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WHAT FUTURISTS THINK

Stories, methods and visions of the future

Sohail Inayatullah

This special issue of *Futures* presents life stories of selected futurists on how they became interested in the future, what methods they use to investigate the future, as well as their visions of the future. The purpose of this special issue is both to make an inventory of the range of futures thinking/activities as input into the knowledge base of futures studies and to present a balanced account of futures studies, visions and activities throughout the world.

This issue attempts to offer personal statements of individuals as to their role in the growing futures studies movement, or discourse, and give substantive statements about what trends they think are creating the future and what their preferred future is. Thus not only 'why futures studies?', but also, 'why myself in futures studies?'

The reasoning for the special issue developed from a challenge by Zia Sardar that futures studies was becoming an Orientalized discipline,¹ where the thoughts, visions and activities of a select group of predominantly centre-based scholars were being promoted to the exclusion of visions and individuals from the periphery. In danger of becoming fugitive was the plurality of futures, so essential to maintaining the biodiversity of thought. The future was thus increasingly becoming grounded in contemporary frames of thinking, often strategic, technocratic and problem-based approaches to the future.²

While few could argue with Sardar (only provide explanations and rationalizations), Slaughter raised the issue³ that within the field there are critical, multicultural, visionary, enabling perspectives that are not owned by any frame. Instead of merely attacking current references of important defining books in the field, what is needed are efforts to support the work of nascent endeavours. Futurists need to create projects that are more cross-cultural, gender-balanced, epistemologically rich and that approach the Other within the categories of the Other.

Although the representation in this issue certainly does not meet Sardar's and Slaughter's challenge as much as I would have liked, it is an important beginning. This issue has gaping holes: to begin with, representation from East Asia and the former Soviet

Union, in particular. As with all such efforts, perfect balance was not possible. However, this is clearly a dramatic improvement over previous similar efforts. For example, in *What Futurists Believe*,⁴ by Coates and Jarret—even though diversity was one of the criteria of their selection of futurists, they still ended up with a homogenous group,⁵ writes Sardar.⁶ In Robert Bundy's *Images of the Future*, no non-Western perspective appears although there are four essays by women.⁷ But for Bundy, this is how it should be, since the backward receive the future, but do not create it. He writes: 'Western civilization is the obvious focus of all that is said. But the drama engaged in is global; there is an important underlying assumption in all the essays that what happens to the West will significantly shape what the world will be like in the second millennium'. One civilization thus comes to mean universal civilization, its categories are seen as natural, others as problematic. Terms like second millennium continue to inscribe a particular temporal frame on the temporal ecology (cyclical, generational, ancestral, spiritual, lunar) that is humanity. Of course, in fairness to Coates and Jarret, their purpose was different. They asked representatives of business corporations who, from a list of 125 futurists, have something relevant to say to their corporation. They focused on the predictive-consultant dimension of futures studies (particularly its genesis in the USA) rather than on the broader visionary, civilizational and global dimension we are more biased towards. We can only hope that others will continue this process and be more successful in finding futurists from unrepresented areas and convince them to break away from their work of creating the future to reflect on their participation in futures studies.

However, although balance was important, I had no intention of being 'politically correct' and trying to choose from each continent, of believing fully that individuals can accurately represent their cultures, civilizations, genders and organizations; indeed, part of postmodernity that we must all wrestle with is the problematic nature of representation, the undoing of fidelity. Moreover, I did not seek to make this issue become merely an informed Other to the dominant model and thus *a priori* deselect, for example, all 'white, middle-aged, professorial or corporate, American males', that is the conventional stereotype of the futurist. My concern was to develop a conversation about what the future might be, what we want the future to be, and who are the individuals who are actively engaged in asking these questions.

As you read through these essays, if you are a futurist and your name is not here, then you might be angry and wonder why you weren't selected; or, if you were selected, you might be delighted that your essay is here (or perhaps upset at my editing). As in all such processes, there is subjectivity and objectivity involved, as well as practical issues of correct addresses (as in returned letters). See these visions as parts of a conversation about the future that you, too, can join in.⁸ Futures studies is in the process of refining its knowledge base, not closing it.

I am pleased with the content, with the stories told. For me, it has been among the most enjoyable and inspiring efforts in futures studies. To hear individuals' honest accounts of their fascination with the future, their successes and failures, their dreams, reaffirmed to me the importance of futures studies. Reading these essays convinces me that futures studies do have something to offer to other disciplines and discourses.

The criteria

The criteria for inclusion was the following: (1) excellence in the field through futures

activities (workshops, teaching, community organization, corporate forecasting, local government training); (2) excellence in *publication* (through the journals of the field, primarily *Futures*, *Futures Research Quarterly*, *World Futures*, *Alternatives*, *Journal of Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, *WFSF Futures Bulletin*) and books; (3) active *participation* in a futures course, whether at established graduate programmes in futures studies such as those at the University of Hawaii or University of Houston, Clear Lake, or at the numerous futures courses taught by the World Futures Studies Federation in Andorra and Bangkok, Thailand; (4) *epistemic difference*—that is futurists who are able, if not to speak outside the confines of normal knowledge boundaries, of the episteme of modernity, at least through their scenarios and efforts to begin to contest these categories and critically create different sorts of futures; (5) although *balance* was not our first criteria, it remains an important one. Too often, we select according to the dominant culture, forgetting those who exist outside the imperium. We have sought a balance of gender, culture, age, civilization and theoretical perspective; and, finally, (6) *self definition*: I have chosen individuals who self-interpret themselves as futurists, who are willing to live under that category. This is an important criterion in that, for example, although many individuals have political views or are politically conscious, there is a much smaller set which calls its members political scientists, political theorists or students of politics (or have enough legitimacy to be called that by others).

Fame was not a criterion. An elementary school teacher in Queensland teaching futures studies may be as important as a well-known author of a best-seller. Futures studies work by changing the paradigms, the episteme of modernity, by constantly calling into question the assumptions of the status quo and thus creating the spaces for alternative futures. Futures also work by empowering individuals to discover their own visions of the future, to make the future an intimate and possible place.

The approach was to search for excellence and difference. I am committed to many futures, from many different traditions. The past 500 years have been a monologue of one type of rationality, one civilization, one gender, one colour, and one theory of the future. To survive we need difference in the context of shared visions, what Tony Judge has called a harmony of differences. I hope this special issue will begin to create alternative futures, not merely the appropriation of the non-West to save the exhaustion of modernity, but for other cultures—through the gaze of particular individuals—authentically to see themselves in their eutopias, utopias, eupsychias, visions of time and efforts that seek to create new cosmologies, that stand in new and other spaces.

Over 100 individuals were requested to write an article. An initial list was prepared and then passed to five independent referees, who provided criticisms of the entire selection criteria and also suggested additional names. This was done to reduce the amount of selection bias. But this is not to say that all subjectivity has been reduced; I do not think that is possible. Rather the effort has been to balance subjectivity (a vision of the field, how it should be defined and thus develop) with certain criteria (again based on a vision of what constitutes knowledge) with external commentary (to provide some type of criticism mechanism).

Again, as you read through these criteria, remember that this issue is a cross-section of futurists. Of the over 100 people who were asked, some did not manage to write an essay, some could not be reached; many who did respond wrote essays that were more like lists of publications as opposed to insights on their futures travels. This selection, I believe, is a good one. Both gender and non-West are well represented, although certainly not

perfectly represented. Age also is well represented, with some young emerging futurists in their late 20s and 30s and some in their 60s and 70s. We have not gone for the most famous, or even the greatest, but what we do have are some 50 plus quality essays that will form the basis for extensive quantitative and qualitative sociological research on who are futurists, what they think, what they do, and how they do what they do.

Respondents were asked to use the following questions⁹ as points of departure. (1) What has influenced your futures studies? (2) How do you do what you do? (3) What forces and trends are creating the world? (4) What world do you want to live in? And (5) Who are you and what do you do?

But these essays should not be read as sociology, as a search for a general typology of futures—whether Amara’s preferred, possible and probable; Linstone’s (as well as Masini’s and Gillwald’s) technological, personal and organizational, or Slaughter’s technical, humanistic and epistemological; rather, these are inspiring encounters with the future. I was surprised by the results; I did not expect such personal renderings nor such positive visions. Although Jim Dator, for example, is quick to remind us that he is keen on skipping the next century and going straight to the 22nd, because current trends are so damaging to humanity (the short-term future is bleak, as many emphasize), still, even as Dator recounts his failures, clearly he, and many others, such as Bob Jungk and Eleonora Masini, have had profound positive impacts on the field.

While this is not a sociological introduction, some trends are obvious. Based on the responses, the futurists can be divided into: (1) *civilizational* futurists, often men and women from the non-West; (2) *feminist* futurists or futurists concerned with gender futures, often women; (3) *environmental and social justice* futurists from all categories; (4) *transformational* futurists, of technological and spiritual varieties, often from the First World; and, (5) *problem-oriented* futurists. These are the main clusters in terms of how this selection of futurists describe themselves. The quantitative analysis of these clusters I leave to others.

The essays

Summarizing 50 plus essays is, of course, violence to all of them. I simply provide some pointers to give a flavour of the essays.

Most essays begin with a personal history. Erzsebet Novaky and Istvan Kappeter begin their essay by clearly stating that they are not members of any particular party—obviously an important comment to make, coming from the former Soviet bloc. Ana-Maria Sandi believes that her popularity in futurist circles was based on her gender, her age, and being Eastern European. With the latter two issues no longer relevant (and gender never really an issue anyway), where to now?, she jokingly asks. Sam Cole believes he first became a futurist when he asked himself, ‘when did I feel some responsibility for the future?’.

Jim Dator became futurized in Japan, where he read a study on cycles comparing Japan and the USA. Clement Bezold, of the Institute of Alternative Futures, began as a researcher of anticipatory democracy and ended up creating one of the premier futurist institutions. Tony Stevenson tells us how he has constantly changed careers. It is non-average behaviour, ideas on the margin, that drive his future. Being open to societal, but also personal, change is fundamental to him. Walter Anderson also focuses on the idea that the future is a surprise; indeed, the future is unknowable.

Methods

More than personal stories, we also learn about the methods futurists use. Bart van Steenbergen, for example, moves from trying to predict the future to searching for the seeds of the future and attempting to understand and grow them. Eleonora Masini also looks for the invisible seeds of the future. Chris Jones teaches by raising future pregnant questions (what if questions such as: are you ready for full unemployment?). Mika Mannermaa advises that it is important to choose some method, to not merely 'wing it'. I have argued for causal layered analysis to deal simultaneously with various levels of a problem, from the quantitative to the metaphorical. Sam Cole has sought to go beyond the myopic and the technical and bring back the cultural into mathematical simulation models. As a scientist, he is well aware of how statistics can be used to deceive. Rick Slaughter, as with other futurists, no longer predicts but instead seeks to create institutions and environments of foresight, with the hope of recovering wisdom cultures. Johan Galtung, although a founder of modern futures studies (at least in its European civil society brand), finds most futures studies too conservative, not willing to engage in the *longue durée*, in the world 50 years from now. He also asks: what type of future do we want? Futures that emerge from peace studies is his response to this issue. He arrived at this view following his father's imprisonment (and later his own).

Equally committed to peace is Cesar Villanueva, who works with communities of social justice. His forecasting technique is the search for typhoons, dramatic trends that sweep across the Philippines. His method is that of visioning the future, of imagining desired states. His hope is for a mosaic of a culturally rich future. For Ivana Milojevic, as well, vision is central. Disdaining trends because they tell us stories of misery, as in her homeland, the former Yugoslavia, she prefers to investigate and help create positive feminist visions of the future. Jennifer Coote is a futures weaver and a futures watcher. She weaves together strands from many sources in her analysis of emerging issues. What results for her is a vision of a future where men and women take equal responsibility for their future. Women, Vuokko Jarva believes, in alliance with humanistically oriented men, can and will change the future. She believes that the best of men are already beginning to realize that allying themselves with competent women is the best strategy to achieve a partnership society. For Riane Eisler, a partnership society is much more than a vision. It is a historic necessity, part of humanity's progress to the spiritual. Eleonora Masini, as well, is committed to feminist futures, arguing that the future will be created by Third World women; they are the carriers of the new civilizational codes. As a Pakistani woman, Samar Ihsan tells her own story of the cultural context of gendered futures. She remains focused on social change, on the recovery of the good, of the human. Ana-Maria Sandi is now focused on developing practical strategies in helping Romanian women to achieve a modicum of decency.

Civilization, identity and hope

Zia Sardar is more focused on identity, arguing that the world forces him into one self, but he is many selves. He is a Muslim futurist, committed to reconstructing this classical civilization. Sardar does not use any particular method; rather he is eclectic, but always asking: who benefits? He hopes for a future where he will be many things and true to all of them. Susantha Goonatilake is also informed by the idea of civilizational sciences. He combines Buddhist realism with postindustrial information sciences to make a rich

epistemological approach. He looks forward to the flourishing of many sciences. Ashis Nandy takes a step further, arguing that futures studies should not only contest Western, linear, technocratic knowledge frames, but also offer alternatives to official forms of dissent. Dissent must remain multivocal and not a mere ornament to democratic discourse.

Others are more focused on their own geographical regions. Maria Guido is committed to the self-determination of Latin Americans everywhere. She asks: 'How can Latin Americans envision utopias unfettered by psycho-distortions, create new futures and leave baggage behind, recovering culture but also being critical of distorted memories?'. Linda Crowl, a publisher living in Fiji, while acknowledging that Pacific Islander writers will remain a 'tiny minority of the world', believes that Pacific Island voices can contribute to the production and dissemination of information. This is especially possible with a global environment being brought closer by the new information technology. Ron Crocombe, as well, writes and lives in the Pacific. He is equally committed to positive Islands futures, where Islands peoples have some voice in the global cacophony. However, they must take care to protect their diversity (1200 languages and 10 000 islands), as they are vulnerable to unwelcome external forces.

However, although futurists are often focused on their own civilization or region, all are concerned about finding points of unity of agreement. Martha Garrett tells about the work of futurist Trevor Hancock, a health futurist who facilitates community workshops: 'He says that when workshop participants split into groups to draw sketches of their envisioned future communities, the resulting pictures are strikingly similar. It seems that, despite our cultural differences, despite our disagreements about details, many of us share a vision of a secure and equitable future in a green and peaceful world. The existence of this common image is cause for hope'.

Indeed, hope is a unifying theme; Elise Boulding, like many others in this volume, believes that the seeds of hope are coming from the social movements, from the synergy of peace, spiritual, consumer rights and ecological movements. Hazel Henderson, too, pins her hopes to the ability to put into context current economic practices—to reveal the naked emperor—and to create new sustainable economics. David Hicks, who teaches children, believes that students must have stories of hope in order to counter the prevailing psychology of despair. He argues for a constructive postmodernism where, while the future is essentially contested territory, a new paradigm of ecology, social justice and participation is needed.

Wendell Bell believes that we need a post-positivism, not a postmodernism. For Bell feels, even among the sea of differences, that humans can agree upon basic values of the good. In fact, we do agree on them; most do want humanistic green futures. Of course, pedagogy is the key. Anita Rubin, as well, believes that we must encourage the young to see their own futures. Through art, music and love, we can expose others of parallel realities and help create humanistic and spiritual futures.

David Loye, a brain researcher who argues that humans can, to some extent, accurately forecast futures, believes that spiritual futures are our destiny. As he writes: 'I see a prolonged time of increasing conflict between those who, out of fear and privilege, cling ever more ferociously to the past and those who not only yearn for a better future, as in the past, but who now can *taste* this better future in the air—and who beyond this time of crunch, given the drive of evolution in *their* direction, will in the end prevail'. Dusan Ristic, writing from the former Yugoslavia and taking a macro view of the future, imagines

a future without fear. This focus on destiny and choice is, of course, one of the grand tensions of futures studies. Kathleen Rundall takes an extreme position to other futurists. She writes: 'I do not have a dream, I am content to let God dream me'. Yet this does not mean she is passive; she believes that the future can be used to recreate the present. Indeed, the utility of the future is in creating 'nowist' individuals—individuals who are truly present in the moment, even as they dream utopias. For South American Paulo Moura, God is central to the future, as well. He believes that we are in the middle of a grand liberal transformation.

Tony Judge, less focused on particular nominations of religion or deity, asserts that he is 'a save the world junkie. I am most impressed by what does not happen at gatherings in which much has been invested with the greatest of expectations'. For Judge, we need better metaphors of how we arrange our meetings and our conversations. Too often, grand ideas are defeated by impoverished responses to issues of participation and cultural differences. Futures, then, is not only about forecasting but about revisioning today's words and worlds.

Consciousness, future generations and planetary society

Other essays are less religion-based and more consciousness-based. Markeley examines the new waves of consciousness that are changing us—technological consciousness but also spiritual consciousness, noetic thought. He also asks what about extra-terrestrials; how will contact transform us? But which consciousness will be transformative? For Jordi Serra and Chris Jones, it is the new emerging cyborg consciousness that will be crucial in creating the futures. Serra believes that new technologies, interweaved with the organic, will help people to find their future. Jones, as well, believes that we are in the midst of a fundamental transformation—the move to a spiritual and technological postindustrial society. But, for Martha Garrett, technology, particularly in the form of the television, is destroying the community—trivializing religion, politics and education. We need to focus on the environment and social justice futures and be far more critical of technology.

Allen Tough approaches the spiritual as future generations, calling for us to grow emotional relationships with the unborn. Tough writes that, 'They, too, will laugh, cry, shout, run, work, love, have projects . . . they will definitely be real, not a figment of someone's imagination'. Margarita de Antunano is also committed to the needs and rights of future generations. Waking up one day to see birds lying dead on the streets of Mexico City, she was inspired to change conditions that create the practices that drive pollution. Martha Rogers, a nurse, believes that our futures must be caring futures, involving mind, heart and soul, creating a global human and spiritual transformation. Victoria Razak reminds us of the perspective of the Hodenosune Indians of North America, who believe that decisions must be made with seven generations in mind. One heuristic tale advises: 'Your patience must be very great—seven thumbs thick. You must walk and work in unity—never think of your own interests but work to benefit . . . those yet unborn'. Olugbenga Adesida, too, expresses this concern. Writing from an African perspective, he says: 'We can only pay our debt to the past by putting the future in debt to ourselves'. Levi Obijiofor, too, believes that environmental futures are our hope. As a journalist, he reminds us that all news has future implications. For Anandhavalli Mahadevan, future generations are expressed through the environment. Through commitment to the greening of her own region, she became intrigued by futures studies. Satish Seth tells us we must

learn from tradition, from the ancient stories of sages. But too often we do not; rather, we stay in technocratic modes. Seth asks: 'Will a central planning commission ever get to know the fears, hopes and expectations of people living in remote hamlets and inaccessible villages?'. Even as futurists imagine green futures, social justice issues are never lost sight of. Kjell Dahle warns us that we should not give way to millenniumism; we must be committed to people's emancipatory futures. Mika Mannerman, a futurist and green activist, evokes the memory of Bob Jungk, who tirelessly taught futures studies by words and deeds.

Yehezkel Dror, ever the realist, desires to improve governmental decision making, to reduce the probability of bad futures and to create realistic visions. He writes that by 'adopting a more limited time frame of 30 to 50 years, a number of prescriptions can be derived from the recognition of long-term uncertainty and inconceivability: potentials for the future should be upgraded . . . by improving capacities to better engage critical choice in the face of mutating situations, both cognitively and morally'.

Others, too, believe that, as futurists, we should be participating in creating global solutions to the global problematique. Pentti Malaska believes that knowledge is the key, but it should be knowledge that can encompass the political, cultural and material spheres of life. Energy futures and systems must deal with issues of poverty and system transformation, chaos and bifurcation. Partow Izadi brings a mixture of systems thinking and his Bahai faith to the analysis of current problems. His solution is a vision of global civilization. I, too, imagine such a planetary civilization but unfortunately believe it will be born from our collective suffering rather than a burst of goodwill (although that, too, should be imagined). We need to straddle constantly the positivity of inspiring visions and the reality of evil. S P Udayakumar, a peace futurist, believes that Gandhi provided an example of this balancing act. Ever the visionary, Udayakumar longs to go to lands where all is abundant—to that 'City Beautiful' he calls us. I, too, long for a future of beauty and I hope that the efforts and visions of my colleagues will play a role in creating such futures.

Notes and references

1. Zia Sardar, 'Colonizing the future: the "other" dimension of futures studies', *Futures*, 25(2), March 1993, pages 179–187.
2. See responses to Sardar's concerns in the March issue by Rick Slaughter and Sohail Inayatullah, and in the May 1993 issue (25(4), 1993) by Susantha Goonatilake, Jerry Ravetz and Ashis Nandy.
3. Richard Slaughter, 'Responding to the inner voices of an irritated text', *Futures*, 24(2), March 1993, page 190.
4. See, for example, Joseph Coates and Jennifer Jarret, *What Futurists Believe* (Bethesda, MD, Lomond, 1989).
5. It is thus not surprising, then, that the futurists chosen end up ignoring issues of women, religion (its rise) and cultural conflicts/minorities (except as threats to liberalism and stability). Also see J Coates and J Jarret, 'What futurists believe', *The Futurist*, Nov–Dec 1990.
6. As Sardar writes, 'seventeen masters of the field, all white, male, mostly American and with an average age of 58', were chosen. Sardar, *op cit*, reference 2, page 186.
7. Robert Bundy (editor), *Images of the Future* (Buffalo, NY, Prometheus Books, 1976), page 5.
8. Moreover join in. The project will expand to become a book, to be published by DDM and Futures Study Centre, Australia. If you would like to contribute, send your essay to me for consideration.
9. *Driving questions*
 1. What has influenced your futures studies?
What are the main sources—individuals, texts, institutions, dreams, visions—that have influenced your futures-related studies, activities, research?
 2. How do you do what you do?
What is the focus in your work? That is, how do you describe the future in your work—as a metaphor, as a utopia, as images, as forecasting, or as . . . ? What are the limits to the method or methods you

use? This is basically a methods question but going beyond traditional framing of what constitutes methodology.

3. What forces and trends are creating the world?
What do you think (feel, believe, are committed to) are the main forces and trends creating the future in the next 30 years (or choose a different temporal frame, if you wish) you prefer or fear?
4. What world do you want to live in?
What type of world would you like to see in the next 30 years or so (or choose a different temporal frame, if you wish)? Describe your preferred society. Is it similar or different from the world that you think or feel will most likely come about? Define 'world' in categories that are meaningful to you.
5. Who are you and what do you do?
List the main projects you are working on or have recently finished, as well as anticipated new projects.

FUTURES AND HOPE FOR AFRICA

Olugbenga Adesida

My involvement in futures studies resulted more from chance or faith than by a calculated effort, a dream or a realization that I needed to change the world. I discovered futures studies as a part of a team of UNDP consultants, who were put together in January 1992 to devise a methodological framework for implementing a new UNDP project on national long-term perspectives studies. Since then, I have become a passionate believer in the opportunities offered by and the utility of futures studies.

As a field that is mostly concerned with the systematic exploration of the future,

Olugbenga Adesida is a practising futurist and strategic planner. He is presently the systems analyst for the African Futures project of the United Nations Development Programme. Before joining the project in 1992, he was a PhD candidate in economics at the City University of New York. While in New York, he taught in adjunct positions in the economics department of the Bronx Community College, The College of New Rochelle, and The Berkeley School. He co-edited a special edition of *Futures* 26(9), November 1994, entitled 'Futures studies and the future of Africa'. He has published articles in *Futures*, *African Development Review*, *WFSF Bulletin*, *The Futurist* and *African Futures Bulletin*. Address: African Futures, UNDP, 01 BP 1747, Abidjan 01, Côte d'Ivoire (Tel: +225 22 26 69; fax: +225 22 26 64; e-mail: jadesida@worldbank.org).