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Foundation Professor of Foresight: Richard Slaughter's Scholarly Book Contributions to Futures Studies and Strategic Foresight

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Highlights

- Over the last four decades, Richard Slaughter has contributed significantly to Futures Studies and Strategic Foresight.
- This journal article provides a sequential, historical, and thematic analysis of Slaughter's (selected) books, from 1975 to 2012.
- Slaughter's contributions include his personal synthesis of Critical Futures Studies and his conceptualisation of Integral Futures.
- Slaughter's counter-hegemonic stance is situated in terms of his academic and teaching career, and contrasted with other recent thinkers.
- Slaughter's book publishing is situated in terms of the neoliberal university's political economy.

Abstract:

This brief article provides an overview of selected research monograph books from Foundation Professor Richard Slaughter's research career. Foundation Professor Slaughter's books have contributed significantly to Futures Studies over a forty year period. The development of Critical Futures Studies, Integral Futures, and Anthropocene debates are considered. Foundation Professor Slaughter's books are also situated in terms of the neoliberal political economy in the United Kingdom and Australia, and research management insights on academic career progression. Professor Slaughter's anticipation of recent debates about 'lost futures' and a 'postcapitalist' world are also considered.

Keywords: Richard Slaughter; Critical futures studies; Integral Futures; Strategic Foresight; academic publishing; futures studies

Introduction

Foundation Professor and Dr Richard Slaughter has made significant and sustained contributions to Futures Studies and Strategic Foresight over the last four decades. In this brief article I consider the unique research contributions of a selection of Slaughter's many research monograph books to Futures Studies and the related applied field of Strategic Foresight.

I do so as a past intern and graduate of Slaughter's former Australian Foresight Institute and Strategic Foresight program at Australia's Swinburne University of Technology. I also situate Slaughter's books in the political economy context of Australian higher education: the ideological and the institutional pressures that he navigated whilst writing these books.

Periods of Richard Slaughter's Research Book Monographs

Slaughter's book contributions and research career trajectory can be organised in several ways. In this brief article, I provide one approach based on the early, mid, and professoriate career phases of Slaughter's academic career, primarily at Australia's University of Melbourne and Swinburne University of Technology, and via professional associations and networks such as the World Futures Studies Federation. Each of these (artificial) time periods provide a scaffolding for how Slaughter's deep engagement with Futures Studies and the applied field of Strategic Foresight has evolved over his scholarly career and life to date.

After graduating with his PhD in 1982 from Great Britain's University of Lancaster, Slaughter further developed the new sub-field of Critical Futures Studies as a meta-theoretical vantage point to both critique Futures Studies as a normative 'culture industry' about preferential future(s), whilst simultaneously also extending its scope into education leadership and other related, applied fields. This period culminated with Slaughter's creation and curation of the multi-volume *Knowledge Base of Futures Studies* (Slaughter 1996a), which gave significant coherence to the disciplinary field and its international scholars.

Slaughter's field-building practices in Futures Studies provided the career impetus for him in 1999 to become the Foundation Professor of Foresight at Australia's Swinburne University of Technology. Here, he developed a significant corpus of material on social foresight and how institutional renewal at a time of millennialist hope could occur. This period also coincided with Slaughter's leadership of the World Futures Studies Federation.

The most important development in this period was Slaughter's direct engagement with philosopher Ken Wilber's Integral transformative agenda, to conceptualise Integral Futures as a transdisciplinary meta-frame for Futures Studies research, that emphasises the interior development of practitioners and methodologies as artefacts of this unfolding meta-ethical awareness. Futures Studies has a history of exploring this meta-ethical awareness of interiority: Slaughter's direct engagement with Wilber's frameworks created new directions for the field. Over time, the Australian Foresight Institute's initial emphasis on 'methodological renewal' matured into an engagement with 'practitioner development'.

After the Australian Foresight Institute was disbanded in 2004, Slaughter pursued a later career period as an independent scholar who writes about Futures Studies and Integral Futures in the Anthropocene. Slaughter's most recent Futures Studies work engages directly with the human species challenge of anthropogenic climate change. He has articulated the different 'descent' pathways that human society is likely to face, due in part to political gridlock and inaction. This period of Futures Studies research is still unfolding as Slaughter continues to write and publish new books and articles in leading Futures Studies, Strategic Foresight, and Integral journals.

The maturation of Slaughter's career and research book monographs occurred during the dramatic shift in United Kingdom and Australian higher education to a neoliberal political economy. Its dominant logic is a commoditised, globalised education sector focused on cost-cutting, course profitability, and financialised student debt as a form of neoliberal economic stratification (Kirsch 2019). This was also the short-sighted managerialism (such as infrequent, 'value destructive' organisational restructures) in which Slaughter's research monographs were written in, and provided alternative futures to enact.

The German economic sociologist Wolfgang Streeck has recently pointed out the importance of research monographs books in contrast to the emphasis on peer reviewed journal articles. “Books . . . are *Gedankenspiele* – arrangements of long chains of ideas, evolving step by step out of each other,” Streeck noted [emphasis original] (Streeck 2020: 9). Books are more than the necessary precondition now for academic employment: they are an artefact of a Professor of Foresight’s thinking; a vehicle for inter-generational cultural transmission and knowledge-sharing; and an accessible way to communicate the field’s knowledge with future generations. Books enable academic knowledge to endure beyond a single, individual lifetime.

Period 1: Conceptualising and Implementing Critical Futures Studies

Slaughter graduated from his PhD studies into the harsh, neoliberal environment of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher’s government in the United Kingdom (Sandbrook 2019). This was Slaughter’s Early Career Academic period (the first five years after PhD conferral) in which he sought to use Critical Futures Studies to decompose the dominant logics, images, values, and worldviews in Thatcher’s ‘entrepreneurial’ neoliberal society. Developing alternative futures meant first surfacing and interrogating the unspoken norms and beliefs which shaped collective societal ideologies. Slaughter situated this period of his Futures Studies work in an historical lineage that included the Frankfurt School and early social construction theorists (Berger & Luckmann 1967; Jefferies 2016).

Slaughter’s (1988) book *Recovering The Future* articulated a counter-hegemonic stance to neoliberalism’s dominant logics inherent in economic growth, techno-utopian thinking, and the ‘default’ futures accepted by mass society. *Recovering The Future* was published during significant upheavals to the funding systems in United Kingdom and Australian higher education, such as the 1988 Dawkins Reforms in Australia.

Slaughter’s emphasis on the emancipatory potential of educational pedagogy and youth engagement anticipated by several decades - a now much larger literature on social inequality and youth experience in neoliberalist capitalism - that has jettisoned the Futures Studies

frameworks and methods (Howie & Campbell 2017). It also foreshadowed recent debates on politico-economic elites, ideologies, and stratification, which in some cases can be traced to academic theorists and think tank lobbying for received futures (Piketty 2020; Blakeley 2020).

After relocating to Australia, Slaughter found a more receptive climate for his Critical Futures Studies research agenda. Australia's Hawke and Keating governments engaged in significant restructuring of society and consultative policymaking. One hallmark of this period was the Australian Government statutory body the Australian Commission for the Future and its *21C Magazine*, to which Slaughter contributed. The Commission asked Slaughter to create an introductory resource on Futures Studies in response to Australia's Bicentennial celebrations in 1988 (Slaughter 1989). Australia's reception of Futures Studies looked hopeful.

Between 1989 and 1994, Slaughter worked with the University of Melbourne's Education Research Institute as a Lecturer in Futures and Social Education. This gave him the opportunity to deepen his use of Futures Studies in an education context, including growing consultation with schools and state education departments. One of the most important research monographs to emerge from this productive period was a collaboration with the late Professor Hedley Beare: the co-authored book *Education for the 21st Century* (Beare & Slaughter 1993). This book advances a collaboration that brought Slaughter into his Mid-Career academic phase (five to fifteen years after PhD conferral), and that defined the importance of embedding the 'forward view' in education pedagogy. But the University of Melbourne let Slaughter's contract run out and it was not renewed, during a university-wide restructure: a possible case of elite exclusion.

The Foresight Principle (Slaughter 1995) was drafted during the University of Melbourne period, and was an accessible book for a broad, general readership that anticipated the emergence of applied Strategic Foresight. It provided a detailed framework and an in-depth justification by Slaughter for foresight as an individual, organisational, and a civilizational

capability to be cultivated, focused, and protected. For neoliberal critics it provided a convincing business case that they now had to (and still have to) contend with.

This book signalled the shift from Futures Studies methods and individual practitioners to cohort-based learning and institutional capabilities. *The Foresight Principle* was discussed in the mid-late 1990s meetings of 21C Magazine's editorial team as a clear statement, and was a transitional book to Slaughter's next mid-career period as the Foundation Professor of Foresight at Swinburne University of Technology from 1999 to 2004.

Slaughter's formative personal synthesis of Critical Futures Studies can be distinguished from subsequent attempts to engage with the neoliberal imaginary. In the 2010s, the late critic Mark Fisher and the critic Grafton Tanner began to write about the 'lost futures' of the 1970s and 1980s that were initially envisioned but that never happened, and the growing addictiveness of Silicon Valley's social media platforms (Fisher 2013; Tanner 2015; Tanner 2020). Fisher and Tanner were both well versed in critical theory but did not have Slaughter's expertise in Futures Studies methods and Strategic Foresight. As evidenced by Fisher's unfinished *Acid Communism* book and Goldsmiths final lectures this 'lost futures' analysis could inform group work but was also trapped in nostalgia loops that Slaughter's forward-looking Critical Futures Studies was not (Fisher 2020).

Period 2: Foundation Professor of Foresight and Conceptualising Integral Futures

By the time that Slaughter became the Foundation Professor in Foresight at Swinburne University of Technology, he had consolidated a significant research agenda in Futures Studies. Edited collections like *New Thinking for a New Millennium* (Slaughter 1996b) and books like *Gone Today, Here Tomorrow: Millennium Previews* (Slaughter 2000) evoked the millennialist excitement about Futures Studies knowledge and Strategic Foresight methods. These books highlighted that Slaughter had created a viable and self-directed research program which transcended many of the structural and elite overproduction problems of the contemporary neoliberal university (Smyth 2017).

Two books in particular cemented Slaughter's reputation as a Foundation Professor of Foresight. *Futures for the Third Millennium* (Slaughter 1999) collected together Slaughter's insights on the growing legitimisation of Futures Studies in academia as a disciplinary field worthy of intensive scholarly debate and research. Creating a substantive body of academic research and making a sustained contribution to Futures Studies is a necessary condition to becoming a Professor of Foresight. This differentiated Slaughter from the current platform economy of corporate Strategic Foresight practitioners who draw on marketing as curated image management (Srnicek 2017).

Futures Beyond Dystopia: Creating Social Foresight (Slaughter 2004) is for me the strongest of Slaughter's books. It contains an edited collection of Slaughter's articles which span from Critical Futures Studies critiques of American techno-utopian and cyberpunk texts to early papers on Integral Futures. The book also includes an extensive, detailed, and evaluative annotated bibliography of Futures Studies literature to date, with Slaughter's views on respective strengths, weaknesses, and novel innovations that advance the disciplinary field. It was an important, wide-ranging and well-argued book that showed how Slaughter was creating new horizons as the Foundation Professor of Foresight.

In retrospect *Futures Beyond Dystopia* was published at a transitional period – just after the 2000 dotcom crash and Al Qaeda's terrorist attacks on 11th September 2001 but also before the 2003 Iraq War, the 2008-09 Global Financial Crisis or Great Recession, and before the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic-caused recession and the United States election that President Joseph R. Biden won. It was also published at a time that Swinburne University of Technology's then Vice-Chancellor Ian Young sought to shut down Swinburne's Institutes including the Australian Foresight Institute in order for neoliberal cost-savings. These mini-dystopias unleashed a much darker timeline for Earth, before Slaughter's more hopeful vision could take hold for a broader audience. We are today still living with the consequences.

Whilst the Human Potential Movement had previously interacted with Futures Studies in the United States, it was Slaughter's conceptualisation of Integral Futures in *Futures Beyond Dystopia* that gave new insights. Slaughter engaged deeply with Ken Wilber's Integral philosophy, his emerging Integral Institute, and considered its implications for the limitations

of major Futures Studies frameworks and methodologies. Slaughter recognised that cultivating meta-ethical awareness and being open to personal transformation was crucial for Integral Futures practice. Subsequently, any Futures Studies work is mediated through the lived experience and developmental levels of the practitioner rather than just the frameworks or the methodologies themselves.

Futures Beyond Dystopia was an invitation to engage with Integral Futures and to use its four quadrant approach for analysis with greater breadth, scope, and depth. I interacted with the Integral community primarily between 1999 and 2004, primarily with Slaughter, Ken Wilber, Spiral Dynamics co-founders Don Beck and Chris Cowan, Joseph Voros, and Peter Hayward. Initially constructive conversations became difficult and polarised, for complex reasons that are beyond this article's scope. By the time of the 2008 and 2010 Integral Futures 'controversy' in *Futures*, I was moving towards a political science PhD after further Masters studies, having decided to immerse myself in a disciplinary field. When contestation leads to stratification—envision, choose, and enact your own preferential future.

In *Futures Beyond Dystopia*, Slaughter had also written about second generation Institutes of Foresight as the institutional or organisational forms of his social foresight agenda. Apart from writing books one of Slaughter's most important legacies around them was to support and build a strong practitioner network at Swinburne University of Technology concerning Strategic Foresight practice. Slaughter worked with Joseph Voros, Peter Hayward, Maree Conway, Jose Ramos, Rowena Morrow, and later Marcus Barber and Barbara Bok, who each contributed to Futures Studies and Strategic Foresight practices. This practitioner network – along with Slaughter's use of cohort-based learning in the Masters of Strategic Foresight postgraduate program from 2001 to 2004 – were visible manifestations of the social foresight agenda in *Futures Beyond Dystopia*.

Period 3: Autonomy, Scholarly Independence, and the Anthropocene

Foundation Vice-Chancellor Iain Wallace championed Strategic Foresight at Swinburne University of Technology and laid the philanthropic groundwork for the Australian Foresight

Institute. Wallace's successor Vice-Chancellor Ian Young was more sceptical about the scientific credentials of applied foresight work. A deeper reason was the growing institutional reliance on financialisation, which for Young meant that Institutes would be closed as cost-cutting measures, as noted above. When the Australian Foresight Institute was disbanded and Slaughter left Swinburne in 2004, he began a third period of greater autonomy, senior scholarly independence, and a focus on the implications for Futures Studies of the Anthropocene.

This interest in the Anthropocene can be traced back to Slaughter's first, pre-doctoral book, on birds whilst teaching between 1969 and 1975 in Bermuda (Slaughter 1975). It was also a clear implication of Slaughter's maturing research agenda in Integral Futures: a transformed practitioner now engages with the significant issues of their time, such as anthropogenic climate change and the human species' response to it. This theme had also been evident in the Critical Futures Studies period of Slaughter's research program, and it re-emerged with renewed vigour.

During the 2001-17 time period of the Strategic Foresight program at Swinburne, climate change and sustainability both emerged as significant existential issues for students, many of whom also experienced significant existential life changes during and after the Masters course (Alexander & Floyd 2018). During this initial period Slaughter re-engaged with his Futures Studies and education work—going back to the Australian Commission for the Future and the University of Melbourne as well—in a book with colleague Marcus Bussey on classroom frameworks, methodologies, and interventions (Slaughter & Bussey 2016).

The Biggest Wake Up Call In History (Slaughter 2010) synthesised Slaughter's earlier approaches to Critical Futures Studies and Integral Futures into a careful analysis of the current problematic. Topics included global power structures, financialised rentier capitalism, the psychological shadow of social inequalities, the 'peak oil' scare of the mid-aughties, and precautionary approaches to deal with global warming. Slaughter combined critique, theory-building, and Integral Futures-based methodological renewal. Foresight

International released this as an affordable ebook, thus also enabling Slaughter to maintain control of his intellectual property rights (copyright).

At the core of the current problematique is an emphasis on neoliberal economic growth at the expense of post-conventional stewardship. *The Biggest Wake Up Call In History* was also an opportunity after engaging with its practitioners to reconsider Integral Futures and to apply it in a more mature form to anthropogenic climate change. Earlier work in Futures Studies had emphasised external challenges such as the World-3 simulations of the Club of Rome's ground-breaking *Limits to Growth* study. Mature work in Integral Futures considered the interior development of practitioners, and the cultural transmission of frameworks and methodologies. *The Biggest Wake Up Call*'s analysis of anthropogenic climate change detailed the (elite) power structures that prevented or delayed a collective response.

The ability to conceptualise an alternative to the dominant neoliberal economic and political order is also present in recent work on the possibility of moving towards a post-capitalist future. Topics in this literature included the failure in the 2010s of collective activist movements; the deflationary and stagnant economic environment since the 2008-09 Great Recession or Global Financial Crisis; the spectre of automation and technological mass unemployment; anthropogenic climate change impacts; the necessary societal transformations to realise a plausible and preferred post-capitalist future; and the possible dystopias that could instead result (Frase 2016; Srnicek & Williams 2016; Bastani 2019; Varoufakis 2020).

However, two specific knowledge gaps exist in this recent body of work. First, whilst it articulates normatively preferred futures it does not do so using the newer frameworks and methodologies that Futures Studies has developed over the past 20 years. Second, there is a significant gap about how to transition from the current neoliberal order to a post-capitalist future. *The Biggest Wake Up Call In History* both anticipated and problematised this possible transition through showing how current elite and neoliberal power structures are able to reproduce themselves adaptively despite crises, and how anthropogenic climate change imposes carrying constraints on what kind of post-capitalist future might possibly come into being.

To See With Fresh Eyes: Integral Futures and the Global Emergency (Slaughter 2012) provides the most mature to date analysis by Slaughter of how Integral Futures can contribute to solutions for coping with anthropogenic climate change. The book spans a 37 year period from *Birds in Bermuda*'s recognition of modernity's deficiencies in 1975 to Slaughter's most recent Integral Futures synthesis. What emerges from *To See With Fresh Eyes*' collected essays is the interplay of external material conditions, the infra-personal cultivation of ontological and epistemological insight, and their cultural transmission in Futures Studies frameworks and methodologies.

The different periods of Slaughter's academic career have followed a coherent logic of field-building, analysing the current problematique, and conceptualising new frameworks and methodologies. These academic career contributions are far deeper and more significant than just the key performance indicators of neoliberal academic workload models. *To See With Fresh Eyes* reveals that Slaughter's self-directed research program continues to flourish in the freedom of autonomous book publishing, and regular academic publications in key Futures Studies and Integral Studies journals over this time, rather than rentier capitalism of traditional academic publishing structures (Christophers 2020; Askenazy 2021).

Conclusion

This brief article has provided a sequential, historical and thematic analysis of Foundation Professor Richard Slaughter's research monograph books. Slaughter's work has evolved from a Critical Futures Studies critique of the emerging neoliberal society to working on the species level issue of the Anthropocene and energy descent pathways for human civilisation. He has matured from a university-based Foundation Professor of Foresight to an autonomous, independent scholar and senior practitioner in Futures Studies and applied Strategic Foresight. Ultimately, who are, the depth of your reflective awareness, and who you may become enables how you engage with Futures Studies and applied Strategic Foresight over a longer time period.

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