Integral Futures – a New Era for Futures Practitioners

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Changing methods and approaches

This paper discusses a new stage in the development of Futures Studies (FS) and applied foresight. It notes a progression from forecasting and scenarios in earlier years to a social construction phase and, more recently, another described as Integral Futures. In the 1970s forecasting was regarded as a 'cutting edge' methodology. Since then, however, we have seen forecasting per se decline and witnessed the rise of scenario building, or scenario planning. They were widely used and have long passed into public awareness. Both forecasting and scenarios focused largely on the external world. Critical Futures Studies (CFS), on the other hand, examined what might be called the 'social interiors'. That is, it saw the much studied exterior forms of society (populations, technologies, infrastructure and so on) as grounded in, and dependent upon, powerful social factors such as worldviews, paradigms and values. [1]

While futurists had by no means overlooked the latter, they were seen as problematic topics. Methods to incorporate them systematically into futures enquiry and action were needed. Perhaps the central claim of CFS was that it is within these shared *symbolic* foundations that the wellsprings of the present lie, as well as the seeds of many possible alternative futures. Since the latter is widely believed to be a key guiding concept in futures work generally, locating the origins of these alternatives in the ways that different societies actually worked was a significant step forward.

Critical futures work, however, itself lacked something essential: deeper insight into the nature of individuals. By finally addressing this 'missing dimension' Integral Futures has, in a sense, completed a forty year process of disciplinary development. Or you could say that it has initiated a new phase. The chapter briefly explores some implications and provides examples of work in practice.

A new map

Some years ago Ken Wilber worked out a way of integrating the central ideas of key people from a wide variety of disciplines: scientists, engineers, psychologists and even mystics. His synthesis resulted in a framework that views the world through a four quadrant framework created by a simple division between 'inner' and 'outer' on a vertical axis; and between 'individual' and 'social' on the horizontal one. (See Figure 1) Each quadrant records the process of evolution in that domain – from simple stages to more complex ones. Hence there are four parallel processes, each intimately linked with the other of: interior-individual development; exterior-individual development; interior-social development and exterior-social development. According to Wilber, 'the upper half of the diagram represents individual realities; the lower half, social or communal realities. The right half represents exterior forms - what things look like from the outside; and the left hand represents interior forms - what things look like from within.' [2]

Figure 1: The four quadrants

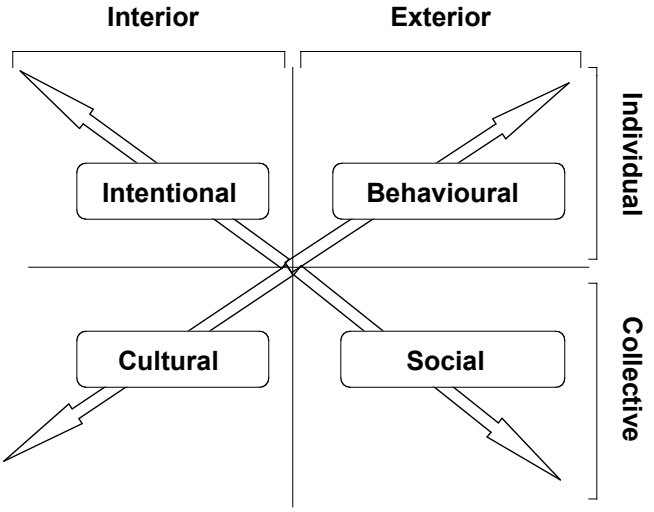


Figure 2 outlines the general stages of development in each of the four realms. 'The upper right quadrant runs from the centre - which represents the Big Bang - to subatomic particles to atoms to molecules to cells to neural organisms to triune-brained organisms. With reference to human behaviour, this quadrant is the one emphasised by behaviourism.' [3] The upper left quadrant 'runs from the centre to prehension, sensation, impulse, image, symbol, concept and so on... With reference to human beings, this quadrant contains all the 'interior' individual sciences (among other things), from psychoanalysis to phenomenology to mathematics.' [4] The lower right quadrant runs through the stages of galactic and planetary evolution. With reference to humans it 'then runs from kinship tribes to villages to nation states to (the) global world system'. [5] It also incorporates the physical realms of architecture, technology etc. Finally, the lower left quadrant outlines the interiors of social systems; that is their culture, values and worldviews.

The four quadrant model is useful because it helps us to question the widespread habit of viewing the world as if it were a singular entity (which is how it appears to our senses). This habit causes us to unconsciously run quite different domains together, which creates confusion. Instead we can begin to see how different principles and tests of truth (etc) apply in different domains. This, in turn, brings greater clarity to the kinds of tasks that Futurists undertake, as well as leading toward more innovative solutions.

New grounds for problem solving

At the beginning of a paper on global problems Mark Edwards writes:

> one increasingly pervasive and almost immobilising aspect of life at the beginning of the 21st century is the feeling that the immensely powerful forces which are shaping the social and natural environments of the globe

are now out of control of any governing entity. [6]

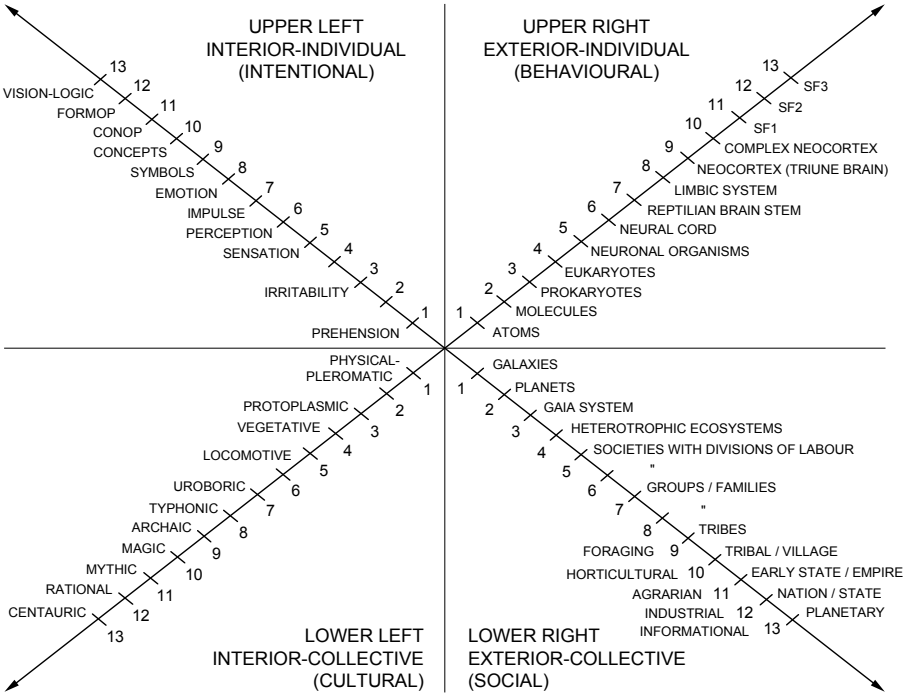


Figure 2: Stages of development – details of the four quadrants

This is undoubtedly how many people, especially young people, feel. Taken at this very general level of 'problem description' there seems to be no solution in sight. If we direct our attention mainly to the *external* aspects of the human predicament then we will have great difficulty finding a way forward. The global context could become a trap for humanity, a civilisational end game. The fact is, however, that conventional 'exterior' approaches to world issues only cover part of the territory. If we also begin to explore the two 'newer' domains of the 'interior collective' (society) and the 'interior individual' (the unique world of each person) then we can begin to see how an integral approach brings new gifts to FS. Some of the consequences include:

- a balancing of inner and outer perspectives;
- multiple and yet systematic views of our species' history and development;
- access to the dynamics of social construction, innovation and 'deep design';
- aspects of the 'deep structures' of more advanced civilisations;
- a new focus on the detailed development of the practitioner (not merely his or her cognitive ability); and
- new methodologies and approaches.

Futurists and foresight practitioners need access to these new tools, perspectives and capacities. Like any other tool kit, they have limitations. They too will change, develop and be replaced over time. Yet even at this relatively early stage they provide a starting point for depth insight, practical wisdom and a more durable foundation for ground breaking futures work. Part of this involves the shift from conventional to post-conventional stages.

From conventional to post conventional futures studies and foresight

Conventional work in any field plays a vital part in the overall picture. It operates within pre-defined boundaries according to clearly defined rules using well-known ideas and methods. A great deal of futures work in the world is like this. It serves well-known needs and clients. It operates in familiar territory: corporations, planning departments, consultancies, government agencies and the like. Those working in this mode are likely to have a degree, and long experience in well-known futures methods such as Delphi, trend analysis and scenarios. By definition they'll also tend to focus on the 'exterior collective' domain (technology, the infrastructure, the physical world). Such work can now be greatly enhanced by considering post-conventional approaches and by including the interior domains.

Post-conventional work recognises that the entire external world is constantly 'held together' by inner structures of meaning and value. Two examples of such underlying cultural commitments would be the pursuit of economic growth and viewing nature merely as a set of resources for human use. In a post-conventional view, objective accounts of the world are impossible (even within the so-called 'hard' sciences). Rather, human activities in all cultures are supported by these subtle but powerful networks of value, meaning and purpose that are socially created and may be maintained over long periods of time. Post-conventional work draws on these more intangible domains and, it is well to be clear, demands more of practitioners. It means, for example, that a focus on various 'ways of knowing' (eg critical, empirical, psychological etc) becomes unavoidable. Yet the effort involved is highly worthwhile. Careful use of appropriate methods means that practitioners can gain depth knowledge and profound insight both into the currently changing social order as well as its possible futures.

It took several years for Critical Futures Studies (CFS) to demonstrate how it contributes to the development of FS as disciplined and innovative field. Over time futurists and others saw for themselves how depth understanding of social factors provides us with powerful new tools and insights. Jay Olgivy summarised the evidence for this view over a decade ago better than anyone else before or since. [7]

Post-conventional, integrally informed, futures

Following this focus on how societies worked, the next step was to begin to correlate different approaches and methods in futures / foresight work with a new appreciation of the 'individual interiors', the unique inner world of each person. One widely known approach was through 'spiral dynamics', based on the work of Clare Graves. [8] It depicted a nested series of 'human operating systems' that provided many clues as to what is going on 'under the surface.' The approach can be used as a guide to individual and social interiors but it is not immune to critique and is by no means the only option. It turns out that there are a number of stage development theorists, each of whom provides a variety of insights into over twenty distinct 'lines' of development in human beings (e.g. values, communication, self concept etc). The practical consequence is that we can gain greater clarity about our own 'ways of knowing,' our preferences, strengths, blind spots etc, as well as those of others. Why

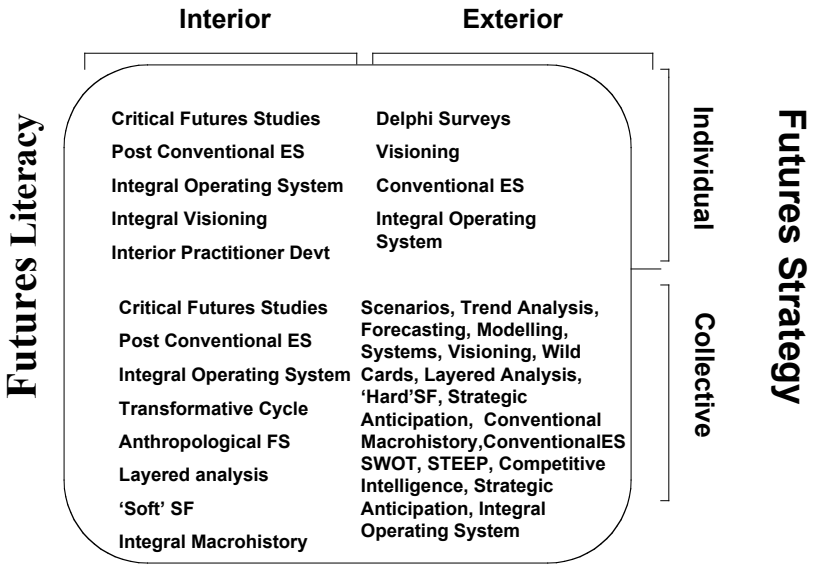
are these developments significant?

In the first place, they remind us that 'successful practice' (whatever that means to different people in different places) involves more than mastering some of the better-known FS techniques. One of the most striking discoveries of Integral Futures work is that *it is levels of development within the practitioner that, more than anything else, determine how well (or badly) any particular methodology will be used or any practical task will be performed*. In one sense this is obvious. An inexperienced or poorly trained practitioner will always get inferior results when compared with others who have in-depth personal and professional knowledge. Yet, on the other hand, there are all-too-few professional training programs that focus explicitly on the 'interior development' of practitioners. This oversight can now be corrected. Early results from the Australian Foresight Institute provide tangible evidence in support of this view. [9]

Second, we can now see why the earlier tendency to focus on a practitioner's cognitive development and methodological skills provided an incomplete picture. To be a success in any field demands much more than cognitive ability and technical competence (as Peter Hayward's work – summarised below – demonstrates). For example, ethical, communicative and interpersonal lines of development are equally vital to the 'well rounded' practitioner.

Third, if we see the professional development of practitioners as seeking a balance between 'inner' and 'outer' factors, we'll be open to the idea of a new relationship between 'futures literacy' (in-depth futures understanding) and 'futures strategy' (timely and effective action in the world). (Figure 3) Moreover 'depth' will no longer be taken to mean 'academic', 'theoretical' or 'obscure' (though it can be any or all of these things in the wrong hands). Rather, depth in the sense used here, can be seen as one of the keys to individual and disciplinary development. I now turn to some examples of the new perspective in action.

Figure 3: Literacy, strategy and methodologies



Four examples of post-conventional futures / foresight work

Rushkoff – open source democracy

Douglas Rushkoff would not claim to be a Futurist as such, rather an informed commentator on 'cyberculture' and the internet. In a paper published by the UK 'think tank' Demos, Rushkoff tackles the issue of open source democracy. He discusses three steps in the development of information era autonomy: deconstruction of content, demystification of technology and finally do-it-yourself or participatory authorship. This is part of a 'second Renaissance.'

> The first Renaissance took us from the position of passive recipient to active interpreter. Our current renaissance brings us from the role of interpreter to the role of author. We are the creators…. We begin to be aware of just how much of our reality is open source and up for discussion. [10]

Or again,

> One of the most widespread realisations accompanying the current renaissance is that a lot of what has been taken for granted as 'hardware' is, in fact, 'software' capable of being reprogrammed. (People) tend to begin to view everything that was formerly set in stone – from medical practices to the bible – as social constructions subject to revision. [11]

From here Rushkoff develops a critique of media policy and also of the current form of what he calls 'globalism'. Arguing against Peter Schwartz' aphorism 'Open markets good. Closed markets bad. Tattoo it on your forehead', Rushkoff suggests that 'the market's global aspirations amount to a whitewash of regional values. They are as reductionist as the tenets of any fundamentalist religion.' [12]

Rushkoff's essay is very positive about the potential of 'new interactive media' to 'provide us with the beginnings of new metaphors for cooperation, new faith in the power of networked activity and new evidence of our ability to participate actively in the authorship of our collective destiny.' [13] In conclusion he suggests that 'our understanding of progress must be disengaged from the false goal of growth' and 'be reconnected with the very basic measure of social justice: how many people are able to participate?' [14]

Here, then, is an example of advanced work that looks beneath the surface and questions some of the shaping realities that can now be more clearly understood, challenged and perhaps changed. While not everyone would support all aspects of Rushkoff's analysis, he has certainly set out a strong case for using a post-conventional perspective in which issues of credibility, legitimation and social construction are clearly highlighted.

Voros – reframing environmental scanning

Ten or fifteen years ago Environmental Scanning (ES) was seen as an activity based

on fairly straightforward methods for (a) detecting signals from the environment (b) outlining organisational implications and (c) feeding these into a decision making process. It was described as a 'front end' technique that alerted an organisation to external changes and provided time for strategic responses to be developed. So far so good. What was less obvious then, however, is that the world 'out there' is framed, conditioned and mediated by the world 'in here'. I drew attention to this and proposed that one use of the four quadrant model could be to develop a new framework for ES in which both inner and outer factors would be considered. [15]

Voros took this a stage further and developed a notation method for clarifying the 'filters' at work in the minds of scanners. He writes that 'in addition to opening up the viewspace being viewed, one needs also to understand the extent and the scope of the 'mindspace' of the scanner doing the viewing, and to take conscious steps to open *it* up'. [16]

What was needed were 'models of human consciousness' that would help to reveal the filters that were operating in the scanners' mind. 'Informed by this one would then seek to become aware of the potential blind spots we might possess as scanners'. The next step is to

> factor these insights into a scanning praxis so as to minimise the 'scanning blindness' of the scanning team. In this way a team effort of diverse scanners consciously reflecting on their preferred mind sets, and taking steps to broaden their views, is less likely to miss critical signals than a homogeneous group … who are unaware of their own potential blind spots… [17]

Clearly ES is an activity that absolutely *requires* a profound appreciation of human and cultural interiors. As Voros says, 'scanning the environment … depends very much on the eye of the beholder … What that eye sees is conditioned by what lies behind the eye of the beholder, in the interior consciousness of the perceiving subject'. [18]

This example makes it very clear how the reality of 'interior consciousness' begins to emerge as one of the foundational shaping factors in all futures / foresight work. This is shown even more clearly in the next example.

Hayward – resolving the moral impediments to foresight action

In an integral view the nature of the consciousness that is experiencing or directing change is crucial. This has been elegantly demonstrated by Peter Hayward who employed Jane Loevinger's stage development theory to show how 'the organisational capability to consider future implications (of foresight projects etc) is synonymous with the individual capability of people in that organisation to do that very same thing'. [19]

Hayward explores some implications of the role of moral thought in organisations. He argues that 'no sustainable change to the organisational stance towards foresight research is possible unless there is adequate moral

development in the individuals of that organisation.' [20] To be brief, Hayward considers how the first four of Loevinger's stages can be considered 'pre-foresight', ie, stages where foresight is simply not possible. These stages are known as: Presocial, Impulsive, Self-Protective and Conformist. The capacity for foresight does, however, emerge at the next stage – that of being Self-Aware. He comments that 'the individual now appreciates multiple possibilities in situations, and the understanding of complexity is increasing'. He adds that 'at the same time that multiple perspectives are considered in the external world, the interiority of the individual begins to examine itself'. [21] The 'formal appearance' of foresight capability, however, occurs fully at the following stage which is termed 'Conscientious'. Here are added the powers of 'self-evaluation, self-criticism and self-responsibility (and hence) conscience is said to be fully developed'. He adds, 'the Conscientious individual is confident enough to make individual choices around which group rules or norms will be complied with… A focus on achievement emerges and with it comes long term self evaluated goals and ideals'. [22] At this stage what Loevinger calls the 'Conscientious ego' corresponds closely with what Piaget termed 'formal operational thinking'.

Thus far Hayward has identified conventional stages of human development that correlate well with conventional FS. In the next step he identifies the transition that occurs in the shift from formal to post-formal foresight. Loevinger's focus here was on what she called the Autonomous stage at which individuals 'can now cope with … inner conflict; they can accept the inherent contradictions in life and just get on with things. What were seen as 'opposites' at the earlier stages is now recognised as complexity'. [23] Tantalisingly, Loevinger hypothesised yet another stage that she termed 'Integrated' in which conflicts are transcended and polarities reconciled.

The conclusion is clear. Questions of human developmental stages, of the development of higher order moral, cognitive and other capabilities are central to understanding and dealing with the global problematique in all its guises. These human factors are deeply and profoundly implicated because they evoke different worlds of reference and, properly understood, foreshadow futures that literally take us into new human and cultural territory.

New survey framework (aka 'metascanning')

In a monograph for the Australian Foresight Institute, Jose Ramos sets out a framework to examine 'who does what' in Australian foresight practice. [24] The framework he used was developed during several AFI workshops during 2004. It is comprised of six elements:

- social interests
- methods
- focal domains
- capacity building
- organisational type, and
- region.

Leaving aside the final two - which are fairly obvious - it's useful to briefly summarise the subheadings in the first four categories. These are as follows:

1. Social interests
    a. Pragmatic
    b. Progressive
    c. Civilisational

2. Methods
    a. Linear
    b. Systemic
    c. Critical
    d. Integral

3. Focal domains
    a. Structural
    b. Inter-subjective
    c. Behavioural
    d. Psychological

4. Capacity building
    a. Concepts
    b. Methods and tools
    c. Structures and processes
    d. Social legitimation.

Pragmatic social interests are those that tend to be bound up with current practice, 'the way things are'. Progressive interests are those looking for real improvements, but still working conventionally. Civilisational interests are those that look forward to quite new possibilities. In this sense they are post conventional. In terms of methods, linear means extending forward unproblematically or, in conventional terms, 'straight line trends'. Systemic refers to the ability to see entities in their own structured complexity, as dynamic systems. Critical refers to the social processes that make and 'un-make' social phenomena. Integral includes all the above as well as the 'interior individual' aspects of futures work.

The 'focal domains' relate to the four quadrants outline above: the inner and outer human; the inner and outer social. Capacity building relates to a strategy for creating and sustaining social foresight that has been pursued through a research program at the AFI. It begins with the ability of the human brain / mind system to deal with the 'not here' and the 'not now'. It proceeds to the level of futures concepts and tools enabling a futures discourse. Futures methodologies come next. These are followed by enabling contexts (sometimes called Institutions of Foresight, or IOFs). Steady progression through these 'levels of capability' appears to support the capacity to create and sustain social foresight. [25]

At the time of writing this framework was still too new to have been very widely tested (but also see additional note below).* It was, however, applied to a National Intelligence Committee Report published in December 2004, with startling results. It

found that the report had overlooked many of the most innovative and perhaps fruitful possibilities through its reliance on some of the more traditional methods. [26,]

Integral futures practice

An Integral Futures framework acknowledges the complexity of systems, contexts and interconnected webs of awareness and activity. These all influence the behaviour of individuals and groups. They also shape structures and events in the physical, social and psychological worlds. The framework incorporates a developmental perspective that recognises individual and collective access to different structures of consciousness. Human development is seen as multidimensional, following interrelated, discoverable, forms. In this view there are specific ways of understanding and working with different dimensions of development, including how these different dimensions interact. [27]

In this perspective innovative problem solving actively acknowledges phenomena from each of the four quadrants. Hence they include:

- the specific ways that stakeholders construct meaning and significance;
- culturally derived perspectives, rules and systems of meaning;
- the social infrastructure, including people's concrete skills, behaviours and actions; and,
- the nature and dynamics of the relevant societal structures and systems.

Integral Futures practitioners will therefore not be content to study only external phenomena. They will also seek to understand the nature, structure and limitations of their own perspectives. They will become proficient in exploring different perspectives in order to find approaches that are appropriate to different situations. Finally they will understand and grasp the nature of the relationships between different perspectives. They will avoid being attached to any single view and be open to a wide range of perspectives and interpretations.

Developments in this evolving area can be seen both as providing challenges to conventional futures thinking and opportunities to move forward into exciting new territory. As Joseph Voros notes, Integral Futures is an approach to Futures Studies that 'attempts to take the broadest possible view of the human knowledge quest, and of how this knowledge can be used to generate interpretive frameworks to help us understand what potential futures may lie ahead.' He adds, 'because Futures Studies is, by its very nature, a broadly inter-, trans-, multi-, and meta-disciplinary activity, it is well suited to the conscious use of a more inclusive and integral frameworks'. [28] He concludes that:

> Integral Futures, thus, does not take a singular perspective; rather it recognises a plurality of perspectives. It is not confined to a single tool or methodology; rather it is aware of the existence of an entire (indeed, infinite) tool kit. It recognises that there are many ways of knowing –

> many paradigms, practices and methodologies of knowledge seeking – and that no single paradigm can be assigned pre-eminence… Integral Futures Studies welcomes, embraces and values all careful and sincere approaches to knowledge-seeking in all spheres of human activity to which they are both appropriate and adequate – including analytical rationality, intuitive insight and spiritual inspiration. [29]

What is perhaps newest and most innovative about the perspective is the way it sheds new light upon the central role of human development and awareness. What is commonly seen as occurring 'out there' in the world is conditioned by what is going on 'in here' in our own inner world of reference. [30]

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to show how integral approaches to futures enquiry and action provide us with much richer options than hitherto. In so doing they can help us to engage in depth with the multiple crises that continue to threaten our world and its nascent futures. To deal with the anticipated criticism that all this is 'merely theoretical'examples of work completed and work in progress have been provided.

The kind of futures work outlined here is intensely relevant and practical. As futurists and foresight practitioners we can start looking more deeply into ourselves and into our social contexts to find the 'levers of change' the strategies, the enabling contexts, pathways to social foresight. Integral Futures work reaches across previously separate realms. It regards exterior developments with the 'eye' of perception that it *consciously* adopts. It participates in shared social processes and takes careful note of shared objective realities. In other words this is an invitation to move and act in a deeper, richer and more subtly interconnected world.

Post-conventional futures work is certainly not for the faint-hearted. Yet even in this brief review it suggests a range of constructive responses to a world currently desperate for new solutions to a wide range of challenging issues and problems.

Notes and references

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***Note**

A further application of what became known as the 'metascanning' method was the State of Play in the Futures Field (SoPiFF) project. A special issue of the journal *Foresight* was devoted to this. See Vol 11, No 5, 2009.

The original paper was published in Wagner, C (Ed.) Foresight, *Innovation and Strategy: Toward a Wiser Future*, World Future Society, Bethesda, MD, 2005, pp 275-289.