To See With Fresh Eyes: Integral Futures and the Global Emergency
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Looking back to look forward

To See With Fresh Eyes (TSWFE) was and remains the record of a journey. A journey in space from a working class home in Portsmouth, UK, to Bermuda, back to the UK and then finally to Australia. It's also been a life journey of experience and developing insight. Yet I've never travelled alone. I've always been clear that this journey could not have taken place without the inspiration and support of many other people. I pay tribute to some of them in the introduction to this book.

Looking back what stands out to me is the compressed power of the three main subjects of the title: fresh eyes, Integral futures and global emergency. Taking them in reverse, humanity has certainly fallen deeper than ever into what I've often referred to as a 'trap of its own making'. This is not a popular view, so it is almost universally denied or avoided. But the evidence just keeps getting clearer, stronger, all the time. Back in 2010 I'd initially presented the evidence as I saw it in *The Biggest Wake-Up Call in History*.[1] I returned to the subject later in a 2015 article for *Futures* that drew on a wide range of reliable sources.[2] So the generic 'failed future' remains a dark backdrop to my work. But the effect that it has is not to make me feel depressed but, rather, to provide enduring motivation and purpose. Similarly with Integral futures, the early days of exploration and excitement steadily gave way to sober application and wiser, more informed use. The rise of Integral thinking and methods is by no means universal but over the last decade it has been widely validated and applied.[3] Thanks to those who understand it and apply it with due care, it now appears in the mental maps and work of many futurists and others around the world. Finally, the notion of seeing with 'fresh eyes' is a notion that's not particularly easy to pin down or define but neither does it become dated or less valuable. It sometimes emerges when you least expect it. The key thing, perhaps, is to be ever on the lookout for new sources of inspiration and insight. They are indeed plentiful once you know where, and how to look.[4]

Several years ago I was invited to speak at Womad - a popular bi-annual music festival held in the Adelaide parklands. I was on a small panel with two others and Robyn Williams as chair. The topic of our session was 'reinventing society'. It was during this session that Williams asked me if there'd been any new developments in futures methods over the last 20 years. Which was an ideal opportunity to say that, yes, while good foundational work had been carried out 20 or more years ago much of it had been concerned with tracking and understanding *external* change. Now, with the help of Integral and related perspectives, we were at least as interested in the pervasive influence of *the human and cultural interiors*. So, in a few words it was possible to summarise what I saw then, and still see now, as an 'epochal' shift in the self-understanding of practitioners and their methods. The point is this: when you look back at the field and compare where we are today you can see real progress, more depth, more modesty, less overstatement and greater willingness to confront complexity. It's truly a field that one can be proud of.

Structure and content

Given that elements of the first paper in TSWFE were drafted some four decades ago, I'm struck by how certain insights have changed more in detail and depth than they have in substance. Even at that early date, I was increasingly clear about two things. First, that

there were indeed many ways beyond the 'civilisational trap'. Second, that however we collectively responded, the road ahead was going to be very challenging. Yet, the core of the book is a belief that what emerges from these chapters makes the journey deeply satisfying and productive. The evolution of understanding and insight presented there leads to a renewed sense of agency and purpose wherein lies real hope for the future and greatly enhanced capacity, both human and social. In other words, we can now see ways forward with far greater clarity and insight than before.

Part one, *Early Perspectives*, presents three early works. In *Origins of a defective worldview* I tried to account for how it was that we'd arrived at this point in the first place. Parts of the piece were derived from my very first book, *Birds in Bermuda* (1975) later reworked into the first chapter of *The Foresight Principle* (1995).[5] Reading it some years later, I still find the overall diagnosis persuasive even though I'd express it rather differently now. Two pieces on 'future vision…' and 'cultural reconstruction…' are closely related and deal with related issues in greater depth. In effect, they delineate what might be called my 'thinking environment' of the time. They are early attempts to articulate themes offered to support what I saw—and still see—as useful sources of informed optimism and hope. Part two, *Applications*, presents work from 1996 to 2003. I included *Mapping the future* for a very specific reason—to demonstrate the point I'd reached *prior to* grasping the essence of an Integral perspective. It shows how social construction theory can illuminate much that's otherwise hidden while, at the same time, also providing evidence of significant gaps. A few of those 'gaps' are briefly addressed in *Transcending flatland*, first published in 1998. Here are the beginnings of an exploration into the nature and applications of Integral theory in Futures and Foresight contexts. The following year I showed how applying such theory to a core Futures/Foresight methodology—environmental scanning—seemed not only to take it to a new phase of operational effectiveness but also to change the very nature of that game. Now, instead of an exclusively outward gaze at signals and events 'out there', I proposed an equally vital focus of attention to the framing of the world 'in here' within the minds and understandings of the scanners themselves.[6] I saw this as a pivotal shift—and so it has proved to be.

Part three, *Case Studies and Implications,* contains seven items from 2004 to 2011. *Waking up after the war* began as three shorter 'thought pieces' that were published in the *WFSF Bulletin* following the US-led invasion of Iraq. The focus of this work, however, was not the conflict itself but 'post-conventional Futures/Foresight practice.' It was informed by depth knowledge of many of the active personal and social processes that operated around us and, in this view, are in many respects 'prior to' more commonplace concerns about technology, wealth, development, etc. Overall, while post-conventional work could certainly be said to be more demanding, I felt that it was capable of producing more innovative and useful results. I demonstrated this—at least to my own satisfaction—when Zia Sardar, then editor of *Futures*, invited me to review a report from the US National Intelligence Council. Viewed through the framework that had by then evolved, I found it to be a deeply flawed work. Then, more positively, another opportunity arose to evaluate the usefulness of integrally informed methods. It came in the form of an international research project into the *State of play in the futures field* (SoPiFF). A team of researchers based in several countries worked on this project over an extended period and the results were published in a special issue of *Foresight* in 2009.[7] The lead paper I wrote providing an overview of the project and its key results are reproduced in the book. Two final papers rounded out this section: *Welcome to the anthropocene* and *Making headway during impossible times*. The former identifies the shift of eras from those driven by natural processes to another characterised by the

global impacts of human activities, with all the associated impacts and ramifying costs. What I hoped to achieve was to review and recontextualise some of the issues that identified *a true global emergency* and, beyond that, to set out as clearly as I could some of the most promising options available to us. *'Making headway...'* then considered what I called 'proto solutions' for a detailed and integrally informed agenda of action and response. That this work remains of continuing value is demonstrated by its use in my most recent work where it has been applied to Humanising and Democratising the IT Revolution (Figure 1).[8] In the original context it was followed by a rationale for helping societies to see the point of moving beyond the 'growth imperative,' since it is the latter that arguably lies at the heart of many of our continuing dilemmas.

Humanising and democratising IT

Interior human development

Relate human developmental factors to organisational development and innovation. Implications of different worldviews, values and choices. Revalue human agency as source of power and capability. Re-focus attention on human and social priorities for positive futures.

Exterior actions

Abandon the century-long fiction that consumerism equals happiness. Re-value human capabilities and redress their takeover by tech substitutes. Restrict 'screen time' in favour of real world interaction and experience. Refine uses of 'digital reality'

Interior cultural development

Revalue the socio-cultural domain and recognise how IT conditioned by these foundations. Develop understanding of how cognitive and social interests intersect with technical and practical outcomes. Pay particular attention to role of public goods and moral universals in pursuit of healthy social forms. Abandon business models based on theft of private data. Support progressive innovations such as social democracy and platform cooperatives.

Global system, infrastructure

Revise and update civil infrastructure to shift core functions from private interests. Invest in powerful new oversight and foresight functions. Subject new technologies such as 'big data', algorithms and cryptocurrencies to strict evaluation and continuing management. Ensure that innovation and technical development contributes to human, social and environmental wellbeing. Ensure that 'sharing cities' are based on democratic principles.

Source: Slaughter, R. The IT Revolution Re-assessed Part 3: Framing Solutions. In press, *Futures*, 2018

Conclusion

Since editing this book I've continued to further explore and develop the themes and perspectives within it. For example in 2015 I co-edited another special issue of *Foresight* on what might be called a 'macro strategy' of 'descent pathways.' That is, the notion of a moderated descent from the peak of industrial-era growth (leading inexorably to collapse) to a 'staged descent' arguably leading to a more stable and sustainable world. In particular I focused on the theme of 'The denial of limits and interior aspects of descent'.[9] In the same year I wrote a companion piece on 'Integral futures and the search for clarity' for Jim Dator's *World Future Review*.[10] Yet in contrast to all this, and as noted above, my most recent project has been a fascinating in-depth attempt at 'Re-assessing the IT revolution' for *Futures*. Interestingly, while much of this exacting three part project necessarily deals with the 'nuts and bolts' of the Internet and related

technologies, the conclusion returns to what I have long regarded as 'the source', i.e., values and moral development. This would be no surprise at all to readers of *To See With Fresh Eyes*.

Notes

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PDF and ePub copies of *To See With Fresh Eyes* can be obtained from the Foresight International site: https://foresightinternational.com.au/shop/page/2/

References

[1] Slaughter, R. *The Biggest Wake-Up Call in History*, Brisbane, Foresight International, 2010.

[2] Slaughter, R. The global emergency-perspectives, overviews, responses, *Futures* 73, 2015, 78-85.

[3] A selection of 'Readings on Integral Futures' can be found here: https://foresightinternational.com.au/if-sub-page-1/

[4] One of the most useful sources I've found on this key topic is Solnit, R. *Hope in the Dark*, London, Cannongate, 2016.

[5] Slaughter, R. *Birds in Bermuda*, Bermuda Bookstores Ltd., 1975. *The Foresight Principle: Cultural Recovery in the 21st Century*, London, Adamantine, 1995.

[6] Slaughter, R. A new framework for environmental scanning, *Foresight* 1, 5, 1999, 387-397.

[7] Slaughter, R. (Ed) The 'state of play' in the futures field. *Foresight* 11, 5, 2009. For more details see: https://foresightinternational.com.au/archive/the-state-of-play-in-the-futures-field-sopiff/

[8] Slaughter, R. The IT revolution re-assessed, parts 1-3. In press, *Futures*, 2018.

[9] Slaughter, R. The denial of limits and interior aspects of descent. In Floyd, J. & Slaughter, R. Descent Pathways, *Foresight* 16, 6, 2014, 527-49.

[10] Slaughter, R. Beyond the global emergency: integral futures and the search for clarity, *World Future Review*, 7 (2-3), 2015, 239-252.