

New Futures Ahead

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Three factors are decisive in thinking about the future. First is a map of the future. It was not Columbus' discovery of the new world that was pivotal in the European mind but the map making that showed their world to be more than the Mediterranean. Second, structure. Forces that are difficult to change. Imperialism, patriarchy and deep structures of power: military, cultural, economy and peoples. Third, our aspirations, the image of the future we hold. Indeed, Fred Polak, in *Image of the Future*, argues that one factor that explains the rise and fall of civilisations is the robustness of their vision. Once a vision of the future disappears, ceases to have meaning, then either a group - civilisation, nation, corporation -will decline, or leadership will emerge offering an alternative vision.

The current conventional view of the future in Australia and other OECD nations assumes that life will keep on getting better. Income will go up, houses will increase in value, the latest technologies will continue to make life better for all, even if in the short run some of us have to retrain. Our children's lives will improve. To be sure, there will be difficult times, but challenges will be solved, either through government or through entrepreneurial activity. Australia will remain fair, where the most vulnerable will be taken care of.

However, this incremental view of the future is being challenged with claims that we are in the midst of the emergence of a post-industrial knowledge economy, a postmodern future. Indeed, this is a time of many "posts", meaning that the new era we are in is still being created, its outlines not yet clear, the institutional arrangements (what will government look like, who will watch over whom) still being sorted out.

Deeper changes

But perhaps the transformation is even deeper, challenging not just industrialism, but the entire rise of capitalism and the long term ascension of Western civilization, the Colombian era.

Three trends are crucial:

- (1) Nano-technologies and artificial intelligence might make production on a scale never before possible. Of course, these technologies are not yet on line but they challenge the idea that poverty will always be with us (well at least because of technological reasons).
- (2) Smarter markets, meaning all products bar-coded with complete pricing details (how much the Indonesian worker was paid, how many trees were cut down, how much the middle-man made) will soon be possible, allowing consumers to vote with their

dollars. Standards will then continue their transformation from merely the product's physical quality (what it looks like, is it safe and safely made) to its functional quality (how well it does what it claims to do) to its context (ethical quality). By giving accurate information to consumers, the Internet could level the inequalities of capitalism, creating a giant peoples market.

- (3) Equally transformative is the rise of multiculturalism. Taken to its full extent it shatters any notion of one culture, one state, one knowledge system, and one view of science. Can nations adequately organise the emergent differences being created, the vision of a world of many cultures - a gaia of civilisations - of an ecology of different worldviews? Indeed, all three trends challenge the nation-state and the world economy as we have known it.

Structure of power - the nation-state

Proudly negotiating the tensions between the local and the universal (between feudal and empire/world church), even if the passport office maintains its power to deport, the nation-state as the sole holder of power has entered a terminal process. Whether it will take 50 years or a hundred, we know well that revolutions from below (nongovernmental peoples' organizations), revolutions from above (international institutions), revolutions from capital (globalism), revolutions of culture (new ways of seeing self and other, of boundaries) and revolutions of technology (air travel, the Net) all make the nation-state deeply problematic. Of course, the Hansons, the Milosevics, the brahmins and mullahs will not disappear. With no place to hold onto, they will fight until the bitter end, hoping that enough of us will retain sentiments of ethno-nationalism, of patriotism (and be willing to kill for it). They will hope to transform the quite legitimate concerns of individuals fearing change (largely globalisation: corporate control, foreigners and loss of jobs) into a politics of exclusion, of attacking the other.

Governance

What world is likely to result from these historical revolutions in governance? Taking a macrohistorical perspective, as developed in Johan Galtung and Sohail Inayatullah's *Macrohistory and Macrohistorians*, there are a range of possibilities. Either one religious system dominates creating a world church, temple or mosque or one nation dominates creating a world empire. The former is unlikely, as reality has become too fragmented. Neither Christians nor Muslims (or Buddhists) are likely to convert en masse tomorrow, even if Jesus, the madhi, or amida buddha return. The problem of universally recognising God is not likely to be solved in the year 2000, even if the Redeemer does return.

A world empire is difficult given the democratic impulse. The only nation currently vying for the job is trapped by its own democratic participatory language. Disney and Microsoft (and their successors) are far more likely victors than the US State department, irrespective of what

conspiracy theorists in Belgrade, Baghdad, Beijing and Kuala Lumpur believe.

But can the world capitalist economy - the third alternative - remain as the hegemonic definer of identity? It has flourished because the economy has been global, expanding, while identity has been national, fixed. With the nation in steep trouble, can a world economy with politics confined by the nation-state continue? Localist - the fourth alternative - movements hope to capture the spaces being created by the loss of national identity. These are local and regional social movements committed to retaining language, culture, and economy. Cooperative movements throughout the world are one example. However, in their attempts to be authentically local, to challenge corporatism and nationalistic notions of one language, culture, economy, they find themselves forced to link with other environmental, spiritual, labour, and consumerist organizations. Cyberlobbying, the politics on the Net, too, forces them into global space. Indeed, all forces do. Localism only succeeds when it becomes global. A global consumer movement will fare more successfully than a local city or national movement.

Globalism

In this sense while we are halfway through the first phase of globalisation, that is, of capital, phase two is likely to be the globalisation of labour, Marx's dream all along. If capital can travel freely, why not labour? Already, elite intellectual labour does, and soon other forms will as well. At the very least information the conditions of labour will, via "the smart products method", become global. The next wave will be the multicultural. This is about creating an authentic multicultural world and not the Los Angelization of the planet. Remember: it is not the global village we have created but the global city with all its pathologies.

News - not the details of reporting but what we report about - will begin to flow not just downwards from Hollywood, New York and London but upwards and sideways as well. Already, the best newspapers are those that include the feeds of many cultures. The Pakistani paper, *The News*, for example, far exceeds any reporting *The New York Times* might manage, largely, as it is weaker, and thus to survive gets feeds from Arab, South Asian, East Asian and Western sources. Not just news, but ideas, language, culture are beginning to filter all around, and even if Murdock is likely to standardise information, information wants to be free, and communicate with the other.

Customisation is the likely future. Technology allows it so, and postmodernism provides the cultural legitimacy for it. The search for authenticity in postmodern times, even if largely about style, forces a questioning of one's once-presumed universal values. To question: the male, western, technocratic, linear, capitalist basis of reality. History books (why are Muslims seen only as threats, why is the Pacific, the water continent seen as irrelevant?) and children's stories are all being deconstructed (why are witches - basically elderly woman with wrinkles -

constantly portrayed as evil?) and seen as particular of a worldview (Europe defining what is true, good and beautiful), and not as universal (*for more on this, see: www.others.com*).

The final phase of globalisation is likely to be a world security force, inklings of which we are already seeing.

With empire, one church, localism and a world capitalist economy in the context of a nation-based interstate system nearly impossible to sustain, we are likely to move to a world government system (a global policy framing body) with strong global/localist tendencies, with hundreds, even, thousands of bio-regions of self-reliant communities and even city-states.

The guiding world ethic will be a move from strategy as our foremost paradigm to that of health and healing. What this means is that the classical perspective of defeating the enemy (or deterrence) will move to a view of negotiating reality, difference, and reconciliation. There will remain a big stick, i.e. the world security force, but along with it a neo-Magna Carta guaranteeing the right of culture, language and income. Rights will likely be extended to plants and animals, and large corporations will be far more transparent paradoxically by an increase in their formal role in world governance. This continues the 1000-year trend (with many reversals) of increasing rights to those who previously were rightless (peasants, females, the colonies, children, nature, for example).

In this sense we should expect dramatic diversity of association, some individuals being concerned about their local space, others denationalised world citizens, others regional, and many less concerned with physical space and far more with their electronic communities (and of course nonpersons as well as new life forms). Passwords and not passports will be far more defining.

Imagining a world government with representatives from 1000 associations, some corporatist (many already in the top 20 when it comes to budgets), some nongovernmental peoples' organizations (Greenpeace, Amnesty International) some directly voted in (through cybergovernment) and some traditional nation-state functionaries are now possible.

The details are terribly important and burdensome, and how the Chinese will get along with the Americans is difficult to predict (just as the modern era was not possible to articulate from the feudal), but the structural forces are such that the only solution to the future is that. Most likely notions of Chineseness and Americanness will transform as well.

While many hope for a weak world governance system with strong localism this is an unlikely fantasy as localist systems alone cannot survive because they get taken over (cannibalized by adventurous dictators and expanding economies).

Aspirations

With structure outlined, aspirations of people all over the world fall into three scenarios.

The first is the **globalist** scenario. A jet plane for each and every one; the capacity to speak many languages; multicultural; postmodern (quick selves); Net-hip; liberal, and no more scarcity. It is the breaking down of all national and religious barriers, ending our feudal history, finally completing the mission of the European enlightenment: liberty, fraternity and equality (but really extending it to each and all).

The darkside of this scenario is that either (1) it will not be extended to the others, Africa, the indigenous, and suffering will remain just a discourse not an authentic foundational experience or (2) the other will become museumised through cybertechnologies or (3) banished from history through eugenics, the information and genetic technological revolution (IGTR).

The second is the **organic** scenario. Community and connecting with others is far more important. Relationship is not just about communication but it is a way of knowing. Slowing time down from the fast, always-one, always-everywhere, globalist world is a priority. Good sex, good food, and regular exercise and meditation also rank high. The image of the future is that of self-reliant communities linked electronically and spiritually. The electronic pathways of communication are there and in development are the spiritual pathways. This finds its conceptualisation through the works of Indian Philosopher P.R. Sarkar. He asserts that the basic units of life are microvita, pockets of energy that are both matter and idea. At the crudest they are viruses and at the most subtle they can be used to spread ideas. Our evolution can be directed by our imaginations of a different future. For Teilhard de Chardin this was the noosphere, the shared space of humanity's ideas. For shamans, this is the idea that as you think, you become. With this new map of the unconscious, of how vision creates the future, suddenly what future we desire ceases to be mere fantasy but, in fact, becomes the tool to create the future. Not only do we create the future but also the future creates us.

The dark side of this scenario is that notions of community will become oppressive, taking away individual freedom. Commitments to Gaja will lead to ecological fascism with the greediest being banished to outer space or forced into Yoga camps to transform their hormonal systems.

The third scenario is the **collapse**, the return of Mad Max, the end of capitalism, tidal waves galore, escaped viruses (of the Internet and biological types), airborne AIDs, and -- thank God for it since we have collectively sinned - mixed species, mixed marriages - and forgotten what reality is really about. The aspiration dimension is that after the collapse, a moral order, with a strong father figure, returns.

The dark side to this vision is that first many desire it and second, there is no evidence that a great depression will lead to a new birth. And third: the father figure might be just that.

Generations

There is a generational aspect to the future as well. Baby boomers have been both committed to making money and to challenging authority. Generation X is concerned about ethics, about the environment, about others, using their dollars to transform world culture. The emerging globalist scenario is loved by the .Com generation. Growing up where difference is essential, they surf culture and the Net. Further down the track will be the double-helix generation. They will be far more plastic, willing to change identities and living with multiple life forms, unattached to foundational notions of self. They will complete the globalist agenda.

Who then will create the future? Will it be those who are part of the current system, those in the continued growth model of the future? Government leaders and corporate CEOs?

Will it be young entrepreneurs from Silicon Valley, the .Com children followed by the double helix generation?

Or will it be the social idealists, those imagining a more organically connected future, totally outside of current notions of official power and wealth? But do these idealistic members of social movements have the memes and the capacity to create a new future? Will their challenge for new rights (for humans, animals and plants), for gender partnerships (womanists and feminists), for spirituality (seeking to transcend religion and secularism, finding meaning in a lived relationship with the infinite) and for social activism (a moral, not amoral, economy and politics) and against 500 years of continued growth be successful?

However, Instead of idealism focused on transforming the future from cyclical (traditional) to spiral time progress with tradition), the likely future remains that of speed, the teflon postmodern self (creative, playful, always recreating itself) and our genetic recreated offspring, the double helix generation to come. They imagine a future with no limits and have the wealth to create it.

Which future will it be then? Incremental Change? The globalist artificial society? The organic global community? Or a collapse followed by a strong moral order?

Do our aspirations matter? Imagine the future and let your children's children see.

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