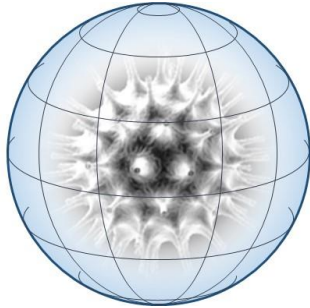# Pandemic-3.0 – from crisis to transformation

A response to the Great Transitions Initiative

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At terrifying speed the Covid-19 global pandemic has brought a multitude of deaths, the lock-down of half the world's population, and the decimation of its economy. The material facts of this disaster bring hard lessons in disaster management, public services and social inequality…

But here I want to take a forward look on the massive transformations now in motion, both negative and positive – and explore practical questions on what kind of pathways could help steer from one kind of outcome to another (see background on www.urban3.net)…

This is the first of two instalments: here setting out the problem, and next, exploring responses.

It seems for situations of high urgency with uncertainty and controversy, we need more than standard forecasting or systems tools.   Here the **FORESIGHT-III** visual thinking approach from the Synergistic Toolkit is very useful.[1] This *Foresight Mode-III,* builds on standard practice, to explore the scope of a '*collective pandemic-3.0 intelligence'*, i.e. the learning and thinking potential of communities and societies to anticipate, adapt, contain or manage the fact of the pandemic.

The sketches below explore this critical moment through the GTI scenario lens. They start with the saying '*never let a good crisis go to waste'* – and then ask, if new systems of *Mode-III* social-political-economic cooperation can emerge from this crisis, how to let these grow against the forces of power and darkness? This is a brief sketch for a planet-sized challenge, which draws on new thinking (and the new book) on '*collective intelligence and the pathways from smart to wise'.*[2]

<<insert figure 1>>

Pandemic-3.0: scenarios

Figure 1

The Pandemic unknowns /unknowables played out on the Great Transition 3x2 scenarios

	Pandemic solved: (containment, vaccines, test/trace, treatments	**Pandemic continues** (viral mutations, policy failures, medical failures, social conflict
CONVENTIONAL WORLDS Market forces Policy reform		
BARBAR-IZATION Breakdown Fortress world		
GREAT TRANSITION Eco-communities New sustainability		

Scenarios – unknowns or unknowables?

For a first mapping of the 'unknown / unknowns' (or maybe 'unknowables'), we start with the GTI scenario set, and for each ask the $trillion question (assumed as context beyond our boundary):

- '**Pandemic solved'** with a successful combination of containment, test/trace/isolate systems, vaccines or medical treatments??

- **'Pandemic continues'** with viral mutations, policy / social conflict, health failures, vaccine failures etc??

The sketches here are standing in for 1000s of words, so briefly, the implications could be:

- **Conventional worlds**: generally the direction of policy and business is to maintain the system either market or policy focused: if the pandemic continues both will be under severe stress, and likely to flip over to either '*Barbarization'* or '*Great Transitions'*.
- **Barbarization**: the '*Breakdown'* scenario will see systems collapse whether or not the virus holds. '*Fortress world'* looks very plausible with containment by physical barriers and digital surveillance.
- **Great Transitions**: '*eco-community'* with a continuing pandemic could see an inward retreat: '*new sustainability'* may have to adapt to new conditions

It gets interesting when these scenarios are not only neutral visions of a possible future – they are more like active grabbing of the present. To simplify, the forces of power / wealth / ideology will do whatever it takes to hold on to the current structures, but the pressures induced by the pandemic may reach a tipping point – either towards *barbarization*, or towards a *great transition*.
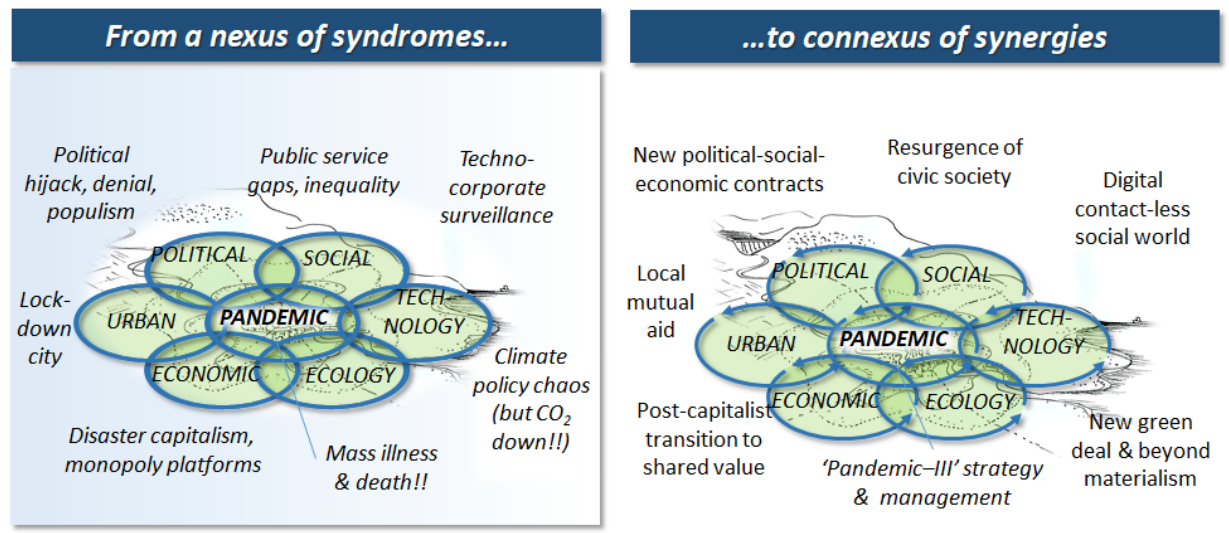

Societal transformations – by accident or design?

Reaching for the flip-chart, we see the social, technology, economic, ecological, political, urban domains ('STEEP' for short) – on the left of *Figure 2,* sketched around the pandemic in the centre. Each involves not only material facts such as economic growth, but the underlying layers of discourse and myth between all involved.[3] And it seems for each negative part of this *nexus* there's also a potential positive or counter-case, shown in the *connexus* on the right hand side of the picture. So here's a first sketch of negative and positive, a starting point for exploring the possible pathways from one to the other.

<<insert figure 2>>

PANDEMIC–3.0: TRANSFORMATION AGENDAS

Figure 2

Scoping of the nexus of challenges, compared to the 'connexus' of transformations

From a nexus of syndromes...

Political hijack, denial, populism

Public service gaps, inequality

Techno-corporate surveillance

Lock-down city

POLITICAL   SOCIAL

URBAN   **PANDEMIC**   TECH-NOLOGY

ECONOMIC   ECOLOGY

Climate policy chaos (but CO_2 down!!)

Disaster capitalism, monopoly platforms

Mass illness & death!!

...to connexus of synergies

New political-social-economic contracts

Resurgence of civic society

Digital contact-less social world

Local mutual aid

POLITICAL   SOCIAL

URBAN   **PANDEMIC**   TECH-NOLOGY

ECONOMIC   ECOLOGY

Post-capitalist transition to shared value

'Pandemic–III' strategy & management

New green deal & beyond materialism

In the **social domain**, the pandemic response locks down all forms of direct social interaction, along with one third of economic activity in service consumption: it also exposes the gaps and shortfalls in public services, and the underlying inequality and exclusion. However there's a resurgence of social and cultural values, organizations and systems, from singing on balconies to a mass volunteering in the health service.

For **technology**, the door is open ever wider for techno-corporate surveillance and financial-ization: while local businesses go down, and while community apps and 3D printing emerge, the global 'GAFA' platforms are expanding without limit. Meanwhile in a possible future world of distancing and 'contactless community', the same digital platforms and networks will be indispensable.

Production in the global **economic system** has been through possibly its greatest ever shock and reduction of GDP, with untold suffering from the newly sick, unemployed, uninsured and homeless. In parallel there are new patterns of part-time and home-working, and a general questioning of materialist debt-fuelled production and consumption.

For the **ecological and climate** agenda, the pandemic slowdown has brought clear skies for the first time in generations, even while climate change, species extinction and toxic overload continues. While international cooperation will be more difficult, it seems possible that in a post-pandemic era, new forms of the green deal will emerge along with non-material lifestyles.

Political implications spread in all directions – the most obvious being the extraordinary acts of the state underwriting businesses and workers (in many countries) – and the most extreme where large (tax-avoiding) corporates carve up the multi-billion bailouts. Again in a post-pandemic era we look for pathways for transformation, with new political-social-economic games in play, and a potential emerging *collective political intelligence*.

Scientific knowledge and expert practice in a post-truth society may yet emerge as the source of trust and confidence. But the massive uncertainties in the basic science are now entangled with

existential controversies: it seems *post-normal science* is one way to approach this, if it can link 'science' with other forms of knowledge.[4]

The next step is to track systematically the components of success – the factors of a *collective Pandemic-3.0 intelligence* – which can lead from crisis to positive opportunity for all – see the next instalment.

So, whether the future is one of hazmat suits and video-holograms, or new-found communities partying in the streets, these will emerge in the months and years to come. The question here is how to shift from power-grabbing alienation to a *Pandemic-3.0* induced *Great Transition*. In this we will need many of the *'pathways from smart to wise'* which are beginning to emerge: intelligent finance, integrated positive health systems, inclusive social mesh-works, synergistic business-enterprise models, deliberative-associative multi-level governance, and so on. All this calls for a collective open mind, to realize the potential emerging from the ashes.

This will be explored by visual thinking and 'mind-games' in our next instalment… coming soon…

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[1] Ravetz, J, & Miles, I.D, (2016) Foresight in cities: on the possibility of a "strategic urban intelligence", *Foresight*, Vol.**18**(5), pp469-490, http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/FS-06-2015-0037

[2] Ravetz, J, (2020), *Deeper City: collective intelligence and the synergistic pathways from smart to wise*. NY, Routledge. https://www.routledge.com/Deeper-City-Collective-Intelligence-and-the-Pathways-from-Smart-to-Wise/Ravetz/p/book/9780415628976

[3] Inayatullah, S, and Black, P, (2020). *Neither A Black Swan Nor A Zombie Apocalypse: The Futures Of A World With The Covid-19 Coronavirus.* Journal of Futures Studies. https://jfsdigital.org/2020/03/18/neither-a-black-swan-nor-a-zombie-apocalypse-the-futures-of-a-world-with-the-covid-19-coronavirus/

[4] Waltner-Toews, D, Biggeri, A, De Marchi, B, Funtowicz, S, Giampietro, M, O'Connor, M, Ravetz, J.R, Saltelli, A, and van der Sluijs, J.P. (2020) *PostNormal Pandemics: Why Covid-19 Requires A New Approach To Science.* Discover Society: *https://discoversociety.org/2020/03/27/post-normal-pandemics-why-covid-19-requires-a-new-approach-to-science/*