

This issue of UDF focuses on Sydney

What do we say. Sorry! This issue is very late and Sydney is to blame. It was our first go. The team didn't get motivated, the computer was down, the pencil had no lead, the summer was hot. Frankly we wanted more and it was too hard to organise. Those Sydney readers who feel guilty should contact us and we will ask them to get another issue ready on time. Readers please note there was no December 1993 edition.

Wow. The end of the first year of UDF Sydney. Good old brash, non-caring Sydney. Could we sit together and talk Urban Design!

Of course we did it a different way to Melbourne we had lunch for anyone to turn up and we talked about jobs and opportunities and not too much on the meaning of urban design. Speakers could talk but not show slides a good discipline. Later we braved our first evening meeting for Chris Johnson, with slides which was well attended. Then we endured organising the UDF conference.

I've often wondered what a traffic engineer was doing organising UDF - so have a lot of others. Do I fit in? Then I look at my City, the centre crowded with traffic and polluted, we need more than a few squares. I look at most World Cities and see their efforts. I almost envy Melbourne. We continue the Colonial battle between State and Local Council. So many players, so much good will, so much to do. The inner suburbs radial roads spaces and places being encroached by traffic lanes and a "common good" of movement; facades remind us of the role these roads played for the local community. Identity disappears to the traffic engineers mores, mostly unaware of other matters.

Street life Envy

I do envy Melbourne it's Brunswick Streets and inner tram routes, providing the strong backdrop to the street fronts and activities. Do I hear somebody say why don't you go and live there - no way they're all too polite. Sydney is changing:

King Street - still too much traffic, Darlinghurst Street - not particularly for the locals and the UDF have suggested the revamping of Parramatta Road (see page 3).

Moving further out, the outline planning for Rouse Hill shows all the promise of being traffic engineered into oblivion, a sponge of people set in a perfectly rising road hierarchy. But there is hope: Hassell's plan for Narrellen looks interesting (but dare I say cheats a bit by including a new Civic Centre which will detract from, if not kill, the historic role of Camden); Masterplan's early scheme for the ADI site had form, where did that go? Pyrmont Ultimo looks like going the way of the uninspired, no doubt led by some lovely architectural edifices - a throw back to the Bond boom. Why, so the State government can make an extra 10% on it's holdings. Confusing because some of us thought that Government-owned land was the way to responsible planning. The them and us becomes more interesting, RTA's and MOT's moving more to the side of the angels as others take on the role of devil.

Speakers Program

During this first year, Sydney UDF has invited David Churches to talk on selling the Olympics, well done; John McInerney exposed the City, Dimity Reid put us right on Melbourne, John Toon on Sydney's suburbs. Chris Johnson's presentation on street edges was from his thesis for a Master of Built Environment. Malcolm Smith brought the Canberra perspective, John Lewis reflected on the planning for Circular Quay when he was at the Urban Projects Unit in Public Works. Elizabeth

with one week to go our attendance numbers were low, our blood pressure high, tempers frayed and our vocabularies - well the less said the better!

Despite this we somehow made it and I found myself at the North Head Quarantine Station at 7.00am Friday 8th October enjoying what can only be described as a spectacular view. By 8.30am UDFers from all over Australia were drifting in (I of course ignored them and continued with my coffee and croissants on the balcony). Not only were QLD, VIC, SA, WA, TAS and of course urban & rural NSW represented but also the varied professions whose collaboration defines Urban Design today. The informal atmosphere of the venue (suggested by Claire Middleton) was ideal for our egalitarian group and in reviewing my notes/tapes from the forum I am amazed at how much work was achieved despite the relaxing atmosphere. The differing perspectives of the group contributed to productive discussion and the absence of egos was notable.

Highlights: The Friday afternoon cruise, enabling critical review of the harbour foreshore, was conducted in a purely professional fashion. Well, that's what they told me and I certainly wouldn't want to disagree or create another conference

A MOZ ON THE WALL

MAUREEN MCKINNON

WARNING: Before reading this article please be advised that, not being an Urban Designer, Planner, Architect etc. all too familiar phrases & acronyms like FSR, public domain sustainability etc. are noticeably absent. Actually there is no evaluation of the technical content of the UDF conference at all - what follows is my 'moz on the wall' interpretation of the second national get together and what I took away from it.

Background: The NSW(Sydney) UDF first met in August 1992. By September 1993 we were up to our necks organising the 2nd National Conference. It was obvious that we

- (a) had let our ambitions overtake our abilities;
- (b) had over indulged at one of our luncheons;
- (c) were naive fools; or
- (d) ALL OF THE ABOVE

(* score 10 points if you ticked (d))

Of course we were not the only ones worried. The organisers of the inaugural event (Broken Hill '91) were starting to display signs of strain too and why not, I mean, lets face it at times NSW UDF can be so 'laid back' as to appear comatose. This however was not one of those times and

URBAN DESIGN FORUM

ISSUE No.25

MARCH 1994



▲ Sydney - where are you !

Farrelly added her inimitable political/architectural style and Robert Zullo took us to Newcastle. Our thanks to all of them.

So, we have a different form of UDF in Sydney. We need this coming together, this debate on our role. We can't speak as one until we know the one. Anyway we are enjoying ourselves and thanks to Moz in my office, who sends out all the notices and keeps the place going (ph. 02 267 5300 but please use the fax in preference for communication 02 267 5301 as this can be answered in batches, we are only a four person office). Thanks for your support.

Now what was the main debate?Urban Design placing buildings into the surrounding space and the surrounding activities in a comfortable manner... is it arranging activities and spaces together and placing the building in a comfortable manner ... or building around spaces and getting the activities to feel comfortable... and what's all this about comfortable... in Sydney we're the brash people. Lets get action and vibrationswhat?

Wendy Morris was our first speaker for 1994. Melbourne again!

Such is life!

CHRIS STAPLETON

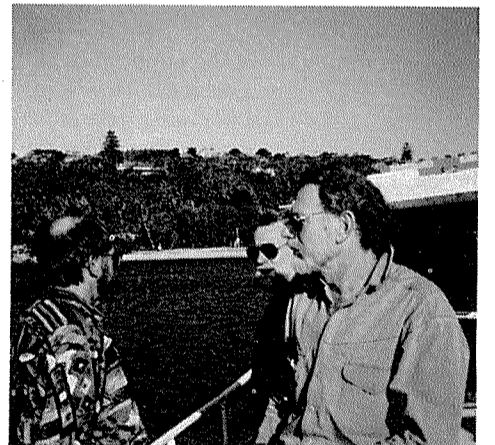
scandal reminiscent of the skiing dentists furore.

The evening open session was followed by dinner with The Greater Debate. The UDF is no place for the light hearted or thin skinned, as proved by Terry Byrnes, Peter Annand and Malcolm Snow. The result? It would also appear that "All Image Is Disguise" and that the best tactic for winning a debate is to present your opposition with 2 or 3 bottles of red beforehand.

Democracy is a wonderful ideal but it takes a dictatorship (mine) to pull a conference together: Jan, there are no E's in sustainability; Wherever 15 or more are gathered never volunteer to take the group photo; At every steak bar-b-que there will always be a lone vegetarian. When the night is idyllically still there will always be a snorer nearby. (Special mention at this time to Harry Bechervaise's poetic prowess).

And of course could we forget Liz' wonderful little vocabulary builder "FASCODOMY" probably best defined by Clive Alcock as 'the buggersation of facades' - particularly good for use at pretentious dinners or on crowded trains. I for one am just dying to use it at the next P&F meeting at the kid's school.).

Having been involved with NSW UDF since its shaky start it was nice to finally be able to put faces to names, particularly



▲ Serious site inspection by Melbourne Mafia in Sydney

after burning the fax and phone lines to Melbourne for so long. Although the faces didn't all match the voices (as usual) the helpfulness and good humour certainly did.

Our conference was not a grandiose affair, but then it was not designed to be. Our objectives were the same as they have always been, to provide an arena for the discussion of Urban Design issues that is not restricted professionally.

Thankyou to all who contributed to the success of the event: the attendees; the speakers; the organisers; the man who invented valium; and my dear benevolent boss Chris Stapleton who kindly gave me a week off to recover after it. P.S. I didn't mean any, 3/4 1/2 1/4 10% of the things I said about you at the time !

UDF '93 National Conference:

Quarantining Urban Design

The second national Urban Design conference held at the Quarantine Station, Sydney in October was that blend of congeniality and interest that is always desired but so rarely achieved on such occasions. Thanks almost entirely to the efforts of Chris Stapleton and his staff and perfect weather, the participants could not have asked for more. The very pleasant conditions brought out the best from an interesting and diverse collection of people. Yes, there were 52 definitions of what urban design is, but this was, by and large, done in the context of case studies rather than in esoteric debate of the "meaning of professional life" variety.

Malcolm Snow (standing in for Rob Adams) kicked off the proceedings with a presentation on the spectacular Swanston Walk project in Melbourne. Most of the discussion revolved around the fundamental role of the mix of uses, land values and interest groups and the way in which these interact to produce successful public places. The debate ranged between the poles of influencing these factors by regulation (the planners' approach) or through the intervention of built projects (the architects' approach) and concluded that both methods were used to excellent effect in this project. It was also agreed to be an object lesson in how to produce results in a hotly political environment.

Regional Specificity

Harry Bechervaise followed with an exposition of the regional specificity of urban design activities. He argued that cities are a manifestation of their culture and illustrated this through the examples of Sydney and Adelaide, both of whose planning he has had an intimate involvement. In his talk he posed a question which I have been pondering ever since without finding an answer I could be completely happy with:

"What is the image of Sydney's CBD which is embraced by a public space, in the way that Swanston Walk encapsulates something of Melbourne".

Harry also brought out the importance of establishing a comprehensive databank of the city as an essential planning tool. He advocated that CAD models should be developed for all the centres of develop-

ment and used to model the impact of proposed developments. Professor Paul Reid made the point that the combination of such a model with a set of simple and implementable controls would provide a powerful framework for the design of public spaces

Sessions by Peter Jones and Jan Martin followed in a category entitled "Success Stories", which brought out the word "collaboration" as being intrinsic to the urban design process. The process was characterised as being essentially a coming together of many fields and hence that collaboration was the key to its success.

Bob Meyer led a session which emphasised the mismatch between the places where the population was concentrated and those where urban design attention was being focussed. Terry Byrne said in response that urban design did not just consist of the "Pretties", but must be taken to encompass the building of all public spaces, good and bad, hence the disparity was one of quality not attention. He also advocated that in some cases the "Do Nothing" option should be considered. Better no change than change for the worse.

Professor Paul Reid hosted a session whose central theme could be summarised as being: "Urban Design is public policy not shape making". For me this is probably the most important message to come from this conference. No amount of correctly aligned cornice lines will breath life into a place without the support of appropriate public policy.

The Under City

Barry Maitland led us on a journey through the "Under city". That is, the high-ways and low-ways that are evolving in cities the world over that allow pedestrians to avoid using the street. This is covered well in the article below so I won't go into detail here, except to say that it raised for me some fascinating issues about equity in the private/public domain. What appeared at first sight to be a public street simply lifted off the ground, or buried under it, is still treated as private property by the owners with some insidious implications, despite the fact that it takes up space in the public domain. Like the moral questions raised by genetic engineering, we should

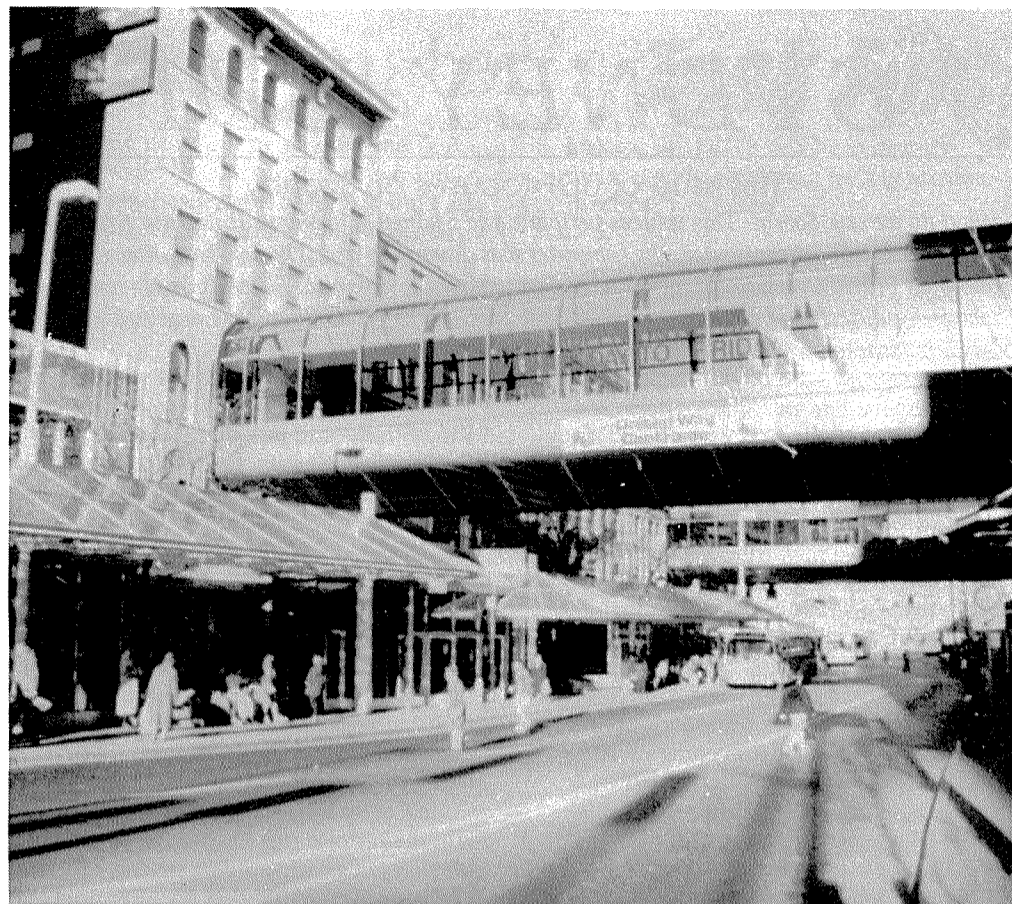
treating has a massive 22km pedestrian tunnel circuit linking 44 city blocks). Australian cities have experienced the same pattern albeit on a much smaller scale, and the burgeoning Asian cities are set to follow suit as they emulate Hong Kong, Singapore and North America.

What this proliferation represents is a fundamental shift from the exterior of the city block, its street frontage, to its interior passageways.

Responses

Planners remain ambivalent, acknowledging the convenience and popularity of endorsed pedestrian walks, but deploring the physical side effects of the traditional city. This is reflected in the formal policy of many cities which find themselves uncertain hosts. In recent North American survey work, 33% of cities have a policy encouraging their growth, 30% discouraging it and 37% having adopted no policy.

Opponents of these grade-separated systems identify the negative side effects as; visual intrusion, particularly bridges, disorientation; placelessness and sterility; a



▲ Rideau Street Ottawa: various devices have been tried to make the street level competitive with enclosed skywalk malls, in this case by enclosure of the sidewalks with glazed half-arcades.

not allow the rights of citizens to be eroded by stealth.

James Weirick did not pull any punches in his provocative attack on what he saw as the woolly-headedness in the urban design polemic. He argued convincingly that the models being proposed for urban consolidation all had adverse consequences that had not yet been properly thought through.

Dual occupancy, he argued, was built on ground and so took up valuable, existing open space and served to increase land value thereby making housing less affordable. The Greenstreets program did nothing towards densification and raised as yet unresolved management issues.

Model projects, such as Citywest and the Olympic Village, which he thought were interesting, applied, he thought, only to greenfield sites and these exist largely only on the periphery of the all-ready-too-large cities.

He also had some broadsides at several of the groups involved in the urban debate: Environmentalists he characterised as largely having an "Anti-urban attitude", with the notable exception of Greenpeace, whose "Strategy for a Sustainable City" he lauded. Planners he argued should

subordinate what he perceived to be an arrogant role into one as stewards of a participatory process. Developers, somewhat surprisingly, came out of James' diatribe quite well. "Home ownership and speculative development are the key to city formation in Australia", was the memorable quote.

I have concluded with James talk, and commented on it at some length, because I think it provided an interesting critique of the all-too-utopian concepts often expounded at conferences. It ultimately suffered from the same failing, however, in that he reviewed all the approaches as though they had to pass a test of being universal solutions. The city is fundamentally pluralistic. In fact a good definition of the city might be that it is a place where diverse interests meet. So the attempt to find universal panaceas for the city's ills is inevitably doomed to failure. Almost all approaches are valid and relevant to some contexts at some point of time. Instead of preoccupying ourselves with knocking holes in the latest idea, we should be embracing it as a potential solution for some niche, just as we need to keep species alive for the sake of the richness of the gene pool.

JOHN LEWIS

The Under City

THE UNDER CITY

The growth of the Under City, the one behind beneath and above the city of streets and spaces was the subject of Barry Maitland's informative presentation to the second UDF conference. His research into underground and skywalk pedestrian networks, based mainly on North American cities, reveals the extent of this post-war phenomenon, and the abivalence towards its proliferation.

Proliferation

From Piranesi's epic visions of cattedraces and early realities like Cosimo de Medici's private skywalk in the 16th C, the multi-layered city has become widespread in the 20th C with sweeping modernist visions, but often banal realities of bridges, tunnels and corridors.

There are over 85 North American cities with skywalks or tunnel systems, (Mon-

sense of insecurity due to guards and alarms; whole parts of the city being privately controlled and closed at night; and particularly the reduction of street life. Montreal now reflects these concerns in its latest master plan with no prospect of further tunnels. However proponents argue that for the past 30 years downtown areas have been in direct competition with the enclosed suburban shopping mall, and have been obliged to duplicate the enclosure to survive. Glazed and even heated sidewalks have been built in colder cities, but full enclosure has been most widespread. Climatic comfort is somewhat dispelled as primary motivation for enclosure by the research, which showed that it rated much lower as a motivating force (11% of cities) than commercial advantage to adjacent properties (41%).

What seems to be emerging in North America is a planning response of allowing the completion of existing systems, but restriction thereafter. Recent design has tried to open up the skywalks and tunnels to views within buildings (such as seeing the operation of a bank through upper level 'goldfish bowls'), and natural light wells into tunnels for orientation and

humanisation. The Mayor of Toronto made his own impact on that city's system by installing extensive maps and signs after he got lost looking for his dentist!

Reconciliation

Acceptance of the secondary networks and a reconciliation with the rest of the city is now forwarded as a positive response to integrating the hidden city;

"What is needed is a new detail of the character of the 'piano nobile' as a city wide level of public space, different from but complimentary to the 'piano rustica' of the street. As in those Italian cities in which such an elevation and detachment of major public buildings from the street occurs, the connections between the two will surely become much more highly developed, both architecturally and functionally, than they are at present".

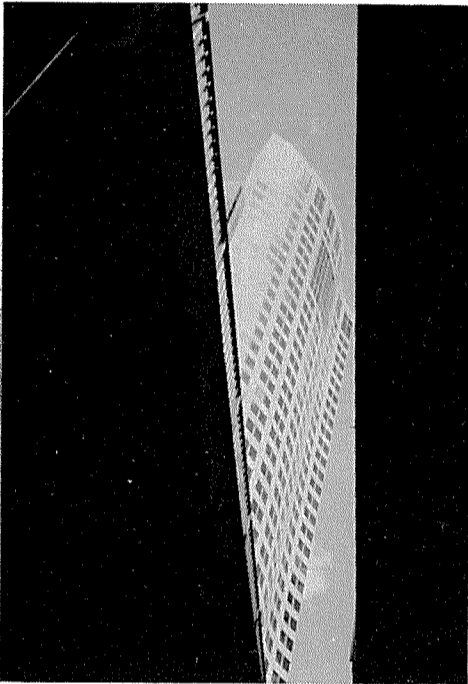
(This article is based on 'Hidden Cities: The Irresistible Rise of the North American Interior City' Barry Maitland, in Cities (UK) Vol 9 No 3 Aug 1993)

CLIVE ALCOCK

SYDNEY IN Olympic MODE

You can already sense a new level of confidence as Sydney grows to its role as an Olympic City. Hopefully we won't become any more brash than we already are. We may even learn to relax into our role as a World City, along with Australia defining and feeling comfortable with its identity. It should be that BIG.

Both these aspects are part of the creation of a grand meeting place at Circular Quay, our heritage and gateway. Thus far all we hear is that it is the removal of the Cahill Expressway, its deleterious effects on traffic and the cost. Yours truly did the analysis of the traffic for the RTA and there is not even a minor impact on traffic other



▲ Cahill view

than the need to change (sure there will be chaos when it closes as things settle down). As for cost, early work by John Lewis when he worked for Public Works indicates that the sale of development sites can make the development self funding over time, so only seed money is needed. The debate does not bring this up and there is almost no debate on the real objective of

creating a meeting place at this historic site. Sydney needs a place where more than 5000 people can meet without trampling gardens (QC) or walking on the road (Town Hall Sq). Paul Keating entered the fray with an article to the Australian (7th Jan) describing Circular Quay as "A place where our many paths cross". So Mr Fahey lets get going, it will take time to complete.

But so far the new work is coming from private development and has little to do with the event or sprucing up the City, just a simple change of attitude to the future. Sydney looks like recovering from the recession quickly.

At government levels a lot of thinking is going on as departments and levels of government vie for position or try to work out their best position. Very little positive planning is occurring; except we hope at the Olympic site itself, but even there we hear there's uncertainty and delay. Great start, are we going the way of 1988 when the pollies and their wonder staff noticed the date and tried to do everything in the last few months - with a few exceptions.

No, at the moment the State Government looks set to wait for pocket money from the Feds. The track record of where it's spent is not too good - we're building a \$165m Bridge across the entrance to Wattle Bay - where? This is part of the job creation program, this structure is as high as the Harbour Bridge, a monument to engineers, a left over in their drawers that was jumped on in spite of the desperate appeals that tried to stop the stupidity. (yes we did need a new road there but not that). The Feds are not that happy, particularly a government that has the courage to start a Better Cities Program - not sure where that money is going but the bits I have seen were spent in haste: why this haste - do you have the same problems in Melbourne and other civilised places.

But there are often some environmental gains waiting to be discovered from a new road. In this case the Glebe Island Bridge will link to a new road through to Five Dock which will take traffic off Parramatta Road west from the City to about 3/4 of the way to the Olympic site, which leads us to one of the ideas from the UDF. The UDF along with some others have put forward the proposal to revitalise Parramatta Road as the road route to the Olympics.



▲ Parramatta Road

This project alone illustrates the wealth of energy which is available to urban design in Sydney. The ideas come from many sources and the problem with Sydney is getting it all together.

But does all this come from an intellectual base or is it all brash and bluster. Melbournians, I suspect, would like to think that we have no ideals of common good, no deep debating of issues, and there would be a lot of examples of this. Of course the State Government has a history of the fear that Sydney will die or worse still seep out to Melbourne, if it does not give in to every aspect of any building owners demands. All pretty pathetic. So the "secret" deals continue in Macquarie Street and no one with a responsibility takes it.

Huge changes are afoot but what of their guidance. Who knows the rate at which Pyrmont will change, the Casino is a starting point. And the first new light rail system for Sydney has just been located in such a place that it is bound to be a failure. A few of us are trying to get it moved so that it crosses Pyrmont Bridge and runs, at grade directly into Market Street to terminate at DJ's. "The City turns a corner" from the linear towards Pyrmont. The

Market Street route opens up the inward facing design of Darling Harbour with a street coming directly from the City, mind you it needs more links before it becomes part of Sydney. We are also suggesting that the Tram - I'll call it that for this example - uses Harris Street to reach Central Station and the removal of through traffic - and ! put it where the light rail was going? At least lets talk about these things.

And whilst on the subject of street walls - the new Grace Brothers building and World Square are also both inward looking, trying to escape from the traffic infestation of City streets. This must not become a trend. So plans are afoot for reducing traffic in the City Core, introducing public transport priority and improving the footpath environments. Plus lets have a more comprehensive look at the street level spaces and activities.

Yes this is typical Sydney in Olympic mode, chaos and voices; lacking the style of informed debate but somehow getting there - or should it be somewhere else?

CHRIS STAPLETON

WHAT WASN'T SAID

Leigh Woolley

At the Conference in October Leigh Woolley provided some thoughts on "What wasn't said." His comments refer to issues which time did not allow to be adequately addressed during the conference.

The "Struggle" for the City

Re-assert the importance of the urban design professions in focusing attention on our common urbanity, and the particularity of our urban places. This approach reinforces the need to develop and share coherent images of the cities and settings in which we live and work. With the city regarded as the dominant entity for study, the "idea" of its potential form at the territorial scale becomes the principal design issue. It accepts the importance of designing the interrelation between components within the urban system rather than its "stage set" pieces. (The term was popularised by Barcelona urban projects director Manuel de Sola Morales on a recent visit to Australia.)

Assessing Australian Spatial Perception

Confirm the importance of addressing and pursuing our own idiosyncratic spatial perceptions within a world of increasingly universal development. This assumes the need to demystify Australian anti-urban attitudes in order to reinforce and build on our own urbanity. Extend the net of publicly shared perceptions of place by reinforcing how people structure their city. Developing and publishing appropriate case studies from different regions throughout the country will substantiate this role.

Topographic/Landform Analysis

Appreciate the critical role of the city as the forum from which to address the meaning of the landscape within this culture. Assess the role of topography and landform in order to reaffirm how we experience, move across and use the land. Issues of environmental sustainability need further critical review to underpin design practice. Ensure that as full a range of biodiversity as possible is protected within our communities.

Regional diversity and social justice

Increase recognition of the role of urban design in the political and social agenda of the country. The diversity of economic experience brought about by the recession has created considerable dilemmas and imbalance between regions. An extended

role for an ambitious national long term agenda to build new economically helpful infrastructure is a powerful and emerging idea. Its importance to our cities will be profound.

Learn from other regions as well as our own

While the Olympics will be good for Sydney, and the rest of the country, the focus should also be a catalyst to bring attention to urban issues throughout the country. It is worth remembering that while the Olympics sped up the development of the urban projects in Barcelona the commitment to the city had already been made. Rigorous urban critiques and design agendas had already been established. If the Olympics had not occurred the facilities would still have been built - albeit over a longer time frame.

If the diverse economic regions in Australia are to have an even greater say in how they develop, and this is inferred in recent government Green papers, then this needs to be backed up by regional design and development agendas. Regional imbalance cannot be allowed to develop unchecked. The make up of the Prime Minister's Urban Design Task Force would seem to maintain the traditional bipolar metropolitan bias. Participation from our own regions should be further encouraged.

The redesign of our familiar Territory



▲ John McNerny relates another little-bird story

With the approach of the next millennium the continuing design and redesign of our existing settings becomes more demanding. The often privileged design position of the past will be increasingly tested. Its previous abuses where the character of places have been ignored, or where natural and human processes have been abstractly interpreted, or where the habit of taking the side of the powerful leaving the weak to their fate, will remain as issues to test professional design. If the demand is not taken up by the built environment professions, who else will be responsible for creating meaningful and environmentally sustainable urban images?

Urban Design and the Prime Minister's *Task Force*

The Commonwealth Governments' Urban Design Task Force, initiated by the Prime Minister, is in a search for an answer to a question: Why are Australian Cities so Ugly? Formally the UDTF's Charter is:

"The Task Force should review the quality of urban design in Australia and make recommendations to the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister for improvement. It should particularly focus on ways in which the day-to-day working, residential and recreational environment of most Australians might be enhanced by more thoughtful attention to urban design.

Urban (or "community") design should be understood to apply to all scales and types of urban activities and to be concerned about the physical arrangement and functioning of urban activities, the physi-

cal appearance of the built environment and its relationship to the natural environment, the way in which people experience it and the social and economic factors which influence its quality.

The Task Force should examine all influences on the way in which urban growth and change takes place, including informal but conventional practices and formal planning controls. It should consider the impact of current trends in urban development and whether current practices are adequate to create pleasing results.

The Task Force should determine how improved design may enhance the quality of built environment and provide examples of the way in which this might occur.

In making its recommendations the Task Force should bear in mind their feasibility, equity, practicality and cost. It should also take into account current complementary work on urban planning issues, including the Better Cities Program and the National Urban Development Program."

The members of the Task Force are John Mant (Convenor); Michael Llewellyn-Smith, Professors David Yencken, Evan Walker and Peter Droege, Espie Dods, Alex Tzannes, Neville Gruzman, Geoff Campbell, Catharin Bull, Michael Dickenson and Wendy Morris.

Notable to date in media publicity has been the over-zealous description of as many members as possible as "architects". Is there in the public's mind no recognition of the discipline of urban design? A key

task for the UDTF will be to destroy misconceptions relating to "big architecture" or "aesthetics".

Wendy Morris says "The work of the Task Force is intended to stimulate a wide discussion and debate. Although the UDTF is not able to formally call for public submissions, I would be very happy to receive any comments and suggestions from UDF readers to take forward to the group."

Wendy Morris is a member of the Commonwealth Government's Urban Design Task Force. She can be contacted at the Urban Design Unit, Department of Planning and Development, PO Box 2240T, Melbourne 3001, ph (03) 628 5469, fax (03) 628 5705.

I HAVE A DEFINITION OF URBAN DESIGN!

Urban Design is the black hole towards which all debate about the built environment is inexorably drawn and the vacuum which exists there spins all who enter off into a vortex of tail chasing and pontification.

In architects' minds it conjures up Leon Krieresque images of 'urban villages'. Buildings brought to the street alignment, Beaux-Art axes and spatially defining enclosures.

In planners' minds it evokes an extension of planning regulations into the realm of design, the arsenal of the regulators being enhanced by devices such as cornice heights, building envelopes and through site links.

To the landscapers it probably evokes an attempt by both of the other groups to move into their domain. The landscaped courtyard becomes an urban room and the trained hedge becomes an 'organic wall'.

What I do has often been described as urban design, but if it is then I am puzzled, as I spend my time on the computer, in meetings, embroiled in political lobbying and an array of other activities that rarely have anything to do with the above.

The scheme to remove the Cahill Expressway began not at the drawing board, but out of a chance comment made by Nick Greiner in the dying days of his reign and was brought to life by research into

property values, equity interests and transport dynamics. It's true that many reams of butter paper were consumed in the process and endless debates raged about concepts of containment, appropriate size for public spaces and the heights of towers, but these were the fuel not the vehicle, the canvas not the painting. Without software to drive the hardware of urban design the process is, as Paul Reid aptly put it, "One of hollow shape making".

This is more than a mere quibble about semantics. The whole training, discussion and publication about urban design is utterly dominated by the hardware. Students who come to work with me have fine presentation skills, excellent terminology, but no idea how to use a spreadsheet, utter disdain for the bastardry of politics and no interest in understanding the dynamics of interacting interest groups. There are vast arrays of design talents in this country, so why do we have such a lamentable lack of quality in our public spaces? Because we are not contacting this talent with the coalface, where the rubber meets the road.

Perhaps this is personal post-rationalising, but I would strongly urge those who wish to have a real effect on the built environment to consider an MBA before an MBE or MUD, particularly those who are talented designers. You can acquire an understanding of the design of the city through architectural practice, but architects rarely get much expose to strategy, finance and politics through daily practice.

JOHN LEWIS

RUMOURS AND SNIPPETS

Geelong UD Thrives

Under the enthusiastic leadership of Rod Charles, the Urban Forum in Geelong is taking the opportunity of local government reform to up the ante for urban design in the community in this region. They regularly have meetings, lobby the decision makers, educate anyone who is willing and enjoy the challenges before them. More news next edition.

Melbourne Balls in Air

Melbourne has got its open space balls in the air again. In a very complex deal between the Melbourne City Council (now under the control of the Chief Executive and her Administrators), the State Government (under the control of the radical and enthusiastic Jeff Kennett), and a private developer in conjunction with a trade union superannuation fund (are you still with us?), public open space in the central city may be about to be transformed.

The existing City Square is about to be reduced in size, rebuilt, and sprout a new hotel. This and renovations to the adjacent historic Regent Cinema will be paid for by the sale of the nearby Queen Victoria Hospital site, sold to the private sector interests at a very reasonable figure. However, the "Age" newspaper is heavily promoting the hospital site becoming a public park, to compensate

for the rapidly diminishing Square. When UDF consulted the Oracle to try to make some sense of all this, the reply was: "Don't be surprised if in a year or two or three, the best laid plans of the developer don't quite work out, and the Council and the Government repurchase the sites, at a rather higher figure than they received for them." Seems possible, although Premier Kennett has just pulled off the deal of the century by purchasing the Gas and Fuel buildings in Flinders Street, designed by Les Perrott's company in the 1960's and described by both ex-Premier John Cain and Kennett as "the ugliest buildings in Melbourne". The price was bargain basement, and the intention is to pull them down and create another public open space. And all this is happening along the somewhat ambivalent Swanston Street Walk!

If you think this sounds a little crazy, and maybe a bad deal to boot, don't worry. The football season has started again and more important interests will prevail.

Urban Design Conferences

Keep watching for more news of a western style UDF Conference on Rottnest Island, of Perth, in September, as a counterweight to the hoards of people who will fly east for the AFL finals.

In October, UDF and the "Collaborations" Advisory Group in Adelaide are planning a weekend conference to focus on collaborative practice in the urban environment. More news next edition.

Book Review

William Kelly

"Creating Safer Communities" (40 pages, includes an annotated bibliography) Written by Nicholas Abbey Edited by Judith Dixon Published by the Victorian Community Council Against Violence.

This is an important document that takes a broad and inclusive look at the issues and decisions involved in design in the public domain. It seems to have one eye towards safety in the short term and the other towards changing our values for a longer term result. It clearly points out the significance of interdisciplinary cooperation and action in areas of health, education, urban design, policing, et al.

It also points out the value of community participation of a significant kind as important to the end result. It is inclusive rather than dogmatic. It suggests "care must be taken to avoid competing claims made by those who favour a situational as compared to a social or community development approach to the issues. There can be a tendency to view options as alternatives rather than aspects of a more comprehensive strategy."

Pragmatically, the book suggests that "more immediate" solutions should also be linked to longer term strategies, thereby forming the basis for each successive step. I have a feeling it is calling for both increased awareness and bravery on the part of designers, architects and planners

to look more fully at the social consequences of our decisions and challenges us to find increasingly innovative ways of dealing with these concerns.

It is a valuable discussion paper and it is noteworthy that the Community Council Against Violence, itself a lead organisation in this area, recognises the role that designers can play and has made community safety through design one their priorities.

Increased awareness of and dialogue on these issues suggests further consideration on a more formal level in our tertiary design programs would be an important next step.

(For a copy of the book or more information contact the CCAV, 471 Little Bourke Street, Level 7, Melbourne, 3000; Telephone (03) 603 4477)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Urban Design Forum is published for information and interest by the Urban Design Forum Incorporated. The views in UDF are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of organisations with which they are associated.

Word processing, artwork and layout: Melbourne City Council, Urban Design & Architecture Division (Howard Lindsay).

Distribution: This edition is distributed as a supplement to the "Australian Planner" (RIPA) Reg. Pub. No. SBP 0566, by Local Government Associations in each State, by the Australian Institute of Landscape Architects (Victoria) and to various other interested people in Australia and overseas.

Guest Editors: Chris Stapleton, John Lewis
Convening Editor: Bill Chandler

Contributions for UDF 26 DEADLINE: 15th May 1994. Send to Bill Chandler, 79 Power Street, Hawthorn 3122. Ph. (03) 819 1144; Fax (03) 819 1665.

Funding: This edition of UDF was funded by the Sydney City Council