Abstract
In everything from wilderness documentaries and ecotourism developments to the advertising of real estate and shampoo, contemporary forms of symbolic convergence between nature and the good life have complex and historically deep sources. Within this broad subject, the question of what lessons can be learnt about present imaginaries of nature from Australia's remarkable suburban history is an intriguing one. I concentrate on two - of, no doubt, several - instructive possibilities here. First, I suggest that private dreams of Edenic harmony with and social autonomy in domestic nature were not only prominent during the first century of Australian suburbanisation (roughly, 1850 to 1950), they operated as a counterweight to public dreams of technological dominion over raw nature in the creation of Australian modernity. Second, I propose that growing disenchantment with and anxiety about the technological reality of suburban Eden during and since the post-war 'boom' is an important and overlooked element in processes by which post-war environmental movements and, latterly, wider culture have re-imagined and re-lived dreams of refuge in nature through the figure of wilderness.
Understanding the nature of research on urban form in Australia depends in part on appreciation of the origins of Australian town layouts. Land settlement in Australia commenced in 1788 and colonial governments generally followed a policy of surveying the land before it was granted or sold. Thus the large majority of towns were located and laid. Urban Morphology (2006) 10(2), 89-100 © International Seminar on Urban Form, 2006 ISSN 1027-4278. Nature was, first of all, an object of rational (scientific) research; second, it was a mass of lifeless powers to be harnessed for human use. Our physical horizons expanded immeasurably, knowledge of the structure and laws of our plane reached dizzying heights; that is the value of the third phase. But there is no point in speaking of natural scientists' love of Nature.