

Urbanising Nature: a political ecology case study of Sydney Park

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Abstract: This paper examines the making of Sydney Park, a 41.6 ha park south of the Sydney central business district within the context of urbanisation in Sydney. Formerly a brickwork and landfill site, Sydney Park has been the focus of three iterations of master-planning since the late 1970s. Now a greatly transformed landscape, Sydney Park currently figures as a major hub in the Sydney 2030 Strategic Plan and its 'Green Global Connected' vision for the city. This research adopts the lens of urban political ecology (UPE) to explore how this former industrial site has come to feature so prominently in Sydney's journey towards a sustainable city. Drawing on evidence in planning documents and design reports, this paper documents the various ways in which formations and re-creations of 'nature' were articulated, modified and inscribed into and onto Sydney Park between 1979 and 2010 to direct specific social, ecological and economic outcomes. (UPE) offers a platform for assessing the making of Sydney Park as a case study of ambiguities and contradictions that can result from well-intended efforts to 'green' the city. Preliminary findings reveal that the journey from wasteland to parkland has invoked specific concepts of nature which represent and in turn have served broader social, political and economic agendas. The discussion revisits the urban political ecology framework to assess the role of Sydney Park's constructed ecology in the trajectory of urban transformations, with particular attention to the link between ideas of nature and ideas of public benefit.

Introduction

As Sydney emerged as a global city in the 1980s and new economic realities played out in the urban fabric, several depleted quarries were transformed into parks. Examples include Sydney Park, Bicentennial Park, Chipping Norton Lake, and Penrith Lakes. These manufactured landscapes are valued for their contributions to the health of the urban region, and as large urban parks, they now improve urban conditions, and resolve urban problems. In as far as parks fix cities, we can understand them as landscapes selected, edited and framed to suit particular social, political and economic intentions. Far from natural, urban parks are nature reworked, a reworking which may take many forms—topographies invented, ecologies constructed, vegetation reassembled--involve diverse processes, and serve many purposes.

Sydney Park in St Peters exemplifies this type of landscape transformation, that is, a situation in which an urban problem—whether social, economic, ecological, or aesthetic—is resolved by recalibrating the role of nature in the city and rearticulating its materiality. Working from the view that large urban parks are instruments of urban transformation, this paper has two aims. The first is to situate Sydney Park in the context of Sydney's urbanization from the 1960s to the present in order to explore the influence of culture, economy and politics on the making of the park. The second is to examine the specific concepts of urban ecology and social benefit mobilized in the course of the reworking of this landscape.

Sydney Park is located 4.3 km south of Sydney's Central Station in a corridor of industrial and commercial land currently undergoing extensive regeneration. The land the park occupies was a brick quarry and brick works from the mid-1840s until the mid-1950s. For the next two decades, the site served as a tip, and closed in 1976. The following year, the NSW Planning and Environment Commission (NSW PEC) established the Inner City Open Space Acquisition Program to redress the inequitable distribution of open space in the city. Sydney Park was one of several industrial sites transformed through this program. Today, Sydney Park is the largest park owned and managed by the City of Sydney and one of its most ambitious in terms of social and ecological programs (City of Sydney 2014a, p.3).

The paper begins by establishing urban political ecology (UPE) as the relevant conceptual framework for the research. This is followed by a brief history of the park, which traces shifts in concept and program through a review of plans of management, related archival data and observations of the park itself. The discussion situates the treatment of urban ecology and social benefit at Sydney Park in an urban political ecological framework.

Urban Political Ecology

Urban political ecology is concerned with the social and political production of urban nature (Heynen, 2014, p 598; Heynen *et al*, 2006). In the words of Roger Keil (2003, p. 724), urban political ecology involves, 'viewing the landscapes and urban infrastructures of cities as historical products of human-nature interactions.' Because UPE focuses on socio-ecological change over time, in specific urban contexts (Heynen *et al*, 2006, p 1), it provides a lens for critical investigations of the deliberate and systematic reshaping that occurs as cities build and rebuild. A UPE perspective traces 'the linkages among history, ecology, culture, urban morphology and economies of how cities emerge and work,' and has the capacity to reveal changing assumptions about the role of nature in the city and the connection between these assumptions and broader socio-economic values (Pincetl, 2007, pp 87, 90). Because UPE also provides a critical lens for understanding cities as shaped by socio-spatial-political intentions and outcomes, it is frequently used to investigate issues of social and environmental justice.

In simple terms, UPE provides three variables for a critical reading of urbanisation. Although these variables overlap significantly, it is possible to outline the distinct scope of each. Urban refers to the dialectic between socio-spatial processes and the human settlements they shape. UPE challenges ideas of urban areas as contained, bound and fixed entities, and instead considers urbanisation and urban regions as comprised of complex and multidimensional processes in which boundaries and dualities between urban/nature and culture/city are collapsed (Heynen *et al*, 2006). Urban in this sense also refers to the constant flux over time of spatial reconfiguration as a key attribute of urbanisation.

The political in UPE refers to the players and dynamics of political structures, both formal and informal (Keil, 2003). Urban political ecologists focus on two main aspects of the political: conventional institutional governance structures and their associated processes and practices, and moments of disruption, disequilibrium and change (Holifield and Schuelke, 2015). Much UPE research applies actor network theory to investigate the allocation and distribution of power and the processes of decision-making amongst the actors, human or otherwise, as well as the networks that connect them. Actor network theory relies on and reflects the value of a hybrid understanding of urban 'actors,' an understanding which deepens our knowledge of who and what is involved in urbanisation. The focus on actors and their networks in UPE also reveals the relationship between political motivations and social outcomes, intended or not, particularly changes in spatial practices, social equity and environmental justice.

Ecology in UPE refers to urban ecology, and addresses the complexity of urban habitats and systems (Keil 2003). Fundamentally, urban ecology recognises that urbanisation does not equate with destruction of nature; instead urbanisation integrates and re-forms nature—meaning the environment and its ecosystems, and produces an altered but nonetheless functioning new *urban* nature. In an example of the overlap of these variables, UPE scholars use the metaphor of metabolism inherent in ecological concepts to focus on the networks, processes and flows that constitute the 'social and material production of urban nature,' and to investigate the politics of how 'nature' is mobilised and transformed, and how new socio-environmental conditions are produced (Heynen *et al*, 2006, p 6).

Applying urban political ecology to urban green spaces

Scholars of UPE view urban green spaces as resulting from entwined social, political and natural processes. Because UPE scholars, such as Matthew Gandy (2003), James Evans (2007), and Jennifer Foster (2010), are alert to masked intentions of urban environmental transformations, they attend more to the social-political and economic contexts, motivations and outcomes than to the design output itself. The materiality of the artefact is frequently the backdrop to a broader investigation in which UPE is the framework for assessing critically the political intentions and social and economic outcomes of urban processes, such as restoration, conservation, etc. While this approach has value in that it reveals issues and ambiguities with what might otherwise be viewed by urban residents as benign efforts to re-nature the city, it falls short of fully investigating the design process and its products, that is the generation of specific forms, and the selection of specific materials and programs, as key aspects of the socio-political and metabolic framing of these sites.

This paper extends UPE in two ways: first, quite simply, by expanding the geographical scope of UPE to the Australian context, and secondly, by situating changes in the concept, form and materiality of a specific urban park over time and in relation to its urban, social and political context. This contextualisation registers how unfolding urban ideologies were manifest in a series of interventions in Sydney Park, fundamentally and deliberately altering the 'nature' of the park. A UPE perspective, in

this case, reveals how, why and in what ways a specific parcel of urban terrain was shaped and reshaped as an instrument of advancing Sydney's global aspirations.

Sydney Park: historical overview

Description

Sydney Park straddles two of the three geological formations which dominate the Sydney landscape: the sand sheets and swamps of the Botany Basin and the clay rich shale of the Cumberland Plain. Relatively low in elevation, the terrain slopes southeast into what was once Shea's Creek (now Alexandra Canal) and onward into Botany Bay. Historically and culturally, this was Sydney's backside, the location of manufacturing and industry—the workings of the city. Today the area is in the midst of a decades long transformation into a corridor of mixed use, with many urban infill and infrastructure projects underway and/or recently completed.

From pit to park

Throughout the 19th c., a clay quarry and brick manufacturing facility on the site served the Sydney region. By the mid-20th c., the site comprised seven clay pits, five brick manufacturers, as well as facilities for gas storage, metal works and chemical manufacturer. As the supply of clay diminished in the St Peters and Marrickville area from the mid-20th century, the St Peters brick manufacturers relocated to shale deposits further west. From 1949, the City of Sydney progressively occupied the St Peters brickworks site, beginning in the southwest corner, for controlled tipping of city refuse. The St Peters tip received putrescible and non-putrescible waste until 1977, and continued operating until 1981 (Ove Arup in Conybeare Morrison, 1982 np).

As Sydney's mid 20thc urban expansion intensified, garbage disposal became a metropolitan scale concern. Pressed by the NSW Department of Local Government to investigate the issue, in 1958, the Cumberland County Council (CCC) published its recommendations in a report titled 'Refusal Disposal in the County of Cumberland.' In line with international trends (Melosi, 1981), the CCC identified sanitary landfill as the preferred option for disposing of garbage, as opposed to incineration, which was still widely practiced in Sydney, and described sanitary landfill as the best option since 'digestive' methods were not well tested. The landfill method was also seen as embodying a conservation approach to land use, providing 'some improvement of the land' and being 'the most effective way of ridding the community of unsightly and sometimes dangerous swamps and disused brick pits' (CCC, 1959: Foreword and 4). Locations considered suitable, on the basis of low cost and wide availability, included inland depressions created by disused brick pits and quarries and low-lying areas along creeks, rivers and harbour foreshores. Significant reclamation projects of this era now recognizable as parklands etched along Sydney's waterways include Deans Reserve on the Cooks River in the southern area of the city and Tunks Park above Flat Rock Creek in Sydney's northern suburbs.

The proposal to develop a park on the landfill and brick quarry at St Peters followed this trend, but also was catalysed by a social agenda. From 1953 until the late 1970s, and across three successive state planning agencies, the state had focused on the provision of regional open space the County of Cumberland, and left the issue of local open space to local government.¹ State agency surveys of open space in the Sydney region in 1962 and 1975 revealed a paradox: according to standards of provision applied in the surveys, the Sydney region had more than adequate open space, both local and regional, but most of it was inaccessible for inner city residents (Conybeare Morrison, 1982, p11).

Sydney Park is one outcome of this paradox. In 1978 the NSW Planning and Environment Commission (NSW PEC) initiated the Inner City Open Space Acquisition Program, 'to provide more parks in inner urban areas which had missed out as Sydney expanded' (Anon 1989, np). Described as a move to 'transform the environmentally deprived sector of the Metropolis' (Conybeare Morrison, 1982, p5), the program aimed 'to overcome deficiency of inner city open space through the purchase of obsolete industrial land, industrial brick pits and harbour front sites and to manage and implement suitable uses and design' (NSW PEC 1980, np). The program immediately expended \$2.5 million on significant sized parcels of land in St Peters between 1977 and 1983. Other sites included in the program were brickpits at Ashfield and Burwood, a 4 hectare harbour front site at Mort Bay in Balmain, and 1 ½ acres at McMahons Point.

Shortly after acquisition, in 1982, Conybeare Morrison & Partners and landscape architect Bruce Mackenzie, in association with engineers Ove Arup, prepared the first Plan of Management for the

¹ The three state planning agencies referred to are the County of Cumberland Council (1944-1963), the NSW State Planning Authority (1963-1974), and the NSW Planning and Environment Commission (1974-1980).

park. The objectives included the provision of local opportunities for recreation, education, and outdoor performances/exhibitions, a 'naturalised' environment to contrast with surrounding area, an urban farm, an ecosystem with a pond, indigenous planting, a casual and self-sustaining character, all to be 'generally enjoyed in insulated circumstances, separated from the presence of noisy, unwanted urban pressure' (Conybeare Morrison, 1982, p 43).

As the park was gradually implemented in the 1980s, the desired distinction from the urban surrounds was realised by the construction of a playing field, an artificial lake, and the creation of a park-like setting for the remnant brickworks with their kilns and chimneys. Stage 2, undertaken between 1984 and 1987 by the NSW Public Works Department, involved more extensive remediation and resulted in the transformation of 10 hectares (25 acres) into three large mounds, consisting of *in situ* and imported fill and a series of ponds to capture and treat runoff from the fill. At the same time, an open, un-programmed area described as a 'village green', a carpark, and a family recreation area were constructed.

The 1982 Plan of Management was more ambitious and strategic than this list of works suggests. The document identified diverse challenges of the site, the toxic soil, leachate, uneven and deeply excavated topography, unsightly and derelict structures. It went so far as to describe the unbuilt park as 'a derelict bomb site where the natural features have been erased,' (Conybeare Morrison, 1982, p 32), clearly indicating the state of existing degradation and the degree of transformation required. The plan advocated rezoning adjacent areas to higher densities in order to bring economic benefit, and promoted specifically:

change to the urban structure of the district. The benefits that could flow from such a restructuring include rezoning to a higher and better use of land abutting the Park, and the introduction of increased residential densities close to the Park and public transport facilities.

The opportunity for Government to capitalise on such rezonings should be fully explored at the early stages of development, for this would be an equitable way to offset the high costs of development and restoration of a despoiled site (Conybeare Morrison & Partners, 1982 p5)

Thus the, 1982 Plan presented a park with two major urban roles: on one hand, it was to become a place apart from the city, and on the other, by activating new land use and densities, it would generate increased revenue for the city.

City of South Sydney (1991-2003)

The issue of revenue for development of the park itself was an ongoing an issue. Following the establishment of the City of South Sydney in 1989, and in line with the intention of the original funding program for the park, in 1991, the NSW Department of Planning (NSW DoP) transferred the park to South Sydney City Council (SSCC) for continued development and management. This transfer of governance was also sparked by a NSW DoP proposal to sell off 6 ha of the park in order to generate revenue for developing the park (EDAW, 1995, p. 1). In resistance to this prospect, the SSCC agreed to take on the responsibility for development and maintenance of the park, with funds for park implementation raised through a contract for accepting clean landfill (SSCC 1991, Joel Johnson, 1992 pers comm).

Since then, Sydney Park has had three additional plans of management and master plans. The first of these, the 1995 Plan of Management, represented several significant changes to the conceptualization of the park (EDAW, 1995). A case in point is the Bedford Brickworks. Described in 1982 as derelict, by 1995 they had become a focus point of the cultural significance of the park, and featured as the icons on the SSCC's logo (they were listed subsequently as heritage items in the City of Sydney Local Environmental Plan in 2012). The EDAW scheme also revisited the potential regional significance of the park, and identified opportunities to link to proposed and existing parkland to the northwest and south of Sydney Park. Additionally, it reflected the socio-political issues of the time by relying on extensive community consultation for data, and expressing an explicit concern for offering educational opportunities based on sustainability along with diverse recreation activities, and a distinctive program of art, music, performance. At the same time, on the ground, with fill operations freshly completed and not well documented, issues with soil quality and run-off persisted, and challenged the aspirations of park planners and designers. The vegetation performed poorly, and tarnished the image of the new park (NSW Public Work and Services Department, 1992). Run-off alerted the NSW Environmental Protection Agency to ongoing contamination risks, and limited funding prevented the extensive work required to convert the kilns to public use.

City of Sydney (2004-)

In 2004, South Sydney City Council merged with the City of Sydney creating a super-council. One key benefit of this expanded area of governance was the access to additional resourcing for Sydney Park's continued development. Another has been a return to the concept of the park as a regional recreation and social hub. The City's 2008 strategic plan titled *Sustainable Sydney 2030: Green Global Connected* has had a galvanising effect, and has resulted in several initiatives, as the title suggests, to green and connect the city. In general terms, it promotes green infrastructure as a means to deliver connections throughout and beyond the city. This concept of green and connected was re-enforced in a number of supporting plans, notably Greening Sydney (2012) and the Urban Ecology Action Plan (2014).

In specific terms, the *2030 Strategic Plan for Sydney* positioned Sydney Park as a green hub along a proposed north/south 'Harbour to Bay' Green Corridor, to the extent that Sydney Park registers (in plan and from the air) as a key feature in a green/connected city. Through its survey of biodiversity hotspots in the local government area, the city's 'Urban Ecology Action Plan' (2014) identified Sydney Park as one six sites of significance, in terms of biodiversity—quite ironic, given that the park was an expansive, excavated pit only 40 years ago. Within the park itself, the City of Sydney is now developing an urban farm, an idea first suggested in the 1982 PoM. The city has also introduced a water harvesting system, in collaboration with Sydney Water and the energy supplier, Transgrid. Both efforts reflect an understanding of the park as integrated into the urban system, with a role that extends beyond the physical park boundaries.

Given these extensive efforts, the current description of Sydney Park on the CoS website, presents a perplexing rendition of the park. Titled 'Picture perfect in St Peters,' and after noting the visual dominance of the brick kiln chimneys, the web page goes on to say,

Sydney Park is much more than just brick chimneys . . . the open space is made of 40 hectares of lush grass, landscaped gardens, rolling hills, meandering pathways and picturesque wetlands. Creeks flow throughout the park and attract all different types of birds. There are plenty of spacious viewing decks that are perfectly placed to make sure you can take it all in as long as you like. Sydney Park is popular for weekend picnics and it's very dog friendly (City of Sydney, 2015).

The distinctly picturesque qualities listed here belie the extensive amount of physical and fiscal investment undertaken to establish the park, and gloss over the reality that Sydney Park is just as much an urban project as it is an urban park.

Discussion

Urban: the spatial fix

As Sydney expanded in the mid 20thc, and as shale was depleted in the St Peters and Marrickville brick quarries, manufacturing and extraction relocated to the west. The remnant quarries were repurposed to accommodate urban refuse, and later, the need for spaces of urban recreation. Today, the changes in form, material and program of the St Peters brick pits serve to register and convey the shifts in urban and economic activity and demographics that have occurred since the 1950s.

One of the most striking facts about Sydney Park is that its location was not informed by an assessment of prime locations for a park. Instead, its location was a more complicated spatial fix, the result of an opportunistic move by the state government to transform an 'environmentally deprived sector of the Metropolis', and considered by planners and designers responsible for shaping its future as a potential catalyst for increasing revenue for the city (Harvey 2001, Conybeare Morrison & Partners, 1982 p5). At the time, this attention to inner city industrial sites was a distinct shift in perspective for the state government, with the establishment of a special program to realise a suite of parks signalling on one hand the importance of open space provisions at the time as an urban issue; and on the other hand notable as a rare, if brief, attempt to coordinate park making across the urban region.

The subsequent evolution of Sydney Park and its role in the city have been underpinned by additional restructuring of governance arrangements, and rezoning of land in and adjacent to the park as well as site-specific plans. Sydney Park today thus presents a sequence of spatial fixes, initially focused on constructing a new landscape, with the more recent work capitalising on the value established by the first 'fix.' The second generation spatial fix is driven clearly by the City of Sydney's aspirations to be green global and connected, to be a diverse, equitable, accessible and profitable city. Indeed the city is now leveraging 'green' advantage from the location, size, and constituent elements—mounds, ponds, farms, etc of Sydney Park. Thus, while parks in general are promoted today on the premise

that urban people need 'nature' and that urban health requires accessible open space and biodiversity, the location and realisation of Sydney Park within the broader fabric of the city reveals that park making is emphatically part and parcel of the urban economy—parks are engines of urban transformation.

Political: design decisions and spatial practices

In the 1980s, the proponents of Sydney Park were competing with similar developments at Darling Harbour and Homebush Bay for Australia's Bicentennial celebrations funds. The name of the park reflects both the failure to secure these funds (unlike for example, Bicentennial Park at what was formerly Homebush Bay and is now Sydney Olympic Park), and early intentions to establish the park as a regional facility. But what does it mean to be Sydney Park? How should this identity be reflected in the fabric and form of the park?

The park we know today is the result of a series of efforts to physically reform and revalue the land that Sydney Park occupies. It is a highly image-able landscape, its spatial form dominated by vivid and memorable elements of tall chimneys, ponds and large mounds. This vividness lends identity to the contemporary park, and establishes a new urban space, offering opportunities for new perceptions of the city and for new spatial practices, such as urban farming. At the same time, this vividness can be construed as cultural amnesia (Engler, 2004, Meyer, 2007). In re-forming this land, designers, planners, community suppressed, perhaps unwittingly, evidence of extraction and waste and the changed ecological conditions engendered by the transformation of landfill to parkland and wetland. So while the mounds are distinctive both in scale and prominence, they offer little to no acknowledgement of their *raison d'être*. This silencing of history misses an opportunity to affect everyday life by allowing or encouraging park visitors to appreciate its layers of history. As Engler and Meyer (2004, 2007) argue, because it is increasingly clear and accepted that waste has defined our culture and thus our urban landscapes, communicating this relationship can serve to increase awareness of the need to reduce waste and avoid dumping toxic materials. The manufactured landscape of Sydney Park is thus a lost opportunity to reveal and make explicit the relationship between urban expansion and urban waste. Instead the cultural value and practice as expressed in the construction of this park tends more towards resurrecting and constructing an idealised landscape.

The planting schemes are another case in point. The 1982 and 1989 planting concepts for the park in effect abstracted and reconstructed the 'nature' the city had eliminated. This thinking both anticipated and was re-enforced by the 1991 publication, *Taken for Granted* by Dough Benson and Jocelyn Howell. Effectively an environmental history of Sydney's suburbs, *Taken for Granted* illustrated the extensive loss of indigenous vegetation communities across the region since 1788. At the time, immediately after Australia's Bicentennial, there was strong social and political sensitivity to the harm inflicted by European colonisation, both with regard to the land and to its indigenous people. The same socio-political concerns expanded as ecologists documented increasing numbers of threatened flora and fauna species and endangered ecological communities. As these concerns became enmeshed in the broader discourse of sustainability, and were enacted as policy and legislation, they were also to varying extents 'registered' in many landscape projects, including Sydney Park. Thus, the planting proposals premised on Benson's extrapolation of the types, extent and locations of regional indigenous vegetation communities prior to 1788, are an attempt to reverse the declension narrative associated with European settlement of Australia. At the same time, they overlook—in Sydney Park, quite literally—the new ground and new conditions established by human activity since 1788.

A constructed ecology

As mentioned, the current City of Sydney Urban Ecology Action Plan (2014), (itself an offshoot of the 2010 Greening Sydney Plan) focuses on biodiversity rather than urban ecology *per se*. Based on fauna and flora surveys throughout the city, which in and of themselves have value as quantitative accounts of species and their locations, the plan presents neither the city nor the park as an ecological system. Instead, the plan focuses on achieving liveability and resiliency in the city through increasing biodiversity. While not problematic in general, once this aim is understood as being operationalised by an objective to 're-establish representative patches of the likely vegetation communities' issues become apparent. (City of Sydney 2014, 10) In advocating for re-establishment of lost flora and fauna communities, the plan fails to acknowledge the real conditions of the current city and its landscape. This is especially problematic for Sydney Park—where the soil profile across most of the site is completely manufactured, and largely undocumented, and thus to a large extent, unknown in terms of what type of growing environment it provides. It also projects an idealised and

simplified version of Sydney's urban ecosystem, and overlooks the possibility that the sequence of planting schemes undertaken since 1982 have established a new ecosystem—one whose attributes and processes remain formative and thus unpredictable. In doing so, the plan is out of step with contemporary ecological science, which, in the words of Peter Del Tredici, posits that 'environmental stability is an illusion, and that an unpredictable future belongs to the best adapted' (Del Tredici 2014 p. 239). Here of course the key factor has been human intervention—Sydney Park is primarily an urban project, entangled in a network of policy, urban economy, social values, and biophysical context.

As Jane Wolff puts it, 'cities have become environmental hybrids shaped by cultural intentions and natural processes'(Wolff, 2014, p 185). The interplay between cities and their settings results in a mosaic of cultural landscapes and forgotten ecologies, and urban landscapes of forged ecologies. Indeed, because of the wide uptake of this understanding of urban ecology in recent years, landscape planners and architects have focused on bringing redeveloped sites into the matrix of urban systems with an increased emphasis on the ecology as well as the aesthetics of the settings. As Sydney Park matures, it becomes apparent that the park is more than a simple "patch" in the urban matrix, and more than a hub within a major corridor, helping to link urban and ecological systems across the metropolitan area. Sydney Park is a deliberately constructed ecology designed to re-form relationships between urban people, their environment and their economy. Like any landscape development project, the landform and the landscape continue to evolve and mature. On a former landfill site, these changes are dynamic and the subsurface processes have potential to create major changes at the surface. Although the engineering aspects of landfill redevelopment are increasingly well understood and long-term site performance is becoming more predictable and manageable, uncertainty persists on these reconstructed landscapes. At Sydney Park, because issues with soils, toxicity, access, and the safety of the brick kilns continue, it behoves the city to engage with contemporary ecological thinking, as outlined by Wolff (2014, 184): 'that ecosystems are open and networked; that they change progressively and in ways predictable as tendencies rather than in exact detail; that they respond complex ways to disturbance; that they must be understood across scales; and that they can flip suddenly from one state to another.'

Conclusion

The re-formation of urban land is politically charged and economically motivated. With specific regard to the making of parks, although they are broadly accepted and promoted as beneficial for urban health, as we have seen, they can embody idealistic, multiple, and conflicting agendas (Foster 2010). If, from an urban political ecological view, we understand the ecological reconstructions, which so often drive park-making, as part of broader patterns of urban transformations, these conflicts and ambiguities are not surprising. Again, as noted by Foster, today these transformations are common elements of urban strategies, such that '... the opportunity to stimulate natural systems that improve quality of life (at least for humans) in easily accessible, well-served locations has become a hallmark of popular progressive urbanism' (Foster 2010). This is as true of Sydney as it is of New York and Paris, the cities examined by Foster. The City of Sydney's mantra of green, global and connected has had catalytic influence on the city's strategic planning, and its fabric. The speed with which the 2030 plan spawned a suite of 'green' initiatives is remarkable and admirable for its focus and intention. Sydney Park is becoming associated with and even emblematic of urban health and sustainability. The constructed wetlands have spawned a black swan habitat; a dog park co-exists with an all ages playground, an urban farm is taking shape, and the park 'harvests' water from its surroundings. But as noted, the *Urban Ecology Strategic Action Plan* (City Sydney 2014) raises concerns about the authenticity of image and purpose employed to green the city. While re-instating patches of endangered communities on the newly formed and still unknown conditions of Sydney Park communicates the city's commitment to 'green' and indirectly contributes to its global ambitions and stature, it avoids explicit recognition of the assumptions and risks inherent in the remaking of this land. It also belies an authentic record of its making, most particularly the fact that the park is a constructed ecology, the third transformation of this landscape since the mid-19th c.

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