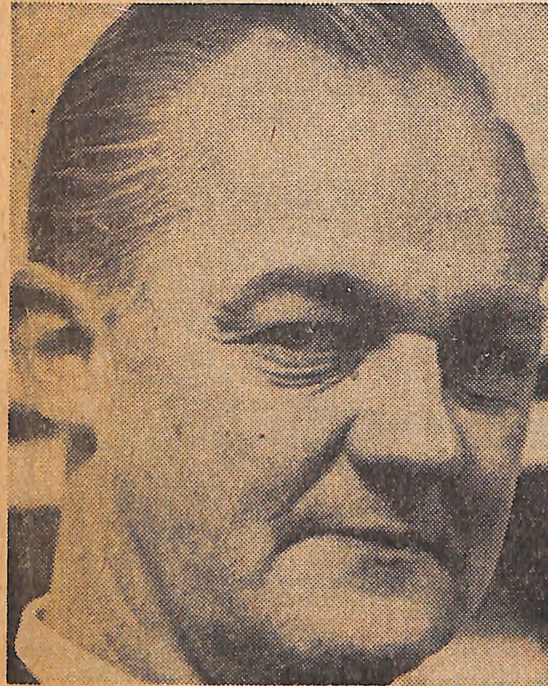


# CITY OR ANTI-CITY?

Noted architect  
**ROBIN BOYD**  
examines the changing face  
of Australia  
in these excerpts from  
an address at the  
University of New England  
last night. Today, the  
university confers on him an  
honorary Doctorate of Letters.

A21-10-67



**T**HE fundamental character of our urban life will be under enormous pressure for change during the next generation, and the way we react to these pressures will determine the physical quality of Australian living at the end of the century.

Tomorrow's city may be loosely divided into centres of fairly specialised districts—financial university, entertainment — and all of them linked by vast public transport and multi-lane highways.

But within each centre, normal car traffic would be virtually eliminated and monorails, minirails, subways, escalators, moving footpaths and so on would be substituted.

The little machine which each citizen might keep in the slot beside his front door would be aesthetically more like an elaborate bicycle than the shining metal sculptures which are today's cars.

Within each centre in each city there will be scope for easy changes of accommodation without the need for the wrecker's steel ball. Buildings, as we know them now, would be replaced by fewer, much vaster structures which would in effect add ground area to the city. They would be merely multi-level platforms perhaps staggered, perhaps leaning against one another in giant tent-like formations, shaped to allow in as much light as possible. All ser-

vices would be available at regular intervals.

Although immense, these buildings would ideally be anonymous and almost negative landscape elements. The expression of architecture, art and aesthetic taste, would be left to individuals who would clip on or slip in their office, shop or home, and take them away again to clip in somewhere else when the spirit moved them or the centre of their interests drifted elsewhere.

This polarising of interests would be very different from the more or less arbitrary zoning of rigid plans which is about the extent of town planning today.

Thus as the world fills up with people and cities expand till they

touch, and all dry land and part of the sea becomes one vast urban and industrial web, specialised centres will gather to themselves concentrations of people with common interests. And these people will be able to identify themselves with and orientate themselves on these centres.

Something like this, celebrating the qualities of mobility, adaptability and flexibility, with conveniently organised services, yet comfortably unorganised people, might be the result of a positive planning approach vigorously applied to the vast complexes of urban development which will cover much of Australia and the world of the future.

Positive city planning implies the

continuity of the city tradition, even if in a radically new form — the maintenance, that is, of ordered centres of activity, including intellectual activity.

However, the city tradition and positive planning are not for everyone. Many will argue that the city concept has gone with the horse and buggy. There is a cool blooded argument which some planners adopt to the effect that the suburban sprawl, the gaudy shopping areas, the drab inner suburban shops, the congested hearts and all the rest of our ordinary, urban environment are not symptoms of city sickness. Much more than that they represent city death, and no matter. Cities as the world knew them for centuries, as Australia conceived

sticky fingers out to touch the nearest towns 50 or more miles away.

Such a community would not necessarily be unplanned. It would just be planned in the negative way. By then, no doubt, some expressways would slice through the undergrowth at reasonably frequent intervals.

A big staff of planners would be engaged in trying to keep more roads, as well as the essential pipes and wires, running after the little buildings, and desperately rezoning areas to try to keep industrial smog as far as possible from the newer houses.

It would need planning, but mainly corrective or negative planning, adding something here, cutting through a new life line there, patching continuously, to keep the patient, the non-city, alive.

Those then are possible alternative futures to which planning could lead our urban development by the end of the century — positive or negative planning (but still planning) resulting in the survival of the city or the substitution of an anti-city. However, it is possible that we will characteristically find a way of avoiding a decision between city and anti-city and will continue till the end of the century still postponing a vigorous new approach to our environment.

But let me be more optimistic: Let us suppose that positive planning is adopted and let us suppose that an enlightened public elects eager municipal governments to instruct the positive planners to go ahead and do their best, assured that the money would be found.

What then is the very best we could ultimately expect? Would they at best be just paler shadows