

**Urban Choreography: Central Melbourne 1985: Edited by Kim Dovey, Rob Adams and Ronald Jones
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Much has been written about the transformation of central Melbourne. *Urban Choreography: Central Melbourne 1985* examines the urban design transformations which occurred in central Melbourne since the 1980s, and analyses and discusses the key achievements, plans, projects and events from multiple perspectives.

This book explores achievements including the significant expansion of Melbourne's city centre residential community; improvements to cycling and public transport services and infrastructure; the increasing student population; improvements to streets to achieve more public life; new parks, public squares and walkways; a revitalised network of walkable lanes and arcades; a more 24-hour city; city-wide art programs; more places for people to sit and relax; more attractions; a greener city; and an integrated policy for paving and furniture.

A key advantage of an edited book, when handled well, is the access provided to multiple perspectives and the range of knowledge of its contributors. The editors of this book have clearly made considerable effort to ensure this book provides an appropriate range of knowledgeable, well-written contributions from relevant sources which function as a coherent and integrated whole, rather than as a series of discrete contributions. The multiple narratives are threaded into a highly readable, integrated whole, with an easy-to-read and accessible writing style throughout.

The book is comprised of twelve chapters in addition to the Introduction. The initial two chapters take a scene setting role, with the first chapter '*Move to Melbourne*' authored by Jan Gehl describing his perceptions of 1970s central Melbourne, and his perceptions as the central city changed over the next forty years. The second chapter, '*Taking Council*' written by Lecki Ord, Melbourne's first female lord mayor, details the conditions of inner-city Melbourne in the 1970s, and the campaign for reform in the early 1980s which led to the development and implementation of the *1985 Strategy Plan*.

Jane Homewood picks up the narrative in the third chapter, discussing the community-based planning which occurred during the 1960s to 1980s in '*Radical Roots to Urban Change*'. In the engaging and informative fourth chapter '*The Transformation of central Melbourne, 1982-88*', David Yencken relates the role played by the state government in Melbourne's revitalisation from 1982 to 1988.

The economic context of Melbourne since the 1980s is explored in the following chapter entitled '*Economic Change and Urban Design*' by Marcus Spiller. This essay focuses on the ways in which urban design opportunities and challenges have emerged from the decline of manufacturing and the rise of an increasingly global and neoliberal economy in Melbourne during this time.

'*A City with Soul*', authored by Kate Brennan, discusses Melbourne's relationship with public art and urban design, and changes in this relationship over time. Peter Elliot in '*Designing and Framing Public Space*' draws on his experiences of the transformation of the RMIT University campus in his piece considering challenges faced by urban designers.

Glyn Davis' and James Green's '*Voices in the City: Participation and Planning*' delineates the development of planning processes within the City of Melbourne, describing the use of innovative public consultation techniques such as citizen juries to inform policy and budgetary decisions. Kim Dovey's '*City and University*' considers the relations between the City of Melbourne and central Melbourne's major universities (University of Melbourne and RMIT University), analysing not only the spatial dimension, but interestingly,

also the intellectual dimension. This thoughtful chapter proved to be a highlight, providing a stimulating nexus of intellectual and empirical content.

The final chapter, *'Melbourne Futures'*, authored by the three editors, contemplate Melbourne's possible futures. For the authors of this chapter, inventing Melbourne's futures is understood as being primarily repurposing, rescheduling and redesigning the existing city, rather than requiring more grandiose or idealised future visions. From this perspective, change is pragmatically understood as being primarily incremental, though the reader is reminded that "incremental change, ...in aggregate, ...is transformational' (Dovey, Adams and Jones 12). For me, this encouraging prompt is the key take-home message of this book.

As well as the contributors' shorter chapters, the book also includes two longer pieces written by the editors. Firstly, Ronald Jones' *'Melbourne, sung as it were a new song'* traces the path and outcomes of a number of central Melbourne projects. This chapter, for me, was a second highlight, particularly Jones' discussion of the role of promoting mixed land uses as a mechanism for steady, self-sustaining activity in the central city, and the implementation of the three-year Postcode 3000 program in 1992, which re-introduced housing into the central city activity mix, and described the specific mechanisms through which this was achieved. The second longer chapter is *'The Marios Talks'* by Rob Adams with Kim Dovey, which traverses interview extracts with Rob Adams. This chapter takes an interview format, which to me feels somewhat disjointed; but the content canvassed in the chapter is a trove of useful and interesting subject matter.

A key strength of this book is the editors' ability to harness multiple perspectives and approaches to communicate the narratives through multiple formats, including prose; an interview; high-quality contemporary and historical photographs; maps; aerial photographs; short prose; and poetry. These provide multiple perspectives and lenses through which to view Melbourne, such as from the viewpoint of a specific time, place, in relation to a particular issue, or from the viewpoint of a particular person. Before and after photographs are an effective technique for capturing changes in a specific particular location over time, for example.

It is disappointing however, as the editors themselves acknowledge, that there are no indigenous voices represented within these pages. It would also be helpful if the brief background for each author was repeated on the title page for each author's chapter. Although this would add visual clutter, it would eliminate the need for readers unfamiliar with the cast of characters to search for biographical information on commencing each chapter.

As the contributors to this book intermittently draw on urban design and planning theorists for conceptual frameworks to support the key focus of empirical transformation of central Melbourne, this book is likely to be of interest to urban designers, planners, architects, urbanists, researchers, students and others with an interest in matters urban. Although focused on Melbourne, the content is likely to resonate with readers in multiple locations with an interest in similar, and perennial, urban and human issues.

I learnt much from reading this book; and just as importantly, I enjoyed reading it. *Urban Choreography: Central Melbourne 1985-* constitutes a valuable addition to the field of urban design literature, and specifically to literature relating to revitalisation of urban centres, providing a rich and varied source of insight which will undoubtedly both inspire and inform.

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