



**Figure 29**  
Reconciliation Plaza at Victoria Square/Tarntanyangga. Source: History Trust of South Australia, 2016.  
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# Reconciling the Australian Square

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The urban square is one of most enduring colonial imports into Australian cities, culturally and politically. Adelaide, Australia's celebrated colonial planned city, features five public squares, with the largest, named Victoria Square (until 2002), occupying the centre of Colonel Light's 1837 grid. Conceived without a square, Melbourne is considered to have lacked a civic heart until the competition for Federation Square in 1997. It is therefore not surprisingly that the political intent to enact processes of Reconciliation in the urban domain has drawn designers, planners and politicians towards the re-conceptualisation of the square in the Australian city.

This chapter explores how Adelaide and Perth, two capital cities with a strong contemporary Indigenous presence, have reconceived the role of civic squares. Adelaide's Victoria Square/Tarntanyangga Square, dissected and bounded by major roads, has struggled for decades to perform as a vibrant civic space. This is despite the square being significant to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. It is notable, for instance, as the first place in Australia to fly an Aboriginal flag in recognition of land rights for Aboriginal people. In 2009 landscape architects Taylor Cullity Lethlean (TCL), in collaboration with architects Tonkin Zulaikha Greer, led the development of a revitalising masterplan which aimed to enable "a new civic life reflective of our 21<sup>st</sup> century culture to emerge."<sup>1</sup>

In contrast to Adelaide, the Metropolitan Redevelopment Authority (MRA) sought to develop a new civic square for Perth as part of a city-wide plan to better connect the central railway precinct to surrounding suburbs and introduce an entertainment precinct, public open space and commercial redevelopment. Opened in 2018, Yagan Square was designed as a collaboration between Lyons

Architects in association with Iredale Pederson Hook Architects and ASPECT Studios.

Collectively, these squares have won numerous design awards.<sup>2</sup> However, there has been hesitancy to engage with the cultural and political complexities of these spaces in terms of design critique, instead defaulting to the view that any aspiration towards Reconciliation is positive. While this is true, this shying away from a more comprehensive interrogation of these new civic outcomes does little to advance knowledge and practice.

Working across policy, masterplans and design outcomes, in this chapter we examine how the twin agendas of civic space and Reconciliation manifest in these twenty-first century squares. This comparison reveals that the design of contemporary civic space in Australia remains an evolving cultural and economic challenge, requiring the negotiation of two new influences: Indigenous communities who have historically been absent from the conceptualisation of urban civic space, and the ongoing dilemmas of funding the civic realm. We reveal the rise of 'creative' placemaking as a key influence, highlighting a critical distinction in the conceptualisation and politics of this role. In the case of Victoria Square/Tarntanyangga Square, creative placemaking strategies are aligned with postmodern approaches driven by non-Indigenous designers and curators and are strongly influenced by the theoretical positionings of the new museum. In contrast, Yagan Square was developed using strategies of co-creation, bringing together non-Indigenous and Indigenous designers, artists and communities into a cross-cultural relationship of authorship. Offering evidence of a growing maturity of Reconciliation processes, we argue that this transition demonstrates a critical step towards the decolonising of design processes, moving from *recognition* of Indigenous perspective to *dialogue* between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

### Decolonising the Civic

The design of civic space has generated extensive discourse over the past 60 years. Beginning in the 1960s with a focus on morphological and social aspects of urban space, attention in the 1980s turned to Henri Lefebvre's concept of the *right to the city*, with scholars such as David Harvey, Leonie Sandercock and Peter Rowe warning of the dangers of neoliberal capitalism. Responding to the political and technological influences on the twenty-first-century city, theorists

now challenge the expectation that public spaces operate as the primary sites for civic practices. Urban scholar Ash Admin, for instance, observes that “sites of civic and political formation” are now distributed in a variety of civic practices “that are not reducible to the urban.”<sup>3</sup> While this is true, the urban civic spaces of the streetscape, plaza, park, garden or waterfront remain critical spaces for the city, conceived as an interaction between the individual and the state. Representative of both collective and individual experience, ‘civic space’ is broadly symbolic, and yet grounded in the particular and the everyday.

This expanded notion of the civic has been paralleled by the rise of *creative* placemaking, along with the emergence of the professional *placemaker*. Definitions of placemaking are elusive, ranging from an “ideology, a theoretical framework for urban policy and design to a technique or set of tools for practitioners.”<sup>4</sup> Distinctions are drawn between the neighbourhood activism placemaking strategies advanced by Jane Jacobs, at one extreme, and the concept of creative placemaking which promotes the movement of the arts from the studio into urban spaces, at the other.<sup>5</sup> The latter concept in particular has been broadly embraced in Australia through policy adoption and strategic governance as a broadly positive approach to bringing coherence and meaning to locale.<sup>6</sup> As Chris Ryan articulates:

Place-making aims to turn public spaces into places; places which engage with those who inhabit them, places through which people do not merely pass, but have reason to ‘stop and become involved’; places which offer rich experience and a ‘sense of belonging’; places in short, which have meaning, which evoke pleasure or contemplation, or reflection and, most importantly, an appreciation of cultural and environmental diversity.<sup>7</sup>

The idea of the creative city is often regarded as somewhat of an urban cure-all through placemaking, revitalising the public and social life of the city while also activating the local economy through the regeneration of the built environment, resolving “the city’s ‘urban problems’ in general.”<sup>8</sup> While this strategy is appealing to urban policymakers, the key indicators of a successful creative city are largely measured through increases in speculative land value and decreasing vacancy rates, which are also economic indicators of the displacement of marginalised, low-income city residents.<sup>9</sup>

In the Australian context, concepts of civic space are further complicated by legislative requirements to respond to Reconciliation as the nation recognises its moral obligations to redress the legacy of colonialism. Civic space within a framing of Reconciliation offers the opportunity to explore shared histories, experiences and practices, between indigenous and settler subjectivities. In his book *Civic Realism*, Peter Rowe defines “urban public spaces that are civic in character” as “belonging to everyone and yet to nobody in particular.”<sup>10</sup> According to the definition given by Rowe, civic space:

is at once familiar, pluralistic, and critical – at least to the extent that this last quality can be sustained architecturally. It is also specific, socially relevant, transcendental, and concerned with everyday life, including matters of both individual and collective experience. Furthermore, it is inextricably bound up with the continual advancement of the expressive means by which it is made and elaborated.<sup>11</sup>

More simply, civic space encompasses singularity and pluralism; critique and accord; fluidity and transcendence; familiarity and development; and the collective and the individual.

However, this definition of *civic* is problematic within the settler context, where space and politics are inherently *unsettled*. Universalist definitions of the *civic citizen* sit uncomfortably in a place where the importation of Western ideologies has left a violent and traumatic legacy for indigenous people. Anne Lewinson suggests that civic spaces in colonial cities are never neutral, as the politics of control inherent in the colonial project have usually touched these spaces.<sup>12</sup> In this context, Gavin Malone argues that civic space is an effective medium through which to ‘read’ sovereign politics, that, “as a space of both contestation and reconciliation, can be seen to reflect not only the more recent reconciliation process but also the evolution of the recognition and social inclusion of Indigenous people in Australia.”<sup>13</sup>

Without any formal Treaty between the traditional owners and the British settlers, Australia has struggled to address the ramifications of colonisation, legally and culturally. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, legislative changes recognising native title attempted to rectify some injustices. However, the avoidance of fundamental issues such as sovereignty has led to limited

success. Over the last decade this challenge has been tied into processes of Reconciliation, which began formally in 1991 with the passing of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation Act. Ambitions have evolved from addressing the misunderstandings of Australian history and race relations towards instigating policies and practices which encourage relationships and dialogue between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, along with questions of equity and equality.<sup>14</sup>

Australia's 'unfinished business' has left professionals working in the realm of the civic without clear legislative and policy frameworks for engaging with Reconciliation.<sup>15</sup> In contrast, following the establishment of the Waitangi Tribunal in 1975, New Zealand has formalised legislative and policy processes of decolonisation such as the Resource Management Act which offer clear guidance for designers and planners in urban and non-urban areas. This lack of clarity in the Australian context, beyond affirmative action models of Reconciliation Action Plans (RAPs), highlights why it is so important to document the processes and theoretical underpinnings of civic projects emerging over the past decade. Focusing on the two key precedents of Adelaide's Victoria Square /Tarntanyangga and Perth's Yagan Square, we explore the ideas and concepts (built and unbuilt) that underpinned the development of these urban civic spaces between 2008 and 2018.

### Spatial Foundations

The two state capitals of Western Australia and South Australia have maintained a strong contemporary Indigenous presence, following a long history of Indigenous occupation that predates the colonial cities of Perth (1829), and Adelaide (1836) by thousands of years. The traditional owners of the south-western area of Western Australia are the Noongar people,<sup>16</sup> representing one of the largest Aboriginal cultural blocs in Australia.<sup>17</sup> The Whadjuk Noongar specifically are the traditional owners of the Perth region, and today over 27,103 people of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent live in greater Perth.<sup>18</sup>

The colony of Perth was established on the banks of the Swan River (known as Derbal Yerrigan in the Noongar language) by Lieutenant-Governor James Stirling on 12 August 1829.<sup>19</sup> Originally, the landscape of the Swan River plain consisted of a series of freshwater wetlands which flowed to the west.<sup>20</sup> It has been estimated that up to 80 percent of the urban landscape of Perth is built on

reclaimed wetlands.<sup>21</sup> Early contact between settlers and Noongar were initially amicable, though quickly deteriorated. The area occupied by the colonists was of great economic and ceremonial significance to the Noongar community, and tensions swiftly escalated. Disease, violence and the loss of food-gathering sites had a significant impact on population numbers by 1864.<sup>22</sup>

As in cities throughout Australia, the spatial containment of Aboriginal people in Perth was enacted through urban planning and social policy. In 1833 the Mount Eliza Depot for Aborigines was established on the site of the Old Swan Brewery as a means of segregating them from the rest of the settlement.<sup>23</sup> The Noongar community was restricted from King's Park, as "an Aboriginal presence was judged to disrupt the visual and social ordering of the city."<sup>24</sup> Later social policy, in the form of the Native Administration Act 1905 (WA), saw Aborigines banned from the Perth Metropolitan area until 1954.<sup>25</sup> Aborigines were not eliminated from the city, but lived on reserves, in state-allocated housing and as 'fringe dwellers' in informal camps.<sup>26</sup> In the mid-1950s, social policy shifted towards assimilation.<sup>27</sup>

In spite of this history of dispossession and displacement, in 2006 Noongar were successful in their landmark claim of native title rights over Perth, the first of its kind in an Australian capital city.<sup>28</sup> However, the claim went through a protracted appeals process, attaining registration in October 2018, with a \$1.3 million dollar settlement which formalised six existing Indigenous land use agreements.<sup>29</sup> Many contemporary landmarks and public spaces are now recognised in Perth's urban fabric as culturally significant to the traditional owners of the city, while parts of East Perth and Northbridge continue as important contemporary gathering spaces.

Adelaide occupies the Tarntanya plains of Kurna Country.<sup>30</sup> This indigenous landscape is characterised by grasslands and open grassy woodlands in the western coastal hinterland, and forests to the south of Karrawirra Parri/the Torrens River.<sup>31</sup> Kurna culture remains an enduring presence within the Adelaide area, with ancestors having occupied the southern Australian landscape for at least forty thousand years.<sup>32</sup> The area where Colonel Light surveyed Victoria Square is identified as the main campground or "headquarters" for the Kurna in the region.<sup>33</sup>

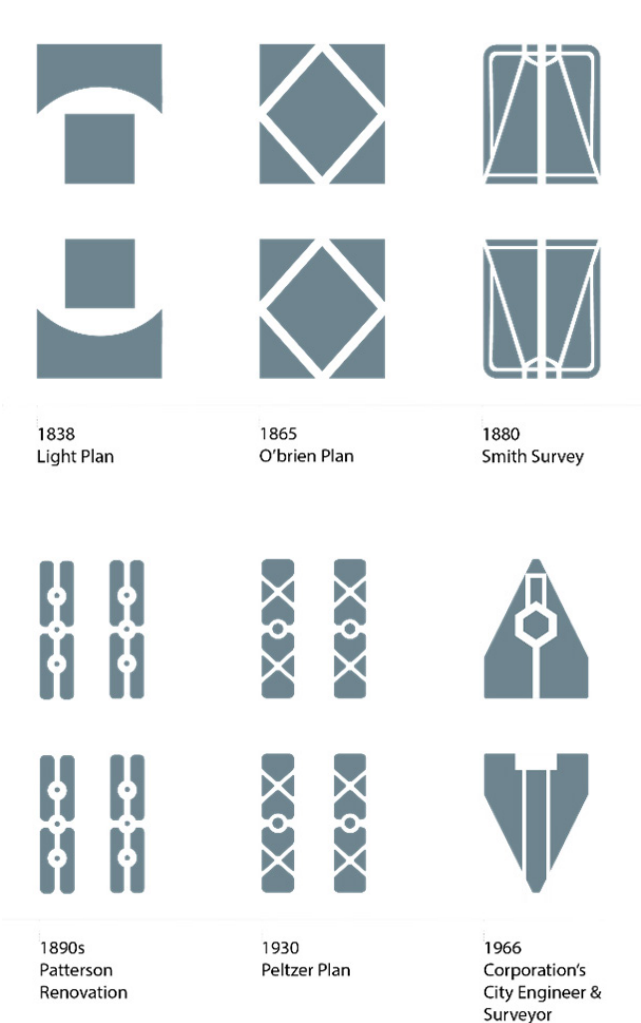
The city of Adelaide is notable in Australia as the country's only planned free settlement, and is exceptional in terms of race relations. The Colonial Office in

London was aware of the Indigenous settlement of the general area and over time developed policies to provide some form of protection for the Indigenous inhabitants and to ensure that colonists displayed just conduct when establishing a new colony.<sup>34</sup> However, the settlement of Adelaide was plagued by a conflict between legislative protection for the interests of Indigenous communities and demand for land by settlers. Building on the generation of civilisation through ‘cultured’ society, the settlement was planned to include provision for the establishment of public institutions, alongside five village squares, with Victoria Square as the six-hectare central civic space at the ‘heart’ of colonial Adelaide.<sup>35</sup>

Notwithstanding the ongoing marginalisation of Kaurna people within the city, the formal squares of Adelaide are resilient public spaces for Indigenous sociality and solidarity.<sup>36</sup> Most significantly to the nation, the newly designed Aboriginal flag was first unveiled at Victoria Square on National Aborigines Day, 12 July 1971.<sup>37</sup> This event is symbolic of Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination, given the history of civil and land rights movements. In terms of land rights, in March 2018 the Kaurna people were successfully granted native title for the area from Myponga to Lower Light, encompassing Adelaide, inclusive of native title right to 17 parcels of undeveloped land not held under freehold lease.<sup>38</sup> This just beat the Noongar claim to Perth as the first metropolitan agreement registered, although it took 18 years to achieve, having first been tabled in 2000.

Given this history, the intent to develop contemporary civic squares for Perth and Adelaide offer distinctive design challenges. Rather than create a ‘new’ space, it was recognised that Adelaide’s Victoria Square/Tarntanyangga Square had existed since Light’s 1837 colonial plan. As a European civic space, Victoria Square has suffered under the weight of expectations established by the primacy of its central position. Over time, the square had struggled to perform as a vibrant civic space, disconnected from the major cultural and entertainment activities located on North Terrace. The space has been dissected by various experiments in planting, fencing and circulation, directing pedestrian flows and vehicular circulation. As illustrated in Figure 30, there were six spatial iterations of the square in its first 130 years, an extraordinary number given the centrality of the space to the major civic institutions of the state capital.

The will to revitalise Adelaide’s squares emerged at a planning level through the 1986-1991 City of Adelaide Plan Review.<sup>39</sup> A series of redevelopment



**Figure 30**  
Victoria Square: planting  
and circulation patterns from  
colonial foundation through to  
modernism. Source: Authors'  
diagram.

strategies aimed to address the languishing of the space were proposed throughout the 1990s and 2000s. The 2002 Urban Design Master Plan was particularly significant as it was the first to conceptualise a direct design response to Reconciliation, through a symbolic Arts and Culture strategy of “cultural layering.”<sup>40</sup>

While this scheme failed to gain political support, in 2008 a Community Ideas Competition for the Victoria Square was held by the Adelaide City Council in partnership with the state government of South Australia.<sup>41</sup> Building on the ideas generated by the competition, council issued the *Victoria Square/Tarntanyangga Vision and Guiding Principles* brief in October 2008 and sought expressions



**Figure 31**

The new urban space of Yagan Square is nestled between the historic William Street Horseshoe Bridge and Perth railway station. Source: ASPECT Studios; photography Peter Bennetts, 2019. Used with permission.

of interest. Through direct consultation with the Kaurna community, designers were asked to interpret the spiritual significance of Tarntanyangga to enhance the identity of the space, as well as “creatively introduce” Aboriginal culture into Victoria Square/Tarntanyangga through education and celebration, drawing on practices of dance, music, performance, interpretation and design.<sup>42</sup>

In May 2009 landscape architects Taylor Cullity Lethlean (TCL), along with architects Tonkin Zulaikha Greer (TZG) and engineers QED, were announced as the successful team to develop the masterplan for the 6-hectare Victoria Square/Tarntanyangga Urban Regeneration Project. The design team worked on design and interpretation in collaboration with Kaurna Indigenous consultant Karl Telfer and cultural curator Peter Emmett.<sup>43</sup> It is the outcome of this consultancy that forms the focus of this analysis.

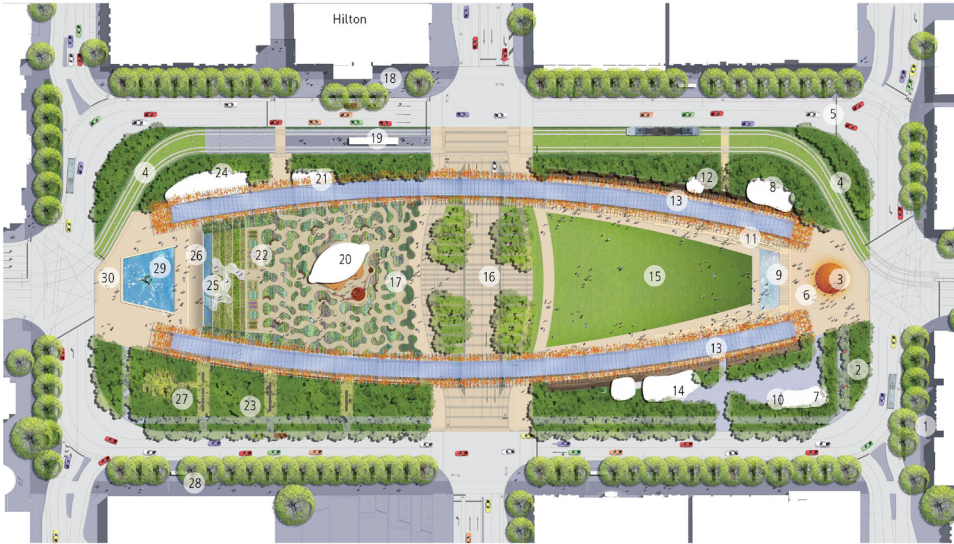
In contrast to Victoria Square/ Tarntanyangga, Perth’s Yagan Square was an entirely new urban space. The square was conceived and managed by the Metropolitan Redevelopment Authority (MRA), which emerged in January 2012 following the amalgamation of four existing state government

redevelopment authorities across metropolitan Perth. More recently, the MRA has merged with LandCorp, the state government land development agency, to become Development WA in 2019.<sup>44</sup> Working across regulatory planning and land development, the MRA offered a comprehensive approach to planning, development, management and activation.

Yagan Square forms part of a series of infrastructure projects including Elizabeth Quay, Perth Cultural Centre and Perth City Link in support of expanding Perth's population by 4 million by 2050. The site emerges through the bridging of railway lines adjacent to Perth Railway Station and reclaiming space within the 'arms' of the historic Horseshoe Bridge. This new spatial insertion forms a critical part of the City Link plan to better connect the city to surrounding suburbs by sinking railway infrastructure and infilling with an entertainment precinct, public open space and commercial redevelopment.

In an important point of distinction, the MRA champion their role as "Place Manager, Planning Regulator and Developer," claiming to be the only Australian government developer to have "all three functions in-house."<sup>45</sup> This governance alignment is particularly powerful for embedding Reconciliation goals across a diverse range of activities, with the MRA delivering its first RAP in July 2013-2014. Designed as a collaboration between Lyons Architects and iredale pederson hook architects and ASPECT Studios, Yagan Square opened in 2018.<sup>46</sup> The complex resolution of level changes and movement patterns demanded by the insertion of this new space resulted in a stepped architectural form punctuated by ramps, staircases and constructed peninsulas. A central gathering space located at the upper level accommodates up to 1000 people and is framed by a signature canopy structure (Figure 31).

In contrast, the master plan for Victoria Square has only partly been realised. Construction of Stage 1 (only 25 percent of the plan) was completed in February 2014, at a cost of \$28 million.<sup>47</sup> As shown in Figure 32, the master plan proposed a far more complex built program including an arbor promenade, the largest gesture to reconcile the square into a collective space, alongside a culture centre and a mosaic of gardens for the southern part of the square. Without the comprehensive redevelopment model of the MRA, Victoria Square suffered from a lack of funding assurance.<sup>48</sup> Regardless of this incompleteness, for the purpose of this essay it is still extremely valuable to examine the placemaking strategies lying behind the two schemes.



**Figure 32**

Victoria Square/Tarntanyangga Masterplan. Source: Adelaide City Council and TaylorCullityLethlean and TonkinZulaikhaGreer, *Victoria Square | Tarndanyangga Urban Regeneration Project Design Development Reports* (Adelaide: Adelaide City Council, The Government of South Australia, 2011), 18.

### Reconciling Placemaking

Broadly speaking, the creative placemaking approaches adopted in the design strategies for Yagan Square and Victoria Square/ Tarntanyangga share a common intent to re-inscribe precolonial stories and environmental histories onto contemporary urban space. However, a closer look reveals a major transformation of the politics of authorship, moving from postmodern-inspired representations of cultural plurality, inclusive of Indigenous stories (but curated by non-Indigenous designers), to processes which bring non-Indigenous and Indigenous artists, designers and communities together in a cross-cultural convergence. This difference owes much to the maturing of policies and framings of Reconciliation which establish influential contexts for designers to work within.

As discussed above, the renewal of Victoria Square/Tarntanyangga was shaped by a planning agenda tied to creative placemaking, which occurred in concert with the introduction of Reconciliation policy at a local level. The Adelaide City Council (ACC) was the first local council in Australia to adopt a Reconciliation Vision Statement (1997), which included an obligation to

recognise Kaurua heritage through the physical features of the city.<sup>49</sup> This commitment has been expressed through civic placemaking in two ways – firstly through the installation and commission of public arts, and secondly through a widespread strategy of dual place-naming, such as Victoria Square/Tarntanyangga.

Responding to these imperatives, the proposed creative placemaking strategy at Victoria Square/Tarntanyangga, an ethos of site activation which has been termed the *new civic*, was driven by cultural curator Peter Emmett. Known for his role in the development of the Museum of Sydney (1995), Emmett is noted for his *art and artifice* approach to museum curation, maintaining a focus on material culture while also engaging with the *poetics of place*. Emmett typically worked with an array of creative practitioners (including Paul Carter, who will be discussed below in relationship to Yagan), eschewing the conventional dominance of the writer, “to both compose and liberate the metaphor of place.”<sup>50</sup> This approach to museology practice, described as the *new museum*, emerged in the 1990s, reflecting the increasing understanding of the contingent nature of evidence and historical truth.<sup>51</sup> The new museum typically deploys technology and interaction to demonstrate its image of newness.<sup>52</sup> Displays were reconfigured to present plural and inclusive storytelling, often through the adoption of postmodern techniques of bricolage and montage.<sup>53</sup>

The new museum was particularly influential in shaping the new postcolonial national museums emerging in Canada, Australia, South Africa and New Zealand in the late 1990s (including the Museum of Sydney), challenging curatorial practices considered elitist and anti-democratic and reinforcing processes of imperialism and colonialism.<sup>54</sup> Emmett’s *new civic* focus for Victoria Square/Tarntanyangga, underpinned by pluralism and diversity, shares these philosophies. According to Emmett, the *new civic* shifts “the paradigm of urban culture from grand city symbols, strategies and master-narratives to many stories about personal and collective memory of its citizens, interpreting place through spatial experience and interaction with others. Place becomes experience and not thing. We ask not what is this place but what is taking place here?”<sup>55</sup>

The new museum’s emphasis on the intersection of art, new media and museology clearly shapes Emmett’s creative placemaking strategy, “The Curated Square” which highlights an “integrated approach to public art, design, interpretation, heritage, digital interactions and wayfinding.”<sup>56</sup> This philosophy is

most evident in three proposed design elements, framed by exhibition practices:

textual inscription – *The Arbour Text*

installation – *The Arcadian Grove*

technology – *The Digital Sigh*

These are deployed through techniques of juxtaposition, fragmentation, inclusivity and pluralism. For example, using interpretive signage *The Arbour Text* directs the scattering of text fragments amongst the pillars of the Arbour structure of the square. This installation seeks to represent the “collective unconscious of Adelaide” and promote inclusivity and diversity by presenting “fragments of past mutterings about civic life.”<sup>57</sup> For instance, official announcements and regulations are juxtaposed with protest references and more everyday observations such as the lateness of trams. Emmett suggests that this “musing and debating over who has the right to be or not to be in this place?” enacts “new civic values of acknowledging difference and diversity.”<sup>58</sup>

Elsewhere, *The Arcadian Grove* focuses on four colonial-era statues in the square, proposing that they be “metaphorically knocked off their pedestals” and repositioned within a “ruin-like” installation in the south-east corner.<sup>59</sup> With the pieces removed from their heavy bases, the public would have the opportunity to engage with the historical values of the statues, an activity enhanced by a commissioned soundscape installation. This soundscape reconceives the statues as “The Oracles of Victoria Square” which act as witnesses to past events in the square, with the audio content curated to promote a civic rights story.<sup>60</sup>

*The new civic* alluded to the potentials of new technology to extend the cultural curation of the square. *The Digital Sigh* project, for instance, sought to collect daytime use data (registering places of congregation and pedestrian desire lines) and transforms this information into a light projection which expressed the daytime presence of citizens on the space at nighttime.<sup>61</sup> Other digital concepts include the incorporation of screens for digital graffiti and the insertion of digital information pods throughout the square.

The mirroring of the museum as a typology is extended to the framing of interactivity in the passive recreational spaces of the proposed Native Garden in the southern Stage 2 of the masterplan. Mirroring the *docent* activity of the museum, the design team propose that the garden will be inhabited by trained

cultural guides and gardeners, “hosts” who provide visitor interaction and information.<sup>62</sup> These interactions have the potential to take on a theatrical quality of orchestrated surprise for the visitor, as ephemeral pieces of performance.<sup>63</sup> This deployment shifts modes of interactivity traditionally found inside the architectural envelope of cultural institutions into the exterior space of the square.

Turning to Yagan Square, a significantly different framing of authorship and Reconciliation is evident. Underpinning the MRA Reconciliation Plan is the intent to co-create “dynamic, authentic and sustainable places for people” in *partnership* with the Whadjuk Noongar community.<sup>64</sup> This vision emerged during 2016-17 as part of an innovative Aboriginal engagement framework process, developed for the MRA by Noongar man Dr Richard Walley OAM, known as Kaart Koort Waarnginy – Head, Heart, Talking (KKW).<sup>65</sup> Conceived as a new community heart and central public space of Perth City Link, Yagan Square formed an important pilot project for KKW. When considered against the processes of Victoria Square/Tarntanyangga, different power dynamics relating to how Indigenous people are included in the project are apparent. For instance, Dr Richard Walley replaces Peter Emmett as a central figure, while the Whadjuk Working Party (the nominated representative working group of the Traditional Custodians in the Perth metropolitan region) assumes the position of Indigenous cultural curator Karl Telfer.

As part of this process, the concept of a creative template forms an important tool for defining a *sense of place* for the project and, critically for the designers, gathers local stories in a single document, thereby creating “a common language that can inspire all aspects of the development process and integrate key architectural, landscape and public space elements.”<sup>66</sup> Developed as a collaboration between Paul Carter, the project artists and designers, along with Dr Richard Walley, the creative template establishes “common ground between Indigenous and white settler heritages, and uses these to generate new forms, symbols and stories.”<sup>67</sup> The creative template identifies points of site convergence between Indigenous and non-Indigenous stories including the significance of tracks and tracking, the integration of the local and the cosmic, the site’s role as a gathering place and the importance of the black swan to Noongar and European culture.<sup>68</sup>

The decision to name the square after Yagan – an influential Noongar warrior



**Figure 33 (top)**

William Street Mall entrance to Yagan Square featuring the *Wirin* statue by Noongar artist Tjyllyungoo. Source: ASPECT Studios; photography Peter Bennetts, 2018. Used with permission.

**Figure 34 (bottom)**

*Waterline*, by artist John Tarry. Source: ASPECT Studios; photography Peter Bennetts, 2018. Used with permission.

and leader who was murdered (and beheaded) in the early days of the colony – is a particularly powerful gesture. Controversially, Yagan’s head was exhibited in a London museum before being buried in a Liverpool cemetery in 1964. For decades, the Noongar community lobbied for a memorial to recognise Yagan, with a life-size bronze statue constructed in 1984 on an island in Perth’s Swan River. However, in 1997, within weeks of the repatriation of Yagan’s remains to Perth, the statue was beheaded (twice) by vandals using an angle grinder.

Naming such a prominent space in Yagan’s honour reflects the acceptance of his significance to Noongar people and his importance in understanding the full story of Perth’s colonial history. This decision is far more confronting than the now common policies of dual naming in Australian cities (such as Victoria Square/ Tarntanyangga). As Stephen Gilchrist highlights, a difficult and uncomfortable history is inscribed into Perth’s new meeting place.<sup>69</sup> This decision by the WA state government was inspired by an observation by Noongar elder Ken Colbung who, on the return of Yagan’s head to Australia, expressed the hope that “the spirit of Yagan would now be able to join the continuum and could perhaps live on in a new body.”<sup>70</sup>

Throughout Yagan Square, a diverse range of public artworks explore stories and sites of convergences, ranging from the 9-metre tall *Wirin* statue designed by Noongar artist Tjyllyungoo (Figure 33), which greets visitors on the William Street frontage, through to artist John Tarry’s *Waterline* – a 200-metre water feature carved from Western Australian granite which references the wetland ecology of the site (Figure 34). This work physically brings water into the site, transforming from a small trickle over urban steps close to the amphitheatre into free-flowing water channels and finishing in a shallow reflection pool at street level.

This agenda extends into the potentials of *new media* and real-time data to encourage public interactivity. In a further evolution of creative placemaking strategies, digital technologies are applied in a more comprehensive manner than discussed for Victoria Square/Tarntanyangga – a reflection of technological advancements. Two digital surfaces project image and sound (night and day) and introduce a public digital art gallery which can show visually dynamic representations of stories, histories and artworks from community groups, emerging and established artists. The high shade canopy framing the amphitheatre reflects digital content from above and below, while a digital tower

on the street frontage adjoining the square projects visuals into the surrounding urban fabric, forming a major digital “totem” for Perth’s CBD.<sup>71</sup>

Developed over a decade, these two projects offer evidence of a maturing of Reconciliation processes and ambitions, along with the conceptual differences in reworking an explicitly colonial square – subverting dominant narratives and symbols – versus developing concurrently stories of encounters and convergence in a new space. Furthermore, they also provide a valuable insight into the economic realities of funding civic spaces, an area which is often given little attention in academic discourse on the public realm.

Much discourse on civic space in the late twentieth century warned of the dangers of neoliberal development. For example, writing in 1997, Rowe highlighted the challenges of producing design that resist “the whims” of the private developer, the “consumerist pabulum of market forces” and the “co-option by states in the form of grandiose projects.”<sup>72</sup> Informed by many post-industrial redevelopment schemes such as London’s Docklands or Melbourne’s Southbank, this type of development has resulted in relatively soulless urban form, primarily commercial in nature. However, it has become increasingly clear in the new millennium that few governments are in a position to entirely fund public works, let alone the ongoing management, maintenance and funding of programs and events essential to any new civic space. The contemporary square, therefore, is as much a commercial venture as it is a cultural stage.

### Who Finances the Civic?

In December 2017, the Victorian government announced plans to demolish Federation Square’s eastern building and replace it with an Apple Global Flagship store. With no consultation with the public or Melbourne City Council, yet with a charter claiming the square under community ownership, this development shocked the public.<sup>73</sup> Many were outraged that a much-loved Melbourne place would now be branded by Apple. The relevance of a global brand to Federation Square’s cultural and civic charter was argued through the language of creative placemaking, championing innovation, creativity and cultural expression. Apple is particularly astute in this realm, with the design of physical spaces considered their “largest physical product,” aiming for their stores to become “one with the community.”<sup>74</sup> The debate over Apple is not unique to Federation Square, but has been replicated in other parts of the world

as the company aggressively inserts itself into culturally significant public space.<sup>75</sup>

Apple's tactics of focusing on creativity and community building make the debate increasingly difficult to negotiate. However, given government reluctance to fund the public realm, is private sector engagement with creative placemaking and civic space so problematic, particularly if the alternative is nothing being constructed or managed? For example, missing from the Victoria Square/Tarntanyangga development was the proposed Mullabukka Cultural Centre, which was conceived as a "Living Kultja" – a place for the transfer and activation of the knowledge of country, ritual, song, custom, memory, place and belonging.<sup>76</sup> Surrounded by a mosaic garden of South Australian native plants, the centre was intended to offer visitors an orientating experience of Indigenous culture and the unique environment of South Australia before they headed into other regions of the state.<sup>77</sup>

The fact that this stand-alone centre has not been realised is not surprising, given the difficulties arising from Indigenous cultural centres constructed throughout Australia in the 1990s. The concept, as presented in the development document, replicates major mistakes of earlier endeavours by focusing solely on architectural form and design intent, without considering more critical questions of governance, organisational structure and the dilemma of ongoing funding.<sup>78</sup> Whether the cultural centre and garden will ever be realised is questionable. Adelaide City Council, which funded stage one, are requesting the South Australian state government to provide funding for stage two. The state government is reluctant to invest until after the redevelopment of the nearby Adelaide Central markets.

The largest challenge for the realisation of the vision for Victoria Square/Tarntanyangga is therefore economic. Without any permanent cultural or commercial attractor, it remains unfinished, suffering many of the same problems which inspired its revitalisation. Beyond hosting feature Adelaide events and occasional recreational activities, such as a temporary ice-skating rink, the day-to-day use of the square is low-key and passive.

In contrast, Yagan Square was constructed with a commercial program centred on food and entertainment. The complex is devoid of museums, galleries and cultural centres, an omission explained by its proximity to major cultural institutions such as the Art Gallery of Western Australia and the Perth Institute

of Contemporary Art, located just 200 metres down the road. A market hall stretching over two floors houses small food stalls (many of which originated from local food trucks), featuring Western Australian specialties such as farm-to-plate dining, lobster rolls, toasted sandwiches and produce from a honey farm. A playground is located behind the central amphitheatre, while an Asian-themed food street, and more food, drink and entertainment establishments, are positioned away from the central gathering space along the street perimeter. Yet questions have been raised over the Yagan Square's commercial viability. A year after opening, some businesses had closed, with tenants expressing disappointment at low levels of pedestrian traffic (around half of the predicted numbers) from the transport hubs and the CBD.<sup>79</sup> Weekends are particularly empty, with the interior food court failing to be noticed by passing pedestrians. Whether Yagan Square will suffer from a similar economic fate as Federation Square is still unclear. However, its popularity is expected to be bolstered by the continuing urban development in the precinct. For example, a new \$695 million campus for Edith Cowan University will be built close by, accommodating up to 9200 students and staff.<sup>80</sup>

### The Future Civic

Designing Australian urban civic space in the early twenty-first century is a complex affair, requiring the negotiation of the increasingly blurred boundaries between the civic, cultural and commercial realms, along with the growing cultural and political ambitions of Reconciliation. In this chapter we have highlighted how the maturing of Reconciliation processes has reshaped design processes constructing civic space, shifting attention from the *recognition* of Indigenous stories and histories to the *co-creation* of places. In the absence of formal redress, legislative change and the subsequent revision of urban and environmental history, Indigenous-led frameworks such as Kaart Koort Waarnginy and the associated creative template form essential tools to guide government, developers, designers and the Indigenous community in an inclusive and innovative manner.

Although incomplete, Victoria Square/Tarntanyangga continues to be an important place of Indigenous gathering in the city of Adelaide. In a major symbolic gesture, the central plaza was named Reconciliation Plaza (Figure 33) in 2014 and constitutes as an important stage for civil expression, as evident

in the recent convergence on the square for Adelaide's Black Lives Matter rallies in July 2020.<sup>81</sup> Lacking any 'big ticket' drawcards, the square can still be considered a successful civic space, fulfilling many of Rowe's indicators – representative of collective and individual experience, broadly symbolic, and yet grounded in the particular and the everyday. While its physical form may remain distinctly colonial, its enduring value to Indigenous sovereignty, self-determination and now Reconciliation aligns it with the aspirations of twenty-first-century Australia. Perhaps this will suffice? Only time will tell whether Yagan Square's strong conceptual and developmental framework can achieve the depth of cultural meaning and economic vitality expected of such a civic investment. Despite the best intentions, sometimes good development process and design are not enough.

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## Notes

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2. The Victoria Square Masterplan received the 2010 SA Local Government Award for Planning Excellence; the 2010 Urban Design SA Commendation for Planning Excellence; a commendation for Urban Design at the 2011 Planning Institute of Australia National Awards for Planning Excellence; and the 2011 Australian Institute of Landscape Architecture SA Award for excellence in Urban Design. The constructed Stage 1 is similarly celebrated, having been awarded the 2015 AILA SA Award of Excellence for Urban Design, the Australian Institute of Architecture's 2015 Gavin Walkley Award for Urban Design, and the 2016 AILA National Award for Urban Design. Yagan Square was awarded the John Septimus Roe Award in the category of Urban Design, as well as the Colorbond Award for Steel Architecture at the 2019 Australian Institute of Architects Western Australia Awards, alongside commendations for Public Architecture and the Mondoluce Lighting Award categories. Other accolades include: Silver Award for Architecture – Public Realm at the Drivenxdesign 2019 Gov Design Awards; Australian Institute of Architects National Architecture Awards 2019 National Award for Urban Design; 2019 Planning Institute of Australia's Great Place Award; 2019 Australian Institute of Landscape Architecture National Landscape Architecture Awards: Landscape Architecture Award for Civic Landscape; 2019 Good Design Australia Award (Architectural/Urban) Winner; and Award for Excellence at the 2019 International Federation of Landscape Architects Landscape Architecture Awards.
3. Ash Amin, "Collective Culture and Urban Public Space," *City: Analysis of Urban Trends, Culture, Theory, Policy, Action*, 12:1 (2008), 5-24, at 6.
4. Ruth Fincher, Maree Parry and Kate Shaw, "Place-making or Place-masking? The Everyday Political Economy of 'Making Place,'" *Planning Theory & Practice*, 17:4 (2016), 516-536, at 518-519.
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8. Shaw and Montana, "Place-making," 168-9.

9. “Shaw and Montana, “Place-making,” 169-71. See also Jim McGuigan, “Doing a Florida Thing: The Creative Class Thesis and Cultural Policy,” *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 15:3 (2009), 291-300. <https://doi.org/10.1080/102866309027463281>.
10. Peter G Rowe, *Civic Realism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), 6.
11. *Ibid.*, 218.
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14. Catriona Elder, “Unfinished Business in (Post) Reconciliation Australia,” *Australian Humanities Review*, 61 (2017), 74-93, at 79-82.
15. In Australia the term “unfinished business” refers to unresolved aspects of formal Reconciliation, with particular reference to the recommendations of the Parliamentary Royal Commission *Bringing Them Home* Report. See Coral Dow, “Sorry: The Unfinished Business of the Bringing Them Home Report,” *Parliament of Australia*, 2 February 2008, [https://www.aph.gov.au/about\\_parliament/parliamentary\\_departments/parliamentary\\_library/pubs/bn/0708/bringingthemhomereport](https://www.aph.gov.au/about_parliament/parliamentary_departments/parliamentary_library/pubs/bn/0708/bringingthemhomereport); Elder, “Unfinished Business.”
16. The Noongar people comprise 14 separate language groups including Amangu, Yued/ Yuat, Whadjuk/Wajuk, Binjareb/Pinjarup, Wardandi, Balardong/Ballardong, Nyakinyaki, Wilman, Ganeang, Bibulmun/Piblemen, Mineng, Goreng and Wudjari and Njunga.
17. The alternative spellings of Noongar are Nyungar, Nyoongar, Nyoongah, Nyungah, Nyugah and Yunga. Throughout this paper the spelling ‘Noongar’ is adopted for consistency unless quoted otherwise. This follows the usage of the South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council; see “About Us,” *Kaartdijin Noongar – Noongar Knowledge – Sharing Noongar Culture*, 2012, <http://www.noongar-culture.org.au/about/> (accessed 13 December 2020).
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23. Jacobs, *Edge of Empire*, 107.
24. *Ibid.*, 108.
25. *Ibid.*
26. *Ibid.*
27. *Ibid.*
28. National Museum of Australia, “First Australians – Fanny Balbuk,” 2015, [web.archive.org/web/20151004055744/http://www.nma.gov.au/exhibitions/first\\_australians/resistance/fanny\\_balbuk](http://www.nma.gov.au/exhibitions/first_australians/resistance/fanny_balbuk) (accessed 13 December 2020).
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30. Kurna identity has a complex history. For a discussion of the origins of the term, and the location of Kurna territory, see Steve Hemming, “‘Kurna’ Identity: A Brief History,” *Journal of the Anthropological Society of South Australia*, 28:2 (1990), 126-42.
31. Phil Bagust and Lynda Tout-Smith, *The Native Plants of Adelaide* (Adelaide: Wakefield Press, 2010), v.
32. The knowledge available is pieced together from Kurna oral history, early colonial sources and archaeology, as well as that documented by anthropologists following settlement. Although contemporary anthropologists have revised the often paternalistic documentation of Kurna cultural practice, the flaws and contingencies inherent in this particular lens of history are worth noting. The largest body of contemporary scholarship related to the Kurna relates to the dynamic revival of language emerging from the Kurna Language Reclamation project, Kurna Warra Pintyanthi, hosted by the Linguistics Department at the University of Adelaide.
33. “The Adelaide Tribe,” *The Advertiser*, 8 December 1927; Tom Gara, “The Life of Ivaritji (‘Princess Amelia’) of the Adelaide Tribe,” Aboriginal Adelaide Special Issue, *Journal of the Anthropological Society of South Australia*, 28:1-2 (1990), 64-104; CG Teichelmann and CW Schürmann, *Outlines of*

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  35. Susan Marsden and Kathy Gargett, *Adelaide: A Brief History* (Adelaide, SA: History Trust of South Australia, 1996), 17.
  36. Lee-Anne Hall, "Sitting Down in the Square: Indigenous Presence in an Australian City," *Humanities Research*, 11:1 (2004), 54-77, at 56.
  37. Pitjantjatjara elders discussed their native title claim at Victoria Square before they met with then Premier Don Dunstan.
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  43. The interpretation strategy also engaged secondary consultants for digital media Gary Warner and Rezon8, as well as sound designers Sonia Leber and David Cheswith. See TaylorCullityLethlean and TonkinZulai-khaGreer, *Victoria Square | Tarndanyangga Urban Regeneration Project*, 137-48.
  44. Department of the Premier and Cabinet, "Media Statement – DevelopmentWA to Play a Central Role in Shaping the Future of WA," 25 September 2019, <https://www.mediastatements.wa.gov.au/Pages/McGowan/2019/09/DevelopmentWA-to-play-a-central-role-in-shaping-the-future-of-WA.aspx> (accessed 5 December 2020).
  45. DevelopmentWA, "Our Approach," 2018, <https://www.mra.wa.gov.au/about-us/our-approach> (accessed 2 August 2018).
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  48. K Cullity, "More Than Just Looking Good: Beauty, Aesthetics and Care - Braided Pathways: A Practice Sustained by Difference" PhD thesis, RMIT University, 2013), 192.
  49. The ACC also became one of the first councils to sign the National Sorry Day Acknowledgement in 1998, which formed the basis for the ACC Reconciliation Action Plan. It also signed a Reconciliation Vision Statement (1997). See also the most recent RAP: Adelaide City Council, "Stretch Reconciliation Action Plan 2018-2021," 2018, [https://dmzweb.adelaidecitycouncil.com/agendasminutes/files08/Attachments/Reconciliation\\_2\\_December\\_2020\\_Item\\_5.1\\_Link\\_1.pdf](https://dmzweb.adelaidecitycouncil.com/agendasminutes/files08/Attachments/Reconciliation_2_December_2020_Item_5.1_Link_1.pdf).
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  51. Kate Gregory, "Art and Artifice: Peter Emmett's Curatorial Practice in the Hyde Park Barracks and Museum of Sydney," *Fabrications*, 16:1 (2006), 1-22, at 2.
  52. Kylie Message, "The New Museum," *Theory, Culture & Society*, 23:2-3 (2006), 603-6, at 604-5.
  53. Kylie Message, *New Museums and the Making of Culture* (Oxford, UK: Berg, 2006), 28.
  54. Andrea Witcomb, *Re-Imagining the Museum: Beyond the Mausoleum* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 128.
  55. TaylorCullityLethlean and TonkinZulai-khaGreer, *Victoria Square | Tarndanyangga Urban Regeneration Project*, 131.
  56. *Ibid.*, 107.
  57. *Ibid.*, 132.
  58. *Ibid.*
  59. *Ibid.*, 133-4.
  60. *Ibid.*
  61. *Ibid.*, 139.
  62. *Ibid.*, 91.
  63. Cullity, "More Than Just Looking Good," 196.

64. DevelopmentWA, "DevelopmentWA Reconciliation Action Plan July 2020-June 2023," 2020, <https://developmentwa.com.au/documents/1276-rap-2020/viewdocument/1276>, 15.
65. Walley is a visual artist and major Indigenous leader in Australia who served as chair of the Australia Council's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Board for many years. In 1993 he was awarded the Order of Australia Medal for his contribution to the performing arts and Nyungar culture. See also DevelopmentWA, "DevelopmentWA Reconciliation Action Plan July 2020-June 2023," 15.
66. DevelopmentWA, "DevelopmentWA Reconciliation Action Plan July 2020-June 2023," 15.
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68. *Ibid.*, 333.
69. Stephen Gilchrist, "Surfacing Histories: Memorials and Public Art in Perth," *Artlink*, 38:2 (2018), 42-7.
70. South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council, "Yagan," *Kaaridijin Noongar – Noongar Knowledge – Sharing Noongar Culture*, 2012, <https://www.noongarculture.org.au/yagan/> (accessed 13/12/2020). Cited in Paul Carter, "Ghosting: Putting the Volume into Screen Memory," in *Contemporary Publics: Shifting Boundaries in New Media, Technology and Culture*, ed. P David Marshall et al. (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2016), 61-76, at 63.
71. The tower is crowned by 14 metal bull rushes (which represent the 14 Noongar language groups).
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