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Indigenous to Life being as expression of place

By Daniel Christian Wahl



People of the Amazon steward their ancestral home.

Writing these lines at this point in our human journey has to be an exercise in humility. The theme of this issue is 'Realigning with Earth Wisdom'. How would a white, middle-aged, academically overeducated male have something to say about that? Given the centuries of violation this particular demographic has enacted upon the community of life, is it even appropriate to accept this invitation?

I write these lines from relative comfort at a time when many are suffering the degenerative effects of the Western narrative of separation that has objectified life, disrespected fellow humans on the basis of gender or ethnicity, and othered nature for centuries. For too long have we disregarded Earth Wisdom as it has been held in custody by our elder brothers and sisters – the indigenous people of Africa, Australia, Asia, the Americas and Europe.

In response to the now strikingly evident destruction and inequality the narrative of separation has wrought, we have seen the interest in regenerative development and regenerative cultures grow rapidly in recent years. It is imperative to highlight that regeneration is an inherent pattern of life itself and that all our distant common ancestors understood life as a regenerative community of which we are members, not masters.

Our species evolved primarily through collaboration and in coevolving mutuality within the ecosystems we inhabited. For 98% of our common journey as hominids we have lived in reciprocal custodianship within the places and

bioregions we called home. From the forests of Colombia and Peru to the Pacific NorthWest and Australia, evidence is mounting that human inhabitants co-created and nurtured these peak ecosystems to higher diversity, abundance and bioproductivity over many millennia.

We are all indigenous to life as a planetary process The central lesson of many Earth wisdom traditions is about alignment with life as a process, living in right relationship and letting life's regenerative patterns flow through us. In this way of being we understand ourselves not as owners but rather as *expressions* of place. The land does not belong to us, we belong to the land. The land and the sea will be there long after we return to the soil as compost for new life.

Aligning with Earth wisdom is about living in right relationship. We are relational beings. Each one of us is unique and a nexus of intimate reciprocity within life's regenerative community. To align with Earth wisdom we have to not just learn from but *as* nature. Janine Benyus elegantly distilled the central lesson of biomimicry to one sentence: "Life creates conditions conducive to life."



Shared ritual | Sinchi Tribe, by Wayne Quilliam

As life, how do we let Earth wisdom flow through us as we set out to create conditions conducive not just for all of humanity but for all of life?

Clearly our more recent record as a species seems to suggest we have forgotten the vital significance of this question. The effects of our actions – more truthfully the actions of a relatively small proportion of humanity – have pushed all of humanity into a species level 'rite of passage'. We are facing the real and present danger of an immature end of our species as part of the current mass extinction event. Will we step into mature membership in the community of life and become a regenerative rather than degenerative presence on Earth in time to manifest a different future?

To co-create a regenerative future based on diverse regenerative cultures as elegant expressions of the bio-cultural uniqueness of the places they inhabit we require changes in *doing*, *being* and *thinking*. We need a new and very ancient worldview. Our organising ideas and culturally dominant narratives have cut the process of life into individuals and species. This way of seeing has predisposed us to focus on competition, scarcity, and mortality.

Today, we can draw on both ancient indigenous wisdom and cutting edge science to understand life as a syntropic force in the universe – creating conditions conducive to life through collaborative abundance. Life is a planetary process! As Gregory Bateson put it in his 1970 essay 'On form, substance and difference': "the organism which destroys its environment destroys itself. The unit of survival is a flexible organism-in-itsenvironment."

Conscious participation in the evolutionary process of life invites us to hold the seeming paradox of existence as simultaneously part *and* whole. From a relational participatory perspective all being takes place in

the polarity between 'being for oneself' and 'being as reciprocal expression of the whole'. We are *both* at once. As Thích Nh t H nh invited us to understand by introducing the word *interbeing* to the West: "To be is to interbe. You cannot be by yourself alone."

The Earth Wisdom of the Navajo is *Hózhóogo Naasháa Doo* or 'walk in beauty'. Their advice: 'if you walk into the future walk in beauty'. The way to walk in beauty is to 'witness the One-in-All and the All-in-One'.

Living regeneratively is living as a conscious expression of and participant in the wider nested complexity in which the local, regional and global are dynamically copresent. These nested scales are united through fast and slow cycles of collapse of structures and patterns that no longer serve, transformative innovation, and temporary consolidation of new patterns into a dynamically and constantly transforming whole. As such, regeneration as a process is intimately linked with the evolutionary and developmental impulse of life itself.

Once we learn to understand health and resilience not as static states to 'bounce back' to, but as dynamic capacities to transform and express vitality in the face of shifting context, we can also see how working regeneratively is about systemic healing and building resilient communities capable of anticipating and transforming environmental or social change.

Regeneration is about more than just 'net positive impact' or 'doing good'. It is about

evolving the capacity to manifest the unique and irreplaceable gift of every person, community and place in service to the liferegenerating context in which we are all embedded.



Life is a regenerative community at nested scales: from the community of organelles that form all nucleated cells, to the ecosystems of human, bacterial and fungal cells that make up the regenerative community you and I are referring to as 'our body', to the communities of species that create the functional diversity of abundant and highly bio-productive ecosystems, all the way to the physiology of a living planet with marine and terrestrial ecosystems contributing to a continuously evolving life support system that regulates planetary climate patterns and atmospheric composition to make them conducive to life.

Realigning with Earth's wisdom is about reinhabiting this regenerative community more consciously again and humbly returning to our role as healers within that nested regenerative community of life. Our future will change depending on the degree to which each and every one of us manages to re-inhabit this community.

As the poet Gary Snyder suggested in 1976: "Those who envision a possible future planet on which we continue [...], and where we live by the green and the sun, have no choice but to bring whatever science, imagination, strength, and political finesse they have to the support of the inhabitory people natives and peasants of the world. In making common cause with them, we become 'reinhabitory'."

Re-inhabitation in the context of the bio-geophysical reality of the places and bioregions we inhabit is *a change in doing* and how we relate to the bioregions as we try to meet human needs in ways that regenerate healthy ecosystems functions, thriving communities and vibrant economies – place by place.

Re-inhabitation is also active in the terrain of consciousness, as we learn to re-perceive ourselves as processes of becoming – processes that are in themselves dynamic expressions of the places, communities and ecosystems that bring us forth. As such, to re-inhabit is *a change of being*. The future potential of the present moment is to come home to our bodies, our communities, our places and bioregions *now* – not sometime after a long 'transition' or a 'great turning'.

It seems our current theory of change has us stuck in discussing strategies within a problem-solving mindset that predisposes us towards abstraction and the habit of "solving" problems in isolation from each other and from the places where we propose to implement "solutions".

What if we focused on being differently now? What if we re-perceived who we are and identified more with life as a planetary process of interbeing? What if we aimed for being in right relationship to self. community and life? What if we focused on our individual and collective potential of being and becoming healing and nurturing expressions of place? What if we dropped the dysfunctional habit of trying to solve abstract global problems and scaling-up solutions? What if we focused instead on our potential to create conditions conducive to life in co-evolving mutuality with the places and communities that are the ground of our being?

ABOUT DANIEL CHRISTIAN WAHL



Between 2007 and 2010, Daniel was the director of Findhorn College based at the UN-Habitat Award-winning ecovillage in the north of Scotland. He now works independently as a consultant and educator with organizations

like Gaia Education, Bioneers, the Clear Village Foundation, and the UNITAR training centre CIFAL Scotland. He is a member of the International Futures Forum and a fellow of the Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA).



Book Review

Reviewed by Alireza Hejazi

The Many Futures of Work

Edited by Peter A. Creticos, Larry Bennett, Laura Owen, Costas Spirou, and Maxine Morphis-Riesbeck

CORE MESSAGE

This book reflects the labor perspective on business, and it exposes the numerous unsatisfying, unfair environments that the working class faces today unabashedly. It outlines the obstacles and offers constructive legislative recommendations to better the status of the people who create the true value in the great majority of America's firms. It argues that the key to capitalism's effectiveness in providing inclusive wealth for all parts of society is entirely dependent on the governance system in place. However, in today's climate, history and its lessons are at risk of being forgotten. The writers underline that the present tendency is to focus on today. They think that the future must provide inclusive prosperity, well-being, and progress for all members of society in the aftermath of the epidemic. This book will be valuable to anybody interested in imagining the future of work, particularly in the American setting.

CONTENT ANALYSIS

The Many Futures of Work is a collection of articles by professors, journalists, and activists from throughout the United States, all of whom speculate on what 'work' may



look like in the future given developments in the economy, globalization, technology, society, and public policy. Creticos et al. (2021) have arranged the presentations delivered at "The Many Futures of Work: Possibilities and Perils" conference in 2017 in this book. The conference focused on the forces driving changes in labor trends, solutions to the many repercussions of such changes, and economic fairness as a fundamental policy goal.

This book is divided into five sections. The first section, "The Impact of Prejudice and Structural Inequality on Work," discusses how bias and structural inequality are prevalent and cause expanding income and wealth disparities along many economic fault lines. The second section of this book, "Rising Economic Inequality: The Elephant in the Room," examines the causes that contribute to rising economic inequality. Contributors discuss the platform economy and gig employment in the third section, "The Platform Economy and Gig Workers: Expectations, Challenges, and Opportunities." The fourth section, "The Role of Labor Activism in the Twenty-First Century," questions conventional union methods and suggests alternative forms of worker collective action and involvement. The final section of this book, "Paths to the Future," includes policy recommendations.

The book opens with a summary of many recent studies conducted by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). It illustrates how work is evolving throughout the OECD countries, but it also highlights some substantial regional differences in these changes. The book discusses structural hurdles based on gender, disability, immigrant status, and race. These and other structural constraints are almost uniformly omitted from normal job "future" estimates. The discussion in this section and throughout the book points to a sometimes-fatal weakness

in policymaking: the inability to identify material injustices and inequalities that place different people on various career paths. The writers' usage of the plural "futures" is meant to bring these distinctions to the reader's attention.

The book then covers contemporary changes in women's labor-force participation and occupational segregation in the United States, as well as wage disparity. It also looks at important hurdles to women's development and the widening gaps between collegeeducated professional and management women and the rest of the female labor force. It is concerned with the future of work for individuals with impairments. It inquires if immigrants are under-skilled or, more commonly, have been assigned to under-skilled occupations. It provides a thorough examination of the repercussions of racial stratification as the foundation of some of the most persistent injustices in the labor market.

The book investigates differences in remuneration for comparably competent people working in various types of organizations, concluding that outsourced and supply chain production innovations have significantly contributed to rising salary discrepancies. It discusses how shareholder primacy and corporate financialization methods are antithetical to creating longterm prosperity and the growth of what he refers to as the "creative enterprise."

While popular modes of service provide new opportunities

for certain workers, they also introduce a slew of new obstacles that exacerbate already-existing injustices. Although gig workers who rely on electronic platforms as their major source of income remain a tiny section of the broader workforce, task-based labor mediated through electronic platforms is an increasing element of how employees and families produce revenue. Businesses are increasingly using these platforms to engage a section of their staff.

The lessons of professional music performance as the original "gig" economy are shared in this book. It provides a framework for thinking about policies that might channel emerging institutions and practices in a socially good manner by providing a spectrum of scenarios for interpreting the future direction of the digital economy, from the utopian to the dystopian. It reminds us that large pools of venture money support the platform economy's "disruptive" advances. As a result, there is a societal obligation to encourage enterprises that profit from these financial injections to create labor-friendly, workenhancing internal procedures.

The book considers new and updated unionization approaches that are in line with the changing structure of work. A tiny group of organizers and scholars already understand the fundamental structure of broad-based unions that may work successfully in today's market. The major obstacle of establishing these unions on a big scale is not one of technology; it is one of generating will and power. The book discusses the underlying issues that have contributed to the seeming loss of worker power. It analyses three emerging areas of worker maltreatment that must be addressed and then proposes policy remedies and worker actions to counter them.

CONCLUSION

This book explains how the old ideal of a planned and rewarded job does not accurately reflect today's reality. It contends that the idea of productive employment should be expanded to encompass unpaid family care work and civic activity. Legislators must also build laws and procedures that acknowledge and encourage variable vocations and life paths rather than rigid age-graded regimes, according to the authors. They claim that both shareholders and stakeholders must hold corporate management responsible and progress toward a "commonwealth business" structure. Workers will take more action in their positions as shareholders and stakeholders under this framework to invest responsibly and recover their ability to engage in corporate governance.

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FUTURISTS IN ACTION

A PRIMER ON FUTURES STUDIES, FORESIGHT AND THE USE OF SCENARIOS

by Joseph Voros



This is the second part of a two-part article introducing futures studies and foresight to those less familiar with the field. The first part appeared in the June 2022 edition of *Future News*.

FORESIGHT, STRATEGY AND PLANNING

There is often some confusion about the relation between strategic thinking, strategy development and strategic planning. The confusion between these three types of activities lies essentially in the belief that they are all the same thing – which they are not. They are, in fact, three quite separate but mutually inter-dependent activities which have decidedly different foci of interest, and which require quite different styles of thinking for their proper execution.

Experts on strategy, such as Mintzberg (1994), have characterised the essential difference between strategic planning, strategy development, and strategic thinking. In essence, strategic planning is about analysis – the breaking down of a goal or objective into steps, designing how the steps may be implemented, estimating the anticipated consequences of each step, and measuring the manner by which progress is being made. This is a planned, programmed activity requiring thinking which is strongly analytical, logical and deductive, in order to ensure that things stay 'on track'. Strategic thinking, on the other hand, is about synthesis; it is generally intuitive and attempts to go beyond what logical thinking can inform. Because information about potential futures is *always* incomplete, the thinking required for success in this activity needs to be 'synthetical', as it were, and inductive, not analytical and deductive.

Foresight then, as a part of a strategic thinking, is designed to open up an expanded range of perceptions of the strategic options available, so that strategymaking is potentially wiser. Strategic thinking is concerned with *exploration* (based on limited and patchy information) and *options*, not the steps needed for *implementation of actions*, which is the realm of strategic planning.

The junction between these two activities is the mysterious 'black box' of strategy development or strategy-making itself, where a particular goal or objective is actually set or a decision made. The focus here is on assessing options, examining choices, making a *decision*, and/or setting a *destination*.

Thus, in brief, as a process, strategic thinking is about exploring options; strategy development is about making decisions and setting directions, and strategic planning is about implementing actions. All three are needed and vitally necessary for successfully confronting the strategic environment.

Foresight, therefore, is an element of strategic thinking, which informs strategymaking, which informs strategic planning and action. It does *not* replace strategic planning, which is a proven methodology for implementing, monitoring and reporting on strategy. Rather, foresight work enriches the context within which strategy is developed, planned and executed.

A GENERIC FORESIGHT PROCESS FRAMEWORK

The Foresight and Planning Unit (FPU) was set up at Swinburne in 1999 and charged with the mission of developing, implementing and continuously improving the University Planning Framework in ways that meet the needs of the University community, and with developing a strong foresight and strategic thinking capacity to underpin and inform the University's strategy development.

I arrived in the FPU in August 2000 and, adapting some earlier work, set about developing a foresight framework which would not only fit into the University's planning framework, but also be widely applicable to non-organisational foresight work. I presented aspects of this framework during seminars to staff, to the major University committees, and to some outside bodies, such as DETYA.

Foresight was implemented *at* Swinburne *for* Swinburne using the pragmatic approach – addressing the strategic question of how to survive in an increasingly competitive education environment. While this implementation was informed by the solid discipline and academic rigour of the futures field, it also operated within the confines of the strategic reality of Swinburne having to remain viable as an organisation. Maintaining this balance was of prime importance.

Using, in particular, the earlier work of Slaughter (1999) and Horton (1999), during 2000 I developed a generic foresight process framework (Voros 2003). There are four main elements of the process: Inputs; 'Foresight Work'; Outputs; and Strategy. The first three elements are shown in Figure 2.



Figure 2: Some representative methods in the GFP

Inputs. This is the gathering of information and strategic intelligence. Many methods, techniques and frameworks exist, of which 'environmental scanning' is perhaps the best known. The tools and techniques of 'competitive intelligence' are also relevant here.

'Foresight Work'. This can be conceived as comprising three broad steps which follow a logical sequence. The first step is **Analysis**, which is best considered as a preliminary stage to more in-depth work, rather than as a stand-alone technique itself. Forecasting and trend analysis are the best known methods. The results of the analysis are then fed into a second step, **Interpretation**, which seeks to "probe beneath the surface" of the analysis to look for deeper structure and insights. This is the realm of critical futures studies and causal layered analysis (see earlier), systems thinking, and other 'depth' approaches to futures thinking. The third step is the actual creation of forward views. I call this

step **Prospection** (from 'pro' = forward, 'spect' = look, and '-tion' = the noun form of the action; thus, 'prospection' is 'the activity of looking forward and creating forward views'). This is where various views of alternative futures are examined or created. It is where scenario planning, 'visioning' and so-called 'normative' ('preferred' futures) methods are located in the broader foresight process.

Outputs. The outputs of foresight work are the range of options generated by the work (tangible), together with the changes in thinking engendered by the whole process, especially the insights generated in the Interpretation step and by the creation of forward views in the Prospection step (intangible). The intangible output might be somewhat difficult for some hard-headed, 'objective' people to appreciate or even recognise. But it is quite possibly *the* most important output because of the way it alters the very mechanism of strategy development – the perceptions of the mind(s) involved in strategising. At this point, foresight has done its work – the generation of options and (hopefully and more importantly) an *expanded perception* of strategic options available and possible.

Strategy. The final part in this four-element framework is that of Strategy (both development and planning), about which I will say very little here, given the earlier discussion about the relationship between foresight, strategy and planning. Suffice it to say that since foresight has done its job, it now hands over its *options* for consideration by decision-makers in generation *decisions* and strategic *actions* for implementation (strategy development and strategic planning).

The results of the Strategy step need to be fed back into the Inputs of the overall foresight framework in an ongoing way, closing the loop, as it were, so that continuous re-assessments and 'course corrections' are possible along the 'strategic journey'. Hardin Tibbs (1999) uses the powerful metaphor of the 'strategic landscape' to encapsulate this notion of a strategic actor undertaking a strategic journey into the future.

THE USE OF SCENARIOS IN FORESIGHT WORK

As should be clear form the preceding section, creating scenarios is *but one aspect* of an integrated and ongoing foresight process. The creation of scenarios (as one means of generating forward views) should come at the *end* of a careful and detailed process of wide information gathering, careful analysis and critical interpretation. The deeper the interpretation carried out, the potentially more robust the forward views (in this case, scenarios) which are created. It should also be clear that scenarios based solely on the Analysis step (i.e., based solely on trends and forecasts) will generate a very narrow range of alternative potential futures, as is clear in Figure 1. Such a paucity of breadth in the forward view, owing to a lack of depth in interpretation, represents a risk to the continued viability of an organisation; doubly so if the narrow range of options generated has a high degree of credibility apportioned to it in the minds of decision-makers because of the use of 'hard' (and therefore 'solid') quantitative methods. It is valuable here to remember the maxim 'garbage in, garbage out' from computer science. Let us be careful what we put in.

Scenarios are a valuable part of foresight work – they are just not the only part – and need to be seen within the context of an on-going, long-term, 'closed-loop' organisational foresight process. With this understanding of their place in foresight work, they are a useful tool for generating shared forward views, helping to align strategic action across an organisation on its journey into the future.

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Signals in the Noise 6 IN-DEMAND JOBS OF THE FUTURE

By Morris Misel (Miselowski)

hether you're looking for a change or just curious, it's worth exploring: what jobs will be in demand in the future?

Technology might be your first thought. But interestingly, with technology allowing for more jobs to be automated, jobs of the future will be more human-centric – focusing on health and wellbeing and helping humans live their best lives.

Futurist Morris Misel explains, "While there will still be a need for people who can code, these types of skills will be cooling down and making way for those who can integrate tech and humanity," he says.

"The health and wellbeing sectors will also be growth industries, we are increasingly taking wellbeing into our own hands – including when it comes to caring for our elders, and we are learning to be more discerning in this age of information."

Here are the careers he predicts will be big in the future:

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

A range of job types will be in focus here: from health and wellness coaches to physios, personal trainers, nutritionists and dietitians. Our increasing interest in health and wellbeing and growing awareness of choosing suitably qualified health practitioners means study and experience in these fields will be time well spent.

MENTAL HEALTH WORKERS

The isolation many of us experienced through COVID-19 has shone a light on the message that mental health is just as important as our physical health. Careers in this area will cover a broad range; think anything from telehealth counseling to senior policy making.

GERIATRIC CARE

With an aging population and a shift in what we want from aged care to focus more on at-home care, all the usual health services will require more workers for this format – including fields such as physiotherapy. It's also likely there'll be a surge in demand for people who provide help with everyday living; think gardening, meal provision, driving and delivering supplies.

PHYSICIAN ASSISTANTS

With it taking up to 15 years on average to become a fully qualified specialized surgeon, there's potential for more demand for physician assistants who can be trained in far less time to reduce wait lists. Don't be alarmed; this doesn't mean an influx of trainees being elevated to expert ahead of time.

Physician assistants or PAs practice delegated medicine, meaning they perform patient exams, order and interpret tests and imaging, diagnose, order treatment, formulate management plans and review patients, assist in surgery, perform minor surgical procedures as required, and refer people to specialists.

VIRTUAL INFLUENCER 'TEAMS'

When you consider the world's top 'robot influencer Lil Miquela (aka Miquela) pulls in almost \$ 10 million a year through social media platforms, and her closest competitor Noonoouri is netting \$ 2.5 million per annum, learning to build and brand virtual influencers is likely to become a much coveted career in the future. More than simply knowing how to code, you'll be looking for expertise in psychology to nail this career brief.

Why? Miquela is a Japanese virtual rock star who holds sold-out real-life concerts while Noonoouri is an activist, vegan and fur-free supporter strutting virtual runways around the globe. These persons, who update as often as reallife influencers, are established on the basis of detailed intel on what audiences respond, to both appearance and behaviour-wise.

ROBOTIC TO HUMAN EXPERTS

This work takes a blend of IT, psychology and consumer behaviour skills. It's all about exploring and refining the bridge between humans and technology. It can involve influencing habits and purchases through in-app experiences, voice command tech and programming tech to deliver a unique experience or recommendation specific to each time, situation or place.

In short, careers that have a focus on helping humans live their best lives is the biggest trend Miselowski is expecting to see in our future job landscape.

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