

RECIPES FOR LIVING IN THE 'VUCA' AGE

In his science fiction novel *The Gods Themselves* (1972) Isaac Asimov wrote: "The easiest way to solve a problem is to deny it exists." (- which could be a D. Trump mantra!). This was set a century after an ecological and economic collapse in which the world's population dived from six billion to two billion people, and could be a prescient call from the present state of play on a world stage with a population heading towards 7.5 billion.

But perhaps there is hope! In my current reading list are:

- *The Well-Tempered City* (2016 - Jonathon F.P. Rose; an urban planner and environmentalist) on what modern science, ancient civilisation and human nature can teach us about potential scenarios for the future of urban life on earth, and how we might deal with future Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity (VUCA).
- *The Burning Answer* (2014 – Keith Barnham; Emeritus Professor of Physics at Imperial College London) that analyses the solar revolution and its capacity to deal with threats of global warming, nuclear conflict and ongoing disturbances in the oil-rich Middle East, and posits that misdirected funding and political intent have cost us dearly.

There is a convergence of aspiration in both these books that the human race can move from our plundering, blinkered practices of maximising economic gain to seeking a new paradigm for urban ecology and development that can 'make our global, urban-dominated home a more resilient and compassionate place.' (D.J. Siegel, MD, Mindsight Institute). Much of the subject matter covered also dovetails with many of my TVO subjects over the past two years, and frequent media coverage on the same.

Are these the best cities we can build? Is this the best we can do?
University of Sydney cultural theorist Oliver Watts

A recent Common Edge article by Steve Cochran and Steven Bingle – 'Climate Change is Upon Us. How Are We Planning for It?' – sets out five basic challenges that coalesce with needs expressed in both books to guide the scientists, urban designers, community planners and politicians whose role it will be to help us deal with our common urban futures.

Live with and not against nature. Green roofs and designing for solar and wind power in buildings can help a more sustainable balance between manmade and natural habitats - TWTC proposes that green urbanism and biophilic infrastructure can help reduce energy demand, and TBA gives a glowing report on the fast improving solar technologies that boost renewable energy supply.

Support systems for planning and decision-making that will allow citizens to equitably participate in the creation of their own futures. Many existential threats lie ahead for our systems of top down governance, but at the community level much more can be done to reinforce ties, create trust and build collective efficacy for our neighbourhoods that can build and reinforce social capital at local levels. Both TWTC and TBA propose that local sourcing and control of energy, as well as growing efficiency can greatly improve local resilience across all global cities in the next 2 decades.

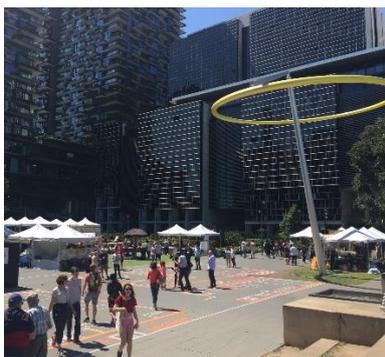
Embrace more efficient transportation and distribution systems: Uber services, driverless cars and light rail systems get plenty of media coverage as solutions along with other resource efficient alternatives like bikeways and drone deliveries. But the densification of urban areas and limits to suburban sprawl will in time help both connectivity and proximity, while reducing energy needs and traffic congestion – all work in progress across Sydney.

Create smaller and smarter dwelling units. Architecture Week in early October included Global 1:1 - a ‘tape-down’ comparison of compact 1 bedroom living units, and Pod Chats that demonstrated innovation in small, flexible living units (see pics). Living with sustainable ratios of space per person that operate in harmony with more creative, expansive and communal public spaces was mentioned in an SMH article 12/9/16, and on 17/10/16 NSW Planning Minister Rob Stokes released a draft Medium Density Housing Code that supports the rejuvenation of the terrace as a compact way to increase density.

Develop new coalitions between governments, businesses, educators, and all community stakeholders. The Greater Sydney Commission should be a step in the right direction to improve coordination of planning and infrastructure levers across metropolitan Sydney. Complemented by *Better Placed* - a design led approach to developing Architecture and Design Policy for New South Wales released by NSW Government Architect - a framework is being sought for more cooperative government, private sector and community interaction to improve social, environmental and economic outcomes for New South Wales and its communities. Problems do exist, and we ignore them at our peril!

In a time of increasing volatility, complexity, and ambiguity, the well-tempered city has systems that can help it evolve toward a more even temperament, one that balances prosperity and well-being with efficiency and equality in ways that continually restore the city’s social and natural capital.

Johnathon F.P. Rose



Architecture Week action at Central Park- promoting solutions for the VUCA age.

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