MOBILE PRIVATISM OR CONVIVIAL COMMUNITY

(Paper to be read with supporting material under the same title in the yellow-covered publication headed "Human Settlement" attached.)

by M.Crow.

Value judgment: Lets bake a better cake !

Let me start right in with a value judgment in place of the customary self-deprecating joke to prove that the lecturer is only human. However,I am conscious that one person's sacred value judgment may be,for another person, an uproarous joke: so I will not be offended if you laugh.

My value judgment is this : that 80% or so of Melbourne's people who are working people (whether industrial,whitecollar or professional workers) are severely alienated,both from the products of their labor and from each other; that this inhuman condition,endemic to a capitalist industrial system,has been accentuated in recent decades by the development of what I have called "mobile privatism" whereby,ironically,one half of them are suffering from an excess of mobility and an excess of consumerist hardware,while the other half are suffering from a deficiency of mobility or consumer goods or both;that therefore both halves of the working population and their dependents are deprived,and not merely those who appear to be "have-nots",and all this is bad And lastly,the way out of this impasse is not simply more mobility and more consumer goods for the deprived sections,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.

With perspectives such as these,you will gather,I believe that the future must be a planned one. Humans cannot leave their fate to the automatic mechanisms of an all-pervading market place whose money-fetish messages now penetrate via T.V. to our very living rooms,educating everyone,even the schoolchildren of tenderest age,with demands that equate life with "fun" and fun with the acquisition of the latest fashion.

There follows from this several corollaries regarding methods of examining society and re-shaping it.

Firstly,if one is earnest about a humanised and ecologically-tolerable urban future,the guidelines for that future can never emerge from a questionnaire. Extrapolation from the experiences of people who have been alienated all their lives may register strong negative readings of discontent but never sharp positive concepts for an alternative lifestyle in an alternative society.

Those who have been endowed with insights into the nature of society (and this includes sociologists - but not only them) should not,in my opinion function as barometers that indicate where the boiler might burst and be patched up with a few controls. On the contrary,I believe their responsibilty is to help to project options for the alternative futures for society ... and not just options in general,but workable options that can be seen to be workable and relate to everyday living.

Secondly,there are some sociologists and others,who commendably concentrate their emphasis on the disadvantaged,the deprived,the low achievers,the migrants working women,the single parent family and so on. Let me call these,collectively "the poor",meaning not poor in spirit,but poor in cash,or by circumstance, communication,lack of opportunity,lack of age or of qualification - those who are poorly-equipped to attain the lifestyle of those with no such handicaps.

Well,sociologists and others are not wrong to bring succour to the poor, so defined - of course! But what would be wrong is any notion that the real solution lies in raising the poor to the level of the others:because "the others" are not rich anyway. The catchword should not be "the poor against the working people",as if the lot of the working people was already paradise!

It is not a question of re-slicing the same cake more equitably. Indeed, in this direction lies elitist solutions that come to regard a charitable hand-out of consumer goods and services to the poor as a substitute for assisted do-it-ourselves efforts,in which we can all be involved in a mutual struggle to emancipate ourselves by our own efforts from the pervading alienation thrust upon us all. In this process we are talking about a new cake with a new quality!

Projection of workable urban alternative

My next proposition then is that it is inescapable for those who embrace such value judgments that they bend their hand to the task of projecting a planned alternative workable urban system,and so I will try to keep Melbourne in the centre of the focus from here on.

This urban alternative,then,must include a planned change in the organisation of secondary and tertiary industry,in transport and land-use design and in social policies to achieve both human and ecological ends.

I have been speaking thus far about human ends rather than ecological ends yet the projected future society has to take account of both---or rather human ends must always be seen as embracing ecological ends,for human society itself,having been clever enough to break right out of the circle we call ecological balance,and dominate nature for a time,must now be even more cleve and break back into that circle to re-establish the balance with human societ once more as a non-disruptive part of that balance.

To tackle ecological problems without tackling big-city problems is an impossibility. Pollution,not to mention resource conservation of non-renewabl resources,bears a direct relationship to the expenditure of fossil fuel energy,itself a non-renewable resource. Although it is true that the relationship between energy-use and ecological effect is not a one-for-one relationship for all the different processes or activities for which energy can be deployed ,we can be sure that any measure that contributes to the net reduction of energy use cannot fail to lie in the right direction. In Melbour there is an enormous expenditure of fossil fuel energy in the industries centred here and in the transport needed to convey both goods and people to their daily destinations. The total is something like $\frac{3}{4}$ of that for Victoria as a whole.

What we have to do therefore - and do urgently -is to halt the trend of an exponentially increasing use of energy per head,and then reverse that trend. Fortunately,the solution to this problem based on multi-disciplinary planning efforts for industry and transport and household uses,co-incide with social solutions based on community experience to expand low-energy convivial community pursuits...or anyway they can be made to so coincide. The creation of a more human society,and the restoration of ecological sanity are,to my way of thinking,simply different sides to the same coin.

<u>Re-establishment of "extended" community,but one in which the nuclear family and/or the individual within it,are afforded a reasonable amount of privacy</u>.

I want to illustrate this proposition with reference to the position of women children and the elderly in Melbourne's suburbia,but with the focus on women.

Time does not permit an expansion of certain assumptions on which my conclusions will rest,but I will list 4 of these assumptions to expose them to your scrutiny:

1. <u>Women are,indeed,second-class citizens</u> ---and here,bear in mind,I am referring not only,and especially not mainly to tertiary-trained women graduates in creative career jobs (although I guess they have their hassles too) but to the tens of thousands of typists,shopassistants, process workers,nurses,as well as housewives who do not also go out to work--all of them suffer to one degree or another from a very real oppression springing from their subservient position in very many ways.
2. <u>Women are doubly oppressed</u>, by their position in the home as well as in the wider world of affairs.
3. The liberation of women from this oppression should not be seen as a transposition of the sexes : men too are deprived of a full life, precisely because they are deprived of a full companionship with women arising from their position of ascendancy - so that <u>ascendancy of either sex over the other is undesirable</u>.
4. <u>The men in this audience</u> do not agree with such a state of affairs,and <u>would wish to correct the situation</u> if they could see how.

To correct such conditions my first proposition is that the universal provision of nuclear-family homes,self-contained for all purposes and insulated from its neighbours,artificially isolates women,children and the elderly,and some sort of shared activities based on shared facilities at the neighbourhood block level are required to reverse this trend.

Australia has never been a feudal country: we have never had a peasantry with big families - what we now call "extended families" as distinct from nuclear families i.e with grandparents or maybe aunts or uncles or cousins all in the one household,and with a variety of such households grouped together in a little village. More pertinent,since we have not had these extended families,we have not had domestic industry - home industry - strongly developed. The home industries of breadmaking,winemaking,preservatio of fruit fish meats and other foods,vegetable growing and poultry keeping

weaving,clothesmaking and pottery making etc. and the numerous arts and crafts that go along with all this.

In these type of activities,the home was like a small multi-purpose factory,the housewife was a mistress of many crafts and had the dignity of a purposeful,if often harrassed life. I don't want to idealise the situation: probably much of the work was sheer hard never-ending grind;probably the element of creativity was not very highly developed,the skills being very much passed on from one generation to the next unchanged. But - as I say - at least there was the dignity of a purposeful life,and a small commune of people to which you belonged,and in which you were respected for what you did.

One feature of this I want to emphasise: it was not just the mother involved in this,it was the children and the generation of grandparents too. And that is a very salutary way of looking at the problem of women in cities. The position of little boys and old men is tied-in with the position (or rather lack of position) of women,just as much as are little girls and old women. And if I do'nt always mention this tie-in,please try to mentally include it,where the context admits.

Now this type of feudal or post feudal but pre-capitalist yeomanry farming existence denied personal freedom,and it denied personal privacy--except in the fields. With the development of capitalism in Australia this century,the husband went into the factories,and some of the women too (but mainly women before or after the childrearing ages). What we now call the "nuclear family" became typical. That is,the Mr Justice Higgins basic wage family of man wife and two children. Man and wife,and their immediate issue,became independent of the extended family shackles,gained more privacy - and there are positive features of privacy - But,as Margaret Meade points out: for the first time in history the rearing of children - previously a matter for the extended family and even wider community- for the first time in any country,any period,in any earlier form of society - became thrust upon the nuclear family.

Because of both availability and custom,the responsibility was especially thrust upon the mother. But the nuclear family mother and housewife,as industry developed,was assisted by more and more so-called labor-saving domestic devices and the displacement of formerly home pursuits which were taken over by industry. Food and drink were prepared,cooked,smoked or cured, and tinned canned or bottled in factories,clothing and furniture were mass produced,washing machines and cleaning machines appeared,so the possibility of education of the young by either the mother or grandparents of these domestic skills evaporated. And - universal compulsory so-called free education-the school system run by the State-took over.

So here is one cause of the modern-day problem of women. The responsibility of upbringing is supposed to rest upon her - the pedestal of the nuclear family. But industry has stripped her of the body of domestic wisdom she once had to practice and which she used to hand on to her children. Her authority, or rather "respect" would be a better word --- the respect that goes along with work,the respect engendered in passing on the know-how of work,or,even better,the respect generated by a collective-type working - a working together on a project (even a domestic project) ---this work respect between mother and child has evaporated.

At the same time,from the children's point of view,they never see the father at work either - segregated in factory office or laboratory.

No wonder adolescent children cease to be able to relate to their parents - and still less to their grandparents and vica versa !

Here,then,is one problem. How is it to be overcome? One aspect of the cure must surely be the re-establishment of an "extended" community,but one within which the nuclear family and/or the individual within the nuclear family,are afforded a reasonable amount of privacy,if and when they need it. But at the same time,the advantages of a mixture of generations around some purposeful activity in a commune-type group similar to the extended family,but without blood-relations,is needed.

Now when I say that,let me immediately qualify it. I am not suggesting that the way forward is to push women - or even women,children and old people all together - back into the kitchen,the kitchen garden or the home workshop - even if it is a bigger kitcken,a bigger garden and a bigger workshop than that provided by the brick-veneer. We live after all,in a big city,we do,or rather could have enormous richness of relationship with other people, precisely because of this - and an endeavour to deny this,to artificially revive a sort of universal subsistence farming or artisan work would,in fact, be irrelevant for most people,children included.

But the optional podsibility of community,along with privacy,would both help to ease domestic isolation,and simultaneously lay the objective basis in the form of shared childrearing and maybe other shared domestic tasks in such a way as to assist women,children and the elderly (but above all women) to get out into the wider world

For such a transformation to succeed would require a rethinking of our concepts of housing. Communal-type living requires experiments in the arrangements of living spaces that are appropriate to the challenge. The efforts of pioneers using existing building structures are likely to remain permanently at the experimental stage unless there is hard political effort to change the building regulations,the planning ordinances,the rules of home-financing,even the laws on titles which hamper the conversion of old buildings into living spaces suitable for communes and which do not permit the building of new structures suitably designed for communal living.

I am not suggesting that spaces can create human relationships - of course they cannot. But human relationships can certainly be thwarted by physical barriers so designed as to make a desired relationship arduous to establish or maintain. The Cluster Titles Act provides a legal framework that is a useful step in a helpful direction. But much more is necessary. If urban communes are to flourish,it must be made readily possible to adapt buildings to group living - to enlarge,disband,or reform such groups,also for a family or individual to move readily,without financial hassles and fuss,from one communal situation to another.

One of the biggest stumbling blocks to people deciding to live in any other shelter than a 3-bedroomed brick-veneer is that under this capitalist system, the naked cash nexus that pervades literally all human relationships,imposed through the system of home ownership,has resulted in a house being regarded as an investment,as well as a shelter. So,the re-sale value must be considered. And the same constrint which has a most sobering and conservatising effect, prevents developers building anything they fear might not sell and re-sell.

Let me summarise this aspect. Communal arrangements of <u>some</u> description, with a sharing of some of the childrearing and some of the domestic chores,in order to give equal opportunity for all to participate outside the home in education,work or recreation,and with the possibility of re-introducing some communal handwork or culture or other low-energy projects for the whole collective is required. It is required as part - but only <u>part</u> - of the solution for ending the deadly isolation of the housewife and the children and the elderly both from each other and from the wider world. To succeed it will require a restructuring of all our concepts of housing design,including the concept that a home is a market commodity - an investment - that has to be standardised in order to be marketable.

Let it be assumed then that by some ~~by some~~ more communal arrangement we have liberated the housewife,domestically speaking that is,for a day. What is she going to do with her day? Where does she go? What does she do when she gets there? To use an "in" word:to what does she have "access"?

<u>Two barriers to access by women children adolescents and the elderly to the wider world need to be overcome:</u>

   (a) <u>the segregation,stratification and institutionalisation of society</u>
   (b) <u>practical accessibility due to city land/use transport design</u>

Take the workplaces of private enterprise first. The necessity for trade secrets which spring from the desperate competition of the capitalist system,which also impels enterprises into a feverish efficiency---means that a person is either employed with a definite niche within the division of labor - a definite "cog in the works",as it were - or you are not there at all: you are locked outside. So,the factory,the office,the laboratory is not "open sesame" to the housewife...nor,for that matter,for the unemployed,the youth or retired elderly people.

The whole purpose of such enterprises is to produce as many commodities or services as it can to sell on the market,use the surplus to re-invest and grow as fast as it can to unload still greater quantities of commodities and services on the market. It has no time to educate or train people how to take part in this process - this timewasting and ineffient function has been passed over to the education system for the community to pay. It has no time or room or patience for employees to design new products or even better ways of making old products - mass production requires standardisation both of product and productive method.

So,short of becoming a fulltime but second-rate cog in these male-dominated places,the housewife has no place here.

Turn now to the community institutions: can the schools,hospitals,asylums, community centres,universities and kindergartens be humanised and provide a humble place for the housewife? Traditionally: no. Traditionally,like the private enterprises they have excluded from participation the consumers of their services,whether of education,health or care of various sorts.

Firstly the consumers have had no say in the running of the place,and secondly,like the private enterprises,they have tended to grow in size into huge bureaucracies male-dominated,at that,which further places them beyond

the control of any viable small community unit.

There are currently many signs of revolt against these traditional trends: community controlled schools,community based childcare,domiciliary health and welfare services and small health clinics to supplement or supplant aspects of the giant hospitals and so on. And there are demands for smaller human-scale units - more manageable,more accessible to the ordinary person - including the housewife.

Then there are being set up all manner/of innovative voluntary services outside the traditional ones: learning exchanges,fun factories,the open book, resource centres,craft shops,neighbourhood houses,womens centres,community newspapers,medical consumer unions and so on.

Women have played a prominent part in these forward moves - but their experimental fragile nature does not always make participation by a stranger an easy matter. The recent retraction of funding also leaves some of them in a tenuous position or a state of collapse.

Yet these type of new personal services of the tertiary industry are often run by women;they are more tailored to the needs of women as consumers,and more adaptable to the needs of women who want a participatory niche,who want to be involved somehow at some level.. The new workforce is more related to the housewife "at the front gate" level as the new saying goes;more attainable.

Of course the Establishment will try to starve these frail organisations of peoples' initiative - or to head them off into a few safe pockets, absorbed and crippled with rules and regulations of a top-heavy administration of the traditional type.

But here the battle has begun. Shut out,except as fulltime employees,from factory,office and laboratory,shut out from the traditional hospital school childcare and other community centres women - a few of the pioneering stamp - are asserting themselves both within the traditional structures and by building new structures. How can hundreds of thousands of women be assisted to follow suit? Before leaving the subject of "front gate" services however, please observe that they are all relatively low-energy activities.

I want to finish on the question of transport and land-use design which are matters quite inseparable from the problem of creating vital urban centres throughout the suburbs,for which,in my view there is a crying need.

(Part of the article in the accompanying yellow-covered handout at pp 9 - 112 deals with two stereotypes for city design at opposite poles. There is the car city,or city of mobile privatism,as one model and the tracked city or convivial community city as another.These sketchy stereotypes apply to Melbourne where we have an electric suburban train system as well as an electric tram system,and as many of you will be from cities not endowed with such blessings,the stereotype towards which one might direct policies would have to be re-written to fit your own local circumstances. The purpose for these stereotypes was to enable the reader to get his bearings in relation to two local Melbourne planning controversies,the Strategy Plan for the inner areas and the projected outer ring freeway,according to which type of city he preferred. The local controversies,I suggest you regard as case studies if you are interested enough.. So..from this material I will select only a few of the salient and more general ideas.Back to the argument,then,about the housewife.)(For some of Ruth Crow's ideas on suburbia see pp. 1 - 8).

The evolution of the design of the capitalist city has accentuated all the obstacles for women I have been mentioning.

100 years ago,when Melbourne was a walking city,houses of rich and poor alike had to be close to workplaces,and shops and pubs close to both. Landuses were mixed,and except for a few with horses,mobility was very evenly distributed,and the housewife and children and old people at least had the corner shop or corner pub,the local dance or local football club,for a bit of life around the place.

Melbourne next became a tracked city,but in this period too,transport was fairly evenly distributed. There were a few stray motorists from amongst the class who used to own horses,but everyone else - for a modest fare -could get now easily to the local shopping centres strung along the tram lines or around the railway stations. The scout hall,the library,the tennis court,the picture theatre as well as shops and pubs were accessible,as also were the beach and countryside in the weekends. But because people could now work far from where they lived Melbourne began to get differentiation between suburbs-some industrial working-class and "poor",some definitely only the wealthy could afford,and some in between.

Socio-economic stratification of the population had begun. In addition to accentuating this,Melbourne,having become a "rubber city" over the past 20 post-war years,has heaped age-stratification. By and large,young couples have been induced to set up house in new housing estates;so that some suburbs are young,some middle aged and some elderly.

But worse,for the first time in the history of cities the car has brought with it a decidedly uneven distribtion of mobility. Half the population -

mainly the male mature-age adults - have the magnificent new form of automobile mobility. The rest;those too young or too old and very many house-wives have practically none,or relatively extremely inadequate public transport which has suffered a rapid run-down in the last few decades.

Worse still,decision as to location of workplaces,shops,schools and all other people-intensive activities are made by the middle-aged male planners, city councillors,company directors etc...all of whom are car drivers,and who have come to believe that it is axiomatic that car-access is the greatest convenience that life can offer.

As a consequence the last twenty years has been an anti-urban period. Whereas a good urban pedestrian convenience concentrates a rich range of different attractions all together,the rubber city is undoing this as fast as it can.

This underline dispersal coming on top of the segregation and institutionalisation already mentioned,has stranded the housewife and the teenagers and the elderly in the suburbs. Even if they can find a chauffer,even if the housewife herself is chauffer,they cannot set out to go "there" ;because,as some wag has put it,when they get there there is no there there ! To play on the words a little further: to the housewife liberated from her domestic chores and children,who has no place to go where she can get actively involved,the answer is not "there,there -never mind". The answer is to create such places.

What is needed,I suggest,is to concentrate into one local centre every possible people-intensive activity in that local catchment area - shops, offices,light-industry,hotels,entertainment,secondary and tertiary educational institutions - to provide a lively place with a range of attractions for all types and age groups. Right in the heart of such commercial activity should be established all manner of indoor spaces available for a range of non-commercial community activities - the "front gate" services I have mentioned, for example - but not only those :any other low-energy pursuits in which citizens can interest themselves - craft,indoor sporting,cultural or whatever.

Thus there would be at least one local place where students,housewives, industrial and office workers and pensioners could meet amd mix,there would be one "neighbourhood focus" All efforts of the social planners,the landuse planners the transport planners- and local urban groups and conservation groups -should be concentrated on this objective.

For those who chose to live right in or very close to such a centre,and were prepared to live in high-density accommodation this would be available too,to further enliven this urban place. The solution proposed,in effect,is to deliberatly set out to urbanise the suburbs,gradually freeing them from the disurbanising effect wrought by the over-use of the car for all purposes.

The car would be banned from such centres,and,except for separated delivery services,so would the truck. This would enable a tight compactness,enabling easy pedestrian access to every part of each centre,thus permitting the highest possible degree of practical variety and hence attractiveness.

Public transport would be deliberately deployed to accentuate the availability of all urban centres both from residential areas,and between one centre and another. All local public transport would be a shuttle type, funelling everyone to the local centre whether that was their ultimate destination or only on their way to some other centre. All local and district centres (which would be somewhat bigger than local centres and serve several of them) would be around railstations;all district centres and Melbourne central city area would be connected by express services.

Please note that lifestyles so based would minimise the number and length of trips necessary,direct most of them to public transport that couldn't be done by walking or cycling and are desirable ecologically,since they conserve resources both in transport energy,and in energy required for a heavy pre-occupation with consumerism rather than personal involvement in low-energy type convivial pursuits.The extravagance of freeways,of course,has to stop.

Built on an expanding base of clustered housing with some degree of chosen collective self-support and activity (as already described when discussing life at the residential block level) such centres providing some opportunities at a more specialised level are surely the only way we can hope to overcome the privatism that has beset us,alienating us from each other,and simultaneously endangering our planet's ecosystems?

On the underline details of such mighty social transformations,that circumstances now require of us,there are likely to be endless differences;but on the underline main direction we humans must go to remain alive and to retain our humanity, lets agree and get going. But the underline way to "get going" is not the familiar grand-scale macro planning that gives us zoning schemes,freeway networks and universal low density together with a maximum of tourism and consumerism and a paucity of urban life. Instead we urgently need a Melbourne regional strategy plan that starts from behind the "front gate",and is concerned with how life can be enriched with human relationships and low energy satisfactions because it is from these humble micro-planning imperatives that the macro-planning should proceed.

That is the paper as I had intended to deliver it, prepared before I read the abstracts of papers to be given by the other speakers.

Having read them, I believe it is helpful for me to add one further thought to make explicit what I realise was an undisclosed assumption in what I have said.

Some of the other contributors are to share that There is public apathy to environment & social issues, or conflicts between different interests. & My approach, (although it is not mentioned) is based on an assumption of conflict of interest — even its mildest reforms, such as a modification to the freeway network or the Melbourne Strategy Plan is accompanied by a tremendous conflict: That, to me, is simply axiomatic & Bigger & more radical social changes would generate bigger conflicts for sure.

But the problem is how to differentiate the different sorts of conflict. Conflict between different segments of the working people, in my opinion, (and I count them as 80% of the population) are of a different character altogether, and are only minor tactical war compared to conflict between all of them on the one hand, and the system of material growth, alienation, and environmental damage we term capitalism on the other.

If a program can be found that can reconcile all the minor tactical conflicts and the system can accommodate them, well and good. But it is my belief that the major conflict cannot be contained by the system, because it is the system that causes it, and therefore it is the change of that system to which we must look.