

# **To See With Fresh Eyes**

## **Integral Futures and the Global Emergency**

**Richard A Slaughter**

### **Introduction**

Throughout my career as a Futurist / foresight practitioner it never occurred to me that I'd one day assemble a book on Integral Futures. For most of that time I was far too busy travelling, writing, editing and working with and for various organisations in Australia and overseas. More recently, however, a number of people have encouraged me to take a fresh look at the trajectory of that work and to consider making some of it available to a new generation of scholars and practitioners. In this introduction I provide a brief account of the context and process that led to this point, along with an overview of the book itself.<sup>1</sup>

#### Starting points

These lie in my childhood in Portsmouth, England. During the post-war years I was often taken to the Canoe Lake and Southsea Common, both of which were open areas by the sea. Later on I found an account of early Portsmouth that described these places as having earlier been criss-crossed by watercourses and inhabited by many different forms of wildlife. I still remember the shock of discovering that a familiar place had a long and very different past. The Common that I knew, where I'd played – and later managed a school football team - was only the most recent incarnation of a long sequence of processes and events that I could scarcely begin to imagine.

Since then there have been many other occasions when a sudden shift of view takes place from a close-up present to larger, longer-term perspectives. Sometimes there's a gradual build-up; at other times you're metaphorically hit right between the eyes, dazzled and disoriented as your inner world shifts upon hidden axes. Then as the implications begin to sink in there's a period of adjustment and reorientation. That's when new insights start to emerge and for a while you do, in reality, see the world with fresh eyes.

Over decades this can happen many times. In my own case several shifts of this kind stand out. During my time at Chester College in the 1960s I came across a book of Reith Lectures for 1967 called *A Runaway World?*<sup>2</sup> I have the book before me now and it's not hard to recall how, during a first reading, I was struck by what I saw as profound contrasts between the rather conventional curriculum I was receiving at the time as a trainee teacher and the dynamic world of powerful forces and emerging structural dilemmas that it described. The former assumed a steady, largely settled world in which the future was simply assumed. The latter blew this comfortable picture away and painted a portrait of a world sliding into deep crisis. It raised huge questions about the viability of human existence. Ever afterwards I saw the contradictions between these two views writ large in schools, universities and education systems – and, sad to say, they largely remain thus more than forty years later.

Throughout my teens I'd been an avid reader of Science Fiction (SF). Over time I could not help but to start to question why images of the future were so negative. 'Why,' I wondered, 'did the future appear to be such a continuing disaster?' Then, as I began to attend SF conventions and came in contact with authors who included John Brunner, Brian Aldiss, Arthur C. Clarke, J.G. Ballard and Isaac Asimov, I began to find out. For example, Brunner commented that 'I tried to write a Utopia, but it was just too difficult.'<sup>3</sup> It became clear that future aware writers could not *but* reflect the trends they saw around them such that, when projected into the future, the results were clear. Humanity was in greater peril than it realised. Brian Aldiss put his finger right on it when he wittily defined the SF genre as depicting 'hubris clobbered by nemesis.'

Such insights were embedded in my awareness when, in 1969, I left the UK for a six year stint of teaching in Bermuda. I'll never forget the sheer delight I experienced in moving from the grey, drab atmosphere of post-war England to a vibrant sub-tropical climate with its bright blue skies, lush vegetation, coral reefs and abundant bird life. It was another awakening and I soon found a natural home within the small conservation community that existed there. After two or three years, however, disillusionment unexpectedly began to set in. I'd quickly learned how most of primeval Bermuda had already been irrevocably lost to 'development.' A mid-ocean metropolis had emerged that worshipped the values inherent in the 'almighty dollar' and cared little for environmental values. The latter were being sacrificed to the former with little thought for any long-term consequences. But there were many. The islands were becoming increasingly crowded. Add political resentment imported from the USA to this mix and Bermuda's own future began to look increasingly problematic. After several years I fell into what I later called my 'Bermuda low,' meaning that my spirits became weighed down as I came to regard this as a microcosm of the global system. The overall process of deterioration was happening in many other places. So, overall, the six years I spent there comprised what I later thought of as a 'radicalising experience.' By that I don't mean that I became radicalised politically. Rather, it was there that I 'woke up' to the fact that the dominant directions in Western culture made no real sense at all.

Fortunately during those years I had a couple of lifelines, one of which was my friend David Wingate, the government conservation officer. I'd also discovered the work of Lewis Mumford, a thoroughly grounded and authoritative critic of 'progress.' It was he who defined the essence of the mistake that I saw occurring all around me. For him modernity was characterised, in part, by what he called the 'removal of limits' and the adoption of new priorities encapsulated by the terms 'faster, farther away, bigger (and) more.' So when I returned to the UK it was with the beginnings of a critique of progress and Western-style modernity. There had to be other options.

### New beginnings

The chance to explore these concerns at the School of Independent Studies, the University of Lancaster, opened up the path that led on to my PhD. Some thirty

years ago, in 1981, I was working my thesis.<sup>4</sup> My sons were two and four years old respectively and I had no idea where or how my career as a Futurist would develop. What I did know was that I'd found something that I had to follow through with no matter where the path might lead. The PhD was not merely an academic exercise. It helped me to understand why my own experience of school had been so problematic. More significantly I'd been able to begin 'probing beneath the surface' to discover why the world appeared to be set on the downward path toward Dystopia. Further shocks were in store when, in 1982, with a freshly minted Doctorate, my father passed away and there was simply no work available. It was a tough time for myself and for my young family. Yet as is so often the case, a new pathway eventually opened up.

I fell sick with 'flu on a visit to the Findhorn Community in Forres, Scotland. But it led to one of those rare moments of clarity that can change everything. During a healing session I had what I can only call a life-altering vision. For a short time I actually experienced something of the breadth and depth of a vastly expanded universe. I knew deeply and incontrovertibly that, in a sense, 'everything was alright.' I'm going to pass over the many later experiences that supplemented this initial one. The point is that at that time I became sensitised to what Aldous Huxley had termed the 'Perennial Philosophy' which itself reflects the age-old wisdom traditions of humanity. This was another turning point that helped prepare the ground for my later interest in Integral perspectives.<sup>5</sup>

#### Evolution of integral futures

During these years it became abundantly clear that something was awry with the way that different areas of knowledge had been treated. Some – such as economics - had been elevated way beyond what might be termed their 'proper' or reasonable place. The dominance nearly everywhere of technology-led views of progress and 'the future' seemed similarly misguided. By the same token other complementary fields dealing with interior, non-empirical phenomena had been widely overlooked, demoted, made to seem inferior. Yet the more I considered the latter the more vital they seemed. In fact I began to wonder if the entire external panorama that appeared so dominant had in some sense emerged from, and was supported by, these human and cultural interiors. Which was when Ken Wilber's work gained greater relevance to my own.

After a couple of lean years I finally received a post-doc fellowship and was able to explore some of the practical implications of my earlier work. While my PhD had sought to develop a critical approach to Futures Studies (FS) the fellowship gave me a couple of years to show how this could be applied in practice within schools. 'Futures in education' was an unheard-of notion at the time but a critical perspective (that did not mean 'to criticise' but, rather, 'looking more deeply') opened out new options for helping young people find ways forward.<sup>6</sup>

I'd seen how so much of what we take for granted is socially constructed and also how understanding this could potentially create new opportunities for intervention and choice. What I had not understood at the time was how interior human factors (as opposed to cultural ones) also played a variety of significant

roles. It took Wilber's four-quadrant model - and some of its later elaborations - to make this clear. In other words, Integral models were able to incorporate the earlier critical ones and significantly increase their explanatory power. Integral thinking therefore became a useful addition to, and extension of, all that had gone before.

The route to this book has been a long and sometimes challenging one but I've never travelled it alone. Some of my companions have been people I've known and worked with personally – David Wingate, John Reynolds, Brian Wynne, Hedley Beare, Adolph Hanich and others. But the vast majority have been what you might call 'virtual companions' in the sense that I've encountered their thoughts and insights through books, papers and, more recently, the Internet. There is, in other words, a community of people, organisations and associated resources that has been a vital aspect of my own path and the products that have emerged from it. Futures / foresight enquiry and practice are in their very essence collective, not individualistic, concerns. Indeed, those who think that they can do anything much on their own are already part-way into the desert of isolation and self-deception.

In earlier years I used to wonder why some (but not all) of the older members of the Futures / foresight community seemed to 'go quiet' and withdraw from some of the more active forms of involvement. Then, as I headed into my 60s I began to understand. There's a point, I suppose, where one runs out of patience with the downside of any community and I reached that point during my time as President of the World Futures Studies Federation (WFSF). Another reason to pull back was that, in Australia at least, a new generation of integrally informed practitioners had started to emerge, primarily from the Australian Foresight Institute in Melbourne that I'd set up in 1999/2000. To know some of these young 'mid-career professionals' is also to know without a shadow of doubt that the Futures / foresight enterprise is in excellent hands. It is to them that this volume is dedicated.

### Structure of the book

Looking back over nearly four decades to when elements of the first paper included here were drafted, I'm struck by how certain insights from that time have changed more in detail and depth than they have in substance. Even at that relatively early time I was increasingly sure about two things. First, that there were ways beyond the 'civilisational trap' that humanity had constructed for itself. Second, that any real 'solutions' were unlikely to be easy or straightforward. However we collectively responded, the road ahead was going to be very challenging. Yet, what I also think emerges from these chapters makes the journey deeply satisfying and productive. The evolution of understanding and insight presented here leads to a renewed sense of agency and purpose wherein lies real hope for the future and greatly enhanced capacity. In other words we can now see ways forward with far greater clarity and insight than before. This is, I think, good news for a world sliding ever deeper toward a true global emergency.

The sequencing of the chapters in the book follows the same general order in which they were written. It moves from early perspectives, to applications, case studies and implications. The final chapters represent 'work in progress' and, since there's no obvious 'end' in sight, there's no conclusion as such. Integral futures work has already spun off into many other publications and projects.<sup>7</sup> Part one presents three early works that evoke the perspectives of the time. In *Origins of a defective worldview* I tried to account for how it was that we'd arrived at this point in the first place. Parts of the piece were derived from my very first book, *Birds in bermuda* (1975) that were re-worked later and ended up as the first chapter of *The foresight principle* (1995). Reading it some years later I still find the overall diagnosis persuasive even though I'd express it rather differently now. The two pieces on 'future vision...' and 'cultural reconstruction...' are closely related and deal with related issues in greater depth. In effect, they delineate what might be called my 'thinking environment' of the time. They are early attempts to articulate themes offered to support what I saw – and still see - as useful sources of informed optimism and hope.

Part two presents work from 1996 to 2003. I've included *Mapping the future* for a very specific reason - I wanted to demonstrate the point I'd reached *prior* to grasping the essence of an Integral perspective. It demonstrates how social construction theory can illuminate much that's otherwise hidden while, at the same time, also providing evidence of significant gaps. A few of those 'gaps' are briefly addressed in the following paper, *Transcending flatland*, published in 1998. Here are the beginnings of an exploration into the nature and applications of Integral theory in futures / foresight contexts. The following year I showed how applying such theory to a core futures / foresight methodology – environmental scanning – seemed not only to take it to a new phase of operational effectiveness but also to change the very nature of that game. Now, instead of an exclusively outward gaze at signals and events 'out there,' I proposed an equally vital focus of attention to the framing of the world 'in here' within the minds and understandings of the scanners themselves. I saw this as a pivotal shift - and so it has proved to be.

That's not to say that the 'social construction' perspective was suddenly redundant - far from it. After all the empirical tendencies of the field had been in place for a long time and they would not be set aside quickly or easily. So I wrote another piece that considered the evolution of the field in terms of what I called its 'methodological paradigms.' It turned out to be one of my few papers that were commended by the publisher and distributed widely thereafter. I argued that forecasting and scenarios had usefully catered for certain ends and that critical futures work added a new depth of understanding and insight with many practical applications. It was partly with this in mind that in 2002/3 I revisited a method that I'd first developed in my PhD and had published back in 1987 – the transformative cycle. Now, with more fully developed critical and Integral perspectives, the method could be re-visioned and developed further. The latter version is presented here. Thus this roughly seven-year period saw the emergence of Integral Futures as a perspective along with the development of several applications. It took a little longer for case studies and wider implications to emerge.

Part three is comprised of seven items from 2004 to 2011. *Waking up after the war* began as three shorter 'thought pieces' that were published in the *WFSF Bulletin* following the US-led invasion of Iraq. The focus of this work, however, was not the conflict itself but 'post-conventional futures / foresight practice.' It had long become evident that while conventional work remained the norm in many places its usefulness was increasingly open to question. It had certain applications and could be said to satisfy the requirements of various mainstream clients. But I could not shake off the feeling that, in essence, it was merely 'spinning the wheels' and under-performing. However I attempted to consider conventional work I could not see how it made any real headway in addressing underlying structural issues. On the other hand post-conventional work did exactly that. It was informed by depth knowledge of many of the active personal and social processes that operated around us and, as noted here, are in many respects 'prior to' more commonplace concerns about technology, wealth, development etc. Overall, while post-conventional work could certainly be said to be more demanding, I felt that it was capable of producing more innovative and useful results.

I demonstrated this - at least to my own satisfaction - when Zia Sardar, editor of *Futures*, invited me to review a report from the US National Intelligence Council. Viewed through the framework that had by then evolved I found it to be a deeply flawed work. Then, more positively, another opportunity arose to evaluate the usefulness of integrally informed methods. It came in the form of an international research project into the *State of play in the futures field* (SoPiFF). A team of researchers based in several countries worked on this project over an extended period and the results were published in a special issue of *Foresight* in 2009. The lead paper I wrote providing an overview of the project and its key results is reproduced here. Interested readers are encouraged to track down some of the other contributions to this work as they shed significant new light on the current state of the field. During the same period I'd also been working with another group of colleagues and former AFI post-grads on a special issue of *Futures*. This was intended as a kind of 'first cut' overview of emerging integral futures methodologies. An edited version of the lead paper from that issue is reproduced here. Responses to the special issue were wildly divergent. On the one hand a small group of people condemned our work as being 'hegemonic' and sadly deficient. This somewhat bruising and unfortunate episode was later reviewed and brought to closure in an issue of the *Journal of Integral Theory and Practice*.<sup>8</sup> On the other the Association of Professional Futurists selected the very same issue as one of three 'best Futures works' of 2008.<sup>9</sup> Readers will surely note the irony in these differing judgements.

For me perhaps the most conclusive 'test case' to date appeared when papers were invited for a special issue of the *Journal of Integral Theory and Practice* dealing with global warming / climate change. I felt that if an Integral Futures perspective could successfully be applied to what is arguably one of *the* most pressing and urgent issues facing humanity as a whole, it had to be this. So I set about reviewing a number of works on the topic and summarising the conclusions. That was step one. Step two involved taking those results and

writing an article that took things further and sought to break new ground. Readers will judge for themselves how well this work succeeds.<sup>10</sup> It subsequently formed the core of *The biggest wake up call in history*.

The next item is a newly edited version of *Welcome to the anthropocene*, a paper I wrote for an invited conference presentation at the University of Hertfordshire, UK, during mid-2010. The paper was actually drafted late in 2010 and then completed in early 2011. It identifies the shift of eras from those that arose from natural processes to another characterised by the global impacts of human activities, with all the associated impacts and ramifying costs. What I hoped to achieve in this piece was to review and recontextualise some of the issues that identify *a true global emergency* and, beyond that, to set out as clearly as I could some of the most promising options available to us. The final item, *Making headway during impossible times*, was written for a European futures conference to which I was invited but that I was unable attend in person. (Instead I gave a short presentation via videoconference.)<sup>11</sup> In part by addressing other work on the global emergency, it extends the discussion beyond the point reached in the previous paper. I re-emphasise that it is indeed a work in progress, and I fully expect to return to these issues in due course.

Whether or not these latter items represent the start of a new phase of work that, over time, may achieve a modest distance from Integral thinking *per se*, is impossible to know. It's been my view throughout that the latter should not be seen as *the* dominant framework to which all should submit but, rather, an embedded part of a still wider and continually evolving perspective. I see new evidence for this nearly every week but commenting upon it is for another time.

While others will necessarily be the final judges I hope that this book goes some way toward expressing what I've been trying to say for over three decades. The outlook is extremely serious but we have more resources and options at our disposal than have yet been taken seriously and widely applied.

As ever, it's up to us, here, now.

Richard Slaughter  
Foresight International, Brisbane  
October 2011

## Notes and references

<sup>1</sup> For further information see: [http://richardslaughter.com.au/?page\\_id=2](http://richardslaughter.com.au/?page_id=2)

<sup>2</sup> Leach, E. *A runaway world*. Reith Lectures, 1967. London, BBC Publications, 1968.

<sup>3</sup> John Brunner, author of several Dysopias including *Stand on Zanzibar*, New York, Ballantine, 1968.

<sup>4</sup> Slaughter, R. *Critical Futures Study and Curriculum Renewal*, University of Lancaster PhD, 1982.

<sup>5</sup> A more detailed account can be found in Slaughter, R. The emergence of critical futures, available from: [http://richardslaughter.com.au/?page\\_id=2](http://richardslaughter.com.au/?page_id=2)

---

<sup>6</sup> See Slaughter, R. and Beare, H. *Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Revisited*, Brisbane, Foresight International, 2011. Available from:  
<http://www.foresightinternational.com.au/>

<sup>7</sup> See Collins, T. & Hines, A. 2010.

<sup>8</sup> *The Journal of Integral Theory and Practice* Vol 11 no 2, 2011 introduced a new section called *Critical Responses*. Besides my introduction, it contains three papers. These are: Morgan, D. *Futures and the Future: An Integral Response to Epistemological Pluralism in Futures Studies*, pp 112-132; Riedy, C. *Learning from the Integral Futures Controversy*, pp 135-148 and Klisanin, D. *Postformal-Integral-Planetary Scholarship: Insights from the Integral Futures Controversy*, pp 149-156. The essential insights to emerge are first, that the legitimacy of the critiques leveled against us were largely ill-founded; second, that posing 'post-modernism' against 'integral' constitutes a false opposition and thirdly, that venturing beyond ego, anger and fear reveals the desirability of mutual respect among all varieties of futures workers everywhere.

<sup>9</sup> See Inayatullah, S. *Epistemological pluralism in futures studies*, *Futures*, 42, 2, 2010. Also see report dated 18<sup>th</sup> April, 2009 on APF award at:  
<http://richardslaughter.com.au/>

<sup>10</sup> An abridged version of this paper appears in Slaughter, R. *The Biggest Wake Up Call in History*, Foresight International, Brisbane, 2010, chapter 6: Reframing climate change and global warming.

<sup>11</sup> The Yeditepe International Research Conference on Foresight and Futures, August 24-26, Istanbul.