No Maccas in the Hills!
Locating the planning history of fast food chains

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The rise of the 'fast food' concept as it is understood in the 21st century is the result of a series of calibrations enacted over decades by business, society and technology. The expansion of fast food franchising has paralleled social and environmental change, particularly since the middle of the 20th century.   Its origins may be seen as modernism's response to unease with the processing of food under industrial conditions; yet its development as a 'system' has mirrored or inspired innovation in service delivery, construction and social expectation over the last century. Many of these are connected to the rise of the automobile and the expansion of low-density suburbia.

Fast food's planning history has gone largely undocumented. The fast food outlet is so ubiquitous that while critics might decry its products as a negative influence on health, the outlet might nonetheless be said to be hiding in plain sight: in the guise of just one more manifestation of automobile-led change. This paper explores the community effects of fast food chains as a wider built environment phenomena, first in the early 20th century US and then as translated into Australia in from the late 1960s onwards. It considers - in what regard has urban planning evolved to accommodate fast food restaurants; and how have such places impacted on urban form? How have communities responded (including the case of conflict in Tecoma, Victoria) to the local emergence of global fast food outlets, and what can community responses tell us about the history and future of fast food chains?

Keywords:

Introduction

The rise of the 'fast food' concept has paralleled – and to a certain extent, initiated – social and environmental change since the middle of the 20th century. Its origins lie with societal unease regarding industrial food (particularly meat) processing; yet its 'system' styled development has inspired innovation over the last century. The Ford production line, the Levitt system of house building, and even megabusinesses like Amazon owe a debt to 'fast food' styled efficiencies.

Fast food's planning history is largely undocumented. There is a recent literature around the health impacts of fast food products and social issues of global branding. Nonetheless, so ubiquitous are fast food outlets like the Golden Arches that while critics decry negative health effects, the outlets themselves hide in plain sight, as neutral as traffic lights or petrol stations. This paper explores the community effects of fast food chains as a wider built environment phenomena. It considers the rise of such systems in the United States, then their Australian operation. It then gives examples of community reaction to specific outlets, focusing on a recent conflict in Tecoma, Victoria. It draws on secondary sources – including food histories – to highlight build environment factors in fast food history. For Australian material archived news articles and planning system documentation are used.

The rise of Fast Food Systems: The Jungle to the White Castle

Prepared food outlets are a feature of all urban retail phenomena and a core element of urban and suburban centres. The rise of fast food is aligned – perhaps counterintuitively, considering its notoriously problematic status – with vendor promises of hygiene and conformity.

Frederick Henry Harvey began 'the first chain of eating houses that could assure customers of quality and service at every unit' (Hogan, 1997, 11) on the Santa Fe railroad in 1873. The chain was iconic even in the 1940s, the subject of a popular novel and film set fifty years previously. Outlets were still appreciated by hungry travellers in 1951 (Curkeet, 1951), as the company adapted its formula to highway roadhouses.

A second strand to a developing fast food ethos in the USA was the diner. At the turn of the last century, Hogan (1997) tells us, lunch carts at factory gates (15) became permanent outlets when their 'wheels were taken off'. The creation of recognised fast foods such as hot dogs joined with national drinks – Coca Cola, for instance, a recognised cultural icon from 1886.

Walt Anderson created the White Castle chain a century ago (Hogan 26-7). Anderson's chain was based on a series of white-washed structures with crenellated walls and turrets, modelled on the Chicago Water Tower - in popular legend the only building to survive Chicago's great fire. Whilst not franchised – all outlets remain directly owned by the company - White Castle initiated several practices adopted by Ray Kroc at McDonald's. White Castle appears pioneered its 'system' and emphasised cleanliness and consistency through recognisable branding. Cleanliness was promoted through pointedly pristine, white décor and by the visibility of the kitchen from the dining room. A brochure from 1932 assured visitors that:

> When you sit at a White Castle, remember that you are one of several thousands; you
> are sitting on the same kind of stool; you are being served on the same kind of counter;
> the coffee you drink is made in accordance with a certain formula; the hamburger you

eat is prepared in exactly the same way over a gas flame of the same intensity… (Quoted in Steele 2008, 234)

White Castle's presentation was not out of context. In Hungry City Carolyn Steel suggests that the promise of clean and safe food was a conscious response to widespread anxiety over mass-produced food, particularly industrially produced meat, during the early 20th century (pp 233-236). Upton Sinclair's 1906 novel The Jungle was instrumental in this regard. Sinclair's book was understood as a thinly veiled depiction of Chicago's meat industry. It planted, in visceral detail, suspicions about cleanliness and quality of low priced meat products technology made possible.

Cronen (1991) describes Chicago's vast slaughterhouses functioning at this time as a (confronting) tourist attraction. The previously unheard-of scale and efficiency of the process were a source of pride for some, making it "an icon of nineteenth–century progress". Pride in efficiency nonetheless toed a fine line with discomfort. Rudyard Kipling, for example, was "appalled" by the experience and described with horror the indifference of a young woman visiting the slaughterhouse. Sinclair remarked of the killing floor that:

> One could not stand and watch very long without becoming philosophical, without beginning to deal in symbols and similes, and to hear the hog-squeal of the universe (Sinclair 208)

Sinclair's presented the Chicago meatpacking trade as symbolic of the moral corruption and decay of capitalism: not only callous in its efficiency but, crucially, suspect and contaminated. The efficiency of the modern systems making mass consumption of lower priced food possible was, in this sense, a paradox with which consumers had an unstable relationship. Ground beef was particularly suspicious: Sinclair portrayed an unseen, filthy process by which repulsive items – diseased animals, sawdust, old nails, offal – were packaged into ground beef and bologna, and "would appear to be ordinary, healthy food". This idea of hidden workings through which feared things could be disguised as consumer items that struck a nerve and influenced public attitudes to food production, and its regulation. Cronen argues that:

> Public fears about the health hazards of dressed beef and its by-products did not finally explode until 1906, when Upton Sinclair published his muckraking novel The Jungle and Congress passed the Meat Inspection and Pure Food Acts, which subsequently imposed much stricter inspection standards on the packers and their products (253).

The White Castle 'system' repackaged the cheap industrial meat that The Jungle had rendered "grotesque and unsanitary". Steel suggests that White Castle used branding and design "to persuade diners there was nothing nasty lurking in the kitchen" (233). The purity of the brand – the 'White' of the name – was a means to, in the words of co-founder Edgar Ingram, "break down a deep-seated prejudice against chopped beef". White Castle served the promise of hamburgers that were, if not 'natural', reliably edible and clean. These values remain, as food historian Visser argues, a key element of what fast food sells - the promise of removing differences between places and times (1986, 118).

Steele (2008) argues that a key feature of modern food consumption is the freedom to not think about its origin. Systems are invisible in plain sight, providing food cheaply, efficiently, and safely.

Mass food production is however more carefully marketed than other widespread systems: food producers constantly balance assurance of quality control against the fact the system can produce anxiety about whether food is sufficiently natural or appetising. The products demand a dual mentality of knowing, and not wanting to know. It is important that it is easy to believe that hamburgers 'come from' the kitchen visible over the counter. Cronen observes wryly that 'Forgetfulness was among the least noticed and more important of [the meat industry's] by-products' (256).

A National Institution

By 1930 White Castle was a 'national institution' of 116 restaurants; (Hogan 40) and 'the buying public seemed to crave standardization and uniformity in the marketplace' (48). Other, comparable, businesses – such as, for instance, the grocery trade – moved to similarly efficient 'system' processes in the 1930s and 40s, with the added advantage of self-service to cut operating costs (Dippman, 1946, 10). Competitors appeared, adhering to a type: 'Small white buildings with some sort of tower, such as a turret, clock tower, light house, ziggurat, or even a crystal ball' (Hogan, 48).

Soon automobiles were incorporated into the model. White Castle introduced 'kerb service' in 1935. Yet the hamburger chains' rise to prominence was not always on a smooth path, as Hogan observes:

> Zoning commissions and city planning departments also presented problems for White Castle. The town of Oak Lawn, Illinois, for example, passed an ordinance prohibiting all hamburger and hot-dog stands within the town limits. White Castle successfully appealed this rule and was eventually granted an exception, but many other chains were excluded for years. Other cities, such as Louisville and Chicago, built new expressways and turnpikes to alleviate the traffic on main thoroughfares but by so doing often ruined the business of the Castles on those particular avenues. Developments that many planning commissions termed urban progress often meant financial disaster for many downtown Castles (121).

Alongside McDonald's (see below), Florida's Burger King and Indiana's Burger Chef, both launched in 1954, were amongst the first nationwide chains, followed by Pizza Hut in 1958. Harland Sanders operated Sanders' Servistation on US Route 25 between 'the Midwest and Atlanta and Miami'; when a highway route rationalisation cost him his business in 1955, he sold rights to his 'secret recipe' and then began to franchise his Kentucky Fried Chicken, becoming the figurehead (and affecting his 'Colonel' persona) for the operation. Glen Bell had almost fifteen years popularising fast Mexican food in Southern California when he established the Taco Bell franchise in 1964 (Hogan 152-3). Wendy's, the North American burger chain launched in 1969 in Columbus, Ohio, incorporated 'drive-thru windows' into its model, effectively inspiring (if not forcing) McDonalds and Burger King to incorporate the same.

The 1970s saw minor changes to the business strategies of most of these organisations, with major expansions as the fast food restaurant aligned with suburban development in western nations, particularly the USA. The urban form of early fast food in the USA was concentrated in pedestrian and public transport oriented areas, typically downtown or in the vicinity of industry. In the post war period, major chains spread to vehicular oriented areas well outside of downtowns.

So successful has McDonald's been as an operating 'system' that the man behind its franchising, Ray Kroc (1902-1984) has become a business icon. Kroc was not the founder of McDonalds, but took the initiative in formulating a replicable version of the original store, amplifying many of its central elements and eliminating others, creating a streamlined 'restaurant'. Kroc, a salesman of Bohemian stock, writes in his memoir that he:

> first became aware of the hamburger patty as an element of food purveying when I was a young man going to dances on Chicago's West Side. There was a White Castle on the corner of Ogden and Harlem Avenues, where we could go for hamburgers after a dance. (Kroc and Anderson 1977, 73)

Kroc encountered the McDonald brothers' restaurant in the early 1950s in his capacity as a milkshake mixer salesman. The efficiency and the cleanliness of the restaurant led him to pursue the role of the restaurant's franchisor. He could have merely produced his own version of the McDonald's formula: the brothers were, it seems, candid about their procedures and the kitchen of the restaurant was, in any case, open to public view. Yet Kroc was adamant that the McDonald's name itself was 'one of those promotable names that would catch the public fancy' and that he was possessed by 'a strong intuitive sense that the name McDonald's was exactly right.' (Kroc and Anderson 71-2).

Franchising McDonald's was a bold move, and its success was by no means a foregone conclusion. Yet it was Kroc's lack of imagination that made his McDonald's a success. The story Kroc tells himself in his Grinding it Out is of a single-minded hard worker whose major difficulties were to persuade his franchisees of the value of his principles of hard work, honesty, cleanliness and simplicity: that (as John F. Love writes) 'unauthorised deviation from the basics of the McDonald's system would never be tolerated.' (1986, 85). Kroc insisted McDonalds outlets feature no jukeboxes, vending machines or public telephones: 'All of those things create unproductive traffic in a store and encourage loitering that can disrupt your customers.' (Kroc and Anderson, 84). Kroc standardised both the product and its point of sale in, as Hogan writes, 'all aspects of the business, from the kitchen to the bookkeeping to the building construction' (148). From this we see the derivation of the well-known concept of McDonaldisation, applicable to numerous social and cultural scenarios, and often used interchangeably with the notion of Fordism (Ritzer 1995, Smart 1999, Alfino et al 1998).

Philip Langdon emphasises McDonalds' model's utilitarian – deliberately uncomfortable – space, comparing it to a 'typical shopping center' of the 1960s:

> Retailers, whether in the fast-food business or some other endeavour, focused on delivering their products with utmost efficiency, to the exclusion of any broader vision having to do with encouragement of a more satisfying daily life. Kroc's dream was the typical capitalist's dream: to make himself and his associates rich without concerning themselves about whether their restaurants directly enriched the everyday environment. (Langdon, 1986, 107)

There was less room for individuality as the company's processes became more streamlined and its success grew. McDonald's identified territories and purchased new land to lease to franchisees, who had first refusal on new franchises nearby. All labelling and menu items were strictly regulated. By

the time McDonald's (and other similar businesses) crossed the Pacific to Australia, their modus operandi was robust and strategic.

Fast Food in Australia

This paper now turns to fast food as it translated into Australia. This history is traced using archived news articles, and planning system documents as in Taylor (2014). Although broadly recognised as a global phenomena, here we focus on its integration into a particular landscape.

Fast Food franchises arrived in Australia in earnest with three competing American businesses, one of which was almost instantly successful. Beef-a-Roo arrived in Melbourne in 1969 claiming to be the Australian arm of an 85-restaurant-strong American business, though on its collapse at the end of 1972 it was revealed that there were in fact no more than 12 ('Beef-a-Roo's'). Another, Red Barn, licensed from its Canadian arm by Spotless Dry Cleaning ('Marra takeover', 'Drive-ins') – its operators apparently unperturbed by any connection customers may make with its name and the popular play Murder in the Red Barn – would not last much longer, but its locations, when sold to newcomer McDonald's, would provide a head start for that chain in Victoria in 1973 ('Cottees Sale').

Kentucky Fried Chicken (later KFC) also arrived in 1969 (Murphy 1991), and reached an impressive number of stores – 120 – in just four years. The Australian operation's managing director H. F. Coops (!) explained in a Canberra Times advertorial that 'planned pioneering' was key to its rapid success – in effect, market research. He added that outlets were 'located on sites that were easy for people to reach and provide space for them to park their cars' ('Planned Pioneering'). KFC expanded to 186 Australian stores by 1979 – illustrated with an advertisement with photographs of store managers in matching ties, under the title "Just 10 years old and look how our family's grown" (Australian Women's Weekly, 1979). The McDonald's franchise chain arrived in Australia in 1971 (Australian Women's Weekly, 1971), with Sydney store Yagoona and with the first Victorian McDonald's store in 1973 in Glen Waverley. KFC, McDonald's, Red Rooster and Pizza Hut remain amongst the major chains operating in Australia today.

Impacts on Communities

In a Melbourne thesis 'Spatial Demand of Fast Food Outlets', Harvey (1980, 20–28) listed 'major detrimental impacts associated with fast food restaurants' as 'traffic, design, litter, noise, hours of operation, loitering, public nuisance'. Such issues continue and despite the obvious popularity of fast food there have been innumerable examples of community resistance to the model, both due to practicalities of siting and design and to a sense of symbolic imposition.

The tarnishing of the Golden Arches (and Colonel Sanders' aged, welcoming face) in the public consciousness has been a slow process. Certainly by 1995, when McDonald's announced an 'Out-Mac' policy (a play on 'outback') to double the number of restaurants in Australia, health authorities professed concerns, as did unions which believed the franchise's wages were too low (Cooke, 1995).

Yet there has been pushback from local communities against the establishment of fast food outlets for many decades. Fast food outlets – particularly the drive-in model – have altered Australian streetscapes and planning practices over the last 45 years. McDonald's restaurants are best suited to

roads and strip retailing; outlets such as these require private automobile use, their popularity with (for instance) teenage foot traffic notwithstanding. Constructing this urban form has often triggered formal assessment processes for planning permits, providing a contested if constrained forum for broader community views on fast food. The involvement of heritage streetscapes has been a particular focal point for scrutiny by communities; as has the placement of fast food forms in peri-urban areas anxious to avoid its suburban connotations.

One of the earliest known 'no Maccas' cases dates back to 1974; the Washington Post reported that the McDonald's chain had 'met an unexpected whopper' with resident resistance to proposals for the Upper East Side and West Village of Manhattan (Washington Post 1974). In Hampstead, a "leafy" London suburb, residents mounted an articulate campaign in 1980 against a McDonald's proposed for what they referred to as their 'village'. McDonald's was perceived by "an army of middle class activists" as an American invasion; they "took to their tree lined streets to beat back the tide of 20th century eating habits" ('Big Mac attack pushed back'). After a drawn-out battle of over 15 years, McDonald's built a form of the Hampstead restaurant in an "acceptably genteel frontage" (Emilsen, 2004).

In 1977 in Ballarat, Victoria, McDonald's sought to demolish existing buildings and construct a new outlet in Bakery Hill, historically important in the Eureka uprising. The proposal met with resistance from community action groups (and a union ban) calling for heritage preservation. McDonald's later modified and occupied the existing heritage building. In inner Melbourne suburb Clifton Hill, a 1987 proposal for a McDonald's sought not to demolish an art deco hotel but to modify it. A protracted series of planning tribunal cases around the Clifton Hill site focused on the heritage impacts of signage and drive-throughs, but, as with an increasing number of conflicts, also mobilized broader community opposition to fast food branding (Taylor 2015).

One of the better-known 'No Maccas' planning disputes in Australia was the "Mountains against McDonald's" campaign by New South Wales Blue Mountains groups against three proposed McDonald's outlets in the region between 1995 and 2003, spanning hundreds of media reports, through to protests and celebrity endorsements (Emilsen, 2004). The Blue Mountains opposition resulted in local planning design rules to indirectly deflect fast food ('The Sisters order fast food to go'). Similar peri-urban hills locations in Victoria – Belgrave, and later the adjoining Tecoma - were the sites of campaigns, one successful and one failed, against McDonald's restaurants in the mid 1990s and in 2012.

Tecoma: "No Maccas in the Hills"

A recent example of community reaction to fast food comes from Tecoma, Victoria. Community responses to fast food tell us something of the built environment history of fast food and the pressures on its future growth. In October 2012, despite considerable resistance from not only local residents (on the grounds of health, economic competition, local character, traffic, parking, signage and noise) but also local government, a planning application for a McDonald's in Tecoma was approved on appeal at the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT).

Tecoma is a peri-urban ('hills') area with a population of 2,000; its residents have long regarded it as a village, separate both from the city's suburbs and from adjoining Belgrave, with which it shares a

populated main road. Its principle resident group, Tecoma Village Action Group (TVAG) was formed some years earlier, to resist a Coles supermarket – which it did. Some months into the campaign a purposeful anti-McDonald's group, No Maccas in the Hills, took over, in part on the understanding that the McDonald's campaign was only partly of interest to Tecoma and that McDonald's saw the settlements of the Dandenongs as dominoes to topple.

In context, the 'No Maccas' campaign had a good chance of succeeding. Previous campaigns – such as that of the supermarket proposal for the same site – had been effective and there were precedents in, for instance, neighbouring Belgrave. However, many of the community's issues were officially irrelevant to the planning process – in part because the state's planning system had become increasingly standardised to favour 'convenience restaurants' (Taylor 2015).

In simple terms, the dichotomy seemed clear: for many in Tecoma the battle was between local ubiquity and global conformity. McDonald's hoped to place its restaurant on a site occupied by an institution known as the 'Hippie Haven', a café and record shop; shades of local community resilience in the face of modernity or corporate greed – as per the 1953 film The Titfield Thunderbolt – may have been coloured by ambivalence to the countercultural element of this institution. However, what was clearly more important in most residents' minds was the value of Tecoma as the 'gateway' to the Dandenongs, a status consolidated by the boundary of the Shire of Sherbrooke, extant as a local government area from 1963-94. Community feeling against McDonald's was, in any case, keen: the Shire of Yarra Ranges received almost 1200 individually written letters protesting the McDonald's proposal. David Jewell, of TVAG, said in 2012 that his group's approach to VCAT regarding the McDonald's development was 'primarily around their building proposal being totally out of character' adding that, aside from one early 1990s building:

> There's no other flat roofed place in Tecoma. There are no other parapet lines that are flat, like they're proposing. All the parapet lines are either circular or triangular. Their proposal doesn't fit in with the character. It's going to be the biggest building – it's five times bigger than the average street frontage. It's just going to be so imposing. It's not hills town character. And that's the key phrase that's been used in um…council… in the local planning policy framework and also in previous VCAT hearings. (Jewell 2012)

No-one in the state government was willing to affect the outcome, and associated issues of concern to the community – such as children crossing the road to the McDonald's from the school close to a sharp bend, or the health implications of the firm's product – were inapplicable. Nonetheless, the community maintained a protest vigil as the building progressed, and indeed there was additional outrage in the community at both the inability of a 'village' to control its streetscape and constituent traders, at council's inability or unwillingness to contribute to the outcome, and at McDonald's attitude of fait accompli.

Helmed by software developer Gary Muratore, No Macca's in the Hills raised money to mount a well-publicised visit to the McDonald's company headquarters in Chicago to request they vacate the 'town' of Tecoma. Other strategic campaign elements – for instance the 'Burgeroff' catchphrase, and a range of anti-McDonalds garden gnomes – gave the movement humour, wit and evoked specifically Australian and (arguably) 'suburban' aspects.

Conclusions and future

While the Tecoma campaign was not ultimately successful – at least, the restaurant has opened, though reports of its success are varied – Muratore and the No Macca's movement persist. Indeed, Muratore has been consulted on campaigns in other states such as that in the Perth suburb of Applecross in 2015. Addressing residents, Muratore claimed that while Tecoma may have lost the battle, the Burgeroff movement was 'winning the war' and that 'McDonald's want to use their might to overturn… democratic voices' (Holland).

The design and system of fast food in the early 20th century emerged in response to fears - uncertainty, difference, danger, dirt – thought to be associated with urbanisation at the time. The suburban form of fast food created and complemented trends toward auto mobility and suburbanisation. Modern resistance to fast food likewise expresses fears – of loss of local identity, lack of community control, and the mounting health impacts of obesity. The lines defining public health and community concern have shifted considerably since the early 20th century, yet contemporary conflict over fast food can be seen to still draw on similar anxieties over the boundaries between known and unknown, suspect and reassuring. Like the earlier expansion, the new pressures on fast food draw on community narratives of fear, and also take on legal forms. In South Australia for example, legal moves to restrict fast food outlets on health grounds have gained foothold.

Food is a key commodity in globalisation, and thus vulnerable to global contamination (Law & Mol 2008). An exotic American branding was used in the initial marketing of fast food in Australia, as in 1970s advertising for KFC: "until ten years ago, anyone with an appetite for chicken cooked the way only Colonels from America's deep south could cook it, had to visit America's deep south" ('Just ten years old'). Later, nationalism and globalisation became a point of contention and subsequently, Kentucky Fried Chicken and McDonald's have adopted modified Australian names ("Macca's ®"). The McDonald's Australian website showcases customised, localised, and artisanal elements - "what Australia ordered", with a "create your taste" menu and "barista made coffee". In response to obesity concerns, fast food brands emphasise (the availability if not popularity of) healthy menu items – in stark contrast to "Hugo and Holly", the grotesquely obese cartoon children who hankered for "Kentucky Fried" in the back seat of their parents' car in the 1970s ('Hugo and Holly').

With the late 20th century fast food forms and franchises a widespread fixture of Australian urban and suburban areas, recent decades have seen trends in fast food reminiscent – in iconography and design – of earlier American forms. Subway, tending to occupy existing buildings mainly in pedestrian locations, is often festooned with pictures of early 20th century American public transport. Australian chain Lord of the Fries has established in pedestrian-oriented inner areas and, in a twist on the fast food model, revealed its 'hamburgers' do not actually contain meat. Mobile 'Food Trucks' or 'Taco Trucks' are diners reinterpreted in 21st century forms via social media, food tourism and place branding. In some ways these trends invert the dominant fast food model that, as we have discussed, spread from the early 20th century in a way prizing uniformity. In others, they similarly parallel social trends and expectations. The pressures on planning systems to accommodate food trucks (Griffin, 2011), as well as community resistance to global franchises, illustrates how fast food is not placeless but rather, remains an often overlooked built environment phenomenon.

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