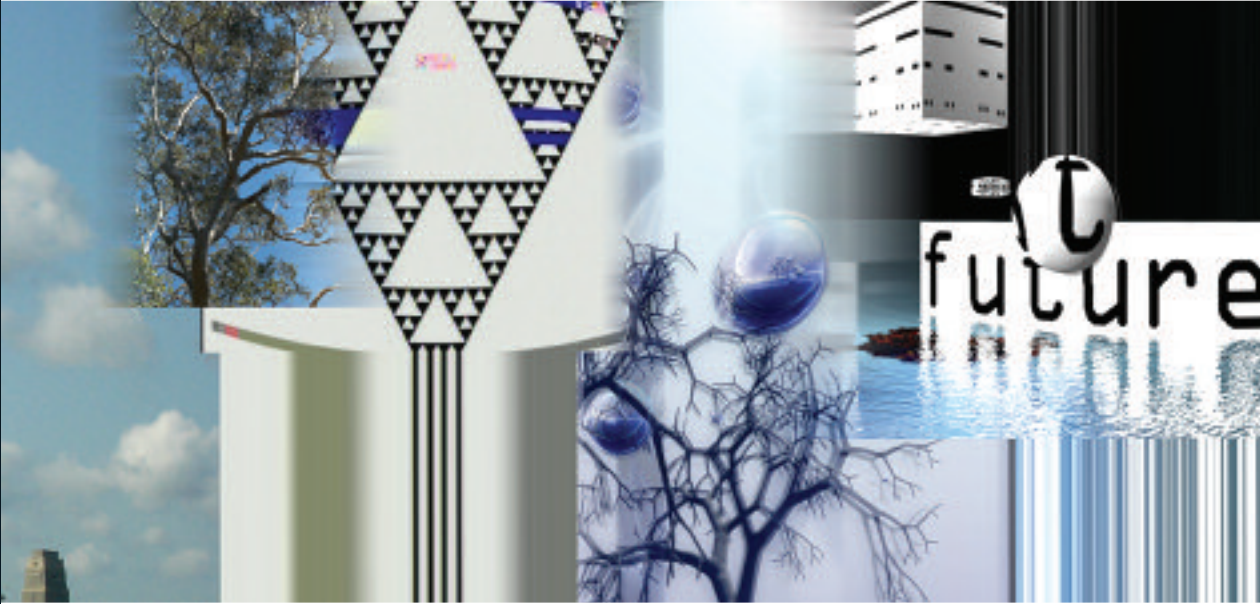


PATHWAYS AND IMPEDIMENTS TO SOCIAL FORESIGHT



AFI MONOGRAPH SERIES 2003-2006 | 6

Richard A. Slaughter

Pathways and Impediments to Social Foresight



STRATEGIC FORESIGHT PROGRAM
(Formerly The Australian Foresight Institute)

MONOGRAPH SERIES 2003–2006

Series Editor: Richard A. Slaughter

Other titles in the Series:

2003

Foresight in Everyday Life
Peter Hayward

From Critique to Cultural Recovery: Critical futures
studies and Causal Layered Analysis
José Ramos

Wider and Deeper: Review and critique of science
and technology foresight in the 1990s
Andrew Wynberg

Reframing Environmental Scanning: A reader on the art of
scanning the environment
Edited by Joseph Voros

2004

Futures in Education:
Principles, practice and potential
Jennifer M Gidley, Debra Bateman and Caroline Smith

The Transformative Cycle
Richard A Slaughter, Luke Naismith, Neil Houghton

Foresight Practice in Australia: A meta-scan of practitioners and organisations
José M Ramos

Creating and Sustaining Foresight in Australia: A review of government foresight
Maree Conway, Chris Stewart

2005

Foresight and Philanthropy: Towards a New Alliance
Richard A Slaughter, Serafino De Simone, Dr Gio Braidotti

Acknowledgment

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'Creating and Sustaining Social Foresight', which is supported by the Pratt Foundation.

ABOUT THE STRATEGIC FORESIGHT PROGRAM

Faculty of Business and Enterprise
Swinburne University
(formally the Australian Foresight Institute)

The Strategic Foresight Program, situated within the Australian Graduate School of Entrepreneurship at Swinburne University, Melbourne, is the latest guise of the Australian Foresight Institute. The Institute was formally disestablished in 2005, with the teaching program continuing in the Faculty of Business and Enterprise.

The Australian Foresight Institute (AFI) was originally established as a specialised research and postgraduate teaching unit in 1999 at Swinburne University of Technology.

It was designed to develop an innovative set of postgraduate programs and research in the area of applied foresight. Its main aims were to:

- provide a global resource centre for strategic foresight
- create and deliver world class professional programs
- carry out original research into the nature and uses of foresight
- focus on the implementation of foresight in organisations
- work toward the emergence of social foresight in Australia.

The Strategic Foresight Program now carries on these activities and is intensively networked around the world with leading futures/ foresight organisations, academic bodies and practitioners. These include the World Future Society, the Association of Professional Futurists and the World Futures Studies Federation.

The Strategic Foresight Program offers a nested suite of postgraduate programs. Based on coursework, the programs are offered through the Faculty of Business and Enterprise at the University.

Overall, the Strategic Foresight Program aims to set new standards internationally and to facilitate the emergence of a new generation of foresight practitioners in Australia. It offers a challenging, stimulating and innovative work environment and exceptionally productive programs for its students who come from many different types of organisations.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Richard A. Slaughter

Richard A Slaughter completed a PhD in futures at the University of Lancaster (UK) in 1982. Since then, he has explored futures thinking through education, institutional innovation, social foresight, integral futures and the identification of an evolving futures studies knowledge base. He is currently Director of Foresight International, an independent company dedicated to building the futures field. During 2001-2005 he was President of the World Futures Studies Federation. During 1999-2004 he was Foundation Professor of Foresight at the Australian Foresight Institute, Melbourne. He is the author or editor of some 20 books and many papers on a variety of futures topics. His most recent projects include a book *Futures Beyond Dystopia: Creating Social Foresight*, and two CD-ROMs from a projected series: the *Knowledge Base of Futures Studies: Professional Edition* and *Towards a Wise Culture: Four 'Classic' Futures Texts*.

For more details, including extracts and info on related works please go to: www.foresightinternational.com.au

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FROM THE EDITOR

Rowena Morrow

This will be the final in the series of Monographs started by Richard Slaughter under the auspices of the Australian Foresight Institute. The Monographs have been well received around the world as a source of new ideas and reinvigorated methods. It has been gratifying to see the interest in such a boutique effort, with the Monographs being used as textbooks in academic courses, quoted in articles and bought for University libraries around the world. So, it is with some regret that the end of the series is sent out into the world to find a readership. Many thanks to all the authors who contributed to their work, without payment, to the Series and to those who assisted in the production of the end result. The academic staff of the Strategic Foresight Program deserve special mention for their support and encouragement, as do the wizards at the Swinburne Press Art Department for layout and design.

COVER ART

Dr Cameron Jones

Title: InFractal Cycles We Go Round

Cover image designed by Dr. Cameron Jones, Chancellery Research Fellow, School of Mathematical Sciences. These images were generated as part of The Molecular Media Project that is concerned with science-driven art and design. This work is a meditation on space and time, and how events are partitioned across many different scales: real, imaginary and complex.

Pathways and Impediments to Social Foresight

Monograph Series 2003–2006

No. 10

Richard A. Slaughter

Strategic Foresight Program
Swinburne University

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1 Pathways and Impediments to Social Foresight

BY RICHARD SLAUGHTER

INTRODUCTION

This paper draws the AFI research program ‘Creating and Sustaining Social Foresight’ and the Monograph Series to a conclusion. It outlines key features of the AFI program, including the other nine monographs published over three years from 2003 to 2005 inclusive. It considers the limitations of conventional views of the future in the immediate regional (Australian and New Zealand) context and also why the future still appears to be a ‘missing dimension’ in so many places, including a variety of related debates and publications. Attention is drawn to the significance of two areas of published work. One deals with what has been termed the ‘global problematique’ and provides a broad brush context. The second considers how these issues manifest in the Australian context. By drawing on work carried out at the AFI over these years it is possible to approach these concerns in fresh ways and discern new ways forward. The new tools and approaches include: layered explanations, the role of social interests, the need to be ‘integrally informed’ and the use of a more comprehensive professional tool kit than was previously available anywhere in the world.

These gains represent an as-yet unacknowledged gift to the well-being of Australia and of future generations. They are being carried into a range of operational environments by a new, integrally trained, generation of practitioners and used to

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stimulate and explore range of adaptive responses. As this process continues, the prospects for social foresight in Australia will improve dramatically. The latter is a tool to enable the single most significant change of thinking in our times: the shift from short to long-term thinking. To the extent that this occurs we may come closer to avoiding – or at least mitigating – the ‘social learning experiences’ that are the main, currently overlooked, alternatives.

EMERGENCE OF SOCIAL FORESIGHT RESEARCH

During the early 1990s the awareness that society was plunging blindly into what were widely considered to be unknown (but are in fact highly risky, disaster prone) futures became inescapable. For myself, prevailing anodyne and conventional views had steadily been undermined by everything that I’d learned from colleagues, the futures literature and my own experience. By 1995 *The Foresight Principle* had appeared and I’d started to think seriously about how collective responses to the prospect of darkening future prospects on the one hand, and apparent social incapacity on the other, might be achieved.¹

I’d been a critical friend to the Commission for the Future (CFF) throughout most of its life. I’d worked closely and productively with Oliver Freeman and the Global Business Network (GBN) Australia, and I’d also appreciated the efforts of Jan Lee Martin and other, mainly Sydney-based, people to set up and run the Futures Foundation. Yet, despite sustained commitment, most of these efforts seemed to remain at a relatively low level of operation and, with some exceptions, were constantly rebuffed or marginalised by nearly all the major social formations. Whatever was said or done ‘the future’ remained out of sight and largely out of mind in the wider society and culture. Given the propensity of our species for world-shaping actions, the emergence of a wide range of associated opportunities and threats (including several overlapping technological revolutions of unprecedented reach and power) and, sadly, the continuation of so many endemic conflicts around the world, this oversight seemed – and still seems – paradoxical. In this context the future cannot be left to ‘take care of itself.’ There is simply too much that can, and will, go wrong.

What also deepens the paradox is that many well established, and even well intended, social responses and trends are actively unhelpful. In particular, the tendencies to withdrawal, indifference, denial, the comforts of consumerism (‘shop ‘til you drop’) all of provide evidence, if it were needed, of the sheer dysfunctionality of ‘endemic short-termism’. This is a deeply embedded contradiction that undermines the viability of our proud high-tech civilisation and places very real question marks over its future. The term ‘cocooning’ was coined to describe the way large numbers of

affluent people appear set on withdrawing to the safety and isolation of their high-tech homes and apartments and the many comforts installed there. Withdrawal, indifference and denial are therefore no longer merely private responses – they have become social norms in their own right.

Erudite analyses of the global predicament emerge from time to time but, at a structural level, nothing much changes due to the persistence of other long-standing factors, some of which are explored here. For example, short political cycles, a diminishing social capacity to think clearly about anything and, of course, the ever present belief in the power of the almighty market, now enshrined in a process of rampant ‘wild’ globalisation. Where, I wondered, in such conditions, would society ever find the capacity to create intelligent forward views and use these as a guide to decision making? In 1996 two papers emerged that suggested a tentative response. One set out an early view of aspects of a ‘national foresight strategy’ for Australia. As well as outlining some of the implications for government, business and education it also set out some of the steps that could be undertaken. In summary they were as follows:

- Set up an Australian Foresight Institute (AFI)
- Map national and international foresight work
- Develop a skill-transfer strategy
- Identify key sectors, organisations and individuals
- Review progress and link with similar efforts
- Secure long-term funding.²

The other paper explored how a capacity for social foresight might be achieved over time through a number of distinct types and levels of activity.³ These are summarised in Figure One, below.

The figure illustrates the way that social foresight may be progressively enabled level-by-level from an under utilised potential to an applied social resource. At level 1, futures thinking is virtually impossible and the future seems to be an ‘empty space.’ Concepts, methods and applications augment these capacities. The future then begins to emerge as an *active social category* brimming with implications for the conduct of social life in the here-and-now.

Three years later the establishment of the AFI provided the first real opportunity to explore and develop some of these ideas more widely. They were subsequently woven into the teaching program. The establishment of the social foresight research program *per se* took a little longer. In fact it was an unexpected consequence of the

Stages	A futures-responsive culture	Indicators
Level 5:	Social capacity for foresight as an emergent property	Long-term thinking becomes a social norm
Level 4:	Futures processes, projects and structures embodied in a variety of applications	Foresight routinely applied in most organisations
Level 3:	Futures tools and methodologies increase analytic power	Widespread use of standard fs and methods
Level 2:	Futures concepts and ideas enable a futures discourse	Futures concepts and ideas become influential via discourse
Level 1:	Raw capacities and perceptions of the human brain-mind system	Unreflective use of forward thinking in daily life of individual
A past-driven culture		

Figure One: Stages in developing social foresight

September 11th, 2001, strike on New York. A highly placed executive from a Melbourne philanthropic foundation, with whom I'd been discussing various options, notified me quite unexpectedly that, following this event, their Board had decided to award AFI a substantial sum of money in order to carry out this work. This was encouraging (and it also enhanced the credibility of the program inside the University). Up to that point the notion of social foresight had been little more than a theoretical framework, an avenue of possibility. Now we had the chance to take a fresh look at what might be involved, to examine each step, check assumptions and perhaps begin to make real progress.

THE AFI PROGRAM

The Australian Foresight Institute (AFI) was established on July 1st 1999 at the behest of the then Vice-Chancellor (VC) of Swinburne University, Professor Iain Wallace, and its Masters in Strategic Foresight was accredited the following year. The first intake occurred in 2001 and the course has continued each year since.

It is a common practice for organisations to define their vision, mission and values, and this is no exception. Very briefly, the vision is to (a) create the next generation of foresight practitioners in Australia and (b) in so doing support progress toward what we termed ‘social foresight.’ The mission is to put in place the means to achieve this: the course structure, the learning materials, overseas visitors and suitable personnel. In the latter regard AFI’s Board, consisting of several highly experienced people provided valuable support. The core values are generally progressive and left of center but not, in any way, ‘left wing.’ As many commentators have observed, the right/left distinction makes less and less sense. What also draws the AFI program away from such stereotypical notions is the fact that it is based on two substantive areas of enquiry and practice: on the one hand the *Knowledge Base of Futures Studies* (KBFS) and, on the other, the integral perspective. It is a matter of historical fact that these elements were first assembled and put to work in Australia.

From a modest beginning in a small (some would say marginal) institution, with minimal staff and slender financial resources, something quite remarkable occurred. The program quickly gained coherence and began to attract a range of outstanding post-graduate students. The only relevant descriptor for the latter is that of ‘mid career professionals.’ That is, people who had already achieved much in a variety of ways, in many different fields, and who were ‘looking for something different.’ Since 2004 the first year (Graduate Certificate) units have also been offered on line. At the time of writing (late 2005) there have been five iterations and over 100 people have either graduated or are working through the program.

But this is not merely a question of cold statistics. The program also has a heart, as it were, a deep sense of interior awareness and meaning that varies from person to person and yet also contains shared elements. For example, nearly every teacher, lecturer or professor in the world will recall those outstanding occasions when, in the course of their work, there are breakthroughs, moments of enhanced awareness. In this case some of the ‘stand-out’ moments often took place at the beginning of the year when a new cohort of students gathered together for the first time. Those who register early and give themselves time to explore the KBFS are visibly full of questions, puzzles, insights and a wide range of comments. They are both inspired and challenged by the breadth and depth of an advanced futures/foresight perspective that, in nearly

all cases, they had not encountered before. Each person follows their own learning journey, takes a different track through the material provided. So, during the first few days, there is a great deal of excitement tinged, for some, with fear and uncertainty. Overall, however, early immersion in the KBFS is very clearly a rich and rewarding experience. Energy levels soar and group bonding begins to occur.

As people ‘find their feet’ in this new territory of the futures/foresight domain, and gain in confidence, they open up further to the integral perspective. In so doing they discover an even more powerful set of understandings and tools. The significant point is this: the latter provide not merely enhanced clarity regarding the great shaping issues of our time but also the grounds of mature long term purpose, hope and direction for individuals. These are some of the key elements underlying the success of the program and they help provision it for further trials ahead.

Graduates of the AFI program are, as noted, the first anywhere to have been trained in these forms of advanced knowledge, conceptual sophistication and the new or renewed futures/foresight methodologies. The process also initiated a further stage in the development in futures/foresight theory and application. The evidence for this is varied and will become more obvious over time. Even at this relatively early stage it can be seen in the clarity of the work – and by ‘work’ I do not merely mean academic essays but also real world ‘on the ground’ hard-headed organisational work. It is there in the conversations that you have with students and graduates, the glint in the eye that tells all, as well as the clarity of thinking and purpose that emerges. It is there in the development of the Australian Foresight Institute Association (AFIA) an autonomous group with regular meetings that may, in time, support other organisational developments. The evidence is particularly visible in the various ways that this work is being received around the world. It is being taken up not only by academics but also by other professional groups and members of the two key international organisations: the World Future Society and the World Futures Studies Federation. The AFI monograph series is one of the first in-depth published expressions of these new capabilities and it is certain be ‘mined’ for many years to come.

THE MONOGRAPH SERIES

The series was designed to publish the results of our research and related material involved in building both the perspective and the capacity for advanced futures work. An editor, Rowena Morrow, was hired and in 2002 we started working on material for the first four titles. These were published in 2003. Four more were published in 2004. The final two (of which this is the last) were published in 2005/6. There follows a brief summary of the series.

1. Foresight in Everyday Life. Peter Hayward with Preethi Krishnan

The ability to use foresight in order to make wise or prudential choices is one of the most powerful capabilities of individuals. Yet theories of how this capability arises in individuals appear to have been largely ignored. The monograph contributes to our understanding of the human capacities involved in foresight and provides a foundation upon which the development of an applied foresight capability can be considered.

2. From Critique to Cultural Recovery: Critical Futures Studies and Causal Layered Analysis. Jose Ramos

Critical futures studies is not merely concerned with the careers of individuals. Rather, it concerns projects that transcend the narrow boundaries of the self. The monograph examines the life and work of two Australian futurists/foresight practitioners – Richard Slaughter and Sohail Inayatullah, highlighting and exploring the evolution and development of their ideas and methods over time. The background and core contributions of many of the thinkers and practitioners that influenced them are unearthed and characterised. Both ideas and methodologies are situated in their cultural and historical contexts. Overall, the monograph shows how a focus on the person, the context and the episteme (or underlying civilisational framework) contributes to the development of social foresight and the field as a whole.

3. Wider and Deeper: Review and Critique of Science and Technology Foresight Exercises in the 1990s. Andrew Wynberg

National science and technology foresight (STF) exercises have been undertaken in many developed countries since the 1970s. The monograph presents an overview of the objectives and methodologies of science and technology foresight exercises in the 1990s. The concepts of STF are compared with some of the concepts and paradigms of advanced futures studies, and suggestions are made to incorporate aspects of the latter into science and technology foresight work. Hence the term ‘wider and deeper.’

4. Reframing Environmental Scanning: A Reader on the Art of Scanning the Environment. Joseph Voros (editor), Chun Wei Choo and Richard Slaughter

Environmental scanning (ES) has been conceived of as a rational, analytical, programmed activity. The papers in this monograph challenge this notion and go beyond it by showing how the interior consciousness of the scanner interacts with the material being scanned. In order to gain the maximum benefit from ES practitioners need to ensure that the ‘perceptual filters’ that they use are acknowledged and understood. Chun Wei Choo introduces the reader to best practice in

environmental scanning and situates it among a variety of similar intelligence gathering activities. Richard Slaughter draws on Wilber's four quadrant metaperspective to develop a wider framework of viewing than is commonly practiced, as well as to explore some of the deeper layers of meaning and insight found 'below the surface'. Building upon this, Joseph Voros suggests that one also needs to understand the 'mindspace' of the scanner doing the viewing and take conscious steps to open it up. That is, to find models of human consciousness and use them to understand the active filtering that occurs within the scanner's mind.

Overall, these four monographs from 2003 set out a clear and coherent program of work. They suggest that social foresight, however that may eventually come to be understood and implemented, can indeed be understood to be grounded in the operations of everyday life. This is a highly significant fact. It means that *instead of being faced with creating an entirely new capacity, the task is rather one of building forward from what already exists and is in wide use.* The second Monograph describes, in some depth, two intersecting pathways built on this basis that enhance human and social capabilities. Similarly, Monograph Three takes this notion and suggests how foresight projects with an initial stereotypical science and technology focus can be improved and extended. Finally, Monograph Four turns the analysis back upon a core methodology of FS itself, showing how greater depth and conceptual sophistication can create improved functionality and more insightful results.

5. Futures in Education: Principles, Practices and Potential. Jennifer Gidley, Debra Bateman and Caroline Smith

Futures in education provide young people with essential knowledge, motivation and a range of proactive skills. This monograph examines how equipping young people with the tools and concepts of futures creates the opportunity for a futures discourse as it is this discourse that arguably underpins a society-wide capacity for foresight. Jennifer Gidley reviews what has already been learned about futures in education. Drawing on an extensive bibliography of works on this topic, she draws on examples and research from many countries, provides new insights and poses vital questions for further work. Debra Bateman and Caroline Smith survey the scene in Australian schools regarding the teaching of futures and the process of incorporating it into school curricula and curriculum frameworks (in some States). The two contributions in this monograph summarise the current 'state of play' – as well as the value and potential – of this vital, yet all too often overlooked, area. As noted, it includes a thorough and up-to-date bibliography to inform further work.

6. The Transformative Cycle. Richard Slaughter, Luke Naismith and Neil Houghton

One of the underlying principles of the AFI program is that methodological renewal in FS is one of the cornerstones of the discipline's continued growth and development. Theories of change inform the development of applied foresight based on depth understanding. This monograph illustrates the development of a concept into a tool, that, over time, is further developed as a meta-theory of change. The re-invigoration of the transformative cycle (or T-Cycle) exemplifies the process of development and renewal. Richard Slaughter introduces the original concept and tool, with an updated conclusion based on some twenty years of reflection and use. Luke Naismith takes the T-Cycle and evaluates its usefulness by applying it to a range of topics. This is followed by a comparison with other theories of change through which synergies and distinctions emerge. Finally, Neil Houghton relates the T-Cycle to complexity theory, transdisciplinary and meta-theories of change. The three pieces illustrate the utility of a tool that not only brings clarity to change processes at the individual, organisational, societal and global levels; it also contributes to the opening up of the interior domains of enquiry that are revealed by the emergence of integral futures.

7. Foresight Practice in Australia: a meta-scan of practitioners and organisations. José Ramos

This monograph began as a series of in-house methodology workshops. It reports on a 'meta-scan' of foresight practitioners and organisations in the Australian context. It is one of the first iterations of this method as it emerged from developmental work at the AFI over several years. It suggests that foresight practice in Australia is still at an early stage, but has gathered momentum. At this point, there are at least fifty organisations and practitioners committed to looking at the future in professional and rigorous ways. This critical review analyses the social interests, methodologies, epistemological focal domains, capacitating foci, geographic locations and organisational types that characterise the practice of foresight in Australia. This deeper understanding of how foresight is practiced is a necessary step in the development of a national foresight strategy. The method used also has multiple applications internationally.

8. Creating and Sustaining Foresight in Australia: a review of government foresight. Maree Conway and Chris Stewart

The final 2004 monograph provides a timely overview and analysis of government foresight work in Australia. It considers the experience of key organisations and outlines a fresh framework for creating a national foresight strategy. Two valuable appendices then outline a variety of case studies from here and overseas. Overall this is a valuable,

practice-oriented, piece of work that sheds new light on the options for embedding foresight at this level. The authors conclude, however, that ‘whether or not any government decides to take the lessons learned through previous foresight exercise ... will depend on how many individuals within government recognise both the strength of their own foresight capacities and the imperative of accepting responsibility for future generations today.’ Clearly the previously occluded issues involving perception, time frames, personal and disciplinary paradigms all remain central to this topic.

The second four monographs clearly build on the foundations provided by the earlier ones. The exploration of futures in education is clearly fundamental to progress in this area, despite the fact that it has been consistently ignored and overlooked by mainstream educational bodies. The fact remains, however, that *perhaps the single most significant step that society can take to properly equip successive generations for an ever more dangerous and demanding world is, indeed, to help them acquire a modicum of futures, or foresight, literacy.* The movement of futures concepts into some curriculum frameworks is evidence of progress, yet this is still only a beginning. The T-cycle and meta-scanning monographs provide two further examples of ‘methodological renewal’ in FS driven by depth knowledge and advanced methods. They also show how earlier insights can be deepened and extended through the careful use of these frameworks. Finally, by working from and through these perspectives, the authors of Monograph Eight are able to bring new clarity to the role of government in the process of creating and sustaining social foresight.

9. Foresight and Philanthropy. Giovanna Braidotti and Serafino de Simone

The penultimate monograph provides two complementary views of the interaction of these fields that, hitherto, have tended to operate in isolation. It soon becomes clear, however, that each needs the other. Braidotti considers a spectrum of possible responses to the kinds of social problems and issues that are often tackled by philanthropists. Her specific contribution is that by bringing a post-conventional, integral futures view to bear, she sheds light on these interactions, opening up quite new options for foresighted philanthropic work. Simone’s piece takes a more systematic look at what each of these domains can offer the other and puts forward a synthesis that will be of great interest to each. Together these papers set out the core of a new rationale for cooperation and development.

10. Pathways and Impediments to Social Foresight. Richard Slaughter

The final monograph reviews and pulls together some of the key themes of the series. It also takes a fresh look at a number of topics including: why is the future a ‘missing dimension’ and what’s missing from current debates? It then seeks to redefine ‘the problem’ that we collectively face, assess the contributions of various writers and finally summarise some of the next steps that are required in order to build and sustain this critically vital capacity.

In summary, the following are some of the key outcomes of this process of research, reflection and related work. The monograph series has:

- revisited and extended the original thesis about social foresight;
- checked assumptions, tested hypotheses and added more detailed knowledge;
- stimulated a series of developments in thinking frameworks and methodologies that have national and international implications, and
- set out a clear agenda for further work and practical implementation.

The series deals with concerns that remain poorly addressed elsewhere in contemporary life. Hence it mounts a challenge to the ‘powers that be’ to lift their eyes from day-to-day micro management and to respond more effectively to the longer-term concerns upon which our collective future now depends. Some of these are considered below. But first our starting point is to characterise some aspects of the Australian and New Zealand context from a conventional point of view. In so doing we can clarify what may be expected of such thinking and also where its limits may lie.

A CONVENTIONAL VIEW OF THE AUSTRALIAN AND NEW ZEALAND CONTEXT

Australia and New Zealand are two largely Western societies superimposed on older and more traditional cultures. In global economic terms, they are small, isolated and vulnerable. They have been profoundly affected by globalisation, have limited manufacturing sectors and have specialised in the export of primary products such as beef, wool, butter, wood products and minerals. This structural imbalance is reflected in the aphorism ‘tonnage out, lifestyle in.’ The trend is well established with, for example, the export of basic raw materials such as wood-chips to Japan and the import of electronic consumer goods. Trade with China has grown rapidly. Both countries have long attempted to diversify into tourism and information products (including

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software and educational services). Both have attained a slow rate of population growth, sensitively affected by immigration. They have aging populations with smaller cohorts of young people. They are occasionally affected by high rates of unemployment.

Isolation is both a benefit and a cost (the so-called 'tyranny of distance'). Both countries possess unique flora and fauna. But these have suffered enormously as a result of human settlement from the earliest times and remain under constant threat from development pressures. The extinction rates of local species will accelerate in the coming decades as their environment deteriorates from salination, deforestation, urbanization, soil erosion, and pollution of lakes and rivers. Conflicts between conservation of natural resources (especially forests) and their commercial exploitation are now endemic. This reflects an underlying conflict between commercial motives and a developing conservation or stewardship ethic. The latter has won some important battles especially in Tasmania (eg, saving the Franklin River from a hydroelectric scheme) but resource security legislation with an anti conservation bias has also been enacted.

The keys to future energy supplies in Australia and New Zealand are conservation and diversification. In the past, both have relied upon coal and oil, with growing investment in gas, hydro electricity and, in the case of New Zealand, geothermal energy. In the future there will be increasing investment in energy conservation via 'demand management', wind power, and solar energy (both for water heating and electricity). The Australian interior, with its vast and reliable inflow of solar radiation, is an outstanding environment for the development of the latter. Many small communities there are pioneering the use of high-tech solar systems for refrigeration, power, lighting and communications. This comparative advantage provides a potential to support an innovative edge in the years to come.

Australia and New Zealand both have conventional, high-quality education systems, ie, ones that are past-driven, rather than futures-responsive. The need to move from the former to the latter will increase as the social and economic stakes continue to grow. Both nations have a genuine interest in social justice and have taken a variety of steps to right historical injustices perpetrated upon the Aborigine and Maori peoples. This process will continue. In both cases, native cultures pose a challenge and a stimulus to the white majorities, who nevertheless will continue to benefit from cultural diversification. In New Zealand, Maori culture continues to be a powerful social and economic force. In Australia, the impact of Aboriginal culture is less marked, but strong in the arts and literature. Serious structural inequities continue in both places.

Transport and communications will continue to be important due to geographic isolation. Efforts will continue to be made to upgrade both, particularly via satellite and other new communications technologies such as fiber optics, teleconferencing

and e-mail. Geopolitically the two nations remain dependent upon the United States, particularly since earlier ties with Europe, and particularly with the United Kingdom, grow more tenuous. Indeed, it is likely that Australia will eventually become a republic. The ANZUS treaty (for mutual defense between the US, Australia, and New Zealand) remains in force despite New Zealand's stand against ships bearing nuclear weapons. On the other hand, both continue to pursue active diplomacy and economic interests in Asia, the Pacific Basin and Antarctica. In time, the latter may become an international conservation area, with distinct economic benefits to both countries. Australia has attempted to control and regulate pirate fishing and over-exploitation of marine resources in the southern oceans. Science and technology are pursued aggressively in areas such as biotechnology, food processing and astronomy. But numerous failures to commercialise discoveries and to market them successfully imply continued dependence on high technology work done elsewhere. (For example, the airplane flight recorder, or 'black box' was an Australian invention, but has long been manufactured overseas.)

Though isolated, Australia and New Zealand are strong in culture and the arts. They possess orchestras, ballet companies and local art of the highest international standard. This will continue, with the added presence of native cultures providing variety and a lively stimulus to creativity.

Future alternatives for Australia and New Zealand fall into two broad categories. First, they continue to play the old industrial game of competing in the global marketplace with better placed nations and continuing to decline economically, with growing overseas debts. In this scenario, many of the fears of social polarisation, breakdown, violence, and so forth may occur on a new and destructive scale (as in Los Angeles) with real environmental deterioration. A business-as-usual outlook (which remains the commonplace assumption in many influential circles) tends in the same direction, since it contains no proven principles to resolve the intractable problems of late-industrial life.

An alternative path involves a genuine commitment to sustainable development. In this scenario, growth is reconceptualised, environmental integrity becomes a primary social goal, and social institutions restructure away from high-consumption, rapid-throughput systems, toward more qualitative, long-term ends. Institutions of Foresight become central to the functioning of each society. At present they remain marginal. Australia's Commission for the Future failed to win wide support. The New Zealand Commission for the Future was abolished long ago, leaving only the much smaller NZ Futures Trust.

Thus the ability of these countries to assess the significance of changing global conditions, to carry out serious, high-quality futures research, and to adapt and shift toward a

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revised modus operandi remains limited. At present both remain in the paradoxical situation in which social learning is achieved more effectively through disasters, depressions, violence, trauma, and environmental destruction than through applied foresight.⁴

In reading such an account one is struck by the fact that the phenomena described are, to some extent, confirmed by experience and general knowledge – in other words they ‘ring true’ – but only up to a point. Something is clearly missing – but what? The answers illuminate the rest of this paper. First, this is a largely ‘exterior’ account that deals mainly with well understood empirical issues. Second, although it hints at other kinds of factors (world views, ideologies, values) they are not articulated clearly. Third, the analytical frame used to create such an overview remains in the background, hidden, and to a large extent, unacknowledged. Given these limitations the degree of clarity required for understanding and action is very limited. The clear implication is that to develop more adequate views requires us to move beyond conventional approaches. That is the underlying theme of this monograph.

To see the potential for other types of futures, other options, requires a shift of focus from ‘exteriors’ to personal and social ‘interiors’. Within that broadened context many new possibilities emerge. For example, if and when a true paradigm change occurs, ie, if a new or renewed world view involving stewardship, qualitative growth, human development and foresight were to become established, then these and other nations would be much better placed to pursue sustainable options. Currently, however, the prevalence of short-term thinking and the near-absence of the future from current social discourse brings us back to a key the question: why is ‘the future’ with its many ramifications for daily life, culture, the economy, government policy etc, still a missing dimension nearly everywhere?

WHY DOES THE FUTURE SEEM TO BE A ‘MISSING DIMENSION’?

Any thorough explanation for this phenomenon must go beyond the kind of everyday thinking that implicitly views the world in a unitary, one-dimensional way. To begin with it should encompass a variety of layers, or levels, of understanding. So, to take this idea a little further, at the level of human psychology, it’s clear most people, rich and poor, are preoccupied with their immediate lives in the here-and-now. The not-here and the not-now seem pale and insubstantial by comparison. According to some this may be a ‘hard wired’ feature of the human psyche. If that is correct then Australia, and human civilisation as a whole, is far more vulnerable than is generally realised (because future dangers are consistently under-regarded). On the other hand, as noted

above, explanations that deal only with ‘exterior’ phenomena (such as the ‘wiring’ of the human brain-mind system) overlook other equally vital shaping factors.

The tendency to exaggerate the here-and-now is reinforced by a second layer of explanation, ie, cultural factors. For example, the laid-back Australian lifestyle typified by phrases such as ‘no worries’ and ‘she’ll be right’. On the whole, a high standard of material living and the unchallenged occupation of a vast continent are two factors that have encouraged urban Australians to adopt a lifestyle that is relaxed and informal – at least on the surface. (It should be acknowledged, however, that those living and working close to the land, with its inherent instabilities and associated costs, know differently.) These tendencies are reinforced by a consumerist culture originating in the USA and wielding vastly more power than is commonly realised. It has successfully marketed all the symbols and products of affluence that reinforce a focus on short term immediacy and self gratification. Given the outlook facing humanity, this is dysfunctional almost beyond belief. It needs to be understood in depth, challenged and replaced.

Pervasive commercial influence supports a broad social phenomenon that may best be called ‘the great forgetting’. What I mean by this is an induced social amnesia where the immersion of humanity in nature, our full and complete dependence upon natural process, has been obscured behind the screen of constructed fantasies, comforting images and products. The effect is so powerful that it has, over time, diverted whole populations away from understanding fundamental natural laws (eg, that the economy is a wholly owned subsidiary of the ecology) and processes. It has promulgated false and untenable beliefs about people (constructing them as consumers and customers rather than citizens and agents) and their world. *In so doing it directly threatens their shared long term interests.* It undermines the viability of future generations by driving processes that simplify the Earth’s life support systems and steadily remove from play many of the options, choices and experiences enjoyed by previous generations. What has been called ‘the 6th extinction’ is well under way. New Zealand, for example, no longer enjoys the dawn chorus of its many vanished native birds. Australia stands to lose much, if not all, of its Great Barrier Reef. The Faustian bargain has incalculable costs throughout the world for this and all future generations.

Behind the slick marketing gloss lies a corporatist ideology that is deeply dysfunctional for social systems. It distorts our collective priorities and obscures the realities of our situation. As John Saul noted, it has no interest whatever in the future of society nor the well-being of its citizens.⁵ It is an abstract ideology framed and driven, in part, by the drive for money, power and privilege pursued by social elites over a long period of time. What is commonly overlooked is that a point is never reached when this

compulsive accumulation is satisfied. Abstract goals are pursued ‘forever’, without acknowledgment of limits and without being informed by notions of social desirability or need. While a series of corporate scandals has revealed in detail some of the deceptions played out here, and while civil oversight has, in some cases, been improved, the penny has still not dropped in other ways. Untold numbers of quite transparent falsehoods continue to be promulgated daily through all the many channels and devices adopted by advertising and marketing. Yet this is still considered ‘normal’. One thinks, for example, of a popular weekend tabloid TV program that in 2005 ran a segment on global warming and then immediately cut to advertisements promoting large four-wheel-drives! Such contradictions, once spotted, are not uncommon. They suggest that sanguine responses are inadequate.

The unrestrained operation of commercial imperatives is reinforced by other factors operating at a still deeper level of explanation: that of other perspectives and practices that have become welded into structures of great instrumental and symbolic power. One such is mainstream economics. Unlike advertisements that flutter at the edge of our awareness every day, the latter is all-but invisible in everyday life and thus can be difficult to pin down. Yet its influence is pervasive, particularly on current political and business leaders. This abstract and defective system of understandings and practice is long due for replacement by a more humanly viable, life-oriented, system that might be called ‘the economics of permanence’. It is one of a number of redundant formations that are long past their ‘use by’ date and cry out for replacement. Others include:

- what is meant by ‘education’, ‘defence’, ‘health’ and so on;
- the growth paradigm and its implications;
- the flight of mass media from promoting reflection and understanding to chronic reality avoidance;
- human beings, organisations and societies seen as privileged ‘masters of nature’ and
- science, technology and knowledge in general for abstract ends disconnected from ecological realities and social needs.

The point is this: in naïve and conventional views such concerns are invisible and cannot be brought clearly into awareness. And, as is well known, ‘out of sight’ equals ‘out of mind’. Publications, policies, debates and, indeed, poorly grounded futures work that originates in such shallow territory cannot be other than ‘part of the problem’. On the other hand, work in any of these domains that draws on a deep understanding of interior and exterior factors not only help to explain current dysfunctions, they provide a vastly improved capacity to negotiate new dimensions of uncertainty and hazard.

Standing behind all the phenomena outlined here lies the Western world view itself – that peculiar combination of ‘ways of knowing’ that emerged from a long historical process filled with contingent events, discoveries and turning points, the consequences of which underlie and mediate every aspect of our present world. It follows that one of the most significant things that futurists and foresight practitioners can do is to look back and understand why it is that we live in *this* particular world, and not the multitude of others that were once possible. If one of the most dysfunctional features the current world view is seen and understood to be its tacit support for short-term thinking, then self aware human beings are far from helpless. They can reclaim the initiative. Such ‘cultural habits’ are not immutable, not set in marble. Short termism can be understood as a long-standing ‘perceptual defect’, a social construction that has become contradictory but that we now have the power to critique and replace.

Overall therefore, the *general* lack of interest in ‘the future’ can be accounted for by layered explanations of this kind that consider factors at at least four levels: human, organisational, social and worldview. The overall effect of these oversights is to privilege certain forms of knowledge at the expense of others and, as a direct result, to drain ‘the future’ of much of the significance it undoubtedly has for the conduct of life now and in the future. The result of understanding them clearly is to return the initiative back to people and organisations within their social contexts.

WHAT’S MISSING FROM DEBATES ABOUT THE FUTURE OF AUSTRALIA?

Some of these themes have been represented within the Australian context. But the first thing to note is that debates about the future of Australia have not been frequent or influential. The Commission for the Future was perhaps the first focused institutional effort; it came and went, leaving little behind. A small scattering of books and other publications on various issues appeared over a dozen years. But nothing really cohered or attracted widespread and sustained interest. It all remained rather esoteric and secondary and the CFF eventually ran out of steam in 1998. Yet many drew the wrong conclusion. The conventional response was ‘we tried it but it didn’t work, therefore futures/foresight is of no further interest.’ A much more useful response, however, is ‘what can we learn from the CFF and how can this work be made more effective?’ An understanding of what had been learned from the CFF was, in fact, one of the inputs to the formation of the AFI.

On the whole, however, people have not flocked to join in any kind of dialogue on futures as stimulating and lively as that on the Republic, the ‘stolen generations’, the environment or the rights of women. Various secondary debates have occurred across a spectrum of issues including alternative lifestyles, energy, transport, the future of

cities, governance (ie, the constitution) and population. A focus on specific issues does make sense in various ways and in certain contexts. At that level there have been significant achievements, particularly in the arena of environmental politics and the (to some) successful waging of campaigns to protect specific areas. Single-issue debates and campaigns can contribute examples and inform broader work. But other, broader and more strategic, approaches are needed in order to craft viable forward views.

During the late 1990s two default debates about ‘the future’ took place. One was formed around the 1997 constitutional convention on the future of governance. The other arose as a response to the need for a more rational immigration policy. In the former case the key issue was whether or not Australia should become a republic and, if so, what model it should adopt. In the latter, the need to have a better immigration policy referred back to a still unresolved question: what is the optimum population for Australia?

With regard to the population issue, there appear to be at least two basic ‘camps’ or foci for opinion. One suggests that the country is already fully populated and points to the wealth of data about environmental impacts and loss of biodiversity in support of this view. The other suggests that the country could sustain many tens of millions more people and that, indeed, it should do so if it is going to continue to be a strong and secure nation. This tends to lead to a discussion on the limitations that, eg, fresh water supply impose on such expansion and on ways to use such scarce resources more efficiently. It’s no exaggeration to suggest that the former view is largely driven by scientific knowledge and environmental interests and the latter by economic and business ones. Hence there is a familiar division of view along standard political lines. As noted above, however, any ‘right wing/left wing’ formulation is completely inadequate to the task.

During late 1999 and early 2000 there was a predictable flurry of ‘millennium fever’, a temporary spike of interest in ‘the future’ as the calendar changed and the numbers rolled over from the 1900s to the 2000s. Yet two key facts were widely overlooked. First, that a more accurate start for the ‘new millennium’ would have been January 1st, 2001. Second that the ‘year 2000’ was fictitious, pure social construction, due to inaccuracies in the attempt to count years and compensate for mistakes in earlier calendars. Various newspapers and journals ran a number of special issues, or highlight sections, dealing with this ‘historical transition’. Most tended to follow the well-trodden path of over-identifying technology with the future, which continues to this day. This is clearly another long-term, deeply inscribed, social mis-perception.

In September 2001 the strike on New York’s twin towers occurred and the resulting preoccupation with a putative ‘war on terror’ pre-empted many of the debates that

were nascently present at the time. Some, however, re-commenced later. As of 2005 the debate about global warming received new impetus from increasingly irrefutable scientific evidence. The price of oil again shot up, prompting governments and consumers alike to recall well-known concerns about how close the period of ‘peak oil’ might be. This stimulated a renewed and entirely predictable debate about the possible role of nuclear power as a long-term source of energy. Humans are nothing if not optimistic about their ability to control such powerful technologies that, in fact, require God-like ethics to mediate unprecedented instrumental power. Such ethics are, of course, nowhere in sight, so the prospect of further technological revolutions, avidly pursued by some, must be seen as posing further sources of instability and threat for societies that remain ill-prepared to respond to any of them.

Both the US and Australian governments (but not informed segments of their populations) remained officially hostile to the Kyoto Treaty on global warming and also to any suggestion that behind many future challenges stands the still unresolved question of economic growth. While the Meadows’ *Limits to Growth: 30 Year Update* provided persuasive evidence that humanity had overshoot the carrying capacity of the Earth some years ago, to read the papers and listen to political leaders on the television news, you could be forgiven for thinking that they were still living back then.⁶ And in a profound sense, they are. We will return to this central issue below.

One unexpected success did occur, however, during this time. After several years of pursuing an inhuman and degrading policy of holding would-be immigrants in long-term, prison-like detention, the government finally relented and took steps to facilitate improve conditions or arrange for the release of the remaining detainees. This step back from continuing the Australian Gulag was welcomed by nearly everyone.

Yet the background signs that all was not well remained visible for anyone to read. Over a forty year period (the time that coincides with the rise of Futures Studies and applied foresight) a significant literature had emerged that very clearly outlines the nature of the predicament that humanity has constructed for itself. I now want to review a sample of that literature in two sections, one at the global scale and the other for Australia. Properly understood, it powerfully supports our attempts to break the stranglehold of conventional, short term, ideological thinking. Two other points should be kept in mind. First, that the problems faced in Australia are not separate from those affecting the rest of the world. Second, that real leadership in this context will not be achieved through denial and avoidance but, rather, by responding to the challenges outlined here.

SHARED RESOURCES FOR THINKING AHEAD

- Rachael Carson: *Silent Spring*, 1962
- Paul Ehrlich: *The Population Bomb*, 1968; *Extinction*, 1981
- Dennis and Donella Meadows: *Limits to Growth* 1972, 1992, 2004
- Hazel Henderson: *Politics of Solar Age*, 1981; *Beyond Globalisation*, 1999
- J R Saul: *The Unconscious Civilization*, 1997
- Edward Wilson: *The Future of Life*, 2002
- Jared Diamond: *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Succeed or Fail*, 2005

Figure Two: Physicians of the planet

Back in the early 1960s Rachael Carson was one of the first to reveal some of the drawbacks of modernity. At the time she was demonised by the US chemical industry for showing that DDT had cascaded through the ocean food chains to affect the reproduction of some species of oceanic birds. Later in the decade Paul Ehrlich also offended many people, and especially the Catholic Church, by exposing the dysfunctional character of unrestrained population growth. While some of the forecasts fell wide of the mark, the overall case against unrestrained growth was sound and remains pertinent to this day. The Meadows team took a different approach using systems dynamics and computer modeling of the global system. Over a period of thirty years they carried out a sustained and disciplined study into how the world system would likely evolve according to different assumptions and human/cultural responses. Their first study made a huge impact in the early 1970s, was widely critiqued and then set aside. Two other very valuable works followed but they had little influence in the expansionist ethos of globalisation and were effectively marginalised. (See below.)

Henderson's work began by critiquing mainstream economics and then went on to consider and promote a wide range of social, economic and organisational innovations, offering new tools to a hard-pressed world. Over time she has assisted many governments and international agencies to re-think their paradigms and approaches to a wide range of issues. As noted, and despite a popular and sometimes polemical style, Saul helped to identify and diagnose the dysfunctional nature of conventional corporate ideology and behaviour. Wilson's extensive scientific studies re-framed the debate in terms of the overall effects of human activity on the web of life. He reached the striking conclusion that:

we have entered the Century of the Environment, in which the immediate future is usefully conceived of as a bottleneck. Science and technology, combined with a lack of self understanding and a Paleolithic obstinacy, brought

us to where we are today. Now science and technology, combined with foresight and moral courage, must see us through the bottleneck and out.⁷

Seldom are the issues put more plainly or with such nuanced recognition of the different types of factors involved. Yet they remain shadows upon the wind to the dominant social formations of our time. Finally Diamond took the long view back over the rise and fall of many different societies and civilisations to provide us with an historical overview of the factors that contribute to, or detract from, collective survival. (Significantly, among the latter is the ability of current political elites to make good, far-sighted decisions!)

In the light of the social foresight research project we should not be surprised that so little of this work has had any real structural impact. There have been some gains, eg, DDT was widely phased out and futures/foresight work has ‘come of age’, as it were, now being widely adopted even by governments in certain limited instrumental ways. But, overall, these messages, insights, proposals all receive the same general treatment and share a similar fate. They are given brief, tokenistic, ‘air time’ and then forgotten. The signals they contain are filtered out by editors, government advisers, economists, CEOs and many other such gatekeepers who know that ‘the public’ prefers good news to bad and appears to be much more interested in the sexual adventures of film stars and sports personalities than they are in the implications for their children of levels of CO₂ in the atmosphere. In such ways essential signals that, rationally, society would otherwise want to deal with clearly and explicitly are set aside. The many potentials for public leadership and civil response are deferred or lost.

Until ...

And there’s the rub ... Until such time as a crisis occurs and the value of what has been proposed and set forth over decades suddenly becomes unavoidably clearer to many more people. Then the standard filters are briefly shaken, destabilised, delegitimised, such that people, organisations and even societies waken momentarily from their ordinary slumber and begin to enact some of the proposals that have long been available. This phenomenon is remarkably widespread and particularly visible in the critiques of economics that have been with us for several decades but that have had little effect over that time. The principle has, at the time of writing, just been demonstrated yet again in the context of New Orleans. We now turn to sources that specifically address the Australian context.

- Charles Birch, *Confronting the Future*, 1976, 1993
- Tim Flannery, *The Future Eaters*, 1994; *The Weather Makers*, 2005
- Lindy Edwards, *How to Argue With an Economist*, 2002
- Richard Eckersley, *Measuring Progress*, 1998; *Well and Good*, 2005
- Clive Hamilton, *Growth Fetish*, 2003; *Affluenza*, 2005
- Ronald Wright, *A Short History of Progress*, 2004
- Ian Lowe, *First Survive the 21st Century*, 2003; *Living in the Hothouse*, 2005

Figure Three: Physicians of Australia

Again to be very brief, Birch was the first and, thus far, the only author to work systematically through a range of futures-related concerns for Australia. Updating and revising his work would be a service to the nation. Flannery drew on his broad biogeographical knowledge to place the continent's ecological inheritance into context and suggest why human beings had become 'future eaters.' (They move into ecological niches that they then over-exploit.) The book was also turned into a three-part ABC TV series. More recently he has spoken out very clearly about global warming and the measures needed to moderate it. Edwards provides an insider's view of the symbolic war between the 'pointy heads' (economic rationalists) and the 'bleeding hearts' (those with a wider, more humanistic, view) in successive Australian governments. She outlines several strategies for challenging the former on their own ground (eg, identifying market failures).

Eckersley has used social indicators to show that, while material standards have improved people are, on the whole, no happier. His more recent work goes beyond the usual economic indicators to examine more subjective areas of life including: meaning and purpose, identity, belonging, perceptions and expectations. Over several years Hamilton has worked out of one of Australia's few critically enabled so-called 'think tanks', the Australia Institute. He has developed a critique of the traps and social consequences of consumerism, also questioning the dominance of materialistic values and goals. His term 'affluenza' neatly captures the dysfunctional nature of the current economic system. Wright's 2004 Massey Lectures provided yet another opportunity and resource for revising conventional views. Like Diamond, but much more succinctly, he reviews the historical record and concludes that 'the most compelling reason for reforming our system is that the system's in no one's interest. It is a suicide machine.'⁸ Finally Lowe, currently the President of the Australian Conservation Foundation, has written a number of well researched and articulate publications about a range of key issues, including energy, the environment and global warming, directly

affecting Australia's future options. But, like most of the material reviewed here, this work has been consistently sidelined by the government

PARADIGMATIC EXCLUSION

There is also in Australia a secondary and derivative literature that attempts to engage with various aspects of 'the future' but, in lacking any awareness of the work that has already been done (here and overseas) or of the many productive options for futures enquiry, either falls into the 'futures for entertainment' category and are soon forgotten, or miss the point entirely. These mostly exhibit what might be called 'unconscious paradigmatic exclusion', ie, where a genuine lack of knowledge helps to explain the many oversights and omissions.

A more pointed – and inexcusable – type of exclusion is exhibited by those who affect to possess some knowledge of futures work but in fact remain ignorant of it. This can be seen in a 2004 publication by David Yencken and Ian Marsh called *Into the Future: The Neglect of the Long Term in Australian Politics*.⁹ It attempts to deal with what is obviously a central problem for anyone attempting to bring any kind of futures awareness and/or capacity into the political system of the country. Yet it also clearly demonstrates how the the process of paradigmatic exclusion operates in Australia.

First, the analysis, while clearly informed by close knowledge of the Australian political system, is entirely conventional. The issues and problems facing Australia are viewed as problems for social administration. There's no indication of the need to critique market-led economics, deal with underlying issues of growth, or deal with the distortions of the standard Western world view. These issues are simply not considered. Second, and more seriously, the book exhibits no awareness at all of the advanced futures work that has been available in Australia for some time (including that carried out at the AFI). Reading the booklet clearly shows that *nothing that the futures community has achieved in Australia over the last decade has registered*. The booklet's ignorance of the domain generally – and its local manifestations – is short sighted and counter-productive to the point of self-contradiction. If what Yencken calls the 'Australian Collaboration' continues to operate along the lines dictated by such 'old thinking' it will certainly fail. Yet this is still not the whole story. If we want to understand why intelligent people in the wider community – business leaders, politicians, intellectuals and educators – continue to operate in a business as usual mode then we have to look further.

TRUTHFULNESS VS LOYALTY

One factor has already been considered above – a dominant corporatist ideology that de-focuses the realities of the wider world and substitutes a set of more compliant abstractions that are mistakenly used to represent that world. In what I’ve called ‘the great forgetting’ awareness of the complete dependence of the economy on the ecology is repressed and put out of sight. But there is also another factor at work. It is revealed and clarified in a book by Sonia Shah called *Crude – The Story of Oil*.¹⁰ Here she identifies a fundamental stumbling block for many people in positions of power and responsibility. After noting that ‘the oil industry is under no obligation to sate global desires for crude’, she goes on to say that:

as long as consumers don’t cotton on to the fact that the oil supply they depend on is in permanent decline and prudently decide to wean themselves off it, the crossover between supply and demand could trigger many lucrative years of high oil prices.

She then comes to the nub of the issue:

Some within the industry perhaps genuinely believe the economists, who argue that higher prices will always lead to more resources and so resource depletion can never be a genuine problem. Others, however, must have realised that their future livelihoods depend on the *obscurity* of the coming peak. If the industry wanted to stay in business for another century and beyond, it would do well *not* to let on that the world’s favourite fuel is anything less than perpetually abundant. (Emphases added.)¹¹

Taken together, these comments bring further clarity. Critiques of market-oriented ideologies eliminate any remaining residual confidence that we might have that markets can, by themselves, help humanity move toward viable futures. Shah’s perceptive insight tells us why those running businesses, governments, government departments and the like cannot ‘come clean’ about the deteriorating human prospect. To do so, especially in commercial contexts, would not only be disloyal. It would also amount to a denial of the very system that provides them with income, privilege and power. It would destroy ‘confidence’ in themselves and their organisation, damage share values and be seen as ‘biting the hand that feeds’. *In other words it is almost impossible to tell the truth from within the conventional ambit of profit and power.* Those who attempt to do so (such as Andrew Wilkie who ‘blew the whistle’ on the government’s manipulation of intelligence regarding the Iraq war) risk paying a heavy price. In Western democracies whistle blowers can be readily dismissed; in other locations they are jailed or simply killed. These are clues that questioning existing socially legitimated beliefs and practices is a very serious matter indeed. Equally, challenging and changing them is not for the weak-hearted or the poorly equipped.

Acknowledging and responding to contradictions

It is clear from the above that a series of barriers and constraints prevent essential signals about ‘the true state of the world’ from having much effect. Conventional thinking is complicit in this process. Moreover, it cannot deal with contradictions. It either must deny them or find strategies for avoiding or limiting them. But *contradictions emerge precisely because there are serious mis-matches between an underlying reality and the perceptual resources that are currently available to respond.* As such a better use of contradictions is not to ‘tune them out’ but to use them to sensitise us to new possibilities. In an article dealing with the London tube bombings of July 2005, John Hinkson responds to Mayor of London, Ken Livingstone’s, defence of what he calls ‘the global city’. After pointing out some of the unacknowledged costs of such cities (including new forms of social exclusion, dependence and dysfunction) Hinkson draws out four unresolved contradictions, as follows.

1. In addition to the inequalities of class there is now also a radical marginalising process that places growing numbers of people outside of society as such. These inequalities ...reflect the fact that high technology has the potential to eliminate work in the economy as never before.
2. The new freedom requires, as a matter of necessity, institutions of surveillance (such that) familiar social structures that relied upon individuals being present with each other are now being supplanted by a social order composed of mediating (high) technologies.
3. (There is) a crisis of meaning that typifies our world today. ...In this city there is plenty of consumption and movement, but little purpose.
4. The fourth area of contradiction that challenges this global surge to urban life is the crisis of the environment. (He adds) ‘there is nothing quite so destabilising as the practical coming apart of deep environmental assumptions of a society.’¹²

Then, finally, referring back to the root source of the bombings, Hinkson suggests that:

standing behind the secular political strategy (of the terrorists) and the openness to terror as a strategy, is a deeper motivating force – the tensions, frustrations and profound inadequacies associated with a social order that is sweeping the world and can only offer superficial meaning to its members.¹³

The relevance of these remarks to this monograph are as follows. Several things stand out very clearly. First, there is no solution to the challenges facing Australia and the world unless people are prepared to look freshly on embedded assumptions and tackle

deep-seated social, political and economic dysfunctions. Another way of putting this is to say that there is no way forward without intelligent critique (which is, of course, not news to those use, and see the value in, critical futures methods). Second, conventional thinking is not only inadequate, it ‘tunes out signals’ and casts a pall of forgetting, of ‘not knowing’, across the realities of our situation. This confuses the public, keeps them from questioning too deeply, and allows the currently powerful to evade accountability for their systematic lack of care. Third, the blockages to understanding and action are, generally speaking, not primarily external but rather within people, their ‘ways of knowing’ their habits, values, predispositions and so on. Again it is confirmed that futures/foresight work needs to be able to access and understand these interior realities if it is going to have any long-term effect. Finally, we are reminded of the crisis of deep meaning and purpose that stands at the heart of all these issues.

RE-DEFINING ‘THE PROBLEM’

It is now obvious why conventional approaches to options and alternatives for Australia (or the world) are unconvincing and cannot sustain any sort of meaningful debate or dialogue. They quickly become frustrating and get nowhere. They lead to ‘dead conversations’ that reflect ‘old thinking’ and re-hash old ideas that have lost energy and salience. This is one reason for the failure of Australia’s first formal attempt to deal with these issues – the Commission for the Future.¹⁴ To make progress we need to re-define the problem, our approaches to it and canvass ways of moving beyond the blockages outlined above. In the context of the AFI program and the research carried out into ‘creating and sustaining social foresight’ we can now do this. To begin with we can:

- look for layered explanations (ie, multiple layers of causation, not merely one);
- understand the nature and operation of social interests;
- be informed by integral understanding and practice;
- use the full range of available tools and methodologies.

Layered explanations

There are many ways of doing this. One is to use one of the newer methods – causal layered analysis.¹⁵ This allows us to distinguish between three or four layers of distinct phenomena:

1. ‘the litany’ or familiar description of everyday issues;
2. ‘social causes’ or the ways societies respond and/or regulate well-known issues;
3. ‘worldview’ or the underlying belief system, values etc, that are enacted; and
4. ‘myth and metaphor’ or the ‘deep stories’ that cultures enact over long periods of time.

While not immune from criticism, this method allows us to ‘tease out’ which levels of various phenomena are relevant to specific concerns we may have. Another layered approach is to consider individual interiors. Individuals can create and sustain the webs of extended awareness that support the emergence of their own innate foresight capabilities. Individuals can move through well-known broad stages of development, as follows:

- pre-conventional aspiration (‘learning the ropes’);
- conventional practice (being a competent member of a social group) and, later,
- post-conventional achievement (moving beyond the given into much more creative and innovative territory).

At the pre-conventional level we are all learners who aspire to the levels of competence required to function as a well-adjusted individual. At the conventional level that is exactly what we are doing. We can take our place in families, organisations and other social contexts as a contributing member. It is at the next stage, however, that things really begin to happen. For it is at the post-conventional stage where we begin to understand that we are surrounded by social constructions, frozen negotiations of value, meaning and purpose that can, in principle and in fact, be ‘unfrozen’ and changed. This is where we can ‘take back our power’ that has been hitherto embodied in remote social formations and begin to have a range of real social impacts. This has obvious relevance to all the issues outlined above.

Social interests

Organisations can be differentiated according to similar criteria. Are they aspirants working to become established? Are they successful members of a taken-for-granted social and economic order? Or are they moving into the fresh territory indicated by post-conventional thinking and action? Moreover, what social interests do they represent? In advanced futures enquiry we distinguish between pragmatic foresight, progressive foresight and civilisational foresight. The first is about ‘doing today’s business better.’ The second is about making substantial improvements that are useful in wider ways (such as pursuing a post-materialist economy). The third looks beyond the present entirely and considers how foresight work can identify and explore the underpinnings of the next civilisation. These descriptors obviously apply to the organisations around us. Are they unthinkingly pursuing conventional pragmatic interests, ie, merely ‘making money.’? Are they, in any way, supporting progressive interests, ie, pursuing some substantive improvements to present practice? Finally, are they at all interested in civilisational concerns?

Being integrally informed

Integral futures completes a forty year process of development within Futures Studies. For two or three decades the field had been preoccupied with externals, ie, the tracking of empirically verifiable changes and trends in the world and the rendering of these into forecasts, trend charts and the like. From trying to ‘get the future right’ there was a later shift into the use of scenarios that explored divergence in the forward view. Both approaches, however, overlooked the grounding of all such work in social and human factors. Critical Futures Studies brought into play the underlying issues of social construction, revealing how all societies used processes of legitimation to maintain themselves. Finally, integral futures achieved two further gains. First, it revealed the hitherto-overlooked factors of human development, human interiority. Second, it brought to bear a set of integral tools and methods for aligning all the above developments in a greatly expanded metaperspective. The widespread use of Wilber’s four quadrants allows us to differentiate between different ways of knowing and to see that different lenses are required for different forms of knowledge and action.

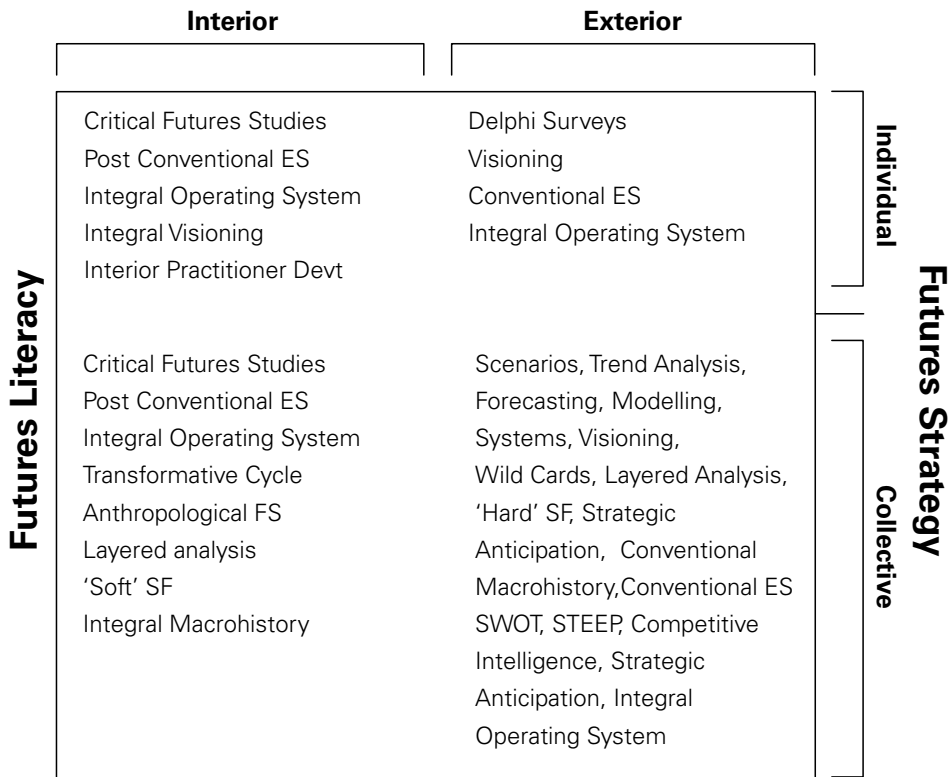


Figure Four: Futures literacy, strategy and methodologies

Overall, the affect has been to greatly strengthen the capacity of futures/foresight practitioners to understand themselves, the organisations in which they work and the interior/exterior structures of their world. Perhaps the single most powerful insight to emerge is that *it is depth within the practitioner that allows us to get the very best results from whatever methodology is being used.*¹⁶

This has, in turn, led to a resurgence in the development of futures methods and, overall, a re-balancing of the capabilities of the field to include both interior and exterior realities. In other words, *integral approaches certainly demand more of the practitioner, but they arguably are much more rewarding as well.* As noted, the consequences can be seen in many places. One of the most dramatic examples occurred when I was asked to examine two PhD theses over Christmas 2004. One had been written without any integral understanding. It was trite and profoundly unsatisfactory. The other had been written by an individual who had explored the relevance of the integral perspective and it is no exaggeration to say that this element transformed the thesis into one of great originality and power. It follows that the time has arrived when those who are unwilling to make the investments in understanding and dealing with these developments will, sadly, fall behind.

Using a range of tools

As noted, in earlier times the tools and methods commonly employed in FS and foresight work were largely restricted to externals. Nowadays two processes are occurring together. First, quite new tools and methods are arising in the left hand (interior) domains. Second, the emergence of integral FS is driving a re-assessment and deepening of existing methods (such as environmental scanning and scenarios). Finally, admitting the interiors fully into futures work means that we can identify a new relationship between futures literacy (LH quadrants) and futures strategy (RH quadrants and professional activities arising from all of the above). This means that training programs can be reconfigured accordingly to focus not merely on the effective use of methods but also on new requirements for interior practitioner development. Figure four provides some examples of these processes which, over time, will continue to transform the landscape of futures methods, practices and practitioners. The latter will increasingly have access to new personal and professional options and a greatly extended range of new and renewed methods. Yet the great majority of other observers and actors in other fields are not yet aware of the power of these approaches. What are the next steps?

These issues have already been touched on above. For example, in monograph nine Giovanna Braidotti suggests that a new way of dealing with the issues and concerns

shared by philanthropists and foresight practitioners is to carefully attend to paradigmatic and developmental issues and, in so doing, to uncover genuinely fresh approaches. This has a very direct bearing on understanding the nature of ‘the problem’ faced by Australia (as elsewhere) and the role of social foresight in responding to it.¹⁷ Similarly, in a paper dealing with the capacity of organisations to successfully employ foresight Peter Hayward suggests that implementation very largely rests on the developmental capacities of key decision makers.¹⁸

For those thinking and operating in conventional, taken for granted, ways, it has become clear that the value of foresight work makes little sense. But both writers agree that those who are willing and able to work post-conventionally not only see its value but, moreover, see beyond this to action. This provides a vital clue as to where long-term solutions can be found. Ways are needed to help many more people embark on this transition into a richer world of understanding and greatly enhance practice.

In summary, re-defining the problem means that we consider it with fresh eyes and employ all the means at our disposal to understand it at various levels and through different ‘ways of knowing.’ We have to understand the uses and limitations of empirical work and to supplement it with the insights gained from those disciplines and approaches that open up the inner worlds of people and cultures to our understanding. We need to be alert to the relevant stages of development that come into play in different circumstances. We always need to bear in mind how social interests permeate everything. Finally we should draw on the widest possible selection from what I have termed ‘the infinite tool kit’ that is now available to us.

GLOBAL REALITY CHECK – THE LIMITS TO GROWTH: 30 YEAR UPDATE

Of all the books mentioned above, this is one that most deserves to be understood, its basic message propagated until the ideas and suggestions it contains become common knowledge. The book presents what the authors refer to as ‘pervasive and convincing evidence that the global society is now above its carrying capacity’.¹⁹ They acknowledge that:

the idea that there might be limits to growth is for many people impossible to imagine. Limits are politically unmentionable and economically unthinkable. The culture tends to deny the possibility of limits by placing a profound faith in the powers of technology, the workings of a free market, and the growth of the economy as the solution to all problems, even the problems caused by growth.²⁰

The bulk of the book is devoted to reviewing criticisms of the earlier books, considering changes in the World3 model, testing assumptions and showing very clearly why they believe humanity is already living in ‘overshoot’ mode. Though dealing with some very heavy issues indeed, it avoids being either shrill or defensive. The authors are clear about their values and open about their methodology. They intend to open out new possibilities for understanding and dealing with the global predicament. In particular they suggest a number of ways to avoid overshoot and collapse of natural systems. These include:

- Growth in population and capital must be slowed and eventually stopped by human decisions enacted in anticipation of future problems rather than by feedback from external limits that have been exceeded.
- Throughputs of energy and materials must be reduced by drastically increasing the efficiency of capital (de-materialisation, lifestyle changes etc).
- Sources and sinks must be conserved and, where possible, restored.
- Signals must be improved and reactions speeded up; society must look further ahead and base actions on long-term costs and benefits.
- Erosion must be prevented and, where it already exists, slowed and then reversed.²¹

Clearly this amounts to a nearly impossible program for societies as they are presently constituted. There is simply insufficient broad understanding within society as a whole and, as a result, no political will that will ensure necessary actions are taken in time. Recognising this, the authors also consider what they call ‘transitions’ to a more sustainable system. They note that there are three ways that the human world can respond to the signals that environmental limits are being exceeded. These are:

1. deny, disguise or confuse the signals;
2. respond by alleviating the pressures through technological fixes; or
3. work on underlying causes and change the structure of the system.²²

At present, it has to be said, the preferred response is 1, followed by 2. Again there is no prospect of approaching the latter at the present time. Experience is still much more likely to be an effective teacher than foresight.

WEAVING THE THREADS TOGETHER

This final section draws together the various strands of the discussion and suggests the nearest thing to a solution that appears possible at this point.

Revisiting the theory

When we talk about futures studies people are puzzled by what we mean (how can you study what does not exist? is the common refrain). But when we refer to foresight, that establishes a direct link with common lived experience. The dilemma is that foresight is a human capacity. For it to become a social capacity it needs to be understood and enhanced in the various ways that have been explored in this research project. Social foresight embodies an intent that seeks to increase awareness and capacity and to embed that at the level of conscious social operations. It is part of a strategy to help society become aware of the dangers and opportunities that lie ahead and, in so doing, to provide it with a measure of ‘steering capacity’ or ‘lead time’ to intelligently anticipate and, if necessary, act. In some obvious ways this is common knowledge – as sayings like ‘a stitch in time saves nine’ clearly demonstrate. But this common knowledge immediately runs up against the barriers, exclusions, diversions, obfuscations, deceptions, lies and forgetting that have been discussed here.

There seem to be two pathways around this thicket of constraints and difficulties. One is for individuals to develop their awareness to the point where these relationships (between present reality and future potential) become obvious and they understand the need to embark on various forms of action. Moreover, something very significant appears at this point that has great potential power. By understanding the pattern of opportunities and dangers so clearly, and forming very specific views about what needs to be done and why, what these people are in fact discovering and enacting is *a new form of motivation*. It is one that corresponds with some of the more advanced stages of human development with names like: post-conventional, integrated, integral and autonomous.²³

The other pathway is summarised by the term ‘the dialectic of foresight and experience’.²⁴ This occurs as individuals and societies accumulate learning experiences that demonstrate very clearly the value of applied foresight and also the costs of *not* employing it in a timely and intelligent fashion. The issue here is that as human impacts on the global system become more destructive, irreversible and long-lasting, so this second pathway becomes increasingly contradictory. Do we really have to witness large slabs of the ecology collapsing before we will, as a nation and a civilisation, deal with the issues raised here? That may be so but it is no longer the only option.

It is often said that the solution to many problems lies in education and, in this case, that statement is probably true. Perhaps the single most effective thing that Australia (or, indeed, any society) can do to expand its future options is to ensure that successive generations have access, at the appropriate level(s) to the symbolic and practical resources drawn on here. In other words, they must become futures-, or foresight literate, in order to understand and deal with the world they are entering and shaping.²⁵

I have often reflected on the time when I heard a colleague give a twenty minute overview on the future of energy, based on his expert knowledge of the area. It was then that I realised very clearly that anyone working in an energy-related field that did *not* know what he was speaking of would operate very differently on a day to day basis than one who did. Here, then, was a clear demonstration of the functionality of creating and sustaining elaborate forward views and one more proof of the value of social foresight.

Reinvigorating practice

What did we learn at the AFI over these years? One of the most significant gains is that we achieved what entrepreneurs call ‘proof of concept.’ We learned that:

- the *Knowledge Base of Futures Studies* provides an appropriate and evolving foundation for advanced training and work in the field;²⁶
- the integral perspective is useful and durable; it has multiple uses including up-grading the concepts, methods and tools available to practitioners;
- ‘depth’ equals ‘productivity’ in futures enquiry and, finally;
- long term solutions to social dilemmas can be productively explored and pursued in this context.

What now needs to happen is for the substance and the conclusions of this research project to be translated into exemplars, projects, demonstration exercises, social innovations and the design of other programs. Individuals are currently carrying their new-found knowledge into a wide range of organisational contexts and this, in time, will contribute to the emergence of social foresight. The very fact that the term exists and that there is a growing shared understanding of what it means, is encouraging. One PhD has been written and others will follow.

A number of proposals have been put to government in the past and the placing of successive proposals (for projects, action oriented work, the establishment of new Institutions of Foresight) must continue. Not only to national government, but also to state governments, departments, businesses, charities, philanthropic foundations, educational institutions and systems.

CONCLUSION: THE ULTIMATE SOURCE OF SOCIAL FORESIGHT

The twenty first century is clearly a ‘make’ or ‘break’ time for humanity and present trends, continuing global dysfunctions, do not encourage optimism. As noted above, the year 2000 and the shift to a new century and millennium attracted widespread hopes for improvement in the human condition. But most of them cannot be sustained, at least not yet.

The diet of ‘bad news’ that characterised the late twentieth century will continue for a long time to come because humanity is still only part-way through a challenging and painful transition that will take generations to complete. Endemic conflicts will continue. The environmental news will worsen. Coral reefs will shrink and even disappear, forests become remnants. We will lose many more species. Whole areas will become deserts. Overall, the erosion of the ecological foundations of life will continue unabated. Equally, the fear of annihilation – whether by a resurgence of nuclear conflict or by some unstoppable mutating lethal virus – will loom large over rich and poor alike, particularly in over-crowded cities. It is a terrifying prospect – so terrifying, in fact, that those with the relevant money, resources, choices will, *en masse*, generally opt for the comfort of images, unreality industries, 3DTV, instead of the exacting work of facing up to it. But face these issues we must if we are to see our way through the impasse and beyond.

This monograph, and the series that it concludes, demonstrates that there are indeed very many ways in which humans can act to develop foresight and to ‘steer’ toward more viable futures. The central task of the new generation of foresight practitioners is to value and protect what they have helped to create and to broaden and extend their community. Thus, sustaining social foresight suggests a number of lines of further action and commitment to:

- continue the process of disciplinary development: tools, practices, practitioner support;
- embed the perspective in different environments, eg, planning, education, government, business, the third sector;
- create a number of further ‘centers of excellence’; exploring new relationships;
- stay in touch with similar initiatives overseas; and
- constantly demonstrate value through quality, relevance and public outreach.

In her essay on Australia under the present government Judith Brett makes it clear why the latter cannot contemplate leading the electorate and actively dealing with the issues raised above. After commenting on Keating’s willingness to ‘lead from in front’ and even legislate to bring about change, she says:

Howard, with his Liberal commitment to smaller, less interventionist government, does not think it is the role of government to impose cultural change from above. The state may be the expression of the unity of the nation, but it is certainly not its creator. Rather, unity comes from the historical experiences and daily practices of the people.²⁷

In this view political legitimacy comes from past experience and commonly shared, ie, conventional, unexamined, social experience. We therefore must conclude that there are literally no immediate social or political solutions to the current lack of installed foresight capacity in Australia. Such solutions as are already well known and understood are placed out of sight and out of reach by the forces of social editing, evasion, and lack of focus that were described above. This occurs even when they emerge from within government agencies.²⁸ Solutions will, however, emerge from a very different direction.

If the collectivity is effectively disqualified from responding to the deepest needs of a nation and a world faced by more diverse dimensions of hazard and uncertainty than it yet knows, then the initiative will come from smaller, more empowered, groups and, finally, from individuals. It was Ulrich Beck who wrote so lucidly about ‘biographical solutions to systemic problems’ and it is here that the greatest potential for further work and progress currently lies. ²⁹ In other words, the ability of society to understand and respond to its nascent futures can, in the end, only emerge from one source: the growing number of individuals who have themselves refused the current diversionary and sugar-coated versions of progress put forward in the mass media, embraced new forms of professional practice and embarked on their own journey toward higher awareness and enhanced functional capacity.

The early work on social foresight, the research program and the innovations in training and professional development have, in effect, established a variety of personal and professional pathways for many others to follow. But is within the process of individual recovery, development, the finding and enabling of new sources of authenticity, productivity, solidarity, motivation and informed hope that the wellsprings of future social and cultural recovery lie.

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PATHWAYS AND IMPEDIMENTS TO SOCIAL FORESIGHT

ABSTRACT

This Monograph is the final in the series and draws the Australian Foresight Institute research program 'Creating and Sustaining Social Foresight' to a conclusion. Dr Slaughter considers the limitations of conventional views of the future in the immediate regional (Australian and New Zealand) context and also why the future still appears to be a 'missing dimension' in so many places. He draws our attention to the significance of two areas of published work. One deals with what has been termed the 'global problematique' and provides a broad brush context. The second considers how these issues manifest in the Australian context. By drawing on the work carried out at the AFI (now the Strategic Foresight Program, Faculty of Business and Enterprise) over the years 2003-2006, it is possible to approach these concerns in fresh ways and discern new ways forward. The new tools and approaches include: layered explanations, the role of social interests, the need to be 'integrally informed' and the use of a more comprehensive professional tool kit than was previously available anywhere in the world.

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Richard A. Slaughter completed a PhD in futures at the University of Lancaster (UK) in 1982. Since then, he has explored futures thinking through education, institutional innovation, social foresight, Integral Futures and the identification of an evolving Futures Studies knowledge base. He is currently Director of Foresight International, an independent company dedicated to building the futures field. During 2001-2005 he was President of the World Futures Studies Federation. During 1999-2004 he was Foundation Professor of Foresight at the Australian Foresight Institute, Melbourne. He is the author or editor of some twenty books and many papers on a variety of futures topics. His most recent projects include a book *Futures Beyond Dystopia: Creating Social Foresight*, and two CD-ROMs from a projected series: the *Knowledge Base of Futures Studies: Professional Edition* and *Towards a Wise Culture: Four 'Classic' Futures Texts*.

