Innovating Responses to Crisis: Exploring the Principle of Non-Action as a Foresight Tool

Giovanna Braidotti
Swinburne University of Technology
Australia

Abstract

Forecasts that predict disastrous consequences for our most cherished economic activities have created an unbearable tension at the heart of modern societies. We stand accused by science of prospering at the cost of the future. Yet we are assured by economics that gains in prosperity guarantee future well being. One way of solving this tension, popular with governments, is the idea that technological innovation can provide sufficient fixes allowing modernity to stay on course with a fundamentally unaltered identity, vision and mission. In this context, 'innovation' is framed as an essentially conservative construct operated by a technocratic elite. As a change-making tactic, the techno-fix amounts to action framed exclusively in the positive polarity: it seeks to bolster an existing system by adding in relevant fixes. Yet the literature that refers to 'action' in all its developmental capabilities refers to a second, negative polarity – so-called 'non-action' – that is defined by renunciation. In view that non-action options are rarely discussed or formulated, this paper serves as an introductory exploration into the nature and value of non-action and makes the case that it offers foresight practitioners methodological possibilities for innovating responses to social and environmental crisis.

Keywords: non-action, foresight, social foresight, foresight methodologies, technological innovation, social crisis, environmental crisis, philanthropy, crisis aversion

Introduction

Technological innovation and private entrepreneurship are 'change-makers' increasingly counted upon to avert social and environmental crisis. However, as crisis deepens into the possibility of catastrophe, given the likes of resource wars and climate change, the quest for solutions is morphing into a requirement for near-salvation. The situation is an odd one. Messianic hopes are being invested in change-makers that are specialists at embracing the bulk of business-as-usual practices while

adding something that either transcends a problematic limit (a technological innovation) or exploits an unused opportunity (entrepreneurship).

A typical example in Australia is the quest for a technological fix that preserves the value of coal as an energy source while innovating operations related to greenhouse gas emissions that contribute catastrophically to climate change. Proposed fixes include sequestering the exhaust from coal-fired power stations underground or first liquefying the coal into cleaner burning gas. Invariably the techno-fix is designed to secure the very thing that essentially caused the problem in the first place – namely, trade in privately owned coal valued at prices that externalise environmental costs.

As crisis-mitigating innovation, this is a conservative strategy: it implicitly preserves/conserves the underlying nature (identity) of the system causing crisis. Can such a conservative relationship to a 'crisis-maker' suffice in the face of climate change as emissions reach a catastrophic threshold-point? Or conversely, can innovation and entrepreneurship retain their relatively conservative identities upon turning their attention to averting social and environmental collapse?

When it comes to deep crisis, Jared Diamond has conducted an extensive review of societies overwhelmed by social and environmental problems and identified a short-list of conditions that inextricably lead to collapse:

> *First of all, a group may fail to anticipate a problem before the problem actually arrives. Second, when the problem does arrive, the group may fail to perceive it. Then, after they perceive it, they may fail even to try to solve it. Finally, they may try to solve it but may not succeed (Diamond, 2005, p.421).*

In cultivating the means to solve Diamond's dilemma, 'action' must at some level pull against the identity of the norm, the desired and the expected. Actions that preserve the essential identity of a crisis-maker cannot achieve this. Yet, the techno-fix that falls short of this requirement dominates discussion. Why is that? Interestingly, a scan of what strategists and policy-makers call 'action' tends to reveal an interesting bias. The term is generally defined exclusively in the positive polarity: action in the service of making change by adding something to an existing system. For example, the means to sequester carbon dioxide added on to a coal-fired power station.

In contrast, the literature that deals with 'action' in terms of human potential, claims there is a second, negative polarity: so called 'non-action'. This polarity has mostly been ignored, raising the possibility that in terms of crisis-mitigation, we are using only half the arsenal at our disposal and are missing a potentially useful analytical and tactical framework. This paper, then, serves as an introductory exploration of the nature and value of non-action to foresight practitioners dealing with the kind of entrepreneurial innovation needed to avert catastrophe (Morrow & Stewart, 2005).

Towards Articulating a Non-Action Science

Defining the principle of non-action

To highlight what is meant by 'non-action' it helps to run through some of the activities that are deemed effective at dealing with Diamond's dilemma. One often cited approach is for consumers to exercise a collective economic power. Once the

synergy is achieved, there is both a positive and negative polarity to the operation of consumer activism. People can either buy a product because it is certified as environmentally friendly (the positive polarity) or boycott a product deemed problematic by informal information networks (the negative polarity). The former can be described as an action; the latter as a non-action. These polarities are defined relative to 'business as usual'.

Despite the term's commonsense connotation, non-action is *not* the 'inactivity' which differentiates action. It is a field of endeavour and enterprise in its own right. The negative polarity is effectively defined by renunciation. Its master exponent was Lao Tzu, a Chinese scholar born at the end of the seventh century B.C.E. (Wilhelm, 1989). Non-action developed its own epistemology, ontology, axiology, praxis, science and even spirituality. In other words, it can 'do' (provide a way) as much as the positive polarity.

A surprising number of operations deemed effective relative to Diamond's dilemma are, in fact, non-actions. Examples include: consumer boycotts; strikes; conscientious objection; debt relief; civil disobedience; passive resistance. These operations amount to *not* doing something that is vital to a problematic system: it amounts to *denying* that system something it needs and wants as leverage on behalf of solution.

One of the deeper reasons for non-action's efficacy was articulated by Lao Tzu in the Tao Te Ching (Wilhelm, 1989). Tzu notes that the moment the heart craves something it becomes possible to be denied that something which births the experience of confusion and suffering. Similarly at the systems or societal level. Both individual and collective craving/suffering can be leveraged by the practice of cultivating an "empty heart", that is, the renunciation of the common but problematic desire. The term, however, can produce many false connotations. A feel for what is actually meant can be derived from the last three lines of section 37 of the Tao Te Ching (Wilhelm, 1989, p.43):

> *Unutterable simplicity works departure of desire.*
> *Being without desire makes still,*
> *and the world rights itself.*

There is a parallel in Buddhism and its practice of stilling karma, with the term very much related to the impact of actions on the world and how those actions are chosen:

> *Now the Pali word kamma or the Sanskrit word karma (from the root kr to do) literally means 'action', 'doing'. But in the Buddhist theory of karma it has a specific meaning: it means only volitional action, not all action (Rahula, 1962.).*

There is, among Buddhist teachings, a sense that action needs stilling based on an internal renunciation (non-attachment). Similarly, with the Zen principals encoded in the Samurai code known as Bushido ('the way of the warrior'), credited by modern analysts as providing a basis to Japan's post-war economic miracle (see for instance, Lafayette De Mente, 2004). It's notable, however, that in the West (outside of monasteries and the peace movement, that is), it is the positive polarity that organizations have elaborated into a spectrum of complex strategic options: plans, ploys, perspec-

tives, positions and patterns of behaviour.

The point of this essay, however, is not to categorise and compare action and non-action. Rather, the aim is to contrast the effectiveness of non-action (in terms of Diamond's dilemma) and the cognitive pre-occupation with action in its positive polarity. Why such a pervasive bias in favour of the positive polarity when experience suggests it is the negative polarity that is under performing?

Non-action versus the vice/crime principle

According to Diamond, "there are half-a-dozen types of action that often prove effective" when dealing with profound societal crisis (Diamond, 2005, p.556). He then proceeds to remind readers they have the option to *not* vote for business-as-usual political parties, to *renounce* gratuitous consumption and so on (Diamond, 2005, pp.556-560).

All the operations that solve Diamond's dilemma remain classified as volitional actions. We are exhorted to "make a difference" but create confusion with a positive-polarity definition that implies adding something new to the system – in other words, to make an addition. In fact, to make a difference (mathematically speaking) requires *subtracting* something out. It requires a renunciation, denial or deprivation.

Interestingly, whenever citizens are explicitly exhorted to *not* do something, the activity typically involves smoking, drinking-and-driving, drugs, gratuitous sex and robbing banks. In fact, calls to *not* do something may well encapsulate our entire relationship to criminality, vice and sin. Inevitably really, non-action – as defined by the crime/vice principle – requires the institution of the prison. As a society we grow dependent on using incarceration to subtract out the problematic behaviours. Capital punishment, prisons, and fines as the normative operators of non-action.

But solve Diamond's dilemma using the vice/crime operation for negating prob-lematic behaviours and capitalism (in the form of economic imperatives that function as crisis-makers) end up redefined as vice that endangers society that should at least be regulated if not criminalized (see for instance, Hertz, 2002). One lands with a cri-tique that requires a corrective cultural *demise* of the very society facing collapse ... and that we were trying to save. In other words, the normative version of non-action – the vice/crime principle – enacted to prevent collapse actually masterminds one of its own.

This attribute of the vice/crime principal may explain some of the reticence of governments to use all available means – including non-actions – to protect the planet. To some extent, they are right. 'Prisons' and 'empty-heart non-actions' are light years apart in terms of operations that make a difference. As a society we are armed almost exclusively with the former, malfunctioning version of non-action. Given its inadequa-cies and it is rational that as a society we dare not attempt the cultural demise associ-ated with the vice/crime approach to subtracting out problematic behaviours. The vice/crime principal, however, acts like a check-mate on salvation as its very inadequacy contributes to the third of Diamond's traps: failing to attempt to solve a perceived cri-sis.

We arrive at a situation where problems can be perceived, effective renuncia-tions can be identified, but we nonetheless generally fail to 'not act' (in terms of *not*

buying shares of unethical companies, *not* driving the car and so on). Emancipating non-action from vice/crime insufficiency may, therefore, liberate a broader range of analytical and tactical options. As such, non-action may well relate to work performed within foresight studies at the civilizational level and it may be useful to articulate some of the reasons for the affinity.

Situating non-action within future studies

In this introductory exploration of non-action, two synergies with future studies are drawn out. They are offered partly to start the conversation and partly to help the foresight community determine whether there is something of use in Tzu´s principle.

1. Integral futures

At the time Tzu was writing, social conditions in China had produced a malaise with a stark parallel in Richard Slaughter's contemporary "flatland" critique that describes a greed afflicted, world economy with no height or depth to its vision:

> *The consciousness of the time is characterised by what I refer to as 'living in the breakdown'. By this I mean living in a sense and a reality that something has gone wrong at such a deep level it cannot be clearly articulated, let alone resolved (Slaughter, 2000, p.3).*

Now, here is Wilhelm commenting on Tzu's social reality:

> *A deep rooted inner falsehood had wormed its way into all relationships, so that although love of one's neighbor, justice and morals were still preached as high ideals, in fact greed and covetousness poisoned everything. Under these conditions, all attempts to put things right inevitably fuelled disorder. Such a disease could not be cured by external means (Wilhelm, 1989, p.6).*

About 2700 years ago, Tzu offered the following laxative to a culture grown bloated, insipid and dishonest with "greed and covetousness":

> *There is no greater sin than many desires.*
> *There is no greater evil than not to know sufficiency.*
> *There is no greater defect than wanting to possess.*
> *Therefore: the sufficiency of sufficiency is lasting sufficiency.*
> *(Wilhelm, 1989, section 46, p.48)*

Non-action has a manifold nature but it includes an ancient tactic to confront a society that has flatlanded. The tactic claims that achieving satisfaction requires an inner renunciation that in turn assists in the diminishment of ego, the defeat of narcissism and the gain of simplicity and spontaneity. The significance to foresight are many. By taking an integral perspective (Wilber, 2000a & b), one notes that non-action is not just the post-conventional version of the vice/crime conventional truth. Non-action is a construct that is intended as a conduit to the transpersonal (Wilber, 1996). As such non-action can supplement, mitigate or provide an alternative to 'crisis' and 'stagnation' as drivers of first-tier human development. This automatically

amounts to a shared goal with integral futures. As such, it may help the foresight community to contrast the moral imperatives embedded within the conventional and transpersonal versions of non-action.

2. Moral imperatives at the civilisational level

According to the vice/crime principle, actions come in two varieties: good and bad. These are fixed attributes believed to reside *intrinsic* to actions. That is, there are some actions that are intrinsically morally defective. Such as rape. This formulation provides a basis to good governance: citizens are required to *do* the good and *not do* the bad. This is also the formula that proves inadequate relative to Diamond's dilemma and crisis-averting entrepreneurship.

Similarly, according to the empty heart principle, non-action comes in three varieties: good, bad and spontaneous/inevitable. The attributes 'good', 'bad' and 'spontaneous/inevitable' are relative such that the same non-action in different contexts can oscillate: sometimes it is good, other times bad and so on. This formulation provides a basis to good governance. Citizens endeavour to let the context determine the manner of deed required relative to an unorthodox principle: allow life, benevolence, and trust ('Te') to flow unimpeded. A clarification of the meaning of 'Te' can be derived from the following quote (Wilhelm, 1989, section 49, p.49):

> *The Man of Calling has no heart of his own.*
> *He makes the people's heart his own heart.*
> *To the good I am good,*
> *to the non-good I am also good,*
> *for Life is goodness.*
> *To the faithful I am faithful,*
> *To the unfaithful I am also faithful,*
> *for Life is faithfulness.*

The insight transforms into something starkly simple – become a conduit for Life, benevolence and trust. Clearly, then, 'non-action' avoids prevailing on an atomised self-sense and furthering its egotistic isolation. It can also supersede inappropriate uses of vice/crime morality since it is the isolated self – a distinct and incarcerated unit – that can be cleanly subtracted out by the vice/crime principal.

The approach also avoids driving that self into censoring the world into a set of relationships wherein actions, reactions and consequences are perceived exclusively from the perspective of the impact to one's self. Gebser has described this self-centred state in terms of 'perspectival consciousness' and has demonstrated the way it reinforces the crises of egotism and the deficiencies of rationality (Gebser, 1984). He has proposed that when these mental structures experience performative turmoil, the advent of crisis enacts a drive towards 'aperspectival consciousness'. In many ways, non-action as originally conceived is very much in tune with Gebser's evolutionary zeitgeist.

By seeking to still the drive to serve a self-centred perspective, non-action practitioners report experiencing the world differently. From within an attitude of stillness one can:

... penetrate deeper and deeper into the 'within', until one reaches the point of unity where the individual personality is in touch with cosmic totality. From this point of unity a view of the great essence becomes possible (Wilhelm, 1989, p.81).

It is the experience of the deeply interpenetrating depths of consciousness that permits practitioners to switch emphasis from action geared to 'saving the world' to allowing the world to "right itself". It is an unusual dictum. But as already noted in the Introduction, something unexpected needs to occur to the identity of the crisis-averter upon challenging problematic imperatives. Despite the peculiar state of the conclusion and the fervent objections it may elicit, it should, nonetheless, be readily discernible that non-action, with its emphasis on allowing spontaneous forward movements (on *becoming*), is singularly situated within an attitude of foresight.

Not surprisingly then, Lao Tzu's work (especially the second part on Te) is littered with foresight-promoting axioms. Interestingly, just as foresight practitioners do not deal in prediction and forecast, Tzu too scorns these attributes which translators have termed "foreknowledge" (with the scorn probably due to the prominence of fortune-tellers at the time he was writing). Hence the couplet: "Foreknowledge is the sham of Tao/ and the beginning of folly" (Wilhelm, 1989, section 38, p.44).

Two examples of the embedded foresight are provided, partly to clarify the point but mostly to give Tzu the final word in the form of foresight flowing spontaneously from action posited in the negative polarity:

One must work on what is not yet there.
One must put in order what is not yet confused.
[...]
Pay attention to the end as much as to the beginning:
then nothing will be spoiled.
(Wilhelm, 1989, section 64, p.56)

Plan what is difficult while it is still easy!
Do the great thing while it is still small!
Everything heavy on earth begins as something light.
Everything great on earth begins as something small
(Wilhelm, 1989, section 63, p.55)

Towards practical applications: Case study – the Niger Famine 2005

To test the methodological potential of non-action, a case study is provided. It examines a familiar kind of social crisis – famine – while attempting something unfamiliar: an examination of what is going on at the level of non-actions. In other words, the case study is an attempt at critique in the negative polarity. It asks what is not being done and why. It examines which non-action principal is at play and asks why was it chosen and what are the consequences.

In August 2005, journalists alerted the world to a humanitarian disaster in Niger. Food supplies had failed in northern villages months before the next harvest. There was no civil war, no tribal conflict, drought or other social or environmental affliction. The expected harvest was down only 11% compared to average yields. But those crops were simply months away from harvest. Adults were reduced to eating weeds,

which causes mothers to stop lactating thereby situating children under the age of five in danger of death by starvation. As with many prior famines, the host nation possessed sufficient food reserves to avert the localised disaster. In fact, Medécin Sans Frontier (MSF) volunteers reported travelling through towns where the markets had plentiful varieties and supplies of agricultural produce for sale even a few miles from the aid camps (MSF Newsletter, 2005). The problem in Niger was that the government had deliberately chosen a policy of not distributing food aid. A more important principle was at stake, one that felt privileged to endanger hundreds of thousands of people from the affected 3.6 million.

Niger's government, western donor countries, and the United Nations had become convinced that the poverty of the country (which is among the poorest in the world) could only be defeated by strict adherence to free market economic practice:

> *The UN, whose World Food Programme distributes emergency supplies in other hunger-stricken parts of Africa, also declined to distribute free food. The reason given was that interfering with the free market could disrupt Niger's development out of poverty (Vasagar, 2005).*

This is the vice/crime version of non-action where some actions are deemed intrinsically wrong, the wrongness is a fixed attribute such that the righteous know what they must never do. In the process, the inadequacy of this principle is free to mastermind a collapse of the very thing it is trying to save. In this case, the well being of rural farmers and their agricultural surpluses upon which all higher-order economies depend.

Distributing food for free is, according to free-market theorists, an intrinsically morally and socially defective action. It gives people the wrong signal; it undermines the market with unfair competition; it generates dependency on welfare thereby destroying entrepreneurship and innovation. This may well be true in terms of economic modelling. But the case study highlights a nasty by-product associated with co-mingling economic rationality with vice/crime morality. For The Good to triumph, The Bad must be banished, excised, or otherwise prevented from happening. In the process the logic creates a requirement for purity ... in this case, the purity of the market.

As a consequence, market economists neglect the *freedom* of 'free-markets' that can include, for instance, the choice to philanthropically help improve agricultural practices among Niger's farmers, just as the Grains Research and Development Corporation does in Australia where it successfully helps farmers deal with ancient and exhausted soils that are, for the most part, unsuitable for cultivation. The investment in R&D means Australian farmers routinely manage vast surpluses.

With an emphasis on purity, however, combining market economics with some other strategy (say a philanthropic one) is viewed as diluting the power of righteous action (rather than boosting its capabilities). In Niger, to enact the market-magic, the government stuck to economic theory with righteous rigour and defended the *purity* of the market (not the market itself) with homicidal rigidity. In the process, market economics became an immoral, totalitarian construct in the sense that by assuming its own goodness is a fixed property, the market is actually blind to the consequences of

its own actions. This in turn destroys the foresight capabilities of the economic theorists and their attendant governments.

Despite the grotesque consequences, the government's *intentions* were basically good. However, the ineffectiveness of vice/crime operations (related to constraints associated with rationality itself), once again, lead to the destruction of the very thing it was trying to protect: morally-correct economic freedom.

To change the government's mind required a crisis far worse than the turmoil contemporary economists associate with compromising the purity of the market. As the smallest, most vulnerable children started dying, the government hit the point where aspiration and desperation balanced each other out: food was offered at subsidised prices. Yet the aid was far too expensive to avert famine. Within this context, MSF offered its medical aid embedded within a masterpiece of Tzu-style non-action.

MSF has previously developed the logistics and the medical expertise to save even children whose malnourishment is so severe that the provision of food can kill. It therefore has the means to provide effective positive-polarity actions. Special milk formulas, enriched peanut pastes, and boosted flour and oil have allowed infants and their families to make remarkable recoveries. The immune systems of these children are, however, suppressed and they are susceptible to disease such that specialised paediatric care is also required especially during the rainy season.

In helping Niger, MSF created a mobile system that went to affected communities but examined only those children below a certain height (and, therefore, age) and then categorised the extent of malnutrition using a system of colour-coded tags in order to grade the amount of aid required by each child. Severely affected infants were treated on site, others were released with a months supply of MSF's specialised food aid. Flour and oil was also provided to the family on condition the child remained in treatment. No specialised paediatric care was provided. After all, the rainy season was starting which tends to aggravate the spread of disease: providing short-term assistance in the mobile camps would ultimately only confound the long-term suffering of malnourished infants. Instead, sick children were transferred to local hospitals were MSF had extracted from authorities an agreement that they would be treated for free. As the infants made the remarkable recovery pioneered by MSF, no other aid was provided.

The entire MSF operation was constructed to quarantine its specialised infant nutritional care in a way that avoided mitigating the responsibility of authorities whose policies where intensifying the famine. It also took long-term consequences of aid into consideration and not just the immediate crisis: it paid attention to the end as much as to the beginning. For instance, local hospitals were primed into action at a point where their resources were still competent to prevent epidemics. MSF therefore also targeted the problem while it was still small, before starvation had spread to the adults and the rainy season made disease inevitable. Overall, MSF demonstrated that the crisis wasn't the inevitable product of natural laws (like drought or locust) which humans are impotent to prevent but must stoically endure. Instead, it created a situation where human decisions were overwhelmingly powerful to affect the outcome. It then stood aside ensuring that the government was faced with the starkest of choices: was it going to be a conduit of life or death?

Just weeks after rebuffing food-aid demonstrators in Niger's capital, the government, the UN, and Western aid nations reversed their stance, cancelled $2 billion in debt and allowed food aid for free. It turns out that it is far more expensive - even in purely economic terms - to deal with full blown famine during the rainy season than to distribute food early thereby preventing the unfolding of a catastrophe.

Non-action as a social foresight methodology

Foresight endeavours to understand the performative dysfunctions of conventional and business-as-usual strategies relative to the evolution of outcomes, consequences and repercussions. In the domain of crisis-aversion, conventional non-actions too are subject to malfunction. Namely, the propensity of the vice/crime principal to collapse the very thing it is trying to protect. This feature is all too apparent in the Niger case study and it amounts to a second, epistemological crisis that adds to the original ontological one: a mindset that is pushing leverage points in precisely the wrong direction and making things worse (Meadows, 1997).

It is the occurrence of the second, epistemological crisis (for example, the ban on food-aid for reasons of economic theory) that normally necessitates that crisis-averters be capable of changing people's minds. Given the difficulty associated with challenging deeply held beliefs, and this can amount to the need for a superpower. Without it, even the best planned efforts to avert crisis can be stymied. As such, positive-polarity aid carried out in the absence of negative-polarity analysis is prone to becoming trapped within dynamics that can spiral crisis out of control. Action has to surmount the following triad (three-tier complex) of escalating confusion:

1. the occurrence of an ontological crisis (food runs out months before the next harvest);
2. the evolution of an epistemological relationship to that crisis that makes things worse (policy that forbids free food aid);
3. the need to rehabilitate epistemology relative to ontological necessities at all levels of power (how to convince Niger, aid nations and the UN to not practice free-market economics according to vice/crime morality?).

What is interesting about the triad is that forecasting essentially deals with the first tier, foresight with the second, and integral futures with the third. The dynamics of escalating crisis essentially amount to an abysmal failure of foresight at every one of its operative levels. In this context, what non-action might offer futures studies is a kind of three-tier jujitsu move: the possibility of using the internal dynamics of the crisis-triad to leverage the system on behalf of effective solutions.

The point can be clarified by idenditying the positive-polarity fixes taken to avert crisis at each level of the pyramid. For the Niger case study the comparison looks like this:

1. Food aid is the positive-polarity fix for the first tier of crisis – but Niger possessed plentiful supplies of food so officially there was no famine.
2. Demonstrations in Niger's capital was the positive-polarity fix for the second tier of crisis – but it was ineffective given a government foresworn to a fixed economic principle beyond the reach of democratic processes.

3. The UN and aid nations were the positive-polarity safeguards for the third tier of crisis – but the vice/crime principle sabotaged this safeguard into defending an economic principle that made the crisis worse.

Consequences: the result of the event-sequence is the escalation of crisis into full-blown catastrophe officially justified as a victory in Niger's battle to defeat poverty. And then the infants started dying.

From the action-map, it may now be noticeable that none of the positive polarity fixes are actually matched to their corresponding problems. In fact, they are hope-lessly mismatched.

Indeed, the innovators/crisis-averters are behaving as if distracted into solving some problem unrelated to the dynamics by which crisis is occurring. It is no won-der, then, that these actions failed at each level. In non-action terms, the fixers craved humanitarian compassion. The desire blinded them to the actual problem at hand. Being denied their desire also birthed the experience of anguish which in turn requires further, even more unrelated, corrective actions. Unexamined is the possibility that their desire and anguish amounts to granting the adversary/crisis an immense amount of operative power. And indeed, each positive polarity fix was met with some variety of vice/crime non-action (denial) and was defeated.

In non-actions terms, the problem in Niger was actually a malfunctioning vice/crime principle (not a lack of food, awareness, or good intentions). The solution amounted to a temporary *renunciation* of that principle. Actually achieving the solu-tion, however, required the leverage of a tactical non-action.

For example, recall MSF's strategy. The official indifference to the dying infants was met by the aid agency with empty-heart stillness. Rather than fighting it, MSF went along with it. They matched their medical aid to its prerogatives. In so doing, MSF reversed gears on public officials in a way that reframed those deaths as a choice – a simple, straightforward, nothing-to-do-with-ideology choice. The organization then stood back and did nothing else.

That example leads to a straightforward, three-step procedure that can comple-ment the action-map with negative-polarity insights:

1. Diagnostics: which non-action principle is at play among both the crisis-makers and crisis-averters? How does it relate to the dynamics of crisis aversion/esca-lation?
2. Analyticals: run cause-effect analysis in the negative polarity to help identify key renunciations that can release a system from escalating crisis. Note the location in space and time of people with power over the relevant decisions.
3. Tacticals: identify tactical non-actions that can leverage a system relative to obtaining the key renunciation.

Given existing critiques, economic rationality is bound to appear repeatedly in these kinds of crisis-maps (see, for instance, Chomsky, 2003; Hamilton, 2003; Hertz, 2002; Dean & Massumi, 1992). But adding to the criticism is not the purpose of nega-tive polarity analysis. Rather it is a way to dis-identify with existing reactions to crisis, especially when those methods are not working effectively. For example, analysts tar-get the 'hypocrisy' with which some practitioners of economic rationality stress moral-

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ity and church attendance. But in negative polarity mode, dysfunctional economic imperatives are not necessarily reflecting a widespread choice of evil by conventional economists. Rather, the negative polarity highlights that *laissez faire* economics implicitly relies on vice/crime non-action: it works by *denying* permission for certain positive-polarity actions. Like the activity of unions or UN aid agencies. That is one of the sources of its power. It does not necessarily always have the means to prevent actual actions and actual non-actions, however. Meaning that there is a way round its propensity to make things worse especially when its intentions are basically sound.

Just as prominent and problematic, but far less visible, is the operation of a vice/crime principle on the part of social innovators and crisis-averters. Note that in order to affect its strategy, MSF had to be willing to play a dangerous game: to *not act* in the face of starvation in a way that moves a deeper, hidden leverage point. However, for crisis-averters to deliberately *not act* – especially if intervention is desperately needed – can amount to a taboo in its own right. In other words, the sector may be dealing with a vice/crime prohibition on tactical non-actions and that taboo may itself be capable of destroying the very thing the aid is trying to protect. This raises the possibility that in some instances, the key renunciation (that can release a system from the drive to make things worse) involves the sector's own refusal to *not act*.

This may seem paradoxical and strange. But note the manner in which some recent aid efforts not only failed to mitigate famine/civil war/ethnic cleansing but actually helped to sustain and prolong crimes against humanity. By refusing to *not act*, the aid added to crisis rather than averting it. As such, the possibility that the third sector is not allowing itself to mount tactical non-actions raises the question of whether the expertise needs to be provided from outside the sector.

It is noteworthy that foresight practitioners are not themselves subject to the non-action taboo and are in a position to perform analysis in the negative polarity, identify key renunciations, and facilitate the identification of relevant, tactical non-actions.

But additionally, foresight can take the idea one step further. Practitioners can help organisations confront their own non-action taboo thereby opening the way to target it as the key renunciation that can leverage a system on behalf of solution. For instance, the use of scenarios can be applied in the negative polarity to help familiarise an organization to non-action's paradoxical possibilities and desensitise it to its own taboo.

In this context, non-action seems to offer methodological possibilities to foresight practitioners in these times of crisis. Certainly the third sector's ownership of crisis - which it can leverage by not acting - amounts to a kind of power that spontaneously appears precisely when it is needed most: as crisis deepens into the possibility of global catastrophe. Of course, to reach for this power requires contemplating the perverse option of 'not acting'. But dare contemplate this possibility and, at the very least, one can grasp why Tzu claimed that non-action allows the fortuitous emergence of precisely that which permits the world "to right itself" ... if humans allow it to happen.

Conclusions

In many ways, the training of foresight practitioners innately creates a propensity to rediscover non-action in its true form, at least in those susceptible to stillness. This process of rediscovery is occurring within a society facing the possibility of not only failing to meet social and environmental crisis but one that champions a mindset actually capable of making things worse. This is the crisis of conventional rationality. And it is to innovations that preserve the essential identity of this mentality that we are staking humanity's future.

As the synergy between representational-truth and the desire to technologically possess/control the crisis attains ever higher operational capability, it exalts action in the positive polarity and subjugates it to utilitarian goals under guard of the vice/crime principal. Inevitably such fixes carry over the underlying mental structures leading many analyst to doubt the long-term efficacy of such fixes. This is the point expressed so well by Gebser (1984, p.4):

> The condition of today's world cannot be transformed by technocratic rationality, since both technocracy and rationality are apparently nearing their apex; nor can it be transcended by preaching or admonishing a return to ethics and morality, or in fact, by any form of return to the past.

But with minds trained to avoid dis-identifying with the mainstream cognitive norms, the urge to help solve social problems too becomes bound up in the quest for ever better, more utilitarian and assertive control operations based on inadequate representation of the problem. This has led to a situation where even practitioners in altruistic organizations need to be reminded of the negative polarity, of the power of renunciation, of the call to stillness.

However, in the corridors of third sector organizations, during informal chatter, people can be heard muttering about the need to not provide goods and services so as to leverage the advent of crisis on behalf of solution. When these insights move into committee rooms, more organizations may well start articulating post-conventional varieties of non-action, just as MSF did. A few sturdy non-action principles have already emerged from the informal chatter:

1. Do not allow actions to mitigate the responsibility of those in charge.
2. Do not let the immediacy of crisis get in the way of authentic solution.
3. Do not solve non-existent problems as a function of passionately held beliefs.
4. Do not fix something that isn't broken as a function of the identity of the organization and its practitioners.

A new mental operation might well be emerging within the third sector, one with the potential to stand still when the vast turmoil of compounded action in its positive polarity sweeps by like a mini-tsunami, policed by a vice/crime principal capable of harming the very thing it seeks to cherish. Normally the ability to make things worse is viewed as a disastrous aspect of the human condition but bizarrely, it is this very property that empowers non-action and serves as a beacon to the transpersonal.

Non-action comes with three attributes worth noting from within the foresight community. Firstly, it intrinsically activates dormant or suppressed foresight capabili-

ties. Secondly, it can discern disparities between ontological (experiential) and epistemological (representational) realities, a capability crucial in terms of allowing for authentic solution. Thirdly, it can identify the impact of fixed vice/crime dogma allowing for tactical non-actions relative to hidden leverage points.

More generally, negative polarity analysis offers a way to aggravate dis-identification with problematic but conditioned norms. From being busy as an atomised ego on the chaotic surface of flatland to belonging within a unified totality with the simple intention of allowing Life, benevolence and trust to happen.

Correspondence

Giovanna Braidotti
Foresight researcher and science writer
Coretext
PO Box 12542
Melbourne, VIC 8006
Australia
Tel. 0423 653 677
Email: gbraidotti@coretext.com.au

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