

Concluding Reflections

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1. We Are All Mad Here

It is a strange new world in which we find ourselves, where down is up and what was outrageous is now merely normal. While bookshops sell out of George Orwell's 1984 with Aldous Huxley's *A Brave New World* a close second, perhaps the best advice might be found in reaching for Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*.

"It's no use going back to yesterday, because I was a different person then."

Society was different then. The election of Trump in spite or because of his racism, his treatment towards women, his bullying and his poor grasp of policy means we are a different people now. His election has given permission for society to behave differently and to believe differently, ignoring convention and championing alternative facts.

We can see the rules of the game have fundamentally changed (Ramos). So how might futures thinkers play a different game?

Change the Drivers of Change

The growth of cities and populations increasingly concentrated in urban centres has often been declared a key driver of future change. Yet post-Brexit, post-Trump times remind us that the power has not necessarily shifted to cities.

Acknowledging that cities are complex, specialised systems that may not be as resilient to fast technological and environmental change is one way to challenge the preferred narrative of the city planet. While cities provide benefits in terms of access to education, employment and diverse culture, the assumption that this experience will reshape worldviews towards more inclusive and less hierarchical values should be questioned. When does this assumption break down? What influences might young, educated and urban people be expected to experience that might change worldviews unexpectedly?

Critically evaluating the conditions for the re-emergence of regional centres or small-to-medium cities over megacities may create space for different and less polarising conversations. Localisation (Bauwens & Niaros) provides an alternative to major centralisation.

Rethink Work

In the rush towards transitioning to knowledge and service-led economics, the second-order effects of these transitions have not been well researched (Curry). Understanding future trajectories of employment and population would benefit from further consideration. Possibilities such as increasing polarisation of full

employment and unemployment, universal basic income, or changes to paid and unpaid work structures are poorly understood in the public domain where the future of work focus is stuck on creating new types of jobs in the wake of new technologies.

Localised economies provide a different pattern of work. Autonomy, participation co-creation of new solutions (Bauewns & Niaros) may help us to move beyond these stuck patterns of globalised automation. Rethinking how communities share resources and manage the provision of necessities like clean air, clean water, clean energy and sustainable food forces a focus on how well our current capitalist systems are meeting basic needs.

New modes for sharing resources such as peer to peer systems illuminate alternatives to democracies where wealth and power is concentrated in a few.

Prepare for New Governance

Breaking the concentration of wealth and power means we must keep imagining new futures that exist beyond the system (McAllum).

If we are to go beyond the system, it also requires us to better understand the system we are in. How might we interpret voter behaviour that's rewarded Trump and led to Brexit? In contemplating the rise of more participatory democracies, we've instead promoted popular ones.

Some of these is understandable. Gearing up for change is hard. Preparing to respond to threats of climate change and means people are being presented with difficult choices. Unsettling choices that risk economic sustenance. Leaders that step in to fan those fears have more short-term impact than long hard change. Fear and fight sells more papers, creates more views. Good journalism isn't rewarded by the business model which brings funds for views, not quality.

What is harder to understand is the sudden acceptance of previously unacceptable behaviour, especially with Trump. Tolerating the racism and misogyny by large sections of the community because he says he will make things great again, tolerating incompetence and the selection of unqualified and incompetent people to roles where they are clearly out of their depth. Leadership failing to grasp fundamental theories of economics, science and cause and effect.

Does breakdown of existing social order inevitably lead to something new or it is just a correction? While hope and optimism remain powerful motivators for creating new systems, in curtailing the power of the transnational capitalist class, it is wise to contemplate also breakdown and catastrophe.

It may only be through breakdown that radical new forms of governance are able to emerge.

If the current system is ineffective in meeting the needs of the many (Inayatullah), we need new ideas about new systems. In that event we must be prepared with new models, informed by research, testing and discussion to be able to propose plausible ideas when the time is ready (Dator). We can't assume that breakdown will occur on the voting cycle and must be prepared for that time to be sooner than we think.

Reinvent New Systems Now

The system we find ourselves in post-Trump is a system that feeds on fear. New systems need courage.

We may choose to abandon fear in favour of connection and reciprocity. Replacing the "I deserve" reward with one of service, honouring each other and country in a way that is familiar to First Nations people.

If the new systems of the late 18th century were established on the ideas of learned men (Dator), then perhaps it is time for the future to be female (Inayatullah). More women embedded in the current governance systems, selected and elected to democracies. More women resisting and persisting. More men who are prepared to do things differently. More women inventing and testing

models for new ways or working – paid and unpaid, of sharing resources and creating both wealth and value.

We must look for ways in which we can further the development of a shared planetary worldview (Ramos), reminding ourselves that we hurtle through space on a pale blue dot, our survival as species dependent on each other.

Reinvent old systems too

In making things great again, it's easy to see this as a reversal, a retreat along the linear paths of progress, but there are better models for conceiving patterns of change.

We may be on the edge of a pendulum swing, where societies sense that globalised production has gone too far, and new ways or reconceptualising our connection to place (Curry) and localised production may provide an alternative (Bauwens & Niaros). We may be on the edge of an expansion, that shifts us beyond borders to a new planetary mindset (Ramos). We may be at the turning of macro-historical cycles where disruption is inevitable, but needed for transformation (Inayatullah). Even White House strategist Steve Bannon sees he is granted permission for chaos by the patterns of the past.

These models are useful as they identify possible responses to what feels like chaos. If our realities are constructed, they can be deconstructed too. Responding to the pendulum means remembering the long-term in thinking how we respond to the immediate. Responding to cycles of change means we look for groups that challenge the status quo and seek to understand the shift. We challenge power and seek truth in helping with the transition to a new global economic system.

Locating our confusion as a period of transition may be more helpful than accepting current world politics as the new normal. But futurists should keep our minds to possibility open.

Stop Being Rational

“Why, sometimes I’ve believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast.”

While Dator’s law of future studies reminds us that for an idea about the future to be useful, it should at first appear to be ridiculous, it’s easier to seem ridiculous than it is to imagine the irrational.

Progressive policies are easily reversed as has been the case with carbon emissions trading schemes. Anti-discriminatory policies loosened, anti-cruelty policies erased. In rethinking systems of governance or work or place, we need to get better at imagining the illogical, the unscientific and the unsound.

“This revolution will break your heart” (Dolan) because it’s hard to understand how we could be so stupid.

The Golden Rule

Finally, for all of us trying to make sense of a world where nonsense rules and moral conventions are discarded like old skins, be brave and be compassionate. Keep inventing alternatives and creating positive engaging futures that draw us forward.

“Imagination is the only weapon in the war against reality.”

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2. Trump, a Footnote in the Imagination of Osama Bin Laden

This symposium has straddled the boundaries of agency and structure, of what is possible, what is impossible. I would like to conclude with narrative - whose story are we living?

Often leaders think they have agency, but in reality, Trump and many others are still reacting to the global vision and strategy set up by Bin Laden.

The radical Islamist had two goals to realize his vision of an alternative world order:

1. Convince the global moderate Muslim Ummah to reject the realist and secular nation state paradigm and join him in over throwing the leaders of the nations they lived in, thereby eventually creating a global Ummah-caliphate;
2. Create fear in western nations such that the moderates disappear and a polarity emerges. As they become more fearful, they would move to the extreme right (turning on Muslims within their nations, on refugees, and on the progressives within their nations), and this would further convince the majority of Muslims that they needed a safe protected caliphate governance system.

To create this future, 9/11 in New York was the beginning, and the subsequent 16 year global war - with bombings in Madrid, London, Paris, Islamabad, Mumbai - the world has been in. However, the majority of Muslims did not join even if they did feel that they were subjects of nations that were hypocritical and unjust. The more they refused to join, the more barbaric Al-Qaeda became to the point - through the geo-political disaster of the war in Iraq, and in particular the Rumsfeld decision to fire 400,000 Iraqi soldiers - it morphed into Daesh.

This vicious cycle has more and more turned the vision rotten (i.e. every attempt to resist is met with more violence by Al-Qaeda, Daesh, and the Taliban). Every attempt to negotiate is met with claims of peace and more terror against anyone who does not fit into their cult claims. Thus, the first part of the Bin Laden strategy continues to fail. Even if they - these organizations - sprung from Islam, they have left that shore long ago, and just as they claimed others were not the true Muslims, most in the Muslim world came to realize that it was Bin Laden and his jihadist offspring that were not the true Muslims.

Strategy 2, which appeared also to have failed - creating division within and between Western nations - has now returned with a vengeance, i.e. the trap Bin Laden set for the extreme right wing - the trap of identity purity, is what Trump, Le Pen, Hanson, and even Brexit to some extent have fallen into.

There is no escape as they create security and surveillance polities with no way out. The enemy is everywhere, and they give up their core purpose (progress, civil liberties, freedom) to fight the enemy, eventually becoming what they hate.

For those of us who wish to see Bin Laden become a footnote in history, and not the narrative creator, the goal is not to restrict identity i.e. to become more white, brown, Muslim or Christian, but to move toward a broader global identity, to move toward a planetary identity, toward hybridity.

This is difficult because in fear, old neural patterns are resorted to, forcing individuals into closed worlds. The solution is to continue both the European enlightenment project (of deepening democracy) and the Eastern enlightenment project (of self-awareness and transcendence).

Counter-terrorism works best with eyes and ears and a population who are with you, not a population who are convinced you are the enemy. Prevention, better representation of “minorities” in the police, capability building are far more effective strategies than singling out any collectivity.

I hope Trump and his circles wake up. But waking up a footnote who thinks he is a disruptor is more than challenging. As with the Taliban, humour should work to de-legitimize, but it can often only madden their illness. In Pakistan the Taliban attacked the television producers who made fun of them. Likewise, Trump and his clique will attack judges and whomever he considers soft, hoping all join him in the war of civilizations. Will he do what works i.e. understand that it is not a clash of civilization but a lack of civilization, or will he help succeed in creating the Bannon-Bin Laden dystopia?

I certainly hope both are footnotes in history, and we develop global immunity to the virus they seek to spread.

This symposium has been about the context, the analysis, of understanding the illness and seeking diagnosis and eventually actions to create a healthier planet. We thank the authors for their contributions.

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