



VICTORIA UNIVERSITY
MELBOURNE AUSTRALIA

Ecoso exchange newsletter 2/7; Dec. 1989

This is the Published version of the following publication

UNSPECIFIED (1989) Ecoso exchange newsletter 2/7; Dec. 1989. Ecoso exchange newsletter, 2 (7). pp. 1-14.

The publisher's official version can be found at

Note that access to this version may require subscription.

Downloaded from VU Research Repository <https://vuir.vu.edu.au/16271/>

ECOSO EXCHANGE NEWSLETTER

No 2/7, Dec. 1989

ISSN 1033 9205

This Issue

This Ecoso is mainly devoted to ideas on women and urban issues in the hope of strengthening the links between the community movements and the eco-feminist movements.

Contents

Page	1	"Women and Environments"
	2	Preparing a Women's Charter
	2	Women and Housing..... Llewellyn Johns
	5	Women and Urban issues.....Ruth Crow
	11	Anti-patriarchy and Socialist Principles
	11	Women in Suburbia.....Barbara Weimar
	14	"Media Information Australia" - A Mine of Ideas ! Wrap-ups on Wrapper (don't throw wrapper away, yet !)

"Women and Environments"

"Women and Environments" is a periodical produced at the Centre for Urban and Community Studies, 455 Spadina Ave., Toronto, Ontario M 5S2GB. The Spring/Summer 1989 edition has a number of articles on urban issues from several different countries.

The challenging ideas in "Women and Environments" can be judged by this selection of quotes (note, underlining for emphasis is by Ecoso) :-

"Two thirds of the jobs lost as a result of privatisation of state services have been women's jobs." Linda Peake, writing from London, (Eng.)

"There are several aspects to planning for women's safety that make it different from other planning knowledge." Josephien van Wyk, Amsterdam.

"Suburban residential areas restrict women to a life of mother and wife. The world of power, paid labour, and culture is difficult to reach. Moreover, housekeeping is often burdensome as a result of the large distances to schools, services and shops..... The arrangement of these residential areas and the problems encountered are especially severe for women who want to change their situation." Dolores Hayden, New York, USA.

"Defining rooms as the 'dining' room and the 'master' bedrooms should be avoided in favour of rooms without specific function and pre-set labels." Mieke Verloo, Nijmegen, Netherlands.

"These social housing forms (co-operatives and mutual housing associations) provide opportunity, security of tenure, and independence for tenants in addition to controlling costs and offering some choices for families rather than capital gains. It is these important components, the linking of the social meaning of housing to the physical form, that brings about a sense of community and shared responsibility for a development's success." but "The prospect for low income development under Bush appear dim at this time." Edwyna Fong, Los Angeles, United States.

In Victoria during the winter months a number of women's organisations planned a Women's Summit. They started out by listing the "fragments" and decided to prepare a Women's Charter to help rebuild the links between the various groups.

The Victorian Women's Summit was held in October. The Summit recognised the pioneering work of Jessie Street and the Women's Charter movement of the 1940s. Parts of the 1943 Women's Charter document were available to participants but there was no harking back. Women are discussing issues differently today. For example in 1989 women are now concerned about urban planning, the environment, the media, control and other subjects which were not on the women's agenda, as such, in 1943.

To further the Women's Charter campaign, Ecoso reprints two contributions to the Summit one by Llewellyn Johns and one by Ruth Crow.

The policy proposal for housing in the original Women's Charter document (1943) dealt in some detail with equity and economics of housing but did not include women's need for safety nor indicate concern for suitability of housing for women, and no mention is made of the "meaning of housing to women"...so now read on and consider what Llewellyn so thoughtfully and passionately presented to a group of women in 1989.

Women and Housing

(Notes from a talk by Llewellyn Johns
at the Melbourne Women's Summit, 21st October 1989)

Housing is not just another dimension of women's disadvantage. Women have a special relationship to their dwellings.

As Sophie Watson, (author of "Accommodating Inequality") puts it :-

"If work is the warp, home is the weft, intricately threaded together, to give women's lives special texture and colour. Women's identity as much as men's is bound up with work; and often, still, home is the site for much of women's work."

Women of course are not a homogeneous group. Some women - on social security benefits, disabled women, young women, black women - experience the issues of affordability, safety, and suitability more acutely than others. But the housing disadvantage of women in general is best seen when they are single.

By "single" I do not necessarily mean living alone, or without a relationship with someone else. What I do mean by "single" is bearing sole or major responsibility for sheltering oneself and dependent others, usually children.

In Australia women are single often for great blocks of their lives between one long term partnership and the next, in old age and sadly, at very young ages.

The 1986 census showed that more than 150,000 women live alone usually in separate houses. Most of these women are concentrated in the 60 and over age groups. The census also showed that today more than 85% of single parents are women.

There are three big issues which seem important to many women: affordability, safety and suitability.

Affordability of Housing for Women. It is known to us all that :-

- * In paid employment, women, on the average, receive lower incomes.
- * Many more women than men receive social security payments (37% compared with 14%).
- * Women have less access to full-time paid employment - part-time compared with full time - 26% of women in the labour force worked less than 24 hours a week compared with 5% of men in 1986.
- * Women have more responsibility for housework and domestic child care - women are overwhelmingly likely to be bearing the major costs of child rearing after divorce - in the property settlement women are often unable to get a fair share.

For these economic reasons women are disproportionately represented amongst those in housing need, amongst public housing tenants and amongst those privately renting a place to live rather than owner occupying.

Another factor related to women being disadvantaged is housing costs. There has been a great increase in rents, especially on the private rental market and the vacancy rate is very low. Landlords are choosy and for poorer people rental accommodation may be less well maintained.

Home ownership gets harder for the majority of Australians all the time; and especially so for women. In 1987/88 only 21% of the total of the Victorian Ministry of Housing's Home Purchase budget was allocated to women.

There are long waiting lists for public housing and the demands for priority allocations are increasing. There are many rent arrears and evictions even when rentals are controlled at 20% of income.

Housing and Safety for Women. Home is not very safe for many women :-

- * As a society we have been forced to acknowledge the very widespread nature of domestic violence and child abuse.
- * In 1987 the Women's Referral Refuge Service had requests to place 3200 women and 4000 children but could only place 4/5 of these requests.
- * Single women living alone or with dependent children may experience harrassment from neighbours, landlords and others.

For these reasons women experience housing crisis or homelessness - homelessness not being on the streets but the concealed homelessness of being forced to stay in unsafe places, forced to share with relatives in unsatisfactory conditions, forced to live daily with insecurity of shelter.

Suitability of Housing for Women. Living spaces are often physically unsuitable for women's needs and the children they care for :-

- * Dwellings are not designed with the complexity of women's work in mind. The Department of Economic Industrial Research figures for 1986 show that 8% of architects are female, 4.5% of town planners and 2% of building professionals and engineers are female.

- * Most dwellings don't provide occupational safety and physical security.
- * Most dwellings are still built for the nuclear family.
- * Relationships between individual dwelling space, immediate surroundings and the neighbourhood make it difficult for many women because of geographical isolation and inadequate facilities.

The Meaning of Housing... Dreaming of Our Own Lives

The Victorian Ministry of Housing (MoH) regards housing as "the essential commodity" or as a "general stock". Bureaucrats dealing with living places in these terms are preoccupied by the "movements" of the housing stock. For example the MoH has promised the delivery of 15,000 public rental units and reports that there are 9000 movements through the Ministry's housing stock each year.

Housing is not regarded as a fundamental need and right but a commodity purchased for profit rather than for use. These two meanings are inconsistent.

But more than that - housing is not just a thing or abstract principle but a material process, part of living and living intimately with family and friends.

Housing is deeply connected with what it means to be alive, to work, to build safe, comfortable shelters for ourselves and our kind. Because housing is about these things I like to think it is also about dreaming of our city, our place as we'd like it to be.

Whatever our means, sometimes in the smallest ways, we shape spaces in accordance with our notions of intimacy and beauty, fittingness and comfort.

Women's Charter on Housing

- * We need a reconceptualisation of housing, a redirection of the housing debate, because the way we think of things determines, in part, how we act and what we expect.
- * We can't leave it to men to redirect this debate. We women must move it away from coldly technical, economic notions.
- * Always contest the idea of housing as a commodity - with all that it implies.
- * Develop the idea - now current - of supportive housing. Housing as human ecology - housing embedded in and interacting with wider structures, meeting the emotional, social and physical needs of people, supporting other living things and our inanimate partners - water, air and the soil - in what increasingly has to be seen as a whole earth enterprise.

(Llewellyn Johns is currently working with Women in Supportive Housing ...WISH...conducting community consultations on housing with women throughout Victoria. The consultation aims at avoiding defining the issues beforehand and is encouraging women to speak about their own housing experiences. For more information 03. 416.1625.)

For more information on Women's Charter phone 03. 654.7409. Most Documents mentioned in Ecoso are available from D.A.T.E. 03. 328.2345

Women and Urban Planning
"The Built Environment a Major Source of Discrimination"

A Talk by Ruth Crow at the Women's Summit
October 1989

"Australian women have been slow to recognise sexism within our cities, the built environment — as a major source of discrimination against women, severely restricting women's access to opportunity, resources and power; and of particular importance, employment.

"Sexism pervades all aspects of our built environment from the spatial layout of our cities to the male dominated planning process itself and as such, is a serious barrier to women's achievement and equality.

"Urban planning cuts across all these areas of deprivation, and it is increasingly obvious that urban issues are closely related to women's well being and questions of urban policy, land use, housing, transportation are being newly defined as women's issues and the legitimate focus of the women's movement." (from a report by Mercia Ferrier on "Sexism in Cities" at the Women and Labour Conference, 1979...footnote 1).

We cannot go on as we are today !

- * Living in our sprawling suburbs where inadequate public transport forces most people to be car dependentfootnote 2.
- * Increasing the cost of living through the unavoidable expenses of having to be a car owner, which especially affects low income people in outer suburbs where there is cheaper housing but very inadequate public transport....footnote 3.
- * Extravagantly using non-renewable energy resources and contributing to pollution and to the greenhouse effect.....footnote 4.
- * Trapping women, children and youth in suburbs where community life is declining and women bear the increasing burden of the "invisible housework" (including chauffeuring licence-less members of the family) needed to provide compensations for the private personal life centred on the home and the private car.....footnote 5.
- * Disregarding the fact that our relatively high standard of living is at the expense of the low standard of living of the vast majority of people in the world.....footnote 6.
- * Allowing office towers to dominate our city centre and inner areas with the subsequent reduction of the residential and other uses which are crucial for the vitality of the Central Activities District.....footnote 7
- * Tolerating a reduction in Government support for essential services such as public transport, housing, health, children's services, community care and other human services, and the escalation of the "for profit" services as substitutes.....footnote 8.

(Footnotes are on page 9 of this Ecoso Newsletter)

- * *Passively accepting the continuation of large service institutions (such as hospitals spending a disproportionate amount of money on high technology) which are reducing the ability of people to have control over their own lives... footnote 9.*
- * *Permitting planning decisions to favour the transnational corporations and other big developers, so that in effect our urban areas are planned to ensure maximum profit rather than for human use... footnote 10.*

There is a Better Way !

"The way out of this impasse is not simply more mobility and more consumer goods for the deprived sections of the population, but a new society, differently organised, in which a condition of self-management of production and convivial community arrangements for leisure-time pursuits replace the system that has given rise to our present malaise.

"The future must be a planned one. Humans cannot leave their fate to the automatic all-pervading market place whose money fetish messages now penetrate via T.V. to our living rooms, educating every one, even the school children of tenderest age, with demands which equate life with "fun" and fun with the acquisition of the latest fashion." (From a report by Maurie Crow to the 1976 Conference of the Sociological Association of Australia and New Zealand.

A Women's Charter on Urban Issues could include the following :-

- * *Halt the trend of the rapidly increasing use of energy per head of population through the clustering of services and shopping facilities and connecting these hubs with efficient public transport... footnote 11.*
- * *Consolidate urban growth rather than outward sprawl; redevelop land which is now used for obsolete purposes and provide a greater variety of types of housing (including a high proportion of public housing) to meet the varied needs of the population... footnote 12.*
- * *Reduce the segregation, stratification and institutionalisation of society through the involvement of the users of services and facilities in the planning and management of them... footnote 13.*
- * *Support increased funding (from Federal and State Governments) for human services administered by Municipal Councils but planned and managed by community organisations... footnote 14.*
- * *Creatively help to initiate new types of human services to meet new types of social problems ensuring that the potential users of such services are effectively empowered by their involvement in this process... footnote 15.*
- * *Encourage women to stand for election to all tiers of government, but in particular at local government level... footnote 16.*

- * Counter-balance the male domination in the main planning professions (engineering and town planning) by campaigning for planning to be carried out by multi-disciplinary teams, committed to social and economic planning as well as physical planning... footnote 17.
- * Encourage changes in the training courses for planners so that such course are more relevant to women... footnote 18.
- * Continually consider how to link the trade union movement and the urban action movement, particularly on social issues... footnote 19.
- * Whenever opportunities arise (or better still, create opportunities) to prepare alternative plans for neighbourhoods or districts and by so doing give the community opportunities of glimpsing what is possible in the future... footnote 20.

Don't Be Daunted !

Action on urban planning is not some new mystifying campaign remote from everyday life. It is about action on public transport, housing, hazardous chemicals, support for Community Health Centres and District Health Councils, Community Child Care and Neighbourhood Houses; involvement in lobbying, election campaigns and so on.

Many women are already involved in these types of actions, but because women tend to under-estimate their significance, not all realise that in practice they could have a considerable influence on urban planning.

A greater community consciousness about the importance of grassroots, everyday campaigns is needed.

One way of strengthening the effectiveness of these movements is to continually find ways of linking them together. These combined efforts may be for a very short time over a particular issue, but others may be more permanent.

Women's organisations already have very enriching experiences in developing coalitions. The caring and sharing, which are so basic to the way women organise together, is a resource which can help the urban movements to develop quite new forms of organisation to meet the historic challenges facing human society today.

Above all else, we need a vision of what sort of future we can build together; a practical vision which starts from here and now, proposes some realistic improvements that can be achieved in the not too distant future and in addition gives a glimpse of the possibilities of a more radical alternative urban life style which will take considerably longer to reach.

Building on the Past

If we read through the Women's Charter Documents of the 1940s, we do not find any section on urban issues. But that is not to say that women were not active on what today we categorise as urban planning.

Similarly if we read the past publications of such organisations as the Union of Australian Women we can find plenty of evidence of campaigns on safe and cheap public transport, community health centres, child care, clean air and a great deal of encouragement for women to enter into the political arena through election to governments.

Thus, the women's movement has a rich heritage of experience of campaigns around quality of life issues all of which are really campaigns around urban issues.

In addition if we look at the urban action movements we will find that women have and do carry out the main day to day functions of keeping such groups together. It is timely to recognise these efforts.

A Tribute to the Past

In reviving ideas about the Women's Charter it is timely to pay a tribute to the women, in the past, who campaigned not only to defend living standards but who often, as a natural process, combined these campaigns with popularising ideas about humanising the world in which they were living.

Although we are living in quite different times, we face the same problem of working out the basic principles of how to be engaged in immediate action around particular issues and at the same time, envisage a better future for all. There is no ready made formula for this.

Postscript :- Face to Face With Immensity

There are immense urban issues facing us right now.....revived freeway plans, city towers, the Docklands (Olympic Village) Development, the Bayside and South Bank plans, redevelopment of large suburban areas in Richmond, Essendon, Prahran, Kew and Diamond Valley, new green acres housing developments continuing the suburban sprawl and many others.

There are plans for a Very-Fast-Train (VFT) which will reduce travel time to Sydney to a few hours.

Discussions are being held about where to locate a Multi-Functional-Polis (MFP) which would be a self contained high-tech.-city.

It is reported that "Japan is awash with money to invest in the VFT and the MFT"... footnote 21.

Expensive, prestigious gatherings are held where some urban issues are discussed, for example the Greenhouse Conference, the Creative City Seminar, the Workshop on the Information City. Next year there will be a Conference of World Metropolises held in Melbourne.

Looked at from the perspective of these mega-projects and mega-gatherings the urban issues may seem too big to tackle. But so were (and are) the peace issues.

Despite the immensity of the peace issues, for generations, people have found that they can take effective peace action.

Our own experiences in the women's movement and the peace movement can help us to find ways of tackling local urban issues which challenge the market-place urban policies of our society.

From this experience we know that it is in the neighbourhoods that women are most likely to be able to participate in decision making and to become fruitfully involved in the world outside their own households.

Thus, we need to popularise a "below" up perspective rather than a "top down" perspective on urban issues. This is in contrast to bureauocratically orthodox approaches to planning.

Ecoso Exchange Newsletter is a bi-monthly publication which provides information on urban issues from "below up". (\$10.00 for 8 issues)

D.A.T.E. (Documents Available Through Ecoso) is a resource available to Ecoso subscribers. Documents on urban issues collected by Ruth and Maurie Crow are available for browsing, borrowing and buying through DATE.

For more information phone Ruth Crow (03. 328.2345)

The Built Environment - A Major Source of Discrimination

Footnotes

1. Mercia Ferrier lives in Brisbane. For some years she contributed a column on women and planning in the Journal of the Royal Australian Planning Institute. She used the pen name "Marion" in honour of Marion Burley Griffin whose contribution to planning Canberra has been overlooked.

2. Australia is the most suburbanised country in the world, with 80 % of our population living in cities. The book "Seeds for Change" (published by the Conservation Council of Victoria, 1978) proposed a plan for clustering services and commercial facilities in urban hubs and connecting these hubs with effective public transport, lessening dependence on cars.

3. In the Nunawading Energy Study (published by the Conservation Council of Victoria, 1982) the "cluster and connect" model was applied to the sprawling suburb of Nunawading.

The report states that "people would live better, use 1/3 of the oil, otherwise needed and save the average household \$35.00 a week".

4. In the past we have taken energy for granted. It is now recognised that our unrenovable resources are limited and that in addition the burning of energy contributes to the destruction of the ozone layer. (see "Seeds for Change" above).

5. Writing about the tendency towards age stratification in the suburbs K. H. Schaeffer writes in "Access for All" :-

"While the absence of the aged cheats the child of exposure to how other people live, the absence of young adults makes the neighbourhood teenagers unusually cocksure of themselves. These teens see only the adults to whom they do not relate and youngsters over whom they can lord. If young adults are present, a natural pecking order develops. Here for each child or teenager there is someone a bit older and more mature, a natural big brother or sister.

"The age-segregated neighbourhoods - which become a feasible urban form only when the automobile is commonplace - is a natural breeding ground for insecurity and alienation. The harrassed child turns to rebellion, drugs, and delinquency and the harrassed parents to alcoholism and divorce."

6. Years ago Ivan Illich wrote in "Celebration of Awareness" :-

"During the late sixties it has become evident that less than 10 % of the human race consumes more than 50 % of the world's resources and produces 90 % of the world's pollution". The situation is very similar today and we need to remember that we are part of the 10 %.

7. The Central Activities District of Melbourne has the potential of being a compact city of variety served by public transport. For twenty years there have been vigorous campaigns to curtail the sprawl from the C.A.D. into the city's fringe and the encouragement of residential uses.

The Melbourne City Council Strategy plan, which supports such proposals has been continuously delayed through the influence of property developers who want office towers with car parks in and near the C.A.D.

Note, the initials C.A.D. denotes "Central Activities District". Most metropolises use the letters C.B.D denoting Central Business District.

The change in name is the result of community requests. It reflects the human activities that could take place there.

8. Private car transport, private nursing homes, commercial child minding centres are some examples. We all know plenty of others.

9. An interesting example of this was described in an article in the "Age Saturday Extra", 14.10. 89. (page 7) about a recent study that suggests that doctors's indiscriminate use of technology is not only wasting money but can harm patients.

10. "The Olympic Games offered developers opportunities beyond their wildest dreams " the director of Becton Corporation, Mr Max Beck, is reported as saying in the Age on June 22 (page 10).

11. See "Seeds for Change" in footnote 2.

12. Despite its policy for urban consolidation the Victorian Government is releasing green-acre land and the freeway building is encouraging such outward sprawl.

13. For example through the district Health Council, Health Issues Centre, and the numerous self-help groups.

14. Human services, such as Home and Community Services (HAC) are currently being reduced. As well as defensive actions we need to be campaigning for more such services, especially to complement the deinstitutionalisation programs.

15. Throughout history women have been the initiators of services, for example the infant welfare centres in the 1920s, preschool education in the 1940s, community child care in the 1970s etc. Today new types of locally based services are needed to combat AIDS, drug abuse, domestic violence and other such social problems.

16. There has been a considerable increase in the number of women elected to local government. The responsibilities of local government are widening from gutters, garbage and gardens to include a wide variety of human services. In some Victorian Municipalities less than half the revenue is from rates on property, the rest is mainly from Federal or State Government grants for human services.

17. The traditional planning responsibilities have been for land use and traffic with social services tacked on as an extra, and located anywhere.

The changes taking place in local government (see footnote 16) are not yet fully reflected in most municipal planning departments.

Municipal Strategy Plans prepared with community participation can help reverse trend planning (which is mainly physical planning) and ensure human services are an integral part of the official plans. Social planners, a high proportion of whom are women, would more likely be in such planning teams; similarly with other government plans.

18. Traffic and land-use planning as the end result of professional training are not an inspiring future for women. Encouragement needs to be given to planning courses which are providing social and environmental studies (progressive changes are taking place in some courses).

19. There are many areas of agreement between trade unions and community groups. There are also many areas of disagreement. It is imperative to find creative new ways of campaigning together.

20. There is an increasing number of example of this. Some alternative plans are available for reference through DATE (see above).

21. An article in the 1988 December Australian Municipal stated :-

"If we look at the calibre of the hard-headed financially successful joint venturers (interested in the FVT); there is BHP our biggest enterprise, Elders IXL our second biggest company, TNT, which with Murdoch's News Limited owns Ansett and a major Japanese development and construction company.

"Japan is awash with investment capital available for less interest than the Australian investor demands."

An Anti-patriarchal Reformulation of Socialist Principles
The Value Judgements in "Make Melbourne Marvellous"

"Make Melbourne Marvellous" is the title of a book published by the Victorian Branch of the Communist Party of Australia in 1985.

The document presents a vision of Melbourne in the year 2000. The opening chapter states :-

"The sort of values suitable for a Socialist Australia should retain the well known principles of abolishing exploitation and alienation, but should be reformulated, it is suggested, to reflect also positive values that have emerged from new socialist movements, and more recent experiences of socialists."

Then there is a reformulation of the slogan "From each according to ability - to each according to need" which recognises that development of new abilities to serve society, often associated with new technology and new social conditions, gives rise to new needs, and changing needs in turn, call forth and provide conditions for changing abilities.

Thus "Make Melbourne Marvellous" is dealing with how to supplement the long established socialist values of sufficiency and equity with values which are anti-patriarchal, ecology respecting and committed to self-reliance and grass-roots democracy based on collectives.

What Next for Women in Suburbia ?

"What Next ?" This was the name of a seminar on urban issues which was held last year as a memorial to Maurie Crow. (Footnote)

Maurie was one of the members of the collective which wrote "Make Melbourne Marvellous" and at this seminar each of the four discussion facilitators introduced their contributions by quoting one of the "socialist values" described in "Make Melbourne Marvellous".

Transcription of Talk by Barbara Weimar. Barbara Weimar, a young architect, spoke on Maurie's ideas about women and suburbia. Here is a transcription of her talk.

One of the socialist values which appears at the front of "Marvellous Melbourne", which Maurie helped to write, states :-

"The complete eradication of all forms of male domination over female, on the job or in the home, to release women to the full range of areas in which their abilities are exercised."

This socialist value is a very important one, and I think Maurie, himself, kept this in mind in all areas of work and in his personal life.

I'm sure, that for Maurie, the personal was political. For those of us involved in the women's movement that is a very important aspect. One of the reasons he had such a good understanding of the needs of women is that he did believe that the personal is political.

In Maurie's critique of the existing structure of our cities and in his ideas for a socialist alternative he saw the oppression of women as being central. He stressed over and over again, in the writings that I've read of his, the need to understand how women were affected by the structure of society in general, and, how women in particular, were affected by the structure of the city.

Public and Private Worlds of Suburbia

Maurie believed that suburbia and the affect of suburbanisation on women was one of the major ills created by the structure of our cities.

He pointed out that suburbanisation created a city which was divided into the public and private worlds; that women and children were the people who inhabited the private realm of the suburbs; and that the suburbs are places that are separate from the public areas of leisure, shops, work and other services.

He warned that the domination of the car and the separation of women and children in the suburbs is a social and ecological disaster.

In our car dependant suburbs the family turns in on itself. The private space of the car becomes an extension of the private space of the home. Social life becomes very private social life. It becomes impossible to visit friends and family if you don't have a car available. Public transport doesn't really exist when you live in the outer suburbs. The shops, government services and leisure centres consequently are not easily accessible. The domination of the car to service the sprawling suburbs is not only an ecological extravagance in terms of roads, pollution and the use of non-renewable resources, but also squanders human resources.

Consumerism and the World's Scarce Resources

Maurie also made the connection between suburbia and consumerism. He pointed out that we are living in a society that expects each family to own privately the goods and services which were supplied in the past by the community.

Today we are encouraged to buy electric can openers, convection ovens, swimming pools and other luxuries to achieve a "Home Beautiful" style house and the lifestyle to go with it. This escalation of unsatisfying consumption, in the isolation of our own homes, contributes to the escalation of the destruction of our environment.

More cars and greater distances require more resources; bigger houses with more electric gadgets require an inordinate amount of resources resources which Australia, and the world for that matter, cannot afford.

We, in Australia, live an extravagant lifestyle at the expense of the majority of the people in the world. We use the resources and create the pollution which will destroy our environment.

The Process of Fusing Deep Personal Needs with Group Needs

Another concern of Maurie's has been child care. As all women know the provision of community child care is essential for women's liberation.

He recognised that it is possible to fuse the deepest personal needs of individuals by meeting collectively. For example, the process around child care can play a most important role in creating community where none exists. It is the process itself, of people coming together, meeting in collectives, that can create the community and can bring people together.

Maurie really stood apart from most people in that he did have a vision. Most planning literature about suburban life in Australia and other western countries has a very impersonal, scientific, analytical approach but Maurie was a very brave person because he did put forward a vision. When you do that you open yourself up to criticism.

He expressed and developed this vision with Ruth in many articles. In "Plan for Melbourne", written in 1972, they put forward concrete proposals to the Melbourne Metropolitan Board of Works about a better way of developing Melbourne rather than developing it in the seven radial growth

corridors. They proposed growth which creates communities; communities which bring people together and communities which are ecologically sound.

In "Make Melbourne Marvellous", (1985), Maurie, along with others, put forward ideas about a socialist alternative to our sprawling, wasteful city, proposing a "cluster and connect" urban plan.

Home as the Centre for Consumption

For women in particular the cluster and connect model for urban development would mean an end to isolation in the suburbs, an end to the segregation of the private world from the public world. It would mean an end to the home as a centre for consumption.

I have chosen five points from "Make Melbourne Marvellous" to show how women would benefit from the cluster and connect model.

1) A "from the bottom up process". In the women's movement we've recognised that to involve women you have to work from the bottom up because that's where women are. "Make Melbourne Marvellous" emphasises that they are out there, in the suburbs; and thus there is a need for small scale planning to encourage women to begin to meet with others, to develop a greater control over their own lives, and, perhaps, choose to become involved about other social issues.

2) The establishment of neighbourhood centres. This is an important physical proposal, creating places (centres of neighbourhood focus) which meet women's needs for child care and other support services, out there, where women are, in the suburbs.

3) One stop local centres. Centres, served by public transport, where there are government services, other social facilities, shops and some work places. Not like the shopping centres we have now which are merely places where you can purchase particular items.

4) Effective public transport. We all know how important public transport is to link people together and to reduce car ownership.

5) Flexible housing designs to allow for the socialisation of housework and to improve our social relations with other people. There is a possibility to have a situation where communal services could be so effective that we would not have to own so many household possessions (washing machines, lawn-mowers etc).

Eradication of Oppression of Women

The new structure (cluster and connect) aims to fill the original quote I read which is to eradicate all forms of women's oppression.

Maurie did not only write about the liberation of women, he practised what he preached. I'll end with a small quote from a condolence letter to Ruth :- "So often there is a great man living a life of achievement even of community service with the wife playing the role of chief supporter and nurturer. What is admirable to me about the Crow's is the genuine partnership between Ruth and Maurie in making that huge contribution."

(Footnote. Maurie Crow died in April 1988. In Ecoco 2/6 there was an article based on Ann Morrow's speech at the "Tribute to Maurie". That gathering, which recognised Maurie's work in community organisation, was organised by the North Melbourne Association.

The above article is from a talk at the "What Next ? Seminar on Urban Issues", a memorial gathering organised by the Communist Party of Australia. Maurie and Ruth joined the Communist Party in the mid-1930s. By the way the title "What Next ?" was the name of an anti-fascist youth meeting at which Ruth and Maurie met each other in 1936).

"Media Information Australia"
A Gold Mine of Ideas !

"Media Information Australia" (MIA) has become an indispensable reference to anyone interested in discussion and review of media in Australia. The journal, which was begun by Professor Henry Mayer, started publication in July, 1976." writes John O'Hara, Director, Australian Film, Television and Radio School, in the February 1989 MIA.

It is also a very useful publication for any person trying to develop an appreciation of the Australia-wide issue which affect local neighbourhoods. The limited space in Ecoso does not allow any full reviews, but the worth of the ideas in this gold mine can be assayed from these titles and very brief quotes.

From MIA No 51. "Gender-role Stereotyping in Australian Farm Advertising". J.Bell and U. Pandey (Uni. of New England) show "that farmers are almost invariably presented as men, that farming was characterised as essentially men's work, almost entirely dependent on their labour. The advertisements were at odds with social reality in that they not only denied farm women the title of farmer in their own right, but also denied them of any credit for their significant labour contribution to family farms."

"Wicked Women or Working Girls: Prostitues on the Silver Screen"; reviews screen characters in European and American cinemas.

This MIA also contains three articles on how women are portrayed in advertising and reporting on a public forum on this subject, October '88.

From MIA No 52. A quote from an article by Sam Lipski in the bulletin, 22 November 1988, sets the tone for a feature article on "Public agendas and Media Agendas" by R. Warick Blood (lecturer at Mitchell College, Bathurst). Sam Lipski wrote :-

"But the real news (as often happens) has been a process, not a series of events, and it has gone largely unreported. I refer to the emergence of a small but influential group of communications overlords who, partly due to technology of mass media and partly due to a changed Australia, set the public agenda and have become as critical an element - some would say the critical element - in our society as much as the government, business, the trade unions and the bureaucracy."

From MIA No 53. This is a special issue which publishes a selection of papers from the inaugural conference on "Culture, Theory and Power" held at Griffith University this year. These articles are fascinating and give factual material to the hunches we often have about the the oppressive nature of our museums and other nineteenth century cultural institutions.

In an article on "Museums and Public Culture - History, Theory, Policy" Professor Tony Bennett, Director of the Institute of Cultural Policy at Griffith University writes :-

"From its inception the museum has been subject to a contradictory dynamic; conceived as an instrument of public instruction, it has also functioned as a mechanism for social differentiation."

The article includes policy measures for introducing cultural democracy at museums which take account of this contradictory dynamic.

Kylie Winkworth, a curator and lecturer at a museum, uses the title "The museum Inc." to raise some issues about the increasing pressure of museums to raise money from non-budget sources. She states :-

"Sponsorship is occurring in an ethical and policy vacuum which poses threats to the independence of our museums, the integrity of their work, and the public's interest."

(Information on subscription to MIA: PO Box 126, North Ryde NSW 2113)