

Future NEWS

a newsletter from the *futures* foundation

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WHAT CAN WE DISCOVER BY TRAVELLING IN TIME?

The speed and complexity of change today make precise mapping of the future impossible. Instead, futurists explore the future, speculate about its possibilities, engage with its potential, and seek to influence it at key leverage points. (As one US futurist put it, the best way to predict the future is to create it.)

One of the big benefits of futures work for organisations and governments alike is in risk management. Future risks can be slashed by exploring the future, understanding the long-term consequences of the choices we make today.

But perhaps the single most exciting aspect of futures work is its challenge to the way we think, and the way we are. When we apply this challenge to the way we think about time, interesting new ideas emerge.

For example, macrohistorian Prabhat Rainjan Sarkar looks at different ways of inhabiting time -- the way of the worker, who lives in the present; the way of the warrior, who thinks of time as space to conquer; the way of the merchant, who commodifies time; and the way of the intellectual or priest, who theorises time and imagines transcendental time.

Perhaps some future generation will learn to balance time... to live their lives not only under pressure, in the mode of emergency, but to have time also for the way of the mother or father, who makes time; the way of the partner, who shares time; the way of the friend, who gives time. Perhaps they will have time for being, as well as for doing, time for reflection as well as for action, time for play as well as work. Perhaps they will learn, too, as some already do at maturity, to inhabit time at deeper levels, where it moves differently.

Time, said one philosopher, is simply the measurement of the duration of events. It isn't something that worries the birds too much, nor any other species except humanity. Could we defeat short-termism through a better understanding of our relationships with time? ●

Travel warning: take care in Time-land

The Australian government has issued warnings for many popular destinations, including Indonesia, Russia, Central Africa and Turkey -- even at the cost of alienating powerful neighbours. But if it were really talking turkey, it would have issued travel advice about Time-land long before now. Just think: if time were a new land frontier, explorers would develop navigational aids, draw maps of intricate detail, and learn how best to respond to its risks and challenges. (Pretty much the way futurists already do -- see panel at left.) If it were a new tourist destination, there'd be brochures, books and videos designed to help people make the most of their travel. But of course political and economic leaders may not be the best sources of travel advice in Time-land. They themselves are recklessly ignoring the greatest risks, including a raging epidemic of "short-termism" now current.

Throughout the western world, companies and nations alike are being savaged by the time-dependent disease of "short-termism". Too many leaders are blatantly putting their own interests before those of their institutions or societies, much less future generations.

In politics, the disease is especially contagious. And it starts at the top, with Australia's extraordinary, unreserved support for current US foreign policy. As Ross Gittins pointed out in the Sydney Morning Herald (4/11/02), John Howard now faces a temptation similar to that faced by the CEO of a public company: short-termism - whether to do his job in a way that maximises his own immediate interests (the value of his share options/his popularity with the voters) at the expense of the longer-term security and prosperity of the institution he heads.

"Mr Howard's response to these criticisms is that Australia's national interest must come first....Just as our CEOs would justify their every self-aggrandising move by claiming it was made to enhance Shareholder Value, so 'the national interest' can be invoked to defend blatant populism or bureaucratic stuff-ups as well as genuine endeavours. And the question of short-termism is relevant: is it the national interest in the next 10 minutes or the national interest way beyond the next election?"

Wadd'ya know: the very next day Mark Baker reported from Phnom Penh that Australia had failed in its bid to win a seat at the powerful ASEAN summit, an event that is becoming the region's most important annual gathering. That's an exclusion that is very significant for

Australia. Japan, China and Korea, our major export markets, have concluded a comprehensive economic cooperation agreement. Japan has announced its intention to develop its own free trade zone with ASEAN - without Australia. China and the ten member nations of ASEAN have signed an agreement to create a free trade area of about 1.8 billion people - without Australia.

ASEAN has moved towards free trade talks with Korea and the US, not Australia. And in this climate of growing economic cooperation everywhere else, the ASEAN+3 political forum, including Japan, Korea and China, has said Australia may not participate at future summits. And that's not all.

"Pre-Bali, our relations with Indonesia had sunk to such a low priority that I doubt if it ever crossed Mr Howard's mind to wonder what his fulsome support for the United States' position on war with Iraq might mean for those relations," Ross Gittins wrote.

"We keep forgetting that we live next door to the biggest Muslim nation in the world, one whose economic advance has been disrupted by crisis and whose internal cohesion has been weakened by a move to a fledgling democracy.

"My Australian contacts in Indonesia fear that a war with Iraq could split Indonesia badly, and this could hit their economy badly because of its effect on confidence.

"The game has suddenly got serious. We no longer have the luxury of being able to kick the Indonesians and other foreigners so as to harvest a few more xenophobic votes.

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What is the Universe trying to tell us?

We hear it on all sides: more and more people are despairing of the growing problems in western society. They see us brutally "impaling the future", as Kapoor and Serra put it (see page 4). But in systems as big and complex as contemporary societies, where do we begin the process of change?

Peter Saul points out that there are plenty of clues in the universe's communication to us about what we need to tackle to create a healthy, sustainable future.

"Look at some of the features of our world today," he said.

- Priests, welfare workers and others in

authority are abusing children in their care

- Executives are ripping off employees and shareholders for whom they have a duty of care
- Political leaders are using their positions of responsibility and care for personal gain
- Farmers are abusing the land they are custodians of, and creating erosion and salinity
- Many of us are abusing our bodies creating obesity, drug abuse, etc
- Many of us are failing in our duty of care to the families/communities in which we belong because we are too busy being cogs in the economic machine.

"The common thread for me is the abrogation of -- indeed our blindness to -- our duty of care for the broader systems (bodies, families, communities, organisations, natural environments, etc.) in which our lives are embedded," said Dr Saul.

"Like many mining companies, we contribute to the destruction of the 'taken for granted' natural infrastructure that supports us when we pursue our 'individual' interests.

"The notion that we are independent

'individuals' is an illusion that is only around 200 years old. Prior to that we were much more inclined to describe ourselves in terms of the linkages we had to family, tribe/community and country. By living 'individual' lives we are cutting ourselves off from the broader systems that are the source of our life giving energy. It is therefore not surprising that things then turn toxic. However, we are so conditioned to see our separateness that re-learning our connectedness requires the destruction of the institutions that fostered the separate worldview. I believe that we are now seeing the destruction of many of those institutions.

"One thread of the unfolding future is perhaps foundation building for a new worldview based on human beings as part of complex adaptive natural systems.

"Our challenge then may be to learn how to live as part of everything rather than continuing to live as though we are on our own, believing that we must write contracts, engage lawyers and pile up money as defences against the hostile 'other' or 'outside' that from the standpoint of the connected worldview simply does not exist.

"It's scary to believe this - but then it is even scarier to continue not to." ●

Violence against women: the unspoken pandemic

It's under-recognised and under-reported, writes public health expert Cesar Chelala. It's also one of the most significant epidemics in the world today.

According to a new report from the World Health Organisation, gender violence claims almost 1.6 million lives a year, about 3 per cent of deaths from all causes.

"Women of all social classes and religions suffer significant harm to their health and quality of life. This epidemic demands new, more effective policies," Chelala says.

"Domestic violence is perhaps the most common kind of gender violence around the world...Some studies conducted in the US reveal that each year approximately four million women are attacked by their husbands or partners.

"According to another US study, violence against women is responsible for a large proportion of medical visits, and for approximately one third of emergency room visits. Another study found that in the United States, domestic violence is the most frequent cause of injury in women treated in emergency rooms, more common than motor vehicle accidents and robberies combined. It is estimated that their treatment costs between \$3 billion and \$5 billion a year.

"No wonder public health experts consider violence against women a global public health issue, one requiring a public health approach. Worldwide, violence is as common a cause of death and disability among women of reproductive age as cancer, and a greater cause of ill health than traffic accidents and malaria together." ●

Travel warning from page 1

"We no longer have the luxury of being able to use the Middle East to ingratiate ourselves with the Americans without any comeback. Our next-door neighbours are highly distrustful of the Americans and highly sympathetic to the Arabs - and that's just the moderates."

In the corporate world, symptoms of this communicable disease are heightened by major investors -- often superannuation funds -- who assume that their own stakeholders prefer short-term income to long-term societal health. They may be right - but it would be interesting to see the results of a survey that put this question into context. To make profits now, companies are exporting their costs to others by cutting jobs, punishing the natural environment, diluting their ethics, shifting transactions to the customer and more.

Customers who wait on the line lose the value of their own time while the supplier saves the cost of telephone operators. The staffer who is retrenched can become a cost to taxpayers, while her neglected home lowers the value of other properties in the street. Shortcuts that damage the natural environment will cost the taxpayers who eventually foot the repair bill. The community that loses its bank branches will pay in many ways for this cost-saving "heart attack".

But now that more of us are learning to close the loop, we realise that those

delayed customers, retrenched staff, long-suffering taxpayers are themselves shareholders, or members of super funds. Do they really want short-term profits at such a cost? Especially when the short-term yield so often threatens the long-term viability of the company?

Perhaps, as in so many other cases of colonisation, our unthinking occupation of Time will result in its wholesale destruction.

Jerome Binde of UNESCO pointed out years ago (*Future News* 10/97) that modern societies suffer from a dysfunctional relationship with time, in which they are torn between the competing needs of the future and of the present.

"The horizon of modern societies has shrunk, in time and in space. Entire systems of thought and long-term representation seem to have collapsed and, with them, the references to the idea of a common project.

"Emergency has become a mode of destruction of time.... This culture of impatience has ominous consequences."

All over the world the citizens of today are claiming rights over the citizens of tomorrow, threatening their wellbeing and at times their lives.

Now that's a significant health risk! Isn't anyone else going to issue a travel warning? ●

FOOTPRINTS OF THE FUTURE...

from Richard Neville's new Handbook for the Third Millennium

the future
can no
longer be
taken for
granted.

it needs
to be
rescued.

After Agriculture, Industry and Knowledge, the next revolution is Sustainability. By 2010, fish farming will overtake cattle ranching. Plants bloom earlier in spring and autumn comes later. Butterflies and mosquitoes fly further afield. Exxon Mobil continues to deny Global Warming.

DISAPPEARING...
childhood, time, certainty, fresh water, loyalty, institutions, distance, privacy, secrets, jobs for life... if who we are is based on what we do & what we do keeps changing, then
who are we?

We are all temps.



It is rare for an individual to make an impact on society of lasting significance. But the way we raise our children will make a difference for the next 50 years and down through the generations.

Siemens is among the top ten electro-engineering companies in the world. 75% of its revenues come from products that are less than 5 years old.

This percentage is rising.

In organisations, power is shifting away from those who possess title, status and financial clout toward those who share new knowledge and creativity.

Third and fourth careers will become so common that they will no longer be preceded by a **mid-life crisis.**

Unlike machines of the 20th century, which conquered nature, Living Machines of the sustainable economy will partner nature. 95% of the radioactive waste in a pond near Chernobyl was cleaned up by sunflowers.

Meat deriving from collagen and algae is growing in Petri dishes. Animals will no longer have to be slaughtered for food.

by 2025,

Costa Rica, which has already abolished its army, plans to rely entirely on renewable energy.

A quarter of America's GDP is derived from military oriented output. The world's biggest-by-far arms trader is the **Pentagon.**

275 million firearms - half the world's total cache - are legally owned by private citizens. 250 million of these are in the US.

This 84-page sparkler is at bookstores for \$9.95.
For bulk orders, call
Richmond Ventures at 02 9929 2488.

don't believe it all

In an analysis of 789 papers in medical journals, a university professor found that more than a third of the authors had a financial interest in the subject of their study.

Each year, 2 million people pay for their flesh to be sliced to improve their appearance. A high profile plastic surgeon is ready to graft wings onto our re-jigged rib bones. "Let people explore the possibilities," he says.
It will happen.

The macro engineers are waiting in the wings, ready to manipulate the world's oceans, forests, grasslands and water supplies.

For whose benefit?

In industrial countries car use has overtaken trucking, shifting energy consumption away from production to pleasure. At current rates of congestion, use of main roads will soon require reservations. Many of the 11 million cars annually added to the world's fleet are located in the developing world, where hunger is common and roads replace cropland. When China's car ownership matches that of Japan (one for every two people) it will have paved more than half its rice land.

Scanning for signals in the noise

Our thanks to members for contributing articles for inclusion on this page

Communities of tomorrow

The social spotlight seems to be refocusing to the scale of local community at a time when globalisation of the economy is threatening the authority of nation-states, writes Australian futurist Tony Stevenson. This paper explores five scenarios of tomorrow's communities.

Futures October 2002 974

Standing up to be counted

Only two major Australian companies -- BP Australia and Visy -- urged the Federal Government to ratify the Kyoto Protocol, in a *Financial Review* survey of 60 members of the Business Council of Australia. One more, Western Power, said it was now less clear that ratification of the Kyoto Protocol was against the national interest. Otherwise, big business overwhelmingly backed the government's decision not to ratify Kyoto.

Australian Financial Review 28 October 2002 975

Trouble at the top

Mountains appear indestructible but look closely and you find they are among the most threatened environments on Earth. Zoom in closer and you discover that the world's highest peaks supply billions of people with drinking water, but those supplies are now drying up. We have ignored mountains for too long.

New Scientist 2 November 2002 976

Globalization and its discontents

Former chief economic adviser to President Clinton, chief economist at the World Bank and winner of a 2001 Nobel Prize in economics, Joseph E. Stiglitz argues that the pursuit of US interests overseas in the 1990s was as flawed as the way "the best and brightest" defended national security in the 1960s.

Future Survey July 2002 977

Farmers who fail don't deserve pity

If we really care about drought, we'll stop feeling sorry for farmers who mismanage their businesses and then want to blame it on the Almighty, writes Ross Gittins. Europeans have been here for more than 200 years but we still haven't twigged that droughts are frequent and reasonably predicted events. Farmers... can minimise the effects of unreliable rain.

Sydney Morning Herald 16 October 2002 978

Feeding the world

Negative population growth by the end of the 21st century could mean less demand on resources and more food for everyone, say Luther Tweeten and Carl Zulauf. They track the classic four stages of societies -- traditional, developing, developed and mature -- and note that many developed countries have recently entered or soon will enter the fourth stage.

The Futurist September- October 2002 979

Sugar rush

Sugar may be the basis of the next rush to exploit nature, says Karen Schmidt. Once dismissed as mere decoration, sugar molecules turn out to be vital components in life's intricate machinery. Like DNA, there is now another code out there to be deciphered, and the letters of its alphabet are made of sugar.

New Scientist 26 October 2002 980

Food fight over bio-pharming

A fight is breaking out between food and biotechnology industries in the US over plans to genetically modify food crops to make drugs and chemicals. Bio-pharming is widely seen as the next wave for the crop biotechnology sector....but politically powerful trade groups for the \$500 billion food sector are lobbying for new rules.

Wall Street Journal 5 November 2002 981

Money's destiny - to become digital

An OECD report argues that, over time, physical money has increasingly been replaced by more abstract means of payment. Singapore plans to replace its physical money by 2008. Diffusion of digital money may be accelerated to overcome high costs of handling physical cash and to ensure transparency of financial transactions.

Future Survey June 2002 982

Impaling the future

"There is no doubt that this century will be awesome in the power that human beings will exercise over nature....What is understood and acknowledged less often, however, is the flip side of this power and supremacy. A number of trends of recent times point to a future in which large sections of humanity are marginalised and their existence threatened by impersonal, ruthless global forces and by newly created tools of domination...."

"By now there is a very large and persuasive body of literature produced by scholars of North and South, and of different ideological persuasions, that has documented and revealed how from colonial days to the post-colonial and post-modern present, large sections of humanity, their ecological homelands, their livelihood and their worldviews and knowledge systems, have been pulverised and plundered by the dominant Western powers.

"The colonisation of the future continues...."

Futures October 2002 983

Weak signals: detecting the next big thing

Where's the next major innovation coming from? Being alert for weak signals could clue you in, write S. Dyer Harris and Steven Zeisler. Virtually no social, political or business systems follow straight-line paths of predictability. Rather, they behave in nonlinear ways because they are chaotic, complex adaptive systems.

The Futurist November-December 2002 984

What Darwin didn't know

Evolution is a slow, painstaking process. But have plants and animals found a way of seizing the throttle to get them out of a tight spot? By squirrelling away genetic mutations, the raw material of evolution, and releasing them all at once, species may be able to leap from peak to evolutionary peak without ever having to slog through the valleys between -- increasing their odds of surviving stressful conditions.

New Scientist 28 September 2002 985

Membership growth helps us grow our service

Can we send membership information to a friend or colleague?
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