

# future news

a newsletter from the *futures* foundation

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## Alternative futures and policy choices

Queensland policy-makers, like their colleagues elsewhere, are facing the double impact of rising health costs and a rapidly ageing population. In Queensland, the proportion of those over 60 will increase from 15 per cent in 1995 to 23 per cent in 2031. Already 25 per cent of those over 65 demonstrate functional psychiatric disorders, according to a government discussion paper.

Can policy-makers use futures methodologies to address these issues? They put this question to senior futurist Sohail Inayatullah, who prepared a "stimulus paper" for the Department of Families that applied a variety of futures approaches to the topic of ageing.

First, he explained how a futures policy framework differs from four other main policy frameworks:

1. [Cost-Benefit policymaking](#) - with a clear economic bottom line (although that is now being challenged by the triple bottom line approach)
2. [Problem-oriented policymaking](#) - focussed on solving issues in the short term
3. [Political-oriented policymaking](#) - coloured by the ideology of the party in power or by the bureaucracy

4. [Vision-oriented policymaking](#) - concerned about the desired future, moving government in partner-

ship with society toward a desired vision of the future.

[Futures-oriented policymaking](#), on the other hand, challenges and uses all these frameworks.

"It seeks to redress the temporal myopia of cost-benefit analysis by including the costs of the future," says Professor Inayatullah. "In this sense, the impact on future generations may be the fourth bottom line."

"It seeks to address the limitations of problem-orientation by anticipating issues before they become problems. Once issues become problems, government is often shackled by the emotive nature of the problem. Clear sides and positions have been drawn. Through futures oriented policy making, not only can issues be anticipated but the roots of issues can be addressed, since they can be tracked through their full life cycle."

"Futures oriented policy challenges political-oriented policy by suggesting that the clarity of the desired future is required so that citizens can understand how current decisions will impact the future. Politics thus can become less about partisan issues and more about negotiating desired futures. Futures oriented policy certainly works closely with vision oriented policy but seeks to ensure that the vision is shared, participatory, and is informed by changing events and trends. Visions need to pull society forward but also need to be flexible, having the capacity to accommodate change."

He says that futures oriented policy expands, broadens and deepens the policy process by focusing on:

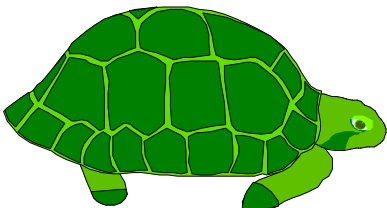
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1. The implications of current decisions on the future
2. Anticipating emerging issues and trends before they become problems
3. Mapping alternative futures so that more effective decisions can be reached today, that is, by using the future to transform today
4. Extending the temporal horizon so costs and benefits include future generations
5. Embedding flexibility into the vision of the future, and
6. Developing processes so that policy remains a living practice – anticipatory action learning.

"When the issue of the future is raised, more often than not allusions are made to forecasting. Forecasting, however, is only one way to 'use' the future. There are other purposes to the future."

(See story on following page.)



# Putting the future to good use

**The first way to use the future is to develop strategy.** Sohail Inayatullah told the Queensland government, with ageing as its case study. For example, given the reality of an ageing Queensland, what should individuals, companies and government do? What are the opportunities and challenges ahead?

**The second way to use it is to gain citizen input and participation.** While leadership may offer the vision, the visioning process must be a participatory one, including all relevant stakeholders and worldviews. This ensures buy-in, and also assures that the variations of the vision - differences - strengthen the overall vision.

"This is especially important to ensure inter-generational views on a preferred vision of ageing," Professor Inayatullah explained. "Citizen input is thus also about worldview input. The notion of worldview implies that ageing should not be seen in a uniform way. There are gendered, cultural and life cycle dimensions to ageing. More important is that the aged should not merely be objects of research but should participate in the design of alternative futures.

**The third way to use the future is for education**...the future serves as a way to train government employees, Queensland leaders, and citizens about how to deal with an ageing society. This means using futures methods and tools – emerging issues analysis, the futures triangle, causal layered analysis, visioning, backcasting – to better understand the future.

Education about alternative futures is essentially about using the future for the **fourth purpose, capacity enhancement**, that is, to develop the capacity to negotiate the many challenges brought on by an ageing society. Capacity enhancement is not about any particular goal or even vision but about creating the societal capacity to negotiate with change, even dramatic change (as for example with the possibility of significantly extended life expectancy). Essentially this is about a society that is a learning community – that reflects and learns from its mistakes and moves forward. A learning community has these characteristics, as applied to ageing futures:

**1. Flexible** – moving beyond the agricultural and industrial model of society. For the ageing discourse, this is the agricultural model of many dying young and the few who survive, by definition becoming wise elders. However, with many more people ageing, wisdom may not be guaranteed.

**2. Responsive** – adjusting to the needs of market, community and state, globally and locally. This means ascertaining new products and services for the ageing and new careers for the aged. This could mean asking - what are the most appropriate uses of digital technologies for creating more socially inclusive communities?

**3. Anticipatory** – develop models of thinking to envision and plan for alternative futures. This could mean asking - what alternative political frameworks are required for ageing? Does representational democracy still work in an age-divided world, or should the youth have a certain percentage of seats reserved in parliament?

**4. Innovative** – seeing ageing as an opportunity to rethink current institutions, to

question our basic paradigms of health, life, and death.

**5. Leadership** plus participation plus expertise. Any new problem faced by society needs all sorts of information and knowledge. It cannot be solved by one sector alone, rather, leaders plus citizens plus experts are required to move forward – that is, evidence-based policy with vision and participation.

**6. Learning plus healing** – a learning community cannot just be about information and knowledge, there is an emotive side to this – the heart as brain. Ageing must be seen an embodied and engaged issues. To begin with this means facing head-on the fears of youth (of being denied their future) and of the aged (of being left out to pasture).

**7. Microvita** (that reality is idea and matter based) – a learning community, of course, is more than just its members. It is the collective, including archetypes and unconscious fields of awareness.

**Fifth, we can use the future to move toward emergence**, that is, toward the edge of order and chaos, where system transformation is possible. This means a societal conversation about ageing futures where foundational assumptions (as opposed to instrumental questions) are challenged, even if incrementally.

**Sixth, the future can be used to enter new memes** (an idea that replicates, moving from brain to brain) in the organisations that challenge old memes. We are seeing this in city futures in the move from the city as defined by the roads, rates and rubbish meme to that of the smart-international-green city.

Also, if we examine the traditional organisation, the dominant meme was work 9/5, work hard, retire and then die. A few decades ago, this changed somewhat because of globalisation to up-skilling, and retraining along with adaptability and flexibility began to define the organisation (downsizing was of course central to this). Most recently, the meme has become the learning organisation. The new meme is learning plus healing organisation (taking into account employees' health, the impact of the organisation on the environment and the organisation as a family – essentially, the triple bottom line approach). Whether it will be selected because of advantages it offers is not clear at this stage, however.

Memes are ideas that transform, as opposed to ideas that inform (the educational perspective) or ideas that empower (strategy, capacity building, and citizen engagement).

Professor Inayatullah concludes that ageing should be seen as a fundamental issue for the future of the planet. An ageing society challenges basic assumptions of modern culture and political economy. These challenges can be met as ways to transform the present and create different futures – ageing can be seen as a resource. By using futures approaches and acting now, the Queensland government has a window of a decade to ensure that the future truly is, like the preferred scenario, *A Society of all Ages*. **(See also [www.metafutures.org](http://www.metafutures.org))**

# Alternative futures and personal choices

**F**undamental change in the way we see ourselves, long anticipated by futurists, may be about to reach critical mass in the west, raising some interesting questions. Will the shift in personal values that is causing this change be big enough to overturn the dominant rule of monetarist-materialist values? Will it simply dilute the excesses of materialism? Or will it co-exist in a pluralistic society, as individuals make their personal journeys from a material to a post-material way of life? And if we see all these changing persons as customers, as shareholders, as employees, as volunteers, as citizens, what might be the visible outcomes of a complex reworking of their relationships?

Whichever way the change unfolds, research shows that while social institutions, companies and governments have been losing credibility and trust in recent years, the personal journey has been heading the other way -- towards the deliberate choice of ethics, integrity and authenticity. Thus social leadership is shifting from top-down policy-making to bottom-up demands for more meaningful ways of life.

Since Marilyn Ferguson first reported it in *The Aquarian Conspiracy* in the 1970s, the quiet social revolution now dubbed "creative" has been gaining strength. Invisible for so long to those whose filters prevented them seeing it, this massive social shift now includes millions of people in the USA, Europe

and Australia who are redefining themselves as citizens rather than consumers.

The change is recognised even at the heart of marketing. Advertising agency strategists are still tracking the "luxury creep" of the affluent society and advising their clients on sophisticated ways to promote ever more indulgent products and services. At the same time, these bellwethers of the consumer society are also reporting massive value shifts and consequent social change in the other direction, with the visible emergence of social conscience and environmental responsibility among younger audiences.

Such a change was anticipated by psychologist Abraham Maslow and his colleagues -- not just in his famous "hierarchy of needs" but later, when at an international conference they addressed the question of what comes after self-actualisation and concluded that the next step was altruism.

First identified by Paul Ray and Sherry Ruth Anderson in their book *Cultural Creatives* (Future News March 2001), the new social class has now been mapped again by Professor Richard Florida in his new book, *The Rise of the Creative Class: How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community, Everyday Life*.

In 2000, Ray and Anderson estimated 26 per cent of US adults -- 50 million people -- had made a comprehensive shift in their worldview, values and way of life. Their research was replicated in Europe with similar results. Now Florida counts his "creatives" at 38 million people in the workforce, or 30 per cent of all employed Americans.

This shift to grassroots social leadership reinforces the lesson that change is resisted more effectively by the larger masses of organisations, while learning is quicker among more flexible, resilient individual organisms. That's one of the reasons why the Futures Foundation has, in recent years, shifted its own focus from working with organisations to providing support to the growing number of individual agents of change.

## No problem footing the bill

"I sometimes feel we are living in a culture so decadent it makes the last days of ancient Rome seem as restrained as a Shaker barn raising," wrote Maggie Alderson in the *Good Weekend* (19-20/4/03). She was especially repelled by a story in American *Vogue* about women who have cosmetic surgery on their feet: "Not elective surgery to relieve painful conditions...but completely unessential vanity surgery to make their feet look nicer."

Not content with surgery, these women are also customers for collagen injections that allow them to wear their designer high heels with less discomfort. And that's not all.

"After they've had these various foot-perfecting procedures (and probably Botox to get rid of those humiliating ankle wrinkles)," says Alderson, "[they] return each month for foot facials (hello?) which cost \$US375 a time."

Alderson wonders if there is something wrong with her that she finds all this outrageously vain and self-indulgent: "Am I the only mealy-mouthed self-righteous do-gooder who thinks that the doctor's bone-grafting skills could be better used by landmine-maimed children in Africa than by spoiled thespians in Manhattan?"

But it is increasingly clear that she is not alone. Just as western decadence gets more and more nauseating -- or perhaps because it does -- researchers are reporting the rise of a new social class that embraces a different set of values. These include deep concern for the environment and other global issues, social justice, personal and spiritual development, and explicit recognition of the importance of authentic relationships.

Each year,  
2m people pay for  
their flesh to be sliced  
to improve their appearance.

Richard Neville  
*Footprints of the Future*

# PHOTONS AND US: DO WE REALLY EXIST?

There's a story about an advanced civilisation that cruised the galaxies in search of backward societies that needed help. When a survey party returned to their ship after visiting the planet Earth, they reported that there were no societies there that were worth the cost and effort of their benevolent intervention. Why? "All the machines are made of meat," they reported.

Clinical neuropsychologist Paul Broks would surely see the logic of their judgement. In his book *Into the Silent Land*, he explores the nature of our minds and reaches a similar conclusion.

Talking to students about the nature of the brain, he invites them to explore it mentally as if they were "crawling through the base of a gargantuan skull and clambering up the brainstem." After describing how the brain might look to such a visitor, he asks them: "Where is the mind In this tangled wood of neurons and nerve fibres? It isn't anywhere. And the self? What did you expect? A genie in a bottle?"

He quotes Tom Wolfe's notion of an apocalyptic near future where advanced methods of brain imaging will strip away the illusion of self.

"It is true. Neuroscience is fast developing the wherewithal to reveal in fine, bare detail the neurobiological substrates of the mind. Perhaps it will despoil the last refuge of the myth of selfhood. Our ethics and systems of justice, our entire moral order, are founded on the notion of society as a collective of individual selves --

## THE END OF SCIENCE

In 1979, physicist and author Gary Zukav wrote: "we are approaching the end of science". He did not mean the end of the "unresting endeavour and continually progressing development" of more and more comprehensive and useful physical theories. Rather, he said, the end of science "means the coming of western civilisation, in its own time and in its own way, into the higher dimensions of human experience".

In his book, *The Dancing Wu Li Masters*, he quoted Professor G.F. Chew, chairman of the Physics Department at Berkeley, who said: "Our current struggle [with current aspects of advanced physics] may thus be only a foretaste of a completely new form of human intellectual endeavour, one that will not only be outside physics but will not even be describable as 'scientific'."

"We need not make a pilgrimage to India or Tibet," Zukav added. "There is much to learn there, but here at home, in the most inconceivable of places, amidst the particle accelerators and computers, our own Path without Form is emerging."

autonomous, introspective, accountable agents."

But, he adds, "you don't need futurist new technologies to expose the brute fact that there's nothing but meat inside our heads. We have known this down the ages."

He notes that the brain evolved as a means of orchestrating interaction between the organism and the world. An emerging theme in neuropsychology is that, just as the brain has functional systems devoted to perception of, and interaction with, the physical environment, so too has it evolved systems dedicated to social cognition and action.

"It constructs a model of the organism of which it is a part and, beyond this, a representation of that organism's place in relation to other, similar organisms: people. As part of this process it assembles a 'self', a device we employ to negotiate the social environment."

The new challenge for neuroscience is to find a way of fitting the brain and the self into a common framework of understanding.

"We are all fictional characters. We build a story of ourselves from the raw materials of language, memory and experience.... the idea of the 'narrative self' has a long history....Daniel Dennett offers a modern version, emphasising the power of language in giving coherence to our experience over extended periods. Dennett says that it is not so much that, through language, we spin stories as that the stories spin us. The self is best understood as a 'centre of narrative gravity'."

This part of the leading edge of neuroscience would make perfect sense to a physicist. That discipline concluded years ago that our ideas of human realities needed a fundamental overhaul in the light of the discoveries of the 20th century. They had found that, as Neils Bohr put it, "Isolated material particles are abstractions, their properties being definable and observable only through their interaction with other systems". Physicist author Fritjof Capra, who was among the first to popularise the new sciences with his *Tao of Physics* in the 1970s, explained further in his 1982 book, *The Turning Point*. "Subatomic particles... are not 'things' but are interactions between 'things', and these 'things', in turn, are interconnections between other 'things' and so on. In quantum theory you never end up with 'things'; you always deal with interconnections.

"This is how modern physics reveals the basic oneness of the universe.... As we penetrate into matter, nature does not show us any isolated basic building blocks, but rather appears as a complicated web of relations between the various parts of a unified whole."

Small wonder, then, that Paul Broks concludes that minds emerge from process and interaction, not substance.

# Clive Hamilton's GROWTH FETISH

For the first time in human history we have the opportunity to live authentic lives, free of pre-occupation with the basic needs of survival, writes Clive Hamilton in his recent book, *Growth Fetish*. Yet just as it becomes possible to take the hero's journey of personal growth without demanding heroics, we are allowing ourselves to be seduced by the trivial indulgences of consumer society.

"Most of us are now freed from the daily need to put food on the table and worry about economic security, because the fact is that most people in rich countries are very wealthy by any standard, Dr Hamilton told *Future News*.

"Constraints of social class, gender and race have largely fallen away, and we have the opportunity for the first time to find our authentic identities -- to live out who we are rather than responding to the dictates of society and the economy. And yet just as this opportunity emerged in recent decades, the marketers stepped in and started manufacturing identities for us.

"My book is about imagining a post growth society

in which we cast off our obsession with material consumption and try, each of us, to find what our lives are meant to be about."

While Hamilton's book was described as "radical" by one reviewer, his central theme rests on principles that have been accepted as self-evident wisdom in many societies over many centuries. And it will be familiar to members of today's change community, whose profile makes a comfortable fit with the emerging social class dubbed "creative" (see story p3), and who have been embracing alternatives to the consumption society since the 1960s.

The good news is that Hamilton presents these ideas with the kind of logic and evidence that make it easier for traditional thinkers to join the seachange, as he challenges them to ask themselves "how should I live?" rather than "what should I buy?"

He reminds us that our private obsession with more income and better goods, and our societal obsession with "growth", are not likely to make us any happier. A substantial body of research shows that after leaving the classification of genuine poverty, more money

"The proper object of economic activity is to have enough bread, not infinite bread, not a world turned into bread, not even vast store houses full of bread.

The infinite hunger of man, his moral and spiritual hunger, is not to be satisfied, is indeed exacerbated, by the current demonic madness of producing more and more things for more and more people. Afflicted with an infinite itch, modern man is scratching in the wrong place, and his frenetic clawing is drawing blood from the life-sustaining circulatory systems of his spaceship, the biosphere."

H.E. Daly (1973)

as quoted by Charles Birch  
and in *Future News* April 2002

does not increase happiness (see notes on the Easterlin Paradox in *Future News*, April 2003). Instead, by stretching the gap between what we have and what we want, affluence can increase dissatisfaction.

The alternative, says Hamilton, is to abandon the pursuit of more things and seek instead the goal of meaning and happiness in life. He borrows the term "eudemonism" from Aristotle, to describe the notion that there is a spirit within each person and the purpose of life is to find, be true to and live out that spirit or inner purpose. Or, to put it in the more formal language of the Concise Oxford Dictionary, to adopt "a system of ethics basing moral obligation on likelihood of actions to produce happiness".

"That is an idea that resonates with me and many people," Hamilton said. "Joseph Campbell summarised it in that powerful phrase, 'follow your bliss'. This is what I see as authenticity, the pursuit and enjoyment of an authentic life, the path that calls each person to seek their purpose of life and to live out that purpose."

## RIGHT LIVELIHOOD

"Any discussion of right livelihood has to address the following question: is the work we are doing good for the Earth and its inhabitants now and for seven generations into the future? To make work into right livelihood, we must pay attention to just who we are as a species -- our strengths and our weaknesses -- for it all displays itself in our work," writes Matthew Fox. He says the despoiling of the Earth is not only ecocide; it is also suicide. "The distractions we are fed daily by advertisers do not substitute for laying out an agenda of needed work as distinct from work that feeds greed and unsustainable consumerism. As Gandhi warned us, 'there is enough for everyone's need, not for everyone's greed. Right livelihood begins with need. It ends with celebration.'"

In his introduction to Fox's story (*Yes! Magazine* Spring 2001), Paul Hawken said "We are beginning a mythic period of existence, rather like the age portrayed in the Bhagavad Gita, in The Lord of the Rings, and in other tales of darkness and light. We live in a time in which every living system is in decline, and the rate of decline is accelerating as our economy grows. The commercial processes that bring us the kind of lives we supposedly desire are destroying the Earth and the life we cherish. Given current corporate practices, not one wildlife reserve, wilderness, or indigenous culture will survive the global market economy."



# Signals in the noise

## Silence is fatal

With fewer than 100 fatalities so far, and a relatively modest death rate, it may be tempting to write off SARS responses as alarmist overreactions. But this is to miss the point about what makes SARS genuinely scary - its contagiousness. The shroud of secrecy in the early stages means we have missed the best chance we will have to stamp out the infection without a vaccine.

*New Scientist* 12 04 03 1127

## The super 'time bomb'

Since the stock market slump, some of Australia's biggest and most profitable companies are sitting on a superannuation time-bomb that could cost them hundreds of millions of dollars. Their defined benefit schemes are now in sharp deficit, and shareholders will bear the brunt of this fallout as more companies eat into profits to top up the shortfall.

*BRW* 17-23 04 03 1128

## A nation lost

Even before conclusions can be drawn about the war in Iraq (Saddam? Weapons of mass destruction? Iraqi stability? Cost to civilians? Syria?) a home front consensus is jelling around a radical revision of America's meaning in the world. Centered on coercive unilateralism, the new doctrine assumes that the United States not only stands apart from other countries but above them. The primitive tribalism of boys at football games -- "We're number one!" -- has been transformed into an axiom of strategy. Military force has replaced democratic idealism as the main source of US influence.

*Boston Globe* 22 04 03 1129

## How safe is nanotech?

As the nanotech revolution gathers pace, few are giving a thought to the impact on health and environment. We may live to regret this oversight. Interactions with other materials, including human tissue, are not yet well understood. Research suggests nanotubes can damage healthy lung tissue.

*New Scientist* 29 03 03 1130

## Where are the keys to the clean car?

Ford's small, green Th!nk City model has been discontinued in the US only months after it was unveiled in a flurry of glitz. The all-electric car needs no petrol and produces no pollution. Meanwhile, automobile companies have teamed up to take out a lawsuit against California's "zero emission vehicle" policy. There are about 45,000 'clean cars' in the US and 20,000 in Europe.

*Australian Financial Review* 17-21 04 03 1131

## Sugar industry threatens to scupper WHO

The sugar industry in the US is threatening to bring the World Health Organization to its knees by demanding that Congress end its funding unless the WHO scraps guidelines on healthy eating. The threat is being described by WHO insiders as tantamount to blackmail and worse than any pressure exerted by the tobacco lobby. In a letter to Harlem Brundtland, the WHO's director general, the Sugar Association says it will "exercise every avenue available to expose the dubious nature" of the WHO's report on diet and nutrition, including challenging its \$406m (£260m) funding from the US.

*The Guardian (UK)* 21 04 03 1132

## Corporate homicide

Street murders occur every day in America. And they are prosecuted every day. Corporate homicides occur every day in America. But they are rarely prosecuted. The last homicide prosecution brought against a major American corporation was in 1980, when Ford Motor Co. was charged with homicide for the deaths of three teenaged girls....Now comes Ira Robbins, a professor of criminal law at American University, who argues that the time is ripe to bring a homicide prosecution against the tobacco companies and their executives

*www.commondreams* 01 04 03 1133

## Halliburton, Dick Cheney, and wartime spoils

US Vice President Dick Cheney is former CEO of Halliburton, an oil-services company that provides construction and military support services. The US Army has awarded a no-bid contract to extinguish oil well fires in Iraq to a subsidiary of Halliburton, granted under a January Bush administration waiver that allowed government agencies to handpick companies for Iraqi reconstruction projects. It was open-ended, with no time limits and no dollar limits.

*www.commondreams.org* 11 03 03 1134