work, Kindergarten Chats, written for young architects, and
serialized in The Interstate Architect and Builder, Cleveland Ohio, from 16 February 1901
to 8 February 1902. This was a collation of all his developed theory to date organized for
the development of creative skills in the young graduate beginning architectural practice.

‘Meanwhile throughout all the activities of professional life, Louis never ceased in steady
contemplation of the nature of man and his powers, of the mystery of that great life which
enfolds and permeated us all; the marvel of nature’s processes which scientists call laws;
and the imperturbable enigma of good and evil.’

In The Autobiography of An Idea (1924) Sullivan spells out how his ‘Idea’ slowly
developed from a childhood fascination with man’s power to do, by observation of the
workmen, the builders; then he had observed man’s power to work things out in his head
before taking action, and saw, with admiration, this power in the architect. Then he
realized the power of thought allied with imagination or the power to create and
discovered the artist and poet. (The artist-architect and the poet-architect) Finally he saw
the powers of nature and the powers of man coalesce into an ‘IDEA of power… – a
complete reversal and inversion of the commonly accepted intellectual and theological
concept of the Nature of man.’

This was not the power which corrupts; this was beneficent power, the beneficent
creativity inherent in the nature of man, released in democracy.

Kindergarten Chats (1901) was conceived and written to reveal this beneficent power to
the young architect, for Sullivan had given up on his own generation. His later writings,
Natural Thinking A Study in Democracy (1902) and Democracy A Man-search (c.1908)
further explicate with examples – parables – and seek to drive home with passion the responsibility and potential to fully develop this beneficent power.

Sullivan’s 1918 revised book version is quoted here. Some quotations may not be exactly as in the serialized version. The serialized version may also have been slightly less developed in regard to his theory on democracy. For this reason, my reading of Kindergarten Chats (revised 1918) concentrates on Sullivan’s teaching of the principles of organic theory. In format, the serial and the book are the same - a ‘post-graduate’ course for the young architect, designed to awaken the imagination and creative powers slumbering under the effects of academic training. Sullivan’s style of pedagogy is illustrated in the Teacher’s promise:

‘I will plant therein the seeds of many thoughts; but they must germinate in the fertile darkness of your own soul, under the beneficent influence of the compelling sun that shines for all, and sends the rain upon the just as upon the unjust,’ 32

The young graduate is introduced to building critique and Sullivan’s readings of some well known buildings, to illustrate the point that

‘…architecture becomes not merely the study of an art [but]…. a study of the social conditions producing it.’ and ‘Every building tells its story, tells it plainly’ 33

He is instructed in the responsibilities of the architect, and in 1901 Sullivan believed that the architect could influence the values of society:

‘Whichever way our architecture goes, so will our country go; or if you prefer, whichever way our country goes, so will our architecture; it is the same proposition stated in different ways.’ 34

Sullivan heaps scorn on the bank building designed in imitation of a Roman Temple

‘Roman does not mean American….. Who should be censured? – the banker, the public or the architect?

The architect is the key to the choice between the

‘….wretched illusion called American architecture [or]…a sane, a logical, a human, living art of your day; an art of and for democracy, an art of and for the American people of your own time.’ 35

This leads to a rational discourse on values, objective monetary value and subjective social or community values - which finally rests on the subjective value of art. The point of the discourse is the value of the building. In dollars and cents it is easy to figure – but there is also a subjective value whose presence is felt – the value of the architect, above or below his fee. The dissolution of objective into subjective value also works in reverse.
‘For human nature determines that subjective value, sooner or later, becomes money value. The subjective value is far the higher, by far the more permanent; but money value is inseparable from the affairs of life. To ignore it would be moonshine.’

Sullivan reminds the young graduate that so far this discourse is not about ornament or even detail – so far it is about common sense.

‘Most men in our profession…intermittently forego their common sense in yielding to the exigencies of “art”.’

At this stage Sullivan is leading the young graduate to his all important theory of Function and Form - ‘The pressure we call Function: the resultant, Form.’ He begins by saying that the interrelation between function and form has no beginning and no ending. The logical progress in his discourse is from the ‘big picture’ to the small; he illustrates the relationships of form and function with many examples in nature e.g. the tree, the horse, the spider, the bird, the wave, the river, the rose. He then proceeds to the individual man, and on to man-made things. From the primary function and primary form he proceeds to the detail and its unison with the primary form – a tree’s leaves, a man’s smile; detail contributing to the distinguishing character of the form. The discourse encompasses the physical and the metaphysical – the worlds of the senses, intellect, heart, soul:

‘the physical world of man we believe we know, and the borderland of that world we know not –that world of the silent, immeasurable, creative spirit, of whose infinite function all these things are but various manifestations in form…– a universe where all is function all is form.’

Sullivan sees this inter relationship of form and function as a never ending rhythm of growth and decadence – an endless story. The basic theory is repeated in the young graduate’s summary and moves on to building form and to architecture. With the law established for the building as a whole, it is acknowledged to hold for the detail:

‘….if the work is to be organic the function of the part must have the same quality as the function of the whole; and the parts, of themselves, must have the same quality of the mass; must partake of its identity.’

They will all be of the same family. As Sherman Paul says “Form follows function” is a vision, not a rule.

There is more to the argument:

‘But I wish to warn you that a man might follow the program you have laid down, [the young graduate has repeated Sullivan’s program] to the very last detail of
details, and yet have, if that were his make-up, a very dry, a very pedantic, a very prosaic result…..because logic, scholarship, or taste, or all of them combined, cannot make organic architecture.' 41

Sullivan is looking for the life force which imparts ‘poetry’ or ‘soul’ to design – the cause and affect manifest in architecture as a creative art, fully alert to its time and place. It must come from the architect.

This leads Sullivan to the training of the architect’s mind in creative thinking – to wordless thought and imagination in terms of images, pictures, states of feeling, rhythm - and to the training of the heart to grasp the warm significance of realities. Turning the full circle of life back to nature, nature is the source of inspiration. For the process of training the mind and heart in the observation of nature Sullivan sends the young man on a summer visit to the country. This is repeated at the different levels of his development so that the young architect experiences the impact of nature in each season, its natural rhythms, its inspiration and the freedom of the spirit. Paul says ‘His intention is Whitman’s.42

‘Stop this day and night with me and you shall possess the origin of all poems.
You shall possess the good of the earth and the sun…
You shall no longer take things second or third hand, nor look through the eyes of the dead, nor feed on the specters in books.
You shall not look through my eyes either, nor take things from me
You shall listen to all sides and filter them from your self.’

The pedagogical technique in which Sullivan had the utmost faith was experience, so he offers the student the experience of organic spiritual growth from within, to strengthen independence and individuality in creative thinking. The student’s feelings as they range from enthusiasms to pessimism and hope are experienced with the seasons. The student becomes aware of the processes of growth in humanity through experiencing the cycles of growth, decay and re growth shared by humanity and nature. Inspiration, interdependence with nature and spirituality are measures of an upward journey. When the student’s soul is tempered they reach the summit together and, fortified in the hope of spring, the student is ready for the responsibilities of a creative architect.
Papers Delivered or Published between 1901 - 1911

Sullivan had yet to write dedicated works on democracy but he was gathering himself in the paper, *Education* (1902) published in the Inland Architect and News Record XXIX June 1902. ‘Rapidly’ he wrote, ‘we are changing from an empirical to a scientific attitude of mind; from an inchoate to an organic trend of thinking’ \(^\text{43}\) He felt that the scientific mode of twentieth century thought boded well for organic democracy — and this paper is a call for the young generation to be ready. Sherman Paul notes ‘How well he understood twentieth century thought; that rejection of the limited empiricism of the British tradition for a philosophy of experience’ \(^\text{44}\)

In this paper, a prose poem, Sullivan lists ideals to set before the young in preparation for ‘the far-reaching changes now underway’. The following selection of quotations from the paper illustrates the trend in Sullivan’s thinking towards organic democracy.\(^\text{45}\) Sullivan is speaking of education for citizenship – but the paper ends in referring to the architect.

‘He should be taught that a mind empty of ideals is indeed an empty mind, and that there will be demanded of him, if not self-sacrifice, at the least self-restraint, self-denial, and that the highest of ideals is the ideal of democracy…….

The beauty of nature should be most lovingly shown to him, and he be encouraged to venerate and to prize that beauty.

He should be taught that he and the race are inseparably a part of nature and that his strength must come of her bounty…….

He should be taught that high ideals make a people strong

That decay comes when ideals wane……..

I am not of those who believe in lackadaisical methods ……..

But at the same time I am of those who believe that gentleness is a greater, surer power than force…….

Nor am I of those who despise dreamers. For the world would be at the level of zero were it not for its dreamers… He who dreamed of democracy, far back in a world of absolutism, was indeed heroic….

(Sullivan is here referring to the one he calls the ‘Nazarene’; Sherman Paul observed that the Nazarene, was the hero of Democracy- A Man-Search\(^\text{46}\))

How deep this dreamer saw into the heart of man! ...

Thus would I concentrate the powers of will…

Thus would I make good citizens and thus would I lay the foundations for a generation of real architects – real because true men, and dreamers in action.’
In 1903 and 1904 Sullivan wrote technical papers in reference to the sub-structure of
the newly completed Schlesinger & Mayer Store (Carson Pirie Scott). Wright was
entering the field of commercial building with the Larkin Administration building and
Griffin was his ‘outside man’ supervising the construction, so this paper was probably
of interest at the Oak Park Studio.

Sullivan was not ready to publicize to the full extent his ideas on democracy until he
had written the paper *Natural Thinking : A Study in Democracy* (1905) *The Inland
Architect*, where Sullivan’s reading was reviewed, proclaimed it Sullivan’s best paper.
The paper deals with democracy at the level of the ‘eternal questions’ on the meaning
of Life, in so far as Sullivan is able to devise the questions and provide some answers.
He began with an immediate invitation into the scope of the paper:

‘Listen;
I have never sought to tell what Life is, because I do not know what it is…. The
Nazarene, seeking, could not tell. He could but hint of it in parable and symbol –
Images like the dawn of an unseen sun.’

On defining ‘natural thinking’ he said:
‘…our thoughts must be honest, must be alive and we must live our thoughts’
And:
‘Natural thinking means this: that, as in any natural process, we are to let nature
sufficiently alone that she may follow her own beneficent laws, methods and
processes. This is to apply to little things as well as great things; in things physical
as well as in things mental, emotional and spiritual.’47

And on artificial thinking:
‘Some men believe sincerely and honorably that Nature is not a safe guide’48

A great deal of the paper is largely devoted to the concept of the Infinite and that it is
not a thing remote from us. Our close identity is with the Infinite – ‘our life can and will
draw upon the Great Life that our minds may draw on the energy of the great mind’.
Sullivan stressed the choice to be receptive, fully attentive (the valuable insight from
Moses Woolson, Sullivan’s High School teacher) and to consent – ‘Nature ever listens
and consents’. When the brain consents one sees objectively; when the heart consents
there is a finer vision of sympathy; when there is full consent with the soul one has
spiritual insight.
The insights on the Infinite seem to converge with Eastern thought and this would be an interesting area for research. There is a wisdom which harks back to an era when seers took time to meditate. Sullivan gives his motivations:

‘Such consideration have led me, in this age of the material and practical, to endeavor to bring close to your minds this material and “practical” value of the Infinite, as a factor of health in your daily, hourly lives: while, at the same time, bringing near to your finer natures the grandeur, simplicity and sublimity of its spiritual aspect.

Or to put it more bluntly to show you that the spiritual is not only of actual practical preservative value, but that ignorance of its quality is demoralizing and destructive. That a mind not open to the inpouring of the Infinite will simply run barren, shrivel and decay.’

Sherman Paul found *Natural Thinking* a ‘more discursive exposition’ than the later *Democracy - A Man-Search* and Paul, an authority on Emerson, found some convergence in trends of thought with Emerson. Comparing some of the similarities Paul writes:

‘Before “feudal” philosophers divided the powers of man into faculties, ‘man is a unified sensibility, one with life.’ (As Emerson wrote: “the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me) Most of man’s “thought” is subconscious or instinctual; the forces of life think for him if he lets them (Emerson: I expand and live in the warm day like corn and melons)

Sullivan uses the act of walking to illustrate this point. In Paul’s summation of Natural Thinking:

‘Thinking cannot be arrogated by elite. Thinking is a common power and it has its origins in the desire and consent of the mind.’

He says:

‘*Democracy is a psychological condition*’ consonant with psychological liberation (the liberation described by Emerson and Whitman – *all mean egotism vanishes*)

*One is empowered by life to do the beneficent work of life.*

The paper gives an account of Man’s history similar to the published *Democracy A Man-Search* (1961), tracing man’s beginnings in ignorance; fear of the unknown, and, through fear, abrogation of responsibility to external powers. Sullivan represents those external powers as the aristocracy and the priesthood. Feudal man is divided against himself. In organic thinking, democracy is the natural state for man and its evolution takes place through overcoming the ignorance which inculcates fear. Here Sullivan
hoped in science to lead man forward. He hoped to see Democratic man restored to
his own authority. Democracy is more than a political system; it is a religion for man
who accepts his own power and authority and with it his responsibility. Sullivan told
Claude Bragdon towards the end of his life that: ‘Architecture is not an art but a
religion, and that religion but a part of a greater religion of Democracy.’ Natural
thinking, the scientific method based on experience and humanism are key indicators
to the understanding of organic democracy.

In *Natural Thinking* Sullivan warned of the dangers of secrecy in society – the closed
society. He advocated publicity, communication and education – transparency and the
sharing of knowledge. Sullivan believed that progress in communication, making the
world a smaller place, meant that the choice between feudalism and democracy would
be confronted.

Sullivan was 52 when he finished, but failed to have published, *Democracy A Man-
Search* (1961). He had hoped for its discussion in an open society. It is a passionate
dramatization of man’s dualistic state – fear, external authority and abrogation of
responsibility masking man’s natural state of the ego assuming authority and
responsibility. Only with the organic growth of democracy can ‘Man’ find his proper
state. Again it deals with ‘Man’s’ place within the natural order and the metaphysical
relationship with the *Function of All Functions*, the life force in the Universe. Elaine
Hedges wrote a perceptive Introduction to the 1961 publication, elucidating its
attributes and providing balanced criticism. The work provides ample evidence for
Vincent Scully’s view of Sullivan as a humanist. While many critics step back in critical
astonishment, Hugh Morrison said of this work that it is difficult for the casual reader to
assess because it covers so many disciplines- poetry, criticism, sociological theory,
philosophy - which scholars are accustomed to assess as separate spheres; yet ‘it
seems valid to hazard an opinion that this might some day be taken as one of the great
literary achievements of modern times.’

It has a messianic fervour which recalls  The Holy Bible, King James, John, Chapter 10
verse 10 ‘ I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more
abundantly.’

Sullivan’s last major public paper was ‘What is Architecture? A Study in the American
People of Today’ (1906) which was originally published in the January issue of
*American Contractor* before Sullivan revised it for *The Craftsman*. It was followed by
the much shorter paper *Is our Art a Betrayal Rather than an Expression of American Life?* (1909). Both papers reflect the importance of architecture and its social value and both were accessible to Griffin in the lead up period before the Competition for the Federal Capital.

*What is Architecture?* begins with a statement on the modern scientific mind, searching out the principles which underlie the complexities of nature and steadily demonstrating the unitary impulse underlying all men and all things. The emphasis in this paper is on the development of one important aspect of man *that as he thinks, so he acts.*

Sullivan says that we would be better to think in this way of a continuous flow, than in terms of *styles.* Powers wane as thought changes – hence the decay of the old and the formation of the new.

...it will become surprisingly clear how each and every building reveals itself naked to the eye; how its every aspect, to the smallest detail...reveals the workings of the mind of the man who made it, and who is responsible for us to use it.

Sullivan’s critique of American architecture focuses on its false expression in the use of past European styles and its association with burgeoning capitalist, feudalistic, wealth and power:

This Architecture is ashamed to be natural, but it is not ashamed to lie; so, you, as a people, are ashamed to be natural but not ashamed to lie...This Architecture is filled with hypocrisy and cant. So likewise are you, but you say you are not.....Is this then Democracy? This Architecture shows, ah, so plainly, the decline of Democracy, and a rank new growth of Feudalism – sure sign of a people in peril!

This Architecture has no serenity – sure symbol of a people out of balance....This Architecture shows no love of Nature – you despise Nature. In it is no joy of living – you know not what the fullness of life signifies - you are unhappy, fevered and perturbed. In these buildings the Dollar is vulgarly exalted – and the Dollar you place above Man.
need for a sound philosophy. In the final analysis it is folly for man to ‘buck against
the stupendous flow of life; instead of voluntarily and gladly placing himself in
harmony with it, and thus transferring to himself Nature’s own creative energy and
equipoise.\textsuperscript{61}

The summary exhortation in the paper is in the ending remarks:
’Thus will you make of Democracy a religion, the only one in the world befitting
freemen – free in the integrity of their bodies, free in the integrity of their thought.\textsuperscript{62}
And ‘Naturally, then as your thoughts change, your growing architecture will
change. Its falsity will depart; its reality will gradually appear. For the integrity of
your thought, as a People, will then have penetrated the minds of your architects.’
\textsuperscript{63}

**Summary of Sullivan’s Theory & Practice**

Louis Sullivan’s journey in architecture began with admiration for ‘the dreamers in action’
the ones who, through reason, intuition and imagination, could envisage great works and
then complete them. He became an architect to provide a practical professional service;\textsuperscript{64}
but equally to practice architecture as an art, wherein he would address human needs in a
fully creative way which was in balance with nature and would reflect the values of society
as its lasting record. Sullivan believed that Architecture could be read as a commentary on
human life and sought to express architecture as a ‘living art’, a reflection of modern
American democratic life.

He said that his theory was not arrived at in a flash. An Intelligent approach was to seek a
sound theory upon which to set free the imagination. He laid great importance on the
training of the mind; alertness, observation and independence of thought should begin as
early as possible so that experience was not wasted. Experience, its importance
confirmed by *the scientific method*, formed his attitude to theory. From the age of 25 he
drew on experience with Dankmar Adler, experimenting with the architectonic expression
of Adler’s steel framed and acoustically engineered structures. All his life he drew on his
intimacy with nature, his experience with its natural laws and beneficence for humanity.
His was the first organic theory for creative practice in architecture.

He began with an open minded approach to technology, admiring the new engineering
approach as an honest point of departure. He had design skills – mastery of the Beaux
Arts theory of the plan and a command of geometry as a control measure from which to
set free the imagination. His source of inspiration and replenishment was nature – pristine nature when possible. He had developed skills of attentiveness and observation and gradually nature became the informer of his creative skills. Sullivan’s defining opportunity came with the Auditorium building (1886 – 90). Theatre design became Sullivan’s first opportunity to develop architectonic forms, based on a 3-dimensional spatial geometry, for Adler’s acoustically engineered funnel shaped structures. Sullivan’s use of geometry was no doubt partly the result of his experience at the Ecole des Beaux Arts. It was also the result of experience in nature for he used it as a construct tempered by the plasticity he was already seeking for his art, for geometry is an ally of plasticity in nature. Sullivan’s approach to design was in a sense anthropomorphic in terms of its iconographical content wherein he wished to express both male and female, plasticity representing the female. In *The Autobiography of An Idea* we have the account of his fascination with the Clopért’s demonstration of a law of mathematics which inspired his own search for universal principles, laws of nature, in architecture. The Auditorium theatre provided the problem with which he began to develop his theory that the solution to the architectural expression of a problem lay in acceptance of the essence of the problem - “it is of the very essence of every problem that it contains and suggests its own solution”.65 To the problem of Adler’s acoustic form Sullivan found the solution architectonically in a series of ‘telescoping arches which projected the stage sound straight out from the stage and up a slowly rising hillside of seats”.66 For the Auditorium exterior, inspired by Henry H. Richardson’s Marshall Field Warehouse in Chicago competed just prior to the finalization of design for the Auditorium Building, Sullivan used the arch to articulate more transparently the transfer of loads on the façade. He further advanced the façade towards modernity by increasing the direct expression of the structural forces in the Walker Warehouse (1888). Ornamentation was used with restraint in the exteriors of these buildings, but used lavishly in theatre interiors, always organically, allowing the full impact of the architectonic forms. 

Confirmation of Sullivan’s fully developed theory of organic architecture, and further inspired creativity, came with several designs for tall office buildings following the seminal breakthrough with Wainwright Building, St Louis (1891). Richardson’s suppressed transoms in the Marshall Field Warehouse probably provided a clue to the achievement of the vertical expression of structure to achieve ‘tallness’. But Sullivan outstripped Richardson; inspired by functional requirements, the requirements pertaining to a central business district site, and ‘tallness’ as an architectonic form. The Wainwright Building was followed by numerous others, among the most famous, the Chicago Stock Exchange (1894), the Guaranty Building (1896) and The Bayard Building (1900). The Adler & Sullivan partnership broke up in 1895. Sullivan had learned much from Adler and much
from observation of nature. He had developed a deep spirituality in his efforts to search out the meaning of life.

The centerpiece of the organic design process *Form follows function* was given full published explanation in *The Tall Office Building Artistically Considered* (1896). The complete organic theory was set down in the serialized pedagogical *Kindergarten chats* (1901) Walter Burley Griffin provided the words which summarize the nub of Sullivan’s organic theory:

‘The definite idea of architecture to my mind lies in the organic, systematic way of creation that nature shows in fitting an infinite variety of means to as many ends with perfection of form for every function - to recall Louis Sullivan’s alliteration: -‘* Form follows Function’.*\(^{67}\)

Adler & Sullivan had shown the way towards modernity for American architecture. But who was following? There were the progressive architects, mainly from offices in Steinway Hall, and Frank Lloyd Wright, who were developing organic architecture for the domestic market. Sullivan was in the commercial market place and there he saw the flaws developing in American democracy, which he believed were fostering what he termed a ‘feudal’ architecture. In 1887 Walt Whitman ‘had entered [Sullivan’s] soul, never to leave it’. He found confirmation and inspiration for his organic interpretation of democracy in Whitman and believed with Whitman:

‘And we, the people of the United States of America, constitute the most colossal instance known in history of a people seeking to verify the fundamental truth that self-government is Nature’s law for Man.’\(^{68}\)

Sullivan said that Daniel Burnham was the first architect to realize the trend towards industrial capitalism on an unprecedented scale because it concurred with his own way of thinking. He also acknowledged Burnham’s abilities, his ‘dream quality’ and desire to express noble ideals in architecture and the creative capacity of his short-lived partner John Root. ‘The art of design in Chicago began to take on a reasonable character of its own, the future looked bright…. Yet a small white cloud…was soon to appear on the horizon.’ – the Chicago Fair and its aftermath. The Transportation Building, Chicago (1893), acquiescent to the Beaux Arts guidelines of the layout of the Fair, was the only American designed polychromatic building, not inspired by European Neo Classicism, and more honestly expressing the temporary, ebullient nature of an exhibition building. The Chicago store known, and still in operation today, as Carson, Pirie, Scott (1899) was Sullivan’s last major contribution to modernity and organic architecture for that city.
During this period there was well underway the formation of mergers, combinations and trusts in the industrial world. The only architect in Chicago to catch the significance of this movement was Daniel Burnham, for in its tendency toward bigness, organization, delegation, and intense commercialism, he sensed the reciprocal workings of his own mind.  

Sullivan’s organic theory became the counter culture to Burnham’s City Beautiful Movement, which coupled Beaux Arts planning with the expression of European Neo Classical facades for steel framed buildings, which Burnham regarded as a noble cultural tradition to which America had a cultural birthright. The architecture Sullivan termed ‘feudal’, for he saw it as dishonest to creative art, then as a threat to the self restraint of the social conscience and the self restraint of society within the laws of nature. Despite it’s noble ideals of ‘noble architecture’, monumental vistas and the incorporation of gardens and parks, the aftermaths of the Fair and City Beautiful were, as Sullivan saw the effect on architecture, a true reflection of the trend for materialism, vain glory and particularly the abuse of power - the corruption by feudalism of the hopes of Whitman’s democracy. He was not the only protestant; one wonders if he read Louis D, Brandeis’ famous essay The Curse of Bigness. The social trends of the effects of feudal power within democracy would continue. Sullivan would have been at home with E.F. Schumacher’s Small is Beautiful (1973), subtitled a study of economics as if people mattered, with its advanced view towards what is now termed sustainable development.

For Sullivan, democracy represented an overarching state for all life, including human life, lived in harmony with the laws of nature; as such it was a religion, or at the least it swept away the need for any other religion. Sullivan came to see architecture as more than an art, being a reflection of life and therefore as part of that religion. His basis for ethics and the moral law was Christianity, but without the mystical devotions and hierarchical power structures introduced by the Churches. His concentration on mystery was focused on the Life Force to which he gave the romantic sounding but powerful imagery of ‘Inscrutable Serenity’ and, more prosaically, the term ‘the Function of all Functions’. This is the closest he came to Divinity. Sullivan does not spell out his ideas about life after death. The importance he gives to the recurring cycles of life and decay suggest that human life too is part of the same cycles in time (similar to the Taoist idea) and that humans depart life with the departure of the ‘Life Force’, which goes elsewhere. In his search for meaning and the eternal quest for knowledge and spirituality, he found the answers in democracy. If ‘man’ would come ‘face to face’ with his own power and responsibility and lose his fear of
external threats he would cease his externalization of power and responsibility. (Marion Mahony Griffin would express this as ‘Authority from within’.) This would realize a new idea of beneficent, organic power. (Again this is similar to Taoism.) It was what Sullivan wished to be reflected in modern architecture.

As an architect he remained focused on the market place but never succumbed to the popular demand for neo-Classicism. His rural banks were more modest commissions than he was previously accustomed to, but continued the same exploration of form and the creative response based on democratic, organic architecture. Sullivan would design no other way.

He never spoke directly on political democracy but he valued the role of the public intellectual in a democracy – his support for the democratic ideals of Whitman was self evident. His public arena was a group of Chicago architects but his message, though often reworked, spread across the profession of architecture, world wide. As a device for giving Sullivan’s ideas currency, it would be an interesting fantasy to sit down to dinner with Sullivan and Alexander Solzhenitsyn. Solzhenitsyn was born 6 years before Sullivan died and lived until 89 years of age. In spite of, or perhaps because of, his life’s experience, he was a man of traditional, pre First World War Tolstoyan values. A superb literary artist and poet seer, his published writing achieved as much as any human effort to dissolve the totalitarian regime of the Soviet Union. Sullivan who would not accept commissions for revivalist architecture also tried writing to address the ills of society which were preventing the full flowering of democracy and reflected by the trends of architecture. He had to overcome great flaws in his own persona – a battle with himself, depression and alcoholism - to complete his final works. Solzhenitsyn’s approach was different, but it was also a battle with the self, as evidenced in the day in the life of an individual, Ivan Denisovich versus a totalitarian state. Between the two men there are also similarities in aims and inspiration. Solzhenitsyn sought refuge in nature in his chosen domiciles in Vermont and the countryside outside Moscow. As evidenced in his Letter to Soviet Leaders (1973) and begun later in the same year, his collection of essays published as From Under the Rubble (1975), he held strong views on the grass roots nature of democracy and the finite nature of the world’s resources. The world had followed the Western bourgeois-industrial and Marxist ideologies only to find that the ‘endless progress’ of the Enlightenment turned out to be ‘an insane, ill-considered, furious dash into a blind alley. A civilization greedy for ‘perpetual progress’ had now choked and is on its last legs.” Totalitarian Communism had robbed the earth as much, if not more, than Western Capitalism. Solzhenitsyn, a committed communist converted to Russian
Orthodox traditionalist, believed that religion was needed to uplift society, but also that religion had to change to meet modernity.

Solzhenitsyn was as equally critical of the Western ideal of unlimited freedom and the Marxist concept of freedom as acceptance of the yoke of necessity. Like Sullivan he believed that freedom is *self-restriction*, the Christian concept: ‘Restriction of the self for the sake of others.’ He pointed out the extent to which this has been successfully applied in Swiss democracy – a democracy which was considered a model and evaluated at the time of writing the Australian Constitution. Solzhenitsyn experienced the change from Soviet totalitarianism to the corruption of Russia under the inducements of Western materialism. Like Sullivan, his criticism of the latter cut his connection with the populace, although he retained connections with supporters of similar views.

Separated in history by two world wars, nuclear proliferation, the cold war and the present fears of terrorism, their ideas were humanitarian. They both focused on the abuse of power, on the disasters implicit in totalitarianism and rampant Western capitalism, the benefits of grass roots democracy, the present state of humanity’s relationship with nature and its precipitation of the dire consequences of climate change, and last but not least, the human quest for spirituality.
End Notes


7 Ibid p 250
8 Ibid, p. 240.
9 Ibid, p. 246.


17 Ibid p 31
18 Ibid, p 32


21 Ibid p 80
22 Ibid p 81

23 Sullivan, Louis H. *A System of Ornament in Accordance with Man’s Powers* (1922-24) Burnham Library

24 Monsieur Clopert gave Louis lectures in mathematics at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris. Sullivan thought himself fortunate in his mentors, Moses Woollson, John Thompson, Monsieur Clopert and Hippolyte Taine – which beneficial encounters he describes in detail in *Autobiography of An Idea*. Sullivan found in Paris and his travel to Florence and Rome opportunities for laying down lasting concepts – a mathematical imagination, awareness of the creative power of art and confirmation of his own ‘eye’ and understanding. He was fascinated by Clopert’s mathematical demonstration of theory which met with no exception and began looking for such a theory for architecture.
26 Ibid p 583
27 Ibid p 588
29 Ibid
31 Ibid p 249
32 Ibid, p 26
33 Ibid p 24
34 Ibid, p 31
35 Ibid, p 32
36 Ibid, p 35
37 Ibid, p 41
38 Ibid p 48
39 Ibid, p 44
48 Ibid p. 12
49 Ibid p. 103
51 Ibid p 111
52 Ibid p 181
53 Ibid p 111
57 Ibid p 176
58 Ibid p 179
59 Ibid p 181
60 Ibid p 187
61 Ibid p 194
This is evident in the service Sullivan gave to the profession in the development of Chicago’s building codes and professional standards. According to Twombly, Sullivan became an “organization man” in the 1880s and 1890s because he was concerned about professional standards. He wrote various technical papers in addition to his theoretical papers. See Robert Twombly (1986 and 1988) - *Louis Sullivan: His life and Work* p 228 and the range of topics in *Louis Sullivan: The Public Papers*.


Ibid
CHAPTER 3
THE GRIFFINS, THE CHICAGO PROGRESSIVES AND ‘SULLIVAN’S KINDERGARTEN’

‘Louis Sullivan laid the foundation of modern architecture. His influence was felt as early in Europe as in America and even more powerfully in the early decades. The successors vary in degrees of creative power but they are not founders.’ Marion Mahony Griffin

Walter Burley Griffin graduated from the University of Illinois in 1899 with exceptionally high grades; he was 23 years of age and ambitious. His greatest interest lay in what is now termed town planning and he dreamt of designing the new capital for Australia, which was considering federation of its colonial states. Like all Chicagoans, he had seen, as a 17-year-old, the impact of the ‘White City’, the eclectic, neoclassical architecture and Beaux Arts planning of the Chicago World Fair, the first example on a grand urban scale of what would come to be called the City Beautiful Movement in America. Yet he chose to associate with the Chicago Progressives, followers of Louis Sullivan, instead of the highly successful co-coordinating architect of the Fair, Daniel Burnham. Burnham became foremost among America’s early town planners, acknowledged as the father of the City Beautiful Movement. Eminent scholars have dismissed Sullivan as a mentor for Griffin as a planner because Sullivan was not interested in town planning. They have not considered Griffin as the one who adapted the fundamental principles of Sullivan’s organic theory to town planning.

What were the formative influences on Walter Burley Griffin? The purpose of this chapter is to revisit the Chicago known to the Griffins, their exposure to the prevalent ideas, and the direction they took. Walter spent fourteen years there after his graduation from the University of Illinois until his departure, with Marion, for Australia, to take up the position of Federal Capital Director of Design and Construction in 1914. The central question is whether Walter, having completed his formal education in architecture at the University of Illinois, and having been deeply impressed by an early encounter with Louis Sullivan, sought at this time to adopt the organic, creative thinking specified by Sullivan:

‘So first learn to think, then, learn to act. Learn to think as an honest architect should think, then act as an honest architect should act. When you think organically, you will act organically. Just as soon as your thoughts begin to take on an organic quality, your buildings will begin to take on an organic quality and thereafter they will grow and develop together.’

109
In the Chicago environment Sullivan had a powerful impact on the architectural profession, whether at Steinway Hall which was the hub of the Progressives, or at Oak Park, the studio of Frank Lloyd Wright. Towards the end of this fourteen year period, Griffin’s collaboration with Marion Mahony is considered of prime importance to the outcomes for both Griffins.

Chapter Structure
This Chapter is set in Chicago and considers the formative influences on the Griffins. It begins with a short review of background material - the formative influences on Marion Mahony and Walter Griffin as individuals.

Walter Griffin’s earliest intellectual influence was Henry George, the American social economist famous for the promotion of Free Trade and the Single Tax. The Chicago World Fair (1893) was a seminal experience for Chicagoans which had echoes in city planning, architecture and exhibition architecture around the world. As a lad, Walter saw order established in the White City’s landscape design and exhibition buildings, in contrast to the chaos of market driven development in Chicago.

The aftermath of the Fair polarized opinion on progressive architecture versus the revival of classical styles and divided the followers of Louis Sullivan, the Progressives with their slogan ‘progress not precedent’ from the classical revival movement led in Chicago by Daniel Burnham. The Progressives were architects who were searching for a new modern American architecture, and steering a separate course for which Louis Sullivan was their most acclaimed protagonist and mentor. They provided the post graduate foundations for both Walter and Marion.

By that time, although Frank Lloyd Wright and Sullivan had parted ways, Wright was a self confessed mouthpiece for the explication of Sullivan’s ideas to the architects at Steinway Hall, where he shared an office. Marion and Walter met at Frank Lloyd Wright’s Oak Park studio.

Sullivan’s great impact on Griffin through his lectures and the serialized Kindergarten Chats took place between 1900 and 1911. Collaboration with Marion Mahony also made a great deal of difference to Griffin, who after 1910 was no longer working alone.
The opportunities for contact between Griffin and Sullivan and the zeitgeist within the architectural circles of the Progressives, and Sullivan their leader, are objectives of this chapter in contributing to the argument that Griffin’s Capitol is the focus of an organic plan connected with the ideas of Louis Sullivan.

Walter and Marion as Individuals
In Magic of America Marion described Walter’s childhood and the development of his character:

‘As a little boy in school, teased and bullied by bigger boys, he decided that if he cried when they hurt him it would amuse them to keep up their torments so he never cried no matter what they did. They soon quit bothering him. In manhood noone could disturb his equanimity. I have seen him go through torments that have driven other men into rages or furied with blood-shot eyes, that have thrown them quite off their balance; but they never got under his skin, they never disturbed the sweetness of his disposition, they were never to wear him out as he could have been worn if he had allowed his emotions to be roused.

A tow–haired blue eyed suburban child whose boyhood life was redeemed somewhat by the fact that the suburb was not very extensive in those days making possible long walks in the open fields, occasionally to the river banks, though thoroughly conventional and timid parents forbade swimming. A child’s instinctive recognition of its rights and of the necessity for independence in certain realms, brought a fair number of plunges in the river swimming pools\(^3\)

She described herself as a tomboy, loving solitary explorations of the neighbourhood ravine:

‘...in the loveliest spot you can imagine, beyond suburbia – four houses and no others within a mile in any direction. Our home was at the head of lovely ravine. A half mile walk through the beautiful forest ...\(^4\) After ten years the home burned in a forest fire and the family moved back to the city where she resumed her tomboyish ways. Yet she was ‘...so shy of human beings even when well along in her teens that she would walk around the block to avoid greeting an acquaintance seen approaching in the distance.’\(^5\)

Friends assisted in ‘breaking down the barriers of an individuality that had a natural preference for isolation’. (She said she later provided the same service to Walter.)
‘During our teens Echo and I read and discussed Spencer and Darwin and such like, absorbing the scientific fundamentals of our time as is essential for any people in any time.’

Of her relationships she says:

‘In all these many and varied friendships it was they who were the initiators. This does not mean that I did not have a very great affection for these wonderful friends, but my shyness perhaps in self-expression never broke down except once. With that man of mine it seemed that I was possessed...’

Love of nature, introspection, shyness and an independent mind characterised the young Marion. Both Marion and Walter experienced the spiritual dimension of their love for nature. From their teens both were well read, which advanced the dimensions of their spirituality. In his essay *Spirituality and Symbolism in the work of the Griffins* James Weirick points to two key influences in the early development of spirituality and social conscience in both Marion and Walter - liberal American Protestantism and liberal Jeffersonian democracy. Referring to Ralph Waldo Emerson and New England transcendentalism, James Weirick says that ‘...one of liberal protestantism’s great inheritances from New England transcendentalism was the conviction that the source of religious authority was to be found within the individual’ When Marion’s family moved from Hubbard Woods to Evanston, they were foundation
members of the Unitarian Church of All Soul’s. James Weirick describes the church activities: ‘Through worship and ‘friendly fellowship’ the life of the church was filled with poetry, theatre, song – it was a group devoted to discussion, reading circles, musical performances, play readings and progressive political causes.’\(^{10}\) The church covenant, adopted in 1894, bears remarkable similarities with the ideas of Louis Sullivan and Sullivan’s representation of the ideals of democracy. Quoted in part below, James Weirick draws attention to it and says that ‘the key to Marion’s life and work is to be found in this statement of faith, to which she committed herself as a young woman in the 1890s.’\(^{11}\)

‘That the Universe is beautiful and beneficent Order; ……
That we ought to work for the good of man, to make the world better;
That character is the supreme matter – not the beliefs we hold, but what we are in heart and life;
That the soul of man awakes the sense of things eternal, and of belonging unto them, whereby we have the earnest of immortal life;
That we ought to hold fast to the freedom of the spirit for ourselves and for all men.’ \(^{12}\)

Walter’s family practised a more conservative protestant faith. At Elmhurst, where the family moved in Walter’s teens, they were active members of the Congregationalist Church, where Walter’s mother was well known for her active part in the church’s social justice program, as their covenant proclaimed: ‘to seek to benefit the poor, the afflicted and the stranger.’ Griffin played no part in the design of the church or the Community House constructed in 1913. His architectural contribution was the stencilling of a Sullivanesque frieze around the Church’s austere auditorium. It appears that Griffin gave up formal religion – possibly gradually at university and later with scientific knowledge and the development of his ideas on democracy. Although Sullivan believed that ‘the Nazarene’ was the first democrat’ he did not believe in formal religion.

With this background, Griffin focused on social justice issues from an early age. The US Government was sending out pamphlets on Henry George when Griffin was 11 years old; In Magic of America Marion records that he read Henry George’s Social Science from the library when he was 12 and goes on to say that this ‘awakened his social conscience and powerful will.’ \(^{13}\) Dustin Griffin expands this information:

‘Griffin’s earliest intellectual influence was probably the economic theorist and reformer, Henry George.[1839-97], whose Progress and Poverty had an extraordinary world wide impact after its publication in 1879... [the theory was] ... ‘that poverty under capitalism could be traced to the inequitable distribution of wealth’ and argued for a ‘Single Tax’ on the underlying value of unimproved land...Griffin
claimed to have read George’s *Social Problems* [1893], a book designed to present George’s ideas ‘unencumbered by technicalities’ as early as 1890, at the tender age of 14, and later said the book made a ‘lasting impression’ on him...Griffin was an active member of the Chicago Single Tax Club and acquired the 1904 edition of George’s complete works. During his Chicago years he was also a regular reader of a Georgist-inspired weekly newspaper, ‘The Public’ edited and published in Chicago by Louis F. Post.”

George’s ideas continued to influence Griffin as a democrat and as a town planner. He supported Henry George’s concept of the single tax as retaining values in the hands of the community and preventing land speculation and price escalation beyond the means of the less affluent. Land speculation was a powerful driver working against equitable decision making in town planning.

As a young man, Griffin thought Australia a very advanced nation in terms of social justice – he had read about Australian implementation of the ‘eight-hour day’, the trade union movement with its policies of collective bargaining and education of workers; the Harvester decision on the minimum wage, women’s suffrage and the Australian spirit of a ‘fair go’- 19th Century milestones at that time in advance of America.

**Chicago: The World Fair and the Contrast with Sullivan’s City**

Although Chicago offered the young Griffin many potential influences, he was decisive in the direction he took. Griffin grew up in a suburb where houses were built on blocks of sufficient size to have a garden, on the outskirts of one of the world’s most demanding city environments. It was characterized by constant change, constant new problems and constant new solutions. Central Chicago, rebuilt after the fire of 1871, had the stamp of progressive technology and burgeoning American capitalism. It was chaotic; Lake Michigan, the rail yards, cattle yards and slaughter yards, beauty and ugliness were cheek by jowl with the recent advances in architecture. When Adler and Sullivan’s celebrated Auditorium Building (1886–1889) was completed on the corner of Michigan Avenue and Congress, Chicago still lacked ‘the noble diagram’ which Daniel H. Burnham and Edward H. Burnett were to provide twenty years later, in 1909. The Auditorium Building, when opened, overlooked Lake Park on the shores of Lake Michigan, (now Grant Park, embellished with City Beautiful monuments and vistas) then a public ground, which often contained refuse.
awaiting removal by train, until a lawsuit was brought in 1890 to force the City to clean up and improve the site.¹⁵

The Chicago Fair: The 1893 Columbian Exposition brought an amazing semblance of order within the 686 acre Fair Precinct in the largely unimproved Jackson Park and the population of Chicago could see the benefits of design. For a number of years in America, particularly in the east, there had been a growing interest in the improvement of community amenities, growing civic pride and awareness of what could be achieved with the incorporation of parklands and boulevard systems such as the Olmsted and Vaux plan for Central Park, New York. Chicago’s business men were able to organize themselves to gain such benefits and with their successful bid for the Fair, the firm Burnham and Root was appointed architect in charge. Unexpectedly Root died and Daniel Burnham headed a coterie of talent which he drew largely from the eastern states e.g. landscape architect Frederick Law Olmstead, architects Richard Hunt, McKim McMeand White and from Chicago, e.g. architects William Le Baron Jenny and Louis Sullivan. Although the Fair was followed by a Depression with little building activity, its success, and Burnham’s was not forgotten; it became the flagship for Burnham’s abilities and for the movement named the City Beautiful, in 1902, after Burnham’s successful appointment to head the McMillan Committee for the redevelopment of central Washington. Posterity has said little ill about Burnham. ‘His deep voice, charm, courtly manner, and erect posture were important business assets.’¹⁶ Above all Burnham was an astute manager of men. Louis Sullivan, speaking of the Fair, described Burnham’s ‘remarkable executive capacity. He became open-minded, just, magnanimous. He did his great share.’¹⁷ At the beginning of the twentieth century Burnham was the most successful architect and town planner in Chicago with the largest practice, employing 150 architects at its peak, and operating from other American cities and overseas.

Frank Lloyd Wright recalled in his autobiography that after Daniel Burnham saw the Winslow House¹⁸ ‘Uncle Dan’ offered to take care of his wife and children while he studied at the Ecole des Beaux Arts for four years, Rome for two years, all expenses paid with a job awaiting his return. Wright replied it was too late, that he had been too close to Mr. Sullivan, and he has Burnham say: ‘The Fair, Frank, is going to have a great influence in our country. The American people have seen the classics on a grand scale for the first time. You’ve seen the success of the Fair and it should mean something to you too. We should take advantage of the Fair.’ Wright acknowledged the temptation and his own fear that the Fair would prevail but his final word was that ‘I should never care for myself after that.’¹⁹
This story of Frank Lloyd Wright's tells of the polarization of ideas - Sullivan’s and Burnham’s - created in Chicago in the aftermath of the Fair. A movement identified with the improvement of basic amenities and, in its more lofty aspirations, with the civilizing impact of culture on raw, unsophisticated even lawless environments, it became associated with the architectural and planning elements of neoclassicism, formality and vista. These elements were present at the Fair and would become identified with Burnham and the City Beautiful Movement. While by and large it had noble aims, it also favoured the interests of the ‘big end of town.’ Sullivan identified neoclassicism with self aggrandizement and greed, feudalistic tendencies in American democracy opposed to the development of true democracy and democratic American architecture.

Writing fifty years ago, Mark Peisch admired the Fair and thought that ‘For Griffin and other members of the New School of the Midwest such as Purcell and Garden, the Columbian Exposition was an unforgettable and positive experience’. Peisch noted that the architectural school at the University of Illinois had a large collection of photos and drawings of important structures of the World's Columbian Exposition and that the German Planning Journal Der Stadtebau wrote on the similarity of Griffin’s Canberra plan and the plan of the Chicago Exposition, presumably referring to the Court of Honor and the Basin. The use of water coursing in lagoons and ponds is one of the most striking features of the environment of the Fair. Griffin always loved water.

Figure 2: THE COURT OF HONOR, From Paul Reid (2002)
What other aspects of the Fair could have attracted Griffin’s interest? Apart from the neoclassical formal architectural contributions there was the more naturalistic, transcendental approach to landscape which was preferred by Frederick Law Olmsted (1822-1903).
There was a great deal to be gained from the experience of the Fair for a well read, serious, young, aspiring town planner like Griffin. But whatever the benefits of his observations they did not encourage him after graduation to look for work in Burnham’s office, not even when that office was redesigning central Washington.\(^{21}\)

The Chicago landscape architects Horace W.S. Cleveland (1814 – 1900), Ossian Simonds (1855-1931) whom Griffin consulted regarding his career, and Jens Jensen (1860-1951), the Danish landscape architect who began practicing in Chicago in the 1890s, preferred indigenous plant material and naturalistic design to the replication of European landscape design. In 1869, Olmsted had laid out and supervised a town plan for Riverside, a village outside Chicago. His plan related to the meandering course of the Des Plaines River which winds through the town and was an informal plan in contrast to the characteristic grid pattern of many other Chicago suburbs. Griffin knew the area.

Olmsted believed in the restorative, recreative aspects of parks and, in planning the landscape of the Fair, sought to keep the Wooded Isle free of exhibition buildings and their hallmark neoclassicism and civic grandeur; the naturalesque of the Wooded Isle was graced only with the traditional Japanese pavilion, the Ho-o-den, its architecture influencing Wright\(^{22}\) and other young Chicago architects. Mahony wrote ‘…the influence of the Japanese, who had exhibited at Chicago’s first World’s Fair, was being felt among a number of the young Chicago architects.’\(^{23}\) The Midway Plaisance, laid out to Olmsted’s vision, with long vistas and avenues of trees and linking Washington and Jackson Parks served as the amusements centre for the Fair. Griffin, in his last years of high-school, made many trips to the construction site and watched the dredging of the canals and lagoons; Ralph and Walter Griffin went to the Fair together, Ralph Griffin recalling to Mark Peisch the Ferris Wheel, invented for the Fair.\(^{24}\)

In landscape, the ideas of Frederick Law Olmsted were more democratic in their treatment of the public realm and more suited to life in harmony with nature than the civic grandeur of the exhibition buildings introduced around the water-court. The ‘Court of Honor’ is attributed in concept to Burnham’s partner, John Root, who died before he could make any further contribution to its architectural character. Montgomery Schuyler felt that

‘The landscape-plan is the key to the pictorial success of the Fair as a whole, and we say it generated the architecture of the water-court by supplying indications which sensitive architects had no choice but to follow. In no point was the skill of Mr.
Olmsted and his associate more conspicuous than in the transition from the symmetrical and stately treatment of the basin to the irregular winding of the lagoon.²⁵

The understanding of form in land planning, the transition from formalized geometry to naturalesque restorative beauty and the inspirational beauty of nature were characteristic of Griffin's creative abilities in landscape architecture. In considering the Fair as a formative influence on Griffin²⁶, it is reasonable to deduce that the work and philosophy of Olmsted influenced Griffin. Connection with Olmsted's contribution to the Fair is supported by Griffin's chosen post graduate path to Steinway Hall, rather than to Daniel Burnham; and it is seen later in the Canberra plan, particularly in the enlivenment of the Plaissance or Prospect Parkway, and recreational parks with functional purposes for the daily gathering of people. The impressive formality of the Fair’s Court of Honor, with buildings around a formal pond has frequently been identified as the model for the Government Group in Canberra, which Griffin assembled and gave the same name. Montgomery Schuyler's interpretation of the design-integrating power of a body of water was perhaps the strength of the connection for Griffin. A Fair metaphor was not intended in Griffin’s Court of Honor— which was supposed to have its ‘own proper grandeur’ rather than be a ‘caricature’²⁷— for in Canberra’s case there was a specific functional requirement for civic iconography democratically expressed, in a cohesive, dignified group focused on Parliament House. In Griffin’s design, modern reinforced concrete buildings, organized in a formal assembly around water, celebrated the honour of democratic representation in government. Similarly the Capitol as the climax of the Government Group has been linked with the City Beautiful, but architecturally it specifically denied neoclassicism with ‘a stepped pinnacle treatment in lieu of the inevitable dome’.²⁸ It was aligned with natural termini and was intended to focus the city on the ideals of democracy, and emanate them to the nation. The ideology of the City Beautiful Movement was incompatible with organic planning in regard to the latter’s emphasis on democratic idealism and the relationship of design to the natural world.

Griffin also saw Sullivan’s polychromatic Transportation building with the celebrated golden door entrance, the Ho-o- Den, and the Turkish exhibition building - non classical pavilions which were to provide later inspiration for young architects. Certainly the Ho-o-den can be associated with the strong interest in the traditional Japanese forms exhibited by the Prairie School.
For the Transportation building Sullivan sought an architectural expression suited to an exhibition building – the building itself as an exhibit in colours of deep red and polychromatic gradations to gold. It was one of his celebrated buildings – but was equally criticised. Whatever Griffin thought about the Fair at the time, as he matured he retained in positive terms what he learned from Olmstead and the landscaping of the Fair.
Sullivan’s City: Architectural students of that era were aware of Sullivan and Root as the design partners of Chicago’s two major firms. By the time Griffin commenced his architectural course (1895) Root had died and Burnham was employing new talent; and by the time Griffin graduated (1899) Burnham was designing major buildings in the East as well as the Mid-West and specializing in city plans.

Adler & Sullivan gained international fame from the Auditorium Building - its tower, the hotel, and the magnificent auditorium with its polychromatic interiors and famous acoustics. At the time when Griffin was a young architect, attendance at a performance at the Auditorium would have ensured a night to remember for any Chicagoan. Sullivan managed to eclipse all advances in commercial architecture with his architectonic development of the tall office building. Griffin had only to walk around the Loop to see some of Sullivan's major buildings – e.g., the Walker Warehouse (1888), the Auditorium Building (1886-90), the Schiller Building (1891-92) and the Chicago Stock Exchange (1893-94).

Outside Chicago, famous Sullivan buildings such as the Wainwright Building in St Louis (1890-91) and the Guaranty Building in Buffalo (1894-96) were photographed for the architectural magazines. Griffin probably saw the Wainwright and the Union Trust Building (1892-93) when he went to St Louis for the Fair in 1904.

The night life of Chicago was brightened by Sullivan’s major theatre interiors – the Central Music Hall (1880) Hooley’s Theatre (1882), the Mc Vickers theatre redecorated in 1890, the Auditorium Theatre 1900 and the Schiller Theatre (1902). During the recovery in the years following the 1893 depression, the contrast between Sullivan’s buildings and the trend for neoclassic buildings was striking. Burnham and many Chicago architects were building in the neoclassical style; only Sullivan and increasingly fewer of the Chicago Progressives were eschewing eclecticism. Even before 1901 when he learned to ‘read’ architecture, through Kindergarten Chats Griffin would have observed and seen clearly the unmistakable differences in expression and meaning – as must Mahony.

Architectural Education in the Mid West

Marion Lucy Mahony went to Boston for her architectural education. In 1894 she became the second woman to graduate in architecture from M.I.T. Apparently she disliked the academic stance at M.I.T., modelled on the Beaux Arts and European styles of architecture, but excelled in drawing.
In the 1890s Louis Sullivan became increasingly interested in the education of the architectural profession and was very active in professional organisations and organisations related to the arts in Chicago. But Sullivan’s ‘educators’ were experience and nature, not academic schools. In 1893 a new possibility for education in architecture opened up at the now the Illinois Institute of Technology, under the name, The Chicago School of Architecture; with 2-year and 4-year architecture degree programs. The man appointed Dean was Louis Millet, one of Sullivan’s closest friends from his student days at the Ecole des Beaux Arts – but there appears to have been no association with Sullivan’s ideas on organic architecture. Griffin did not elect to attend this school and instead of seeking admission to a private eastern school Griffin characteristically elected to study at the state’s public land-grant institution, the University of Illinois.

Walter’s course at the University of Illinois 1895-1899 bore the stamp of Nathan Ricker. In the beginning, the school, the second in America, established after M.I.T., was very poorly equipped and Ricker had to translate books from French and German. When Griffin arrived about twenty years later in 1895, architecture was located in the engineering building and Ricker was Dean of Engineering and Chairman of the Department of Architecture. Ricker’s own architectural education and his teaching practices were based on the Bauakademie in Berlin, where he undertook a special course to prepare himself for his responsibilities as Dean. German methods were the foundation of Griffin’s education; none of the staff at
Illinois had received training at the Ecole. Architectural theory was not integrated with the practical courses in heating and ventilation, surveying, building materials and construction – which were given emphasis. Griffin took Architectural Composition which emphasized proportions, examining proportion in the most important styles, and plan arrangements. He took two courses with the Department of Horticulture – landscape gardening, which was treated as fine art, and Forestry.³³

‘Griffin’s interesting city planning was not even touched upon at Illinois. At that time in America, the literature in the field was largely in the nature of pamphlets supporting the ‘City-Beautiful Movement’. The preparation he received for the role of city planner resulted from his avid interest in the field and was obtained after his graduation from architectural school.’ ³⁴ This statement by Mark Peisch contradicts Marion’s statements, made publicly in 1938, that Griffin organized the first ever course in town planning at Illinois. Is Marion correct and Peisch’s research imperfect? Or was Marion bolstering Walter’s credentials?

Griffin’s education gives substance to his interest in the developments of modern architecture in Europe, particularly in Germany. At Nathan Ricker’s school of architecture, German thought was a formative influence and it is reasonable to assume that Ricker kept his school in touch with the advances in German architecture such as the publication in 1895 of Otto Wagner’s *Moderne Arkitektur*, followed in 1898, the year before Griffin’s graduation, with *Aus der Wagnerschule*. Technical and social realities (Otto Wagner) became allied with the anti-academic art movement (Olbrich, Hoffman, Klimt) illustrated by the seminal Secession Building (1898) in Vienna, by architect Josef Maria Olbrich. This was completed in the year before Griffin’s graduation. The German influence of modernity and practicality and the landscape ideas of Olmsted and Simmonds were the ideas Griffin fostered prior to his encounter with Louis Sullivan. [It is interesting, but probably of less consequence, to note the German connection in the mentality of both Griffin and Sullivan; that Sullivan, born of Irish and Swiss German parentage, in his youth embraced German culture – the ideas of German philosophers and the music of Richard Wagner- and partnership with Dankmar Adler, a German Jew.]

Dustin Griffin provides researched information on Griffin’s reading material. ³⁵ It includes several authors now accessed only through library archives, but the notable authors include as well as Henry George, Herbert Spencer and Louis Sullivan. The material included social and architectural history by Carpenter and Fergusson, Sullivan’s theory, George’s social economics and it seems whatever he could find on the planning of cities. Griffin’s writings reveal him to have been well versed, making his own critical analyses, in ancient and
historic city plans. He attended Patrick Geddes lectures in Chicago in 1900, admired Ebenezer Howard and refers himself to the work of German planners. Dustin Griffin acknowledges Sullivan as Griffin's most important intellectual influence.

The reason that the encounter with Sullivan was so life changing for Griffin was that Sullivan's theory for a modern, organic, democratic architecture rang true with Griffin's own ideas for land planning, social economics and democracy and with his admiration for practical, modern architecture. Sullivan's architecture had a controlling basis in geometry and was bold and powerful in its expression of geometric form. Griffin characteristically retained tight geometric forms with emphasis, not on horizontality but on cubic proportions and the visual transfer of mass to the ground, an aesthetic preference probably formed by his student exposure to early European modernism. This was the aesthetic foundation for Griffin's own individual architecture.

Steinway Hall and ‘The Young man in Architecture’

Dwight Perkins needed assistance with the working drawings for a new 12-storey office building for the Steinway Piano Company in Van Buren Street. When his cousin Marion Lucy Mahony arrived back in Chicago, newly graduated from Perkin's (and Sullivan's) alma mater, the Boston M.I.T. she got the job. Perkins had not been long in his own practice after working for Burnham & Root. When Steinway Hall was completed he took up offices in the loft, with a number of like-minded architects who formed a community of professional friends, pooling their resources and helping each other out with work. The loft provided Frank Lloyd Wright with an economic downtown address, even for a few years after he set up his studio at Oak Park. Marion left Dwight Perkins’ office in Steinway Hall in 1895. She joined Wright, first in the Schiller Building and then at Oak Park and was not again part of the Steinway Hall scene until she joined Von Holst in 1909. When Walter Griffin graduated he worked for Perkin’s on a part time basis and ‘as needs’ for the other architects working from the loft. In 1900 Griffin is listed as occupying Suite 1107 in the Steinway Building with Webster Tomlinson, Birch Long and Robert Spencer.
The architects of Steinway Hall were very active in the Chicago Architectural Club whose main concern was architectural design. The club was founded in 1885. Von Holst, club secretary in 1899, described the club’s objective ‘the development of an unaffected school of modern architecture in America which will change more and more from a vision to a reality.’ Over the years regular design competitions, exhibitions of projects and photographs of completed work were organized. Sullivan and Burnham were listed as honorary patrons and Sullivan’s name appeared frequently as either a contributor or judge/jury member. Expertise in draftsmanship was a prerequisite for exhibiting and exhibitions of architectural renderings such as by Birch Long, Wright’s original renderer with a Japanese technique, took part. (Birch Long won a traveling scholarship and on return went to New York.) Griffin joined the Club in 1900 – but did not excel in draftsmanship. Marion was never a member and regardless of her ability never exhibited her own work in this all male establishment. Until 1911 exhibitions were dominated by the Chicago Progressives; after that they begin to show the strong influence of the City Beautiful, and reverted to the traditional styles that had returned to favour.

The seriously active representatives of the Chicago Architectural Club formed the Architectural League of America. The heroes of the League, for their exemplary work, were Louis Sullivan in Chicago and Ernest Flagg in New York (architect of the Singer Loft on Broadway). The hiatus for the Chicago Club and the League was the Leagues second
convention, held in Chicago in June 1900, with Louis Sullivan as guest speaker at the concluding banquet. Griffin, a serious adjunct to the Steinway Hall Progressives, attended and was ‘won for life’ by Sullivan’s address to ‘The Young Man in Architecture’.

Attending the Convention, Griffin was in the audience at Fullerton Hall in the Art Institute of Chicago when Frank Lloyd Wright paid his tribute to the ‘master’ and when Sullivan rose, under ‘continued and continued applause’,\(^{39}\) to address the audience with some impromptu thoughts. His most potent remarks focused on the search for the source of inspiration to be found in the balance and rhythms of nature. ‘What we find in nature we find precisely in the human mind’.\(^{40}\) Griffin was also present for the address to \textit{The Young Man in Architecture} delivered by Sullivan at the closing banquet.\(^{41}\) It was held in the magnificent Banquet Hall of Adler & Sullivan’s Auditorium Building (Fig. 10; now Ganz Hall Fig. 11).
Griffin later commented on Sullivan’s calm presence and the beauty of his language but the message itself resonated with an independence of mind and fresh ideas to which Griffin was entirely sympathetic. Those ideas included the practice of architecture as an art and not strictly as a commercial pursuit; architecture not as a moribund repetition of past styles but a new opportunity for individual creativity; the concepts of organic architecture, for which Sullivan explained the process of design using the metaphor of a plant, its growth from a tiny seed to its full fruition; the power of the human mind, properly trained; the social injustices of democracy tainted by feudalism; and finally the challenge to the young architect to take responsibility for the creation of an architecture to interpret the material wants and psychic aspirations of an unfolding democracy.

Griffin was ripe for the message. Added to his own love for nature and his compatible views on social justice was his personal ambition to design the Federal Capital for one of the world’s newest democracies. That ambition would be for a country he understood to be of advanced social achievements, provided that its states continued on their path to Federation and he was given the opportunity in competition. A little more than 6 months later, the Australian States confederated, with the need for a new Federal Capital written into the Constitution, and Griffin began to watch the journals for the announcement of a Competition.

Griffin was certainly aware of what Sullivan stood for before the League Convention. In addition to the experience of Sullivan’s buildings, Sullivan had published 12 essays prior to 1900 in various architectural and technical magazines. His seminal paper *The Tall Office Building Artistically Considered* 1896 with the famous dictum *Form Follows Function* was published when Griffin was a student and so widely discussed that he surely read it then. Given Sullivan’s impact and Griffin’s developed reading habit, it is reasonable to suppose that he read everything that Sullivan published (as far back as *Essay on Inspiration* (1886) including technical papers) and attended Sullivan’s lectures wherever he could. There is confirmation of this in an essay by Marion entitled *Louis Sullivan – Griffin his Successor*. She wrote:

‘Mr. Griffin says: - “Louis Sullivan probably broke away from the old traditions when he left the Beaux Arts, if not before. He made his first declaration, presented his thesis in 1884 when he read his “Inspiration” before an assembly of brother craftsmen. Since that time he has been he recognized leader in the effort of the best and brightest among the profession to “draw the thing as he sees it for the God of things as they are”, though it was not until 1893 that a broad, illuminating and
progressive conception of his art was forced upon the attention of the world by his Transportation Building with its polychromatic doorway at the Columbian Exposition.

The public is at last realizing the logic of the principles for which Mr. Sullivan laboured [sic] and which the best among those of lesser years and fresh enthusiasm have sought to develop.... It does mean that a majority of those who believe that “form should follow function” and the “Progress should go before precedent” have good ground for so believing.... Vitally active, and sanely pursued in the Middle West of the United States, it is also the inspiring motive on its Western border, and on the continent from Finland to Buda-Pest, it is the source of the most interesting architectural work.”

Mark Peisch called Sullivan an ‘enigmatic figure’ and’ the intellectual head of the Chicago School’. Peisch says that Hugh Garden in 1912 called Sullivan ‘the founder of the prairie school’. Griffin characterized Sullivan as ‘the true exponent of democratic architecture’ according to Peisch’s interview with Ralph Griffin, St Louis May 20 1955. From his interviews some fifty years ago when people familiar with those events were still around, Peisch formed the view:

‘Sullivan was not an unapproachable person. He lectured to the younger members of Chicago’s architectural profession, sometimes formally at the Chicago Architectural Club, more often on an informal basis in the lofts of the Steinway Building where he was a frequent visitor. It was there that Griffin met Sullivan in 1900 and formed a friendship with him.45

During that year of 1900 Griffin was involved with the work of Perkins and Spencer followers of Sullivan, and, in the latter half, strongly influenced by Sullivan’s address to The Young Man in Architecture. Sullivan must have given Griffin a typescript of this address, for he carried it around with him. (Even to Australia, where it is part of the Eric Nicholls Collection held at the National Library of Australia.) Early in 1901 Kindergarten Chats began serialization, offering the opportunity for a year long ‘post graduate’ course, retraining the mind with Nature, and Sullivan, as teacher.

This was a new way of thinking about architecture, modeled on creation in nature and based on democratic human needs not privileged sectional interests. When Griffin learned to ‘read’ buildings as the student did in Chats he had Sullivan’s buildings all around, to test the theory in the way Sullivan put it to practice. In Kindergarten Chats, Sullivan threw out the challenge, partly to himself, partly to the younger generation of architects: ‘Current ideas concerning
democracy are so vague and so shapeless, that the man who shall clarify and define, who shall interpret, create and proclaim in the image of Democracy’s fair self will be the destined man of the hour; the man of all time.’

Griffin at the Oak Park Studio.
Marion Mahony went from Dwight Perkin’s office to join Wright’s young practice in the Schiller Building ‘as superintendent of a non-existent drafting force’ in 1895, just prior to the completion of Steinway Hall. Wright’s Oak Park studio, an extension to his home was completed in 1898.

Figure 12: The K.C. De Rhodes House Indiana (1906). Drawing signed M.L.M. with Frank Lloyd Wright’s acknowledgement of his debt to Hiroshige added some years later.

from Kevin Nute (1993)

The shy tomboyish girl became ‘the spectacular fiery creature’ with a ‘mordant humour’ who was intellectually able and articulate, a sounding board for Frank Lloyd Wright’s public lectures and the most highly valued member of his staff. Most likely Wright’s famous Hull House address, The Art and Craft of the Machine (1901) was sounded out in the Oak Park Studio. 47
Griffin went to Oak Park to help out Wright in 1901 on a part time basis, probably through their mutual friends at Steinway Hall. Marion recalled her first impressions of Griffin’s professional abilities in her essay *Architecture and Town Planning Inseparable: The Importance of Location on a Lot*. Her first encounter with Griffin’s ideas on landscape architecture, was with Griffin’s suggestions to Wright for the redesign of the Thomas House (1901), which she names as the first example of ‘how Griffin revolutionised the work’ at Oak Park. The analysis she describes employs Sullivan’s organic design principles, the solution arising from the essence of the problem:

‘The power of conscientious consideration of all the elements of a problem was brought home to me when I saw the revolution in methods and results that took place when landscape was made part of architecture…… Not only natural conditions but the character of the surrounding buildings have [sic] sometimes to be taken
advantage of, sometimes to be overcome. And we must consider not the more personal point only but must look to the advantage of everyone affected, for it is curiously true that if a thing is to be real and permanent, advantage to one must be an advantage to everyone. … Human society is an organism, and the individual can benefit only from what is of benefit to all since all are interdependent as root and branch and flower and fruit tree.  

Griffin’s critique of Wright’s design for the Thomas house and the changes Griffin proposed were accepted and built, for Griffin’s design properly evaluated the site conditions and found a better solution, which Wright had overlooked. The site was overlooked by 2-storey flats on one side, but was opposite a lovely neighbourhood wooded park. Wright had placed his design to the rear of the block, leaving the home garden dominated by the flats. Griffin suggested replanning the house in an L-shape and raising the basement out of the ground sufficiently so that the projecting arm of the L would be of sufficient height to screen the unattractive flats and prevent them overlooking the site. The living rooms would be elevated above the eyes of the passer-by and they would overlook the front gardens and the park in privacy. Stairs and service areas were located where no outlook was necessary. This is now considered one of the best of the early Prairie Houses.

Griffin’s critique, probably without much in the way of sketching, illustrates his analytical abilities, his appreciation of 3-dimensional space in the landscape and his power, even as a young architect, to think clearly in 3-dimensions and communicate his ideas. Wright evidently thought so for he took him on ‘according to Mark Peisch’s interview with Marion in June 1957, on a full-time basis in 1902."
In 1902 there were three architects at Oak Park Studio: Marion Mahony, graduate of M.I.T. and in 1898 licensed in accordance with the world’s first licensing law and examination to practice architecture; Walter Griffin, graduate of the University of Illinois and licensed under the same law and examination in 1901; and Frank Lloyd Wright principal of the firm, server of an approximately 1-year apprenticeship with Professor Conover, an engineer, with an approximately 7-year apprenticeship /employment with Louis Sullivan and licensed in 1898 as a practising architect under a ‘grandfather’ clause. In 1908, shortly before the studio was disbanded and closed, Wright listed the following members of the group: ‘Marion Mahony, a capable assistant for eleven years, William Drummond for seven years, Barry Byrne five years, Isabel Roberts five years, Walter Griffin four years.’

Oak Park was an atelier styled architectural practice in contrast to Daniel Burnham’s office where gangs of draftsmen were employed. Symbolised by the entrance motifs (Marion’s design), the Oak Park Studio was a place for learning through practicing architecture, reflecting the belief in learning from experience Wright shared with Sullivan and reinforced in his apprenticeship with Sullivan. It was democratic, promoting the interchange of ideas, creative experimentation and based on the theory of organic architecture Wright had imbibed from Sullivan. According to Barry Byrne, Wright and Griffin frequently discussed design and it seems they had a democratic rather than hierarchical relationship at Oak Park, to their mutual benefit. Griffin described himself as Wright’s associate.

In 1902 Griffin began work on a private commission - a substantial house, the Emery House (1902) for an old school friend. Griffin was 24. The house shows some of Griffin’s design preferences: the gable roof with ‘tent’ ceiling, sometimes, as with this house, with tapered eaves at the gable end; solid masonry corners strengthened by piers capped at the upper sill line, giving the house solid anchorage to the ground. The house was innovative in exploring the character of space - internal spatial definition and connections with different levels and indoor outdoor spatial connections. It showed influences from the Steinway Hall experience, elements from the general interest in Japanese architecture and perhaps Wright, but also an independent mind.
Probably what Wright needed an extra architect for was looking ahead to the supervision of construction of the Larkin Company Administration Building at Buffalo, New York.

Mahony in her essay *Architecture and Town Planning Inseparable: The Importance of Location on a Lot* wrote ‘The first office building of this office and partnership got the same town planning treatment.’ [as the Thomas House] and refers to:

‘...his creative capacity satisfied with nothing short of perfection was masterly and had a dominating and revolutionary effect on the work of the office of F.L. Wright with whom he entered partnership in the early days of that office, as illustrated by the dwelling of Mr. Little in Oak Park and the Larkin Building in Detroit.’

The design concept was based on response to its site located beside the railway, trafficked with steam trains from New York Central. Wright describes the building as ‘a simple cliff of
brick hermetically sealed (one of the first “air-conditioned” buildings in the country) to keep the interior space clear of the poisonous gases in the smoke from the New York Central trains that puffed along beside it.’ It has been remarked that Griffin continued to draw from the aesthetics of the Larkin Building in his own work. It could possibly be that he contributed to those aesthetics - the form which was a direct response to the site conditions? This experience was very early in Griffin’s career – but it is also evident in the Emery House (1902 -3) that Griffin had an early inclination towards strong expression of form.

While Griffin was at Oak Park Sullivan published Education (1902) in the Inland Architect and News Record XXIX June 1902. He was confident that change to a scientific attitude of mind would bring an organic trend of thinking which boded well for democracy. This paper was a call for the young generation to be ready. In 1903 he published an essay on the Substructure of the New Schlesinger & Mayer Store Building, Chicago, which must have been of interest to Griffin and Wright and discussed at Oak Park, for its technical interest as well as design. The store had Sullivan’s famous efflorescence of ornament at the ground floor, particularly extravagant around the corner entrance, but the upper facades were unadorned and in decades following were quoted as supreme examples of twentieth century modern architecture.

Griffin was always interested in basic economy houses. Marti Madre has photographed the first house that Wright is said to have completely entrusted to Griffin, the Robert Lamp House in Madison (1903). As Griffin designed it, this house was a simple cube with plain rendered wall surfaces, a roof parapet and roof garden. The living dining was an open plan around a central fireplace. An addition has since replaced the roof garden. This house, The Fireproof House for $5000, published in Wright’s name in 1907 in the Ladies Home Journal, and the Peter’s House, the first house Griffin designed on leaving Wright’s office, are very similar, using the cube, very typically Griffin and unlike any house designed by Wright.53

In 1904 Griffin was finishing off as ‘an outside man’ for Wright, supervising the construction of the Larkin Building. Griffin from his early days of architectural practice at Oak Park Studio (and afterwards) introduced many innovative ideas involving site analysis, plan forms, space relationships, and the use of modules for planning and design, besides technical innovations. In 1904 Wright completed an important house, the Susan Lawrence Dana House in Springfield Illinois. It uses the forms preferred by Griffin – the gable roof with tapered ends and flattened eaves and the solid corners capped at the level of the upper floor windows. Inside it Wright used light fittings designed by Griffin for the Emery House. The roof forms of the Emery House appear in Wright’s Beachy House (1906), to which
Griffin is thought to have contributed 54, and are used again in his own practice in the Carter House (1910). The Gable roof was linked with the solid corner.

In March 1905 Wright and his wife Catherine took a 3-months trip to Japan and Griffin managed Wright’s Oak Park practice.

When, in 1905, Sullivan proclaimed the image of Democracy’s fair self in his essay *Natural Thinking: A Study in Democracy* delivered at the Chicago Architectural Club, it was a very important occasion for Griffin. It is a much longer paper than *The Young Man in Architecture* and must have been a long lecture. It provides a full discourse on Sullivan’s arguments on the development of democracy and man’s powers to overcome the primitive forces of feudalism. Democracy stands for self governing, free, creative “man” as opposed to “man” fearful and demoralized by external power structures. The paper treats the subject of democracy as ‘natures law for man’ affirming the value of the individual and the moral perspective. It relates this philosophy to the need for its expression in architecture and stresses the need for education. It laid the foundation of the idealism Griffin sought to express with the Capitol as focus of an organic plan in the 1911 Competition for Australia’s Federal Capital.


Griffin was 4 years full time with Wright. He had proven he could take the responsibility of practice and had matured with experience – even his first love affair, with Maginel Wright, who married someone else. His experience with Wright encouraged Griffin to return to Steinway Hall to set up his own practice.

**Griffin’s Practice at Steinway Hall**

At the end of 1905 Walter Griffin returned to Steinway Hall, this time on his own in the loft vacated by Dwight Perkins. After Sullivan’s address at the Chicago Club, *Natural Thinking: A Study in Democracy*, it is likely that Griffin saw more of Sullivan, and that he read and discussed Sullivan’s latest papers which were now focussed on the quality of American democracy and its reflection in the creative work of the architectural profession. *What is Architecture? A Study in the American People of Today* (1906) was originally published in the January issue of *American Contractor* before Sullivan revised it for *The Craftsman*. At this time, from 1905 – 1908, Sullivan, close by in the Auditorium Tower, was working on
Democracy a Man-Search, a revision of Natural Thinking: A Study in Democracy for a more
general readership than the architectural profession. It is reasonable to suppose that
Sullivan, who habitually walked for exercise, may have strolled over from the Auditorium
Tower to read drafts to the architects in the loft at Steinway Hall.

Griffin began his practice in 1906 with a contract to landscape the Northern Illinois State
Normal School and a house for his brother Ralph. The Ralph Griffin house (1909) used the
gable and solid pier forms of the Emery House, with references typical of Griffin’s
independent style. But it is not until the solid rock house in 1911 that the breakthrough came
for Griffin’s mature architectural expression. He was also reading widely on city planning,
watching the professional journals for the announcement of a competition for the Australian
Federal Capital and developing new innovative ideas and diagrams to solve the inherent
problems of the radial and the grid for ‘Communication and occupation’.

Sullivan’s major published work on Democracy, Democracy A man-Search was refused
publication and was not published until 1957. Sullivan’s portrait of the ‘fair face of
democracy’ this refusal was a tremendous disappointment for him. In 1909 he published a
short paper entitled Is Our Art a Betrayal Rather than an Expression of American Life? It
was his last on these themes until his final works, the revision of Kindergarten Chats into
book form in 1918, the ‘System of Ornament: A System of Architectural Ornament:
According with a Philosophy of Man’s Powers’ (1922-1924) for the Burnham Library and
and with undisguised problems with alcohol during the construction of the Bradley House
(1909-10).

In 1909 Sullivan did not have sufficient work or funds to retain George Elmslie, who left
Sullivan to set up his own practice. Sullivan’s wife had left him and lack of work and
indebtedness forced him to sell his library and personal collections, then finally his beloved
retreat and rose garden at Ocean Springs at Biloxi Bay on the Mississippi coastline. He
moved out of the Auditorium tower to a lower floor office on Wabash Avenue.
The series of rural banks were his last testament to his strength as a creative architect. In the use of universal forms, forms and the family of details which express the functional requirements and the essential idea, the banks provide an honest democratic expression of American architecture. What a contrast they provide with the classical aesthetics applied as the general trend!

William J Steel was a draftsman for Sullivan during the latter years of his practice. He described Sullivan:

‘To us who knew and believed in Louis Sullivan and who followed his colorful and romantic career, it has not been easy to interpret him in any but tragic terms. Here was this gifted man, this genius, immensely capable, ready to do what was needed to be done in a complete and powerful way – yet we saw him ignored when he was not ridiculed.’ ‘…just before the end… a shadow of the powerfully built, broad-chested athlete of former days, but a quietly triumphant old man, who nightly sat at a table in the Cliff Dwellers Club writing what was to be his literary masterpiece’ [The Autobiography of an Idea 1924]  

Sullivan’s passionate, vociferous stance against the acceptance of classical revival architecture by the architectural profession was the reason for his rejection. He was against the tide. Neoclassicism and, later, other styles like the revival of American Colonialism were favoured by business men and their wives and the architectural profession was anxious to be their provider. Alcoholism towards the end became painfully obvious to Sullivan’s friends– ‘when he was without funds he would go to the Steinway Building… Dwight Perkins frequently had to refuse the illustrious beggar funds which he would drink up.’
In Collaboration with Marion Mahony

By 1909 Walter Griffin was collaborating with Marion Mahony. She had come to Steinway Hall as the design architect for Von Holst in an arrangement committed to the completion of the work which Frank Lloyd Wright had abandoned when he left his wife and six children for the love of Mameh Cheney, (Cheney House 1904) with whom he departed Chicago for a sojourn in Europe. Marion’s business arrangement with Von Holst was:

‘...that she should have complete control of design. Thus it was recognised that creative work can spring from one mind only, who must have full authority and final decision in all matters of design and construction.’

Apparently Von Holst retained client contact, for Marion explained the better method employed by Griffin, where:

‘it would be necessary for the designer to have the contact with the client to be able to mould his mind in the give and take so necessary in the solution of a problem where the client always wants more that he wants to pay for.’

This was the arrangement Marion entered into with Walter.

Then Marion began to see in Walter ‘the man himself’. In Magic of America the Autobiography of Xantippi [sic] tells the charming tale of Xanthippe’s courtship of Socrates.

She begins:

‘When after a sufficiently long period of patience, Xantippi [sic] put the suggestion to him that he would have to find his woman sometime, that he couldn’t expect his mother and sisters to take care of him forever – both Xantippi and Socrates were in their thirties – he agreed that this was quite true but that though he quite recognized the spiritual and intellectual bond between themselves, he didn’t feel the need of her. He always did pride himself on what he called honesty. You see he had had his first love affair with a beautiful and charming young woman [Maginel Wright] and in the face of the two alternatives between which men customarily chose after such an experience, he did not hurry into affairs with other women but set aside the idea of woman.’
Marion had invited Walter to spend a camping weekend at her brother’s place on the banks of the St. Joe River. There she saw Griffin’s love for water and ‘with the wisdom of the serpent’ suggested they buy together a canoe and explore some of the nearby streams. ‘Socrates was, in every domain of life, an adventurer and thrilled with the idea of pioneering’ while she says she was simply trying to foster his need for her. She describes the start of the routine which they enjoyed for three years: ‘A strenuous week and Saturday noon arrived and two wicked little runaways dropped their canoe into the Chicago River at the Van Buren Street Bridge.’ Later on they parked “Allana” in the care of farmers and caught the train. ‘So many times they paddled for days with no consciousness of mankind.’ Marion claimed to be constantly amazed by Griffin – his knowledge of the rivers and lakes systems, the flora of the country and the timing of experiences like the blooming of the Egyptian lotus, rare but existent in America since the remote past. She describes exploration of the Fox River and the waters of the Grass Lake and places like ‘the roaring rapids of the lower reaches where Xantippe in the prow had hung in the air over a three foot drop shouting back “We can’t go here! We can’t go here! Only to hear from the stern –“We’ve got to”. And ‘after waking very early in the cold morning to slip down toward the Illinois, they watched veil after veil of the mists rise from the bluffed and forested banks…’ In the Illinois-Michigan canal they passed through regions ‘some of which had doubtless not been seen by man for 50 years or more.’

On one trip ‘... after a rest on a sunny bank while he took a dip in the refreshing stream, Xantippe said “Why don’t I join you in your office?” for Xantippe was well known for her renderings, her presentation work, and the work of Socrates was lying hidden away known only to the immediate clients. Said he -“I never dreamed you would do that” Said she “All right I’ll arrange it”. And so they drew a bit closer together.’
Griffin’s pencil was an experienced architect, of the calibre to finish Wright’s abandoned work. The two Mueller houses at Decatur Illinois designed by Marion at the Von Holst office in June and September 1910 were very much influenced by Frank Lloyd Wright, although the second house has the gable roof form and expressed piers favoured by Griffin. Griffin collaborated with Mahony and Von Holst on landscaping. At the time Marion started drawing for Griffin he returned to the exploration and elaboration of his preferred early forms - the expression of modules based on the square with cubic massing in 3-dimensions, begun with the Lamp and Peters houses and the Fireproof House. The three houses at Winnetka, drawn by Marion, are all variations on elaborations of that theme, using flat roofs, roof gardens and roof terraces. The Solid Rock house (Fig. 20), built of reinforced concrete, was a technical achievement of mature architectural design.

Figure 20: THE SOLID ROCK HOUSE
Pictures from Christopher Vernon (2005)

Moreover Marion’s drawings meant that Griffin could now communicate using outstanding visual representation; he could publish designs which were the original, individual responses to site and functional needs that he was seeking. Surely the main source of enmity for Wright, when he returned from Europe, was that Griffin had taken his most valued assistant. For Marion’s part she claimed to be completely fulfilled by the work in Griffin’s office.
Challenging and idyllic, Marion and Walter’s escapes by canoe were also experiences which corroborated Sullivan’s advice in *Kindergarten Chats*. Pristine nature was the best source for inspiration and preparation of the mind for organic thinking and the release of creativity. That three year period heralded the creativity of the Solid Rock House, Trier and Ridge Triangles, the Canberra Plan, the Rock Crest Rock Glen development, the Comstock Houses, the Stinson Library etc.

They also provided opportunities for the observation of the industrial pollution from towns along the Calumet, the change from pristine beauty to ‘waters thick with the poisonous by-products of the mills’. Griffin intended to use this natural sciences research to construct a community plan for Chicago and its environs, but there intervened the huge event in their lives, the competition for Australia’s Federal Capital.

Marion Mahony’s great gift for communicating other people’s ideas probably hindered the development of her own. Independent as she was, she was never completely artistically free. As Griffin’s need for her grew over the years and she assumed ever greater responsibilities their contributions became increasingly entwined. However, writing of the time in Chicago she said: ‘While I played around with the architect with whom I was working in the picture making business in which we both took such pleasure, Burley Griffin took things more seriously, for there was the same difference between Louis Sullivan and the many who followed him that there was between Griffin and myself. It is one thing to be a painter of lovely pictures. Sullivan thought in terms of construction as did Griffin, inventing and solving problems. New styles arise through the solving of problems for new civilization.’

Paul Sprague discusses Marion’s contribution to Griffin’s mature style and generally refutes ideas which he attributes to H. Allen Brooks and Janice Pregliasco that Marion move to ‘Centre stage’ as the design architect. All the evidence points to Griffin as the design talent in terms of form and idea, with Marion’s contribution in interior detail, as she did for Wright.
Figure 22: THE BLYTHE HOUSE, ROCK CREST ROCK GLEN from Christopher Vernon 92005)

Figure 23: THE MELSON HOUSE, ROCK CREST ROCK GLEN The triumphant merge of house with environment. Photograph by Mati Maldre, taken from reproduction by Anna Rubbo (1998)
The mind set which produced the Capitol,  
The Icon of the ‘Ideal City’

Organic Democracy as a secular religion, liberating the beneficent powers of mankind, provided the overarching structure for Sullivan’s beliefs. He identified the traditional formal religions as feudalistic power structures. Griffin was able to say ‘Democracy is independence of thought’ for the logical mind of a Socrates may have long stripped devotional beliefs to the bare essentials. In relation to Canberra, the most important effect on both Griffins was twofold. Sullivan’s ideas developed and refocused their ideas on democracy. He gave Griffin the understanding of how to use his clear mind and already developed rational thought processes in a commitment to organic unity and the practice of architecture as an individual’s creative art. Sullivan completed his work by passing on his ideas to another generation.

In June 1911 Marion and Walter eloped to get married; after that they lived with Griffin’s family at Elmhurst. In September Marion delivered her ultimatum that if Walter didn’t start that day she would not lift a pencil on the Canberra drawings because there wouldn’t be time to finish them. Walter began to saw wood for the stretchers.

They remained independently minded individuals. It never bothered them that neighbours at Elmhurst thought them a curious couple as they set off for the train, one way in front of the other. Yet their minds and creative spirits were fully united in the performance of their roles and responsibilities for the Canberra Competition. Each brought their own individual skills and both had reached the pinnacle of their beneficent creative powers.

Their testimony to Sullivan’s teachings was their developed creativity, benefiting from the experience and knowledge of the rhythms and processes of nature and the discipline of the organic design process. Like Sullivan’s, their belief in democracy was a belief in a complete values system, which they saw as a natural and universal moral order and source of the spiritual freedom necessary for creativity. They sought solitude and the full impact of nature, at times into wilderness during their canoe adventures and never was there a more creative outpouring than in the nine weeks of preparation of the Federal Capital Competition entry. They presented a unified design in unity with the spirit of the land of a far off country, and with the appearance of effortless simplicity characteristic of the greatest works of art. As the centre piece of the Canberra design, the Capitol was the icon for a uniquely advanced democracy. That any government would accept it was a risk - a risk that they believed in sufficiently to take.
End Notes

1 Griffin, Marion Mahony Magic of America, The Individual Battle from Donald Leslie Johnson papers at the Australian National Library, Box 19, Vol. IIB p. 175.


3 Griffin, Marion Mahony. Magic of America The Individual Battle unpublished; from Donald Leslie Johnson papers at the Australian National Library, Box 20, Vol. IVA, p. 84.

4 Griffin, Marion Mahony. “Male and Female Created He Them” from Donald Leslie Johnson papers Box 19, Vol IVA. From p. 130.

5 Ibid

6 Ibid

7 Ibid


9 Ibid p. 60

10 Ibid p. 61

11 Ibid p. 61


13 Griffin, Marion Mahony. “Childhood of Walter Burley Griffin”, Magic of America, The Individual Battle’ from Donald Leslie Johnson papers Box 19, Vol. IVA. P. 86


15 Descriptive History of Grant Park and Burnham Park, AIA Guide to Chicago.2nd Edition. P.34


18 The Winslow House (1893) by Frank Lloyd Wright, a house which Marion found to have ‘benefited from the discipline of Sullivan’ but also thought by some to have been influenced by the Turkish pavilion at the Fair. It is said to be the first expression of the Prairie style for its external expression of the functions of the plan – the sleeping quarters and living quarters.


21 Years later at the Public Works Committee hearing for the War memorial in Australia Griffin said that the plan of Washington was ‘a different kind of plan’ from Canberra. He was referring to the McMillan plan which was the model for the City Beautiful Movement., building on L’Enfant’s plan and its baroque tradition.


23 Ibid

and


25 Schuyler, Montgomery. ‘Last Words About the World’s Fair’ *Architectural Record* 3, no 3 (January – March 1894) pp.291-301.

26 This argument for Olmsted’s influence on Griffin through the Chicago Fair is supported by Christopher Vernon in his essay “Expressing natural conditions with maximum possibility”; the American landscape art of Walter Burly Griffin *Journal of Garden History*, Vol. 15, no 1, 1995, pp.19-47.

27 Griffin explained this in the Original Report. See under *Public Buildings*.

28 Ibid

29 Price, Nancy. ‘Walter Burley Griffin’ thesis University of Sydney 1933


34 Ibid p.15.


37 Ibid. quotes Chicago Architectural Club catalogue

38 Ibid p. 32.

39 The working session was held in Fullerton Hall (See Van Zanten, David. *Sullivan’s City*, 2000, p. 75), in the Art Institute of Chicago, not far along Michigan Avenue from Adler & Sullivan’s Auditorium Building where Sullivan’s office occupied the upper floor of the tower. Robert Twombly is the source for a description of the occasion with its ambience and excitement. See *Louis Sullivan The Public papers* University of Chicago press 1988 p 126 and *Louis Sullivan: His Life and Work* Viking N.J. 1986 pp 366-367.


41 Griffin’s presence at this address has been remarked upon by most Griffin scholars e.g. Nancy Price, (with Griffin’s endorsement, 1933), James Birrell (1964) Mark L. Peisch (1964) James Weirick ( ) and several others. Price was writing in 1933. At that stage any hopes for the perfection of democracy as Sullivan hoped, and Griffin shared from 1900-1921 would have been shaken by the First World War and more so when America became involved. Griffin’s hope for the organic expression of his ideal for democracy in Canberra ended in 1921 – but then seemed to revive in his comments in the Canberra Annual in 1934. Marion became a theosophist and then a member of the Anthroposophical society in 1930 and Walter joined in 1931 - Wanda Spathopoulos *The Crag* p 313. (Marion left Australia in 1930 – so he joined the Anthroposophists while she was away. Walter went to America in winter 1932; they returned to Sydney together.)


Ibid p 26


Ibid p 166


Standing in front of the house in 2005, with the AIA Guide to Chicago open at the Beachy House, I read: (pp 346,347) ‘The thick lines of the eaves, lintels, and corner piers and the wood-mullioned windows have led to speculation that the talented hand of Wright’s employee Walter Burley Griffin contributed much to the design.’


Ibid p27


CHAPTER 4
THE CAPITOL: THE STRUGGLE FOR AN IDEAL

Walter Burley Griffin’s social idealism provided the stimulus for his intellectual interests, artistic development and grasp of technical practicalities. Self discipline and toughness of mind also formed part of his character and professional repertoire. In town planning his idealism as well as his enviable technical abilities set him apart.

When Griffin gambled with his dream to win the Competition for the design of the Federal Capital of Australia, the Capitol was the signifier of the idealism for which he was prepared to risk all. It was of such immense importance to Griffin that he was prepared to place the entry in the Competition in jeopardy for it, even though to enter had been his cherished dream for many years. It was the profound ‘animus’ for his plan, the energizer of the design development and preparation of the competition drawings.

Griffin confessed a certain surprise at winning the Competition, in that he had not believed any government would accept his design. He said that his design expressed his ideal and inferred that it was unlikely to be an ideal of any government. When he won the Competition he told interviewing journalists:

‘I do not know whether I shall be called to Australia to superintend the construction of the new city. I hope so. I rather expect I shall. It would be only fair to me. There is nobody in the world who can work out my ideas like myself.

I do not know what type of architecture I should adopt. I have planned a city not like any other city in the world. I have planned it not in a way that I expected any governmental authorities in the world would accept. I planned an ideal city- a city that meets my ideal of the city of the future.’

The question was, would the Capitol as animus be accepted by the Australian Government? Winning the competition indicated that it was. Griffin did not know whether he would be invited to take part in the implementation of his plan – the Competition brief had indicated it would be carried out by Government officers. In the New York Times interview he said:

‘I do not know to what extent my plan will be carried out. The Australian authorities may merely adopt my ground plan and fill in the architectural details to suit
themselves. However if my plan is carried out in all its details, I think the Australian capital will be the most beautiful city in history.’

By January 1913 Griffin had received a copy of a plan, which had been approved by the Australian Parliament and published in the press, and which purported to be an amended version of his plan. It so differed from his plan that he was moved, first to write to the Australian authorities, and then to come to Australia.

Chapter Structure

This Chapter is structured as a sequence of events, to charter Griffin’s struggle for his ideal city against the difficulties he encountered with the Australian Government and Commonwealth Bureaucracy. The place of the action moves from Chicago, the setting of the previous chapters, to Australia. The story of Griffin’s struggle is in two parts – the first, Griffin’s visit to Australia in 1913 and the second, his transfer to Australia with Marion to take up his contract with the Government in 1914.

This Chapter deals with Griffin’s visit to Australia in 1913 and its focus is Griffin's vision, the Capitol as signifier. Griffin’s visit to Australia in 1913 concerned the following important events:

The Departmental Board rehashed his 1st premiated plan to produce their own plan which was severely criticized by eminent planners.

This prompted Griffin’ to write to the Minister, King O’Malley, dated January 1913. This is treated as a significant document, establishing Griffin’s idealism as being the basis of his plan and seeking verification that the Government will support that idealism. The letter’s significance includes its explicit reference to the ideas of Louis Sullivan and Griffin’s sense of responsibility for the furtherance of the principles, in organic architecture and planning, developed by Sullivan.

Irreconcilable tensions developed between Griffin’s objectives and those of the Departmental Board; his 1913 plan and ‘Report Explanatory’ are evidence that he tried to incorporate the Boards objections, but without compromising his idealism.
One could say that Griffin won the first round when he was appointed Federal Capital Director of Design and Construction with a three year contract with the Government. The Minister disbanded the Board, intending that the duties of these permanent members of the public service would now include assistance to Griffin.

Griffin’s Prize Winning Design
And The Plan of The Departmental Board.

Having been awarded 1st prize, Griffin thought that the design was understood and accepted by the Australian government and he thought it clear that this was the ‘ideal city’ Australians wanted.

Griffin was somewhat lucky at first, for the Minister with the portfolio for the Federal Capital, King O’Malley, who had the final adjudicative power in the competition, claimed to have been born just sufficiently far north of the U.S. border with Canada to prevent him from becoming President of the United States. He was familiar with American Capitols. In addition, O’Malley’s departmental officers had a preoccupation with Canberra’s westerly winds and preferred Camp Hill, below and sheltered by Mt Kurrajong, as the site for Parliament House. For those officers, the Capitol was a convenient monument, occupying Mt. Kurrajong and sheltering the site for Parliament.
House from westerly winds. At that early stage, no one who adhered to the ideology of Australia as part of Empire appears to have raised any objections to the Capitol on political or ideological grounds. Then it was referred to as a republican idea and as such was still not understood as a specifically democratic and organic idea with individual, societal and environmental values.

The Capitol as focus seems not to have attracted too much attention. The awarding of the Australia’s Federal Capital prize to a young Chicagoan caused a stir in America and Griffin was invited on the rounds of lecture tours and interviews. It is quite surprising to find no record of anyone specifically questioning Griffin, or indeed recording any opinion, about the Capitol. Griffin did not proselytize ideological views on democracy and nature as Sullivan had, although he often referred to and identified with Sullivan’s views, as if they were as well known elsewhere as they were in Chicago.

Figure 2: 1912 PLAN. Reid (2002)

Town planning was a new science and there was great interest in the technical problems Griffin had solved in his plan. Presumably to illustrate the design’s technical advancement for publications and lectures, the 1912 plan, (Figure 2) was prepared in
Griffin’s Chicago studio. It was published in Engineering News, and provides more detail on the practical advantages of the stellar growth centres emanating from the Capitol. Avenues are shown with light rail. The technical advantages of the diagonal lines of communication between centres of occupation could be appreciated in the intersections between the diagonals and the polygonal forms which avoided block subdivisions with acute angles. For Griffin, practicality and idealism were fused together - nothing less than the ideal was practical and art meant ‘doing things right’.

Once in explaining his plan Griffin said

“One of the chief pleasures we get in the contemplation of any work of man is the consciousness that results are intentional. We rejoice in evidence of intelligence.”

Griffin’s Perspective and Objectives: From Chicago, he had viewed Australia as ripe territory for such a fusion of the ideal and the practical. He had noted and admired Australia’s social advances - such as the eight hour day, trade unions and their policies of education for the working man and women’s suffrage. But the social economics of the Australian Governments leasehold land tenure policy for the Australian Capital Territory were particularly attractive to Griffin. Griffin’s lecture Planning a Federal Capital City Complete which was first delivered in America and later reproduced in part in Building (November 1913) and deals with the social economics of planning. Griffin thought he shared with Australians an intense belief in the importance of the national capital to Australia as a newly emerging democratic nation.

One of Griffin’s strongly held beliefs, also held by Sullivan, was that society was reflected in its architecture, cities and city planning. In Kindergarten Chats Sullivan taught the young graduate architect that architecture was fundamentally a study of social conditions and demonstrated to him that

“Every building tells its story’. Griffin believed that ‘Buildings are the most subtle, accurate and enduring records of life and hence their problems are the problems of life and not problems of form; … in the aggregate, the architecture of a people certainly represents the greatest amount of human effort applied to the realization of purely human ideals.”

Again in the same essay he wrote:

“In the future as sure as fate, our purposes, our foibles will be an open book in the remains or ruins of our buildings”.

In his design for Canberra Griffin was hoping to tell Australia’s story in a way to completely engage the Australian people with their democracy, their culture and their
environment. In this same essay Griffin also expressed his concerns in regard to social attitudes to the environment:

‘Nature has come to be regarded primarily as a field of economic exploitation, and its beauty only considered in the few cases where it can be exploited profitably ... the upshot of such a process must be a quarried world of rank weeds’. 12

Australian Concerns at That Time: These were Griffin's concerns – but were Australians so concerned? Although there were some outstanding and acclaimed social milestones, Australians' were not very much concerned about Australia's natural environment. Their democratic ideals were largely satisfied by free elections, and they were especially pragmatic regarding anything to do with politics and government. In 1912 a visiting American journalist, Dr Edwin E. Slosson, covering the Federal Capital story, was bemused at the lack of interest:

'I have seen a thousand times more excitement over the location of a Kansas courthouse. The prevailing spirit of the community is pessimism, spiced with contempt and cooled with indifference.'13

Loyalty to Britain was strong. When Griffin first arrived in Melbourne, could he have walked into the Victorian Parliament House, the location of Australia's Parliaments from 1901 to 1927, and viewed the great painting by Tom Roberts of the Opening of Parliament in 190114, he would quickly have realized, seeing the pride in Empire, what Australian political life was about.

The Role of the Public Service: Griffin's relationship with the Government was marked by the influence of the Australian Public Service, constituted to advise ministers of the Crown in the best tradition of the British Westminster System. The provision of ‘free and fearless advice’ to ministers by their public service departments is one of the fundamental pillars of the Australian system of Parliamentary Democracy which differentiates it from the American Congressional system. In Canberra Following Griffin: A design History of Australia’s National Capital Paul Reid has given a penetrating and detailed appraisal of the Department’s stake in shaping the initial foundations of the Federal Capital.15 His insights are the sharper as the inside viewpoint of one who, as Chief Architect of the National Capital Development Commission in the 1970s, was a fearless, though enlightened, bureaucrat himself. His assessment is that the departmental officers who were given the responsibility of preparation of material for the Competition came to regard the Federal Capital as their responsibility, and the need for a Competition as a source only for ideas. In the course of carrying out these duties these
officers traversed the region for preparation of the information issued to competitors, which included a written brief, maps and surveys for location, topography and geology, a meteorologist report, scenic panoramas in water colour and a clay mould of the site area. They formed firm views as to the location for the city, the location of the Parliament House, the government buildings and supporting infrastructure.

The Blunders of King O’Malley: The Minister concerned with the Federal Capital was King O’Malley, formerly an American national;\(^{16}\) he migrated to Australia, became an Australian citizen and was elected to the Parliament from Tasmania in 1910. In the second Fisher Ministry he was given charge of the construction of the transcontinental railway and the Federal Capital. He had been persuaded, contrary to the advice of his Department, to hold an international competition for the Federal Capital.\(^ {17}\) O’Malley gave himself the deciding vote in awarding the Competition - to be acted upon on receipt of advice from an expert jury. This situation was immediately perceived as flawed by the professional bodies, on the grounds that O’Malley had no professional expertise. The adjudication was also marred by dissent in the jury. John Kirkpatrick, an architect, and James Smith, a mechanical engineer advised O’Malley differently from J. M. Coane, a surveyor. O’Malley stayed with the majority vote for Griffin in first place, with Saarinen and Agache in second and third.

*Figure 3: THE COMPETITION JUDGES ON CAMP HILL. Smith, Coane and Kirkpatrick with Clark. Nla. Pic.*
Jury member Coane’s selection of the Sydney entry by Griffiths, Coulter and Caswell, (See figure 4) giving it the status of a 1st premiated design, assisted the purposes of the Department. The plan was so much in accord with the views of the Departmental officers and the Department Secretary, Colonel David Miller, that Paul Reid goes so far as to suggest that this entry may just possibly have been a Trojan Horse. The designers had indeed been party to the views of the department in many consultations during the preparation of the documents for the Competition – Robert Coulter had prepared the panoramas for the Competition and had laid out sketch plans to test the site; Caswell and Griffith were drainage experts and Caswell had prepared drainage studies for the Department in 1909. Their design shows perfect synchronization with the Department’s views. Parliament House, the dominant edifice of the plan was placed on Camp Hill with a monumental column behind it on Mt Kurrajong which was regarded by departmental officers as too windy for the location of Parliament House. The design featured a naturalistic lake across the Molonglo flood plain. The city was compact and located on the south side of the lake, to the east of Parliament House and protected from unfavorable winds. All was exactly what the department wanted. Scattered ‘classical’ monuments lay about unimpeded in placement by planning geometry apart from a central Beaux Arts vista focused on a domed Parliament House, a reminder of the United States Capitol at Washington.

Figure 4: PERSPECTIVE, GRIFFITH, COULTER AND CASWELL’S ENTRY
NAA: 710,19
After making the decision in favour of Griffin, Minister O’Malley appointed the same departmental officers, who had, in preparations for the Competition, formed their own ideas about the Capital, to a Departmental Board to provide advice on the implementation of Griffin’s Federal Capital design. Initially intended to comprise three officers, the surveyor Charles Scrivener, the Commonwealth Director of Works, engineer Percy Owen and the Commonwealth’s senior architect John Smith Murdoch, the Board was expanded to six members and came to constitute a powerful organ under the chairmanship of the Department’s first secretary, later Department head, Colonel David Miller. This augmentation was largely on the advice to the Minister of John Smith Murdoch, who felt the need of more backup in the task of town planning. The officers of the Board regarded themselves as the ultimate source for Ministerial advice and control of the planning and implementation of the Federal Capital City. The flaws in the Competition processes had opened doors for their continued participation.

In King O’Malley’s papers together with CVs dated 1915, from Griffin, Owen, Murdoch and Hill, probably compiled for the Royal Commission in O’Malley’s second term of office. Colonel Miller is recorded as having entered the public service aged 18 years. He appears to have pursued simultaneous careers with the public service and the army reserve, taking leave of absence to serve in the Boer War in South Africa with the NSW Imperial Bushmen as Acting Paymaster. Noted on his CV is the ‘mostly clerical capacity’ of his service. He went to South Africa as Major having commanded a corps as a citizen soldier. On his return, he was appointed to the position of Secretary for Home Affairs in 1901, and, continuing with the army reserve, he was promoted to lieutenant-colonel in 1902 and honorary colonel in 1912. Formal photographs of Miller show him in full military uniform – perhaps indicative of the vanity which earned him O’Malley’s colourful appellation, the ‘gilt-spurred rooster’. Miller seems to have had formidable abilities as an administrator, which earned him high office where he was respected as a strong disciplinarian. He gave full support to his departmental officers, who in turn advised him, and on whose behalf he would brook no rival. His power over Griffin was exercised through his advice to the Minister and his administration of the Department. These dealings with Griffin point to a flaw in his administrative capacity, for he soon treated Griffin as a threat to the fortunes of his Department instead of administering his Department to dovetail with the Government’s contract with Griffin.

Miller prevailed upon Minister O’Malley as to the value of all the premiated designs and O’Malley’s announcement of the winning design on the 23 May 1912, reported in June in Building Magazine, was a very mixed message:
‘I am satisfied that the best design has been selected. It is a wonderful design and shall make the Federal City the finest in the world. What we wanted was the best the world can give us and we have got it… No - we will not actually be restricted to the winning design – we may use all three designs if necessary to produce the working design on which the Capital will be built. A park may be taken from one, a boulevard from another, and a public square from another.’

The Department revealed its hand when it published its own plan in November 1912. The plan attempts little accommodation of the Griffin Plan, which is superseded for the short term ‘practical and economical’ views of the departmental officers; substantially it was the Griffith, Coulter Caswell plan overlaid on Griffin’s axes.

It is interesting to call to mind what Griffin had to say about ‘practical objectives’. Griffin wasn’t speaking of Canberra when he said this, but it applies:

‘This again offers a striking illustration of the impractical nature of the so called practical ways of doing things which method, fixing the attention on a few immediate issues, fails to see beyond its nose and, curiously enough, fails in consequence to accomplish even the ends it is centred on.’

The Departmental Board’s Plan: It retained the Capitol as a monument but totally destroyed its animus. In a large oval park without Griffin’s connecting radial avenues, the Board’s interpretation of the Capitol was the imposition on the landscape of a large neo renaissance monument as terminal to a vista – a ‘City Beautiful’ idea poorly executed. It took the form of a large domed structure which owed something to the genre of American Capitols, but to their City Beautiful rather than Republican associations. The Parliament House, an equal imposition of domed chambers united by a central tower, reflected the Board’s decision that the Parliament House must be on Camp Hill, protected by Mt. Kurrajong from the south westerly winds. An attempt was made to strengthen the Parliament House as focus, using it, instead of the Capitol, to terminate avenues which crossed the lake; but, unlike Griffin’s, the Boards avenues stalled at the water’s edge. (One converted to a rail crossing.)

Percy Owen and John Smith Murdoch are credited with the greatest say in the Board’s plan but once it was decided where to locate the buildings, it must have been John Smith Murdoch, the Department’s senior architect, who provided the architectural ideas. The design does not attempt synthesis but expresses duality of focus between the Capitol and the Parliament House. The Departmental buildings, in crescent form
centered on the Parliament House, appear in perspective to contribute nothing to a unity of composition. See figures 5 and 6.

Figure 5: PERSPECTIVE, THE DEPARTMENTAL BOARD. Reid (2002)

Figure 6: THE DEPARTMENTAL BOARD’S PLAN, 1912. Reid (2002)
The Board’s plan did not retain the Land Axis as Griffin intended it to function - for the orientation of public buildings slightly east of north and for the organization of built form and land form in a monumental synthesis. The Board reinterpreted the Land Axis as a City Beautiful concept of built monuments terminating, at each end, a mall-like vista. The reading of this vista is a dialogue between the Houses of Parliament and the military barracks – to be enlivened, one supposes, by parades and military bands and citizens turned out for such spectacles. Vast parks fringed the northern side of the lake, for nothing other than the military barracks, except the university at Vernon Hill and the hospital at Acton Peninsula, was located there. The City of Canberra was intended for the south-side. The free form lake identified with the Department’s preference as expressed in the Griffith Coulter Caswell design and bore no relationship to Griffin’s extended geometry of the central basins which focused on the Capitol. See figure 7.

Figure 7: THE BOARD’S PLAN 1912 with overlay of the Griffith Coulter Caswell plan to illustrate the similarity in the position of the lake edges and the nucleus of the city in the sheltered valley south-east of Kurrajong. Reid (2002)
Overall the Board’s plan exhibited the replacement of an intelligent geometry expressing rational functions and ideals with a muddle-headed monotony. This was evidenced all over the plan, but especially with the loss of Griffin’s great Triangle, which formed a great integrated public space across the natural amphitheatre of the land form, with direct communication between the three identified centres. The life of the plan, the people, disappeared. The Board’s plan completely lost the opportunity for the heart of the city and the integration of its national, municipal and daily commercial functions. Griffin’s location for a Municipal Administration was given to the university, with no plans at all for a Municipal Administration, which, no doubt, was thought could be slotted in somewhere should the need ever arise.

The Departmental Board tabled its plan in Parliament on 26 November 1912. Its publication drew the approbation of the leading members of the profession and professional organizations throughout Australia and the world, and rallied support for Griffin’s plan. The NSW State architect W. L. Vernon wrote to Building magazine and no less than Patrick Abercrombie, the renowned British planner pronounced the Board’s plan a disaster.

Griffin’s Letter to the Minister for Home Affairs, King O’Malley

When Griffin saw the Departmental Board’s plan in the Chicago press, he wrote from Chicago a letter of outrage to the Minister King O’Malley, dated 21 January 1913. He wrote that the Departmental Board’s plan was being represented as consistent with his plan, with improvements adapted from the other premiated designs. ‘If consistency with my plan, as claimed, is deemed desirable, at least test these locally proposed modifications and alterations by this rational coordination to see how utterly destructive of it they are.’ The letter is quite clear in that the Board’s plan is ‘utterly destructive’ and that Griffin has a very firm grasp of how he intends his plan to be interpreted and carried out.

Griffin’s essential purpose in writing to O’Malley is very important to note. After almost 6 pages, Griffin only asked for an opportunity to explain his plan to the Board. So in 6 pages what was the letter really intended to achieve? This is a seminal letter to study for evidence that Griffin’s idealism, with the Capitol as signifier, was his reason for entering the Federal Capital Competition, and, having won, the reason for his further role in the implementation of his design. He sets out to make this very clear to O’Malley
Griffin begins that given the meaning and content of his plan, he had not expected to win the competition - ‘that the rank given to my design for the Federal Capital was a recognition of advanced ideals, which I hardly dared expect of any country’ - but having won, naturally he did not expect his plan and its idealism to be lightly swept aside. It reveals that he only entered the Competition because

‘I have for many years greatly admired the bold radical steps in politics and economics which your country has dared to take, and which must, for a long time, set ideals for Europe and America ahead of the possibility of their accomplishment. So I have, in your city planning project, tried to express the development of fundamental principles which have suggested themselves to me during study of this experimental science from youth, principles deduced fully as much from the mistakes of modern cities as from their successes. And it must be admitted that the civilized nations of the world offer only pathologic examples for civic study, that modern cities everywhere are abnormal, cancerous growths on the landscape, intolerable community homes for nature and liberty loving, to say nothing of art aspiring people.

Even the basis of our national ideals would barely have thus sufficed to go in except for the evidence that seemed to appear between the lines, at least, in the “invitation to competitors” of a great constructive idealist in authority and this same feeling leads me now to write you in the light of the so-called revised plan which has just come to hand through the press, purporting in your opinion, in part, at any rate to embody the primary ideas of the first prize plan…’

As well as trying to save his plan from misinterpretation, Griffin's firm objective in writing to O'Malley was to establish the idealism of his plan as the basis for him having any further involvement and commitment.

To reinforce this position Griffin made it clear that he had responsibilities in Chicago:

'It is, as the exponent in practice of this same ideal, set by Sullivan, that I am being more and more recognized in America and Europe – an exacting responsibility of such significance and opportunity in affecting the future development of architecture [emphasis is added] as to make me, even after the adverse public expression of your departmental Capital Board, hesitate to leave this country in order to take active measures to present my case for a scientific plan for our city'.

[Griffin intended to contribute to the planning of Chicago – he and Marion on their canoe trips had gathered valuable environmental information] In 1912 Griffin realised himself,
and perhaps even through talking with Sullivan, that the carriage of democratic and organic architecture and town planning in Chicago, if not America, could rest solely with him, Wright having left Chicago ‘under a cloud’ to live and practice from Spring Green, Wisconsin.

He concluded the letter with the acknowledgement that he was drawn to the opportunity, which he had hoped was being offered, to create a city which would reflect his democratic ideals:

‘I do not however, fail to recognize that yours is the greatest opportunity the world has afforded for the expression of the great democratic civic ideal.’

This hope was built on the reputation Australia had earned at that time for its leadership in social justice and willingness to adopt measures to secure a fair society.

‘Your advantages are not only in the characteristic Australian idealism and interest in Government activity, but in the fundamental land policy of the capital…freed from land speculative selfish interest, the natural instincts of the community will guarantee higher artistic and social standards…not found in “boom” towns.’

The letter was intended to squarely confront the Minister with the idealism which was the purpose of his plan and to seek verification that this idealism would be supported and safeguarded in implementation. There appears to have been no direct response from the Government. (Much later in evidence before the Royal Commission on the Administration of Canberra, Griffin referred to two large envelopes containing further analysis of his plan and comparative analysis with other cities, which were not able to be produced; they had been lost.)

An unidentified, undated typed document archived in the papers of the Minister King O’Malley, possibly written for O’Malley if not by him, is evidence of ideals on the Government side. It may have been an address to parliament:

‘The Creation of the Capital City of a great territory unhampered by the fetters of previous occupation, and in the light of all modern advances in architecture, public hygiene and engineering, is a unique opportunity in the life of a new nation. It is an opportunity to powerfully influence the national spirit by awakening to high conceptions of national action. Attempted by men of small horizon, and without idealism, such creation will inevitably fail and this would be a calamity. It calls for the noblest effort of the ablest mind. It should be prophetic of Australia’s
advancement. Future generations should look upon it with pride as attesting the dignity of purpose of their ancestors…

For Australia to fail to appreciate or to utilize its chance in this creation of a capital would be a national disaster, because national actions of the first magnitude both advertise us to the world and react upon our own people. They advertise us because they show whether we are people worthy to hold a large continent in trust- as it were- for mankind, or whether we are mean and limited in our national acts. A public monument reacts upon the people that create it ennobling or degrading the conceptions of the fitness of things, it presents to the world a materialization of their ideals and reveals whether these are high or low …

If we believe in a great destiny for the people of this land, we dare not permit men of limited horizon and small ideas to thwart a great project. Owing to financial limitations we may, perhaps, have to achieve slowly what we desire; but we should never turn aside from the worthy aim, we should never allow the conceptions of genius to be thwarted, and a poor substitute to take its place because small men without imagination are timid or esthetically blind, or do not realize that minor things must not be allowed in national ideals to thwart the great ones. Australia is destined to be a noble country in which the privileges of free citizenship will continually advance. We can, if we will, let this capital be worthy of its great future. Professional jealousies or other limitations must never be allowed to thwart our aims. A work to be glorious must be open to all and its realization entrusted to the control not of the ordinary professional but to one who has achieved distinction.’

The Board looks for New Ideas

The adverse publicity drawn by the Departmental Boards plan set a change of course in the Department’s plans. The Department was mollified sufficiently to send John Smith Murdoch, already overseas on Commonwealth business, to Chicago to talk with Griffin. (When Murdoch left for overseas on 31 October 1912 the Boards plan had not been tabled in the House; although the design work had been completed, the presentation drawings had not. While he was away, during the final sessions for 1912, Parliament approved the Boards plan and it was published, with the ensuing outcry.) Murdoch, on his way back to Australia, spent 2 days in Chicago to meet with Griffin who had, by that time, a lithograph of the Board’s plan. He explained to Griffin that the Board’s main
concern was the cost of his plan. Murdoch must have been sufficiently impressed with Griffin’s clear thinking and quiet manner to recommend to the Board that taking him on might get them out of trouble. However nothing was done.

Murdoch returned to Australia in April 1913, full of ideas for improvements to the Board’s plan. The naming of Canberra ceremony had taken place and Scrivener was surveying in accordance with the Boards plan, which was the approved plan. Murdoch and Percy Owen began work on tracings over the original lithograph to supersede the approved plan. The difficulty was that Scrivener was still proceeding with surveying work at Canberra, and Miller, now the Federal Capital Administrator for the approved plan, was living in a residence erected at Acton for that purpose. Miller too, was intent upon proceeding with the approved plan, but Murdoch, in Melbourne, had the ear of his colleagues and the Minister.

The History of these events is outlined by Murdoch in evidence at the Royal Commission heard in Melbourne in 1916. Referring to the evidence where the Director General of works Colonel Owen questions Murdoch:

‘While you were away I suppose you kept your architectural and artistic eye open with a view, when arriving in Australia, of making modifications, if necessary, in the plan? - My eyes and ears were open for everything I could see.”

Washington gave life to his vision. He said:
“All Mr. Griffin’s Avenues were focused on the Capitol. I was very anxious to have some focused on the Parliament House... [In Washington, from the railway station] ‘the first thing you see is Parliament House [Murdoch means the Capitol] five-eighths of a mile away... I was anxious to have beautiful gardens and statues, and for people to be able to sit around these statues in the reserves at the crossings of streets and avenues.’" 33

Murdoch stopped Scrivener’s work on Canberra, while he hurriedly made adjustments to the Boards plan.

‘I was so strongly in favour of making changes that I was rather insistent on his stopping work.’ 34

A major change that Murdoch was anxious to make was the inclusion of a broad avenue from Parliament House to the Governor General’s residence on Capitol Hill (described in evidence35). This was inspired by his impression of the Avenues of Washington and his desire to express the importance and connection of these two functions above all others, sidelining the Capitol. (Much later, during the Menzies era the eminent British town planner, Lord Holford, then Sir William, was invited to Australia to report on the future of Canberra. One of his recommendations was for a residence for the Queen as the focal edifice on, the by then renamed, Capital Hill; it was viewed as an unfortunate suggestion.)

‘I [Murdoch] was hurrying up so that we could put it to Mr. Griffin when he came out.’ 36

Griffin had decided to come regardless of the lack of formal invitation from the Government. When Murdoch received Griffin’s cable from San Francisco to say he was on his way, parliament had been dissolved (June 24 1913) and the new Cook Government had been sworn in with Prime Minister Cook taking the Federal Capital portfolio assisted by a junior Minister, without portfolio, William Kelly. It seems from Kelly’s evidence to the Royal Commission, that he was more instrumental in bringing out Griffin than was Murdoch. Kelly did not like the Board’s design. Aware of the commitment by the departmental officers to their plan, which he referred to as ‘their baby’, and aware of the criticisms the Department’s plan had received, ‘I [Kelly] thought that the best thing to do was to import the man who made the design.’

Griffin’s timing was opportune, for the Board’s plan was in disarray and work had stopped on the Federal Capital. The Minutes of Evidence, with Murdoch under oath, reveal that the Government, upon Murdoch’s intervention to the Minister, then made the gesture of rendering Griffin’s visit official to the extent of paying his fare. Murdoch in
evidence is absolutely clear that his reason for supporting Griffin’s trip to Australia was for Griffin’s assistance with the Board’s plan, not for the implementation of Griffin’s plan.

The Minutes of Evidence also reveal that Murdoch attempted to update Griffin with the progress of his new plan, addressing a letter to Griffin in Pago Pago. There is no need to wonder what Griffin thought if Murdoch included his idea on the grand avenue connecting Parliament House with the Governor General’s residence on Capitol Hill. Apparently Griffin did not acknowledge receipt of this letter.

Murdoch regarded the Board’s plan of 1912 as no longer conveying the Departmental officers views – and that their views were conveyed by ‘the tracings that we were at work upon at the time the plan was stopped’. The further question was put to Murdoch:

‘Could you state how long it would take to compile a working plan similar to the lithographic plan, supposing these conditions were all agreed to and approved? – I should think you would get a plan sufficiently advanced to be worked on in five or six weeks. But the chances are that when the plan was being made, other suggestions would occur. They usually do occur, and they might have eventually embraced a good many more alterations than our views show in those undeveloped tracings.’

This is astonishing evidence of unbelievable arrogance and self importance to ask for faith in such a process; to expect it to be chosen over the elegance and integrity of Griffin’s design, which had gained support from leaders of the profession around the world! Such were the departmental officers, the public servants who were tolerated to meddle in the planning of the national capital. Marion said that Griffin was never angry; we can see why she thought that he should be angry.

Griffin Arrives in Australia

Murdoch was instructed by the Hon. William Kelly to meet the ship when Griffin arrived in Australia on 19 August 1913; to proceed to Canberra to visit the site and then to bring Griffin to Melbourne to meet with him prior to meeting with the Board. Griffin and Murdoch were photographed on board ship by the press and the body language in the published photograph portends the relationship to develop between these two men - Griffin unhappy and Murdoch, tense and foreboding. One wonders what had taken place between them before the photograph was taken. Perhaps Murdoch had eagerly sought Griffin’s views on his scheme sent to Pago Pago and the photograph registers Murdoch’s disappointment and Griffin’s embarrassment. See figure 9.
Contrary to Kelly’s instructions, the Departmental Secretary Miller and members of the Board saw to it that they met with Griffin in Sydney, and accompanied him to Canberra, where he stayed at Miller’s residence at Acton, prior to his meeting with the Minister.
Murdoch spent the mornings walking with Griffin and they were joined by Scrivener and Miller for lunch and sometimes also other members of the Board for the afternoons. A lot of water flowed beneath the bridge before Griffin was able to meet with Kelly. Griffin and Murdoch traversed the site together, the democratic American and the British subject\textsuperscript{38}, with their minds filled with completely different ideas of the city. Murdoch was anxious to discuss his ideas, for he appears to have believed that Griffin had come to Australia to help the Board with their plan.

That Murdoch believed this, was revealed in evidence at the Royal Commission:

‘I thought I had been instrumental in having a good many improvements made to the plan. I thought when he came out he would criticize these alterations, instead of which Mr. Kelly took up the position that Mr. Griffin’s plan would be the only one considered.’\textsuperscript{39}

This puts an end to the myth that Murdoch was instrumental in bringing Griffin to Australia to save Griffin’s plan.

Griffin must have been eager to stand on Capitol Hill, for him the intensely symbolic place where all the people visiting Canberra would come to view the city and its layout which had ‘grown out of the environment’. On a visit to the Capitol, Australians would be able to touch base with their historic foundations and the achievements and aspirations which identified the nation.

From Capitol Hill the views encompass the physical reality of the region, the distant ranges and snow capped peaks, the local mountains, the proximate hills, the Molonglo flood plain and the generally flat valleys. Griffin’s remarkable and detailed comprehension of the land form had preceded him to the site. He had seen it in his mind’s eye in Chicago and his Competition design had harnessed all this magic of nature with a building orientation line between natural termini, Mt Ainslie and Mt Bimberi, rendering both city and landform monumental.

The irregular hill upon which he must have stood with Murdoch, afforded the setting for ‘the one isolated building’, the Capitol, which he, in an organic conceptualisation of form integrated with a great triangle joining the national, municipal and commercial functions of the city. The stepped pyramidal form of the Capitol descended with the terraces and forms of the Parliament House and the departmental building of the Government Group, to the Lake where it could be reflected in the central basin as one ensemble; and as one
ensemble it could be viewed from the ‘galleries’ rising gently from the opposite side of
the lake to the foot of Mt Ainslie.

The hill’s irregularities also afforded appropriate settings for the two official residences,
the Prime Minister and the Governor General, which Griffin saw as subsidiary to the
Capitol. Murdoch saw the importance of parliament in relation to its connections with
British tradition and Empire and he thought the building for the King’s representative
should become the focus of Capitol Hill, the terminal of a broad avenue leading from
Parliament House, sideling the Capitol. When Murdoch looked along the Land Axis
across the Molonglo flood plain, his view was terminated by a military barracks at the
foot of Mt Ainslie; the barracks terminated a formal Mall with no practical use except
possibly for military parades.

Griffin created a city for living. Looking out from Capitol Hill, his vision would have come
to life: a city with urban character, its eventual urban density relieved at its heart by a
great midway gardens descending from Mt Ainslie, along the Land Axis, down the
Plaisance in a promenade to the edge of the lake and merging into the public parks
which followed the central and side basins. The people, drawn into the city for work and
business or tourist pursuits could recreate here at its heart. In this area, cultural pursuits
within art galleries, concert halls and theatres, spectacles of water events on the lake or
sporting events in the stadium; or simply a stroll to the Casino, its sculpture gardens,
kiosks, tennis courts and restaurants were all available. Nature trails up Mt Ainslie were
there at the heart of the city, for spiritual refreshment. Life and vitality were further
infused into this winning design by the cross Avenue of the Municipal Axis, the base of
the great triangle, the ‘high street’ offering a daily intensity of street life to the National
Capital. The people whose democratic independence was reflected in the animus of the
Capitol, at the apex of the great triangle, were the same Australians, Canberrans, going
about their daily business along the ‘high street’ at the base of the great triangle. In
Griffin’s vision they would come to the heart of the city day and night, at all times for
work and for relaxation. In August 1913 all this was possible.

Evidence referring to the Canberra visit is imprecise with contradictions in detail. In
Murdoch’s recollection:

‘I think Mr. Griffin and I arrived there about 4 o’clock in the morning. That day I
think we had a walk around the place. I think we went over towards Duntroon. The
next day, I think we went up to Mt. Ainslie. The next day, I think, we went to Black
Mountain, and in the afternoon Colonel Miller took Mr. Griffin out for a drive.’

40
Figure 10: GRIFFIN AT THE SITE. Harrison (1995).
In Murdoch’s recollections there is no sense of engagement with a living city - only references to the seat of the military and to scenic outlooks. Throughout his evidence, his is a static vision. He has an aesthetic focus, predicated on tradition, which he is eager to bestow with only rudimentary planning skills. There is nothing to compare with the living realities of Griffin’s use of the site described in his Competition Report, or his vision further explicated after this site visit in the Report Explanatory. Canberra has unfortunately evolved from such limitations; as James Weirick says, Canberra is still a city to be viewed from set points, not like Griffin’s city, a city to engage with.

Griffin would eagerly have climbed Mt Ainslie and viewed the ‘virtual reality’ of Marion’s portrayal of the vista from the summit, highlighting the ensemble of the Capitol, the Parliament House and Government Group; and keeping it in his mind’s eye as he descended along the Plaisance towards the Central basin. He would have walked up and down the ‘high street’, around the mercantile centre at Russell and the city administration site at City Hill. All the while he would have been conscious of prospects of the sight of the Capitol, its stepped pyramidal form of glazed translucency visible over almost the entire city site. And Griffin’s mind would have been full of practical issues, those on which he felt he would have to compromise and those for which he would have to find solutions for the sake of the integrity of his plan. As far as we know the decisions made on the 1913 plan were predicated on this visit, these walks with Murdoch, and the subsequent Melbourne meetings with the Board.

All the executed work which Griffin saw at Canberra was in accordance with the Board’s plan. Griffin had to accept as fait accompli the construction of the Kingston Powerhouse in the location decided by the Department and its decision for an Initial City also on the south side. The Commencement Ceremony for the city had taken place on Capitol Hill presided over by the Governor General Sir Thomas Denman with the naming of Canberra by Lady Denman on 12 March 1913. Griffin was able to correct the erroneous survey which misplaced the coordinate of the land axis in regard to Capitol Hill. John Smith Murdoch’s Commencement Column was intended for the land axis, but its base, constructed for the Commencement Ceremony, was carelessly located off axis. During his 1913 visit, Griffin correctly fixed the survey point for his land axis and coordinating geometry on Capitol Hill by a simple design in stone marking the centre with a brass inlay.
Griffin is Appointed Federal Capital Director of Design and Construction and the Board is Disbanded

On the train to Melbourne\textsuperscript{43}, after his first meeting with Griffin, Minister Kelly informed the Administrator, that the discussions with the Board would be on Griffin’s plan only. Miller warned of trouble. After his arrival in Melbourne, Griffin had several meetings with the Board before returning to Sydney to prepare the amended 1913 plan. See Figure 10 . As instructed by Kelly, he provided a report/memorandum of his personal inspection of the site, his conferences with the Departmental Board and the effects on his premiated Federal Capital plan. The memorandum was dated 13 October 1913. It is a very matter-of-fact memorandum, simply listing the matters of agreement and disagreement and referring to a Review Document attached, which is no longer on the file.\textsuperscript{44} (It probably was the Report Explanatory or the basis of that document) Griffin was able to convince Kelly and Prime Minister Cook of his capacity; Kelly gave his impressions of Griffin in evidence at the Royal Commission, in answer to the question:

‘What was your object in bringing out Mr. Griffin? - Primarily it was to enable him to look into these criticisms and into the question of the layout and completion of the city. Of course, I wanted to see Mr. Griffin before I could come to any definite decision in regard to him. A man might be a brilliant designer, and yet be incapable of practical execution. But as soon as I saw Mr. Griffin I realized he was a practical man as well as one who is possessed of the gifts with which we know he is endowed, and I decided, therefore, to get the Board to sit with him and discuss his original plan… I found however that a deadlock had resulted, and I concluded that the Board was defending their baby. After having given its members sufficient time to come to a decision on the matter I disbanded them. I thanked them for what they had done.’\textsuperscript{45}

Minister Kelly disbanded the Board and Griffin was appointed Federal Capital Director of Design and Construction with the necessary assistance to Griffin to be provided by the Department, again by the same officers who had formed the Board. In addition to the disbanding of the Board, Minister Kelly dropped a second bombshell on the department; Griffin had recommended an international competition for the Parliament House and would determine the conditions. This situation was implosive and needed the executive skills of a Daniel Burnham to manage.

Of necessity, of the many issues which occupied Griffin on this visit to Australia, two were of vital concern; they were the location of the urban centre of Canberra and the
Government’s requirements for Parliament House, which was the Constitutional reason for the Federal Capital. Griffin compromised on the ‘initial city’ which he located on his 1913 plan. For practical purposes he concentrated on the Parliament House on Camp Hill, and immediately began the processes for an international competition. Locking in the location of Parliament house, while its location on Camp Hill was still supported by the government, and creating the empty site for the Capitol with its main radial avenues was a key move to protect the animus of his plan.

The Board had favoured a competition and John Smith Murdoch had prepared the conditions for a two stage competition, to provide, at the first stage, experience and encouragement for the local profession which did not have many such opportunities. Probably British or American firms would progress to the final stage. Murdoch and Griffin differed over these conditions – not surprising in view of their entirely different ideas about the city, Murdoch being keen to ensure an outcome based on architectural revival traditions, whereas Griffin was anxious to secure a modern design from the best world practice.

The Minister’s decisions naturally depleted the Department’s interest in Federal Capital goals; other serious obstacles were the belief among Departmental officers that a large city would never eventuate in inland Australia and the reluctance to move Parliament from Melbourne. The Departmental officers were not motivated by big ideas. Murdoch fell back to his defensive position that he had never been interested in the Federal Capital and preferred not to have anything to do with it. Thence, he and Griffin appear to have seen little of each other and scarcely to have met each other, outside times of conflict.

It would have been timely for Griffin and Minister Kelly to focus on interpersonal relationships, to repair wounded pride and to clarify new roles and responsibilities with the officers of the Department. It was necessary that Griffin understood the hierarchical chain of command within the Department and its pride in status; it was not democratic, and Griffin was purely democratic minded. To see the extent that this was so, it is interesting to refer to Griffin’s evidence much later before the Royal Commission into the Administration of Canberra. After visiting Canberra with the officers of the Board, Griffin explained to them the general principles of his plan as clearly as he could. His method was to take up the different elements seriatim and ask the Board to raise their objections which he would minute. He would deal with the objections and then ask the Board to vote. Only one vote was taken, – this vote, unanimously for Griffin’s ideas, concerned
the Capitol and the Government Group. At that stage, the Minister sent for Colonel Millar and then for Griffin and told him that no more votes were to be taken. The minister did not consider it a proper method of procedure. (Later, in evidence to the Royal Commission, Kelly said that Griffin had trouble with Departmental red tape, which he would not understand. It seems that Kelly had some insights into Griffin’s direct and independently minded approach whereas departmental procedures would have demanded protocols and, in Miller’s Department, hierarchical attitudes redolent of army discipline.)

Once this logical method was discounted Griffin recalled that

‘We did not reach a decision on anything else, so far as I remember; although we discussed a great many things and went into a great many features of the plan.’

Griffin said he had endeavored to modify his plan to overcome their objections as far as possible and for expediency even to consider things which he did not favour. He said they agreed unanimously on the Government Group, but after that ‘there was no point I know of on which we could come to agreement.’

The research has not located proper minutes of evidence, signed by the parties, for these meetings with the Board. Also there were exchanges with the senior architect for the Commonwealth architect over the preparation of a brief for the parliament House Competition which Minister Kelly was eager to get underway. These exchanges also do not appear to have been formalized. Griffin was visiting Australia alone, but perhaps the first thing he should have done was to hire a personal secretary.

Griffin was aware of securing proper conditions of appointment; at the time of the drafting of his contract he took the precaution of consulting with the Crown Solicitor. Kelly had also recommended to him a solicitor for advice. For example, on the matter of services and equipment which he wanted to ensure were covered under his authority in his contract, he was advised of the accepted way of stating the position, and this was included. But later the contract was frequently reinterpreted and detail could not save him from the obstruction caused by his divided and rudderless Government client. The departmental officers worked on their Minister. While the original intention of the contract may have been clear, giving authority over Federal Capital design and construction to Griffin, but requiring the Department to provide him with necessary information and backup services, the department worked on reinterpretation of their role. Evidence was produced at the Royal Commission that Kelly said in the House that ‘The government will be able to have the erection of buildings supervised by its own officers.’ Had all
gone well, this may have been the case, for Griffin’s contract was only for three years, and three years was all he intended it to be. But at every opportunity the Departmental officers reinterpreted events and obstructed Griffin’s progress to regain control. They did not have to wait long for the next change in Government, and with the support of William Archibald as Minister, the lines of control and responsibility were contrived to again favour the Department.

In November 1913, Griffin took 6 months leave of absence to return to America to organize his Chicago practice for the 3-year period of his contract with the Australian Government. He left behind the 1913 plan and the Report Explanatory, competed during this period, recording the compromises made with the Departmental Board and establishing a basis for further progress under his directorship.

Figure 11: THE 1913 PLAN. Reid (2002)
Among these compromises, the 1913 plan responded to an early criticism of the premiated design made by Murdoch that the central basin of the Ornamental Waters was not sufficiently wide to be viewed from the elevation of Camp Hill, then the location of Parliament House. Griffin increased the width of the central basin, but to do so centred the arc on its northern shore, not on the Capitol but on the Government Group. The geometry of the arc containing the east and west basins remained centered on the Capitol, but it could no longer be a continuous arc. These modifications significantly impacted upon the design of the Central Area within the great Triangle: the lake shore was closer to what we now call Constitution Avenue and the character of this ‘high street’ changed from a street with development on both sides to a terrace opened to the lakeside park and cultural institutions. From the terrace intermittent views were obtainable across the water to the Government Group and the Capitol. All three Avenues bordering the Triangle now had, for the most part, hard outer ‘city block’ edges and soft inner ‘green space’ edges, drawing the motorist’s awareness to the iconic integrity of this great public space with its focus on the Government Group and ultimately the Capitol. Paul Reid regarded the change to the central basin as among the changes weakening the plan’s geometry, away from the support of Marion.\(^{51}\) (Marion was of course still in Chicago and had nothing to do with the 1913 plan. Both Griffins possessed expertise in geometry but there is no evidence that Marion was the superior geometrician. In *Magic of America* when Marion tells of her delight in Walter’s skill in her profession, she refers to his skill in spatial geometry for neighbourhood layouts.) This was an ‘on site’ solution which exhibits Griffin’s virtuosity. By shifting the centre point for the northern arc of the Central basin away from the ordering geometry centered on the Capitol, he was able to increase the width of the Central basin. But he retained the focus on the Capitol by opening Capitol Terrace on its south side to iconic cultural buildings in the park setting and using the geometry of the triangle as a spatial as well as communications device, focusing on the icon at the apex, the Capitol.

The Report Explanatory contains some of Griffin’s best descriptive passages of the landform of the region, describing it as a natural amphitheatre and where he placed the spectators in the galleries, the sloping ground at the foot of Mt Ainslie; and in the dress circle, Capitol Terrace and the cultural buildings in the park; the lake, the arena; and the Government Group, the stage with the backdrop of the distant snow peaked ranges.

In Paul Reid’s book, ‘*A work of art: The Organic City*’ is a splendidly titled chapter with a most exciting beginning. This is Reid’s analysis and use of Griffin’s diagrams in what amounts to a definition of the Organic City:
'a synthesis of function and design where the Order of the Site (the natural environment) and the Order of Functions (the needs of the people) are perfectly integrated by a specific geometry,'

Reid shows the diagram from the first page of the Report Explanatory which Griffin calls an equation of the conditions of the site and the functions with numbering for further textual reference. This diagram is followed with an illustration which interprets Griffin's description of the site as a natural amphitheatre. However the clarity exhibited here becomes confused by the content of the remainder of Reid's chapter.

Figure 12: Griffin's Diagram from the Report Explanatory p1.
In the *Report Explanatory* there is no second option for Parliament House on Capitol Hill – ‘Kurrajong is deemed too large and too high for a convenient working organization of Parliament’. But he cautiously expanded his ideas on the Capitol:

‘Centrally located, the Capitol is focused in an extensive hill park, and at that has a limited function either as a general administration structure for popular reception and ceremonial, or for housing archives and commemorating Australian achievements rather than for deliberation or counsel; but at any rate representing the sentimental and spiritual head, if not the actual working mechanism of the Government of the Federation.’

No doubt mindful of the economy impressed upon him by the departmental officers he adds that Kurrajong

‘being the only conspicuous internal eminence that has a skyline visible from practically every portion of the city, it lends itself to an architectural treatment that need comprise little more than the necessary ramps, stairs and terraces for outlook to make it, by its natural bulk the dominating architectural feature.’

He emphasizes that ‘The ensemble presents excellent opportunity for cumulative massing.’
In November 1913 Griffin left Australia, having made some difficult compromises with the Department, but having regained control over his design for Canberra. His hopes were to successfully fulfil the responsibilities of his three year contract with the Government, beginning by launching the international competition for the design of Parliament House for the Camp Hill site. He hoped to establish the winning design as the example of modern organic architecture to be followed throughout the city, if possible acquiring the Federal Capital architect, himself the Federal Capital planner.
The same conviction is shared by Marion. Scholars are tending more to attribute a greater role to Marion in the conceptual ideas for the Canberra. There is no conclusive evidence that this was so. Griffin speaks of the ‘ideal city’ very much as his design. The Original Report describes a design process that appears very much to have come from the writer, particularly in the location of functions for the city. Griffin gave all the lectures which described Canberra. In all projects Griffin always saw the clients; Walter and Marion had made an agreement that the designer would see the client. (Magic of America “Autobiography of Xantippi”) There is no doubt that they discussed every aspect of the design, at the very least so that she could draw it. The person who holds the pen has the ultimate control over the interpretation of the ideas and her ability to interpret ideas is not questioned. That person surely contributes to design development. Marion fulfilled the same role for Frank Lloyd Wright, doing presentation drawings but designing only interiors for Wright during her employment at Oak Park. While she took no credit for design, it is equally true that Griffin gave her no credit as partner in the design ideas. It is hard to believe that he would have been so dishonest.


The word ‘animus’ seems to have developed alternative meanings with usage; Derived from the Latin animus, i. m mind, Sullivan’s interpretation may well be Jungian in the sense of the inner personality which is in communication with the unconscious. I have used it meaning the ‘spirit’ or the ‘spark’ which ignites inspiration. Collin’s dictionary gives ‘motive, intention or purpose’ and also links it with the word ‘animosity’ or antipathy, which is not intended in this usage. It seems to be a word with intuitive rather than precise meaning. I have applied it to the Capitol as the home of the ‘spirit’ of the Australian nation and as the ‘spark’ which inspired the Griffin’s Competition entry.

O’Malley was a colourful figure whose claims are not always able to be substantiated. More detail in Reps, Jon W. Canberra 1912 Plans and planners of the Australian Capital Competition. Melbourne University Press 1997 p 61

In 1923 at the Public Works Standing Committee hearings for the Provisional Parliament House, Griffin reacted to the suggestion of the Capitol as an ornamental monument, then still a view with currency. In paragraph 334 of the Report he said: ‘I do not think it would be purely ornamental by any means. It is the figurative embodiment of the spirit of the Commonwealth. My idea was that at some later period a magnificent building should be erected there.’

This pragmatic interpretation of art was shared by Sullivan and Griffin.

Griffin, Walter Burley. ‘Architecture’ an essay with reference to former discussions at the Chicago Club, Magic of America Donald Leslie Johnson papers Box 18 Vol 11C p 361b National Library of Australia Manuscripts, MS 7817.


Ibid p 126

Ibid p 124


The painting was finished by Roberts in London and remained in Britain with the British Royal Collection until returned to Australia on permanent loan. It was hung in the High Court in Canberra, prior to its present location in the Parliament House.

16 See note 3 above and the reference to Jon Reps.

17 Griffin, Walter Burley. “The Federal Capital as an Essential Democratic Movement”, *Magic of America The Federal Battle*, Donald Leslie Johnson papers Box18, Vol. IIC, pp. 277-293 an essay by Walter, but seems to be overwritten by Marion. The essay has two themes: 1. decentralization to ensure equal opportunity to all Australians and 2. the menace to democracy of bureaucracy. In this essay written at the end of the Royal Commission, Griffin believed the bureaucracy had failed in their bid to get rid of him. Possibly Marion overwrote the reasons: 1. O’Malley decided upon an international competition; and 2. O’Malley crossed out the names of the three judges chosen by the Department and chose three outside the direct control of the bureaucracy.


19 CVs Requested by the Minister December 1915. Papers of King O’Malley, National Library of Australia, Manuscripts, MS 460, Box 1, folder 4.

20 Miller, Colonel David. *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Online edition. This record is more detailed and accurate than the brief summary reference to Miller on the Australian Archives website, which describes him as Commander of the NSW corps in the Boer War.

21 The Papers of King O’Malley, National Library of Australia, Manuscripts. MS 460. Box 1, folder 4; and Reps, Jon. *Canberra 1912: Plans and Planners of the Australian Capital Competition*. Melbourne University Press 1997 p 61 Reps referred to O’Malley as the ‘political lightening rod’ also p 61

22 The Royal Commission findings support this statement. O’Malley took upon himself the role of Federal Capital Administrator and Miller went to Defense.

23 Griffin, Walter Burley. ‘The Federal Capital as an Essential Democratic Movement’ *Magic of America The Federal Battle* unpublished; from Donald Leslie Johnson papers Box18, Vol. IIC, pp. 277-293 an essay by Walter but parts of the essay appear to have been overwritten by Marion. pp 290, 291: Writing of the role of the bureaucracy, Minister O’Malley, described as a non-technical person, ‘accepted the suggestion that a board should gather suggestions from other than the first plan to include in it but stipulated that the design of the city must be that of the first prize plan. When the Department plan was brought to him he asked if that were the case, and seeing that he was set on that point they said yes although, in fact, it was not in any respect based on the first prize plan... The Minister cabled the King that work was to begin on the Federal Capital in accordance with the premiated plan, and work was begun, but on the departmental lines.’


26 It has been said that O’Malley sent Griffin the Board’s plan for comment. Griffin’s letter to O’Malley does not indicate this. No evidence of O’Malley’s correspondence has been found. Another possibility is that press cuttings were sent by James Smith, one of the judges of the Competition who was angered by the betrayal of the Competition.


28 Griffin was confident in the logical process which he had followed in preparation for the design of the city and confident that an explanation using the same logic would convince anyone of the merit of his plan.

31 ‘Minutes of Evidence’, *Royal Commission on Federal Capital Administration* National Archives of Australia, request item 3292356, *Series no A1203(A1203/3) Control symbol 994/7/AUS*

32 Ibid para 11765
33 Ibid para 11779
34 Ibid para 11911
35 Ibid paras 11840–11845
36 Ibid para 11911

37 Kelly learned, apparently for the first time at the Royal Commission from the Administrators statement of fact p 22 printed papers, that on ‘19th August, Mr. Griffin arrived in Canberra. With Scrivener Murdoch and myself he inspected the site on 21, 22, 23, 24 August on which day he left for Sydney.’ Griffin arrived in Australia on Tuesday 19th August, photograph Daily Telegraph, and must have arrived in Canberra on Thursday 21 August.

38 Australian passports designated citizens as ‘British Subjects’ until the Australia Act 1986.

39 ‘Minutes of Evidence’, *Royal Commission on Federal Capital Administration* National Archives of Australia, request item 3292356, *Series no A1203(A1203/3) Control symbol 994/7/AUS*

39 para 11938
40 Ibid, Para. 12049

41 Weirick, James. The Video which is showing at National Archives of Australia.

42 Griffin in paragraph 107 in evidence to the Royal Commission, described the view of the Capitol on arrival in the plaza above the train station: ‘my idea was to bring the railway to a convenient point where the visitor had outspred before him the whole scheme of the city... He is directly opposite the Capital (sic- must have been Griffin’s American accent) building, with an avenue leading directly towards that building, and on his right is another avenue leading directly towards the centre of the commercial city, the idea being to enable him to grasp in an instant the geography of the whole place and at the same time to get a first impression that would be lasting and overwhelming…’

43 ‘Minutes of Evidence’, *Royal Commission on Federal Capital Administration* National Archives of Australia, request item 3292356, *Series no A1203(A1203/3) Control symbol 994/7/AUS*

Para 6193 Minutes of Evidence Royal Commission; Kelly in evidence: ‘I was about to pay a visit to Sydney when I received a telegram from the Administrator saying that Mr. Griffin had completed his labours at Canberra and the Administrator would bring him to Melbourne on the Friday night. I telegraphed instructing the Administrator to keep Mr. Griffin at Canberra and I would meet him on the train on Monday morning.


45 ‘Minutes of Evidence’, *Royal Commission on Federal Capital Administration* National Archives of Australia, request item 3292356, *Series no A1203(A1203/3) Control symbol 994/7/AUS*

Para 6163
46 Ibid para 97
47 Ibid para 6215
48 Ibid para 107
49 Ibid paras 127, 128.
50 Ibid paras 764, 768 also Hansard

52 Ibid
In the interlude between Griffin’s first appearance in Australia and his return with Marion to implement his plan, the Griffins went to Britain and Europe to secure judges for an international competition for Parliament House. The architects Griffin chose were known to have completed buildings which were modern and not ‘modern’ interpretation\(^1\) of classical styles: Wagner, Laloux, Sullivan, Burnet and Poole.

Although Louis Sullivan had fallen on hard times, when Griffin returned to America, Sullivan still had an office in the Auditorium Building.\(^2\) There appears to be no record of a meeting but Griffin secured Sullivan as a judge for the Parliament House Competition. There are many unanswered questions in respect of communication between Griffin and Sullivan after Griffin won the Competition - perhaps an area for further research. There is
no mention of a meeting ever having taken place between Marion Griffin and Sullivan in *Magic of America*, although there must surely have been appropriate times for him to have seen either the Competition drawings or the second set made for display in France. Tragic circumstances surrounded Sullivan at this time, rejected by clients and without work. Griffin had encountered Sullivan’s foe, classical revival architecture popularized in the City Beautiful Movement, in the Australian public service, his government client and perhaps for Griffin this was too close to the bone to speak of. Yet it is safe to assume that Griffin saw Sullivan in respect of judging the Parliament House Competition and that if for no other purpose than that, they discussed Griffin’s design and the prospects for its success.

In Australia the Capitol as the centerpiece of Canberra soon was widely interpreted as the American republican idea of its American designer. As such it became a non issue, for the republican cause in Australia had been lost at Federation. As the building of the Capitol was neither imminent nor threatened (publicly), it never featured as an issue on the public agenda. Its significance was never understood by the public and it slipped from the public mind.

During seven hard years of struggle, which Marion later termed the ‘Federal Battle’ the most vexing issue for Griffin was the problem of interpersonal communication with the Government and the Federal bureaucracy. Government Ministers charged with the portfolio for the Federal Capital changed frequently while their Departmental advisors remained constant and able to exploit changing conditions. With these changes in the Ministry Griffin’s contract as Federal Capital Director of Design and Construction was open to reinterpretation and its powers disputed. James Weirick believes that ‘The instrument intended to achieve [Griffin’s appointment] was based on a fatally flawed document, a contract which created a series of ill-defined, but clearly overlapping responsibilities for the planning and design of Canberra’. Implacable battle lines were drawn over policy and procedures and the control of design and construction. These conflicts are well recorded in the papers of the Royal Commission into the Administration of Canberra; they spring to life in the letters written home to America mainly by Marion which many years later she gathered together for the story of *The Federal Battle*, in *The Magic of America*. Marion herself had no contact with the members of government and bureaucracy.
When Griffin returned to Australia to carry out his contract, his struggle with the departmental officers, who had, by then, determined not to co operate, began in earnest and became of such intensity that it could only be resolved by the defeat of one party.

Chapter Structure

With the Capitol in mind, from 1914 the issues are structured around the nexus of the location of Parliament House:

Between 1914 and 1920 - and for even longer for Griffin when one considers his appearance before the Public Works Committee hearing on the Provisional Parliament house in 1923 – the Department strove for control of the design of Parliament House and the central area (referred to by Owen as the 'official portion'); and Griffin faced the possibility of its redesign. The war was possibly the decisive factor, unhelpful for Griffin.

The most significant player was the Commonwealth architect John Smith Murdoch. The ideological differences between Griffin and Murdoch are discussed. A perspective is developed on their relationship, based on the Minutes of Evidence from the Royal Commission into the Administration of Canberra, although the PhD thesis, Rowe (1996), is also taken into account.

The Chapter concludes on the period following the end of the War. The Federal Capital Advisory Committee was established to replace the position of Federal Capital Director of Design and Construction which was held by Griffin, Griffin refused the Government's offer of a place on the Committee; he appeared at the Parliamentary Works Committee hearing on the Provisional Parliament House and later at the Parliamentary Works Committee hearing on the War Memorial.

The decision not to implement Griffin's Capitol and terraced ensemble with the Government Group was a fatal blow to the design integrity of his plan. The War Memorial and the character of Anzac parade was a blow to the life of Griffin's city.
Griffin’s struggle with the Department Begins in Earnest

The Call for a Royal Commission: By the time Griffin had returned to Australia, on 15 May 1914, dissatisfaction had brewed up a storm among the Departmental officers and they were not cooperative. Such were the difficulties with the director of the public works branch of the Department Colonel Percy Owen that, within 1 month Griffin wrote to Minister Kelly to request that he put Owen straight. Unfortunately 2 weeks later there was a change of government and Kelly was replaced by William Archibald who, probably on the basis of that letter and word from Miller, quickly formed the view that Griffin griped against other men to cover his own shortcomings. Archibald professed to be acquainted with Griffin’s plan as the legitimate plan and never to have seen the Board’s plan. He was convinced that Griffin’s powers extended to the central area of Canberra alone, and even the powerhouse at Kingston was regarded by Archibald as ‘outside the city.’ This misleading interpretation had been put about by Colonel Owen, from the time of his memorandum to King O’ Malley dated 3 January 1913, wherein Owen described the Board’s design as ‘based on the official portion of the 1st premiated design which is the primary consideration.’ Otherwise, he claimed, changes were brought by levels and the street orientation - north east and south west and short streets to moderate dust. With such contrivances, the departmental officers gradually regained control.

Despite the Royal Commission into the Federal Capital Administration, 1915 - 1917 finding in Griffin’s favour and against the bureaucracy, the Department was unrepentant. The issues were wide ranging, but those which affected the Capitol had often been connected directly or indirectly with the views of Commonwealth architect John Smith Murdoch, and continued to be so.
John Smith Murdoch acquitted himself exceedingly well in the evidence he gave before the Royal Commission on Federal Capital Administration 1915 – 1917. In Commissioner Blackett’s Summary of Evidence, Murdoch was exonerated in the matter of deliberate obstruction of Griffin:

“I fully believe Mr Murdoch in his assertion that he very reluctantly followed the Minister’s instruction with regard to suggesting varied terms for the competition.[Parliament House] He says that he “never had any desire to assist in building Canberra (11799), that he “hoped the whole proposal would be dropped” (11858) and I think he is sincere in saying that he would “Like to see the Federal Capital strangled for a hundred years”…No imputation of a desire to usurp Mr Griffin’s functions can be attributed to him.”

All Murdoch’s evidence was extremely well considered, simply told and focused on the point. He was able to convey his opinions and present his situation as a perfect counter to any thought that he might act on the basis of self interested ambition. He always claimed reluctance to be involved with the Federal Capital, yet because of his position in the Department, his opinion was always sought and because of his beliefs were opposed to Griffin’s it was always damaging to Griffin’s plan. He was a strong critic of what he termed the extravagance of the plan, a strong promoter of the city on the south side of the Molonglo, close to Parliament House, and he had little belief in an artificial city or an inland city; he was in favour of natural contours for transport and buildings (did not like trains in cuttings) and favoured a naturalesque lake. His part in the failure of Griffin’s efforts to establish an international Competition for the Parliament House was exceedingly vexatious for Griffin but his greatest impact was his belittlement of the Capitol and his recommendation to Government that Parliament House should be built on Mt Kurrajong. He supplied his own design. He advised the Government on the establishment of the Authority, the Federal Capital Advisory Committee which finally replaced the authority of the Federal Capital Director of Design and Construction. Ultimately the jewel in his public service crown was the design of the Provisional Parliament House, which was designed and erected on a site in contravention of Griffin’s plan and with an architectural character completely antithetic to Griffin’s idea of the democratic, organic design suited to Australian conditions.

Commissioner Blackett found the nub of the power struggle over the Federal Capital to be ‘… whether Colonel Owen or Mr Griffin was entitled to control matters concerning the design and construction of the Federal Capital.’ Both Minister Kelly and Prime Minister Cook had tried to reassure Owen that his position as Director of Works was not
threatened, Cook informing him that Mr Griffin’s appointment was ‘in order to preserve the integrity of his plan’. The Commissioner expressed amazement to find that Owen believed his own appointment to be above any appointment validated by Parliament, since he was appointed by the representative of the Crown -‘I take it that that appointment can only be cancelled by the same authority – the Governor General in Council –or some higher authority’. The Griffins of course found this astonishing as well, and Marion recorded it in Magic of America. Such was the state of play in the Department.

Murdoch did not escape implication in this matter entirely. Commissioner Blackett observed that

‘Mr Murdoch, architect, Department of Home Affairs seems to have given Colonel Owen some evil counsel as to the conflict that would arise...... It is quite evident, then that Colonel Owen had consulted with Mr. Murdoch about the matter, and that the latter, in ignorance as to the terms of contract as to which he was advising, had promoted Colonel Owen’s belief that Mr. Griffin’s appointment was in conflict with his own position.’

Although many believe that Murdoch’s motives were pure, it is certain that, for whatever reasons, he gave no support to Griffin’s plan. Discourse on Griffin and Murdoch has customarily used a dividing line to present the favoured one as lily white on one side and blacken the reputation of the other. It is more useful to examine the dividing line itself, or in other words, the cause of their differences.

The Dividing Line between Griffin and the Commonwealth

Architect

Murdoch was not versed in town planning; he believed in the ‘natural’ evolution of cities and not in Canberra as ‘an artificial Capital’, but he became more interested after his trip to Washington. Both Griffin and Murdoch were highly competent architects and both were completely devoted to their profession. Their differences were ideological and political, Griffin supporting an organic democracy and Murdoch the traditions of Empire. Their ideological stance was reflected in their all important views of architecture and their knowledge and interpretation of town planning – views that were ‘chalk and cheese’.

In a paper addressed to the British Association for the Advancement of Science, Melbourne, in August 1914 Griffin, aware of the difficulties he was already facing, wrote:
‘Altogether the Australians, isolated from their European antecedents both by
distance and disparity in environment and climate, are in a better position than most
others to take the necessary steps towards modernism, and in a natural radicalism
appears to lie the possibility, if not the promise, of concrete civic expression in
Canberra that will justify high ideals.’  

It is ironic that Griffin left America expecting to find in Australia the highest ideals of
democracy and an almost ‘tabula rasa’ in architecture, only to cross swords with ‘feudal’
power in the traditions of the British Empire (The Griffins found this in class distinction and
racial intolerance and markedly in the undemocratic powers of the bureaucracy). The so
called ‘modern’ approach to architecture advocated by the ‘Big End of Town’ in Chicago
, which was vehemently opposed by Sullivan, as ‘feudal’, was similar to that advocated by
the chief architect of the Department which advised the Commonwealth Government
and, by and large, that advocated by the architectural profession in Australia. Murdoch
was fond of ‘Modern Renaissance’ for public buildings. Sullivan’s theory of democratic
architecture had run aground on this same set of preferences for tradition and eclecticism,
then the ‘educated’ architecture of the privileged.

Griffin was at pains to establish where he stood from the very beginning.

‘My work has been previously best known in connection with the development in this
country of a type of architecture that is independent of classic, Gothic, or any other
historic, or academic basis and also free from effort to be original, eccentric, or
striking, further than results from the contrast between the borrowed finery of
applied academic architecture and a straightforward adaptation of present day
labour-saving, economic constructive methods, and materials to the essential, but
often new, functions of our more complex activities. This, in other words, is to treat
architecture as a democratic language of every day life, not a language of an
aristocratic, especially educated cult, as it has been in the modern world since the
year 1500, when architecture as a natural expression and creative art died with the
“Renaissance”.’  

Murdoch’s education and early experience in architecture was founded on the traditional
views of respected architectural firms in Elgin, north Scotland – eclecticism, favouring
Classical for institutional and Gothic for religious architecture. His views, temperament,
administrative and design abilities were well suited to a career in the public service,
serving the Commonwealth Government and the British Empire, which he took up with
the Government in Queensland soon after arriving in Australia, in the 1880s. He transferred to the Commonwealth in 1904 with the assistance of Littleton Groom, Commonwealth M.L.A. representing the Darling Downs. Murdoch was able to say in his 1915 CV that

'Due to my position in the Department, probably no person has had a wider experience of buildings in Australia, including its tropics.'

He was a loyal Commonwealth officer. His overseas trip for the Department in 1912 brought him up to date with world trends and he doubtless saw at first hand developments which previously he had perhaps read about in journals. His views on planned cities modified a little, gaining a favourable impression from the Mall at Washington. He walked around Oak Park in Chicago with Griffin and must have visited Unity Temple. (Possibly there is a connection with the interior form of the chambers in the provisional Parliament House. There is no record of his asking to see any of Sullivan's buildings.) But he retained his view of the value of traditional styles and in America was most impressed by architects like McKim Mead and White, the Eastern States firm which had so much impact upon Daniel Burnham and the Columbia Exposition of 1893. The ‘White City’ was no longer extant but it had been very well publicised and had won many advocates for its white rendered renaissance of classical styles. On that overseas trip ‘modern’ eclecticism and the City Beautiful Movement was evident to Murdoch in its spread throughout America. ‘Modern Renaissance’ was Murdoch’s idea of modern architecture.

Murdoch returned to Australia with an understanding of modern town planning based on the City Beautiful Movement and with the seeds of his later development of ‘Modern Renaissance’ or Federal Capital style as it came to be named after its use in Canberra. It was Murdoch’s answer for Australia’s national style. Howard Tanner’s Conservation Management Plan for the Provisional Parliament House likened the building to a Wembley pavilion. In 1921 Murdoch’s design for the Australian pavilion for the British World Fair at Wembley was a parapeted building, its detail stripped classicism in white render, reminiscent of the White City, although more modest in scale. It was a veritable prototype for the design of the Provisional Parliament House. Viewing Griffin’s Land Axis as a ‘City Beautiful’ mall, Murdoch visualised the architecture of the Parliament House and the Government Group as white rendered ‘Modern Renaissance’ buildings around the Court of Honor, just as in the Chicago Exposition. Nothing was further from Griffin’s intention.
Moreover, perhaps having experienced the cold winds of Chicago, Mt Kurrajong began to appeal to Murdoch as the site for Parliament House. Once the attraction of this site was made clear to the politicians, they would never let go of it. It became the apparition animating their Federal Capital. Some Prime Ministers remained sceptical of a monumental building perched on a hill – and some were fearful of ‘wedding cake’ architecture. The National Capital Development Commission did not support it until director Tony Powell told his senior staff at the NCDC that if they wanted to build the new Parliament House they had to give the politicians the site they wanted. 21

The Impact of the War and the Parliament House Competition.22

On 5 August 1914, only weeks after Griffin arrived back in Australia, Britain declared war on Germany. Colonel David Miller soon found in this situation the opportunity to wrest control over the progress of the Federal Capital from Griffin for his departmental officers.

The building of Parliament House was essential to the viability of Canberra. No one would move there until Government was established. Griffin had enjoyed the support of Minister Kelly in the conduct of an international competition, underway for Parliament House; the entries were to be judged in London by a panel of adjudicators from the leading lights of the profession around the world – Otto Wagner of Vienna, Victor Laloux of Paris, John James Burnet of London, Louis Sullivan of Chicago and George T. Poole, the Western Australian Government Architect. Wagner, Laloux and Sullivan represented the modern movement and Scottish born architect John James Burnet had completed the modern well publicized Kodak building in London (1911). Griffin himself had no role, apart from the provision of the conditions. The Competition programmes were sent abroad and the competition was in full effect from 39th June until 25th September 1914; 217 architects registered, including 67 from Great Britain, 61 from the United States and 52 from Australia. 23 The success of the Parliament House competition was important for Griffin’s good reputation and he was keen to complete his three year contract by having given excellent service to the Government and having made excellent progress on the key areas of the city.

The Parliament House Competition was also vital to Griffin for the selection of the architect who would carry out this most important building, the climax of the Government Group around the ‘Court of Honour’. It would set the architectural character of the group and impact on the architecture of the whole city. It was also the first vital step in the
establishment of the land uses of his plan, strengthening Capitol Hill as the site for the Capitol.

Figure 3: PLANNING CONCEPT FOR THE HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT prepared under the direction of Griffin, 1913. National Capital Authority (2004).

The evidence from Magic of America is that the Griffins very rapidly after their transfer to Australia, perceived Australian democracy as less than ideal and began to regard their Ideal City as a means of leading Australia towards the ideal democracy. The architecture of the city necessarily had to be democratic, associated with the empowerment of the individual, not associated with ‘feudalism’, hierarchy or privilege. They believed that the land leasehold system in Canberra would make possible this societal growth by freeing the society from speculative greed. With the ideal city in place, Australian society would, they hoped, grow towards the idealism which would be reflected in the city and its future Capitol, which could then justifiably take on the role of animus to future generations.

After the September 1914 change of government, Miller finding an ally in the new Minister, Archibald, wasted not a day in galvanising the Minister into action, to secure parliaments approval for the withdrawal of the Competition. This was achieved. This situation was exceedingly vexatious for Griffin who was Federal Capital Director of Design and Construction with a Minister and a Department aligned against him.
Miller, not to lose any opportunity, then set about convincing the Minister of the need for changing the conditions. This he discussed with Murdoch with whom he lunched or ‘walked out’ on visits to Melbourne. When Archibald was sufficiently convinced to ask Murdoch for a redraft of the conditions, Murdoch prepared his report on a Sunday at home (He was a bachelor and resided at the Commercial Travellers Club). He addressed his report, ‘Conditions of Competition for Federal Parliament House Canberra’ in accordance with Departmental red tape, to the Director General of Works, Percy Owen, who in turn, addressed his concurrency to the Departmental Secretary, Walter Bingle with the recommendation for Ministerial approval. It offered a Competition restricted to British countries with adjudicators from the Royal Institute of British Architects and the Royal Victorian and New South Wales Institutes of Architecture and watertight control by the Department

Suave bureaucratic teamwork all came together. Murdoch made it known that he had discussed only the mandatory conditions but that there were also non mandatory conditions on which he had views; he was encouraged to add a postscript to his report –

‘The Minister has further instructed me to comment upon the applicability of the non-mandatory sections of the published conditions to a competition restricted to British countries…’

‘It is essential that competitors shall have distinct knowledge of the position of the parliament house relative to other buildings intended to form the Government group, in which it ranks next in importance to the so-called Capitol building. The question arises what scheme of grouping for these buildings is the best to adopt. Personally, I think this is not fully solved in the plan and section put forward in the conditions and described in the clauses under review. Should such lay out of this group of buildings be adopted, I agree with the description that the Capitol building must be the supreme and objective feature of the group, and that to secure this an ‘open axial view’ must be framed and maintained. According, however, to the sectional drawing presented to competitors, it will be impossible to entirely realize these ideals. If this drawing be correct, from no point in the “Court of Departmental Buildings” could more than the upper portion of the Capitol building be seen (which probably would be better not seen in this way) and from no point on the axis between Parliament House and the Capitol would any part of the “Court of Departmental Buildings” be viewed; it seems doubtful whether much of the proposed basin beyond would be visible on this line.’
The postscript takes a degree of cover as a critique of the conditions for the Competition for Parliament House. Who knows whether a politician with no technical training in the area of planning understood that was the 1st premiated plan that was being unravelled in this document; the Department had used that advantage before.

It is well aimed at the points Murdoch wished to drive home to the Minister: Firstly the point is made that a building obscure in importance, not properly named, is being ranked above the parliament! Murdoch has gone for the jugular on the Capitol, the point most likely to enlist the concern of the politician, and the idea Griffin always feared may not be accepted by any government. That shock tactic behind him, Murdoch then seems free to ask quite reasonably ‘What scheme of grouping for these buildings is the best to adopt.’

But it is not reasonable for Murdoch to yet again question this scheme which was awarded 1st prize in an international competition, attracted world acclaim and was tested against a very bad scheme supported by Murdoch himself. It is not reasonable for Murdoch to question a scheme which was reinstated, with public support, when the Board to advise on the Federal Capital, which included Murdoch, was disbanded. It is not reasonable for Murdoch to regard the matter of the design of the Federal capital as still unresolved. But that is what he does.

Murdoch makes unsubstantiated criticisms designed to unsettle the Minister. It was Griffin’s intention that the Parliament House would obstruct the view of the Capitol from within the Government Group. From there, the focus would be the Parliament House, the whole purpose of the group being the functions of Government. Griffin’s ensemble, the Capitol with the entire Government Group, would come into view at the end of the Court of Honour and be fully realized from across the lake. Griffin’s idea gives independent vitality and sense of identity to each, the Capitol and the Government Group in addition to the overall integrity of the composition, the ensemble, as a statement of the transparency of Democracy. Both James Weirick and Paul Reid have remarked on this depth of expression in Griffin’s design.

Murdoch’s postscript continues with this behind the scenes political conniving:

‘The description of the group goes on to say that Parliament being in two houses precludes giving “focal significance” to the Parliament building; that, however I think cannot seriously be regarded as an obstacle in securing this, should it be desirable in any scheme for layout of the buildings. The so-called Capitol, which monopolises all “focal significance”, is to me a somewhat uncertain conception. At any rate, it is
not likely to develop into much, or even to be called into being for some generations, and I feel that on its account it is proposed to deprive Parliament House (which from beginning to end will be the practical object of the City’s existence) of at least some of the significance of position which might have been otherwise allotted to it in the City scheme.’

Murdoch had forecast, as had Griffin, the likelihood of the passage of some years before the erection of the Capitol. In this case Murdoch’s argument is illogical and the Parliament House on Griffin’s site, Camp Hill would have occupied the most significant position of any building until the Capitol was built.

Murdoch’s postscript continues in similar mode, containing more unsubstantiated statements to provoke concern, but unable to resist the temptation to add a colonnade:

This unfortunately, however, begins to open up the question of the City plan, which I am not called upon to do; but I cannot refrain from regretting that Parliament House, for reasons which appear insufficient, is not to be made the objective of at least some of the City avenues.

Assuming, therefore, that in relation to the City plan, the site for Parliament House is fixed, it will be necessary in these competition conditions to afford competitors the levels decided on for avenues giving access to the site.

It is in my opinion, also advisable that they should be given the natural levels of the whole site intended for the Government group of buildings, and that they be asked to suggest with their designs for Parliament House a lay out and levels for the entire group.

I take it that an infinite arrangement of these buildings will be possible and yet consistent with the City plan. At any rate, in my view, it is most desirable that the Capitol should be of, as well as in, the Government group (it is practically cut off in the arrangement put forward as I have already explained), because it is only through the Capitol as one of its members that distinct direct relationship between the group and the City, as planned, is set up; all avenues of the City being directed on that building alone. From it, therefore, on the main avenue of all, something more than roofs of the Government administrative buildings should be made visible, i.e., open axis through the group is desirable as stated in the conditions, but not fully provided by the plan accompanying them.

To adequately obtain this open view, leaving Parliament House in the position fixed for it, it would, as far as I can see, be necessary to depress the centre of the building some 30 or 40 feet for a length of, say, about 300 feet. [An alarming suggestion!]
This may have the elements of good architectural treatment in it, especially if a surmounting open colonnade on grand scale, through which the Capitol might be seen is formed; but if an expedient of the kind is requisite, I think it should be clearly explained and indicated on the sectional and other diagrams, in order that wasted effort by competitors may be prevented. The idea would be extremely expensive, and possibly might not lend itself to convenient planning.

Should it be decided as suggested to give competitors a free hand to design the whole layout of the Government group, the importance of maintaining the parallel system of buildings considered desirable by Mr Griffin should be mentioned.”

Dated 8 May 1915 JSM
Noted 12 May 1915 PTO [Percy Thomas Owen]

The genie was out of the bottle, never to go back in. Murdoch’s postscript to the Minister suggested that the ‘so-called Capitol,’ ‘a somewhat uncertain conception…not likely to develop into much…’ had assumed too much importance in Griffin’s plan, which was improperly worked out, to the detriment of Parliament House, to which much more importance should be given. The Capitol site loomed large as a possible solution for Parliament House. It may be judged as certain that Murdoch already knew before submitting his post script that these ideas would be supported by the Minister.

Murdoch’s Competition conditions with the Department’s control of the Competition and selection of judges would have been highly unlikely to produce the architecture Griffin regarded as democratic and organic and essential to the idealism of his city. In October 1915 he wrote his resignation and was at the point of submitting it, when his best opportunity since Minister Kelly came with a change in Government to that of Prime Minister William Morris Hughes. King O’Malley served a second term as Minister and established the Royal Commission into the Administration of the Federal Capital. At the hearing of his evidence, Archibald taunted Griffin:

‘I understand from evidence that you gave the other day that you are a happy man now, that your ambitions have been consummated, and that you have everything you desire since this agreement was signed; that under the present Minister you have absolute control, subject to any advice he may want from you, and that you can do precisely as you like. Is not that the position? – I do not think I have made any statement of the kind, nor do I think that is the position.”29
The Royal Commission took Griffin from the work he badly needed to do and it changed nothing in regard to his relationship with the Department. But while O’Malley was Minister and directed their compliance, they complied. The Departmental officers retained their positions in a departmental reshuffle, except that O’Malley adopted the position that had been held by Miller as Administrator of the Federal Capital. Miller went to Defence.

The documents with the postscript that Murdoch had added to his Competition conditions for Archibald’s approval were tabled at the Royal Commission and Griffin knew of Murdoch’s intentions from thenceforth.

O’Malley remained Minister from 27 October 1915 to 14 November 1916. During 1915 and 1916 Griffin produced several plans many of which could be termed exploratory or investigative rather than conclusive. They dealt with road levels, the railway and the lakes and central basins. They were produced in Griffin’s Melbourne office and after the establishment of the Federal Capital Advisory Committee it fell to the Secretary to that Committee, Charles Studdy Daley’s responsibility to classify and record all material and transfer it to the Custom’s House in Sydney for the use of the Committee.

Griffin again retrieved control of the Parliament House Competition conditions but, due to the war, the Competition’s reinstatement was not authorised by Parliament. With O’Malley as Administrator, but under wartime conditions, with expenditure restricted to little beyond war demands, Griffin strove to place his design on the ground as far as possible; he abandoned the initial city, partially excavated the Western basin of the ornamental waters and established what is now called Commonwealth Avenue and State Circle.

In September 1915 a State funeral had been held in Melbourne for General Bridges, shot at Gallipoli by a Turkish sniper. Bridges had been the founder of Duntroon Military College and the Military, the Department of Defence and Lady Bridges wished for his body to be entombed in Canberra at Duntroon. Griffin was informed of the ideas of Charles Bean, the national historian, about the incorporation of a national memorial to the ANZAC heroes within the Capitol. The building concept for the Capitol was for a cruciform base, probably of cubist proportions and about 3-storeys high surmounted by a cardinally oriented stepped pyramid over the great reception hall. The wings projecting from the reception hall would have been suitable for such a memorial as well as for archival exhibits. Griffin offered, through Minister O’Malley, for General Bridges tomb to be located on Capitol Hill as part of this ANZAC memorial. The offer was not accepted. In 1916 Griffin designed General Bridges tomb, not competed until 1920, and located on Mt Pleasant.
Paul Reid wrote:

‘The War Memorial has become the most significant shrine in the nation and could have fulfilled the role Griffin saw for the Capitol. If the memorial had indeed occupied the climactic site in the national capital, Parliament may well have been happy to accept Camp Hill for themselves and Canberra’s history may well have taken a very different path.’

Charles Studdy Daley wrote that

‘the Australian War memorial occupies one of the finest building sites in the capital, and it is perhaps, the dominating institutional feature of the city’s landscape’ [written prior to the construction of the present Parliament House]

He claimed to have chosen the site late in 1921 and was shown a sketch of the building which Dr Bean had made, recalling the Parthenon at Athens. Griffin’s suggestion of Capitol Hill as the site for Bridges tomb lends support to acceptance of the ANZAC heroism, its mateship and courage as a forge of the Australian character and the telling of its story at the Capitol. But Bean wanted a dedicated building and Griffin could never have accepted a war memorial as ‘the one isolated building’, the animus of his democratic, organic city; it could never have replaced the Capitol as animus for a beneficent democracy in Australian life, in harmony with the natural environment. Such a proposal would have been more fatal to his ideals than placing Parliament House on Capital Hill.

With the Griffins democratic idealism and their regard for the environment, war was of course an anathema as war had been for Sullivan, for the reasons of its misuse of power and confirmation of ‘feudalism’. In Magic of America Marion credits Griffin, Adele Pankhurst and Archbishop Mannix with the defeat of Prime Minister Billy Hughes’ bid to gain the consent of Australians by referendum for conscription. Marion too would have been passionately involved. Such an involvement would have done nothing to increase Griffin’s stature with the Colonels in the Department, or with the Prime Minister. Hughes seems to have been fair to Griffin, but as a result of his policy on conscription he was expelled from the Labour Party. He regrouped with the nationals and retained the Prime Ministership at the next election, but, ironically for Griffin, this alliance caused a reshuffle of the Ministry; O’Malley went to the back bench and was replaced by the Hon. Littleton Groom, the member for the Darling Downs and Murdoch’s friend from Queensland.
Griffin developed several plans after the 1913 plan, working on contours, road rail and waterway levels as well as detailed subdivision layouts. Paul Reid believed the 1917 plan of the framework of the city matched to the topography, with the ‘bones’ of the city design revealed, was the most influential drawing for the building of the city. For the central area of the city, the plan which Griffin produced in 1918 and which became the Government gazetted plan was still a proclamation of faith in his design, little changed from the 1913 plan, made to compromise with Australian conditions. In the only remarkable change, the Casino was no longer shown and instead Prospect Place was perhaps a site for an isolated monument – a war memorial? ‘The loss of the Casino was a great loss to the spirit of the city. It was the terminal point of the Plaisance, Griffin’s playground for the populace, and the gateway to the natural beauties of the Mt Ainslie reserve. This is seen in Figure 11 in Chapter 1.’ In Griffin’s 1912 plan the central area was a confident, joyous place; in the 1918 plan it was somewhat battered by his Australian experience. Yet, buffeted as he was by wide ranging criticisms, no further compromise would be entertained by Griffin.
In discussion of these last few years of Griffin's opportunity to protect the integrity of his design in *Canberra Following Griffin*, Paul Reid believed that Griffin had lost his way. This seems to have been so in the environs of the city where the 1912 radial connections with the stellar patterns of local centres were replaced by more meandering and less focused curvilinear forms. Paul Reid believed that the striking integrity of the environs with the urban and landform focused geometry of the city was gone. Was it sacrificed to economy in the hope of dulling criticism and retaining the central area? Reid also suggests that the detailed drawings Griffin left of the avenues, the railway, the lakes and basins and the overall handling of the terrain, particularly at Russell indicate the problems that Griffin faced, more than his ability to provide solutions.
For Griffin, the design was worth the problems to be surmounted. When we consider the difficulties surmounted in the 1980s, in rendering the Capital Hill site suitable for Parliament House, the ramp connection from Commonwealth Avenue and the land bridge connection with the Old Parliament House and the subsequent Mall, it was always a matter of Government will, rather than technology or expense. Griffin’s design for terracing in the Parliamentary Triangle to form the stage setting and climax of the Government group complimented the natural amphitheatre-like form of the land. Today that form and relationship with the natural land form is completely gone. The land forms created at Commonwealth Place have required huge earth works, contriving a hump and cupped forms which have nothing to do with Griffin’s design or the natural integrity of the slope from Capital Hill to the lake. The mind of the visitor to the area is divorced from natural reality by an impression created as if by a curved lens. Griffin, an organic architect, was concerned with working with the land and its general formation to create a noble form for the built environment.

In dealing with public service obstructions and stifled by war restrictions on expenditure, Griffin could not fulfil his contract as he had intended; by now he was trapped in Australia by the state of things as they were. His reputation had suffered. When Griffin’s second three year term expired, his contract was not renewed – he continued on an ad hoc basis while the Government sorted out what it wanted to do. His last hopes for his organic, democratic ‘ideal city’ were draining away; its animus, the Capitol, was threatened by either a Parliament House or, worse, a War Memorial on Capitol Hill; Parliament had not given approval for the Parliament House Competition with his conditions. He knew that Murdoch wanted the Government Group, the stage setting for Democracy, redesigned. The magnitude of the opposition to the core of his design was taking its tremendous toll, and it was Murdoch’s turn for the ear of the Minister.

The Government Perspective and the Rowe Thesis: All these events are seen from the Government’s perspective in David Rowe’s PhD thesis on John Smith Murdoch. The thesis contributes to a mythology that Murdoch supported Griffin’s plan and was responsible for the Government’s decision to bring Griffin to Australia in order to explain his plan. On the other hand, Murdoch’s evidence before the Royal Commission has been seen to be very self revealing, particularly his revelation in evidence that he believed the reason that Griffin was coming to Australia was to advise on improvements on the Boards plan. With a completely different view point Murdoch revealed it was his plan that
Murdoch expected Griffin to comment on - the tracings that have never been seen with Murdoch’s modifications to the Board’s plan developed from ideas gained mainly from his trip to Washington. Murdoch was hurrying up to have this done before Griffin arrived. He thrived in a comfort zone of supportive colleagues in permanent employment in the public service.

In fact it is clear from Minister Kelly’s evidence he was responsible for bringing out Griffin. (6152) 37

‘Were you influenced in any way by public criticism in relation to the departmental plan? – Yes. I looked into it closely, and from the very little I knew of city planning I did not like it…. The absence of focal points and other disadvantages impressed me. But I was mainly induced by these criticisms to realize that it would never do to have a board of practicing architects sitting at the receipt of custom in connection with the establishment of a Federal Capital, and perhaps giving commissions to other architects. In the circumstances I thought that the best thing to do was to import the man who made the design.’ (6157) ‘The Departmental plan did not appeal to you? - No’ (6158-6159)

Kelly wrote to the Prime Minister, Cook, with a paper on the subject of bringing out Griffin. (the paper tabled), (6161-6162.) ‘On 17th July 1913 Cabinet endorsed bringing out Mr. Griffin.’ Finally on the issue of bringing out Griffin, the evidence shows that Griffin was already on his way before he received any support from the government.

The relationship between Griffin and the then Commonwealth architect was a very important matter with major impact on the planning of Canberra. Had they agreed, Canberra simply would be a different place. It is clear, from the ‘Evidence’ that after their initial meetings before Minister Kelly disbanded the Board, Murdoch and Griffin saw little of each other. They knew each others views and they were incompatible. While Kelly remained Minister, Murdoch retreated to his position of not wanting anything to do with Canberra. Also Murdoch reveals at one point in his evidence that he felt Griffin did not wish to discuss matters any further with him – this incident was associated with Griffin’s preparation of the conditions for the Parliament House Competition after the Board had been disbanded by Kelly. Murdoch and Griffin may well have consciously avoided each other.

The Rowe thesis does not investigate this possibility or more importantly, the reasons for it, which were based on the entirely different ideologies and approaches to design by
these two architects, beliefs which each of them held strongly. In relation to the location of Parliament House, the thesis provides the alternative viewpoint which is always useful in establishing the truth. It regards Griffin as a problem for Murdoch, an obstacle which Murdoch overcomes to achieve the pinnacle of his public service career, the design of the Provisional Parliament House. It makes no comment on the cost to the substance of Griffin’s Canberra plan, nor the substantial evidence that Murdoch worked behind the scenes for the relocation of Parliament House.

There appears to be no record of a disinterested appraisal within the Public Service at that time, of Griffin’s plan. Charles Daley describes walking around Melbourne with Murdoch who would analyze for him the features of the more important buildings. Murdoch’s analysis of Griffin’s plan seems unfortunately to have been preconditioned by ideology and his own idea for the location of Parliament House and opinions on other technical matters expressed by some of his departmental colleagues.

Griffin only found out about developments contrary to his plan by reading Hansard, or through the Royal Commission. Again referring to the Minutes of Evidence, Owen repeatedly asked Griffin whether he thought any officer of the Department desired to carry out the execution of the Parliament House. After attempts to avoid answering the question, finally Griffin replied ‘I have never placed it on any officer.’

It becomes clear that the threat of Murdoch’s interference with the Parliament House and the ‘ensemble’ with the Capitol was exceedingly pernicious for Griffin. With Murdoch’s star in the ascent under the patronage of Littleton Groom and with the replacement of Griffin’s position with the FCAC, Griffin was rendered powerless to protect his plan... Sulman accepted the promise of a knighthood in lieu of remuneration for his chairmanship of the Committee38. This of course placed Sulman in no position to support Griffin’s plan and even though Griffin plan was gazetted this proved no impediment to the ways and means of avoiding its implementation. Griffin wisely refused the Government’s offer of a place on the Committee, chaired by Sulman. He had no choice.

Murdoch worked with the Minister, Littleton Groom, to establish the Federal Capital Advisory Committee, with the chairmanship of John Sulman, President of the Town Planning Association of New South Wales, who accepted a Knighthood in exchange for his services. Groom was the MLA for the Darling Downs. Murdoch had enjoyed his friendship since his Queensland days, when, in 1904, Groom had advised him to join the Commonwealth public service.
The Federal Capital Advisory Committee included E.M. De Burgh, Herbert Ross, Colonel Owen and J.T.H. Goodwin with C.S. Daley as Secretary. Griffin declined a place on the Committee. C.S. Daley remembered him stating to Groom ‘A board has length and breadth, but no depth.’

Figure 6: Griffin at the Lippincott’s house seated in a ‘Newman College’ chair. C. 1922, reproduced from Anne Watson (1998)

C.S. Daley wrote:

‘Through his knowledge, ability and integrity, Murdoch stood high in the estimation of his colleagues and of governments. His work and character were often praised in Parliament, many Members meeting him intimately in his constant duty to give evidence and advice to the Public Works Committee, and admiring his courageous and consistent stand for high quality in everything, At the opening of Parliament House, in 1927, he was invested with a CMG by the Duke of York.’
Murdoch’s work rightly is acknowledged as the major achievement in the development of Canberra throughout the 1920s. What has not been adequately acknowledged is the lasting impression made on Murdoch of the Classical Revival/ Beaux Arts design ideology termed the ‘City Beautiful’ during his trip to America and its subsequent impact on Canberra. A true eclectic, Murdoch was on an ideas gathering mission for the development of the Board’s plan. His architectural aesthetics were changed by that trip and he returned to Australia highly motivated on the design for Canberra. Murdoch’s liking for the stripped classicism used for exhibition buildings at World Fairs, dating from the
Chicago World fair of 1893, affected his own design for the Australian pavilion at Wimble in 1921, which became a virtual design prototype for the provisional Parliament House.

In his evidence to the Royal Commission he stressed that new ideas always came and that he was open to changes even during the course of construction of a building. He liked to be regarded as practical and economical – he criticized Griffin strongly on costs grounds - and refuted any idea that, what we refer to today as ‘variations to the contract’ result in cost escalations. The cost estimate for the Provisional Parliament House was approximately 200,000 pounds and the final cost was approximately 600,000 pounds.  

Murdoch had many fine attributes, praiseworthy in many situations, but he was not a town planner and was demonstrably inadequate for the visionary task of planning a city, the capital of a nation.

The progress made by the various Committees reveals a marked decline in the idealism with which the enterprise of creating the city began in the early years of Federation. The Australian Government offered no stability as a client. Griffin struggled for seven years against total opposition to his plan by the officers of the bureaucracy, supported in the main by their Ministers in government. He benefited from only two short periods of support by Minister Kelly, who engaged him and by Minister O’Malley, with all his blunders and imperfections, who renewed his contract, the latter period largely occupied by the Royal Commission.

As little as Griffin’s vision was realised, the transcendental union of the natural and built environments is what we most celebrate in Canberra.

Griffin’s Appearance at the Public Works Committee’s Hearings for the Provisional Parliament House and the War Memorial

Griffin was recalled to participate in the affairs of the Commonwealth Government twice more. In addressing the Chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works (PWC) in relation to the proposal to erect a Provisional Parliament House, in 1923, Griffin began:

‘In my opinion it would be preferable, from every point of view, to proceed with the nucleus of the permanent building. It would be possible to erect the nucleus of the permanent building within three years.’
His words were delivered against the background of evidence given by John Smith Murdoch for the economical value and urgency for a provisional building to be sited below Griffin’s Parliament House Camp Hill site. Murdoch also expressed his opinion that Capitol Hill should be properly considered as a suitable site for the permanent Parliament House which would be needed in some fifty years time. He proposed a design which is printed in the Committee’s report. See figures 9 and 10.

Figure 9: PERSPECTIVE VIEW, PARLIAMENT HOUSE, CAPITOL HILL proposed by Commonwealth Architect John Smith Murdoch
Public Works Committee Report 1923

Figure 10: PLAN.
Griffin continued:

It would be a distinct and radical departure from the original design if a provisional building were erected on the reservoir site, and later the permanent Parliament House on Kurrajong Hill; so radical a departure would it be that it would materially interfere with the whole design. My design provides for the Capitol on Kurrajong Hill, to be utilized for public functions, such as the opening of parliament, memorial or commemorative gatherings, and the like. I do not think it would be purely ornamental by any means. It is the figurative embodiment of the spirit of the Commonwealth. My idea was that at some later period a magnificent building should be erected there.’

The Capitol at Washington is used for the sittings of Congress; but that is a differently planned city, and the Capitol bears a different relation to the city. The original idea included two houses on the sides of Kurrajong Hill – one for the Governor General and the other for the Prime minister. Later it was considered that there would not be sufficient room to give effect to the idea. It was only a matter of convenience, having nothing to do with the architectural scheme, and I would not press it. To build the provisional building just below Camp Hill would absolutely destroy the whole idea of the Government group, which is the dominating feature of the Federal Capital; it would be like filling a front yard full of outhouses… It would never be pulled down; history teaches us that such things are not changed; the pressures being too great to allow it…

‘The city is built around an ensemble of buildings, each bearing a certain relation to the other. If you take the most important element and shift it to another place, the whole thing is upset completely and no longer part of the city plan, and every other feature of the city depending on that is nullified…

…I am emphatically of the opinion that the permanent structure should be on Camp Hill. I consider that to have been one of the earliest decisions, on which everything else was shaped….’

… Under my scheme the whole hill would be developed from base to top as an architectural ensemble. The Capitol could be used as an historical museum in which all the trophies, all the records relating to the achievements of Australians would be preserved.’

At the hearing Percy Owen, the Director General of Works admitted that he had never fully realized what Mr. Griffin intended the Capitol to be.
Griffin’s struggle at this appearance is palpable and hopeless. He is present at the carving up of his great vision for democracy, the organic conceptualization of a noble idea.

On March 24 in 1928, Griffin was called to give evidence at the PWC hearing for the War Memorial. He understood that it was proposed to erect the memorial 400 ft long by 180 ft wide on the southern slopes of Mt Ainslie on a reserve of 30 acres. He said that he would like to study the exact location more closely before expressing an opinion on whether the location would be detrimental to the city. He appeared to connect the location with a short Avenue shown as Vista Avenue on the 1918 plan – from which he had removed the Casino. This is the area of Ainslie Park in the diagram in the Original Report (1911) which Griffin had designated for Commemorative structures. Referring to that he said: ‘In the original description of the plans the suitability of such a site for a memorial building was mentioned.’ Whether Griffin understood that the War Memorial was intended to terminate the vista from the Provisional Parliament House (1927) is unclear.

His following comments show the lingering, wistful association with the Capitol:
‘In the original design provision was made for a capitol building at Kurrajong, and I had in mind a space for the erection of a memorial building, but not of course of the specific nature now under consideration. My mind was concentrated upon a general memorial to commemorate successively the achievements of Australians in literature, science, art, politics, &c. It was to be a continuous memorial that could be extended through the centuries, and not such a specific memorial, the necessity for which has since arisen, to commemorate a great event. I regard the selected site as suitable as it is on the spot contemplated for a specific monument. I understand the proposed building is to be a war memorial and war museum combined, and such a special event as this building is to commemorate, would be submerged too much in the general memorial on the Capitol Hill.’

The War Memorial was set to replace the Capitol as the national place of pilgrimage.
End Notes

1 Many architects, like the Commonwealth architect Murdoch, interpreted the classical styles in a way that they considered modern, e.g. ‘Modern Renaissance’, the style Murdoch said described the Provisional Parliament House. Griffin did not want the judging panel for Australia’s Parliament House to comprise architects of that persuasion. This was a major part of Griffin’s struggle with Murdoch.

In 1918 he had to give up his office in the Auditorium tower for a small space on the second floor facing Wabash Street. In 1920 he lost even that space.

3 Griffin refuted this in 1923 at the Public Works Standing Committee hearings for the Provisional Parliament House. He said, recorded in the Report at paragraph 338: ‘The idea of having a Capitol is not purely an American idea, There is a Capitol at Rome’ Griffin was thinking of the functions of the Capitol at Rome, its several purposes which historically reach back to the foundation of the Roman Republic, BC… where the Capitol buildings on Capitoline Hill included the repository of historical archives and the dedication to the foundation of Rome by Romulus and Remus. The Roman Capitol embodied the secular and sentimental animus of the Roman civilization.

4 ‘The Federal Battle’ is Volume II of Marion’s magnum opus Magic of America. It comprises a collection of letters, photographs and essays; the letters describe events which took place in relation to Canberra and the essays, by Walter and Marion, some of Walter’s are overwritten by Marion are on subjects such as democracy, the environment, art, architecture and define their concept of landscape architecture.

5 Weirwick, James. The Griffin’s and the Great War paper delivered at the Urban History/Planning Conference at the Australian National University, Canberra, 26-30 June 1995, p 1.

6 ‘Mr. Griffin being greeted when he took the first step to fulfil his duties which was a request for data, with -”I’ll be damned if I’ll take orders from you.” When the Minister attempted to bring about a working basis he was told he would precipitate the greatest rumpus the Department had ever known if he persisted.’ This quotation is from The Federal Capital an Essential Democratic Movement an essay written by Walter Burley Griffin which has been included in Magic of America, the Federal Battle, Vol. II C, p291. It appears that Marion has overwritten parts of this essay. The Minister referred to is Kelly. The dislike for Griffin by the Minister who followed Kelly, William Archibald, is palpable in the evidence he gave at the Royal Commission. Jon Reps quotes Archibald as referring to Griffin as ‘the Yankee bounder’.

7 Archibald, William. Royal Commission into the Federal Capital Administration, Minutes of Evidence paragraph 2 p 5

8 CVs Requested by the Minister December 1915. Papers of King O’Malley, National Library of Australia, Manuscripts. MS 460. Box 1 folder 4. Owen was educated at Sydney Grammar School. He undertook military service and went to the Boer War as Staff Officer. After the war he was promoted to major and on the reserve list when he joined Dept in 1904. His promotion to Colonel is not mentioned. He may have received his engineering training with the army.


11 Ibid, para 41.(30852)

12 Ibid Para 42

13 Ibid Para 44

stated his belief that his appointment made him answerable only to the Governor General as the King’s representative and not Parliament. The essay may be overwritten by Marion.


16 The argument is drawn from the Minutes of Evidence from the Royal Commission; The PhD thesis by David Rowe was also researched and is considered at the end of the chapter.

17 Griffin, Walter Burley. “On the modern City” for the *British Association for the Advancement of Science*, 14 August 1914, Melbourne, p 4.


20 Tanner, Howard *Conservation Management Plan for the Provisional Parliament House*.

21 In conversation with Tony Powell, 1996, and Paul Reid, 1996.

22 There is a great deal of information on the Parliament House Competition in the Minutes of Evidence from the Royal Commission into the Federal Capital Administration, the compete record held at the Australian Archives. It is also paced in perspective in Paul Reid’s *Canberra Following Griffin*.


24 Griffin, Walter Burley. “The Federal Capital as an Essential Democratic Movement” in *Magic of America The Federal Battle* Marion Mahony Griffin, Vol. IIC, p 293 from Donald Leslie Johnson papers Box 18, National Library of Australia. The second part of this essay deals with the menace of bureaucracy to democracy. Marion may have overwritten some of this essay. It cites instances of ‘Bureaucratic Government/Imperial Interests’ rather than Democracy.

25 They later came to believe that the single tax system when coupled with a system of bureaucratic control was an instrument for the impoverishment of the people.


29 Minutes of Evidence, *Royal Commission on Federal Capital Administration*, National Archives of Australia, request item 3292356, *Series no A1203(A1203/3) Control symbol 994/7/AUS* paras 982-986


Written several years after the events, it was published by Daley’s descendants after his death (1966) although previously published in the Canberra times in 1964. His description of Griffin as a person is full of recrimination but there is recognition that his ideas were sound.


33 Griffin Walter *Burley Letter to Minister for Home Affairs, 9 May 1916*, National Archives of Australia: Series A199 Control Symbol FC1919/134


35 Griffin in evidence at the Royal Commission stated what he believed then to have been the impact upon his reputation.

Para. 177. ‘A very large proportion of my time has been devoted to defensive work. Only about 10 per cent of my time has gone into effective work for the purpose for which I was engaged.’

Para.179. ‘If I had the cooperation of the Department instead of its opposition I could have done at least nine times as much as I have been able to accomplish. Ninety percent of my time has been absorbed in efforts to protect my reputation and my work.’

Para.183. ‘Had not my engagement been renewed, I can see that it would have had a serious effect on my business prospects, on my professional standing, to have made an absolute failure on a matter like this. It could hardly be interpreted otherwise – not having accomplished anything, not having done the work for which I was engaged. To have relinquished my association with the Federal Capital after the operations which have been reviewed here would certainly have been derogatory to my future professional career. It could not help having a serious influence in that regard. I might have a moral claim against the Commonwealth on the ground of injury done to me, but I would not like to take legal action because of the cost and the whole question of attacking a Government.’

Para.184. I have never considered this matter as a legal question. I had seriously considered it from a personal standpoint. I could not help having the precariousness of my position impressed upon me.

36 In *Canberra Following Griffin* p 127 Paul Reid quotes CEW Bean in February 1920: ‘I don’t know that it would be well to have the War Museum near the National Museum. [Bean’s interpretation of the Capitol] I fancy that a place by itself not far from Parliament House itself might be better.’

37 Minutes of Evidence, *Royal Commission on Federal Capital Administration*, National Archives of Australia, request item 3292356, Series no A1203(A1203/3) Control symbol 994/7/AUS paras 6152-6162. The reference at 6152 is also confirmed by C.S. Daley *As I Recall* p 36


It is interesting to read this in the light of the information that Sulman was not aware of Griffin’s resignation when he accepted the position on the Advisory committee and the comment that he would accept no remuneration for this work as he did not wish to profit from the misfortune of another architect. (Letter from John Sulman, *Building*, March 12, 1921.)

39 Daley, Charles S. *As I Recall*, p. 84.


CHAPTER 6
CONNECTIONS: THE CAPITOL AS SIGNIFIER

This thesis has argued that Griffin’s Capitol had a critical place in his design for Australia’s Federal Capital, to the extent that the decoupling of the Capitol from the plan predicated a very different city. Without the Capitol, the city of the people and organic relationships was replaced by a city planned according to the priorities and policies of government. The nation lost the hallowed ground of citadel, temple and archives upon which to testify to the democratic values of Australian civil society and with which to organically recharge political democracy.

As well as reinventing the citadel, temple and archives for the building of a 20th century democratic society, Griffin’s Capitol reinvigorated the relationship between humanity and nature at the level which Sullivan referred to as the ‘primeval animus’. The Canberra site chosen by the Australian government afforded extraordinary opportunities for the expression of environmental and democratic relationships and the union of both in the functional plan of the city. In 1911 from Steinway Hall in Chicago, Griffin took full advantage of these opportunities, for his powers of visual interpretation from documentation were acute and he had trained his mind in the observation of nature and the logical process of organic planning. In taking advantage of the Canberra site conditions, Griffin extended the iconography of the Capitol to include an organic response to the environment.

Griffin thought the design of a national capital for a new nation - one which he believed to be developing a higher standard of democracy than had yet been achieved – was a matter of great importance. Sullivan’s individual human being could stand tall in the Capitol. This human being, ‘free in his body and free in his soul...set up a responsible government within his own individual person.’1 It was Sullivan who said of the United States: (and Griffin who believed it equally true of Australia)

‘We live under a form of government called Democracy. And we, the people of the United States of America, constitute the most colossal instance known in history of a people seeking to verify the fundamental truth that self-government is Natures law for Man.’2

The design perspective presented in chapter 1 was shown to be synchronized by an organic design process, a logical sequence in analysis and synthesis, a process of form follows function explained in the quotation from Griffin himself:
‘The definite idea of architecture to my mind lies in the organic, systematic way of creation that nature shows in fitting an infinite variety of means to as many ends with perfection of form for every function - to recall Louis Sullivan’s alliteration: - ‘Form follows Function’. Griffin was the first to interpret these design principles for town planning.

Chapter Structure

Architecture is an art is demonstrated in the individual creativity and vigour of their work. Work so different produced from ideas held in common, testifies to the fundamental nature of the principles. Sullivan himself said:

‘Inasmuch as these general principles are universal and proceed from Life, they are at your disposal to apply in your own instinctive way with intelligence and feeling’.

The first part of the chapter is a critique of the talk The Young Man in Architecture to establish the basis for Griffin’s attraction to Sullivan’s ideas. Griffin retained life long respect and admiration for Sullivan, expressed in his own writings and lectures.

Three recurrent, interwoven themes - architecture as an art, nature and democracy which are the signposts of Sullivan’s thought and developed in Sullivan’s writings, also occur in Griffin’s writings. Comparisons are made using three Sullivan texts, which were available to Griffin: The Young Man in Architecture (1900) Kindergarten Chats (1901) and Natural Thinking: A Study in Democracy (1905). This establishes the general principles which connect Griffin with Sullivan.

The connection with Sullivan’s ideas is established as the basis of the convictions expressed in Griffin’s Capitol and its organic engagement with the city. The second part of the Chapter is concerned with the other connections and convictions of Government against which Griffin struggled.

It confronts the choice made by Griffin between organic democracy and the political democracy of the Westminster system as it was interpreted by a still fledgling Federal Government. The decision made by Griffin set up the issues which evolved in his organic plan and which would later be challenged by the officers of the Department. It would require all his strength to follow his principles and maintain his struggle for the Capitol.
The Principles which Signify the Griffin Sullivan Connection

Sullivan's theory, with its numerous concepts and complexities, rests on three themes – art or creativity in architecture, nature and democracy – and all three intertwine in an homogenous philosophy which views architecture as a 'living art' reflective of human nature, the individual and society. Sherman Paul wrote to place Sullivan in the intellectual tradition of America transcendentalism, which he called the 'Green tradition'. What Sullivan did, was coalesce these ideas, render them useful and apply them to the practical world of the built environment in order to create architecture as an art. Therein lies the additional complexity which must be envisaged with the theory, for Sullivan was doer as well as thinker. For Sullivan, the art of architecture 'lives' where creativity in the built environment parallels the systems of the natural world, where 'Form follows function' and where 'Democracy is the natural law for Man'. It brings 'man' to full consciousness of his individual powers and responsibilities to society – it is the ideal condition for society and the natural condition towards which society is evolving.'

These are the ideas which Sullivan coalesced as an organic theory for architects and they also form the basic framework of Griffin's discourse on architecture and are reflected in his work. Sullivan's address to The Young Man in Architecture has the basic structure of these three themes. Throughout the address Sullivan stresses the importance of the properly developed, disciplined mind – ergo, the need for its retraining where it has been contaminated by conventional architectural education.

Nancy Price said in her thesis that

'Mr. Griffin's first sight of Sullivan was at a national Architectural League Convention at Chicago in 1900; at a meeting which the architect criticized from the floor with quiet force and beauty of expression, [these must have been Griffin's words] a paper which had been read on architectural education.' (This appears to be Elmer Grey's paper\(^5\) which was the context for Sullivan's response from the floor of the Congress.) At the concluding banquet of the Convention, Sullivan answered the final task in “Young Men in Architecture” laying down a course of action for the architectural student which Mr. Griffin accepted and has adhered to.'

As the thesis was endorsed by Griffin, in 1933, we must take it that the acceptance and adherence was endorsed too. Griffin was a young graduate when he heard this address, but still finding his direction, and Sullivan, by December of that year had
arranged for the publication of *Kindergarten Chats* which began its serialization the following February—approximately 7 months after the League Convention. The Convention address was an excellent primer for *Chats*. In the Price thesis, Griffin seems to be identifying with the young graduate in *Chats* who accepted the position of ‘student’ for the retraining of his mind by Sullivan as ‘teacher’ of the organic design process, a design methodology from ‘first principles’. We can imagine the discussion of the installments of *Chats* at Steinway Hall and at Frank Lloyd Wright’s studio at Oak Park. Paul Kruty’s opinion is that ‘Even before he heard Sullivan speak, Griffin was responding to Sullivan’s ideas. Sullivan’s influence was everywhere around him’⁶ Dustin Griffin agreed that he had certainly heard a lot about Sullivan and was likely to have read some of his papers before 1900. He has drawn attention to 12 papers published by Sullivan in *The Inland Architect* before 1900.⁷

What drew Griffin to Sullivan and what did Griffin take from Sullivan’s prepared address at the League Convention? The subject of *The Young man in Architecture* was education. Sullivan addressed his concerns about the way young architects had been educated in the schools and his concerns about the way they thought. He structured his address on the three recurring themes which illustrated the principles of his architectural theory, as a sound basis for the direction of an architectural career. In later papers, delivered in person or in the printed media, all accessible by Griffin, he expanded on these same themes.

*Architecture as an Art:* Sullivan’s idea of architecture as an art is about pure individual creativity, poetry in practical problem solving. It is honest, progressive and contributes to culture. He opened his address to *The Young Man in Architecture* with these remarks:

> ‘As it is my desire to speak from the viewpoint that architecture should be practiced as an art and not strictly as a commercial pursuit, I am assuming that you agree with me in this respect …’

In Griffin’s case he rightly assumed instant rapport. Perhaps not then but certainly later, Griffin could have explained the role of the architect answered in similar words to the young graduate in *Kindergarten Chats:* (And Griffin applied the same role to the town planner.)

> To my own statement that the true function of the architect is to initiate such buildings as shall correspond to the real needs of the people, I now add your statement, that he must cause a building to grow naturally, logically and poetically.
out of its conditions... the real architect is first, last and all the time, not a merchant, broker, manufacturer, business man, or anything of that sort, but a poet who uses not words but building materials, as a medium of expression: Just in the same sense that a great painter uses pigments as his medium of expression; a musician, tones; a sculptor the marble block. a literatus the written word; and an orator the spoken word – and, like them, to be truly great, really useful, he must impart to the passive materials a subjective or spiritual human quality which shall make them live for other humans – otherwise he fails utterly and is, in a high sense, a public nuisance instead of a public benefactor.'

Against the revival styles: Then Sullivan introduced his increasing concern with the post-Chicago-World-Fair popularity of revival styles in architecture. His purpose was to establish the illegitimacy of copying past styles because art must ‘live’ and so must not copy; and in order to contribute to the advance of culture, buildings should, (and in any case do), reflect the life of the society which made them. On this basis Sullivan campaigned against the use of ‘revival styles.’

‘We are commanded to know that there is much of mystery, much of the esoteric in the so-called architectural styles. That there is holiness in so-called “pure art” which the hand of the Modern may not profane.
So be it
Let us be the cat
And let the pure art be the King.
We will look at him.’

(The ‘holiness’ was the view taken by Thomas Jefferson in his support for the Roman interpretation of classical for Washington and also by Daniel Burnham in proclaiming America’s right to the culture of Europe – essentially views of an educated elite and nothing to do with, so reasoned Sullivan, architecture as an art or an American architecture ‘of the people, by the people and for the people’.)

Drawing attention to the processes of analysis and synthesis, Sullivan striped down the styles to the elements of architecture, which, at their most basic in primordial desire, are the foundations of architecture, the foundations on which to build the architecture of the present. He proclaimed architectural education in the schools as education in the ‘second hand’ and arrived at the central issue: ‘The human mind, in operation, is the original document.’
It appears that this was the convincing argument that Griffin wished to hear – for he later indicated that ‘the mill’, his university training, had started him on another course, but he fortunately had been rescued by Sullivan. See Griffin’s full quotation referring to his education on the next page.)

Sullivan had no quarrel with the legitimate architecture of antiquity but he saw the attempt ‘to legitimize the architecture of the present as the progeny of the noblest thought in the past’ as a blasphemy. Here he pin pointed Daniel Burnham’s view, and if it had not previously been clear to the Chicago architects that Sullivan opposed the stance on revival architecture taken by Burnham, it was made clear in this address at the closing banquet for the Architectural League Convention. Sullivan believed that the art of the architecture of the past had died with the Renaissance:

‘In truth, the American architecture of today is the offspring of an illegitimate commerce with the mongrel styles of the past.’

(By ‘mongrel’ he was referring to Renaissance architecture and its reintroduction as Classical Revival or ‘Modern Renaissance’ the style favored by Burnham and by the Australian Commonwealth architect, John Smith Murdoch)

In his Original Report for the Competition (1911) Griffin referred to the ‘rehashing the completed Roman expression’ and politely noted that while it might serve for exposition buildings it would not be dignified for the ‘life and government of a great modern commonwealth’, where ‘different requirements will inevitably render [it] a caricature’. His opposition to ‘modern renaissance’ is clear in his struggle with the Commonwealth Architect John Smith Murdoch and his efforts to keep control over the Parliament House Competition to ensure a modern organic design

Education: The theme of education as developed by Sullivan in this address was taken up as a model by Griffin on arrival in Australia, when asked to speak to the profession on education. In 1913, he was asked to address architects firstly in Sydney, probably the town Planning Association, and then at the Royal Victorian Institute of Architects room in Melbourne on the subject of architectural education in America. It was a thorny subject for he found that the Australian profession largely supported ‘revival styles’. Griffin began by saying that engineering had become the basis of architecture in America due to the common demand for the steel frame, with incongruous attempts at architectural expression, based on load bearing construction. He blamed American education.
‘The trouble with our education is that it has brought conventions in as authority, and these conventions are the first thing that the student is taught. The first thing that he is brought into contact with in architecture is the classic “order”, universally in European civilization. It was my own experience. I went through the mill, and I would probably have followed the lines others had had if I had not had the advantage of contact with an independent thinker in Chicago, Mr. Louis H. Sullivan.’

‘His emphasis was always laid on the essential connection between the structure and the use to which a building was to be put, and the expression of it in form. In other words, “form follows function” is the slogan Sullivan laid down 25 years ago, evolved in his own experience …’

‘Convention was not the proper basis for art. Art was not something to be stuck on the front of a building…but consisted in doing some necessary thing in the best way that could be devised… erecting a building in concrete for instance, will mean investigating the possibilities of construction, of surface treatment, of economical handling, of scale, of colour, of form, rhythm, and proportion that can be brought to apply on that material for the particular purpose it has to serve.’

Although few of his audience were sympathetic, Griffin provided his explanation of architectural design from first principles and renounced the application of a language of architecture developed for past cultures and conditions to modern building requirements. His address shows the convergence with ideas he first heard from Sullivan’s lips approximately thirteen years before.

Architecture as an art is not about Ornament: The value of architecture as an art and the creativity of the architect was a Sullivan topic from the time he first put pen to paper and continued throughout his public papers. In the Post Modern perspective, Sullivan’s ornament would be thought the essential element in Sullivan’s idea of architecture as an art. That was not Sullivan’s perspective. His idea of architecture as an art focused on the creative freedom, the democratic independence of mind of the individual architect to seek perfection in the expression of function in form. Ornament, no necessity, was the organic enhancement of form at the hand of a master. It was Sullivan’s individual signature. Architecture was wholly creative, a parallel with Nature’s creativity. Sullivan’s ideas cannot legitimately be reduced to ornament, not even as Frank Lloyd Wright described it:

‘Ah, That Supreme Erotic,
High Adventure of the Mind…’
American Scholar Michael J. Lewis described Sullivan’s ornament as ‘a Cartesian grid into which Medusa had slithered’  

Sullivan used geometry for the control of pattern and texture in detail and for the control of the organic integration of his ornament with the building form. Griffin, where he used ornament did the same. But Griffin did not copy Sullivan’s ornament; his ornament was not a representation of the feminine or a vehicle for plasticity; it was geometric of itself, though used to soften or enrich the severity of pure forms and planar surfaces.

David Van Zanten has suggested a connection between Sullivan’s complex planning grids for ornament and Griffin’s use of geometry as the framework of his Canberra plan.  

‘the plan starts to resemble a spread sheet of Sullivan’s ornament’  

Van Zanten has written other analyses of Griffin’s design for Canberra where he takes a Beaux Arts, City Beautiful standpoint, and his analysis of Sullivan’s ornament would seem to have a Beaux arts foundation and Post Modern perspective. He sees the structures of Sullivan’s ornament as the essential connection between Griffin and Sullivan, the inspiration for the radial connections in Griffin’s ‘starbursts’. Sullivan’s drawings for the Burnham library, which Van Zanten studies at length in his book and with which Sullivan explained the role of geometry in the control of his ornament, were much later than the Canberra Competition. Perhaps Griffin saw many of Sullivan’s drawings and possibly discussed the role of geometry with him, but none of that is recorded. Van Zanten says:

‘In their rhythmic expansion countered by their exquisite detail in hidden patches, the patterns demand to be read as maps or aerial city views’

Geometry, for Art and Utility but not Beaux Arts Theory: Both Sullivan and Griffin were masters of geometry for the control of form and proportion in architecture. Griffin’s training was Bauakademie based, with none of his tutors Beaux Arts trained. His course was elective and he took a subject related to architectural composition, which would have incorporated geometry and proportion. The Beaux Arts provided the foundation of Sullivan’s formal study of architecture at Boston and then the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris, but he rejected it for its cultural inappropriateness for American conditions, and returned to America to find his ‘primeval animus’. It was not the geometry of the Beaux Arts that Sullivan disliked, but ‘feudalistic’ associations in European culture which ran counter to the development of an organic democratic American architecture. Sullivan did not write about the theory of the Beaux Arts although he said he mastered the Beaux Arts theory of the plan and found it useful,
yielding brilliant results but not universal in principle.\textsuperscript{18} David Van Zanten takes this Beaux Arts influence up in his analysis of Sullivan's theatre interiors.\textsuperscript{19}

Geometry and Geomancy are ancient sources of human knowledge – early evidence of human intelligence in ancient culture. Nature was their teacher. Mathematics and geometry are fundamental sciences and therefore organic. Geometry provides the first indication of the organic design of Canberra- The land and water axes and their alignment with natural termini, Mt Ainslie to Mt Bimberi, passing through Capitol Hill and the cross axis from Black Mountain to the Jerrabomberra wetlands are the mark of Griffin's uncommonly developed perception of space and land form relationships. Eminent Australian historian Peter Proudfoot has linked this cross over Canberra with the organic geometry and mystical practices of the ancient civilizations\textsuperscript{20}.

Sullivan and Griffin based composition on geometric solids. In an interview with Australian architect and architectural writer Philip Drew, Dustin Griffin referred to Griffin's idea that a building should be based on permanent and universal forms. His interests included the ancient civilizations of Mexico, Peru and Cambodia, cultures which built stepped pyramids. Both Sullivan and Griffin extended geometry into the control of space. Like Sullivan, Griffin searched for fundamental laws: he described music as a ‘time art’ and architecture as a ‘space art’:

‘we rejoice in being made conscious of space and can be satisfied only when the space units we use reinforce each other and a feeling of spaciousness is obtained. In a building or in a community a huddle and clutter of unrelated units is as distressing as a harsh sound.’\textsuperscript{21}

Griffin used geometry skillfully to control 3-dimensional form and space, and to organize, simplify and communicate planning concepts. This is all demonstrated in the Canberra plan where the art of geometry is used for monumentality, for clarity in the general fabric of the city and for the utilitarian solution to the problems of communication and habitation. The ‘starbursts’ are described by Griffin rationally in terms of geometry:

‘Tendencies for regional development are radial towards centre, the transformation of country roads to city streets – the element of convenient transportation has dominated. Land subdivision for deliberate planned occupation tends towards grid iron. The radial provides for communication; then occupation tends to develop the grid iron to the detriment of communication.
...as a radial system is the best solution of direct access from outlying regions to a center of common interest, and the right angle forms the best shape for building purposes, the solution is to use the radial system and bring in the cross streets at right angle to them. This forms no acute angles and the obtuse angles formed at the junctions of the cross streets are perfectly satisfactory for building and offer advantages for community purposes.

Therefore the intra radial spaces become strictly domestic, and can develop in quiet and security counting on the future as securely as the present.  

The Art of Architecture and Utility: The art of architecture was to be a morally honest art, striving to perfect the expression of utility. For both Sullivan and Griffin art was doing necessary things. Griffin strove to reach the vanguard of practicality, the long term view, where ‘only the ideal was practical’. Neither Sullivan nor Griffin attempted to mystify the art of architecture but regarded creativity as a natural impulse of a free human being. Both men defined art as ‘Doing things right’. They advocated common sense in the practice of architecture; in Chats Sullivan spoke against a false understanding of “art”. He said that most men lack the power to synthesize their common sense with steadiness and reason. ‘Indeed they intermittently forego their common sense in yielding to the exigencies of “art” …a defective education lies at the root of their failure.’

For Sullivan and Griffin architecture was an art to experience with the rational mind and all the senses. They separated their art from the hubris of the ‘set piece’ and located it in the everyday things of life and sought to reflect genuine human qualities of intuition, imagination and spirituality. In Chats Sullivan warned the student against the pursuit of originality for its own sake, a point which Griffin included in describing the nature of his work in his January 1913 letter to King O’Malley. Griffin wrote that his work was ‘previously best known in connection with the development in this country of a type of architecture that is independent of classic, Gothic, or any other historic, or academic basis and also free from effort to be original, eccentric, or striking…’ [My emphasis]

In the Federal Capital Competition design report, Griffin conveyed a modern straightforward approach to architectural expression and a concern for a genuine Australian expression:

‘It would seem that a suggested restriction of one material, say, reinforced concrete, the newest, cheapest, most durable, least limited, most plastic and
variable simple medium yet introduced into construction, would contribute to the
dignity and impressiveness of the entire city, while purity in proportion and unity in
scale, appropriate immensity in spans, and masses with contracting delicacy in
plastic ornamentation, together with a maximum of repetition and rhythm, and a
general simplicity which is best adapted to economic handling of this medium,
would with imagination suffice for a national and genuine style’

Although he thought definitions for art or architecture too constraining, the closest
Sullivan came to defining the work of the architect emphasized the aspect of utility. In
Chats, towards the end of the chapter titled ‘What is an Architect?’ he says: ‘The true
work of the architect is to organize, integrate and glorify UTILITY.’ [Sullivan’s
emphasis.] Griffin was such an architect.

Architecture as Signifier of Culture and Society: Another aspect of the art of
architecture, identified in The Young Man in Architecture, and with which Griffin
identified, was architecture as signifier of a culture; it was at least the equal of any art-
literature, music or painting.

‘...to discuss architecture as the projected life of a people is another story. That is
serious business. It removes architectural thought from the petty domain – the world
of the book-worm – and places it where it belongs; an inseparable part of the history
of civilization. Our architecture reflects us as truly as a mirror, even if we consider it
apart from us.’ 27

and

‘Nothing more clearly reflects the status and tendencies of a people than the
character of its buildings. They are emanations of the people; they visualize for us
the soul of our people. They are as an open book. And by this sign the tendency
today is disquieting.’ 28

In Chats Sullivan developed the idea of architecture as a mirror which reflects the
individual character of its creator, architect or client. He tells the student in Chats ‘I
want you to see it [architecture]just as you may see, if you will, your own people and
your own nation function, grow and take form about you.’ 29 Sullivan wants the student
to see that architecture takes its character from the characters of the individuals
concerned. He takes the student to the city –

‘For, here, Art is tortured, twisted, choked, mangled, beaten, bruised, torn;...For Art
is not in the hearts of men here, Gold is in the hearts of men here...’ 30 He leads the
student in the exercise of ‘reading ‘buildings.
In Australia in 1928, Griffin was of the same mind when he wrote:

‘Buildings are the most subtle, accurate and enduring records of life – hence their problems are the problems of life and not problems of form; - but through the forms and material of buildings we can gain an insight into the life of the past. In many cases that is our only approach and, where archaeology and history have afforded a check, I like to believe that buildings convey the most truth of the mental and spiritual states of various peoples and times. In the aggregate the architecture of a people certainly represents the greatest amount of human effort applied to the realization of purely human ideals…..’

In the future as sure as fate our purposes, our strength, our insincerities, our foibles will be an open book in the remains or ruins of our buildings. The record is not only qualitative but quantitative as the last resultant of all our physical powers.’ 31

Giving the art of architecture its highest meaning, Sullivan asked

‘Is architecture a plaything or is it a great force – a revelation of human character and an inspiration? Is it a remnant or a whole cloth from which we are to make for us new garments?’ 32

Sullivan hoped that the architecture of America would reflect a great democratic society and he hoped too, that architecture would contribute to the making of that society. Sullivan and Griffin regarded architecture and their responsibilities as architects in the same way. This was the sentiment which formed the basis of Griffin’s considerations expressed in his January 1913 letter to King O’Malley, where Griffin expresses his belief in the capacity of architecture as an art to serve human ideals at the highest level:

‘I do not however, fail to recognize that yours is the greatest opportunity the world has afforded for the expression of the great democratic civic ideal.’

As Architects, Both Artists, Both Idealists: This adherence to architecture as a vehicle to uplift society, to express the ideal human condition intuitively and intellectually brought Sullivan and Griffin together in success and failure. Both architects drank the full cup of disappointment. Writing in 1935 on the subject Architecture in Another Fifty Years Griffin expressed these sentiments:

‘… though an individual architectural designer, a Louis Sullivan, may now and then attain to considerable flights of creative art, such flights have commanded insufficient sympathy from the public, support from the business men or co-operation from professional colleagues to bring about any general alleviation of standards, which only amounts to another way of stating the case that architecture
is a reflection of the civilization or culture that it houses. It alone among the arts
denies to ‘genius’, the exception, or the man ahead of his time, the very forces, the
colors, (sic) the notes, the words with which to express himself or to blaze a path for
the masses. The latter must here painfully tread out their own uncertain way...our
one-eyed intellectual, objective attitude toward life has relegated art to a sort of
learned cult with orders and precedents sanctioned by rules and regulations..."33

In those words Griffin expressed recollections of the same resistance to progressive
thinking in architecture that Sullivan had faced in America. In *Autobiography of An
idea*, (1924) Sullivan described the ‘shadow of the white cloud’ which fell on the
progressive spirit of Chicago architecture. The 1893 World Fair marked the 400th
anniversary of Columbus’s discovery and the importation of classical revival
architecture to the mid-west city which hosted it. Later, when the Fair’s influence
spread beyond exhibition architecture, Sullivan attacked the ‘White City’ savagely as a
‘naked exhibitionism of charlatanry in the higher feudal and domineering culture,
conjoined with expert salesmanship of the materials of decay... the structure
representing the United States Government was of an incredible vulgarity.... While
far in the southeast corner, floating in a small lagoon or harbour, were replicas of the
three caravels of Columbus.’ 34

Griffin was never so vehement a critic. However the aftermath of the ‘White City’
travelled far a-field and in Washington, in 1913, the Australian Commonwealth architect
John Smith Murdoch admired it and imported it’s ‘City Beautiful’ ideas – ideals of
“artistic” beautification - to replace Griffin’s organic design in Canberra.

Organic Thinking with Nature as Teacher: Sullivan blamed the inadequacy of
architects to create a democratic architecture for America on the education provided in
the schools and in *The Young man in Architecture* began his pedagogical campaign for
‘Nature as Teacher’. To illustrate the efforts of architects following unnatural principles,
he conjured up imaginary disfigurements in nature - such as:

‘If a pine-tree had taken on the form of a rattlesnake, and standing vertically on its
tail, had brought forth pine cones’ 35 While these images may have served as good
after diner entertainment, Sullivan was serious.

Form follows Function - the Systematic Way of Creation that Nature Shows:
Although *The Young man in Architecture* was Griffin’s introduction to the physical
presence of Sullivan, it is very likely that he had at least some previous exposure to Sullivan’s ideas, and most probably to his ‘universal principle’ *Form follows function.* Published in Sullivan’s famous essay *The Tall Office Building Artistically Considered,* this principle must have been discussed at Richter’s School of Architecture and Engineering at the University of Illinois when Griffin was an under-graduate. With the German connections of the school and its emphasis on the technical aspects of architecture, a more mechanistic interpretation of this dictum may have been expected. However Griffin certainly understood it from an organic perspective -

‘…the organic, systematic way of creation that nature shows in filling an infinite variety of means to as many ends with perfection of form for every function…’

Experiencing the Lessons of Nature: Sullivan emphasized the benefits of exposure to nature, particularly pristine nature, for inspiration and spiritual renewal. Both Marion Mahony and Walter Griffin had experienced solitude in natural surroundings in their youth. Their canoe trips were just such an experience together, leading to their close collaboration in Walter’s practice, their marriage and Marion’s role in the Canberra Competition. The trips began after Marion returned to Steinway Hall in an arrangement with the architect Von Holst to design and complete houses for Frank Lloyd Wright, then away in Europe. Experiences of wilderness together were a prelude to Marion joining Walter in his practice; they continued on as prelude to their great outpouring of creativity in the Canberra Competition. ‘Xantippi’ (Marion) recalled that ‘Socrates’ (Walter)

‘...was, in every domain of life, an adventurer and thrilled with the idea of pioneering. ...for undertaking it was – to rediscover domains in the same pristine state of loveliness as in centuries gone by when Lasalle and Marquette journeyed through the Mississippi Valley...a totally different world it was when they left the grime and nose of the big city and dropped into the sights and silences of the ages...So many times they paddled for days with no consciousness of mankind. What a blessed relief! Only Socrates and Xantippe. Of course she came to seem part of the wonders of creation to him.’

Sullivan and Griffin both experienced nature in its pristine state and sought creative regeneration there, e.g. the boy Sullivan in farm life and the mature Sullivan replenished at ‘Ocean Springs’ Biloxi Bay, the boy Griffin in rivers and streams around Riverside and the mature Griffin with Mahony canoeing down rivers of the Mid West and exploring the Australian bush. Both Marion and Walter became serious environmentalists, ahead of their time.
Retraining the Mind in Creative Thinking: When, in *The Young Man in Architecture*, Sullivan said: ‘The human mind, in operation, is the original document’, he advised the student to try to read it and if that was too difficult, then he said to ‘study a plant as it grows from its tiny seed and expands toward its full fruition.’ Sullivan was suggesting the inculcation of the scientific method into the minds of those who would become ‘real architects, not the imitation brand’. He promised that through observation, the processes and systems of nature will suggest certain laws and rhythms held in an ‘exquisite balance’ and the perception will dawn that the workings of nature have sympathy with the practical workings of the human mind. This consciousness of a free and independent mind would be the basis of organized thinking and open all the chapters for architectural education.

*The Young Man in Architecture* was a primer for *Kindergarten Chats* which subsequently exhorted young graduates to retrain their minds, to use their powers of observation, and open their hearts to imagination and inspiration through the experience of nature. Through *Chats* Griffin received the greater part of Sullivan’s message, the principles of organic architecture; an interplay of the natural, rational, practical, functional, metaphysical, transcendental, and the humanistic, ‘man-centered’. The 1901 serialized *Kindergarten Chats* was the full pedagogical document on Sullivan’s theory of organic architecture, where Sullivan began by drawing the ‘young graduate’ – Griffin in this case - into experiences of the rhythms and seasonal changes of nature. The purpose was to encourage self knowledge, and knowledge of the nature of ‘Man’, exposing the student’s own emotions and cultivating consciousness of the natural cyclical rhythms of growth and decay. Although *Chats* is an intuitive and emotional document it is also an exhortation to use attention, reason, intelligence, and to develop mental toughness and independence of mind and spirit. Griffin may have been well on the way to achieving the latter without Sullivan, but it must have increased the bond with Sullivan’s ideas. Sullivan’s point is

‘…the true cause of a building is not external, but internal. It lies, proximately, in the mind of one man, and that man is the architect…if that mind is awry, the building will be awry…

‘Nature, in its visible, objective forms, impinges on the eyes its aspects of beauty, from and color: Here are the elements of earth and air shaped by the delicate hand of time; but the subtle charm of these externals would be incomplete did they not
further signify, and suggest, an internal, a subjective, a creative impulse of origin divine.
So the materials of a building are but the elements of the earth removed from the matrix of nature, and reshaped and reorganized by force; by force mechanical, muscular, mental, emotional, moral and spiritual. If these elements are to be robbed of divinity, let them at least become truly human.  

In becoming human they must exhibit intelligence. A hallmark of the human is intelligence and one of Griffin's most quotable remarks is:

‘One of the chief pleasures we get in the contemplation of any work of man is the consciousness that results are intentional. We rejoice in evidence of intelligence.’  

So often it is overcome by short term pressures and political exigencies!

Revealing the road to organic thinking and independence of mind for the student was the central objective of *Chats.*

Griffin's idea of architecture expressed as, ‘in the organic, systematic way of creation that nature shows in fitting an infinite variety of means to as many ends with perfection of form for every function’, shows appreciation for Sullivan's application of Darwinian science to an architect's creativity in the built environment. Moreover in emulation of the perfection of nature, architecture is not a mechanistic science, but being organic has all the attributes of the human that are also part of creation – the emotions and instincts as well as reason. Sullivan's message was that the achievement of this skill would be the challenge of a lifetime and his practical advice to the student who was willing to train his mind in organic thinking was:

‘Think your own thoughts in terms of your own nature, of your own surroundings, of your own art. Seek towards this end: That architecture...may respond to your will...and become the plastic medium whereby you shall express not word-thoughts but building-thoughts and the function then will flow to the minutest details of the form in orderly sequence, as surely as the sap flows to the tip of the slenderest tendril of the vine…’  

The Effects upon the Design Process of Organic Thinking: The creative architect must approach every design problem with serious pre – thought, achieving an essential idea or vision. In this way, ‘if the work is to be organic the function of the part must have the same quality as the function of the whole; and the parts, of themselves and by themselves, must have the quality of the mass; must partake of its identity.’  

The vision or idea would be completed in the form and detail or as Sullivan's student in
Chats recognized, the subdivisions and details in the same work must be of the same ‘family’. This concept had previously been explained and published by Sullivan in his famous essay *The Tall Office Building Artistically Considered (1896)* where the essence of the building type needing to be expressed architecturally lay in its *tallness*. The concept of the vision is expressed by the Griffin quotation used in Chapter 1:

> ‘In Town Planning as in architecture there must be a vision. There must be a scheme which the mind can grasp, and it must be expressed in the simplest terms possible.’

The ‘simplest terms’, are arrived at by forms which express the essence of the function(s) or idea and carry it through in the detail.

Sullivan expressed these principles in generic building groups e.g. theatres, office buildings for central business districts of America’s great cities and rural banks. Sullivan’s banks provide a good illustration of his individual creativity, contrasting with the typical use of the Greek and Roman classical orders or the Renaissance palazzo. Griffin, in America, worked in the entirely different fields of domestic architecture and neighbourhood planning. In Australia Griffin’s work included the plan for Canberra, Newman College, the Capitol office building and theatre, the Australia café, incinerator buildings, plans for the towns Griffith and Leeton and his intensive effort at community planning at Castlecrag.

All Sullivan’s and Griffin’s works are linked in their individual diversity by their organic thinking. Any construction method or material could be used, if honestly and faithfully expressed. Whether Sullivan was using terracotta tiles to clad steel frames, load bearing brick or stone or whether Griffin was using stone, concrete block or poured concrete the organic principles held true.

Moreover, Sullivan’s “Clopert” demonstration of the rule with no exception, ‘Form follows function’ held true for Griffin in town planning.

The Application of Organic Thinking to Landscape Architecture: Marion recalled how she first experienced Griffin’s application of organic thinking to landscape architecture in the planning a house from the perspective of taking advantage of the natural conditions of the site. This was the Thomas house at Oak Park referred to in Chapter 4. It was with Griffin’s replanning of this house that Marion first saw a proper synthesis of the site conditions with the functional requirements of the house – which as she described, made all the difference. In giving such importance to the site
conditions it seems that at this time Griffin had taken the principles of Sullivan’s organic thinking further than Wright; and had expanded the application of the principles.

Sullivan did not use the term organic architecture as a ‘generic brand’ but as his writings show he used the term frequently, explaining its principles. As a generic description, he referred to American architecture or ‘the new architecture’ which he hoped would be democratic and organic. Griffin used the term ‘landscape architecture’ as his ‘generic brand’ often using the word organic in the description of principles.

Frederick Law Olmsted (senior) was an early influence on Griffin, more meaningful than simply their shared use of the term ‘landscape architect.’ As a youth Griffin began his awareness of techniques in the use of topography and landscape design by observation of Olmsted’s work not only for the Chicago Fair (subject of thesis discourse from pages 136-142.) but also the commuter suburb of Riverside on the Des Plaines River. With streets not in the grid iron pattern but following the natural contours, parks and utilization of scenic river views, the young Griffin must have found much to admire in this place, not very far from where he lived. Olmsted could be seen as an influence that helped to steer Griffin towards Steinway Hall and Sullivan’s followers and ultimately to meeting Sullivan at the age of 24 years. What Griffin learned from Olmsted was not contradicted by Sullivan but expanded. Sullivan widened and enriched Griffin’s field of ideas with his vision of ‘Form follows function’ and the core position of democracy in his organic philosophy. In espousing architecture as an art form, nature as teacher and democracy as nature’s law for man, Sullivan presented the complete vision, the way of thinking which became Griffin’s code of practice for both architecture and town planning.

Griffin approached town planning in much the same way as he approached the design of the Thomas House – beginning with the site conditions, then the functional requirements and marrying the two for the best advantages. In her essay “Landplanning” Marion wrote that Griffin had given Sullivan’s thought new life by extending it into the field of town planning.

‘We must realize that architecture and community planning are inseparable and that, for all the great genius of Sullivan, the school which grew from his inspiration died aborning so to speak until Griffin united community planning with it.’

She also wrote:
'City planning, as founded by Mr. Griffin, was not a mechanical drafting board affair later to be imposed upon the earth destroying whatever got in the way of this abstraction which might produce a certain monumental beauty but could only be a dead or dying thing doing its share, not toward keeping the Earth alive but toward killing it...

In planning Canberra every detail of the natural conditions was thoroughly studied in order to preserve them and to make the most of each and everything so that the City can indeed be a living thing, a healthy growing thing. Such reverence for our Mother Earth is acutely necessary now for the rate of destruction is increasing so rapidly that even a century or two may make the earth incapable of supporting life, the conclusions of geologists speaking in terms of former long geological periods to the contrary not withstanding. Their theories fall down before actual facts. And the continent of Australia would do well to learn this lesson from its Capital.'

A Democratic Architecture: At the beginning of the twentieth century, Louis Sullivan was the one architect who was publicly calling for a democratic architecture – of the people, by the people, for the people. In June 1900, Walter Griffin heard the first challenging words from Sullivan on the subject of democracy in the address to The Young Man in Architecture:

‘We live under a form of government called Democracy. And we, the people of the United States of America, constitute the most colossal instance known in history of a people seeking to verify the fundamental truth that self-government is Nature’s law for Man. It is of the essence of Democracy that the individual man is free in his body and free in his soul. It is a corollary therefrom, that he must govern or restrain himself, both as to bodily acts and mental acts – that, in short, he must set up responsible government within his own individual person.

It implies the highest from of emancipation – of liberty, physical, mental and spiritual, by virtue whereof man calls the gods to judgment, while he heeds the divinity of his own soul. It is the ideal of Democracy that the individual man should stand self-centered, self-governing –an individual sovereign, an individual god.’

Griffin found himself in agreement with the commitment to independence of thought, which was how he defined democracy throughout the rest of his life. Sullivan
concluded his address by the challenging the young architects to decide whether or not they would take up the commitment to democratic architecture. Democratic architecture was organic and the objective was to practice architecture as an art form. Griffin accepted and adhered to those principles for the rest of his life.\(^{49}\)

By the time Griffin heard the address to *The Young Man in Architecture* with its appeal for a democratic architecture, he was already hoping for the opportunity to design the anticipated Federal Capital for the prospective Federation of Australian States, a new democracy. When *Kindergarten Chats* appeared in February 1901, the States had federated and the Australian Constitution included the requirement for a Federal Capital city to be constructed. In *Chats* Sullivan told the student that ‘No democracy can survive that does not rest on a sound moral principle endorsed by its people\(^{50}\). He presaged his own search, developed in *Natural Thinking: A Study in Democracy*, for the nature of man - to ‘find man in the innermost sanctuary of his secret thoughts, his elemental powers, and reveal man to himself and to his kind...’ In *Chats* he set the task:

‘...It is the great immediate task. Current ideas concerning democracy are so vague, and current notions of man’s powers so shapeless, that the man who shall clarify and define, who shall interpret, create and proclaim in the image of democracy’s fair self, will be the destined man of the hour: the man of all time.’\(^{51}\)

Democracy as the Centerpiece of Sullivan’s Organic theory: Some thirteen years previously, when Sullivan read *Leaves of Grass*, followed by *Democratic Vistas*, and the ideas of Walt Whitman ‘had entered his soul’\(^{52}\) he realized that democracy was ‘Natures law for man’ and the keystone of his own organic theory. It appears that what drew Sullivan to Whitman was the link with creativity in Whitman’s poetic expression, the organic, grass–roots nature of democracy as Whitman conveyed it, and Whitman’s concept of the natural advance of democratic thinking. Whitman’s thought would have consequences for Sullivan and Griffin.

In preparation for the task of defining democracy, Sullivan published *Education* in *The Inland Architect and News Record* in June 1902. This magazine had several changes of name, eventually becoming *Architectural Record*, which Dustin Griffin lists as one of the magazines Griffin took. Griffin was then at Wright’s Oak Park studio. The paper is a call for the younger generation to be ready, for Sullivan felt the scientific mode of
twentieth century thought, dispensing with outmoded fears and superstitions, boded well for organic democracy.

It was to be almost ten years before Griffin would have the opportunity to ‘proclaim in the image of democracy’s fair self’, an ‘Ideal City’ for the unfolding democracy of Australia - another ten years for further exposure to Sullivan’s ideas and for the gestation of his own ideas. During this time Griffin built his reputation as an architect thinking on these lines and contributing to the establishment of America’s democratic architecture – later called the Prairie School.

Sherman Paul sought to place Sullivan in the American intellectual tradition and has many insights into the working of Sullivan’s mind:

‘Sullivan wanted more than a native art characterized by a national style; he wanted a new way of thinking, feeling and expressing. Styles represented dead forms of the past and repressive authority…His concern was never simply with architecture but with democratic architecture. This made him the poet-seer of the Chicago School and an exponent – along with Dewy, Veblen, Jane Adams, H.D. Lloyd and Debs – of the vigorous humanism of his generation. And this was why he felt that the “failure” of architecture in the World Fair of 1893 was also a “betrayal” of democracy.’ 53

Sullivan’s warnings on the threats to the evolution of a democratic architecture were constantly before the profession. In 1905 he published The Possibilities of a New Architectural Style’ in The Craftsman, (June 1905) where he warned that ‘To discuss architecture and ignore life is frivolous; to discuss American architecture and its possibilities, while ignoring the repressive force of feudalism and the expansive force of democracy, is sheer lunacy.’

He took up the task to reveal the true nature of democracy in his paper, Natural Thinking A Study in Democracy, delivered at the Chicago Club, where Griffin was a member54, in 1905. As ‘the poet-seer of the Chicago School’, his was a presence not to be missed when he presented papers to the profession. When Sullivan read Natural Thinking A Study in Democracy at the Chicago Club in 1905, it is hardly possible that Griffin would have missed his reading. At that time, Griffin was Wright’s ‘outside man’ for the Larkin Building, a building for which he is thought to have contributed some design ideas55. Natural Thinking was followed by Democracy a Man-Search, which was
written along similar lines and ready for publication in 1908, but did not find a publisher until 1957.

Democracy, a Values System and a Human State: Sullivan interpreted democracy as more than a political system. Democratic thinking, with the mind independent, contrasted with feudalistic thinking, where external authorities controlled ideas. The role of science in the evolution of democracy took effect through overcoming the ignorance which inculcates fear. In historic Feudalism, the multitudes had sought cohesion in their mutual fear of life, and out of the culture of fear they created their tyrants. For protection they gave up their unconscious powers to those they raised aloft. In democracy, democratic man was restored to his own authority and with his own power and authority he accepted responsibility. As a moral power democracy became a religion to replace formal religion.

Answers were sought for the essential questions: For the relationship of humans to nature, human to human, and the nature of humanity itself answers were provided. As to the relationship of the human being to the Divine Being, the question, in the final analysis was left open, the mystery suggested in “Inscrutable Serenity”. The indication was that “Man” can come closest to “Inscrutable Serenity” in the pristine wilderness. The problem for Sullivan with the concept of God was the association with feudal authority, external authority and the hierarchy of authority fostered in the formal religions. Nevertheless the Christian principles, to name some, of free will, love for neighbour and sanctity of Life are strong in Sullivan’s interpretation of Democracy. The question of death appears to be answered in the rhythms of ‘growth and decay’, the natural life cycles. Life was Sullivan’s main concern; Inspiration was the presence of Life itself: in nature, “Man” as part of nature and architecture as “a living art”. He thought “Mans” spirituality limited and “Man” unable to answer all the questions in regard to the source of life, returning always to “Inscrutable Serenity” as the “Life Force”.

It seems that Griffin, in fact both Griffins, accepted this vision of Democracy as a values system even replacing formal religion. Marion was well prepared for it in concepts introduced in the Unitarian pastorship of James Vila Blake. Walter Griffin had a more conservative Christian upbringing, but it is feasible that he jettisoned the religious structures and beliefs which failed under the scrutiny of scientific knowledge. There seem to be no pastoral records which show that the Griffins attended worship or joined a formal Christian church community in Australia. Their faith in the spirituality of
Democracy seemed to sustain them until some years after their Canberra enterprise failed.\textsuperscript{57}

When the Griffin’s came to Australia, Marion was invited to write a series of articles on ‘Democratic Architecture, Its Development, Its Principles and Its Ideals’ for Building magazine. When she defined democracy as ‘Authority from within’ \textsuperscript{58} as opposed to external authority, her definition fitted well with Unitarian ideas. She went on to write of two men in the Architectural profession whose ‘natural bent, training and sympathies have been entirely democratic…

Both these men, Louis F. (sic) Sullivan and Walter Burley Griffin, know the foundation on which they are standing, and have consciously accepted the responsibility – which a belief in freedom of choice throws on every individual, of having a why for everything they do.’ \textsuperscript{59}

Griffin wrote extensively on democracy as a political system e.g. \textit{Democracy versus Bureaucracy} and \textit{The Menace of Governments}. His writings on this subject were undertaken in Australia based on his experience with Government at both Federal and Municipal levels. Not long after his experiences with the Commonwealth Government, in 1924 he said that:

‘Knowing politicians and officials and their habits, character and means of place holding should be sufficient to forever preclude anything but grave suspicion as to any real human welfare from such a source or under such control.’\textsuperscript{60} And

‘ The powers of government should be eliminated except for one particular branch - that of economic administration – to the extent only of attaining equity among men and primarily as to the natural resources of the earth. Beyond that absolute freedom of the individual and par consequent opportunity for natural growth of society.’\textsuperscript{61}

Sullivan and Griffin did all in their power to help democracy in its unfolding towards perfection. They, like Whitman, believed in democracy as a natural evolutionary state for humanity, an organic maturation of the complex organism, society. Sullivan had hoped that scientific knowledge would speed up the perfecting of democracy. But then Whitman had said ‘Nature never hastens or delays’.

The connections with Sullivan’s ideas are abundantly clear when Griffin’s city is seen through the design process of organic thinking, demonstrated in \textit{Kindergarten Chats}, and through the vision of democracy expressed in \textit{Natural Thinking: A Study in Democracy}. 

236
The Capitol as Signifier

Griffin had pondered for some years on the possibilities of a competition for Australia’s new Federal Capitol, and on how he would design it. His design skills were honed in Sullivan’s methods of creative thinking, with nature as teacher, and applied in his ‘own instinctive way with intelligence and feeling’. He was thoroughly democratic in outlook and believed in democratic architecture. Over this period of time these principles became Griffin’s convictions.

But even as a student Griffin designed a Capitol\(^{62}\). So it is conceivable that before the Competition, Griffin progressed a considerable way in his ideal of what a national capital for a democratic state should be. He may have ‘toyed’ with some ideas for its symbolic centre and perhaps developed ideas on the democratic relationship of the people to representative government and the natural environment.

Citadel, Temple and Archives: For Griffin the Capitol was always a place to develop ‘over the centuries’. He referenced his concept, not to Washington but to the Capitol at Rome, the buildings on Capitoline Hill at the time of the Roman Republic. This may have been related to the student concept, pre Sullivan, but later he used it to tap into Sullivan’s fundamental principles. The Roman citadel was the gathering place, not only, but also in the time of crisis, and as such was a symbol of power and refuge. The highest ground was the place of power. Griffin determined that it should be owned by the people and should be the place of national celebration, of state occasions in the great reception hall. As a symbol of religious power, the power of the Gods and the priesthood, the temple was also built on the high ground; Griffin’s temple was dedicated to Democracy and it was of cruciform plan with a pyramidal lantern over the transept. His ‘Tabularium’ was in the halls of the Capitol recording the national values, the place which would be called upon throughout the life of the nation to cultivate and explicate the broad processes of the gaining of national identity. Griffin’s design was a serious attempt to promote a genuine national identity founded on democratic values. Over time the place and its architecture would be transcended by the meanings accrued from the deeds, beliefs and values of the inhabitants of the land.

The Symbolism of Form: As well as by naming of his symbol for democracy ‘the Capitol’, Griffin’s choice of form became an impediment to getting across his ideas. The
stepped pyramidal superstructure over the Reception hall of the Capitol was a brilliant resolution of form but undoubtedly induced some strange metaphors in Australian minds – not least the Government and the traditional Commonwealth architect. It appears immense and pagoda-like in Marion’s perspective whereas the section tells us that it would have been lighter, crystalline and partly transparent. It was foreign to British culture and Anglo-Celtic Australians, while it may have been a gesture to Australia’s geographical position. It was not flat on top like Mayan stepped pyramids with platforms for ritual sacrifice but sufficiently like to conjure associations. Its stepped form distinguished it from Egyptian pyramids but perhaps not from the fact that they were tombs. It had no relationship with indigenous culture. Naming it the ‘Capitol’ added to the mix of metaphors, particularly when Griffin was trying to avoid the use of ‘the inevitable dome.’ We know there is nothing new under the sun, so perhaps by confusing the metaphors Griffin was trying to create a new metaphor for democracy. He said that he chose it as the form used by cultures at their peak as their ultimate expression.

Inherent Conflict of Interest: In 1911, when finally Griffin was able to read the Competition brief he was confronted with the dilemma of the Australian Government’s requirement that the Parliament House be ‘a dominating feature of the city’. Did this temporarily cool his ardor to compete? Marion has described Griffin’s casual attitude to getting down to the task. Perhaps thinking beyond the Westminster system, he did not expect the Australian Government, in his perception the world leader in democratic ideals, to be proscriptive about a dominant Parliament House. From the outset, there were differences between Griffin’s personal ideas and principles in regard to what Australia’s national capital should represent to its citizens and the world and the Government’s perceptions. Upon winning the Competition, he said:

‘I have planned a city not like any other city I the world. I have planned it not in a way that I expected any governmental authorities in the world would accept. I have planned an ideal city, a city that meets my ideal of the city of the future. – a city that meets my ideal of the future.’

His words perhaps indicate his own consciousness that his deeply held personal views on democracy and organic design had carried more weight for his design than the Government brief.

But he was not the only entrant to place Parliament House on Camp Hill. It is also worth pointing out that the Government brief required that the Houses of Parliament
should be a dominant feature. Griffin had cleverly arranged for Parliament House to dominate the Government Group, without creating a duality with the Capitol (setting a precedent for Romaldo Giurgola’s response to the provisional Parliament House.) With the permanent Parliament House on Camp Hill against the backdrop of bush covered Mt Kurrajong (there was no pressing need to build the Capitol immediately) the requirements of the Government and the Westminster system could have been satisfied for as long as British ties remain relevant. But this is the benefit of hindsight.

When Griffin realized his plan was not understood, and after the debacle of the Board’s plan, he attempted to set things straight in his letter to O’Malley, seeking confirmation of Government support for his idealism. Then he decided to come to Australia anyway. The Griffins found Australia a society of tensions and dichotomies, and, while there was support for Griffin’s ideas, polarization increased between his ideas and those of Government. Griffin though had sensed this probability from the beginning.

The Government Standpoint: Architecture and urban design have ever been used to express the importance of government. Griffin’s Capitol was never supported by the conservative Commonwealth architect, who was ultimately able to focus the government’s ideas. Murdoch quite possibly had been instrumental in writing the idea of the dominance of Parliament House in the Competition brief. He had three attempts at representation of his interpretation of the Government’s point of view. His first effort, for the Board’s plan (1912), was to weaken Griffin’s dramatic urban focus on the Capitol and strengthen the urban presence of the Parliament House by directing the main avenues to the Parliament House as terminus. His second idea which he dispatched to Griffin at Pago Pago (1913) was to make a strong connection by means of an Avenue directly between Parliament House and the residence of the King’s Representative, the Governor General, sidelining the Capitol. Finally he convinced the politicians that as Capitol Hill was the dominant site in Canberra, it was the only suitable location for the permanent Parliament House. It signified an act of political power.

Lawrence Vale argues that Griffin’s allocation of Administration as one of the functions of the Capitol was instrumental in the Government’s decision that the Parliament House must take the high ground. Griffin’s notation of ‘Administration’ on the diagram for the Government Group in the Original Report indicates a function
certainly open to the interpretation of requiring offices for a bureaucracy. Vale quotes an editorial in *The Canberra Times* (1973):

‘The intellectual heirs of the age of armorial bearings and escutcheon find it intolerable that the national parliament should be built on any but the most physically dominant site within the hallowed Parliamentary Triangle conceived by Burley Griffin. Hence the almost pathological fear that a Parliament House built on the lesser Camp Hill could one day find itself looking up to a mere administrative building erected on the more prominent Capital Hill, and the imperative necessity to “garb” the site now and “stick our building on it while we can.’

Griffin, certainly by the time he came to experience for himself the operation of the Australian bureaucracy, could never have entertained such a notion. But some in the Government probably did, just as many years later at the 1955 Senate Inquiry wonder was expressed by a Member of Parliament at support for a plan (Griffin’s plan!) which was based on French ideas of quelling the would-be revolutionary populace by the military control of long avenues. In the *Report Explanatory* (1913), written during his first visit to Australia, Griffin moved towards a more accurate explanation of his intentions for the Capitol, where the administration seems to refer to the administration’s use of the building for popular reception and ceremony:

‘Centrally located, the Capitol is focused in an extensive hill park, and at that has a limited function either as a *general administration structure for popular reception and ceremonial*, [my emphasis] or for housing archives and commemorating Australian achievements rather than for deliberation or counsel; but at any rate representing the sentimental and spiritual head, if not the actual working mechanism of the Government of the Federation.

One of the reasons Griffin gave for the unsuitability of Capitol Hill for the Parliament House was its isolation - its spatial isolation from all the arms of Government and from the people. Resolution was attempted to a limited extent in the new Parliament House by opening the ceremonial spaces as well as the Chambers to the public; but the benefits are lost through security controls and limitations of content and access. The Reception Hall is accessible to all but the Members Hall, beneath the flag mast, to which the Reception Hall opens for grand ceremonial occasions is limited to that. Located on the isolated hilltop site, Australia’s Parliament House is a great icon of political power – and is therefore not under ‘people ownership’. The experience is more one of ‘inspection’ than engagement; almost like tourists polishing the floors of the palaces of Europe as they pass through.
Because Australia has ‘troubling feudalistic tendencies’ it is a ballot box rather than a participatory democracy. The Government is ‘other’, an external authority with potential for repression or incompetence, controlled by the ballot box. Added to the threat of the ballot box, the large focal presence of ‘the people’s Capitol’ must have loomed before Government as a reversal of the Orwellian theme. In line with such symbolism ‘the people’ today can stand on the grassed roof top of Parliament House, security permitting, and look down on the Members Hall below. It is not a place that Members are particularly inclined to go.

The Huge Presence of Government in Griffin’s Plan: In accepting the Murdoch vision, the cost to Government has been Griffin’s pragmatic, honest vision of mandated power and political legitimacy. In terms of political legitimacy the Government lost the substance for the shadow. In a participatory democracy where the voters were involved in the issues and the citizenry enlightened democrats untroubled by uncontrolled feudalistic tendencies, the presence of representative government was an expression of an enviable unity of the nation. To be a member of Government was an obvious honor – hence the ‘Court of Honor’ around which the government buildings were assembled.

The presence of Government in Griffin’s plan was to be truly monumental, a mini city in effect, requiring attendant services for its many employees. It was in recognition of the importance of government to all civilized societies - but its visible presence would probably have been a determinant on its growth. The relationships between the organs of government were transparent - between the executive (on Capitol Hill) the legislature (on Camp Hill), and the bureaucracy and the most distant from the legislature, the judiciary.

This huge presence of Government was another aspect of Griffin’s city not readily acceptable to Australians, who retain a healthy skepticism about Government. Ironically this was a view shared by Griffin, expressed in his essay *The Menace of Governments* (1923). Tax payers do not want to see the burden of an overly large government and administration, so government tends to hide itself away. We simply do not see it as exposed by Griffin.
Apart from the Senate and House of Representatives Chambers, the workings of Government are mysterious to the casual observer, the ‘man in the street’. It is all rather ‘out of sight out of mind’ when ‘seeing is believing’. The Government Departments are located in security enclosed tenancies in ubiquitous offices all over Canberra. There is no symbolism for active citizenship apart from the expressed forms of the Chambers. Apart from the concentration of power on Capital Hill, the presence of Government is weak in the Parliamentary Triangle. It has become the tourist triangle. The presence of Government has been made palatable by association with the presence of national edifices for the arts.

Layering the Experience of Participatory Democracy: For the experience of the Capitol and its relationship with the city, Griffin intended layered encounters with discreet meanings: On approaching the city, the first perception was to be of its ephemeral power in the wider landscape, with glimpses of its crystalline pyramid form; this signified its organic nature and outreach to grass roots democracy. Upon arrival in the central market plaza, the view of the Capitol along Federal Avenue (Kings) would impact as the essential place of pilgrimage; then there would be the engagement with the building itself, the content of the building, the luminescence of the Reception Hall and the impact of the experience of place and environment upon the visitor.

Having visited the hallowed ground, the visitor, re constituted in the spirit of democracy and Australian identity could go down to the Parliament House and sit in on the processes of Government taking place in the Chambers. Griffin intended this as a discrete experience of representative democracy and mandated power. The rest of the Government Group was designed to reveal the relationships in the workings of Government, encouraging active citizenship.

From the Capitol, the Parliament House and the Court of Honor the visitor would sight the hub of the city beyond, the public parks and cultural buildings on the opposite side of the lake, the city business district and the midway gardens of the Plaisance leading to the nature parks at the foot of Mt Ainslie. For all practical purposes the attractions of the city would be laid out for discernment in logical sequence, a symmetrical composition organized by the land axis.
From across the lake, at the base of the Triangle, Capitol Terrace, and from the Plaisance, the cumulative impact of the stepped form of the entire ensemble climaxing at the Capitol would provide a powerful, unforgettable sight.

Sullivan and Griffin were about participatory democracy – of the people, by the people, for the people in the true sense. Sullivan began with the individual who set up self government within himself, the restrained individual who took responsibility in the community. His own professional focus was on the market place and it was there that he saw the feudalistic forces of greed, materialism and selfishness in burgeoning industrial capitalism as a threat to democracy – and its expression in architecture. Griffin entered the world of political democracy and struggled to implement the idealism of participatory democracy, democracy as an essential organic process in human life, in his plan for Canberra.

Griffin published an article in the *Melbourne Herald* in 1927 on the occasion of the opening of the provisional Parliament House by the Duke of York, the future King George VI, a ceremony to which he was invited and attended. Dustin Griffin includes this essay *Canberra Founded on National Sentiment* in his book. He introduces the essay saying that Griffin used the opportunity to call on national sentiment to further the completion of the city. In the essay Griffin makes it clear that his design has not been built:

'It is to be hoped that the visiting public will not be utterly confused by the present disjoined development which, they must be reminded, is not growth, but the arbitrary result of several conflicting interests at different times, and to which I have already alluded…

… The culminating capitol feature, intended to house archives and memorials and to provide for great public ceremonies and commemorate national achievements, consists of one stone about three feet square, laid by the Prince of Wales in 1920.

The city plan will not be comprehensible until the interplay of the various functions commences. It is an organic skeleton designed on the basis of an organic body, and referable to other bodies already grown and growing. It is designed to eliminate confusion and conflict between all the multifarious elements, domestic and industrial, on a more comprehensive scale than has been hitherto attempted in the world.
In his last public comment on Canberra, Griffin began with an emphasis on words that were deeply revealing of his approach to the design: ‘Unity, essential to the city, requires for so complex a problem, a simple organism.’ Unity is an essential objective for composition in the creation of a work of art.

Griffin continued:

‘Thus was founded the genesis of the Canberra plan as adopted in 1913, and it is really its fundamental though invisible element. However platitudinous such a dictum may sound now, it remains still almost as little acted upon as at first.’

Organism is the significant term of Planning, implying unity, and simplicity, but requiring a degree of comprehensiveness in an equation of the site conditions and the functions to which they are to be adapted sufficient for a logical place and setting for every need that may eventuate.

His plan was conceptually rooted in the belief that he shared with Sullivan that architecture as art must live for the people of its day, not be a dead thing tied to the past. Griffin’s city gathered the people for layer upon layer of joyful human experience within the great triangle with direct access to Mt Ainslie and the nature reserve. – work and commerce, nature and democracy, the arts, sport and recreation. With the Capitol as focus it was ‘a scheme which the mind could grasp; we could ‘rejoice in the evidence of intelligence’ and it was designed to grow organically in its capacity for a ‘logical place and setting for every need that may eventuate.’ In all Griffin demonstrated a consummate use of the principles first developed by Sullivan.

With Canberra’s leasehold system of land tenure, and an organic plan, Griffin planned for a fair society without the domination of sectional interests:

‘When the venture has become a city, there will therefore be possible a civic life such as is not attainable in any other modern city, wherein the complexities up to our time have so multiplied the confusion as to stifle the freedom and expression of individual life and the development of a true culture.'
End Notes


2 Ibid p. 141.


8 Sullivan, Louis H. Kindergarten Chats and Other Writings Wittenborn, Schultz, Inc., New York, 1947 p 140


10 Ibid p 220

11 These addresses were reported in The Salon, October 1913, pp 183- 184 and as Architecture and Democracy in Building 11 October 1913, pp 61 – 64. On page 44 of Building, the editor, George Taylor recalled the Sydney meeting with Griffin: ‘Others at the meeting recalled the glories of ancient Greece, and lauded the noble fashion in which the medievalists had expressed in edifices their ecclesiastical hierarchy. But where they held a spluttering candle, Griffin swung a blazing torch which illuminated a vista for Australia leading to the summit-objective of our nationhood.’

12 I Building 11 October 1913, pp 63- 64a

13 Wright, Frank Lloyd. Genius and the Mobocracy quoted from Sullivan’s City, David Van Zanten p 150


16 Ibid p 90

17 Ibid p 137 and p 88


20 Proudfoot, Peter. The Secret Plan of Canberra, UNSW press, Kingston NSW, 1994, p 17, Figure 2.3

22 Ibid, p 408

23 Griffin, Marion Mahony. “Democratic Architecture-II” Building, August 12, 1914, p 101. Griffin, Walter Burley. Architecture reproduced in Magic of America, The Federal Battle, Vol. II.C, p. 377. “This again offers a striking illustration of the impractical nature of the so called practical ways of doing things which method, fixing the attention on a few immediate issues, fails to see beyond its nose and, curiously enough, fails in consequence to accomplish even the ends it is centered on.”

24 ‘Art is doing things right’ : Griffin: Sullivan:


27 Ibid p 65

28 Ibid p 64

29 Ibid p 65

30 Ibid p 107


32 Ibid p 40


38 Sullivan Louis H. Kindergarten Chats and Other Writings Wittenborn, Schultz, Inc., New York, 1947, p 32


42 Ibid. p 47


The term ‘organic architecture’ was first used as a ‘generic brand’ by Frank Lloyd Wright in the 1930s. Wright was receptive to Sullivan’s ideas on organic architecture through his boyhood intuitions in country Wisconsin, but he more pertinently was ‘educated’ in those ideas during his seven years experience as a draftsman for Louis Sullivan. Wright applied Sullivan’s organic principles to his architecture, in his own individual way, as did Griffin. Wright’s appropriation of the term ‘organic architecture’ and theory re-interpreted as ‘Form and function are one’ in this book, have obscured the transference of the line of thought from Sullivan to Wright, Griffin and others.

45 Sullivan uses the term throughout Kindergarten Chats and numerous in the Chapter XI11 Function and Form 2 pp 46 – 48 Organic thinking is the message of the document.


48 Griffin, Walter Burley. Building, October 1913. In one of his first published interviews in Australia Griffin explained democracy in his terms: ‘Democracy as I define it, is independence of thought. Democracy in politics is independence of action, but action must be dominated by thought, and unless our thought is independent we are still in a feudalistic environment.’

49 The Nancy Price thesis: ‘a course of action for the architectural student which Mr. Griffin accepted and has adhered to.’ (1900 -1936 according to this thesis, endorsed by Griffin.)


51 Sullivan expressed the depth of his response to Whitman’s message in Leaves of Grass in his letter to Whitman.

52 Paul, Sherman. Louis Sullivan : An Architect in American Thought Prentice-Hall, INC. NJ 1962, p 32 Sherman Paul brought a smile to this researcher: ‘Where did you get these ideas?” the student asks the teacher [in Kindergarten Chats], “Where anyone with two eyes might have found them,” the teacher, no bibliographer, replies. p 91.

53 Mark Peisch supplied this information in The Chicago School of Architecture – Early followers of Sullivan and Wright, Random House, New York, 1964, p 32. Peisch also says (p 33) that ‘in 1895, as part of the yearly program, [Chicago Club] Louis Sullivan presented a paper called “Architecture and Democracy.” Griffin became a member of the Chicago Club in 1900.

54 Griffin, Marion Mahony. Magic of America, Individual Battle vol. IVA, p 87 Donald Leslie Johnson papers Box 19, National Library of Australia. Marion attributes to Griffin design influence on Larkin Building.

55 Conversation with James Weirick. It is not conclusive because fire destroyed the records of one church which it is considered they could have joined.

Also Wanda Spathopoulos, The Crag, Brandel & Schlesinger, 2007, p. 311, Wanda Spathopoulos knew the Griffins as a child growing up at Castlecrag from 1924. She says that: ‘While architecture remained the driving force in Walter Griffin’s life, underlying this preoccupation was an ill-defined spirituality, present but not obtrusive. Marion always retained and voiced a deep sense of the spiritual. When she and Walter were living in America they both demonstrated their dissatisfaction with religion in its conventional form, which Walter referred to as ‘outmoded religious efforts’.’
Following the disappointments of Canberra, Marion was then the first one to search for a spiritual world which could offer her more sustenance. Both Griffins mixed with members of the theosophical society. Griffin wrote for their journals but was not a member. In terms of their personal spirituality Marion only spoke of their old quarrel about Nietzsche, apparently the link with the Anthroposophists which Walter resisted. *Magic of America, The Individual Battle* Vol.IVA, p 157. She joined the society in 1930 before leaving Australia, and while she was in America, he joined in 1931.

57 Griffin, Marion Mahony “Democratic Architecture-I”, *Building*, June 12, 1914, p 101.
58 Ibid


60 Ibid p 373

61 See endnote 9 Chapter 1 page 6.

62 There is a view that the Griffins’ marriage was a business arrangement based on Griffin as designer and client manager and Marion as manager of the drawing office; also that the arrangement was established for the Federal Capital Competition.


65 Griffin found the life term of bureaucrats, appointed and not subject to popular election, a scandalous abuse of power and an aspect of the Westminster system which was anti democratic. He wrote an article published in the American press on the subject. See also “Democracy Versus Bureaucracy”, *Magic of America*. Marion wrote about the value of the Congressional system.


68 See Griffin, Dustin. *The Writings of Walter Burley Griffin* Cambridge press, Melbourne, New York, 2008, pp 372, 373 ‘Knowing politicians and officials and their habits, character and means of place holding should be sufficient to forever preclude anything but grave suspicion as to any real human welfare from such a source or under such control.’


70 Griffin, Walter Burley. “Canberra in Occupation”, *The Canberra Annual* Vol. 1, 1934, pp.44-6

71 Ibid, p. 44. Continuing from the beginning of the article.

Griffin was a clear thinking, decisive person who took care before embarking on a course of action. Having decided on the course, he possessed the will to carry it through. His plan has the authority of an independent mind. The dilemma for Town planners is often detail overload - minds cluttered with the complexities of the planning issues typified by the old saying that ‘you can’t see the forest for the trees’. The answer for this dilemma is provided in a very simple statement by Griffin:

‘In Town Planning as in architecture there must be a vision. There must be a scheme which the mind can grasp, and it must be expressed in the simplest terms possible.’

In terms of vision, simplicity and legibility Griffin’s plan for Canberra reached perfection.

Sullivan’s was another independent mind, with authority. According to Elmslie, by inference, Sullivan didn’t seek to sit at the head of the table, but the head of the table was wherever he sat. Although he has left evidence of pomposity and arrogance, as part of his rage, he was an architect who sought no sycophantic followers, but universal laws to impart for all to access freely.

‘Inasmuch as these general principles are universal and proceed from Life, they are at your disposal to apply in your own instinctive way with intelligence and feeling’

Griffin saw his value in the principles he developed and observed that Sullivan’s principles were capable of benefiting individual architects like Wright, whose work bore the stamp of his own individuality. It was likewise for Griffin’s own work. The independence of mind in the individual was what Griffin valued.

The point of departure for understanding Griffin was the established knowledge of Griffin’s early ambition – or was it an uncanny sense of his own destiny – to design the Federal Capital for the newly constituted nation of Australia, supported in the belief that Australia was at the vanguard of social economics and issues of social justice. This was coupled with the revelation of the Nancy Price thesis (1933) that Griffin’s professional direction was formed shortly after graduation by, and from thence based upon, a talk given by Sullivan to The Young Man in Architecture (1900). This talk is usually interpreted as Sullivan’s message to the young architect to create a new architecture for American democracy. Sometimes the connection is supported by a
quotation from *Kindergarten Chats* (1901), with the challenge to be ‘the man of the hour’ who would interpret the ‘fair face of democracy’ for all to see. The implication is that with these words Sullivan fired Griffin with the inspiration for his design for Canberra, a design imbued with American idealism about democracy.

This does not convey the extent of what Griffin learned from Sullivan. Put under the microscope, the talk, which influenced Griffin so much, was found to be structured on three fundamental principles which Sullivan coalesced for architects: the nature of architecture as an art which reflected society, but could also influence it; the organic process of creative thinking for architectural design; and the development of a new democratic architecture for America, which would reflect the organic growth of a perfected form of democracy in the individual and society. Deriving the benefits from this theory took time and followed the reshaping of Griffin’s mental processes. Griffin took his professional direction from Sullivan’s theory, extended the theory to the larger scale of town planning, and perfected its application in the design of Canberra.

Sullivan had been up to that time the most successful architect in finding a solution to the creation of skyscraper architecture as an art. Griffin as a bright student, and Nathan Ricker as an educator who believed in modern technology, must both have read Sullivan’s *The Tall Office Building Artistically Considered* published in 1896 in Griffin’s second year as a student. This essay, and the physical (or photographed) realities of Sullivan’s buildings like the Wainwright Building (1890-1) the Chicago Stock Exchange (1893-3) and the Guaranty Building (1894-5), provided a lead for Griffin towards Steinway Hall and the Chicago Progressives. Sullivan represented art in action. This art which wedded architectural expression with technological advance and was explicated in a universal principle *Form follows function* was inspiring to Griffin who did not want to copy revival styles.

For Sullivan in architecture, art was ‘doing things right’. Griffin repeated this definition. In *Kindergarten Chats* (1901-2) Sullivan warned against the architect who loses his common sense for the exigencies of ‘art’ – meaning aesthetics. Sullivan as a student in Europe had experienced the integrity and power of great art as an influence beyond the merely aesthetic approach. Griffin too embraced the vigour and integrity of the architectural art. Architecture as an art was his chosen direction. He believed it was the most comprehensive record of the works and values of a civilization and could benefit the way people lived their lives. In all buildings the desires and abilities of their architects (and clients) could be read as an open book and Griffin, informed by the
principles and example of Sullivan, like Sullivan, wanted a truthful expression. Sullivan provided the lessons on how to read architecture. Legibility thus became a criterion for Griffin and he honed this skill to perfection in his American work and the legibility of the Canberra plan.

The address to *The Young Man in Architecture* was a veritable pot of gold for Griffin for in it he also experienced new insights into Sullivan’s organic vision behind the dictum *Form follows function*. The insights grew as Sullivan talked of the universal principles in the form, detail and rhythms of nature and what they could teach the architect. Sullivan revealed the independent human being at the core of universal meaning and at the core of his architectural theory. It was a necessity of architecture to understand and express the needs and the nature of humanity. The talk encompassed ‘Man’s relation to his fellow man and to Nature, and the relation of both to an all-pervading, Inscrutable Spirit.’ Democracy was the climax of his address, its essence in the freedoms and self governing responsibilities of the individual.

During the eleven years following the Architecture League convention and the address to *The Young Man in Architecture*, the Federal Capital idea had a long period of gestation before the nine weeks of intensive work on the competition entry. Sullivan further developed his theory and published it during this time, but its kernel was in this talk. Almost fourteen years after this talk, when Griffin was appointed Federal capital Director of Design and Construction and the Griffins moved to Australia, Griffin carried with him a copy of the text of this address, which it is probable Sullivan gave him.

Six months after the League Convention, Griffin, in 1901, still regarded himself as a student throughout the serialisation of *Kindergarten Chats*, identifying with the post graduate student in *Chats* who learns from Sullivan (and Nature) as teacher. Griffin consciously retrained his mind in the organic process of creative thinking and gained a deeper entry into the process of creating an individual democratic architecture. He had to wait until 1905 for deeper insights into Sullivan’s ideas on democracy with the reading of *Natural Thinking: A Study in Democracy*. It is quite possible that Sullivan, being aware of Griffin’s interest, also read drafts of *Democracy A Man-Search* (completed 1908) to Griffin, when he returned to Steinway Hall. What Griffin would have gained from the latter papers was awareness of Sullivan’s perceptions of the spiritual and moral dimensions of Democracy. He uses Sullivan’s terms and concepts in his own writings. In treating these ideas Sullivan proceeded from the dimension of the individual to the universal, to the development of compassion, humanity and
beneficence in the individual through the grasp of universal concepts of morality and justice. Sullivan’s Democracy was not a political idea. When he hoped it would be embraced by American Democracy, he was not thinking politically but in terms of a moral code. Sullivan saw Democracy as a religious idea with values based on a natural universal morality - in effect Christian principles without the churches. Griffin probably adopted this form of spirituality and continued with it until he joined the Anthroposophical Society in 1931.

The introduction to this thesis began by pointing out the necessity of engaging Griffin’s plan with the Capitol. Otherwise it is impossible to realize that the plan is an emanation from a vision and follows organic thinking processes which synchronize with a universal order. Griffin’s statement, quoted at the beginning of this ‘Conclusion’, contains two ideas fundamental to the Canberra plan which it has been the work of this thesis to tease out: - the vision and the generation of the wonderfully simple, fully legible, ‘living’ organism which Griffin proposed.

With the ‘germ of the city’, the Capitol, located centrally on an isolated hilltop, the signifier of the vision was in place. The vision was sourced in Griffin’s idealism for architecture as an art reflecting society and as a truthful expression of universal organic principles.

Griffin held up as ideal, the human being who was self governing, independent in thought and respectful of the rights of others – basically democratic. Democracy was an organic grass roots moral power – more fundamental than political democracy. His vision was encouraged by his view of Australian society, which he believed to have a strong grass roots democracy and progressive outlook towards social justice. He seems always to have been unsure about the Government but was encouraged in that quarter by its decision to adopt a leasehold policy for land tenure for the Federal Capital Territory. The vision for a National Capital had to deal with the relationship of the people with Government, and, not without concern, Griffin took the decision to create a city for the people with an organic presence for Government rather than a city dominated by Government and its accretions of power. He and Marion took the decision in awareness that it could place their entry in the Competition in jeopardy.

In giving the city to the people rather than to the Government, Griffin created the Capitol as the first place of visitation, the place of pilgrimage owned by the people. He was cautious about defining it, no doubt expecting some enthusiastic ideas from
Australians and also aware of taking things gently with the Government. He expected that it would not be built for a considerable number of years, time permitting a more definitive vision of what Australians wanted. As time ran out for Griffin he tended to be more definitive in referring to it as the place for celebrating national achievement and by implication national identity and national values, the values of grass roots democracy. The iconography of Griffin’s design of the Capitol Hill site with its radial avenues named for the State Capitals towards which they are directed conveys the vision as both focus of the city and emanatory to the nation.

Government as an organic requirement of society was given a large presence in his design for Griffin was conscious of the size of government and government as big business. The organic nature of democratic government is that it is recharged from the grass roots values of the society. It is an organic necessity to organize society, focus its will and, as Griffin believed its essential role, to maintain equity. Griffin never intended a view of the Capitol as ‘big brother’ overlooking the Government, a symbol of people power through the ballot box, as equally the government and its accretions of power was not the focus of his vision.

To express, in the simplest terms possible, ‘the scheme which the mind can grasp.’ Griffin was aided by the opportunities within the site itself, for which he had developed his creative abilities to perceive and take advantage. His two reports for Government and several of his lectures reveal the process of analysis of the site conditions and the allocation of functions to the mutual advantage of both. In Griffin’s plan, no part of the city was located to serve vested interests or privilege. His plan was based on the democratic needs and functional relationships most suitable for a commodious, lively city. He achieved it with an independent mind which had trained itself in the organic design principles developed by Sullivan. The required lessons in the technique are in Kindergarten Chats.

Griffin used geometry to control his scheme spatially and achieve legibility. Geometry gives order to the city but it is an organic order in compliance with the general characteristics of the landform. He grasped the big picture in terms of landform relationships and chose his axis to align the built and natural environment, monumentalizing both. His termini are natural, signalling that his is an organic plan. His initial decisions were to place the Capitol on the isolated hilltop, the city on the flat plain opposite, separated by ornamental waters which utilized the Molonglo flood plain, and an architectural ensemble from the Capitol to the waters edge forming the
Government Group. All the detail followed in logical progression form the general to the particular. His geometry was practical using radials for direct communication between centres. To engage the city with the Capitol as the place of pilgrimage and the focus of his design, he used radials as direct means of communication with the city, forming a great triangle across the water. Within this triangle all the public buildings were aligned with the main axis which aligned the landforms, achieving a remarkable synchronicity of built form with landform. Griffin’s city was not devised to achieve foci for set piece vistas to reinforce government authority or privileged interests. That happened later in Canberra. Griffin’s lines of communication were intended to provide an organic balance of functional advantages. At the heart of his city, he realized the vision of a citizenry which could engage at a spiritual level with democracy and nature. In Griffin’s mind the architecture of the city would be modern, creative of place and democratic.

The principles involved dealt with legibility, organic functional relationships and analysis which progressed from the general to the particular, the organic conceptualisation of form and detail, spirituality and imagination. His democratic plan considered people and their movement for communication and habitation within the landscape, for work and creativity, recreation and spirituality to nourish their needs as human beings.

Sullivan’s ideas have been critiqued as derived from the zeitgeist of his times. Sullivan and his Chicago contemporaries drew on such material as: - Emerson’s address in the *American Scholar* (1837), Horatio Greensborough’s paper “American Architecture” (1843) and even more importantly Darwin’s *Origin of Species* (1866) and Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* ( ). Who is an the original thinker without building upon contemporary thought? The point is that Sullivan devised fundamental principles for architecture which addressed the needs of his time and continue to have value for following generations. He sought architectural solutions with the integrity of art to satisfy human needs, be they rational, emotional or spiritual – so long as they were morally democratic. This is a different Sullivan from the Sullivan described in some of the recent literature written in the Post Modern perspective. To know this Sullivan requires acceptance of him as a practising architect who successfully contributed his principles to 20th Century architecture. Griffin saw their value, adopted them and acknowledged their influence.
Griffin’s organic planning required a different mindset to the planners of the City Beautiful Movement. This was evident to Griffin as a young man in Chicago. When he elected to work at Steinway Hall instead of for the then most famous planner in America, Daniel Burnham, one reason was possibly because Burnham liked the ‘classics’. When Griffin went to Wright’s Oak Park studio, Burnham’s office was engaged in the re-planning of Washington. Washington, Griffin said in 1923, was ‘a different kind of plan’ from his plan for Canberra. Sullivan and Griffin would have preferred L’Enfant’s vistas with natural termini. Sullivan would have been of the opinion that Burnham’s work on the McMillan plan for Washington reinforced the feudal power structures which he found destructive of democratic idealism in American society.

In Australia, Murdoch admired the City Beautiful Movement and Modern Renaissance architecture and thought both suitable for Canberra. This set him on a collision course with Griffin. Griffin’s convictions were connected with Sullivan’s. Murdoch’s convictions, as a native born Scot and traditionalist, were aligned with his connections with British tradition and Empire. Politically he saw Australia as part of the British Empire and not as an independent democracy; culturally and morally to be British was a worthy aspiration for an emerging former colony. Murdoch’s opinion was aligned with the status quo among the long term fellow employees of the Department who were supposed to give ‘frank and fearless advice’ to Government. When Murdoch promoted the idea of Parliament House on Capitol Hill to favourable ears in Government, it only awaited the end of the war for the opportunity to harness the Government’s resolve. In post war circumstances the economy was such that a provisional building seemed the better course and the commission fell to Murdoch. The idea of the permanent building remained for ever in the mind of Government as the vision for the dominant building site in Canberra, the focus of Griffin’s plan. Murdoch told the Public Works Committee for the erection of the provisional Parliament House (p.112) that the site for the permanent Parliament House should be decided – if only because of the effect on the location of the provisional building.

“You would, in my opinion, be making the most use of Mr. Griffin’s beautiful plan by putting the permanent Parliament House on Kurrajong. After all, Canberra will primarily exist for the purpose of legislating for Australia, and in that case the legislative House should be the dominating feature of the place.”

It was a limited vision. It set in motion the realization of a completely different city. The Federal Capital Advisory Committee and the supporting Department began the planning culture which fosters the idea of Canberra, including Griffin’s plan, as a mix of
City Beautiful and Garden City ideologies. The first imprint of this ideology was the Provisional Parliament House, a reminder of the ‘White City’, but to a smaller, more economical scale like its forebear, the Australian pavilion for the British Exposition at Wembley. Its architecture, Murdoch said, was Modern Renaissance.

It has been said from the beginning that Canberra is not Griffin’s city and that has certainly been in evidence in the course of examining the thesis argument. With the loss of Griffin’s vision the democratic functional relationships of his plan have not materialized.

The place of pilgrimage became the War Memorial, replacing the place of the Australian spirit from the Capitol and the focus of the plan. Anzac parade became a dead place at the heart of Canberra only attracting the throng for one major occasion per year, which Griffin would have gathered there at all times, day and night. The Department of Defence moved in to occupy the site of Griffin’s commercial centre. Capitol Terrace, Griffin's peoples’ avenue and premier address of the city languishes while ‘Civic’ expands asymmetrically to the west, now threatening to become an amorphous mass extinguishing City Hill and Griffin’s ordering geometry of the triangle. The national institutions of art and culture have become accretions of Government instead of feeding into the life and vitality of the city and its public parks. The suburbs of Canberra were founded on hierarchical divisions within the Australian public service and Griffin’s architectural ensemble expressing the presence of government melted away as the bureaucracy was used to seed the development of the town centres. These were modelled on the new town system devised by the graduates of the Liverpool planning school imported to Australia to carry forward the vision of Holford, the eminent British post war, (World War 2) town planner. The y-plan replaced and major traffic arteries like the Tuggeranong expressway replaced Griffin’s concept of the ‘starburst’ environs and a dense city centre serviced by public transport.

Parliament House on Capital Hill, as a single isolated building, could scarcely have been achieved with more respect for Griffin’s City. But its meaning is different from Griffin’s Capitol; it carries the iron hand of political power inside the velvet glove, and its extension to the bureaucracy. Australians go there as observers; they can be impressed but there is limited scope, and carelessly utilized, for engagement with grass roots democracy. The accentuation is on mandated power. Canberra seen primarily as the seat of Government has been sufficient reason for Australians lack of engagement, for the most part of our nation’s history.
Australians engage with the War Memorial and the Anzac legend of mateship, individual responsibility and courage in the face of adversity. Anzac has been actively promoted by politicians as having Australian values. Australians also love sport and admire team spirit, individual responsibility and courage in the demonstration of sporting prowess. In the 19th Century the concept of Australian mateship grew from the hardships courageously faced, the support of a mate, and the hospitality and readiness to share shown by the country’s pioneers. These are the ingredients of grass roots democracy which flowered in Australia in the 19th century, in the early union movement and nurtured the spirit of the ‘fair go’. The ‘world’ and Griffin knew these Australian values. He wanted Australians to have a building which would seriously engage them in nurturing grass roots democracy, in maintaining the values of the ‘fair go’ in all aspects of life – from family life to sport, science, the business world and the environment. Nature was especially valued by Griffin for the knowledge to be found by understanding its systems, its beauty, and the spirituality with which it could sustain human beings. His Capitol building was aligned with the natural environment as a mark of human intelligence.

In the simplest terms, Griffin considered the design of Canberra, the national capital, as a very significant step for Australia and its future as a nation. He designed the city as a ‘living organism’ complete in itself but capable of future growth within the same planning idea. He designed for the people, nurturing the spirit of democracy, and ‘touching the environment with loving hands’.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

National Archives Material


NAA:A110 FC1912/450 Appointment of Board of Assessors- Re Competitive Designs for Federal Capital City 0 Nomination fo Surveyor, Architect and Engineer.


NAA:A110 FC1913/1779 Meeting of Owen, Scrivener, Oakshott and Hill with Mr Mudroch – Re design Federal Capital

NAA:A110 FC 1913/1326 Designs for Federal Capital City – Board required for adoption of a Design for layout of City

NAA: A110 FC1912/563 Appointment of Board of Assessors in connection with the competitive designs for Federal Capital City

NAA: A110 FC1912/4133 Competitive Designs for Federal Capital City – Adjudication

NAA: A110 FC 1914/547 Parliament House -Canberra Design1914-1916


NAA:A110 FC1916/186 Walter Burley Griffin- letter dated January 1913 – Re his plan

NAA:A110 FC1913/2427 Agreement between Minister of State for Home Affairs of the Commonwealth and Walter Burley Griffin


NAA:A110 FC1915/143 Publication “ The Evolution of a Capital” by Mr Griffith Taylor

NAA:A110 FC1915/315 Reports re Progress, Plan for Federal Capital

NAA: A 127, CA8, Department of Home Affairs Central Office 1910-1913.

NAA:A199 FC1921/76 Correspondence with Walter Burley Griffin in regard to position on Federal Capital Advisory Board

NAA:A199 FCW1915/422 Note for Minister concerning Mr Griffin and Canberra Plan

NAA:A202 1913/1898 Meetings of Design Board
NAA: A202 13/2611 Letter from King O’Malley to Secretary of his Dept

NAA: A458 AA120/1/117 (1) Federal Capital Territory Selection of Site (2) Design of Parliament House (3) Notes on an interview with WM Hughes

NAA: CP487/6,14, Copies of Correspondence leading up to the Appointment of the Federal Capital Advisory Committee, 1920

NAA: A1203(A1203/3) 994/7/AUS Royal Commission on Federal Capital Administration – Minutes of Evidence, 1917

NAA:A1818, 11 Federal Capital City Design – Report of Board Appointed to Investigate and report as to Suitability of Certain Designs for Adoption in Connection with La-out of Federal Captial together with Photographs of a Design and Perspective Sketch Submitted by the Board (Parliamentary Paper – ordered by the Senate to be printed 6 December 1912)


NAA: A1818, 13, Federal Capital Design no 29 by WB Griffin – Original Report- Copy A

NAA:Person Notes for Person CP278 Colonel David Millar

NAA:A7973 Item 11447378 Colonel David Millar, VD, ISO, Administrator of the Federal Capital

NAA:M4447 John Smith Murdoch papers

National Archives of Australia, request item 3292356, Series no A1203(A1203/3) Control symbol 994/7/AUS

Books and Chapters in Books

Australian Dictionary of Biography, Online edition.


Birrell, James, Walter Burley Griffin, University of Queensland Press, 1964


Fischer, Karl. *Canberra Myths and Models: Forces at work in the formation of the Australian Capital*, Hamburg, Institute of Asian Affairs 1984


Kruty, Paul and Sprague, Paul. *Marion Mahony and Millikin Place: Creating a prairie School Masterpiece, with the Help of Frank Lloyd Wright, Herman Von Holst, and Walter Burley Griffin*, Walter Burley Griffin Society , St. Louis, 2007


Szarkowski, John *The idea of Louis Sullivan* Minneapolis Minnesota U.P. 1956


Sullivan, Louis H. ‘Essay on Inspiration’ (1886)

Sullivan, Louis H. ‘What is the Just Subordination, in Architectural Design, of Details to Mass?’ (1887)

Sullivan, Louis H. ‘Ornament in Architecture’

Sullivan, Louis H. ‘The Transportation Building’ (1893)

Sullivan, Louis H. ‘Emotional Architecture as Compared with Intellectual: A Study in Subjective and Objective’ (1894)

Sullivan, Louis H. ‘The Tall Office Building Artistically Considered’ (1896)

Sullivan, Louis H. ‘May not Architecture Again Become a living Art? (c.1887)

Sullivan, Louis H. ‘The Young Man in Architecture’ (1900)

Sullivan, Louis H. ‘Education’ (1902)

Sullivan, Louis H. ‘What is Architecture?: A Study in the American People of Today’ (1906)


Vernon, Christopher. *The Vision Splendid* National Archives of Australia, Canberra, 2002


**Articles and Conference Papers**


Griffin, George W. ‘Canberra, Capital City of Australia’ *The Chicago Realtor*, June 1927

Griffin, Marion Mahony. ‘Democratic Architecture-I’ *Building*, June 12 1914, pp.101-102

Griffin, Marion Mahony. ‘Democratic Architecture-II’ *Building*, August 12 1914, pp.88-91


Griffin, Walter Burley. ‘Canberra: The Architectural and Developmental Possibilities of Australia’s Capital City’ *Building* Nov 12, 1913, pp.65-72

Griffin, Walter Burley. ‘Canberra: II.- The Federal City Site and its Architectural Possibilities’ *Building*, December 12, 1913, pp. 65-68


Griffin, Walter Burley. ‘Canberra in Occupation’, *The Canberra Annual* Vol 1, 1934

Griffin, Walter Burley. Paper on the Modern City for the British association for the Advancement of Science, Melbourne, 14 August 1914,

Jenks, Charles . ‘Democracy: The Ideology and Ideal of the West’ *Architectural Design* special issue *The Architecture of Democracy*


Lewis Michael J. ‘Sullivan after functionalism’ *New Criterion* 20.1 ( Sept. 2001 )

‘Mr Walter Birley Griffin Architect and Democrat’ *Advance! Australia* October 21, 1913

‘Mr. W. B. Griffin’s Views’ *The Salon* October 1913 pp.183-184


Reid, Paul. ‘How the Canberra Camel got its Hump: The Departmental Board’s Plan for Canberra; its Origins and Consequences’ paper presented at the Urban History/Planning History Conference, ANU June 1995


Schuyler, Montgomery. ‘Last Words About the World’s Fair’ Architectural Record 3, no 3 (January – March 1894) pp.291-301.


Vernon, Christopher. ‘Walter Burley Griffin’s American landscape Oeuvre’ in the papers of the Urban History/Planning Conference 1995


Weirick, James ‘Griffin and Modernism,’ Transition 24, 1988

Weirick, James. ‘Marion Mahony at M.I.T.’ Transition Winter 1988

Weirwick, James. ‘The Griffin’s and the Great War’ paper delivered at the *Urban History/Planning Conference* at the Australian National University, Canberra, 26-30 June 1995

Wright, Frank Lloyd “Louis Sullivan - His Work” *Architectural Record* 56 [July- December 1924]

Wright, Frank Lloyd “ Sullivan against the World” *Architectural Record* 105 [June 1949]

Wright, Frank Lloyd. ‘Arts and Crafts and the Machine’

Wright, Frank Lloyd. ‘In the Cause of Architecture’ *Architectural Record*, XXIII (March 1908)

Unpublished Material

Bean, Charles E.W. papers Australian War Memorial

Blair, Helen *The History of the War Memorial*


Griffin, Marion Mahony. *Magic of America, The Federal Battle & The Individual Battle*.

Harrison, Peter. *Papers* National Library of Australia Manuscripts, MS 8347


Nicholls, Eric *Papers* National Library of Australia Manuscripts, MS 9957.

Price, Nancy. Bachelor of Architecture Thesis on Walter Burley Griffin, University of Sydney with handwritten notes by Griffin, Harrison papers, National Library of Australia, Canberra, 1933


Sullivan, Louis H. *Natural Thinking: A Study in Democracy* copy from Burnham Library, Chicago.

Australian Government Publications


Griffin *The Canberra Annual*, Federal Capital of Australia Press, Canberra, 1934

Invitation to Competitors, Competition for the Federal Capital City of the Commonwealth of Australia, Melbourne, 30 April 1911

Senate Report from *the Select Committee appointed to inquire into and report upon the Development of Canberra*, September 1955


Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works Report & Minutes of Evidence on *The Proposed Erection of the War Memorial* Government Printer 1928 Control No 3DRL 6673/641


ADDITIONAL SOURCES

Books:


Fitzgerald, Alan *Canberra in Two centuries. A Pictorial History* Pirie Printers Pty Ltd. ACT 1987


Goetzmann, William H. *American Civilization. A portrait from the twentieth century* 1972 SQ917 383/15 L4

Gombrich, E. H. *Ideals and Idols. Essays on Values in History and in Art* Oxford 1979


Hanno, Walter Kruft. *A History of Architectural Theory; From Vitruvius to the Present,* Zweinmer 1994


Headon, David. *The Symbolic Role of the National Capitol,* Commonwealth of Australia 2003


Keneally, Tom. *Our Republic*. William Heinemann, Australia. 1993


Krier, Robert. Methodology for Research: Urban Space


Lowenthal, David. *The Past is a Foreign Country*


Olsen, Donald J. *The City as a Work of Art*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London 1986


White Richard *Inventing Australia* Allen and Unwin, Sydney 1981

Wichmann, Siegfried, *Japonisme,* Thames and Hudson 1981


Wilkinson, Paul, Shearer. *Active Citizenship.* 2nd ed. MacMillan

Articles, Interviews and Conference papers:

‘An American ‘s Plan for Australia’s Captital’ *The Literary Digest,* June 1912, pp. 1298-1299

‘A World’s Competition: Parliamentary Buildings at Canberra’ *Building* July 11, 1914, pp. 57-63

‘Captial of Australian Commonwealth’ *Construction News,* June 1912, pp.6-7

‘Community Planning: Chat With Mr. And Mrs. Walter Burley Griffin’ *Advance Australia* July 21 1914

‘Design for Australia’s Capital City’ *The Contract Rexcord* pp.44-47

‘Marion Mahony Griffin’ *Building,* May 12, 1914, pp.112k-112m

‘Planning a Federal Capital City Complete’ *The Improvement Bulletin,* November 1912, pp.16-17

Taylor, George A. “ ‘There’” *Building,* July 12 1915, pp 97-112

Taylor, George A. “ ‘There’” *Building,* July 12 1915, pp 97-112

Taylor, George A. “ ‘There’” *Building,* August 12 1915, pp 81-91

‘The Right Spirit Displayed in Griffin’s Planning’ *The Western Architect* August 1913 Vol 20 No 8 pp 66-68

‘Farewell to Burley Griffin’ *Construction News* February 14, 1914.

‘Walter Burley Griffin Appointed’ *Construction News* December 6, 1913, p.8

‘Walter Burley Griffin Returns Home’ *Construction News* December 20, 1913, p.10

‘Young Chicago Architect to Build the Capital City of the Great Australian Commonwealth’ *Chicago Commerce,* pp.12-19