



Designing for Wellbeing: Redesigning the Unremarkable

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF TRADITIONAL OWNERS

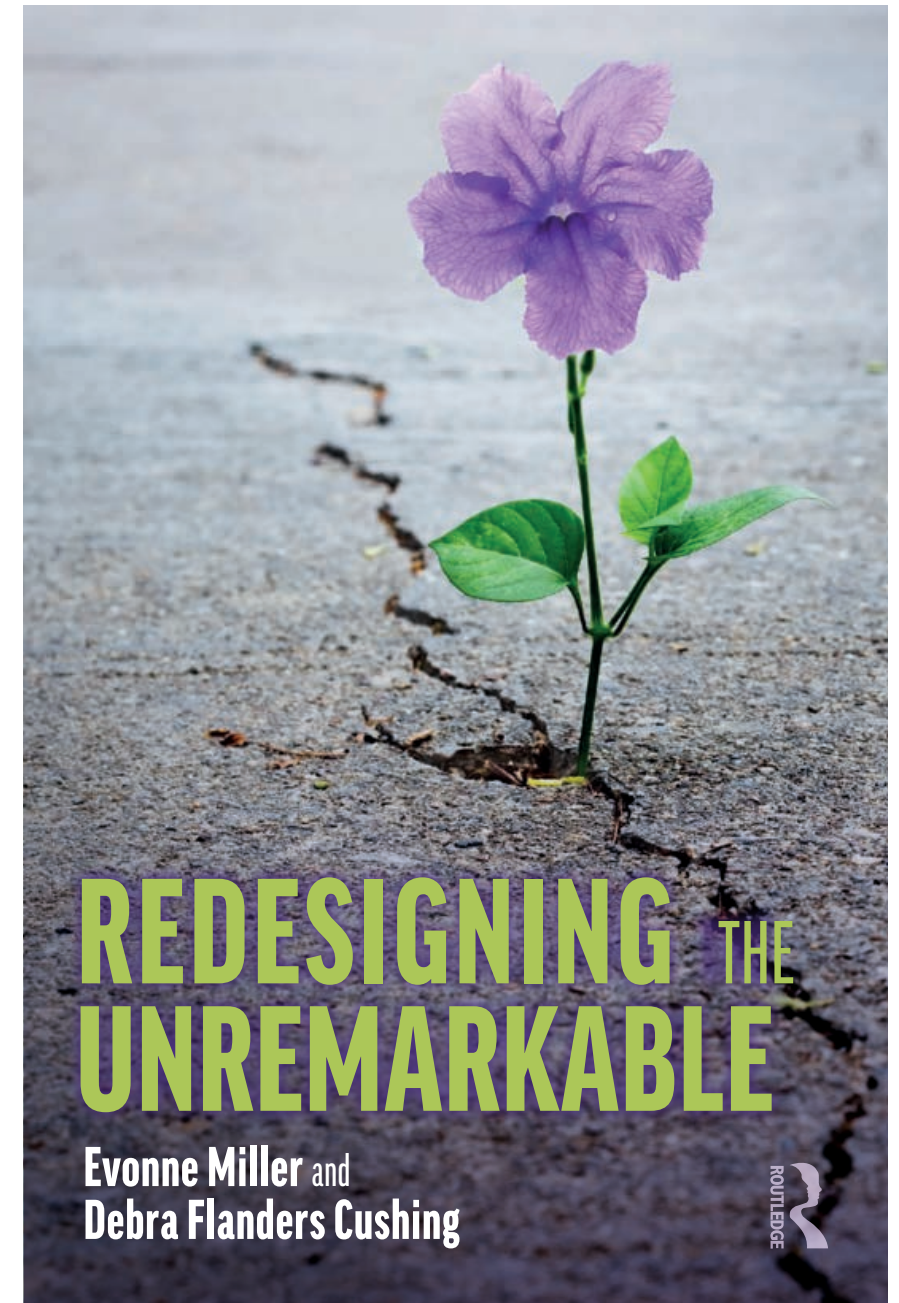
QUT acknowledges the Turrbal and Yugara, as the First Nations owners of the lands where QUT now stands. We pay respect to their Elders, lores, customs and creation spirits. We recognise that these lands have always been places of teaching, research and learning.

QUT acknowledges the important role Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people play within the QUT community.



Why the unremarkable?

Great design is not just for the large-scale, costly public spaces. It is for the **invisible, ordinary**, and often **neglected elements and spaces** in our cities. These everyday spaces make up our urban fabric where we live, work, and play.



Designing an Experience

Elements

- **Sitting Down...** benches and chairs
- **Throwing Out...** trash bins
- **Moving Up...** stairways
- **Blocking out...** walls and fences

Spaces

- **Staying Put...** parking lots
- **Hiding Under...** underpasses
- **Spending Time...** shopping malls
- **Going Places...** multi-use trails
- **Speeding Along...** streets

The Premise...

If we transform the **bland, boring, or broken** aspects of our urban environments with **simple, thoughtful, and creative changes** – we can transform unremarkable experiences into those that promote health and wellbeing.



Photo by Michael Coghlin Flickr CC





Why? Because Design is never neutral...

Urban elements and spaces have **unlimited potential to contribute to vibrant urban life** that fosters healthy living.

We hope to question why things are done and challenge those who have a role in creating spaces to think differently about the unremarkable spaces in their communities.

DIY Urbanism

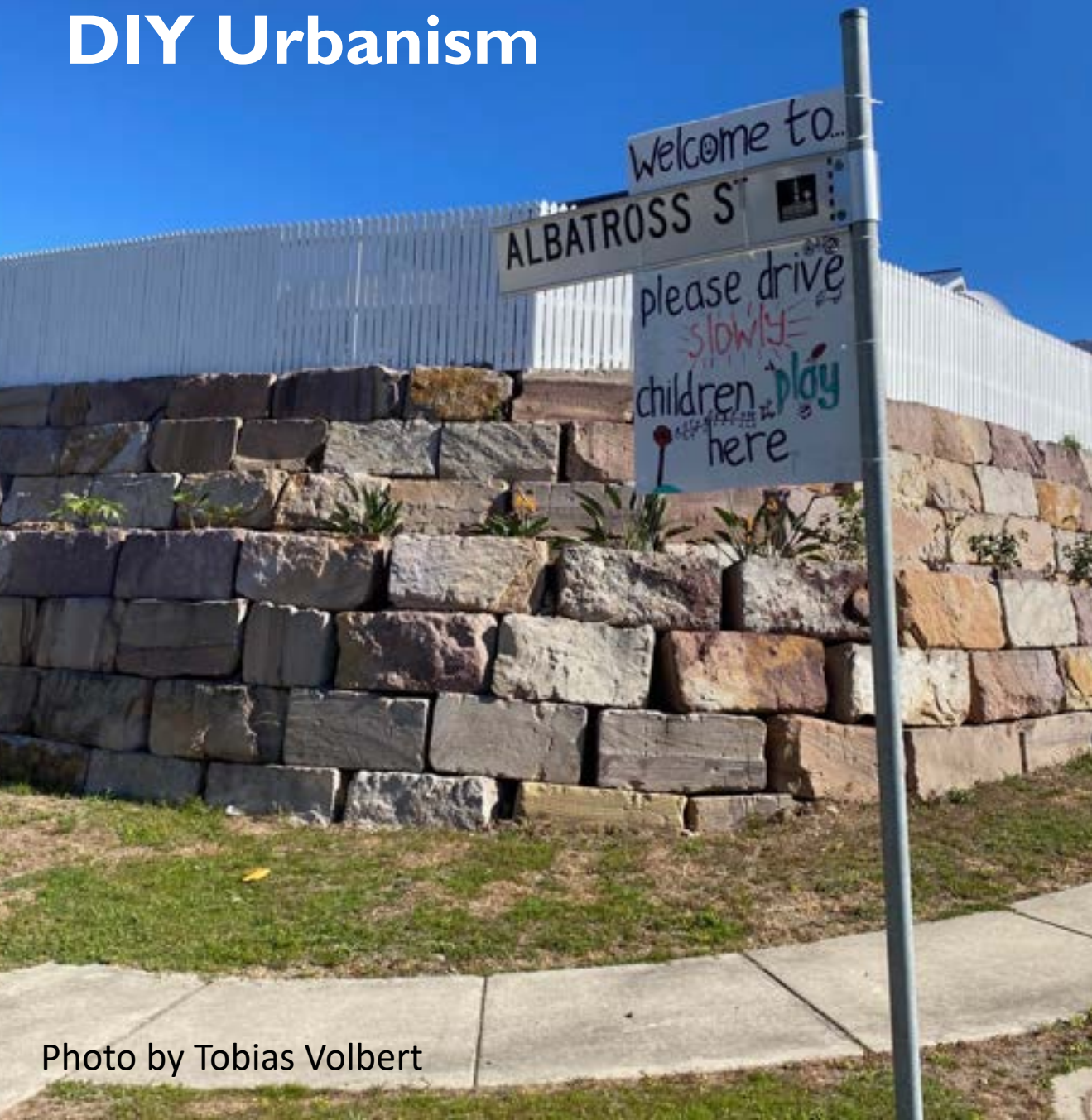


Photo by Tobias Volbert





Playable Design...

Using the idea of playfulness, we focus on our innate need to explore, discover, experiment and test our mental and physical boundaries, while promoting our health and wellbeing.

Informed by 3 key theories:

Broken Window Theory

Minor visual disorder (litter, graffiti, or a broken window) communicates a disregard for maintenance, and an invitation for crime and anti-social behaviour. (Wilson & Kelling, 1982)

Cues to Care

Culturally appropriate symbols or “cues” signal a human intention toward maintenance and care and suggest that our spaces are designed with a purpose to meet the needs of all users. (Nassauer, 1995)

Nudge Theory

Small nudges in the environment steer people’s choices in directions that will improve their lives. People still have a choice, but the nudge encourages the health option. (Thaler and Sunstein, 2008)

Examples of Nudges

Signs



Photo by Elliott Brown on Flickr

Piano Stairs



Photo by KJ Vogelius on Flickr.



Throwing out... trash bins

As a society, we produce a lot of waste that is often 'magically' transported away. The creative re-design of trash and recycling bins and the use of nudges can urge reflection and ideally change behaviour.

Using humour to nudge recycling



Photos by Kristen Hardy Design



A Gumdrop bin

Credit: Gumdrop



Shooting Baskets while Recycling

Photo from <https://themarketingbirds.com/6-creative-bin-design-to-reduce-environmental-pollution/>



Sitting down... benches and chairs

Public seating that is inviting and well-designed can help build social connections and community well-being. It can enhance urban equality and provide a place to be part of community life.

Playful Seating: Swing Time by Howeler + Yoon Architects, Boston




Photo Credit: John Horner, Courtesy of Höweler + Yoon Architecture

Recycled Sculptural Benches



Benches and Photos by Colin Selig, Alligator bench photo by Suzanne Gray



Moving up... stairways

Stairs can evoke curiosity (what is at the top?), can be a metaphor for achieving a goal or obtaining power, and can provide opportunities for being activity. Yet, they can also present mobility obstacles and can potentially be dangerous in certain situations.

Black and White Spiral Staircase Oodi Helsinki Central Library



Elevator decals to encourage exercise, Singapore



The Cascade Project, Hong Kong



Photos courtesy of Edge Design Institute





Blocking Out...fences and walls

Fences and walls keep people/animals in, and also out. They can provide a sense of security and safety but can also create barriers and divisions. Because they are everywhere, fences and walls have huge potential to be used as a blank canvas.

Musical railings to create a playful experience





Yarn bombing on a Chainlink Fence

Photo by Sarah Nichols Flickr CC



Passing Under... underpasses

Dark, damp, dreary spaces that often lack natural surveillance or planned uses. These spaces can become dangerous or unsightly, cause anxiety, and generally detract from urban areas. But they have a huge amount of potential.

Burnside Skatepark in Portland, Oregon




Rainbow Tunnel in Toronto



Silly Walks Tunnel in The Netherlands





Why we need to redesign the unremarkable...

Playful urban spaces and elements that encourage all ages to smile, laugh, challenge themselves, connect with others, be physically active, and simply enjoy life should not be limited to theme parks and sports arenas. We should redesign all unremarkable spaces of our daily activities.



Thank you!

All images not otherwise referenced were taken by Deb Cushing or Evonne Miller. The contents of this presentation is from *Redesigning the Unremarkable* by Miller & Cushing, published in 2023 by Routledge.