

OCCASIONAL ADDRESS

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for graduates from the Faculty of Design, Architecture and Building
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Distinguished Guests, Ladies & Gentlemen.

Firstly, let me also extend my personal congratulations to all you graduates.

I feel privileged in being asked to address you today.

I must thank Ross Milbourne who I've found refreshingly unpretentious in all my dealings with him. Vicki Sara, the Chancellor exudes the same easy style. I admire her ability to maintain a firm hand and a smile for all of you graduates. I'd like to also thank Desley Luscombe, the Dean, who accompanied me on a tour of the faculty, to help me prepare for today's address. During that tour I was impressed by the hi-tech facilities, the 3D modelling work, the overall enthusiasm of the Dean herself and of the students I met graduating today. This seems a very well run Faculty and I applaud the energy and application of all concerned.

My father was an engineer, my mother an arts graduate. Both from the University of Turin in Italy. My wife, Anita, here today, was also born in Turin. She also attended UTS like I did. My father loved contemporary art and design and I too was similarly inspired. But, at University, during my student days in Architecture, I felt quite muddled. I found the experience of university and growing up quite confounding. I think, in my efforts to comprehend my trajectory in life, I felt overwhelmed by the complexity of it all.

Maybe the truth more than anything else is that I was just interested in girls. I can't remember much about my graduation 27 years ago and certainly not the graduation speech!

All I remember is the enormous sense of relief at finally completing the course!!

I want to say a few words about City Life. Here we are today as graduates with careers in the development industry. The development of cities in general is not

just an academic subject. Most of humanity now lives in cities. I tried a jocular approach but kept being pulled back into serious.

When you consider our biological past of some 2 million years, the city is a relatively recent phenomenon. Our history is one of hunters and gatherers, in small tribes. I think that's why we, as Australian in particular, feel such an affinity to Aboriginals.

The metamorphosis that city living demands of our biological make-up as homo sapiens must be dramatic. It is not just the pressure of crowded living and heavy traffic but also the displacement brought about by modern transportation, telephones, radio, TV and now the internet.

The sum total of crammed living, long commuting and psychological disorientation cannot be very healthy. Cities that mediate these physical, social and psychological forces are rare. What city can adequately cater for the intimate, the family, the social, the recreational, the economic, the cultural and the political aspects of our lives?

This is the burden we place on the development industry.

A city, to be a city, needs a sense of community. We form small tribes around our schools, our workplaces, our universities. But a city, if it is to be recognized as a city, requires a broader sense of belonging, a sense of bonding across tribal factions. A community takes decades of living together. Building a community at the outset, requires some form of socio-political compact.

Let me turn now to our city — Sydney.

Sydney has a devastatingly beautiful landscape. Governor Phillip famously wrote "It has one of the finest harbours in the world".

He built this city on the middens of an ancient race, as an outpost of an 18th Century Empire.

In a way, the beauty of this natural landscape has permitted us to commit unseemly abominations — such as the Cahill Expressway at Circular Quay, or the alarming absence of even one decent public square. The beaches have defaulted as are our piazzas.

In architectural terms, The Opera House saves this city from tawdry mediocrity — What are North Sydney, Hurstville, Bondi Junction or Parramatta if not prime examples of appallingly bad planning and design?

This city, like many others of the last century is a monument to commerce. We've created grand consumer culture machines of concrete, asphalt and steel. In the process we have unwittingly desecrated landscapes and foreshores, destroyed flora and habitat. We have created soulless suburbs in servitude to the holy dollar.

Cities keep growing.

The magnetism of social interaction is irresistible. We continue to retrofit infrastructure on the run. Look at Sydney's train system.

Decentralisation policies are abandoned as the momentum of large cities prove unstoppable.

The fabric of the modern metropolis is now set for centuries to come.

From east to the west, from Shanghai to Chicago, from Bangkok to Vladivostock.

The pattern is the same — the encrusted congestion of rampant speculation. Shopping malls default as community centres; high rise shoeboxes as house and home.

The Australian pattern differs only in its horizontal sprawl, still pursuing the Garden Suburb Utopia, ceaselessly creeping the periphery with brick venereal disease. Look at Perth's ravaged coastline north and south — McMansions replete with palm trees. Sydney may not be Manila but similar forces are at work.

The modern nation state is driven by economic and security imperatives, sacrificing liveability in its urban areas. Australian cities are not the catastrophes of many others overseas, thanks only to smaller populations rather than good planning.

A Beijing friend remarked how pleasant it was to visit Sydney ... just to hear the birds.

Only in recent times do we hear Australian politicians speak of liveability in the same breath as productivity.

Only after decades of neglected infrastructure in our suburbs.

Property Developers have for too long, dictated terms.

Our political institutions/local, state or federal have lacked the strength or the vision to avert the sprawl afflicting every Australian city.

In the graduation booklet today, the Chancellor Vicki Sara says you graduates now face the greatest opportunities and challenges.

I agree.

You have the opportunity to rethink the way we build cities, to rethink the way we live.

We need cities where people can feel as a community of citizens, enjoying the society we create.

Recognizing that society is more than a commercial imperative, Recognizing that a direct relationship with the natural environment is fundamental to healthy living and a sense of place.

We need a socio-political compact which creates community. A political space that enhances collaboration rather than division. From this can come a new template for city design

We need better planning, decentralisation and development frameworks.

There are templates — they can be seen in the smaller historic cities — places like Boston in the U.S., or Vicenza in Italy; Karlsruhe in Germany or Lyon in France. Primarily European examples, smaller yet mostly self sufficient — having a good range of commercial, cultural and recreational amenity.

In conclusion, I think it's plain that our insatiable appetite for economic growth and our blatant disregard for the natural environment is now exposed for what it is — unsustainable.

It is up to us to turn the ship around. Town Planning, Architecture, Property Economics and Building are being dramatically reconfigured for a sustainable future. There is an enormous task ahead of us to create a New Urbanism, rebuilding existing cities to make them more liveable.

I'm sorry that this is sounding like a diatribe but the occasion is too important to make it just an 'occasional' address.

Primarily, this rebuilding requires political initiative.

A socio-political manifesto.

A manifesto proclaiming the need to bring liveability onto centre stage.

A manifesto that puts 'Living' into the word 'City'.

If you believe that a Living City is worth fighting for, then you, young graduates, have this opportunity, this challenge.

Good Luck and Thank you.