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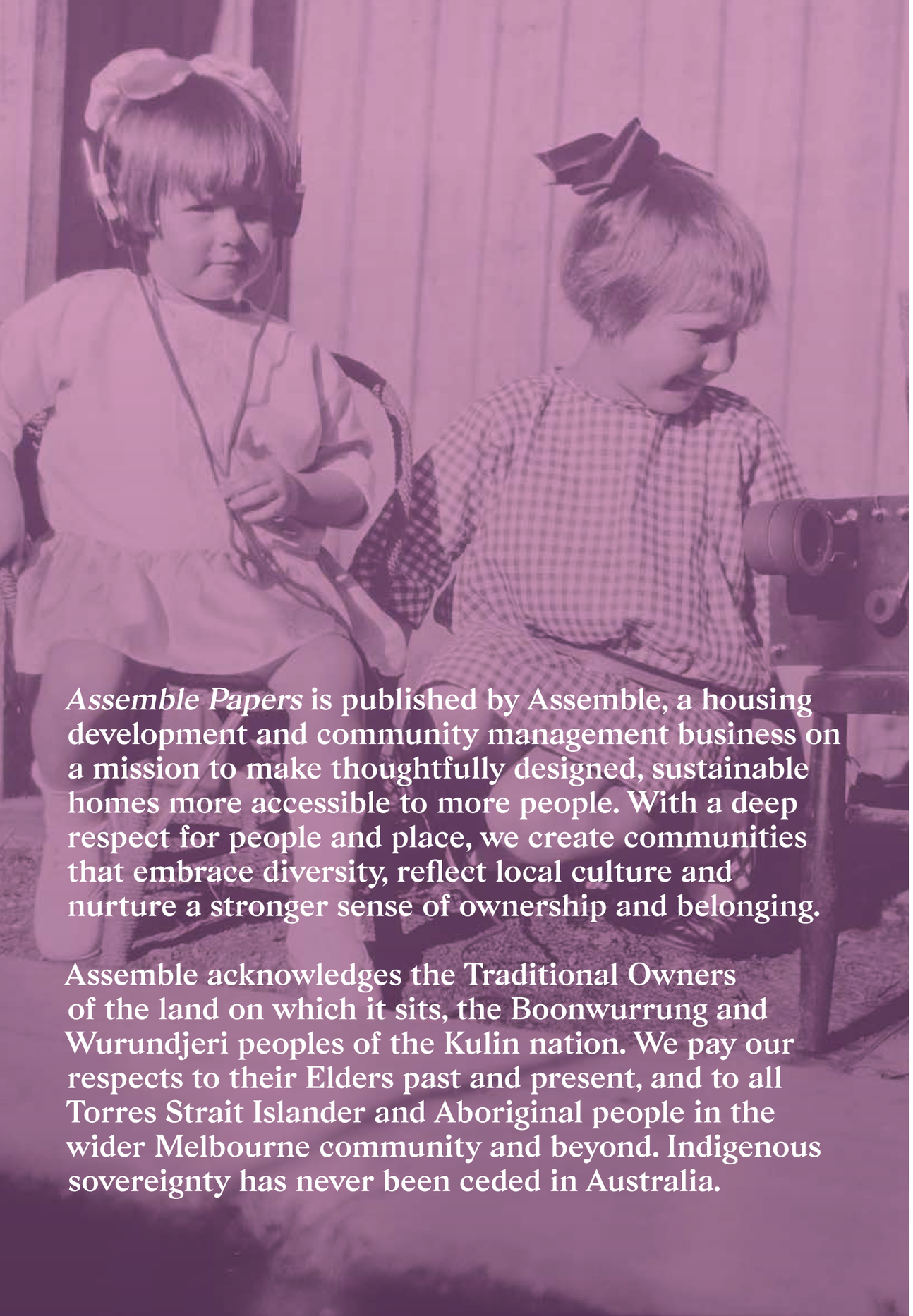
2021

AssemblePapers

Mind the Gap



Assemble Papers is published by Assemble, a housing development and community management business on a mission to make thoughtfully designed, sustainable homes more accessible to more people. With a deep respect for people and place, we create communities that embrace diversity, reflect local culture and nurture a stronger sense of ownership and belonging.

Assemble acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land on which it sits, the Boonwurrung and Wurundjeri peoples of the Kulin nation. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present, and to all Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal people in the wider Melbourne community and beyond. Indigenous sovereignty has never been ceded in Australia.

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Mind the Gap

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(cover) The Kaikohe Basketball Court developed by ĀKAU in collaboration with the community of Kaikohe.
Photo: Aerial Vision.

(opposite) Jean and Myrtle Cheers listening to a crystal set radio in their backyard, Brunswick, Christmas 1923.
Image: Ronald Cheers.
Source: Museums Victoria.

All of us, on some level, need support. This was highlighted by the events of the past year, when we all watched as our systems and bureaucracies, these invisible infrastructures that govern and coordinate our worlds, crashed under the pressure of a virus invisible to the human eye. Through this time, we noticed another invisible infrastructure strengthen in this city, and beyond – that of citizens coming together to respond to, utilise and fill the gaps to support one another.

The gaps and cracks in our systems were always there but became clearer during the COVID-19 pandemic – from structural racism to a lack of social housing in our city; from neglected public spaces to food insecurity. These gaps, while problematic, are also somewhat advantageous. They illustrate that systems and structures need to change, alongside our conception of what is 'normal'. They also allow for innovative solutions and agency to appear. This issue brings together thinkers and doers, storytellers and engagers, to consider how together our civic actions, big or small, fill the gaps when our systems splutter.

Through this issue, we hope you see the power in community, in listening to one another, and in allowing collective agency to emerge. Whether it be in times of crisis or in times of calm, we are stronger together.

Enjoy,

SOPHIE RZEPECKY
Editor

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Essential Service

Melbourne's outdoor markets offer an alternative food system, creating pockets of connection, community and access.

Text by GEORGIA SYMONS
Photography by ANU KUMAR

(opposite) Produce for sale at the Carlton Community Grocer Market on Friday 11 November 2020.

(left) Lewis unpacking the Thriving Foods truck after travelling from the organic farm in Koo Wee Rup, Victoria, on Saturday 17 November 2020.

In recent years, regular outdoor food markets have popped up in Melbourne's metropolitan suburbs, supporting regional farmers and local communities. At the end of August last year, organisers of these markets found themselves faced with an unexpected predicament. Under stringent COVID-19 restrictions, the Victorian State Government announced that farmers markets were no longer deemed an 'essential service'. Organisers frantically lobbied government officials to allow their markets to go ahead, with varying degrees of success. Some markets were allowed to open, but those located in local COVID hotspots or held in locations used by emergency services remained closed. The inconsistencies in this situation point to an interesting question: in a crisis, which modes of food delivery and provision are deemed essential?

Many of us who live in cities don't know where most of our food comes from. And indeed, it's a difficult issue to understand – the reality is that there are many mouths to feed, and Australia is a vast continent, making transport and logistics costly and complex. Large supermarkets dominate our food distribution networks. According to a 2018 report from Roy Morgan, supermarkets hold a 71.4 percent share of the fresh food market. While chain supermarkets provide us with convenient and relatively affordable food, there are many hidden costs for farmers, the environment and our health and wellbeing. The Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics (ABARES) research agency has stated that the structure of the fresh food market drives a trend "towards fewer, but larger farm businesses." Another Australian government document, the 2016 State of the Environment report, identifies that these larger farms "compete for space with natural systems, affecting ecosystem function." So, while a viable alternative system is difficult to imagine, it's clear that our current system of food delivery has a lot of hidden costs. The environment continues to suffer from the effects of large-scale agriculture. Meanwhile, all but the largest farms either have been edged out of the supermarket supply chain or are offered unsustainably low prices for their crops. Where does this leave small- to medium-scale farmers in rural Victoria, unable to produce the quantities supermarkets require?

Metropolitan Melbourne has a strong permanent market culture – Queen Victoria, Preston, Dandenong and Footscray markets are some examples of permanent food markets. However, regular farmers markets exclusively stocking Victorian produce are a recent phenomenon. Melbourne Farmers Markets, a not-for-profit social enterprise founded by Miranda Sharp, was initially supported by locals who were keen to strengthen their community's fabric. At the turn of the millennium, the green wedge around Yarra Bend was threatened with development. Residents in the area fought to keep it as an open green space and proposed uses that would benefit them. They won the battle and Sharp established the first farmers market in 2002 at the Collingwood Children's Farm. Today, Melbourne Farmers Markets operates from six locations around Melbourne – Carlton, Coburg, Collingwood, Gasworks, Alphington and Abbotsford. Prue Clark, market manager at Melbourne Farmers Markets, notes: "There is a beautiful sense of community at the markets. Towards the end of the day, they become a massive swap-fest – everyone is so generous to each other."

For first-generation farmer Paul Watzlaff, the Melbourne Farmers Markets are indispensable. Without them, he would not have been able to establish his farm, Thriving Foods, in Gippsland in 2016. He explains that many small-scale independent farmers consider the markets as a first rung on the ladder to creating a viable business. The markets create opportunity – wholesalers or local restaurants and stores may stock produce after seeing it in demand. Thriving Foods now has a diversified business model, combining its presence at markets with the sale of produce to wholesalers and fresh fruit and veg boxes directly to customers. The benefits are more than just financial. Watzlaff says, "I often get a bit disillusioned... but it's enlivening to look at my customers and see their gratitude." Watzlaff also reports that while many farmers are finding it tough, the lockdowns have been somewhat good for his business, with more people cooking at home and willing to try new things. With the pandemic, he adds, "There has been a renewed focus on having a strong immune system. People seem to want to feel healthy and less run down."

When you purchase directly from farmers, your money goes straight into their pockets and this has a ripple effect in farmers' regional communities. While the logistics of selling their produce in the city can be arduous for farmers – long travel times, transport and logistics, merchandising and display, packaging, customer service, point of sale and inventory management – the markets still provide a viable way of keeping some farmers afloat. According to Sharp, an

“We need the stepping stones between food relief and the supermarket duopoly of Coles and Woolworths.”

– Tess Gardiner

“There is a beautiful sense of community at the markets. Towards the end of the day, they become a massive swap-fest – everyone is so generous to each other.”

– Prue Clark

average of $1 million is spent across 150 Victorian farmers and small-scale food businesses each month at her markets. It’s a miniscule portion of the state’s entire fresh produce market, but it’s a vital lifeline for many. Sharp says, “Through the markets, farmers are controlling their own destiny.”

However, the fair price that small-scale farmers need to set at the markets in order for their farms to stay afloat is expensive for many consumers. Sharp is not naive about the conditions that make her markets possible: “The communities where the markets are are fortunate enough to be of a socio-economic profile that is able to afford this food.”

So, how can outdoor markets serve people who don’t find farmers’ prices accessible? Founded in 2014, Community Grocer – another local not-for-profit social enterprise – is paving the way, aiming to provide fresh, healthy and culturally appropriate food, with a dignity of choice, to all communities.

With outdoor markets at a number of locations across Melbourne – Fawkner, Pakenham and Heidelberg West and public housing estates in Carlton and Fitzroy – their model is to adapt to the needs of the specific community in which they operate. When a site for a new market is secured, the team asks locals about their vision for the market and what kinds of produce and goods they would like to have available. It’s an ongoing dialogue, with marketgoers able to request certain products for the next week’s market. While Community Grocer sources all Australian-grown products, the organisation sells from centralised wholesalers – warehouse-scale depots, often in suburban locations, that act as a mid-point in the supply chain between these farmers and their customers in urban groceries, markets and hospitality businesses. Working with wholesalers as one of their main suppliers allows Community Grocer to be more affordable to a wider range of people, and agile enough to fulfill requests. Price comparisons by Community Grocer show that a 1 kg bag of apples from their market is up to 60 percent cheaper than major supermarkets. Due to this increased affordability, people attending the markets say they are eating more fresh food.

COVID-19 restrictions severely impacted Community Grocer’s activities. At the Carlton public housing estate, the markets closed from July until November 2020, with the market space being used as a COVID-19 testing centre while cases were increasing. Local residents who ran small businesses alongside the markets also had to shut. Community Grocer came up with a number of alternative ways to support a community whose movements were so strictly controlled, one of which was to establish a pick-up fruit and veg box delivery service. Every Tuesday afternoon, Tess Gardiner, general manager of Community Grocer, would meet residents face to face to deliver the boxes, and she noted the desire for the market to return was strong.

Many Victorians experienced food insecurity for the first time during the lockdowns. Spotting the gap in the fresh food market, Community Grocer’s services have increasingly moved into the food relief space. “We need that way out,” says Gardiner. “We need the stepping stones between food relief and the supermarket duopoly of Coles and Woolworths.”

They banded together with other food-focused social enterprises, including Melbourne Farmers Markets, to form Moving Feast – a collaboration focused on responding to food scarcity arising from the pandemic’s effects on the economy. When the hard lockdown of the Flemington, Kensington and North Melbourne public housing estates was announced, within 24 hours, Moving Feast was able to deliver 1,000 culturally appropriate fresh fruit and veg boxes to residents.

Though relatively small in scale, the social enterprises that power Melbourne’s regular outdoor markets are an essential service. During the lockdowns, the markets that had to close left countless small holes in the social and economic fabric of the city. They were sorely missed by the residents who use the markets to connect with their community and to access affordable and healthy food. Happily, all impacted markets have now reopened – and it’s just as well. As an alternative food system, these markets imagine the possible beginnings of a different social and economic infrastructure. ●

(opposite) Ayni picking up her box from the then-closed Carlton Community Grocer market on Friday 11 November 2020.

(above) Linda from Nar Nar Goon Fresh Fruit selling a variety of apples at the Coburg Farmers Market on Saturday 17 November 2020.

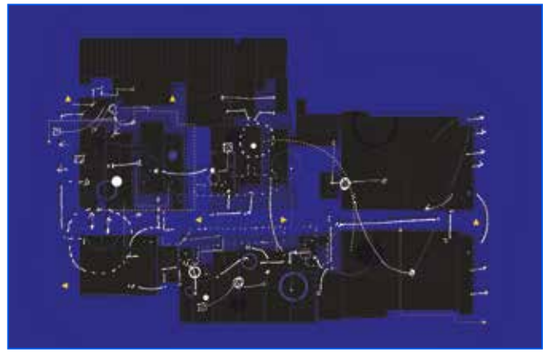
Treading Lightly

Prototyping futures for Brunswick's public space.

Students from RMIT University's School of Architecture and Urban Design with MILLIE CATTLIN and MARK JACQUES

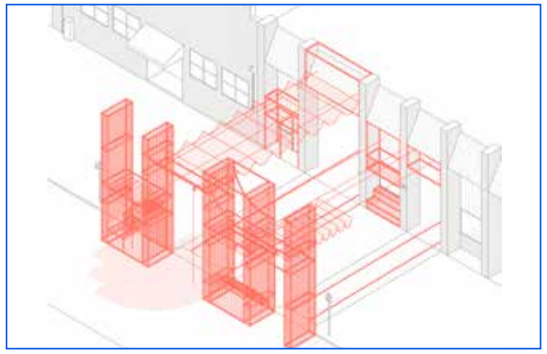
Across Brunswick, the ghosts of industries past collide with new forms of cultural production. Artists, designers and creators of all types work out of large factories; their workshops, spilling out onto the street, create a neighbourhood in motion. But as in all suburbs, progress here is inevitable. The question is, how can Brunswick change without losing what already exists? In 2019, RMIT University, Moreland City Council and the Victorian State Government (Creative Victoria) signed a memorandum of understanding to develop a vibrant 'design district' in the heart of Brunswick. Responding to this, Millie Cattlin and Mark Jacques, designers and teachers at RMIT University's School of Architecture and Urban Design, ran studios to provoke their students to think about design differently. For Cattlin and Jacques, the urbanist who thinks only in large scales is obsolete. The time for designing 'instant cities' is over. Their approaches advocate for small design interventions that rejuvenate what already exists, rather than replacing it with something new. Each student started with existing spaces of creativity and manufacturing, observing existing connections and drawing into these, rather than erasing them. We selected the work of a few of the students to highlight alongside their thoughts on the futures of Brunswick.

"I hope we have learnt to tread lightly with our decisions; implementing smaller gestures and incremental adjustments over time to learn through our curiosity. I hope we retain the character, mess and grit of Brunswick as I believe it is here that we find its vibrancy. It is incomplete, with room to experiment. I hope we test slowly, to navigate to a place that responds to the changing needs and uses of both people and their environment." – Tori Dinardo



Catherine Hucker
Bachelor of Interior Design (Honours), RMIT University

The connection between Brunswick's industrial buildings – of performance, collaboration and production – reinforces them as active and alive. My project protects and amplifies the value of these buildings and the creativity they foster. Shown in this drawing, Ovens Street in Brunswick has many light industrial buildings, each one part of a bigger network, all interacting and connecting with one another.

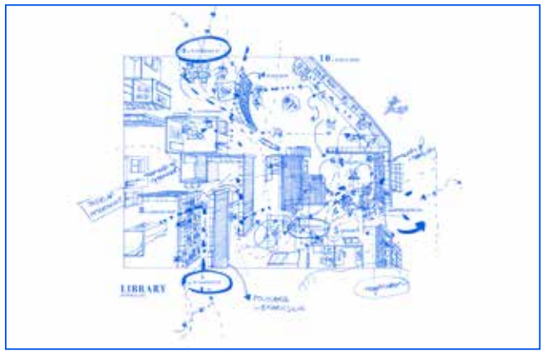


Belinda Smole
Master of Architecture, RMIT University

Brunswick is characterised by production and abundance, made up of past industries that initially arose from the natural resources in the area. Many sites include remnants of equipment like conveyor belts, supply lifts and cranes. My proposal brings the process of making at the RMIT Brunswick campus to the street to engage the public at all stages of design. Continuing the rhythm of Sydney Road, this structure enables a dialogue between the street and the design process by integrating pulleys, counterweights and a curtain to allow for a flexible set up that can also host talks, events and workshops.

Geun Yu Kim and Abigail Liew
Master of Architecture, RMIT University

Sydney Road has always been a place of making. Our project aims to rethink the street through small interventions that allow people to discover and explore, negotiating between the old and new. Through this research, we discovered that our architecture did not need to be big or expensive but could be as subtle and easy as the layering of fresh paint on a wall. Our structural intervention honours the art deco Padua Theatre, built on Sydney Road in 1937 and torn down in 1982. The structure is like a stage, or a blank canvas, for anyone to use.



Tori Dinardo
Bachelor of Interior Design (Honours), RMIT University

The RMIT Brunswick campus could bleed into Brunswick to create a public space shared among students, professionals, teachers, researchers and the Brunswick community. People inhabit the building, but they also live with it and learn from it, and it learns from them. Seen here, the campus library connects Dawson Street to Phoenix Street. The campus enables the design of radical futures, and becomes a way to experiment with the process of negotiation between private and public.

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Together Apart

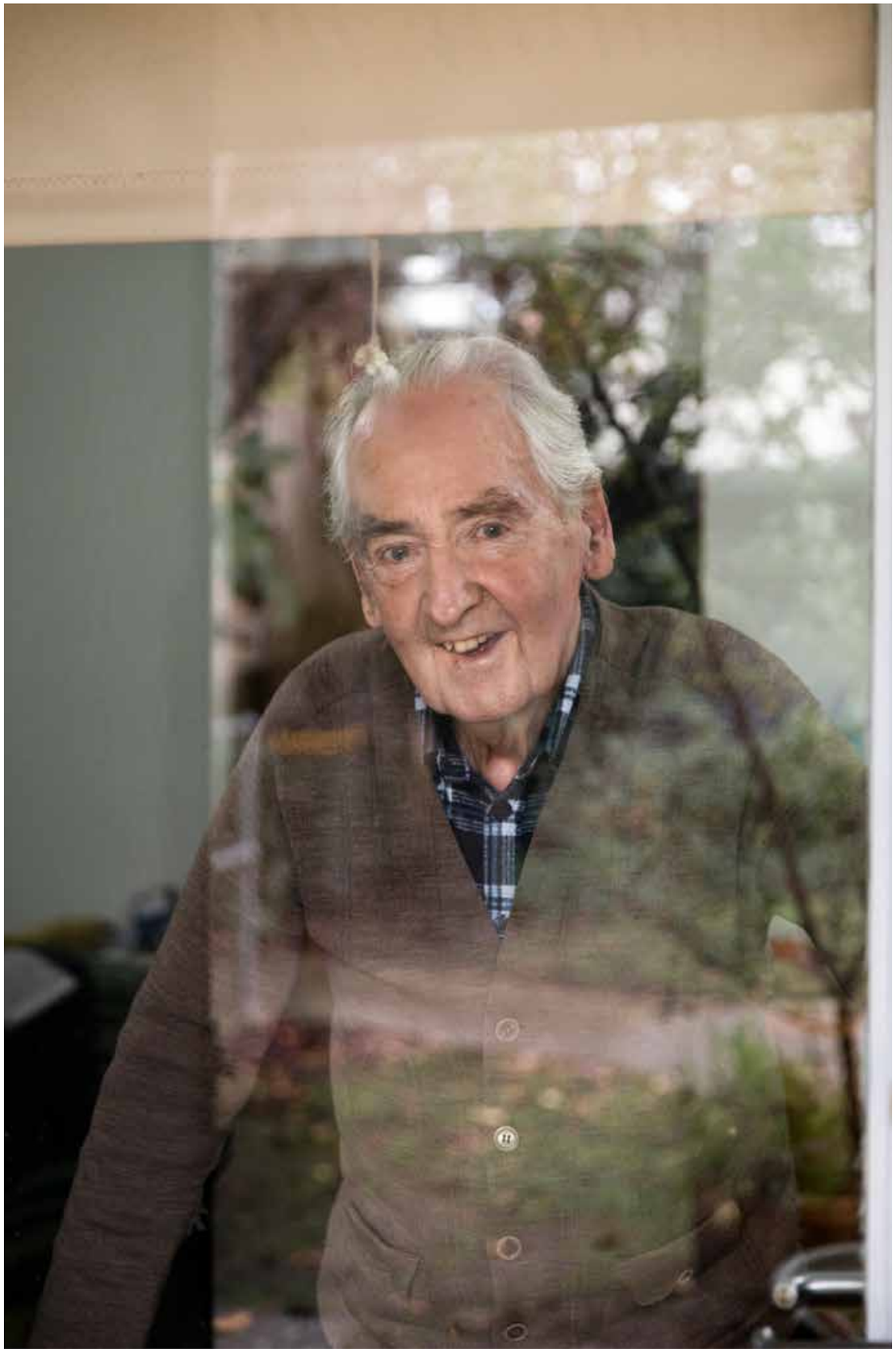
Strength in solitude, the weathering of Melbourne's lockdowns.

Text and photography by BRI HAMMOND

Melbourne's stringent lockdowns last year affected all of us in different ways. In the space of time between the first and second series of lockdowns, and when it was safe to do so, photographer Bri Hammond visited residents in public housing in Collingwood and Richmond to hear how they were faring in isolation. Each person involved in the project has an individual story, and together these stories paint a picture of the diversity, vitality and community strength present in the buildings and homes.

Joshua (above)

"I've been living in this unit for about 20 years on and off. I was my dad's primary carer here before he passed away. I grew up on the estate, from when I was about 14, so 22 years. I turn 36 in June. I run the Collingwood Underground Roller Disco, which is an all-inclusive event in the underground car park on the estate. I'm also working on a new event to celebrate Tavares Lane, which was named after my late father Antonio Tavares. It's the first street to be named after someone of colour, the first non-colonial name and the first name of someone from public housing, which is cool. I've found isolation a bit difficult. I'm a professional musician, a singer, and all of my events have been cancelled. It's been sort of nice to have a break from gigs, but I guess the break without anything else to do is like "oh, ok, we're all in forced lockdown". I guess we're pretty lucky to be in Australia. I've been watching a lot of Netflix, playing video games. I have been working a little bit. I have been seeing some friends because we found it ridiculous that you can have a partner over but not a friend? So everyone who's single is doomed to live this life of solitude? Isolation is the biggest killer of anyone, but now we're saying it's good for you to isolate? Crazy. Crazy!"



Peter (opposite)

“Isolation for me was a double whammy because my spinal injury limits me in my ability to go out and meet people also. If it were not for the Meals on Wheels people, I would have very few people coming in to see me. I think the health workers are to be admired for all the wonderful work they’re doing. And for all the complaints we have for our politicians, compared to overseas I think they are doing a brilliant job. I’ve been switching off the news and watching as much comedy as I can instead. We’ve got to learn to laugh and enjoy the things we have rather than lament the things we don’t have.”

Izzy (above)

“I’ve lived on the Collingwood housing estate now for three years. It’s actually the longest I think I’ve lived anywhere. Previous to that I did a lot of travelling around the world; I’ve had many adventures. I have a project called United Struggle Project, which is a music, arts and theatre based collective. We do a lot of social justice theatre, art and music. I’m also in a political hip-hop group called Combat Wombat. I have four kids, Amper Sonic, Nunei, Sambewa and Bassi. I’ve been a full-time Mum for 16 years, so the lockdown hasn’t been anything too out of the ordinary for me. I am really concerned about my friends overseas who are living in a lot poorer conditions and don’t have access to the medical and welfare that we have here. I guess that’s my biggest concern in the pandemic –how they’ll survive isolation when for a lot of people isolation means starvation. During this time for us in Australia, most of us are living quite comfortably, we’ve got access to community and support, but for refugees, people in detention and people in prison, life is a lot harder and they’re at a lot more risk than the rest of the population.”

Nga (opposite)

“I came to Australia as a refugee from Vietnam. After my family and I crossed the border from Vietnam to Thailand we spent seven months in a refugee camp before we finally came to Australia by boat in 1982. The lockdown period has reminded me of the hardships I faced when I first came to Australia. My daughters have advised me to stay at home and not go out. I’ve felt a bit lonely because I can’t go to the neighbourhood house to join the music activities, but I try to keep healthy and think positively.”

Thank you to the Belgium Avenue Neighbourhood House and Collingwood Neighbourhood House for facilitating these conversations. This project was made possible with support from Yarra City Council. A selection of these stories will be displayed in a digital exhibition presented by Museums Victoria in early 2021 and acquired by Museums Victoria for the permanent collection as a documentation of this period in Melbourne’s history.

Mini (above)

“I’ve been living here since 2016, so four years this year. I’m an artist and a rapper, and I do an event called High Rising Hip-Hop with the Collingwood Neighbourhood House down at the underground car park. I guess I saw a gap with a lot of hip-hop and open mic stuff, there was a place nearby but it was really white and just dudes. People would assume that I was just there to watch, I’d be queuing for ages and I’d just be pushed out of the way, and the one time I did get to go up people would just be real sleazy to me. There are so many amazing artists that I know that live on the estate, and so many amazing programs for young fellas to do hip-hop around here and I just thought it’d be cool to have something that bridged that gap. I feel like a lot of other spaces are really competitive and quite negative as well, there can be a lot of dissing culture and stuff like that. I heard about what a friend of mine was doing over in Footscray with positive rap battles and I thought that’d be a cool thing to incorporate. High Rising Hip-Hop is a space where people can mess up and practice doing freestyling and practice some of the stuff they might be writing or working on as well as come together with more established artists and adult MCs and perform together and make those connections so they can start getting paid gigs.” ●

Future Homes

Do new homes in middle-ring suburbs hold potential for our cities' futures?

SOPHIE RZEPECKY in conversation with JILL GARNER

"Density doesn't need to be frightening."

– Jill Garner

(right) Jill Garner at her home in Elwood, Melbourne. Photo: Tom Ross.

Design for civic and for everyday realities have always been at the centre of architect Jill Garner's practice. Since 2015, in her role as Victorian Government Architect, she has advocated for civic buildings and infrastructure to be considered thoughtfully, acutely aware that design decisions impact Melburnians in their day-to-day lives.

Recently, Garner has been working closely with the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) on the Future Homes project. The project looks at the opportunities that lie in building a greater density of housing in Melbourne's middle ring – the suburbs around 30 minutes away from the city centre. In her mind, to solve the urgent problem of housing scarcity in Melbourne, unconventional solutions are needed. A competition held in 2020 brought together submissions from emerging practices and more established designers to put this theory to the test. A separate competition was run for students to allow for our future generations to be heard.

Sophie Rzepecky:
In recent years there have been a series of design competitions across Australia which focus on the issue of sprawl in our cities and speak to the potential of building vertically. New South Wales had one called The Missing Middle and Queensland had one called Density Diversity Done Well. Both looked at how to develop what they call the middle ring suburbs in their cities. What was the initial motivation for the Future Homes competition here in Melbourne?

Jill Garner:
In Melbourne, our middle ring suburbs, like Clayton in the south-east or Sunshine to the west, used to be outer suburbs, populated between the 1940s and 1960s during Melbourne's postwar boom. Over time, as Melbourne's population grew, the city expanded along its rail lines and modest houses were built on large quarter acre blocks of land. There was pressure to build housing quickly for a growing population, and the housing type resulted in low density, urban sprawl. We really need to start looking beyond the inner suburbs for opportunities to build a denser type of home, and the competition captures this urgency.

SR: The competition asks architects to design apartments, something Melburnians are slowly getting used to in the inner suburbs. Do you think there is a resistance against this in the suburbs further out? Is there a negative perception of density you are tackling with this competition?

JG: There is a question as to how many residents could be living on these large, quarter acre sites. In some homes, there may be only one or two (often elderly) people who can't manage the upkeep. But the house, land and location may be very valuable to them. And they may be fearful of density and living closer to one another. And they have a point. Maybe the crux of the problem is that discussions of homes and apartments often jump from considering the single house on a huge block of land to a high-rise building without showing how good the middle ground might be.

Melbourne has some fabulous examples of denser housing, including the incredible apartments and higher density living from the 1930s and 1940s in suburbs like Elwood. It is interesting to look at Elwood from Google Earth because it is one of the greenest suburbs in Melbourne, despite being one of the densest. It has an incredible natural system that is layered with occupation. I call this attractive density. There are examples of buildings with say 10 or 12 apartments, where everyone shares the garden, and entry points are a careful mix of public and private, and the place becomes a community. Density doesn't need to be frightening. We have not learned enough from suburbs like Elwood.

SR: So, is it a value perception that needs to shift?

JG: Australians are very focused on property as the foundation of prosperity. Stability for many people means home ownership. It's been pushed by our banks and by the way our economy is structured.

The stigma attached to renting is outrageous. This overarching idea that people who rent are second-class citizens or in a holding pattern until they can afford to buy is holding us back. A cultural shift is needed, but we need to be shown good examples of what living in different types of homes could look like.

“Home for me is somewhere where I am not frightened to step outside my front door at night. While it might be a place of respite, it is not a fortress from its place. Home for me is feeling like I am part of a community.” – Jill Garner

SR: Why ‘future homes’, and not ‘future housing’?

JG: The competition is a next step towards improving the amenity of our apartments, which was the ambition of the Better Apartments Design Standards (BADS) developed by DELWP in 2017. We talked to them at length about the idea of taking the apartment standards to the next level and testing them on a different model. We chose the word ‘home’ because in the end that is what we are providing. Home is not a hotel room, or someplace temporary; there is a level of permanence and security when we talk about home. And that’s whether you own it or not.

SR: What is home for you?

JG: Home for me is somewhere where I am not frightened to step outside my front door at night. While it might be a place of respite, it is not a fortress from its place. Home for me is feeling like I am part of a community.

SR: There is quite a long legacy of architects designing homes as a service in Victoria; homes for people and not only for profit. Robin Boyd’s Small Home Service established in 1947 is an example. But now, only 5 percent of residential homes in Victoria are designed by architects. Is the intention of the competition to reposition architecture or good design as an affordable service?

JG: One example you haven’t mentioned, which I think is probably the most important, is the Merchant Builders[1] project during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. It was extraordinary. They were ‘kit homes’ with different components which could be put together in all sorts of configurations. The owner could shift the elements around to customise the design. They were full of light and good airflow and they considered the relationship between indoors and out. Designs focussed on amenity – the good things that we should always consider in designing for living.

Merchant Builders also investigated ‘cluster development’. They would build 10 or 12 homes on a big site and design common areas. These projects put homes and families together in a place that had shared space, private space, communal space, all carefully designed within a landscape. And many had no fences.

SR: Almost like Ikea for homes?

JG: Yes, and they were somewhat affordable because they aimed to be mass manufactured. Many are still left in Melbourne and still occupied – some by the original families. They get passed down, people leave them to their kids, and a new generation occupies the home. They’re a really important reference for this competition. At the time, they brought something very unconventional to Melbourne.

SR: For Future Homes, was there any public or citizen engagement in the development of the competition brief?

JG: The brief drew upon the feedback from the BADS, which had significant industry, stakeholder and community consultation. At one stage, during the development of those standards, it was suggested we would put a spanner in the works of the development industry by making them jump over hurdles. But in fact, it seemed to be an important community awareness campaign in a pressured development market. What we were really trying to say to the community was “Look at the options you are being given; you don’t have to accept poor amenity.”

Many people can’t read floor plans and they put so much trust in the real estate industry. We have heard of people buying an apartment off the plan, moving in, and realising they don’t have transparent windows – they may be frosted because they are so close to a neighbour. They don’t know that they can’t get a queen size bed in the bedroom. They discover they don’t have any storage.

The competition brief took into account the 16 standards within the BADS that were identified through community engagement. We then also took into account the Better Apartments in Neighbourhoods Discussion Paper, a companion to the BADS launched in 2019, which looks at how a development should fit into its neighbourhood.

SR: How did you make sure there was a diversity of practices in the mix of submissions?

JG: The first submission was an anonymous expression of an idea, because we really wanted to judge on merit, not on reputation.

Out of the eight shortlisted submission, four were from reasonably established practices, while the other four were from emerging practices, or not even practices, but collaborations. We understand one was a couple of friends who teamed up to have a go. We were happy to have got this balance between more experienced and less experienced designers, and many cross-generational submissions.

The final four, although different from one another, each had a non-conventional approach. We wanted to see proposals for a different way of living.

SR: Will one of the winning team’s projects will be built?

JG: It is a core ambition. The competitions in New South Wales and Queensland have unfortunately not resulted in winning designs being built. Think of all of that amazing work sitting in a cupboard somewhere.

We thought that if we are going to come up with a slightly more radical way of putting eight or 10 apartments on one block of land, we need to communicate it clearly. We felt unless people could see it, or walk through it, it they wouldn’t be convinced. Floor plans cannot easily communicate how a building will feel.

SR: Were the competition entries designed with the designated site in mind?

JG: Yes, but another aspect to the competition was the idea that the model could be shifted contextually to fit any suburb. The idea of components and repetition, much like the Merchant Builders homes, was a core element.

SR: In June 2020, nine public housing towers in northern Melbourne were put into mandated hard lockdown because of fears around COVID-19. The incident brought to light the lack of quality public housing, and the urgent need for it, in Melbourne. By building one of the competition entries, does Future Homes hope to demonstrate that quality public housing *can* be built by this government?

JG: Yes. We would also like to make the final plans available to the private sector. They could be built by all sorts of people. We love the idea that, quite quickly, these designs could be rolled out on different sites across Victoria.

SR: How will the winners be able to work on “potential planning reforms”, as stated on the competition website?

JG: With the best intentions, the Residential Planning Code (ResCode) has done some very strange things to design. Over time, buildings over two stories have started to look like wedding cakes as they are designed to require front and side setbacks. There is construction risk in the stepped form, resulting in an incredible number of building defects in Melbourne. Frustratingly for architects, when designs don’t quite meet the rules, a value judgement is made. The people who are making these value judgements are not always trained in design – their judgement can be limited to ticking a yes or no box. Design decisions could better take into account site context. We hope to work on this with DELWP and the competition winners.

SR: A side competition was also run for student entries. Do you have any advice for young people who are now graduating from architecture?

JG: My advice to students is to be always looking and experiencing – all aspiring architects need a combination of observation and curiosity. Architects might be labelled the worst drivers because they are always looking at form, at context, at relationships. But ultimately, you can’t practice architecture if you don’t understand space. ●

(below and p.16) Promotional material for Merchant Builders kit housing franchises sold in New South Wales and Queensland. Image: Courtesy University of Melbourne.

1. Merchant Builders Pty Ltd
Merchant Builders was a development company founded in 1965 by entrepreneurs David Yencken and John Ridge to fill the market gap for good quality, medium-cost suburban housing. Over the next 26 years, they brought together an impressive multidisciplinary team of architects, designers and landscapers, including architect Graeme Gunn, interior designer Janne Faulkner and landscape designers Ellis Stone. Each home had landscaping, Indigenous planting, site planning and interiors as part of the total package. The ‘kit homes’ were made from factory-manufactured components that could be slightly customised by the owner. Because they could be mass produced, costs were minimised. Merchant Builders was also interested in increasing the closeness between homes in Melbourne’s suburbs. Influenced by American urban theorist’s William H Whyte’s idea of ‘cluster development’ – building homes that were orientated the most effective way for light, airflow and safety, rather than in a row in one direction with a road running down the centre. Through their design, Merchant Builders created what would become small, tight-knit communities of residents.

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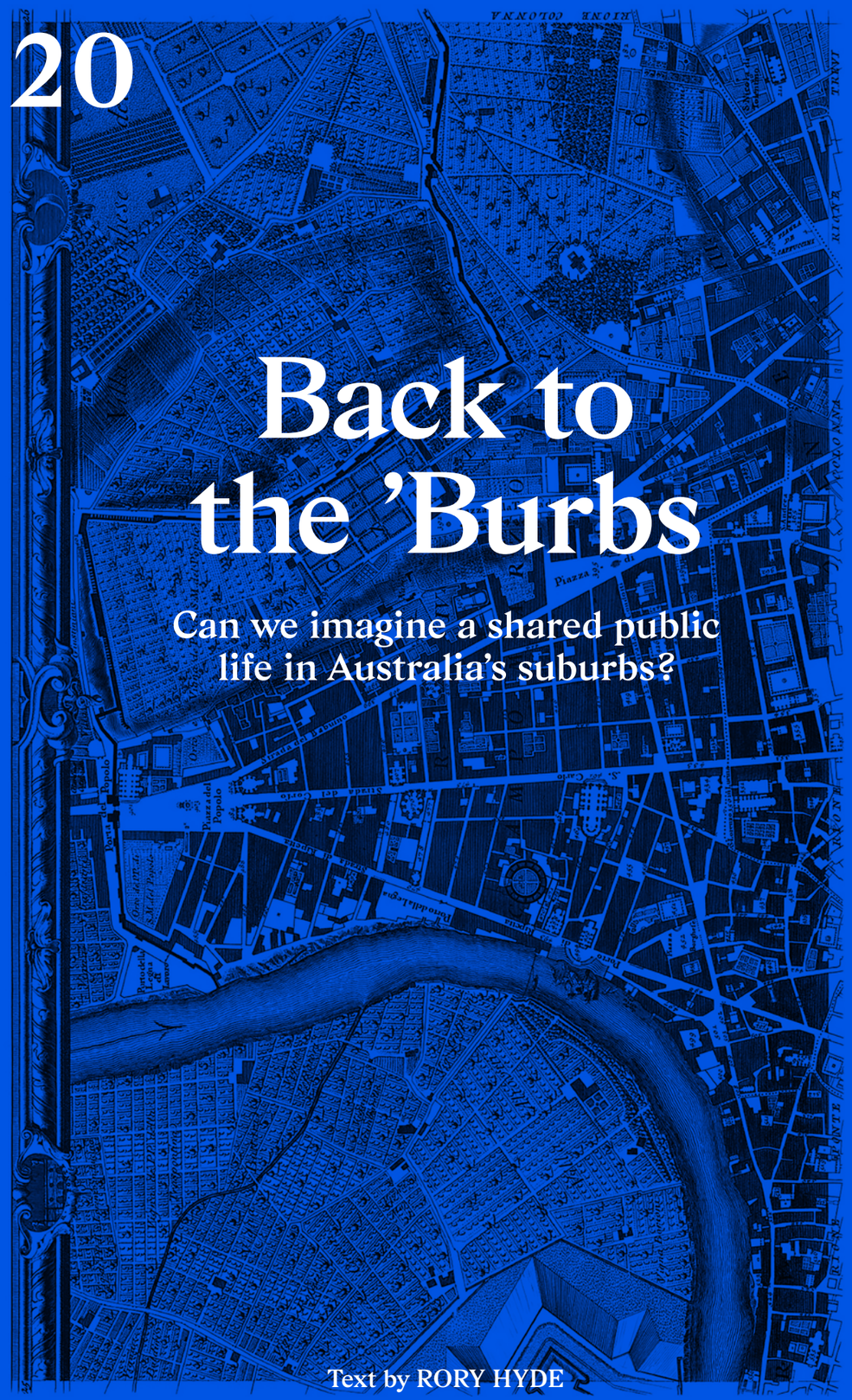
Back to the ’Burbs

Can we imagine a shared public life in Australia’s suburbs?



Giambattista Nolli (1701-1756) was an Italian architect and surveyor. He is best known for his plan of Rome, the *Pianta Grande di Roma*, begun in 1736 and concluded in 1748. The map is composed in 12 tiles, and its measure is 176 x 208 cm. It was by far the most accurate description of Rome produced at that time. Source: Wikimedia commons.

Text by RORY HYDE

MORRISON ON THE VERGE

“Can everyone get off the grass, please?” a man yells, pointing at his front yard. “I’ve just re-seeded that.” An unremarkable appeal, except that it is made to the Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, in the middle of briefing the press, orchestrated to have homes under construction as the backdrop. Morrison then encourages the media pack toward him, gives the exasperated man the thumbs up and tells him, “All good!”, before continuing with his speech.

It’s a funny clip, and like the best funny clips, it reveals some deeper truths. That the man doesn’t hesitate to yell at the highest elected official in the land shows a wonderful lack of deference to authority, that great Australian trait, and surely a sign of a healthy democracy. And in Morrison’s quick understanding, we can also glimpse the invisible boundaries that govern the suburbs. The grassy verge is not fenced – it’s continuous with the public footpath – but it’s undoubtedly private. Not even the Prime Minister can cross this invisible line. With Morrison and his media pack pressed between the seeded lawn and the road, this exchange also reveals the paucity of the public realm in much of Australia today.

Morrison was speaking in Googong, a new suburb under construction near the ACT–NSW border, a 20-minute drive from Parliament House. Under a big sky, surrounded by rolling hills and mature trees, it appears to be one of the more desirable planned developments being built today. The press release proclaims Googong “sets a new benchmark for socially, economically and environmentally sustainable greenfields communities,” highlighting an integrated water recycling system, and “landmarks celebrating the region’s Aboriginal and colonial history.” And yet the pattern of development follows closely the template used all over the country: of large houses on small blocks, with small setbacks or gaps between, strung together along strips of tarmac. Colourbond hipped roofs designed by algorithm appear in satellite imagery like clusters of ancient ziggurats. In seeking to maximise the private domain, the public realm has been squeezed out. The whims of the consumer are satisfied at the expense of society. It is in the public realm where we can address the greatest challenges that we face together: tolerance, community, loneliness, care and support. What might a suburb built around these goals look like?

NOLLI IN GOOGONG

The extent of the public realm is the subject of one of the most famous drawings in the history of architecture. Known as the Nolli map, it is an incredibly detailed map of Rome drawn in 1748 by Giambattista Nolli, an Italian architect and surveyor. The map is drawn in stark figure-ground, where the buildings are shaded black, and the streets are white. Most fascinating is that the interiors of public and religious buildings are shown in the same white as the street beyond, punctuated by colonnades holding up the roofs. What is inside or outside is of little importance to Nolli; what matters is where you can walk as a citizen. The city is exposed as if by x-ray, revealing a continuous public realm, from the narrow back alleyways to the dome of the Pantheon.

What would Nolli make of Googong? Having spent eight years pacing the narrow streets of ancient Rome, he would no doubt be astounded by the space and generosity of the typical subdivision of detached homes. “To every family a castle! What wealth!” Surveyor’s chain in hand, he would pace the street, sketching out a wide band of white space extending from front door to front door, taking in the verges, footpaths, parking lanes and roadway, with the private gardens beyond forming a black boundary. But after being accosted by a homeowner and hooted at by a driver, Nolli might reconsider the shading of this apparent public realm. Despite the ever-present horizon, with the roadway too dangerous to walk on, and the front verge off limits, this grand suburban boulevard is reduced to a thin stripe of white – the footpath – amongst a sea of black shading. As residents enter their homes by driving straight into their garages, Nolli would rightly ask, “Where is the space that is ‘ours’? Where is the space of democracy? Where can I be a citizen?”

WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

An urban structure that discourages chance encounters prevents the kinds of spontaneous mutual support that form the basis of resilient places. Who can you turn to for a last-minute babysitter, an after-school playdate or help carrying in the shopping? Without these informal connections, our neighbourhoods become brittle, unable to respond to crises, and prevent us from caring for each other in times of need.

This tendency is being further reinforced by technology. Seemingly innocuous inventions like the automated supermarket checkout or Uber are abstracting away the micro-encounters of daily life. Handing over change or discussing a route are some of the few moments where we are required to engage with somebody different to ourselves.

This situation has become further apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic, as we look at each with narrow eyes from behind our face masks, passing at a distance. But in other ways, the pandemic has helped. With many people now working from home, no longer commuting to the centre, they are more present in their neighbourhoods, able to invest in these local relationships.

Despite this small glimmer, the physical structure of the suburbs still exerts a negative pull, further widening the gaps between us, leading to a public sphere that’s further divided. How could we reimagine these spaces as places of encounter? As places of conviviality? How can we glue these gaps back together?

PUBLIC LIFE AS GLUE

This glue is public life itself. The daily encounters with people who are different to us in small and large ways build a resilient society. As writes Jane Jacobs, the most passionate advocate for the public life, “Lowly, unpurposeful and random as they may appear, sidewalk contacts are the small change from which a city’s wealth of public life may grow.” But Jacobs’s views were shaped by New York’s Greenwich Village in the 1960s, a dense and diverse working neighbourhood, combining families, shops and industry, all folded on top of itself in a vibrant and dynamic whole. This is the opposite of the suburbs, with Jacobs even warning that “I hope no reader will try to transfer my observations into guides as to what goes on in towns, or little cities, or in suburbs… they are totally different organisms… [and] we are in enough trouble already.”

Ignoring Jacobs’s warning, we can instead imagine the potential for the suburbs to provide a meaningful public life. By reimagining the home, the street and the neighbourhood, we can reconfigure these places to be equally diverse and resilient.

THE HOME

The suburban house today is defended from public life by turning away from the street, guarded by a double garage and a deep setback of unused terrain. The typical plan will also place the living room to the rear, and a bedroom facing the street, further preventing casual encounters with passers-by. The house in this new neighbourhood must reorient itself toward the public realm.

“The grassy verge is not fenced – it’s continuous with the public footpath – but it’s undoubtedly private.”
– Rory Hyde

A further blurring of this distinction between public and private can happen with programs. We have long denied the central role the private home plays as a place of work – not only the largely unrecognised and highly gendered work of running a household or raising children, but also the many small businesses run from front rooms and garages: independent trades, yoga studios, music lessons, shared childcare and so on. These are critical sources of revenue and employment, particularly in places that are remote from centres of activity. How might we encourage more of this to take place?

The viability of many of these businesses, particularly those serving the immediate neighbourhood, depends on a level of density greater than that of many suburbs today. This can be increased with new typologies of housing – the terrace, or back-to-back – and with the spontaneous infill of backyards with accessory dwelling units (granny flats), multi-generational housing, or sub-divisions. A piecemeal approach, led by homeowners, not developers, can lead to densification without displacement of the people and qualities that make suburbs desired in the first place.

THE STREET

Returning to our Nolli map of the suburban street, we can see this thin, white line of footpath as the only truly public space of encounter. How might we reimagine the suburban street to maximise this space? How can we stretch it spatially and engender a collective sense of ownership and responsibility?

We can begin by reclaiming front yards, expanding the width of the footpath to create more useful zones for playing or relaxing. We can create zones of shared productive gardens by taking down fences between properties. And we can even begin to reclaim space from the roadway by moving cars out to the ends of the street, digging up the road and creating a new space for playgrounds, cafes, trees, outdoor gyms, cafes, even swimming pools – a distributed chain of public amenity.

This is a space for those who currently do not have a place in the suburbs: children and the elderly, and their parents and carers. It’s a space for cooperative activities, addressing isolation and loneliness. A safe space owned by the street.

THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

The neighbourhood town centre or high street has been struggling in recent years, their vitality eroded by the rise of Amazon and big box stores and a growing concentration on the city centre. But with the shifting economic geography post-pandemic, could these places become newly viable business propositions? And more than that, could they also serve as vital spaces for civic and social life?

It’s not nostalgic to want these qualities from a high street. Local businesses are invested in local places, and their dollars can stay in these local places, through revenue, taxes, employment and, critically, investment. If this value is captured and reinvested over time, these places that have for decades been neglected will all of a sudden start to get better, not worse, creating more opportunities and skills.

Local economic engines can be used to start to repair the loss of assets and services in recent years or to build them where they have never existed. A local library offers more than books: it hosts local meetings, after-school clubs, job notices and even toy libraries. Combined with hub workspaces – for those working from home but still keen to get out of the house – these places could form distributed networks of care and support, bolstered by spaces of public celebration: cinemas, theatres, good pubs. In other words, they will become centres of wider economic and social ecosystems. ⬢

* This is more than a design project; it is a social, political, environmental and ideological one.
It seeks to burst the illusion of individualism that the suburbs were founded upon and create a new consciousness of our shared public lives.
It reminds us that we are all tethered to each other in a common project of living and the more that we can enlarge that realm, the better prepared we will be for the challenges of our futures.

So when the next prime minister makes an announcement from a suburban street, instead of being asked to ‘get off my lawn!’, she might perhaps expect a friendly wave.

“The house in this new neighbourhood must reorient itself toward the public realm.”– Rory Hyde

New development on the edge of Sunbury, Victoria, in December 2020. Photo: Rory Hyde.

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Watershed

Text by CASSIE LYNCH

Beneath the pavers of North Melbourne, under road, and concrete, and gravel, and sand, lies a landscape in wait. Birrarang-ga, the River Country, as it is known in the first language of this place, is the largest wetland in Australia, currently buried under shops, houses, police stations, and playgrounds. There is a river that lives on the surface, known as the Birrarang to the Boonwurrung, those people of Bundjil, the lawmaker who flies on eagle wings. It is written on maps as the Yarra River, a word meaning moving water, the Boonwurrung language flowing onto the English tongue – diverted streams that find their way. The Birrarang is the trunk of a vast watershed, its snaking body fed by branching creeks and streams, like a great tree of water laid in earth. The Birrarang/Yarra flows out through Nairm, or Port Phillip Bay, to the sea.

The story of change is written onto the Birrarang-ga, the River Country. Nairm, currently a large bay, was a series of grassed plains, home to kangaroos and yam daisies. The Bass Strait that currently separates Victoria from Tasmania was dry and walkable. The Birrarang was longer, it flowed from the Yarra Ranges, through Nairm and then out through the northwest coast of Tasmania. This was during the last glacial maximum, 20,000 years ago, when the world was the coldest it had been for hundreds of thousands of years. The sea level was 120 metres lower than it is today, all the water sucked up into glaciers and ice sheets. Then, the rapid warming began, and the Aboriginal peoples of Victoria and Tasmania, once joined by a land bridge, watched their hunting and ceremonial land become inundated with wave after wave of water. They were cut off from their neighbours, and had to retreat back to higher ground. The ocean levelled off to current-day levels 7,000 years ago.

The Boonwurrung faced a second flooding, this one only 1,000 years ago. The Boonwurrung say that they were not looking after their Country, and were fighting among themselves. They neglected to care for the plants, animals and spirits of Biik, the land. The wurreeny, the ocean, became angry and began to rise. Nairm began to flood, and the Birrarang-ga, the River Country, was disappearing again. The creator being Bundjil proclaimed he would halt the flooding only if the Boonwurrung would promise to follow his laws, the Wurrungie Biik, and care for Country. The Boonwurrung promised that they would follow Bundjil's laws, and would ensure that any visitors to their Country would follow them too. There are channels on the bottom of Port Philip Bay, deep etchings in the sea floor of where the Birrarang used to flow.

The Boonwurrung are survivors of climate catastrophe twice over. Now the Boonwurrung are being tested again. When Europeans arrived 200 years ago, they did not know the laws of Bundjil, and did not know the language of Country. The Boonwurrung offered hospitality to the settlers, attempted to teach them the right way to live on Country, the laws, the Wurrungie Biik. But the Boonwurrung were rebuffed, displaced, silenced, stolen, starved, murdered. Now the sea levels are rising again at the edges of the Birrarang-ga, salt-water coming in again to take more Country. Bundjil watches.

All the land in all the world was connected in different periods of the deep past. 335 million years ago there was only one continent, the supercontinent Pangaea, meaning 'all earth', and there was only one ocean, the superocean Panthalassa, meaning 'all sea'. 175 million years ago this supermass of Country began to pull apart: pyroclastic forces boiling beneath the surface of the earth, irresistible, tore Pangaea to pieces. Now the continents drift on magma, and the one ocean has become many. The Earth is halfway through a supercontinent cycle, the landmasses are the furthest they can get from one another. But they will keep moving. The Atlantic Ocean is becoming wider, the Pacific Ocean is becoming narrower. The continents will meet again as a future supermass, coastlines cuddling together once more. Separation is only temporary in the deep history of the world.

Watersheds though, they are dynamic, they change in an instant. Under Melbourne the volcanic streams of Quaternary magma tell a story of the Birrarang/Yarra being blocked, then finding new paths through the landscape. The extensive wetlands were filled in by the European town planners and agriculturalists and the water diverted underground, but those lost streams thunder back to the surface during storms. Melbourne is dry in the present but in deep time it is saturated. Water lives in the spirit of place, a force for creation and nourishment, but also devastation and catastrophe if not treated with respect. The body contains watersheds, capillaries branching from veins, branching from arteries. There are branching rivers of air in the lungs, the breath. The branch and drain, the push and pull.

There are watersheds in space, the drawing together of rivers of galaxies. Our own Milky Way Galaxy is part of a stream that is drawing into the Laniakea supercluster, a great trunk of galactic water pulling toward an unseeable gravitational sink in space. Laniakea is our home in the universe, our cosmic neighbourhood, a Hawaiian word meaning immense heaven, named for the Polynesian seafarers who criss-crossed the Pacific Ocean, navigating by the stars. To the Polynesians the whole world was water, and they shared the rare green isles with plants, birds, reptiles, mammals and crustaceans. Out there in dark space, Laniakea means keeping the lights gathered together, and pulling stray galaxies into the stream.

Back in North Melbourne, that wetland landscape, the Birrarang-ga, the River Country, lives on. It peeks up through the pavers, flows through drains, grows around bus stop poles, sings from carport roofs. The Boonwurrung language continues to find new paths around the obstacles that seek to block its flow. The word Melbourne is everywhere but the name Birrarang-ga is behind it, seeping through. ●

Boonwurrung words and history from 'The Journey Cycles of the Boonwurrung' by N'arwee't Carolyn Briggs. Permission to share and discuss Boonwurrung cultural heritage granted by N'arwee't Carolyn Briggs.

Boonwurrung Word List
Biik – land
Birrarang-ga – River Country (place of the river)
Birrarang – Yarra River (River of Mist)
Bundjil – eagle/creator being
Nairm – Port Phillip Bay
Wurreeny – ocean/sea
Wurrungie Biik – law of land

Watershed was commissioned for Refuge, a key project of Arts House, as part of the City of Melbourne.

Practical Matters

Creative tips and tricks
for better living, everyone.

Kevin Heinze Grow's Gardening Guide for Melbourne

The late Kevin Heinze, a well-known Melbourne gardener and radio and television personality, believed that all people should be given the opportunity to take part in gardening activities. He understood the therapeutic benefits gardening could deliver for vulnerable people and helped set up the unique community organisation now known as Kevin Heinze Grow. Today, forty-one years later, Kevin Heinze Grow operates from two Melbourne sites in Doncaster and Coburg with more people than ever taking advantage of its tailored therapeutic horticulture programs.

Instinctively, many of us know that gardening is good for you. There are the obvious physical benefits to growing plants, like getting fresh air and light exercise. But what is often overlooked is the fact that while we look after our gardens, our gardens are looking after us! Whether gardening alone or with others, you can expect your stress and anxiety to reduce as your attention and focus increase. Gardening is therapy when it involves meaningful, calming activities that promote psychological wellbeing. It feels good to be outdoors in nature creating spaces that are ornamentally beautiful, structurally functional or full of delicious things to share.

Here are a few ideas to get your garden therapy journey underway...

"Remember, plants are living organisms, just like animals and human beings. We are affected by the weather, our age, where we live and who we live with. So are plants."

– Kevin Heinze

Summer Planting

BEANS

Beans like warmer weather so if you pick up some seeds and get them in the ground now you should be enjoying your homegrown beans in autumn (about 8–12 weeks after planting). Ideally, dig some compost or a little blood and bone fertiliser into the soil a few weeks before planting your beans. The seeds are quite big so they're easy to plant. Beans are a great vegetable to plant with kids – just poke seeds about 2 cm into well-drained soil. Water once and then not again until the seedlings have sprouted, as bean seeds may rot if overwatered. Because they grow upwards, climbing beans are a great option for courtyards and small spaces and can be grown in a large pot or container. Long stakes (at least 2 m tall) should be pushed into the soil at planting time so beanstalks have something solid to wrap around as they reach for the skies. Pick mature beans regularly to encourage more bean growth. Niçoise salads, here we come!

Depth (seed): 2 cm
Spacing: 15 cm
Position: Full sun
Height: 2 m+
Water requirements: Very thirsty (water daily after seeds have sprouted)
Harvest: 12–14 weeks
Tips: Pick regularly to encourage more bean growth. Use sugarcane, pea straw or lucerne as mulch around the plants.

BEETROOT

Roasted, raw, boiled or baked beetroot is delicious and growing your own juicy beets right now will take little more than water and a bit of waiting. Best grown from seed, beetroot fares well in all but the coldest Melbourne months so get some in the ground now for harvesting in late autumn. The knobby seeds are actually little seed clusters and they will germinate better if soaked in warm water overnight before planting. A sprinkling of borax in the water will also provide growing beets with all the boron they need to thrive. Plant about 20 cm apart and when seedlings emerge wait until they are about 10 cm tall before carefully separating the tiny plants and replanting them approximately 10 cm apart (a process called 'thinning out'). For faster growth and tastier beets, fertilise each week with worm tea or a liquid fertiliser. While waiting for them to grow, you can sneak a few of their tender leaves to add to salads or stir-fries!

Depth (seed): 2 cm
Spacing: Sow 20 cm apart then thin out individual seedlings to 10 cm apart.
Height: 30 cm
Position: Full sun
Water requirements: Very thirsty (water daily in hot weather)
Harvest: 8 weeks
Tip: Use mulch around the plants and fertilise weekly to promote quick growth.

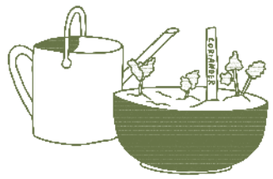
SILVERBEET

Silverbeet or Swiss chard is a great addition to any veggie patch. It is so easy to grow and rewards with a long cropping time. Buy a standard punnet from a nursery and you'll probably only need about 3–4 plants so give the remaining seedlings to neighbours or friends. Silverbeet seedlings should be planted about 30 cm apart. A great 'cut-and-come-again' vegetable, it can be harvested a few stalks at a time for adding to just about any dish you're preparing. In the hotter months silverbeet plants won't mind having a bit of shade and they will certainly need a good layer of mulch and plenty of water to stop them stressing out and 'bolting' (going to seed).

Spacing (seedlings): 30 cm
Position: Full sun/partial shade
Height: 75 cm
Water requirements: Medium (mulch well around plants so soil retains moisture)
Harvest: 6 weeks
Tip: Snap off outer stems at base as you need them.

Autumn Planting

CORIANDER



A ready supply of coriander is a blessing and one $3 packet of seeds might be all you'll ever need. Coriander doesn't like extreme heat so best to wait until March or April before planting in full/partial sun in garden beds or pots. Keep the soil moist to stop the plants from 'bolting' and use worm tea or liquid fertiliser every few weeks in your watering can. When your plants do go to seed, bees will delight in the flowers and eventually you can collect the seeds for sowing your next crop in about September.

Depth (seed): 0.5 cm
Spacing: 20 cm
Height: 75 cm
Position: Full/partial shade (protect from hot afternoon sun)
Water requirements: Very thirsty (water daily in hot weather and mulch around plants)
Harvest: Pick leaves when plant is 10 cm tall.
Tips: Plant 'slow-bolt' varieties. Collect seeds for replanting or grinding for use in the kitchen.

GARLIC

Garlic takes a good chunk of the year to grow but there is something really special about growing your own! Supermarket garlic is often imported and treated with chemicals so growing your own from organic bulbs ensures you have a good, clean supply of everyone's favourite allium. You may want to start experimenting with different garlic varieties which have different flavour profiles and intensity of heat. Over the next couple of months, buy some organic bulbs at a farmers market or garden centre and start preparing your garden bed by digging in some well-rotted manure (cow, sheep, horse or chicken) and compost. When April comes, poke the individual cloves about 3 cm deep into small mounds of soil about 15 cm apart. Water regularly and feed with worm tea or liquid fertiliser once per month. Harvest garlic in 6–8 months when the leaves start to die off and fat bulbs have formed under the soil.

Depth (clove, pointy end up): 3 cm
Spacing: 10–15 cm
Height: 40 cm
Position: Full sun
Water requirements: Medium (mulch around stalks)
Harvest: 6–8 months
Tip: The garlic will be in the ground for a while so choose a spot you don't need for some time or plant in pots.

KALE

Kale is an easy-to-grow cool season crop and comes in varieties such as Tuscan Blue, Curly and Russian Red, each with its own distinctive form, flavour and texture. Early plantings in the coming months are prone to attack by cabbage moth larvae so check them every day and remove the pesky green caterpillars and the tiny eggs. Start by sowing seeds into punnets and then planting out seedlings into containers or the garden bed when they are approximately 10 cm high. Water well, mulch around stems of plants and fertilise with worm tea or liquid fertiliser every 2–4 weeks. Use in smoothies, bake as chips or stir-fry with garlic and olive oil for a delicious and nutritious green treat.

Depth (seed): 1 cm into punnets
Spacing: Plant seedlings 30 cm apart
Height: 60 cm
Position: Full sun
Water requirements: Medium (mulch to retain soil moisture)
Harvest: 7 weeks
Tip: Pest alert – watch for destructive cabbage moth larvae during warm weather.

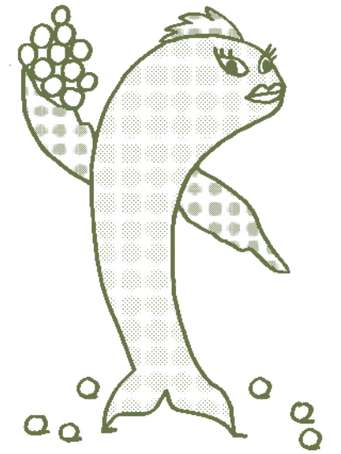
Text by GEORGIA TRACY
Illustrations by ANGHARAD NEAL-WILLIAMS

Julia Busuttil Nishimura's Taramasalata

(Best served shared)

Growing up, our elderly Greek neighbours would pass my mum pale blue ice-cream tubs full of taramasalata over the fence. It was very light pink – almost white – in colour, with a subtle salty fish taste, and it was always topped with a few kalamata olives. I loved eating it doused with olive oil, small Lebanese cucumbers and crunchy radishes. It would be gone within minutes, before my mum could even transfer it into one of her glass serving dishes. When we moved away from our house near the beach, and away from our Greek neighbors, it would be years before I would try it again. Now I like to make it at home for my own young family. I pack it into a small stainless-steel container, cut fresh pita into wedges and eat it at our local park here in Brunswick or down along the Merri Creek on warm evenings with a beer.

The kind of tarama (fish roe) you can find at your local Greek deli or fishmonger will dictate the flavour and colour of your taramasalata. I like the tarama that is almost yellow in colour – it gives the taramasalata a subtle flavour and a light cream colour. Most likely though, the reddish fish roe is what you will find, which is a fine substitute and what gives taramasalata its more commonly seen pink hue.



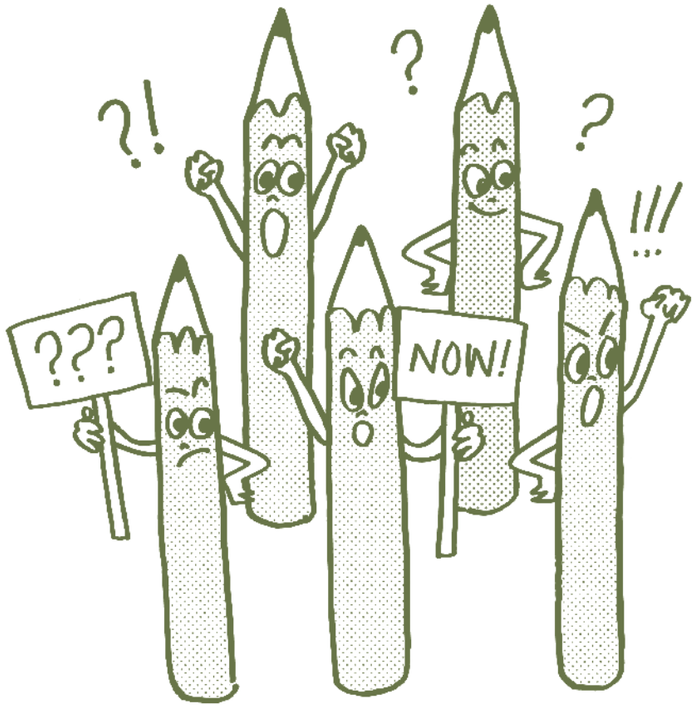
Serves 6 as a snack or as part of a meze

150 g crustless, day-old sourdough bread
60 g tarama (carp or cod roe)
1 small shallot, finely chopped
1 small clove garlic, finely chopped
Juice of two lemons (approximately 50 ml)
200 ml extra virgin olive oil, plus extra to serve
Salmon roe or kalamata olives, to serve (optional)
Raw vegetables such as radish, cucumber and tomato, to serve
Pita or Turkish bread, to serve

Tear the bread into 4 cm pieces and place in a bowl. Cover with warm water and allow to soak for 5–10 minutes or until soft. Squeeze out the excess water and place the soft bread in the bowl of a food processor along with the tarama, shallot and garlic. Blitz until well combined and smooth.

With the motor running, add the lemon juice and then slowly drizzle in the olive oil in a thin stream. Continue to blitz the taramasalata for 30 seconds longer to whip it until it is light. If the mixture is too thick, drizzle 1–2 tbsp of water into the food processor to thin it out a little. Taste for seasoning and adjust with more lemon if necessary. Transfer to a serving bowl, drizzle with extra olive oil and top with salmon roe or a few kalamata olives if desired. Serve with pita or Turkish bread and raw vegetables.

Illustration by ALICE OEHR

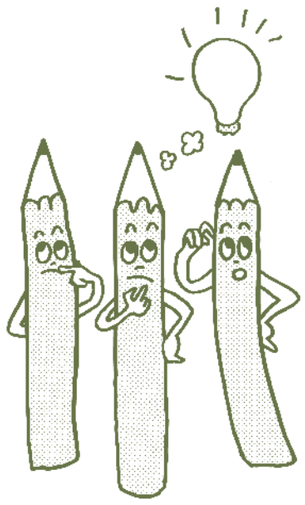


We Need You: Advice from Katherine Sundermann*

It is urgent for a diversity of people to be involved in the decisions that will shape our city for future generations. If planners and architects, like me, are to place people first in urban development, we, and the city, need you! But how *can* your voice be heard?

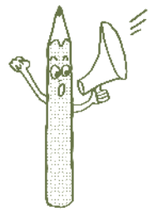
PARTICIPATE!

Whether it's naming your local park or deciding where to put that new bike lane, you can get involved by checking out the community engagement platform your local council uses, such as Participate Melbourne, for things you can do. When it comes to private development, head over to the Planning Alerts website for your area. You can object to the development, but it's also important to speak up for what you like and want to see more of.



DELIBERATE!

Keep your eyes open for initiatives like Future Melbourne 2026, in which a citizen jury of 55 people was formed by ballot and paid to deliberate over the future of the city. The City of Melbourne council took the results of this jury and embedded these goals into urban planning. You might already be benefiting from all those good ideas!



ADVOCATE!

Power to the people! Our elected officials, whether our local councillors or state or federal MPs, have one job – to represent us and make decisions on our behalf. How can we be heard most effectively? You can write or call your local MP directly; the organisation Climate for Change has some snappy email templates on their website to get you started. Truly, every voice counts. Here are a few phone numbers to start:
Premier of Victoria Daniel Andrews: (03) 9651 5000
Minister for Planning Richard Wynne: (03) 8683 0964

INVEST!

Invest if you can, whether it be with time or money. Perhaps the most satisfying way to make change in your neighbourhood is to get out there and do it. Volunteering in your local area, whether at the community garden or local beehive, is a great way to get that instant gratification! Community-owned and operated solar and wind farms, such as Hepburn Wind, have become an increasingly popular way for communities to invest directly in renewable energy.

Illustrations by ALICE OEHR

* This advice is part of a larger research into civic participation, which started with the online panel discussion Let the Citizens Shape the City: From 'Bounce-Back' to a 'New Normal' on Monday 16 November 2020, moderated by Katherine Sundermann, with Anna Kelderman, Brighid Sammon, Ross Harding and Tania Davidge. An essay by Sundermann which further investigates these themes will be published on *Assemble Papers* in February.

Money Tips from Financial Coach Sarah Matzouranis *

(Money – it doesn't have to be a gas!)

It's quite common to feel like a little cog in a big financial machine. Many people I coach dream of achieving their goals but struggle to make them happen. They start to feel helpless and overwhelmed, which can lead to them taking a back seat in their financial life. If that sounds like you, there are some simple tricks to feel more confident and put you in the driver's seat.

TRACK YOUR SPENDING

Comb through your bank statement to assess exactly how much you are spending each month. Understanding your *current* financial situation will help you work out where you can cut back and save to get to your *desired* financial situation.

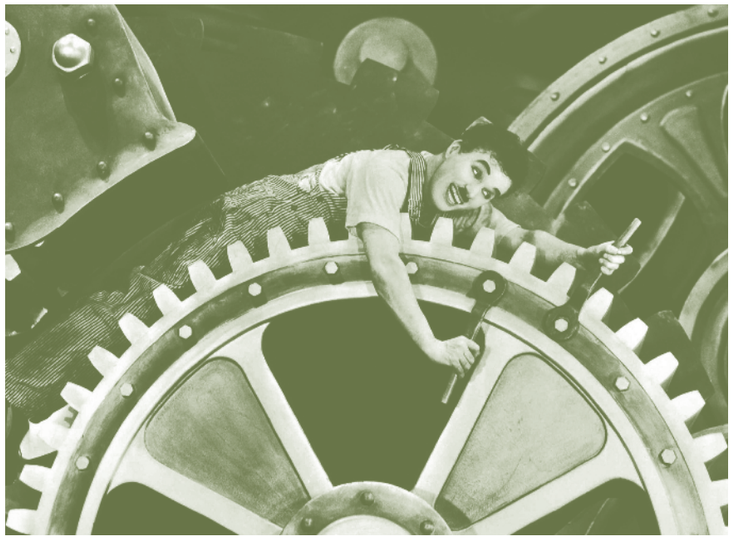
CASH IN HAND

Australians make 63 percent of all payments with a card, and four out of five in-person payments are contactless card payments. A lot of Aussies probably don't know where all their money is being spent. If that sounds like you, try taking out a set amount of cash for the week and once it's gone, it's gone.

SMASH THAT DEBT

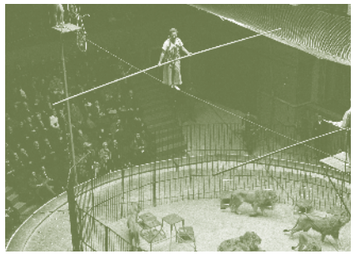
Reducing what you owe is essential for financial security. It's easy to ignore debt, but hitting it head-on is best. Always try to pay more than the minimum repayment and once the debt is paid off, put that ongoing repayment towards your savings instead.

(left to right) Source: Creative Commons.



Charlie Chaplin in *Modern Times*, (1936). Source: World History Archive / Alamy Stock Photo.

"I believe that good money management is a form of self-care. It's essential for your overall wellbeing." – Sarah Matzouranis



EMERGENCY BUFFER

Setting up an emergency fund will provide a financial safety net to cover any unexpected expenses or future changes to your income. If you can, set aside part of every pay into a separate account to build up your savings buffer and be prepared for life's surprises.

MULTIPLE MONEY POTS

Many banks will let you open transaction accounts for free. Set up accounts that match your money goals and transfer part of your pay into them. Set up automated payments so you won't need to rely on your willpower to make the payment each time you get paid.

GOAL BUDDY

Find someone who is keen to set their own money goals and share the journey with you. It will help you to stick to your goals and you will have someone to lean on in case you have any setbacks and need some encouragement. It's also fun to celebrate the wins together!

* Sarah Matzouranis is Assemble's Financial Coach. She has over 18 years' experience in banking, real estate and money management and, with a keen interest in behavioural psychology, has developed a holistic approach to coaching. Since November 2019, she has been working with Assemble's residents as they save for home ownership.

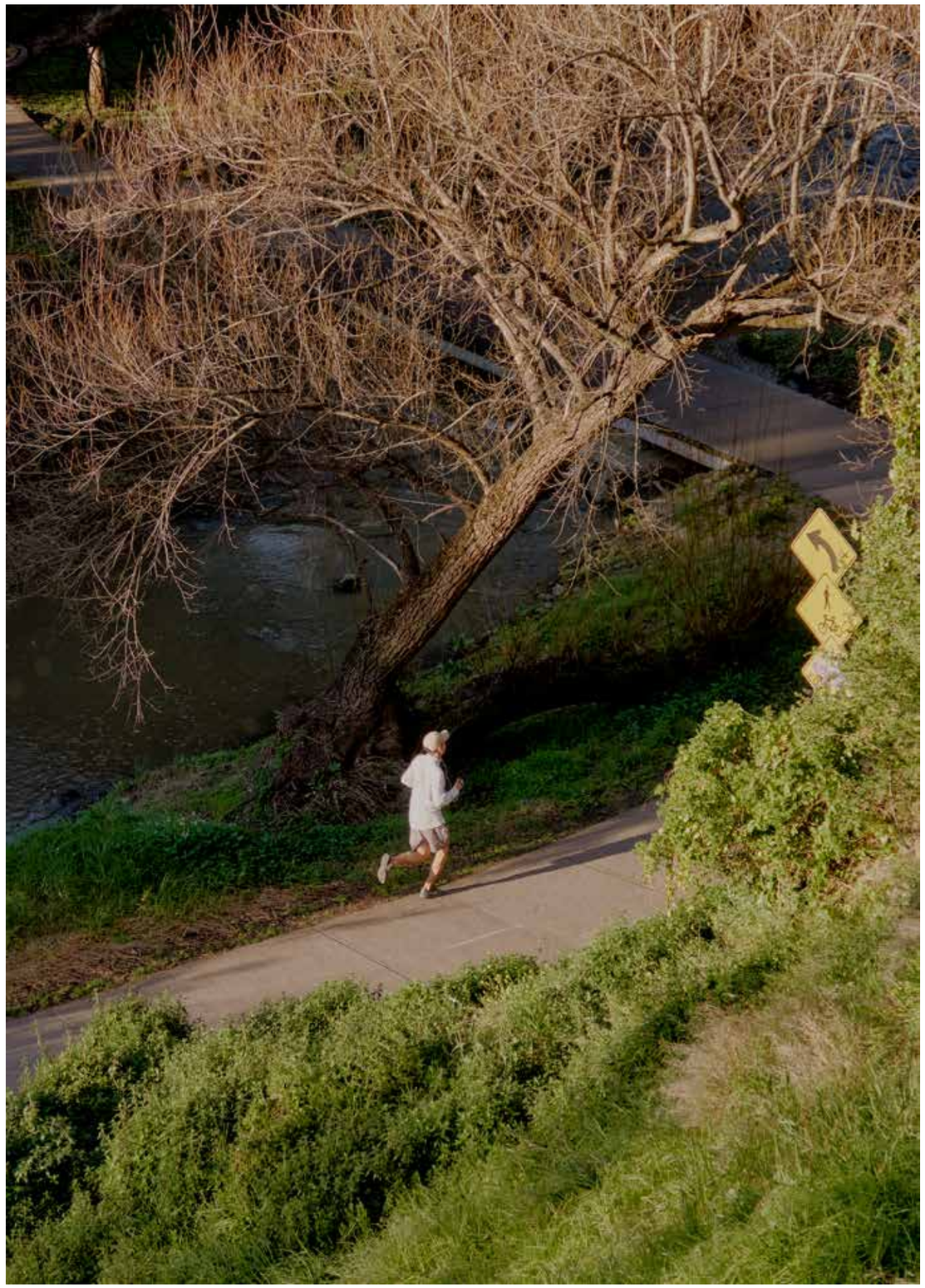
Slow Movements

For many of us during lockdown, our lives inside were whipped into a frenzy of screens, devices, disembodied voices and the internet. As the boundaries between work, entertainment and living collapsed, in some ways, public and private spaces inverted. In Melbourne's northern suburbs people sought peace in outside worlds. Photographer Ben Clement documented people's introspection and quietness; moments of time suspended in public space throughout August, September and October 2020.

Photography by BEN CLEMENT

Location: Near Bennett Street, Fitzroy North
Date: 10.08.20

Location: Main Yarra Trail, Abbotsford
Date: 10.10.20
Time: 1.03pm



Location: Main Yarra Trail, Clifton Hill
Date: 10.08.20

Location: Near Rae Street, Fitzroy North

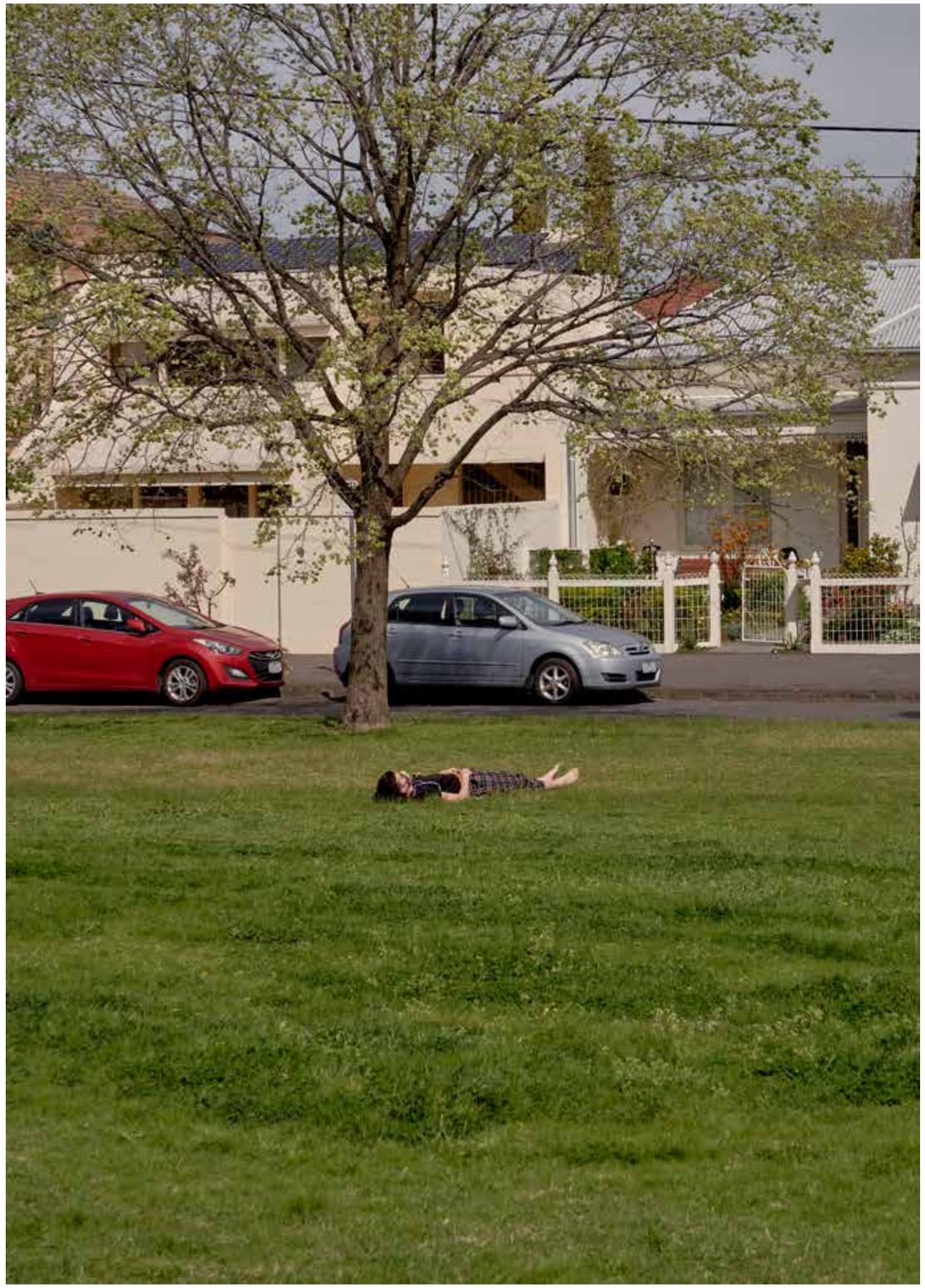
Date: 15.09.20

Location: George Knott Reserve, Clifton Hill

Date: 17.09.20

Location: St Georges Road, Fitzroy North

Date: 14.10.20



Location: Park Street, Brunswick East
Date: 16.09.20
Time: 1.27 pm

Ahakoa He Iti He Pounamu*

AKĀU is empowering a new generation of creators in Kaikohe, Aotearoa New Zealand.

***Although It May Be Small, It Is Precious**

Text by EMMA TELFER & SOPHIE RZEPECKY

Ana Heremaia in the AKĀU studio. Photo: Libby Robinson.

In the heart of the far north of Aotearoa New Zealand sits the small farming town of Kaikohe. Often referred to as the centre of local iwi (tribe) Ngāpuhi, whose hapū (smaller tribes) spread all the way to Cape Reingā, the area is steeped in Māori history. Rolling farmlands that surround the small town are punctured with impressive volcanic cones marked with pā fortifications, architecture built by Ngāpuhi to protect against incoming war parties. Their presence indicates the density of the Māori population 500 years ago and invokes a long tradition of design and making.

State Highway 12 now intersects the town centre, carrying travellers between the east and west coasts near the northern tip of the island. A period in the 1980s hit the already declining town's working population hard. 'Rogernomics', a term coined to describe the neoliberal economic policies followed by the then financial minister Roger Douglas, saw financial market deregulation, tariff elimination and the privatisation of public assets and services. Almost overnight, it put people in small rural towns around Aotearoa out of work, Kaikohe included. That and the discontinuation of a major railway link meant a slow decline for the town. Today the population is just over 4,000 people, 78 percent of whom identified themselves as Māori in the 2018 census.

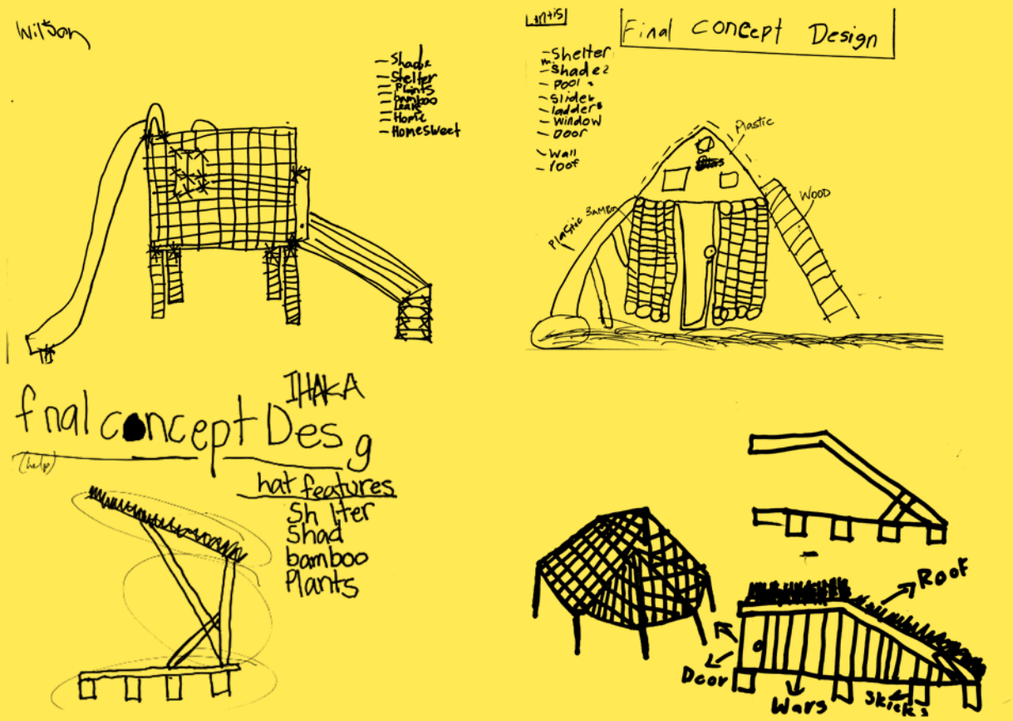
Now ĀKAU, a vital design practice, is working to empower the taitamariki (youth) of Kaikohe to have a say in the future of their town. Designer Ana Heremaia moved to Kaikohe in 2014 after a stint in London working in architecture practices. With her whakapapa (ancestry) present in the local area, she was searching for a way to connect to her roots and give back to the community through her design knowledge. Heremaia co-founded ĀKAU with architect Felicity Brenchley and designer Ruby Watson, both based in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland.

Initially, the trio thought they would be designing furniture and manufacturing it with skilled locals. They soon realised the design process itself held much more valuable engagement than manufacturing objects. Heremaia explains, "We now see ourselves at ĀKAU as a connection point between the community and the design profession." It is a practice in motion; their kaupapa (approach) is constantly growing and shifting. Nevertheless, the projects so far are intrinsically linked to the people and the place in which they are situated. Their name captures this well. In te reo Māori, the Māori language, ākau means the place where water and land meet. "Our name represents the energy created by bringing things together. We bring ideas together, we bring communities together, we bring people together," says Heremaia.

Social enterprise as an organisational model is yet to take off in Aotearoa, so ĀKAU doubles as a design studio and charitable trust. The studio works on architectural projects which aim to have a lasting impact within the community, while the charitable trust focuses on engaging community into the process of design and making through a Te Aō Māori (Māori world view) perspective. Brenchley explains, "Any profit we make in the studio goes to providing our design services to projects and people that wouldn't ordinarily be able to afford it or to support our taitamariki education programs."

ĀKAU's studio sits just off the main road, close to the centre of Kaikohe. It is a porous space, activated by people coming and going; a workshop with local school children one day, and designers working on ideas for public space the next. While the studio is a busy hub of activity, it can be hard to get projects off the ground. "People are innately creative here, but design as a profession has taken a while

(above and p.40–41) Designed and built by taitamariki (youth) in their final year at Kaikohe East Primary School, the te whare tākaro (fort) is based on the concept of hauora (health) and is their legacy to those that follow behind them. Photo: The Tree House Creative.



Design concepts for the fort by taitamariki (youth) at Kaikohe East Primary School.

ĀKAU facilitator Makareta Jahnke helps students build the whare tākaro (fort) together. Photo: Ana Heremaia.

“Our name represents the energy created by bringing things together. We bring ideas together, we bring communities together, we bring people together.” – Ana Heremaia

for people to understand,” explains Heremaia. “There has been consultation for decades by council and government for what people would like to see in their community, but with no deliverables,” she continues. “So, understandably, there is consultation fatigue, frustration and a lack of confidence.” In the beginning, learning through doing with small-scale projects was an important approach to increase design literacy and grow trust for ĀKAU.

Bling Bling Toi Marama, ĀKAU’s biggest temporary project to date, went ahead in July 2020 during Matariki (Māori New Year). Many locals had commented that Kaikohe didn’t have enough streetlights in their town, and that they didn’t feel safe at night. ĀKAU collaborated with Te Pū O Te Wheke Community Gallery and Arts Trust, holding workshops to bring the dark streets to life. Glowing art was created by more than 250 children to create the installation *Te Ana Marama (The Light Cave)*. Tangaroa, the god of the ocean, came to town with schools of bright fish floating around him. Installed in a disused site in the middle of the town, *Te Ana Marama* brought together more than 2,100 locals (over half of Kaikohe’s population) during the three-day festival.

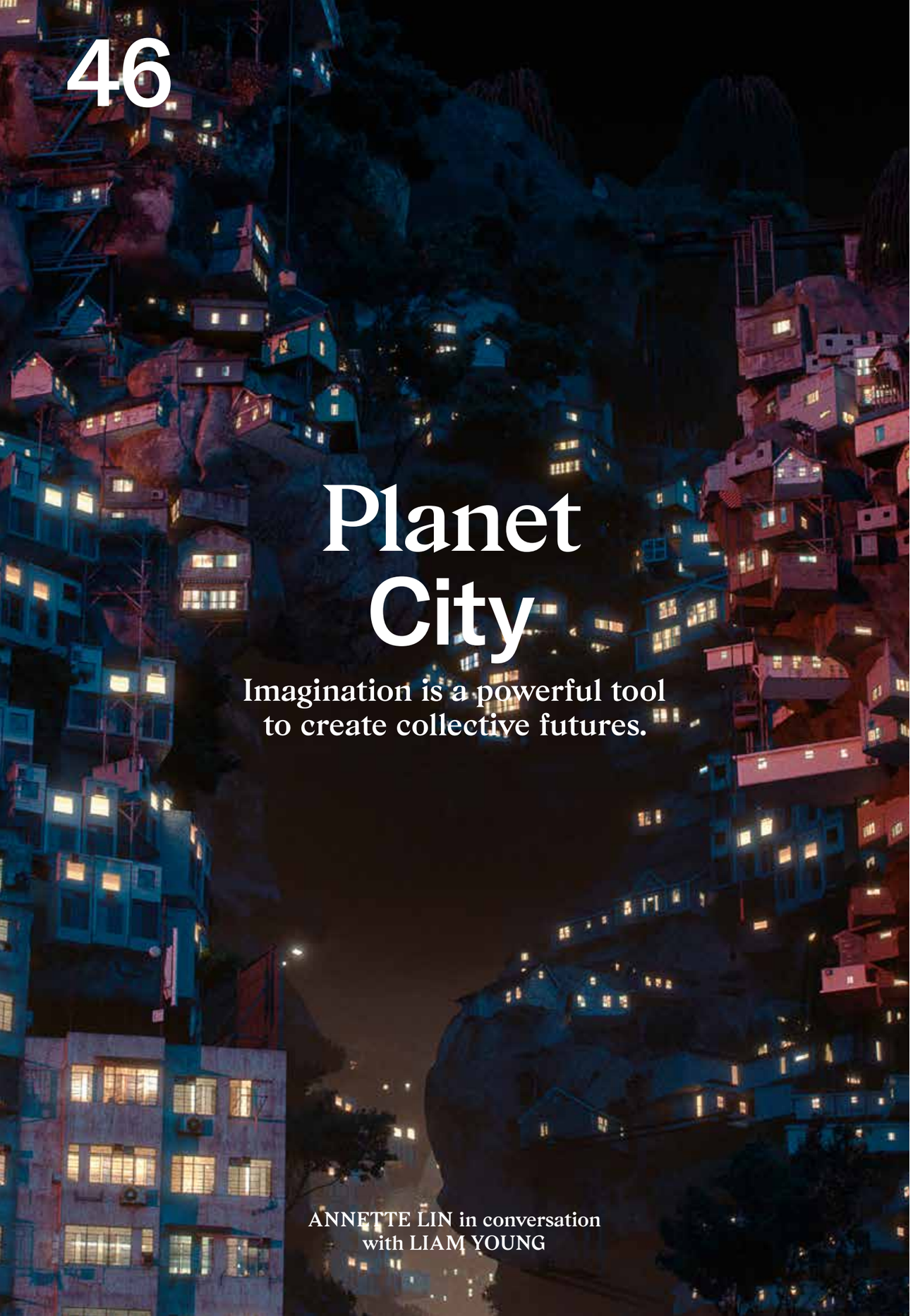
“We do these smaller interventions, which are slowly growing in scale and permanence, in the hope we will finally get some of the larger infrastructure projects over the line,” says Heremaia. ĀKAU advocates for the community to council and recently had plans approved to continue an ongoing project – a landscaped park in the centre of the town. The project started out with a basketball court, driven by the local Kaikohe community and kōtiro from Kaikohe Intermediate, with ĀKAU engaged to do the design. Working with a group of community members, ĀKAU designed a colourful niho taniwha (pattern of teeth-like triangular panels) graphic. It speaks of mahitahi (the power of working together) and leadership. With the basketball court now complete, the next step is to design a whānau area for families to sit under shade and cook and eat together, a learn-to-bike track for kids and an outdoor exercise zone with the development of the skate park and playground.

ĀKAU is supported by architects and urban and graphic designers from around Aotearoa, but finding designers locally can be a challenge. Through its ĀKAU Futures! program, ĀKAU works with local schools to inspire and support young people, some of whom who have started disengaging with their education. “Hopefully, through learning the design process they build confidence, learn more about themselves, and see that they are contributing to their community,” says Heremaia. The pathway for Māori into architecture and design is difficult, and Māori are hugely underrepresented within the profession. Through teaching design at a younger age, ĀKAU hopes to create a new generation of empowered Māori designers.

ĀKAU’s work extends far beyond the Western conceptions of the practice of architecture and design, taught in schools and universities, which in some cases creates distance between the built environment and the people who inhabit it. With every project, big or small, they weave together the needs and wants of their community with the act of making, Indigenising design by connecting to the land, bringing narratives passed down through thousands of years to the surface, and enabling mana (power) for the people of Kaikohe. ⬢

Taitamariki (youth) using the newly laid Kaikohe Basketball Court at the end of 2019. Photo: Aerial Vision.

Te Ana Marama (The Light Cave) as part of *Bling Bling Toi Marama* during Matariki, the Māori New Year in July 2020. Photo: The Tree House Creative.



Planet City

Imagination is a powerful tool to create collective futures.

ANNETTE LIN in conversation with LIAM YOUNG

“As of today, we have created a planetary scale urbanism where every square centimetre is touched by urban development. From that perspective, we are all citizens of one city already.” – Liam Young

When we think of our futures, tumbleweeds blowing across water-starved desert landscapes or rain-washed dystopian inner-city streetscapes spring to mind. It may feel like a climate apocalypse is all but inevitable, but are we too quick to default to hopelessness and dystopia? Australian-born speculative architect Liam Young’s *Planet City* – his most ambitious project to date – brings together thinkers in fields including ecology, emerging technology, economics, political science and Indigenous storytelling. Collectively, they speculate on how the entire human population could live together on just 0.02 percent of the world’s surface. The first phase in this long-term project is a large-scale film accompanied by a book of essays, commissioned by the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) for the NGV Triennial 2020, shown in Melbourne from 19 December 2020 until 18 April 2021.

Young’s work occupies this sticky space between reality and fiction. With his urban futures think tank Tomorrow’s Thoughts Today and the award-winning nomadic workshop Unknown Field Division, his research-based practice is a continuous interrogation of the present realities of cities to imagine future urbanisms. Annette Lin spoke with Young in June 2020, while he was in the midst of production in Los Angeles, about how storytelling and design can be used as tools to agitate our collective imagination and provoke us to realise that we have agency over our futures.

Annette Lin: What brought you from architecture, traditionally considered as the practice of developing buildings, to creating stories that contain speculative futures for our cities?

Liam Young:
Early on in my career, I realised that forces shaping the city existed well beyond the traditional remit of architects. Our cities used to be shaped by buildings, public spaces and large-scale fixed infrastructure – all the things that architects had the capacity to engineer. Now the forces that shape cities are planetary scale networks and invisible infrastructure, like mobile networks which we carry around in our pockets.

My work slowly started shifting away from more traditional, high-profile, iconic building-making activities and towards time-based systems, software and cultures of city making. I wanted to tell stories of cities and the ways they are shaped by forces that exist outside of the built spectrum.

AL: In light of that approach, can you tell me about your most recent project, *Planet City*?

LY: Generally, when we think of the future, we see neon lit streets, the rain of a collapsed climate, technology out of control, and big mega corporations running the city. What many don’t realise is that this is our present. *Planet City* imagines the necessary lifestyle and cultural changes needed in order to dig us out of this hole. It is a long-term research project involving many people from different fields to form an antidote to the narratives about the city produced by Hollywood, Silicon Valley and the international news cycle.

AL: Does the premise of *Planet City* come from the idea that if we could condense our footprint into a smaller physical space, we could let the earth heal from the ravages of human-made climate change?

LY: Yes. The prominent biologist Edward O Wilson developed a theory called Half-Earth, which proposes that human development should be contracted to 50 percent of the planet, and the other 50 percent should be returned to nature, to wilderness, and allow it to recover.

The architect in me considered a city on 50 percent of the earth and thought, “Boy, we can do much better than that.” So, the city we imagine is on 0.02 percent of the earth’s surface, not half of it. We researched the densest urban constructions on the planet. For example, Manila is currently the densest city in the world with 42,857 people per km^2, and a total of 1.78 million over 42.88 km^2. If all 7.594 billion of us could live together at that density, then the city would only have to be the size of Melbourne, Sydney or Los Angeles.

Through this provocation of a single city, we present different ways that we might be able to live more compactly. How could such a city be a self-sustaining organism? Could we think of it as a closed-loop system that doesn’t flush huge amounts of waste, out of sight and out of mind, into a distant landscape?

“There is no one ‘future’; there are *futures*. It’s that plurality that gives us a critical edge.” – Liam Young

(left, opposite and p.46) Liam Young, *Planet City*, 2020 (stills), colour digital video, sound, 15 min. Commissioned by the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Purchased with funds donated by Bagôt Gjergja Foundation, 2020. © Liam Young

AL: How does the work make the argument that we should live together like this?

LY: As of today, we have created a planetary scale urbanism where every square centimetre is touched by urban development. From that perspective, we are all citizens of one city already. This is a city dispersed and distributed and atomised across the entirety of the earth. With *Planet City*, we hope to address a new model of citizenship.

Planet City also has the capacity to act critically and not just as a fantasy, because it’s built entirely from technology that’s already here. Climate change is not a technological problem anymore – we have the know-how to mitigate further damage to the environment. What we’re missing is the political will and the cultural engagement required to sufficiently invest in these technologies.

All of the technological systems that power, run and manage *Planet City* are based on present-day technology, just re-purposed and scaled up. That’s not to say that this is a solution; that we all move to one city and everything’s going to be okay. But it’s a provocation to get us thinking differently.

AP: How did you work to base the fiction of *Planet City* in reality?

LY: What the world doesn’t need is another future city envisioned by the singular genius, a white-male expert. We didn’t want to have any preconceived notions of what the city would look like. So, at the start, we formed a council for *Planet City*, with some of the most celebrated international scientists and theorists from around the world who are developing the sustainable technologies we needed.

We talked to Kenneth Nealson, a NASA biotechnologist who is developing a closed-loop waste system for Mars habitation, about how those same systems might be used in a city like Los Angeles. We have been talking to Lucy Chinen and Sean Raspet, the founders of algae food startup Nonfood, about how we can replace our predominantly meat-based diet (the food system for which is not sustainable given its heavy dependence on energy, land and water resources) with proteins from algae. Authors such as Benjamin Bratton have contributed to the *Planet City* book with texts exploring urban scaled artificial intelligence (AI) and forms of algorithmic governance. Environmental technologies researcher Holly Jean Buck has written on the geoengineering and carbon capture processes that the city sets in motion. We are trying to be inclusive and to think about the narratives of the city that present an alternative to neo-colonial models of extraction and exploitation. Aboriginal Australian writer and director Ryan Griffen wrote a science-fiction story set in the city that speculates on how Indigenous communities might respond to this emerging context and we have interviewed experts such as professor of folklore and ethnomusicology Gregory Schrempp to discuss the cultures and mythology of this city.

I’m really just acting as a sort of curator of conversations that come together to form a city made through the collective intelligence of the council.

AL: There is a duality between science fiction, which is often dystopian, and the utopian future that technology companies out of Silicon Valley communicate. Where does this work sit in relation to that?

LY: Yes, the tech sector thrusts upon us solutionist relationships to technology, while Hollywood is really good at selling the dystopian narrative with cautionary tales.

It’s a critical role of the speculative architect, as I often call myself, to make and put into the world counter-narratives about technology. The work that we do isn’t explicitly dystopian or utopian. We try and sit between those views and say, “Hey, it’s actually much more complicated,” and through this we make space for the unintended and less well-trodden narratives. There is no one ‘future’; there are *future*s. It’s that plurality that gives us a critical edge.

We’re not in the business of prediction. The great cliché of science fiction is that it’s about the future, when it’s actually about the present. George Orwell’s novel *1984* is not about 1984, it’s about 1948, the year in which it was written, and our work shares that same sensibility. What we’re trying to do is present and prototype possibilities. The test of these speculations is not whether we get it right, but whether or not they instigate positive and interesting action in the present moment.

AL: Why is the first outcome of *Planet City* a film? What do fiction and storytelling through film offer that physical buildings do not?

LY: Emerging technologies are shaping cities faster than architects are able to respond to because building is a laboriously slow and financially complicit model. I call all these technologies – drones, driverless cars, Smart City technologies and algorithmic governance to name a few – ‘before culture technologies’ – they arrive faster than our ideological capacity to understand what they mean. Architecture is a discipline on fire. The traditional form of the architect is becoming increasingly niche, and increasingly a tool of a wealthy elite. We’re in the service of capital, in the service of luxury. Fiction is a critical operative strategy which allows us to prototype new cultural relationships to these technologies at the pace in which they are being released. There must be different ways that architects can operate with a new kind of critical urgency, and film and storytelling is just one of them.

Film is very accessible; we all have a literacy with film that we don’t have with urban master planning drawings or cross sections and architectural plans. There’s a real power in the way that you can encode architectural and urban ideas into film, almost like Trojan horses, and connect audiences with those ideas. We then hope through watching, audiences can feel more empowered to make decisions about their futures.

With the first film produced as part of the *Planet City* project, we co-opted the Hollywood mechanisms of visual effects, costume and science-fiction narrative. We worked with the costume designer Ane Crabtree, who designed the iconic red dresses from the TV adaptation of Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*, to tell a different kind of story. The film shows a moment of celebration within the city, a carnival. Instead of repeating the visions thrust upon us of dystopian cyberpunk cities out of control, we want to present futures where we see ourselves living very differently, but it’s positive and aspirational as opposed to cautionary and destructive.

The future fiction of an imaginary world is a new kind of site, and we’re using that as a way to prototype all these shared ideas about what our futures could look like. We hope through this, we may be all able to come to more of a shared consensus about how we want to live together. ⬢

Living Infrastructure

Community makes a house a home in Stavanger, Norway.

Text by ELLIET SPRING

The central courtyard, framed by external walkways, with the shared dining area illuminated. Photo: Sindre Ellingsen.

(opposite) Vindmøllebakken, in the eastern part of Stavanger, is located between small traditional timber houses and large industrial buildings. Photo: Jiri Havran.

“There is an invisible architecture, as important as the physical architecture, which allows this to work…”

– Siv Helene Stangeland

(opposite) Vindmøllebakken residents gather for their monthly dinner. The shared spaces calendar is alive with dinners, events and parties – all of which are self-organised and largely unstructured. Photo: Minna Soujoki.

(right) Resident musicians perform for their community in the atrium during the opening of the building in November 2019. Photo: Minna Soujoki.

Vindmøllebakken, a recently completed co-living housing project in Stavanger, Norway, sits on a small peninsula where the North Sea meets the meandering blue branches of the Boknafjord. Designed by Norwegian architecture firm Helen & Hard, and developed with Kruse Smith, Indigo Vekst and Gaia Trondheim, it is the first project to be completed under the teams’ co-living initiative, Gaining by Sharing.

Situated in the former industrial precinct, the building’s crisp white timber forms blend with the nearby quaint gable houses for which the town is famous. It’s hard to reconcile this image of the project with my memories of the place – when I lived in Stavanger, the site housed two old warehouses and a series of stacked ‘floating hotels’ discarded by the region’s oil industry and adapted as tiny apartments. The precinct was also the location of Helen & Hard’s office, and my daily destination when I worked for the firm’s wildly creative founders, Siv Helene Stangeland and Reinhard Kropf, from 2010 to 2012. Around that time, Helen & Hard had shifted from being classified as an emerging firm to one that was widely celebrated, with a series of award-winning cultural and civic projects. Yet, they were becoming increasingly disillusioned with the commercial housing sector.

“There is no social housing sector in Norway,” says Stangeland. “Housing is not answering the needs of society – not on the individual level, not on the site level – and the industry is definitely not thinking about sustainable solutions on a larger scale. As we see it, a dwelling is a very important building block for a sustainable society to work – that’s where personal health, the tribe and social sustainability are given a base to grow.” Stangeland and Kropf are deeply committed to the role architecture can play in improving community and environmental outcomes, so it’s unsurprising that they were compelled to make

“As we see it, a dwelling is a very important building block for a sustainable society to work – that’s where personal health, the tribe and social sustainability are given a base to grow.”

– Siv Helene Stangeland

changes. Eager to replace the lingering memories of 1970s hippie communes with a new form of co-living, they visited different community-based housing projects in Scandinavia, Germany and Austria to define a new Scandinavian model. “We had to make it contemporary,” says Stangeland.

They had been savvy investors 10 years earlier, purchasing the Vindmøllebakken site when land in Stavanger’s east was still cheap. The steeply sloping site, with its two existing factories, was surrounded by traditional timber houses that the municipality was keen to preserve. In addition, the area was still functioning as an industrial zone. Helen & Hard worked iteratively, exploring design options that responded carefully to the existing built environment. The small, historic timber houses captured their attention and inspired by these, they created block-like modules of the same dimensions. The blocks were carefully stacked to form the building, simultaneously reflecting the small scale of the neighbouring houses while creating a cohesive architectural language for the project.

As the design developed, Helen & Hard also developed the community engagement process now central to the Gaining by Sharing model, with a series of meetings and workshops as part of an ongoing process. The initial planning and designs were flexible to accommodate growing interest. “We ended up with 40 apartments in the co-living part of the building, up from 16 in our initial scheme, and only 14 self-contained dwellings around it. We could adapt the structures to increase the number of co-living dwellings,” Stangeland explains.

The 40 co-living units share 500 m^2 of communal space. “Every unit owns an equal part of the communal space, approximately 12 m^2 each. The model is based on ownership – you buy your apartment and a share of the common space,” Stangeland explains. “Every year a fee is paid to the cooperative, which is distributed to the groups that need to maintain things, buy things for the group and pay bills.” The shared spaces are at the heart of the project, physically and culturally. The calendar is alive with large dinners and events in the central space and parties in the cellar. These spaces are countered by more reflective, calming spaces, including an attic library and meditation space. A garden house on the roof allows for year-round gardening in the cool Norwegian climate. The surprise for the community has been the undefined ‘buffer space’ which separates private spaces from communal spaces – spontaneous activities and events pop up, from co-working to clothing repairs to indoor exercise.

Involvement in activities is voluntary, self-organised and largely unstructured – the only fixed gathering is a monthly dinner, which doubles as a meeting where decisions are made about the building, maintenance and Vindmøllebakken’s communal life. “There is an invisible architecture, as important as the physical architecture, which allows this to work,” she says. “This structure informs how we are organised, how we make decisions, how we communicate in a constructive way, how we solve conflicts. What we found was that we needed some rules in the first year, but in the second year, the rules are more in the background.”

The Vindmøllebakken community is deliberately diverse. There are people of all ages, from small children to retirees, from different backgrounds. There are artists, lawyers, engineers and healthcare workers. The diversity allows for residents to support each other in ways not possible in ordinary developments. “A differently abled man lives here,” says Stangeland. “He couldn’t have lived alone but living in this communal situation offers him enough support that he

“There is no-one on the top; it is bottom-up, self-organised.”

– Siv Helene Stangeland

(opposite, top) Vindmøllebakken residents catch up in the light-filled rooftop communal greenhouse, which allows for year-round gardening. Photo: Jiri Havran.

(opposite, bottom) Residents help each other, trading knowledge and tools in the shared workshop. Photo: Minna Soujoki.

(above) Knowledge is passed down through generations as residents share the common kitchen. Photo: Minna Soujoki.

can have his own apartment – and that is beautiful.” She continues, “We don’t do a lot of work to support him – the form of living offers enough support. We are coordinated. We have monthly meetings, and different groups that take care of different actions, activities or spaces. As he is always involved, we know if he is fine or not.”

So, have they created the Scandinavian model for co-living?

“We know there are co-living models in many countries and that how we arrange co-living is closely related to culture. Norwegians have a high level of confidence in each other: we dare to share without rules. We have a high degree of social trust, which makes things easier – we don’t worry our neighbour is going to steal something or cheat us! It might be seen as naïve, but it makes our co-living work.” Having spent two years living in Norway, I understand what she means. It’s hard to articulate – it’s more of a sense, something that is part of the Norwegian identity and culture. Stangeland continues, “There is no-one on the top; it is bottom-up, self-organised.”

The tendency towards self-organisation propelled the community through its lockdown experience during COVID-19. A group was established to take care of rules, considering how the community could come together in safe ways and adhere to restrictions. And, of course, with nearly everyone at home all the time, creativity thrived: impromptu concerts brightened long, dark days; evenings were spent enjoying each other’s company during dinners; and there were nightly singalongs. “While others were isolated, we were together, going strong.” ●

Small FRY in front of the Triple R poster wall at 221 Nicholson Street, Brunswick. Photo: Bri Hammond.

Mooncake

“A mixtape which floats through experimental, electronica and avant-garde from around Asia and beyond; a mix to soundtrack your vivid dreams and hazy daydreams.”

– Small FRY

We are teaming up with community radio station Triple R on Nicholson Street in the heart of Brunswick to bring you some beats and bleeps for this year’s series of Ears mixtapes. Whether we cruise the stations when driving in the car or tune in while cooking in the kitchen, radio occupies an important place in our hearts and minds. To kick off the year, we asked Small FRY (also known as Vivan Vo) to create us a mixtape riffing off her new radio spot *Mooncake*.

Mooncake celebrates sounds from Tokyo to Taipei, from Seoul to Saigon, and through the Australian–Asian diaspora. With a mix of K-R&B, Mandopop, J-pop and a sprinkle of dreampop and electronica, Small FRY leans heavily into pop and R&B styles. The mix features some of her current favourites, including The Analog Girl, mobilegirl and Origami Girl. Tune in to the mixtape on Assemble Papers online, and to read an interview with Small FRY.

Community radio station Triple R has been live for more than 40 years. The diversity of shows and presenters reflects the values at the heart of Triple R – for the people, by the people. Independent and non-profit, the station relies on sponsorship and listener subscriptions to stay on the air. Listen to *Mooncake* every Wednesday night from midnight to 2am on 102.7FM and support Triple R.

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SMALL FRY (also know as Vivan Vo) is an artist manager and DJ. She is the presenter of *Mooncake* on Triple R 102.7FM, a weekly two-hour program celebrating the diverse sounds from Asia and Asian–Australian artists.

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Thank you

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Distribution

Find the issue for free at cafes around Melbourne, including Assemble bulk-buying partner Everyday Coffee and All Are Welcome bakeries. Otherwise, order a copy from our webshop and pay only the postage costs. If you would like to distribute *Assemble Papers* or can't find a copy, please email editorial@assemblepapers.com.au

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Assemble Papers is published by Assemble, a housing development and community management business on a mission to make thoughtfully designed, sustainable homes more accessible to more people. With a deep respect for people and place, we create communities that embrace diversity, reflect local culture and nurture a stronger sense of ownership and belonging. The views expressed in *Assemble Papers* are not necessarily that of the editors or publishers.

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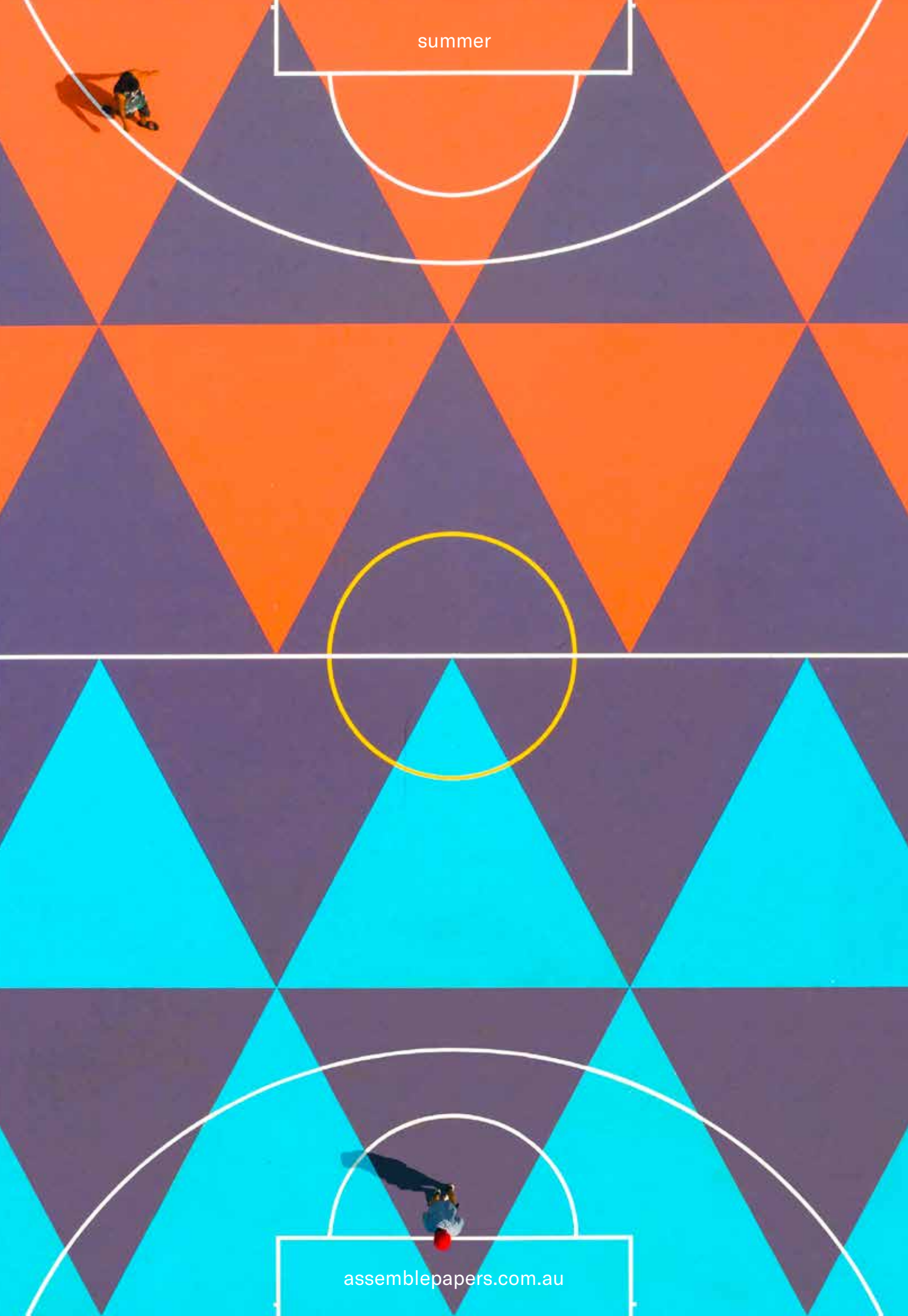
(opposite) Youth protesting on the corner of Melbourne's Swanston Street and Collins Street in the 1980s, commissioned for Futurway Editorials. Photo: Maggie Diaz. Source: State Library Victoria.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