

DECONSTRUCTING AND RECONSTRUCTING THE FUTURE

Predictive, cultural and critical epistemologies

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In this article the various epistemological premises embedded in planning and futures studies¹ are examined. While many planners and futurists might locate themselves in separate discursive spaces, from the perspective developed in this article the similarities in their epistemic basis are more similar than different. Thus, the focus of this effort is on planning and futures studies generally; and specifically, the various perspectives on how the future is planned for: namely, the predictive–empirical, the cultural–interpretative, and the critical–post-structural are articulated.

The thrust of this article is theoretical as opposed to the presentation of specific future 'facts' of a historical time or a geographical space. Of concern then is not a particular plan, but rather the how of planner and future talk, that is, the institutional practices, structures and languages that construct the future. I divide the discourse of the future into three separate but interrelated dimensions—the predictive, cultural and critical. I argue that the first approach simply reinscribes the present even while it 'predicts' the future; the second, while significant in expanding the discourse of the future across cultures, relativizes the future at the expense of politics; the third, however, by historicizing and deconstructing the future, creates new epistemological spaces that enable the formation of alternative futures.

These three approaches are linked to three epistemological positions: empirical, interpretative, and post-structural. While there are similarities between these, the effort here is not to develop their interrelationships but

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to accentuate their differences in the hope of developing more enabling understandings of the ways the future can be conceived.

Epistemological assumptions of the real

Every planning effort involves an epistemological assumption of the real. For planners and futurists, this entails various assumptions about the nature of time, concerning whether time is a social construction or whether it ontologically—really, independently—exists, and whether one is concerned with measurable quantified time, seasonal time, mythic time, or visionary time. In addition to basic assumptions of time, planning involves assumptions of the *economic*, in terms of the allocation of meanings, goods, technologies and resources; assumptions of the *political*, in terms of what should be nominated as legitimate out of the range of possible allocations; and *ideological-cultural* assumptions, in terms of the relative roles of actors (individuals, states or the environment, for example), structures and values in various planning processes. Finally, there are assumptions of language, concerning whether language simply describes the real (ie, language is transparent), or whether language participates in the social construction of the real (ie, grammar as complicit in the real).²

Related to this are assumptions concerning the problem of meaning—whether meaning is located in that which one is speaking about, the referent-object of language (the empirical position), whether meaning is in the aim or intention of the speaker(s) or subject(s) (the cultural/hermeneutic position), or whether meaning is in the site of the linguistic structure in which subjects find themselves (the post-structural position).³ Simply put, every planning effort involves philosophical assumptions as to what is considered immutable and what negotiable; the significant and the trivial. Thus, every effort to plan the future is submerged in an overarching politics of the real.

Assumptions and the planning process

These assumptions are critical, because depending on one's assumptions of the real, the way one articulates one's goals and objectives and the content of this articulation, the planning process dramatically shifts. In most efforts to plan the future or to engage in conversations about the future, however, these various assumptions remain unexamined. The episteme,⁴ the way in which we order the real and our knowing of it, remains unexamined. Also left naturalized are theoretical assumptions about what is foreseeable, data assumptions about what is observable and values assumptions about what is preferred and, more importantly, the categories of theory, data, values and their ordering.⁵

Planning theory and futures studies theory thus often emerge as mentalities, frozen ahistorical categories of thought, ontological givens. Technical efforts such as ensuring that a logical nexus exists between missions, goals and objectives become the critical task. The primary effort is to produce a perfect plan,⁶ with perfection largely defined in narrow, ahistorical terms—presently that of empirical rationality. Or efforts are made to find ways to increase the accuracy of prediction by including more

variables, or more or fewer values, and better or perhaps no theory. What results is a planning strategy that does not engage in conversations that attempt to discern how the choice of one particular worldview or discourse (way of knowing) has come to be and how the world might be perceived differently if other assumptions had been made. Thus, most often, missions or goals are simply adjusted for changing conditions, with no attempt to see how a particular mission has come to exist, or what the range of alternative missions could be.

Predictive—empirical approach

Most planning efforts simply privilege instrumentalist, rationalist modes of prediction. The problem for the planner becomes that of merely predicting or forecasting the future, of determining what is commonly called 'the planning environment'.⁷ The results are studies using a variety of methodologies such as regression, cross-impact analysis, and simulation modelling.⁸ The latter command more legitimacy because they are quantitative, dynamic and interactive—in short, more complex. The goal of this type of planning or futures studies is to develop more accurate forecasts of the future so as to make better decisions today; to create a futures studies based on the empirical natural science model.

Central to quantitative methodologies in futures studies are trends, events and their impact. However, the construction of an 'event' or 'trend' is problematic since both are only sensible within peculiar, modern definitions of time and history. The ancients would choose different categories along seasonal patterns (planting and harvesting, the motions of the stars and moon) in conjunction with an alternative theory of agency—the actions of the gods and goddesses, for example. They would not privilege the empirical event nor the subject or actor involved in the event. Thus, in addition to the probabilistic values assigned with the occurrence of an event (acknowledged by the futures literature), there is the problem of the social construction of 'event' (unacknowledged in the futures literature), in that an 'event' does not exist independently of an observer and his or her epistemology. The argument that both time and event are constructions and not independent states outside perception and history damages any notion of objectivity, and particularly the unquestioned objectivity that is the hidden unthought behind the effort to develop a more complex forecasting model. For central to this model is the view that there is a real world and more of it can be captured or explained by more variables and increasingly complex interactions.

Politics of information

Besides these issues and the questions of politics of meanings that they raise, on a less abstract level what is left unexamined is the assumption that more information about the future will lead to administrators making better decisions. Among other tensions, the notion that the person in need of the information (the administrator) and the planner or futurist might have widely divergent expectations and needs is often left unexamined, as is the notion that more quantitative information leads to better decision making.

While it is often assumed, quite commonsensically, that the relationship between types and amounts of information and decision making is positive and direct, the truth of this—given the politics of planning—remains problematic. Often, the information that results is used simply to justify a decision already reached because of political pressure from various interest groups. In addition, the information about the future given to the administrator will only affect decision making if it conforms to the administrator's preunderstandings. If it is significantly different from that, the report will probably find itself filed far away from the real world of decision making.⁹ Moreover, according to policy analyst Mary Ann Teshima, the reason that a CEO or an administrator may have hired a futurist or planner or some other variety of policy consultant is neither the accuracy of the forecast to be made nor the brilliance of the plan to be constructed. That is not what is being bought; what is being bought is a will to decision making,¹⁰ or, when that is not needed, a less expensive and simpler affirmation of management philosophy. Thus, the consultant is brought in to make a policy decision: centralize, decentralize; more vision, less vision; more history, less history—personal (lack of courage), institutional (lack of legitimacy) or local political reasons.

From another direction, equally damaging to any notion of apolitical or empirical futures studies is the metaconcept behind the idea that 'more futures information leads to better decision making', ie, that the mind is structurally analogous to the computer. The perfect mind, in this model, would be similar to the computer: instant recall, large amounts of information, and ability to use new information to remodel old. Mystics such as P. R. Sarkar with his multilayered theory of mind (the deeper intuitional layers available when the superficial layers are concentrated and focused)¹¹ and in the futures field the works of Willis Harman¹² and David Loye,¹³ make this computer rationality worldview increasingly contentious. For them, and the mystical-spiritual discourse in general, instead of more information about the future, what is needed are ways to train the mind to perceive the world differently, or to perceive the world from a 'deeper level'. Recalling information then is not a rational process as presently constructed, but a direct knowing of the real, unmediated by language. It is only when the intuitionally obtained truth is expressed that adequacy of language and of the rationality of the intellect is critical.

The two critical points, however, are that planning and futures methodology must be contextualized in a politics of information and decision making as well as in a politics of alternative models of knowledge and mind. Unfortunately, many planning and futures efforts remain bounded by models of forecasting and politics that ignore the hidden epistemological assumptions, the episteme, from which they operate. In fact, the use of the term 'forecasting' is itself illustrative of a politics that remains covered. Prediction by most planners and futurists who locate themselves within the modern scientific tradition is seen as an unreliable way of thinking, lacking precision and overly value-ridden (in that it is based on ancient religious and spiritual systems);¹⁴ while at the same time forecasting is seen as legitimate as it is allegedly non-religious (secular and modern, a product of the Enlightenment), acultural and objective.

Consultant futurists argue that corporations and governments should

hire them because they 'forecast', not 'predict'. This of course neglects the view that modern science, too, exists in a paradigm of knowledge, a way of ordering the world that when historicized can be shown to be not universal but peculiar to particular people, a particular system, and a particular time which has become universal not because of any a priori ontological reasons, but because of political, economic and institutional reasons, because of a politics of the real.¹⁵ As mentioned earlier, the assertion that a way of knowing is objective is simply an attempt to privilege one's ideological system over others; it privileges one model of rationality over others and then asserts that this is ultimately the real model, while others are primitive and, for reasons deduced from one's own model, should be forgotten. These reasons are believed to be located in objectivity, rather than, as I argue, ultimately in the political discourse, in the politics of meaning.

Emerging issues analysis

An alternative to the predictive model of planning that is sensitive both to alternative configurations of reality and to the tendency of most planning projects simply to produce 'problems' has been developed by Graham Molitor and elaborated by James Dator and the futures group at the Hawaii Judiciary.¹⁶ This methodology, 'emerging issues analysis', attempts to identify problems before they arise. This is possible as it is argued that problems follow an S-curve growth pattern. By identifying problems in the early phases of the cycle, consciousness raising can take place and policies or laws enacted.

In addition to monitoring various leading edge information sources, emerging issues can be identified by searching for the controversial within each field, with what Wayne Yasutomi has called 'scientific anomaly analysis' (in the hope of making it respectable and thus perhaps fundable or at least discussable).¹⁷ Here, the visions of shamans, street people and other outside institutional vortices are especially valuable, for they speak not from conformity but from dissent. They speak from the edges of society, from outside the disciplinary grid of modern bureaucracy.

What is significant about emerging issues analysis for this discussion is that in addition to its predictive, bureaucratic use (more and better in the sense of more lead time and better utilitarian information), it has a remarkable educational and disruptive use. It is impertinent. As James Dator has argued, a good emerging issue must gain a dubious—'this is impossible, it will never happen'—response from the reader or policy maker.¹⁸ If the issue is immediately acceptable then probably it is only continuing the 'presentification' of the future. Only with an issue that is unfamiliar or unnatural can there emerge an alternative social construction, and thus the creation of the truly other. The issue of the legal rights of robots, for example, besides its predictive value, is significant in that it calls to question our human notion of rights and their historical development.

However, emerging issues analysis is discounted by decision makers precisely because the information it presents is not familiar and thus cannot be quickly understood in the language and categories of the present. Since an emerging issue cannot be appropriated by power—by the decision maker and his worldview and her organizational needs—it loses its currency in

discourse. For most decision makers at all levels simply want information that can justify their preunderstandings of past, present and future. Even when conclusions about the future that diverge from these preunderstandings emerge from conventionally legitimate quantitative methodologies, the conclusions are suspect. Left silenced then is the most significant contribution of emerging issues analysis to decision making: the notion of the unthinkable calling into question the normal.

Structure of the present

As mentioned above, the problem with the prediction orientation is that it reinforces *what is*, the present, the status quo. Planning techniques only reinforce present governmental bureaucratic and legal power structures. In the corporate structure as well, futures and planning primarily aid multinationals in finding ways to maximize profits instead of truly engaging in entering alternative futures wherein corporate structures and goals might change. While planners or futurists might hope that their work can cause a rethinking and a bringing in of 'the future', the reality is that the future is further domesticated and corporatized, instead of corporations becoming futurized or transformed.

The reasons for the predictive orientation come from futures studies itself; namely, the rate of social change has increased dramatically and continues to increase such that there is a gap between our institutions, our images of the future, and our self and the real. Institutions thus increasingly become perceived as illegitimate in that they exist in the past, while technology throws us into the future. Through prediction-oriented techniques, futurists hope that government, business and education can stay current and relevant.

Among others, Roy Amara in his articles on the futures field has attempted to provide a theoretical framework for this approach, largely borrowing from the empirical social sciences perspective.²⁰ However, he softens his 'the future does really exist' (there is an empirical world) approach with the assertion that the future is not predictable (but eventually through multidisciplinary approaches the unexplained regression residuals will be explained), and with the inclusion of values; yet he exposes his liberal orientation by privileging the individual subject and evoking the indetermination of the future. While one may agree or disagree with this perspective, framed as the possible (the realm of choices, for this is America the land of opportunity), the probable (the data) and the preferable (a value orientation), it is an approach that does not make explicit its own predicates—the history of the social sciences, the division and creation of fields adopted from the industrial revolution, and the development of policy sciences which claim a certain acultural, apolitical neutrality.

Alternatively one might attempt to find sister fields not in the US policy sciences, but in continental philosophy and the problem of the text (hermeneutics and Foucauldian thought) and Indian and Islamic paradigms, for example. An analysis of these would bring forth quite a different futures field from that which Amara has in mind, ranging from fiction and interpretation that Richard Slaughter has argued for,²¹ to the future as deep story telling, the future as an exploration of myth, or finally, the future as

discourse—a discourse that questions temporality, especially the temporality of what is now called ‘the modern condition’.

Planning the future as the solution

If the present is located as a realized good society (as most in the ‘West’ would conclude of the modern condition), then the predictive orientation of planning and futures is not a negative ascription. Instead, it is a historic step forward in developing a saner, stabler and more rational society. For now one has information about the future that can help one make better decisions, create new alliances, and develop new marketing strategies. It allows an already good present to become better. Planning and futures research then become innovative social inventions which, as with the behavioural sciences, can aid in the triumph of liberal democracy and capitalism, of individuality and rationality. Planning and futures as used in the West are destined to take their places among the social sciences, but at a higher level, for they have a value component (preferred future) and a praxis component (policy analysis), albeit the problem of no data and little theory remains.

However, if the purpose of planning is to allow for a dialogue that leads to rethinking the real, to an excavation of politics, to a realization that by not problematizing the present, we identify solutions to the wrong problems, then the simple deliverance of more information—precise, valid, or reliable—fails!

Production of identities

Before alternative ways to construct the future are presented, it is important to ask what types of identities or selves are produced within this predictive-oriented planning perspective. Futures studies creates a class of experts; experts who have the ability to forecast, and to do something that in itself is seen as a revolution: to prioritize. Thus the prediction approach creates a professional class of experts called planners (and various types of futurists) who can manage and domesticate time. Once the future becomes constructed as complex and technical (or as the transcendental, in the historical case), then it can be appropriated and monopolized.

This type of monopolization is not new, it has existed in other epistemologies and paradigms. In antiquity, those who claimed the future were called priests. They were individuals who asserted they had special knowledge of the real (past and future), and thus managed to wrest power from the kings and warriors. They, too, believed that they possessed objective scientific knowledge (but then it was called astrology). Specifically, while many present-day futurists lay claim to chronological time, the priests of the past laid claim to transcendental time, and, because of the link of personal actions (the ‘how’ of attaining the other) and the transcendental, they eventually claimed worldly time and space as well. The ideological conquest of Indian social space by the intellectual class, the Brahmins, and the reification of the caste system as divine instead of as a social division of labour, is perhaps the best example of this.

The above example simply points out that the recovery of the past in terms of explaining futures studies need not be limited to postwar efforts. Rather we can find other locations in historical space–time. More recently, besides the priests (the economists are quite a few steps ahead of planners and futurists in the commodification enterprise), are the state advisers. They served to point out the range of possibilities in a given plan, whether war, putting down a local uprising, or other types of manoeuvre. They played a major role in reducing the power of the sovereign and, to use the language of the present, they were the first strategic planners.

Whether priest, the king's strategic adviser, economist, planner or futurist, the key category produced by the predictive framework is that of 'expert'. Instead of decolonizing the future, the predictive-oriented approach cannot help but recolonize it in the hands and sights of various professionals. Futures studies thus remains located in the tradition of the priest or the king's adviser (reproduced in this century as the bureaucracy and the corporation); an information giver to the powerful.

To summarize the previous points, the key assumptions behind the predictive mode of planning are as follows:

- There exists an ontological place or time called the future which, through various methods, is discernable.
- Time must be domesticated.
- Unless one has information about this future, one will lose market share, or be unable to procure fundings, or be audited for not being a modern institution.
- The project is to find better—quantitative, dynamic and comprehensive—ways of discerning what this future might be so that better policy decisions can be made.
- These methodologies should be as scientific and objective as possible, that is, the researcher should be impartial to the results of the prediction.
- Finally, planning is an important step in realizing modernity: in creating a world with clean, safe and well lit streets, a world constituted by a marketplace of rational thinking individuals and states.

Cultural–interpretative approach

However, there are other ways to talk of the future. Yugoslavian futurist Mihailo Markovic elegantly states in a speech titled, 'Beyond the present world crisis' that:

what is needed is a futures studies (a planning) that recognizes the existence of alternative values systems and lifestyles, encourages truly free, symmetrical dialogue among them, and seeks to determine, in spite of all differences, if there are also some underlying universal human needs and interests.²²

In this type of thinking, what is needed is a planning methodology that presupposes change, a constant refiguration of power relations.

Instead of future facts (trends or emerging issues), what is needed are new, culturally self-aware interpretations of the future. The goal here is to discern how other cultures create the future, what they think the future will be like. How is the future perceived in Chinese, Japanese, Indian, Islamic cosmologies? Does the traditional occidental past, present, future break-

down have relevance in the oriental perspective?²³ Or how does, for example, Japan see its future? What does China think are the key global issues in the next 15 years or the next century?

The assumption in this thinking is that there is no one way to constitute the real, the future; by examining how different groups see the real, we can learn from their efforts and see ourselves anew. We can then see the limits to our own future thinkings. We can then see our own peculiarities, instead of insisting that they are universals. We thus see that the real is culturally bound, and that our notion of the category 'the future' as well as the contents of the future are bound by and intelligible in various cultural contexts. The future then becomes subjectivized, now located within phenomenological and hermeneutic traditions.

The task for many, then, is to recover the future; a future that has been colonized by the western or the capitalist tradition of modernity. Futures studies, thus, should not be exclusively concerned with objective forecasts but also with the cultural bases for truth, with the cultural bases of the future. Futures studies should be concerned with how one particular future has emerged as a universal future and what new futures might follow this historical pattern or dramatically transform it. In addition, futures studies must not solely be engaged in pure research, but rather the future must actualize itself through praxis. There must be an effort to identify cultures that have been suppressed or that will be suppressed given various trends, and then aid them in articulating and realizing new visions.

Alternative images of the future

In this way, what emerges is not one future, but a range of alternative futures, or more specifically, alternative images of the future. Thus, the future, instead of being certain, as most decision makers would like it to be, becomes uncertain. At the institutional level, instead of fewer policy choices to be made, more policy choices become available. There are, however, a variety of ways to constitute 'alternative futures' which speak to the problem of diversity in decision making. Most often, for example, in the planning literature, this term remains bounded by the predictive orientation such that it is used to mean a simple range of deviations from the norm, as strategic alternatives; such that a study of tourism projections simply presents graphs on high and low figures and constitutes these as alternatives. These deviations from the norm disguised as 'alternative futures thinking' simply serve to point out that alternatives have been considered—symbolic gestures to show funding agencies and critics that the possibilities of what can happen have been planned for. Obviously, all these have as their assumption a culturally defined present. Notions of different ways in which various cultures constitute growth remain unexamined, for example. Thus, not only are the variables too few, but within true alternative futures thinking the ground of the variables—the culture-, history-boundedness of them—is challenged. What then might be some alternative ways of framing the future that do not take the cultural present as given?

Among the most insightful and promising methodologies attempting to do exactly this is that of 'alternative images of the future', as used by James Dator²⁴ and used by many of those involved in Hawaii-Manoa-based futures

studies activities.²⁵ In further elaboration, Donald Michael and Walter Truett Anderson argue for the use of the term 'stories', which speak to 'the human urge to create order in life, to assemble the events of individual existence within the framework of some larger structure of meaning and purpose',²⁶ in contrast to scenarios, which are playful exploratory devices. These images and stories at the macrolevel include the story of progress and rationality, of the rise and fall of man, of the transformation and the end of history, of the return to the Mother and the Earth, to mention a few. Images are more specific and tend to be derived from current social movements, current technologies, and various theories of social change, while stories are more sensitive to unconscious processes, to myths.

Global depression and the end of capitalism

One present image of the future, for example, that is instructive in understanding 'the future' is that of a global depression caused for a variety of reasons—global concentration of wealth and inequity, South debt, speculation in the markets, new financial instruments that remain unpredictable, and, more important, the pervasive fear that 'we' have gone too far technologically, expanded too much economically, and moved too far from the real basis of life so that nothing appears to make sense any more, to mention just a few reasons. Whether it will happen in 1990²⁷ or in the next 10 years²⁸ or whether it is already occurring in different locations in the world, through 'the structural crises of capitalism' as Marxist thinkers argue,²⁹ the assertion remains that the present world system has existed for a few hundred years and is now in its final years.

The Pacific shift

But that is only one image of the future. The Japan/China Pacific rim image, for example, has increasingly taken on currency; this discourse has been constantly appropriated so that every US state now believes that it is the key (economic, cultural, information) crossroad between Japan and the USA. This vision of the future has many variants, but the main image is that all empires come to be and then pass, they illumine the night for centuries, and before their final end they shine even more brightly, like an exploding supernova.³⁰ The metaphor behind this image is that time is cyclical, instead of linear and progressive. Each empire rises for various reasons—vision of the future, resources, technology, political culture, colonizing others—and then declines for various reasons, usually the exaggeration of power and the burden of keeping the structure in place. Thus, the image is that there is a historic shift under way between the era of the Atlantic and the era of the Pacific, and that the world economy will be dominated first by Japan, then the new Japans, and then finally by China. The salient question then is: within this vision of the future what might a particular region, province or state look like?

The depression image emerges largely from the views of long wave economists, the global alternative movements, and various US 'new age' survivalists, and the Pacific rim image finds its proponents among cultural

historians, those living in East Asia, and the US Californian perspective. The final alternative image of the future I present emerges from India.

Sarkarian spiritual-dialectics and grand theory

One significant new vision of the future developed by Indian philosopher P. R. Sarkar heralds from Calcutta.³¹ Sarkar's vision of the future has as its pillars: individual spiritual development, ecological balance based on a new humanism that includes the existence of plants and animals, self-reliance, and finally, the perspective that we are in such mythic times that the next 10 to 15 years will bring about more philosophical, political and economic changes in the world than the last few hundred. To realize this vision, Sarkar has started various spiritual, cultural and economic people's movements throughout the world.

Perhaps more significant is the ground of Sarkar's vision of the future, his theory of history. Unlike the predictive orientation which remains interested largely in mid-range theories (those propositions that can be operationalized in the so-called real world), Sarkar takes us to grand theory. His view is that social change is cyclical, but unlike a simple (yet powerful) rise and fall of virtue theory with the sage king beginning the new era and tyrant ending it as the ancient Chinese macrohistorian *Ssu-Ma Chien* argues,³² or the rise and fall of *asabiyya* (unity derived from collective struggle) as the 14th century founder of modern history and sociology Ibn Khaldun would argue,³³ or simply the reflections of the interactions between means and modes of production as Marx would, Sarkar believes that power moves cyclically and in phases from the people to military elites to ideological-intellectual elites, to economic elites and then through evolution or revolution to the people again. He uses this to explain the change from kings to priests to capitalists, of course, arguing that all in all the people rarely share in power. Again what is important here is the grand theoretical attempt, very much like Toynbee's challenge-response theory³⁴ or Sorokin's sensate, idealistic efforts.³⁵

Unlike the empirical futures perspective, Sarkar's and other grand theorists' works cannot be simply operationalized or 'social science-ized'; they speak from and to a different episteme as well as audience. Moreover, their work cannot be understood in the simple preferred, probable and possible scenarios, for their grand theory functions in other categories and sees individual agency and intentionality in quite different ways from Amara and others who are committed to the preferred/probable/possible model. Individuals, for example, have preferences, but there are long cycles of expansion and contraction, introversion and extroversion, spiritual and sensate, which create the possible or probable. There are thus deeper real structures, cosmic cycles where intentionality is located. Preferences no longer exist in an objective site; it is now culturally problematic. For Sarkar the notion of preferred has little to do with this new society; it is part of a deeper structure. The notion of preference privileges individual agency at the expense of deeper, historical cosmic processes. Calling his cycle probable simply betrays the western empirical scientific perspective, for Sarkar operates from a different episteme, in which the probable/improbable distinction only exists at some levels. At the level of

the grand scheme of things—the view from Consciousness—such distinctions do not exist. Moreover, ‘preferred’, ‘probable’ and ‘possible’ themselves mean entirely different things in different eras—they are recent creations of modern social sciences and do not have universal applicability.

Implications of alternative futures

Leaving behind the substantive implications of the three conceptions of the future presented, and other possible ones, what type of futures studies or planning orientation emerges from these? By creating an ‘other’ society, a distance is gained from one’s own culture. One’s own future is suddenly relativized. One sees the different ways in which time, history and progress can be constituted through and across culture. Moreover, given the centrality of the term ‘alternative’ within alternative futures thinking, the future suddenly becomes negotiable, open and even unpredictable. Moreover, the type of planning that emerges from this perspective is one that provides multiple understandings, the negotiation and the comparison of many images of the future, both dominant and recessive.

Thus, this type of planning exercise is uncomfortable for many in that instead of certainty and strategy, what emerges is a relativization of the future. The present is seen not as an eternal state, but as a temporary condition, although in most cases, individuals continue to believe that their cultural vision of the future will remain the dominant vision of tomorrow. Certainly, at the local, state, national, institutional and corporate level most decision makers tend to dismiss alternative futures, images of the future from other cultures, as they constitute themselves in a problem-solving mode—successful problem solving is precisely how they have come to be top managers, top leaders in the first place. For them, the planner exists to clarify the possibilities, indicate the dangers of various strategies, to domesticate time and thus make the world simpler—to give belief, not fear. And even when fear is presented the solutions articulated to deal with this fear are technocratic, such that fear becomes a product to be managed, not to be revered. Fear becomes mediated by media, by print, it is no longer a way of knowing, as it is, for example, for eskimos, who perceive the world through ‘fear’.³⁶ Fear for them is not packaged in the nightly news. They breathe and live fear. In addition, an alternative futures approach creates the possibility of a world wherein the elite are not at the top—politically, economically, culturally and more importantly epistemologically (everyone does not see the world through their eyes).

It should not be a surprise then that administrators, bureaucrats and executive officers of states and nations resist alternative futures except when constructed as minor deviations from the present; moreover, one might expect a greater openness to alternative futures thinking from groups less consolidated in various power structures, such as credit unions, people’s associations, self-help groups, the women’s movement.

The innovation of the unpredictable, however, relocates the discussion away from the consensual and instrumentalist to the uncertain and mythic. And clearly, the grand theory efforts—notions of cyclic, seasonal, Earth time—in which many cultures exist are foreign to the commodity notions of time in which most administrators and planners exist. In the modern world

grand theory is fiction, not in the sense of a profound story-telling experience that imparts meaning, but in the sense of insignificant and trivial knowledge that simply muddles the real-world predictions that need to be made in present, bottom-line time.

Thus, given that there is a dominant world economic system in the conquest of certainty, with huge homogenizing influences on local cultures, and given that there is a dominant epistemology—that of science, rationality and individuality—the notion that futures from cultural perspectives other than the modern paradigm can be taken at all seriously is difficult to assert. Cultural futures remain within the discourse of science fiction: interesting. But the future of the present—liberalism and capitalism—will continue to be the future of the future for a long time to come. Alternative ways of perceiving the future might adjust the dominant model but capitalism, the vision of continued growth, will march on absorbing all traditions and histories in the creation of producers, consumers and the God-given market, it can be easily asserted.

The problem of relativity

While the cultural/comparative orientation of futures studies is clearly a significant improvement over the predictive orientation in the sense that more voices are heard and true alternatives gain life, objectivity is damaged and subjectivity culturalized, there remain significant problems with this approach. While the cultural approach relativizes the anchor of objectivity of the predictive approach, this relativization leads to a situation wherein any future is as good as any other future. Significant differences between cultures are often ignored; cultures are seen either as essentially unified ('we are all one') or as fundamentally distinct ('this is our way'). Political inquiry is thrown out as culture is moved to a site outside criticism.

Thus, the relativization of the future often leads to a situation in which we are suddenly anchorless in a sea of cultures. Conferences end up with pleas for more cultural sensitivity, to the Chinese way or the American way, or x way. While cross-cultural futures research can reduce the dominance of the present instrumentalist view, what often emerge are simple taxonomies of past, present and future across cultures. The way power circulates in these images remains elusive. The way a culture has evolved is ignored and, more importantly, the ways that a culture might entirely change because of technological changes or internal cycles is left unexamined. In the end, the cultural approach often freezes time horizontally (across culture) and in the effort to be culturally sensitive, loses sight of the future.

There is, thus, a depoliticization of power and time; preferences become simply eccentricities as opposed to hard fought economic, political, linguistic and civilizational battles with alternative possibilities. The future, while no longer objective, becomes terminally subjective, so that inquiry and analysis are moribund. Without a grounding in critical analysis, what can emerge are futures, visions of the good that enslave the possible, and alternative cultures which merely repeat the terrible history of the past.

The cultural-interpretative approach thus argues for a futures studies that recognizes the existence of alternative worldviews and attempts to provide methodologies and images of the future across cultural space and

time. The real is seen as culture-bound; improved understanding can best occur when alternative visions of the future are included in one's politics. As opposed to the disinterest of the empiricist, the interpretative perspective privileges the subject. Through empathy, text, subject and object become one and the deeper reality concealed by frames of meaning imposed by the dominant culture is recovered. Yet like the empirical approach, the interpretative approach asserts that the real is independent and thus objective. Problems resulting from this view include the inability to provide anchors of inquiry and analyses of power, since all is culturally relativized.

Critical futures: the real as discursive

There are alternatives to the predictive-empirical and the cultural-interpretative. Among the possible grammars available in situating this alternative future is a critical futures studies. This is radically different from the critical futurism Richard Slaughter has argued for. His approach, brilliantly derived from Habermas and the hermeneutic tradition, is concerned with the recovery of a true self, of a true culture—it is the continuation of the Enlightenment project: 'liberty, fraternity and equality'. It is the recovery of alternative futures that have been silenced by various oppressive structures, by a false consciousness. For Slaughter, the goal of futures is to recover meanings that are lost in the predictive statistical approach. But the critical futures that is being posited here draws not from the positivist tradition, nor the cultural or hermeneutic tradition. Rather it comes from the works of Michel Foucault and post-structuralists such as Michael Shapiro (theory of political theory). While they speak from an epistemological position that argues that the real is a social construction and thus seek to relativize culture, they anchor their approach in a commitment to the deconstruction and analysis of power.

Drawing from Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*,³⁷ Shapiro argues that 'the post-structural project is that of chasing power so that it has no place to hide'.³⁸ For post-structuralists, truth is not something to be recovered through empathy with the object of research, nor something to be found with enough variables, but rather there exist regimes of truth which define the way we see, speak, and 'language' (create) the world. From this perspective, what is significant is how the self has become a subject of various disciplinary structures—medicine, psychology, bureaucracy—and moreover how this created self is then objectified and shaped by these various professional discourses.

Instead of the search for the objective or the grand design of things (transcendental truths that cause events and trends), the real is made political, it is historicized and made peculiar; it is no longer seen as Being itself, as an eternal *vérité*. Moreover, the way language and other ways of knowing create subjects and objects and their relationships is made contentious.

Furthermore, the probable/possible/preferred orientation is made problematic, given, for example, the difficulty in separating these categories, existing as they do within a particular model of the self—that of modernity and liberalism—namely, a self that can be divided, has intentionality, and

can make true independent choices. These categories, in addition, exist within a particular regime of truth—not a model which has no political connotations, but a regime, with all its connotations of politics and power, for truth is nothing more than power. It is a regime of truth which has come about at the expense of other configurations of truth, other knowledge paradigms—other discourses.

Making the present remarkable

Thus, in this perspective on planning and futures research, what is essential is not finding better ways to predict the future, but in making the present remarkable. The project here is to show that the real has come about for various reasons and that the coming about of a specific 'present' means the non-realization of other 'presents'. In any given moment then, *what-is* is an imposition, a silencing of various ways of thinking, of doing, and a realization of other ways of thinking. While the post-structural discourse has not yet taken the futures discourse seriously, we can borrow from its theoretical vantage point and assert that the coming about of a particular future is the silencing of other futures. This is not simply a technical task of identifying images of the future or various trends; rather, the choice of identification in itself is political for we have immediately excluded other choices, and at an even more radical level, the choice of language is political in that grammar in itself is complicit with various metaphysical positions, the privileging of the individual subject, for example.³⁹

From this critical perspective, in so far as the present is naturalized and considered normal, the task of the planner or futurist becomes to make the present remarkable, to inquire, for example, not simply how trends affect a population, but how the category 'population' emerged in the first place. We were not always populations; it is a recent category that comes out of a particular model of social organization of a particular historical period, the need for the state to collect 'state-istics' of those in its jurisdiction—and how describing the real in that way (as a population, instead of a people, or a community) leads to various distributions of epistemological and social power.

Thus, instead of taking for given the category 'population' in our various regression forecasts, we take issue with it. We resituate population from a neutral, apolitical, technical site to a political one, wherein population is part of a larger way of constructing the world. Performing a prediction of population is then seen as a political act which privileges certain commitments over others. For example, the assertion that the world is overpopulated exists within various implicit political commitments—ones that believe that individuals are not resources, but problems to be managed, or that resources are predominantly physical not spiritual (and thus limitless). Critical futures studies would then make problematic the basis of population forecasts by historicizing how we have come to be a 'population' and by developing alternative constructions of population, such as communities, the global self, peoples, fields of awareness, ecosystem and civilization.

This third approach, like aspects of the cultural perspective, emphasizes the problematization of current categories and examines how they have come to be the sole way of describing something by evoking alternative

historical periods in which rationality, mind and order were differently constructed. In this perspective, we contest the grounds of various problems by inquiring how a particular problem has come to be framed.

Significant in illustrating the problem of the alternative epistemologies is the case of a Chinese graduate student who, when asked to present a forecasting methodology to a graduate seminar, responded with utter puzzlement. Her construction of time, and her construction of the objective world meant that for her there was no such practice as forecasting. The only viable tool she could determine was the *I-Ching*. This is a historical predictive technique whereby each prediction is based on the exact moment that it is made. A prediction made minutes later would be different, and this difference would not invalidate any criteria of reliability, validity or repeatability, for the *I-Ching* operates on a personal, local sense of being. Moreover, the technology works with the mind of the person who needs the information. There is in this system no difference between the subject and that which is to be predicted—the *I-Ching* facilitates the knowing process of the subject. Equally significant is the notion that there is no constant time, life is continuously in flux. Needless to say, her response to the methodologies presented by other political science graduate students—regression, delphi, policy impact analysis, social change theories—was one of amusement, as they actually believed in the separation of knower and known, and in ontological universals.

Thus, within the cultural, interpretative perspective, the various grounds of forecasting are brought forth. But what Foucault's approach does, in addition, is to ask the question: How is the future put forth in history in various discourses? Specifically, one might ask not what are the different ways—formal or informal, western or Chinese—in which one forecasts, but how is it that forecasting has come to be a way of constituting information? There are obviously other ways to make decisions in life or in organizations. How has forecasting become the dominant form? What are other historical forms? What are the particular ways in which these forms have transformed through history, and, although Foucault would not ask this, for he moves and remains within local peculiarities, what are some ways in which forecasting will be practised in the future? Finally, how do decisions that emerge from a planning or future orientation affect the circulation of power?

We would then attempt a history of the present; a genealogy to see how the preset way of constructing reality has become the sole way of creating the world. We can easily see that the use of complex forecasting models to make budgetary decisions is partly a result of the end of community, the fear of legislative responsibility in light of the media's ability to create categories of arbitrary and well-grounded decision making, the belief that decisions based on data are somewhat more real, objective and impartial than those based on other considerations, and the power of the behavioural sciences to penetrate legislative arenas, as well as the decentralization of power, from executive to legislature.

This critical type of planning eventually calls into question that which is planned, as well as the planner and the 'planee', for these categories themselves emerge from various descriptions of the process, and in turn are empowered once these descriptions become routinized into practices.

Within this perspective, the predictive and the cultural become languages, ways of seeing, discourse; the task then becomes to see how they have become that and what issues are produced in this becoming. Within this framework questions such as land use or transportation planning can be better understood, for they are no longer mentalities, frozen ahistorical concepts discussed by experts, but products of various ways of constituting the world, open to negotiation, to debate by you and me, him and her.

With a post-structural perspective, a both-and approach (the predictive, cultural and critical) becomes possible as it provides a meta-theory from which the future can be created. Forecasts of land use need, for example, can be made while conscious of the politics and language of the type of reality construction that is forecasting. At the same time, alternative perspectives left out by the forecasts can be investigated, for example, the impact on traditional and future cultures, and alternative methods to obtain information about the future, such as the problematic definition of property rights. Finally, the epistemological bases of the entire research enterprise, including the role of the researcher and the politics created by the various divisions of the real into what is negotiable and what is not, can be inquired into. All three then become seen not as concrete regimes but as negotiable assets that can be used better to understand, change, and live in our future plans—plans that will now have been politicized.

Constructing time

The Foucauldian perspective is also markedly different with respect to the question of *time*, perhaps the central point of departure for all planning and futures studies. The empirical view sees time as a given (it has ontological validity) and from this point of view the question is whether to forecast one to two years ahead in budget cycles, or whether to construct long-term, corporate visionary forecasts of 20–30 years. The cultural view attempts to ‘culturalize’ time and recover traditional notions of time: cyclical time, seasonal time, mythic time, spiritual time, and even *Kairos*, the right time. The Foucauldian perspective attempts to deconstruct how we ‘time’ the world through our language and through our various institutionalized practices. Time in this view is a historical social construct; it is not eternal; time is dependent upon the larger episteme—the way of organizing knowledge. Thus much of futures studies deals with metrified (chronological) or commodified time and uses images of economics to talk about time—non-renewable time or saving time, for example. The usefulness of the alternative futures perspective is that we can develop a typology of time, and show how the counter movements (spiritual and ecological), among others, are attempting to ‘time’ the world in a different way.

Using the Foucauldian methodology, we can then see how one of the projects of futures studies (in fact *the* project for some) is to create a new sense of time; to stretch time by including a longer vision of time within our forecasts, decision making, and living. This is different from the perspective of many alternative movements which argue for a time without time (meditation and intuition, for example), or that of transformationalist futurists who argue for a dramatic time (that technology is creating an entirely new other world utterly different from the past). What is significant

here is that suddenly time is no longer a given; it is seen as a way of creating rather than describing the world, since the postmodern perspective argues that there is no *is* to describe, or alternatively is evasive of this 'why' question which simply reinscribes prior categories; rather Foucault asks *how* *x* has come to be historically authoritative. Reality then is simply the victory of one discourse over another. The prediscursive (outside language/description/practices) is neither the empirical world, as it is for materialists, nor the world of spirit (of God, of Being or of nothingness) as it is for the spiritualist/idealist; it is the realm of alternative ways of constituting, or the realm of other possible discourses.

Distancing

The other significant contribution from the Foucauldian view is the notion of distancing. Foucault, by showing how the present has come to be constituted, asserts that the present is remarkable; it is not an eternal. He does not seek to enhance our conversations, to come up with better interpretations so that community and good life can be recovered; rather, he makes the way we speak contentious. He asks how is it that our questions are intelligible to us. As Shapiro writes, Foucault:

has not sought to improve extant political conversations by making them more comprehensive. Rather, he has sought to *distance* us from the various linguistic practices which give us objects, subjects, and the more general valuing practices within which they function, the discursive economies of meaning and value in given historical periods.⁴⁰

One might, as I alluded earlier, show that our research question, 'the future of *x*' is very much a modern question. Those operating under different epistemologies (different ways of timing the world) would certainly not ask the future of *x* if they lived in cyclical or seasonal time, for example, or if the *I-Ching* was an exemplary method. One cannot even ask the future of the self, if one argues that the self is constituted in different perceptual schemes, or as the Buddhists do, that there is no self. As Foucault writes, 'The problem is not so much that of defining a political position [an alternative future, a plan, in our case], but to imagine and to bring into being new schemas of politicization.'⁴¹ Here we can see that the Buddha was responding to the Hindu construction of self. He understood that once a self is postulated, it can be controlled, given value, and appropriated by a class of people. His position, then, was not simply a simplistic cynical one; rather, it was an emancipatory construction that led to a redistribution of value, a levelling of Brahmin power and the creation of an alternative community, the *Sangha*. However this non-self of the Buddha should not be generalized and universalized, for it too came into being in very specific conditions, and to be understood it must be situated geographically, historically and epistemically. Thus, the Zen phrase: 'If you meet the Buddha on the road, kill him.'

The post-structuralist scenario

Relating Foucault's distancing process to futures research, we can see how this very distance can be gained through scenarios. By positing alternative

future conditions, we can either attempt to gain through the use value of these scenarios (are they correct?) or attempt to gain by seeing how these scenarios show that the present is peculiar. For example, in criminal justice planning we can use various statistical indices to forecast the number of criminals, but when we distance ourselves we can see that these very statistics are part of a particular model of language and reality, specifically, a model of representation where those with certain characteristics—big ears a few years back, unemployment presently, are situated in criminality. The task in this model is simply to locate the referents and then the ‘criminal’ will suddenly appear. Alternatively one can make contentious numerous categories of crime such as property theft and the factors that cause it (greed, poverty, biology) if we imagine a society without private property, for example.

The distancing produced by Foucault’s various strategies is different from the distancing of the empiricist, of the predictive model. From the empirical perspective, the researcher must be objective and disinterested in the results of the study. For Foucault, the goal is distance, not disinterest. The researcher is actively involved in the research question, and given the complicity of the subject with the object to be known, how could it be otherwise! This distance is Foucault’s way ‘of politicizing the present by not entering contemporary conversations in order to show how historically peculiar and limited they are’.⁴²

From the hermeneutic position, both the disinterest of the empiricist and the distancing of the post-structuralist are false paths. The goal instead is through empathy and understanding to achieve a conversational context that will ‘in a Deweyan sense, make connection with “the daily problems of one’s community”, and thereby enhance the possibilities for a harmonious form of solidarity.’⁴³ Moreover, for Gadamer a:

hermeneutically trained mind must be, from the start, sensitive to the text’s quality of newness. But this kind of sensitivity involves neither ‘neutrality’ (disinterest) in the matter of the subject nor the extinction of one’s self, but the conscious assimilation of one’s own foremeanings and prejudices. The important thing is to be aware of one’s bias, so that the text may present itself in all its newness and thus be able to assert its own truth against one’s own foremeanings.⁴⁴

But this becoming aware of one’s bias is not facile, according to Foucault, since our sense of self and order, the production of our identities, are themselves complicit in contemporary conversations and in our texts. While there can be no final solution to the ‘dilemma of intelligibility’ through genealogical historicization of the present, through archeology (a deconstruction of the present) and through textual strategies (grammatical shifts) we see how identities are produced and then professionalized, psychologized, spiritualized; that is, we move from being to process. Unfortunately, post-structuralists have not yet used the exemplary distancing that occurs through images of the future scenario writing and through the positing of utopias, eutopias, and dystopias. But, as I have tried to develop, it is this futuring that can aid in problematizing present structures and grammars, and thus create the possibility not of a recovery of the past, but of the creation of new discourses, new constructions of the real. Without this futures focus to Foucault’s efforts, even though enabling spaces for the

'other' might be created through deconstruction, they will remain unfulfilled. The critical 'where to now?' question remains unanswered. Futures can thus play an important role in generating alternative discourses once the space of this creation has been opened through Foucault's problematizations.

Thus, while Foucault and other post-structuralists use history, particularly the history of epistemology, to show the remarkability of the present, the same can be done using an alternative futures perspective.

Language and meaning

Finally, as must be obvious, this Foucauldian perspective does not simply see language as referring to the real world (the non-discursive), but as constitutive of the world. Thus, much of the failure of planning and futures studies in creating alternative bureaucratic or institutional openings and possibilities is because our language itself is present-oriented. In addition, complicit in our discourses—in our ways of knowing, of stating issues—are categories which continue to reinscribe the power politics of the present instead of the openness or the alternative possibilities of the future. More than that, our discourses in the modern world have quantified and domesticated time; thus, to expect a rupture, a new way of knowing and doing, through futures studies and planning is at best difficult. Our writing too simply reinscribes the present. As does our consciousness. We hope for a future time, yet we exist in quantified, commodified time; we hope for a world outside of who we are, yet our awareness only encounters what it has 'admitted beforehand as an object possible for it' (to paraphrase Heidegger).⁴⁵ Thus, 'the future' is a result of various historical events and trends; it is a process, not an eternal that can suddenly be understood or that can be recovered through enough workshops and planning seminars.

Furthermore, by placing futures within discursive spaces, we affirm that the future is constructed by language and that embedded in our forecasts are various power interests. By simply calling for better forecasts, or more sensitive policy statements, or better plans, or more links between the long range and the short range, we forget the structures, the regimes of truth that create our selves and order, that create our notions of what we call the future.

This is not to say that planners and futurists should disavow statistics. But we need to be aware of how statistics have come to be the dominant ways of constructing the world, at how our use of statistics often privileges a certain worldview and certain experts who are more easily heard in these views, but more than that, to see statistics itself as discursive instead of actually representing something that exists independently of our knowing efforts.

In this view, the future is seen as discursive. That is, the distinction between the social construction of the future as subjective and the empirical future to be as objective is not made. Thus, while even the predictive orientation admits that there are no future 'facts' none the less a clear distinction between discourse and the real is made. The post-structural position does not make this distinction. Other perspectives aim at middle grounds, and assert, for example, that although there is an interpretative

dimension, there still exists an independent empirical world; there are simply different historical and cultural constructions of it.

From this critical perspective, our language generally, and terms such as 'alternative futures' specifically, may come to have more than simply an apolitical range from a pre-existent norm, but rather mean entire new configurations that challenge our notions of conventionality. For example, alternative futures matrices that forecast the future of the nation state—in the hope of unpacking imperialism, for instance—by continuing to use the nation state as a prime category reinscribe the nation state, forgetting that it is a contemporary and peculiar phenomenon.

The anchor of politics

Unlike the relativization of the cultural approach, there is an anchor here: that of politics. Of course, thinkers like Galtung, involved in cultural futures research, ask a series of questions of each vision and each history.⁴⁶ They anchor their analysis in categories that define cosmology such as structural violence, direct violence, person-person, person-transpersonal, growth/distribution, and person-nature. Galtung's approach is not to predict future structures, but to show how certain practices are compatible with this cosmology. Like post-structural analysis, cosmological analysis eschews deciding on the dilemmas of structure/agency or mind/body. These distinctions are indeed data that situate cosmology or discourse. The post-structural perspective, on the other hand, would argue that these categories and the 'needs' to which they are related are equally discursive and change through time and history. Choosing them as the ground for one's analysis is enabling, inasmuch as one sees these categories themselves as part of a changing theoretical landscape, not a fixed edifice.

But there are other efforts besides the post-structural to put politics into futures. Of course, the cultural-interpretative approach is one; closely related is that of Robert Jungk.⁴⁷ He has argued for a populist perspective to futures studies to stem the tide of the cooption of futures studies by the professional and capitalist class. For him, the futures project must be people-oriented and must empower the powerless and challenge the powerful—those who control the idea, the gun, and bar of gold. For him, we need to be working with those in the periphery—workers, peasants, children, females, the elderly. The key then is action-oriented futures studies: praxis.

Arguing with Jungk, but extending his view beyond modernity's class notion of politics, I have tried to argue here that part of this process begins with a politics of epistemology, a politics of meaning that can deconstruct and reconstruct planning and futures studies. From this post-structural view, empowering people does not simply refer to conducting problem solving or futuring workshops with the masses—to aid them in articulating values, in developing strategic plans, and in implementing them—but to an inquiry into the epistemological construction of the future. Indeed, genealogy and deconstruction provide the spaces from which more conventional action planning—people's organizing—can come forth.

The Foucauldian perspective argues for a politics of the real; for a planning and futures studies which attempts to see how language creates

intentionality and subjecthood—that is a perspective of grammar that is not innocent but complicit in our politics, in our futurizing. Language is then not representative of things, it is not *about* things but things are constitutive of discourse. Thus, the future is no longer a transcendental construction in spiritual or material space, but a social construction complicit with various power interpretations. This critical view also attempts to make peculiar the present, to show how it has come about, and to indicate the various discourses used to create the present. It is not a history of ideas but a history of epistemes; a history of the victory of certain interpretations (futures) over others. In addition, the Foucauldian approach attempts to make time problematic, arguing that it is social construction and then finding the ways in which we temporalize the world. Finally, Foucault attempts to distance us from the present. He does this not only at the level of structure and institution but also at the level of the way we organize truth. Foucault thus relativizes past, present and future.

Conclusion

The predictive and cultural approaches have as their base a view that there exists an objective world (whether spiritual, materialistic, dualistic or idealistic). In these views the task of knowledge is to discover this world or rediscover and reinterpret it if it has been clouded by an all-pervasive regime of truth. Thus, while for the empiricist knowledge is cumulative and progressive, for the culturalist there are fits and starts, betrayals and moments of glory. From a futures empiricist perspective, the goal is to predict a world that already exists. On the other hand, the more mystical and the hermeneutic articulations of the cultural, interpretive view assert that there is a complicitness between consciousness and the objects it represents, but that either through self-understanding or through enlightenment the truth none the less can be found. Stated in the futures discourse, there is a good society that can occur through certain struggles—good over evil, introversion over extroversion, empathy over objectivity.

From the critical post-structuralist view we have drawn here, the independent existence of the world or of the spirit is either made problematic—shown to be socially and peculiarly constructed—or argued or made independently unknowable given the complicity between knower and known. In fact, as theorist Shapiro argues, in our quest for the real ‘our consciousness can be more of an enemy than an ally’.⁴⁰ Thus, instead of prediction or a discovery of either truths or Truth, what results is a project committed to the creation and design of tomorrow: a project committed to the social construction of time, space and consciousness. This is in contrast to the predictive view which, while claiming to say something about the future, often simply reasserts the present; or the cultural view which, while recovering hidden frames of meaning, simply reifies past identities, making them not temporary but eternal selves; selves that when all is done continue a history of tyranny and tragedy.⁴⁹

The critical futures approach may seem esoteric to some—that is, impractical. However, what could be more practical than investigating how the present and the future have come to be authoritatively created? That is, of course, if one is interested in truly creating an alternative future or

alternative future or alternative futures; if not, then predicting the future from the past will suffice, for a technical orientation will conveniently recreate past and present structures and identities, while a cultural orientation will hide the overwhelming influence of a particular culture in the disguise of similitude and universalism. A critical perspective will show the monuments of power before us and thus allow the continuous destruction and reconstruction of alternative futures, 'past,' 'present' and 'future'.

Notes and references

1. I am thankful to Rik Scarce for his editorial assistance. This is an abridged version of a longer research effort.
2. The perspective developed here, that of a post-structural futures studies, has grown out of numerous conversations with Michael Shapiro of the University of Hawaii Political Science Department. In addition to his *The Politics of Representation* (Madison, WI, USA, University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), see his earlier, *Language and Political Understanding: the Politics of Discursive Practices* (New Haven, CT, USA, Yale University Press, 1981). See also Michael Shapiro (ed), *Language and Politics* (New York, New York University Press, 1984). The relationship of discursive analysis and futures studies/planning is a result of conversations with Anna Yue of the Hawaii Judiciary and Wendy Schultz of the University of Hawaii Social Science Research Center. Also see, to begin with, Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, translated by A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York, Pantheon, 1972).
3. Shapiro, 'Introduction', in *Language and Politics*, *ibid*, pp 3–4.
4. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York, Random House, 1973).
5. See Johan Galtung, *Methodology and Ideology* (Copenhagen, Ejlers, 1977).
6. The planning manual *par excellence* is Gregory Sugimoto with Les Cingcade and Wayne Yasutomi, *Comprehensive Planning in the Hawaii Judiciary* (Honolulu, State of Hawaii Judiciary, 1981).
7. See *Long Range Planning*, *Journal of Forecasting*, *Business Horizons*, and *New Management* for articles on this rather limited perspective.
8. See J. Scott Armstrong, *Long-Range Forecasting: From Crystal Ball to Computer* (New York, John Wiley, 1978) for the seminal book on forecasting methods.
9. Sohail Inayatullah, 'The politics of the dusty plan', *Futures Research Quarterly* 20 (3), 1987. For other problems sequestered in futurizing administrations, see Sohail Inayatullah and James Monma, 'A decade of forecasting: some perspectives on futures studies in the Hawaii Judiciary', *Futures Research Quarterly* (forthcoming).
10. Interview with Planner/Business Consultant Mary Ann Teshima, 10 April 1989, Honolulu, Hawaii.
11. See P. R. Sarkar, *The Supreme Expression* (Amsterdam, the Netherlands, Nirvikalpa Press, 1978); Anandamitra Avadhuta, *Beyond the Superconscious Mind* (Manila, the Philippines, Ananda Marga Press, 1982), and *The Spiritual Philosophy of Shrii Shrii Anandamurti: A Commentary on Ananda Sutram* (Denver, CO, USA, Ananda Marga Press, 1981).
12. Willis Harman, *Global Mind Change* (Indianapolis, IN, USA, Knowledge Systems, Inc, 1988).
13. David Loye, *The Sphinx and the Rainbow* (Denver, CO, USA, Shambala Books, 1983).
14. See, for example, Wayne Boucher, *The Study of the Future: An Agenda for Research* Washington, (Division of Intergovernmental Science and Public Technology, 1977); Armstrong, *op cit*, Ref 8; Joseph Martino, 'Survey of forecasting methods', *WFS Bulletin* (November/December 1976); Daniel Bell, 'Twelve modes of prediction', *Daedalus* (Summer, 1964) and especially Stuart Nagel, *Policy Evaluation* (New York, Praeger, 1982). While one might argue that some of these authors are sensitive to intuitional models of knowing, they would none the less forcefully argue that astrology/palmistry is different from or more backward than modern forecasting; the epistemic contexts for these ways of future-talk would clearly not be significant to them. For an alternative perspective see, for example, the brilliant Dane Rudhyar, *Astrological Timing* (New York, Harper and Row, 1969).
15. See Peter Manicus, *A History and Philosophy of the Social Sciences* (New York, Basil Blackwell, 1987); Paul Rabinow and William Sullivan (eds), *Interpretive Social Science: A Reader* (Berkeley, CA, USA, University of California Press, 1978); Anthony Giddens, *Central Problems in Social Theory* (Berkeley, CA, USA, University of California Press, 1979); and Howard Wiarda, 'The ethnocentrism of the social science implications for research and policy', *Review of Politics*, April 1981.
16. James Dator, *Emerging Issues Analysis in the Hawaii Judiciary* (Honolulu, HI, USA, State of

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17. Wayne Yasutomi, 'Emerging issues analysis: theory and application' (Honolulu, HI, USA, Report to the Hawaii Judiciary, 1981).
 18. See Dator, *op cit*, Ref 16.
 19. Phil McNally and Sohail Inayatullah, 'The rights of robots: law, technology and culture in the 21st century', *Law/Technology*, Winter 1987, and in *Futures*, 20(2), April 1988.
 20. See Roy Amara's much quoted work (in three parts), 'The futures field', *The Futurist* (February, April and June 1981); see also, Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock* (New York, Random House, 1970) and *The Third Wave* (New York, Bantam Books, 1981); John Naisbett *Mega-Trends* (New York, Warner Books, 1984); and Edward Cornish, *The Study of the Future* (Washington, DC, World Future Society, 1977).
 21. Richard Slaughter, 'Towards a critical futurism', *World Future Society Bulletin* (July/August and September/October 1984) and the aptly titled, *Recovering the Future* (Clayton, Australia, Monash University, 1988). Also see Wendy Schultz, 'Silences, shadows, reflections on futures', in Jim Dator and Maria Roulstone (eds), *Who Cares? And How? Futures of Caring Societies* (Honolulu, HI, USA, World Futures Studies Federation, 1988). See also Wendell Bell and James Mau, *The Sociology of the Future* (New York, Russell Sage Foundation, 1971). Bell and Mau, while sensitive to the problem of meaning, wish not to search for alternative epistemologies in which to locate futures studies, but desire to place it firmly in the social sciences. See also Wendell Bell and Jeffery K. Olick, 'An epistemology for the futures field: problems and possibilities of prediction', *Futures*, 21(2), 1989.
 22. Mihailo Markovic, 'Beyond the present world crisis', (paper presented at the 1983 World Futures Studies Federation conference, Honolulu, HI, USA) pp 1–2. For a serious attempt at developing a futures studies that is culturally sensitive yet searches for universals, see Eleonora Masini (ed), *Visions of Desirable Societies* (Oxford, UK, Pergamon Press, 1983). This compilation of visions remains the classic in the futures project. Masini and others ask: 'Is it true that we are living at a time when visions are not really visions, a time when we are living according to worn-out visions of the present or worse, of the past?' (p 4). And, '[v]isions are no longer to be considered a luxury, but a need springing from the feeling of many people that we have come to the end of a particular period in history' (p 3). Moreover, given the dominance of the West, '[a]re Third World cultures capable of visions which are not the reflection of Western visions?' (p 5). In response, Ashis Nandy brilliantly develops the problem of visions from non-western worlds in his *Traditions, Tyranny and Utopias: Essays in the Politics of Awareness* (Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1987).
 23. Johan Galtung, 'Western civilization: anatomy and pathology', *Alternatives*, 7, 1981 and *Buddhism: A Quest for Unity and Peace* (Honolulu, HI, USA, Dae Won Sa Buddhist Temple of Hawaii, 1989). See also Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York, Vintage Books, 1979) for a view that deconstructs the occidental/oriental distinction, and argues that the creation of the 'Orient' by the West simply serves to empower the West and to dominate the East. Those of the Orient end up seeing themselves through the eyes of the West. While we must make distinctions, we must at the same time see them as constructions. The key, as Galtung points out, is to investigate the implications of distinctions in terms of human dignity and distributive justice of the categories we make; West/East, male/female, human/nature, and so forth. Said's book is less impressive than the passionate and brilliantly written book by Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York, Grove Press, 1967); in fact, interesting is Said's own location of his self. From an equally profound level, see Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*. More significant than his commentary on Islam is his appropriation of the English language. His brilliance is precisely because English to him is an asset; one that can be used, not merely lived in. Could a native English writer use English as Rushdie manages? Probably not. For an alternative view of the future of Islam, see Ziauddin Sardar, *The Future of Muslim Civilization* (London, Croom Helm, 1979) and *Information and the Muslim World* (London, Mansell, 1988). His project is not only to recover Islamic pasts that have been masked by westernization but also to create authentic, populist Islamic futures.
 24. James Dator, 'The futures of cultures and cultures of the future', in Marsella *et al* (eds), *Perspectives on Cross Cultural Psychology* (New York, Academic Press, 1979).
 25. The Manoa perspective was a project that began in the early 1980s. The goal was critically to examine futures studies. This effort quickly died as the original group graduated and went on to pursue jobs, but was resurrected in 1988. While a clear regime of truth has not evolved, among the voices heard are those of the cultural recovery project, the science and technology perspective, the Gaian view, the Taoist non-view, the 'let's get something concrete done view', as well as the social construction of the future perspective.

- Of course, much of what the Manoa perspective is up to was begun many years ago. Perhaps the best work on the epistemology of futures can be found in: The Japan Society of Futurology, *Challenges from the Future: Proceedings of the International Futures Research Conferences* (Tokyo, Kodansha, 1970). See, in particular, essays in volume 1 by Bart van Steenberg, 'Critical and establishment futurology'; Robert Jungk, 'The role of imagination in futures research', and Johan Galtung, 'On futures research and its role in the world'. In volume 2, see, in particular, Klaus Tüchel, 'Social philosophy in the future: aims and problems', Ruth Nanda Anshen, 'Language as idea', and Mihailo Markovic, 'Future from the point of view of a critical theory'.
26. Donald Michael and Walter Truett Anderson, 'Norms in conflict and confusion', in Howard Didsbury, Jr, *Challenges and Opportunities* (Bethesda, MD, USA, World Future Society, 1986).
 27. See Ravi Batra, *The Great Depression of 1990* (Dallas, TX, Venus Books, 1985), 'Disaster ahead', *Cosmic Society*; June/July, 1987, and the more recent, *Surviving the Great Depression of 1990* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1988). For a viewpoint that does not privilege fear, but that attempts to empower the individual, see Mark Friedman, *How to Prepare for the Coming Depression* (Willow Springs, MO, Nucleus Publications, 1990).
 28. See, for example, P. R. Sarkar, 'Economic dynamics', In *PROUT in a Nutshell, Vol 1-15* (Calcutta, Ananda Marga Press, 1988).
 29. See, in particular, the writings of Immanuel Wallerstein and André Gunder Frank in, for example, such recent collections as: Terry Boswell and Albert Bergesen (eds), *America's Changing Role in the World-System* (New York, Praeger, 1987); Wolfram Hanrieder (ed), *Global Peace and Security* (Boulder, CO, USA, Westview Press, 1987). For a decent summary of long wave thinking, see Joshua Goldstein, *Long Cycles* (New Haven, CT, USA, Yale University Press, 1988) and Christopher Freeman (ed), *Long Waves in the World Economy* (London, Frances Pinter, 1984). Issues of *Review* are especially useful as well, for example, Wallerstein, 'Kondratieff up or Kondratieff down?' *Review*, Spring 1979.
 30. To my knowledge, Ibn Khaldun was the first to articulate systematically the theory that regimes and civilizations have a final moment of glory before they are vanquished. See his *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History* translated by Franz Rosenthal (Princeton, NJ, USA, Princeton University Press, 1967). See also William Irwin Thompson, *The Pacific Shift* (San Francisco, Sierra Club, 1985).
 31. See Sarkar, *op cit*, Ref 28. Also see Sohail Inayatullah, 'Sarkar's spiritual dialectics', *Futures*, 20(1), February 1988.
 32. Burton Watson, *Ssu-Ma Ch'ien: Grand Historian of China* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1957).
 33. See Ibn Khaldun, *op cit*, Ref 30.
 34. Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1947); see Warren Wagar, 'Profile of a futurist: Arnold J. Toynbee and the coming world civilization', *Futures Research Quarterly*, Fall, 1986; see also Fred Polak, *The Image of the Future*, translated by Elise Boulding (San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 1973). Polak is interested in Toynbee's use of 'the utopia' in the life-cycle of various civilizations.
 35. Pitrim Sorokin, *Social and Cultural Dynamics* (Boston, Porter Sargent, 1957) and *Sociological Theories of Today* (New York, Harper and Row, 1966).
 36. See Michael Shapiro, 'The politics of fear: Don Delillo's postmodern burrow', (unpublished paper, Department of Political Science, University of Hawaii, 1988); and Barry Lopes, *Arctic Dreams: Desire and Imagination in a Northern Landscape* (New York, Scribners, 1986).
 37. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*, translated by Alan Sheridan (New York, Pantheon, 1977).
 38. Michael Shapiro, Department of Political Science, University of Hawaii, Honolulu, HI, personal communications, 1988.
 39. In fact it is not so much that we choose language as that language creates a 'choosing we'; in other words, language creates various subjects and objects with various degrees of intentionality.
 40. Michael Shapiro, 'Weighing anchor: postmodern journeys from the life-world', (revision of paper presented to 19th Annual Meeting of the Northeastern Political Science Association, November 12-14, 1987), p 14.
 41. Michel Foucault, 'The history of sexuality', in Colin Gordon (ed), *Power/Knowledge* translated by Gordon, Marshall, Mepham and Soper (New York, Pantheon, 1980), p 190.
 42. Shapiro, *op cit*, Ref 36, p 11.
 43. *Ibid*, p 9.
 44. Hans George Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York, Seabury Press, 1975), p 238.
 45. Michael Shapiro, 'Literary production as a politicizing practice', in Shapiro (ed), *Language*

- and *Politics*, *op cit*, Ref 2. Heidegger states, 'Science always encounters only what *its* kind of representation has admitted beforehand as an object possible for science', p216. See Martin Heidegger, 'The thing', in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, translated by Albert Hofstadter (New York, Harper and Row, 1971).
46. See Johan Galtung, *Essays in Peace Research, Vol 16* (Copenhagen, Ejlers, 1980).
47. See, for example, Ted Gordon, Herbert Gerjuoy, and Robert Jungk, 'The business of forecasting: a discussion of ethical and practical considerations', *Futures Research Quarterly*, Summer 1987. Also see Robert Jungk and Norbert Mullert, *Future Workshops: How to Create Desirable Futures* (London, Institute for Social Inventions, 1987).
48. Michael Shapiro, 'The politics of fear', *op cit*, Ref 36, p 1; also see Franz Kafka, 'The burrow' in Nahum N. Giatzer (ed), *The Complete Stories* translated by Willa and Edwin Muir (New York, Schocken, 1971).
49. Jiddhu Krishnamurti, *Commentaries on Living* (Wheaton, IL, USA, Theosophical Publishing House, 1967).

Appendix

EPISTEMOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO THE FUTURE: STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

	Strengths	Weaknesses
Predictive	Indicators developed	Assumptions of the real unchallenged
	Time stretched	Present power relations and structures reinforced
	Precise	Creativity often not actualized Easily appropriated by technocracy Only microlevel theories of change
Cultural	Time stretched across cultural space	Leads to cultural relativism—banal similarities
	One's own culture made peculiar instead of universal	Power remains unpacked
	Time/space decolonized, dominated categories recovered Rich, macrotheories of change	Past identities privileged
Critical	Time problematized	Scenarios not developed
	Perspective enables epistemological spaces for creating futures	Anchors too can be relativized
	Power is analysed and the present made remarkable	Not intelligible to policy making and 'the better decision-making project'
	Predictive and cultural modes located in epistemologies, in regimes of truth	No theory of change

EPISTEMOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO THE FUTURE

	Predictive	Cultural	Critical
Perspective	Empirical	Hermeneutic	Post-structural
Project	Accuracy	Recovery of meaning	Deconstruction of power
	Validity	Decolonizing the future	Denaturalizing present
	Reliability	Myth creation	
Method	Regression	Images of the future	Archeology
	Trend analysis	Ethnography	Genealogy
	Emerging issues	Interpretation	Distancing
	Modelling	Grand theory	
Privileged	Bureaucrats	Cosmology	Local knowledge
	Intellectuals	Dominated cultures	'Change'
	Capitalists	Past	Language structures
Goal	Solve problems	Identify alternative futures	Make 'future' problematic
Borders	Non-observable illegitimate (<i>I-Ching</i> , for example)	Cultural relativism	History/future of epistemes—'legitimacy' problematized
Silences	Power/true alternative undeveloped	No inquiry into power	No construction of the possible
Language	Transparent/representation	Deep structures	Grammar as complicit in real