

The Knowledge Base of Futures Studies Volume 2: Organisations, Practices, Products (1996)

Introduction to Volume Two

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Volume One of the Knowledge Base presented various aspects of the foundations of futures studies. Volume Two builds upon these foundations in several ways. First, it presents an overview of a number of futures organisations. Clearly this is only a sample, yet it provides a fascinating overview of their rationales and modus operandi. A very substantial section on futures methods and tools follows. It explores some of the ways that futures thinking can be operationalised. The theme of images and imaging processes follows. The final section takes up the theme of critical practice. In all, Volume Two is concerned with the applications of futures thinking to 'real world' contexts, situations and needs.

Part One opens with an historical and methodological account of the Paris-based Futuribles group by Hugues de Jouvenel (son of Bertrand de Jouvenel, founder of the organisation).(1) In this context, 'the future' is portrayed as the realm of freedom, power and will, and hence is of critical significance to individuals, organisations and cultures. A more 'nuts and bolts' account is given by Howard Didsbury on the development of the World Future Society which is still the largest futures organisation in the world. He outlines its key publications and meetings. Tony Stevenson provides a complementary account of the much smaller, but more international, World Futures Studies Federation, and its distinctively cultural and facilitative approach. In contrast, the origins of the Future Generations Alliance Foundation (FGAF) of Kyoto, Japan, is given by Katsuhiko Yazaki, its founder and benefactor.(2) He shows how a transformative insight during Zen meditation in Hiroshima led him to dedicate himself to the future generations cause.

Geza Kovacs is a former director, and Erszebet Novaky the current director, of the Centre for Futures Studies at the Budapest University of Economic Sciences. Together they give an account of institutional links, the department's varied program of research, and the growth of postgraduate teaching in Hungary. Significantly, the department not only survived the 'change of political systems', but it thrived in a more open, challenging, political and economic environment. Sesh Velamoor then provides an account of the Seattle-based Foundation for the Future created by entrepreneur and philanthropist Walter Kistler. Next Andy Hines profiles one of the newer organisations, the Association of Professional Futurists. The APF is spearheading an attempt in the USA to reinvigorate the profession from within.

There follows a fascinating chapter by Jo Anne Oravec who provides a marvelous overview of the Long Now Foundation. The latter is involved in an ambitious and highly innovative attempt to challenge the current notions of time in the West. To this end it is building a very unusual clock and

assembling a distinctive library with an eye on the long view ahead. Finally, Phillip Spies looks back at his association with a futures research unit at the University of Stellenbosch, South Africa and reports on its progress over a twenty year period. Together, these chapters tell us much about the ways Futures Studies has been supported by various types of organisational and institutional development in various countries.

Part Two considers aspects of futures methods and tools. As noted, futures concepts, metaphors, theories, ideas and so on, combine to create an advanced futures discourse. Yet it is futures methods and tools that extend the analytic scope of futures thinking by providing a variety of strategies for problem solving and decision-making. Joseph Voros sets the scene with his outline of a 'generic foresight process framework'.⁽³⁾ This provides a structural account of foresight theory and praxis that practitioners can use, extend and perhaps take issue with. The chapter is followed by a detailed account by Martha Garrett of how longer-term futures projects operate. It contains a wealth of knowledge derived from her work with many futures research teams around the world.⁽⁴⁾ Fabrice Roubelat then traces the development of the distinctively French futures tradition through the work and ideas of key individuals, culminating the work of Michel Godet and the rise of 'strategic prospective'.⁽⁵⁾ Aspects of a strategic 'tool box' are outlined, followed by a commentary on recent developments within Futures Studies.

Sam Cole takes a more scientific approach to global modelling and data bases. His chapter covers the development of modelling as a futures technique, summarises emerging trends, and then assesses the implications for futures studies. Sohail Inayatullah then describes one of the newer methods in the futurist's or foresight practitioner's tool kit – causal layered analysis or CLA. This method has been widely regarded as one of the most successful methodological innovations in the field for some time. In contrast, a short piece by Jim Dator draws lessons from his long experience in running facilitative futures workshops in Hawaii. This captures aspects of the creative, liberating aspects of such work. There is clearly a long-term future for techniques of this kind.

Warren Ziegler then provides a rationale for extending the workshop format to address questions and realities that can only be termed: 'spiritual'. In so doing, he opens up a powerful but much neglected dimension of futures work.⁽⁶⁾ John Peterson returns our attention to the issue of 'wild cards'. This work has clearly received much greater attention in the post 9/11 world. Overall, these contributions clearly demonstrate the depth, breadth, range and applied relevance of futures methods.

Next is another valuable paper by Andy Hines that outlines a method for carrying out a futures-related organisational audit. He sets out ten questions that he suggests 'every organizational futurist should be able to answer.'⁽⁷⁾ It is followed by a personal account by Emma Robinson about her journey toward becoming a foresight practitioner. The paper explores her location in the foresight landscape and the key concepts, methods and techniques that she uses. Apart from anything else, this is a fine introduction for new entrants

to the field as well as a useful profile for more experienced professionals. Finally a paper by Wendy Schultz sets out her approach to 'futures fluency'. In this view the key elements are: looking for, and monitoring, change; critiquing implications; imagining difference; envisioning ideals and planning achievement. (8)

Part Three looks at images and imaging processes. This topic is central to Futures Studies and applied foresight. Yet it tends to be under-regarded socially and under-researched in the field. The work included here provides an overview of this branch of futures enquiry. David Hicks examines the results of research carried out in the UK.(9) First, he confirms the view that young people's ability to think about the future is currently limited and, second, that their images tend to be pessimistic. The chapter concludes with the view that futures thinking is needed in education, not simply as curriculum content, but as an actively transforming principle. The following chapter by Ken Wark explores images of futures in the mass media. It avoids conventional stereotypes and provides an account of some of the deeper issues involved: 'Tech noir' cinema provides few easy or simple solutions, but instead poses a host of valuable questions. A reflective piece by Elise Boulding follows on the challenge and the process of imaging peace in wartime.(10) Her solution involves: knowing the past, knowing the dreams of others, reinventing imaging workshops and preparing for a new generation of futures imagery.

By contrast an overview of the first Matrix film is provided by Richard Slaughter. He suggests a number of 'readings' of the film, none of them entirely persuasive.(11) The section is completed by two papers that look again at the theme of young people's images of futures. The first, by Ryota Ono, Japan, reports on a study of students in Taiwan and the USA. The second, by Anita Rubin, provides an overview of her complementary research in Finland. Overall, Part Three shows how central the whole question of images and imaging processes are to young people as well as to long-term social wellbeing.

Part Four takes up a hitherto widely overlooked area in FS and applied foresight – that of 'critical practice.' Five very different pieces provide some fine examples of this work. First the late – and greatly missed - Alan Fricker contributes a piece that applies 'layered analysis' to the issue of genetic engineering in New Zealand. He calls for more public involvement and suggests that control of such developments be re-located into the public domain. Next Rakesh Kapoor applies the scapel of critique to FS itself and makes a number of cogent observations about its in-built biases and failings. He then goes on to recommend 'an agenda for futurists'. This includes: greater political engagement, encouraging public debate, and, in common with the foregoing piece, greater freedom from technological domination. Patricia Kelly's paper on 'futurelandia' takes issue with an image painted by artist Robert McCall and commissioned by the Seattle-based Foundation for the Future.(12) Again using a layered approach Kelly's piece explores how the image speaks of a worldview she encourages us to question. It is by no means a demolition job. In this engagement she opens up a plethora of issues

and concerns that give us the opportunity to make up our own minds. In the following paper Wendell Bell similarly takes issue with the Huntington thesis of the 'clash of civilisations'. Against this he argues for the existence of universal patterns and human values. While in no way denying the presence of conflict, he suggests a more humane and civilised way forward based on learning how to live together on this small, imperiled planet.

Finally, in 'beyond development' Ziauddin Sardar offers a powerful critique of the currently dominant market-led ideology and some of its widespread human and cultural consequences.(13) He sketches in aspects of an Islamic view of development and suggests that the Western model may eventually be replaced by a multi-civilisational alternative.

Notes

- 1 Jouvenel, B de (1967) *The Art of Conjecture*, Weidenfeld & Nicholson, London.
- 2 Yazaki, K (1995) *The Path to Liang Zhi*, Future Generations Alliance Foundation, Kyoto.
- 3 Voros, J A Generic Foresight Process, *Foresight* 5, 3, (2003) pp 10-21.
- 4 Garrett, M et al. (1991) *Studies for the 21st Century*, UNESCO, Paris.
- 5 Godet. M (1993) *From Anticipation to Action*, UNESCO, Paris.
- 6 Ziegler, W (1995) *Ways of Enspiriting*, Futures Invention Associates, Denver.
- 7 Hines, A An Audit for Organisational Futurists', *Foresight*, 5, 1, (2003) pp 20-33.
- 8 From Schultz, W (1995) *Futures Fluency: Explorations in Leadership, Vision and Creativity*, Chapter 5, PhD, Political Science, University of Hawaii, Manoa.
- 9 Hicks, D and Holden, C (1995) *Visions of the Future*, Trentham Books, London.
- 10 Boulding, E (1988) *Building a Global Civic Culture*, Teacher's College Press/Columbia University Press.
- 11 Slaughter, R The Matrix: A Disturbing Post-Modern Puzzle, *Futures* 33, (2001) pp 209-211.
- 12 Kelly, P In Occupied Territory: futures.con, *Futures* 34, 6, (2002) pp 561-569.
- 13 Sardar, Z *European Journal of Development Research*, 8, 2 (1996).

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