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Futures, volume one and two: Then and now

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When Zia Sardar, editor of *Futures*, asked me to write some words in celebration of *Futures* 40th birthday, I knew exactly what I wanted to do. A few years earlier, I had decided to see what had been published in *Futures* about two methods of interest to me. One was Kondratieff Long Waves and the other was Age-Cohort Analysis. My conclusions were published in two parts, “From tsunamis to long waves and back,” *Futures*, Vol. 31, No. 1, February 1999 and “Return to long waves,” *Futures* Vol. 31, No. 3/4, April/May 1999. As the titles suggest, I found that many articles (and indeed entire issues) had been devoted to Long Waves, but absolutely nothing at all about, or using, age-cohort analysis.

Nonetheless, in the process of doing that research, I obviously had occasion to scan all of the items that had been published in *Futures* over the years. In general, I had been impressed by the quality of most of the earliest pieces, and less impressed by some of the more recent ones. So, I approached the task that Zia set for me by going back to Vol. 1 No. 1, of September 1968, to see if my original impression about the quality of the early pieces was wrong or not. I do not propose to test whether they are better or worse than later publications, but I will say this: as a member of the current editorial board who reviews many manuscripts for publication in *Futures*, a great deal of what is submitted by recent writers has been written about before by earlier writers – which is fine – but seldom do later writers cite, criticize, test, go beyond, or in any way demonstrate an awareness that what they are writing is not new, but has been said very well before—and in the very journal in which they want to publish their work! I feel it is only fair that present writers know of and acknowledge work that had been done before them that they could then build upon, rather than acting and perhaps believing that they are the first people to have thought the thoughts they want to share with readers of *Futures*.

It is my contention (as Zia well knows!) that the *Futures* field will never get anywhere as an academic field and/or a consulting profession if we do not know and use past material in some way. I see no reason to write anything for *Futures* if I know that only a handful of people will ever read and consider it. And I see little reason to read anything written in *Futures* if I know that it is written in ignorance of relevant work that has been published in *Futures* before.

Unless, that is, *Futures* is a kind of vanity press which lets people see, and show, their name in print, but has no other *raison d’être*. I think *Futures* aspires to much more than that, and in fact largely is under the splendid leadership of Zia Sardar.

So it was in this spirit that I accepted Zia’s assignment.

While I read the first issue of *Futures* when it first appeared (or shortly thereafter), I was not an early subscriber. It was too expensive for me then, as it is for most readers then and now. I do have a few individual early issues of the journal in my possession, but for me to write this essay, it had to go to Sinclair Library of the University of Hawaii, the place where old books go to die.

That is to say, Sinclair Library (arguably one of the most beautiful and eco-friendly buildings on campus) is an “old” building, built when the University of Hawaii was just beginning to think of turning from being a local cow-college into a world class international (or at least Asian-Pacific) Institution of Higher Learning. Sinclair was built by craftsmen with loving care. They relied heavily on local lava rocks and wood. It is spacious with high ceilings and many windows open to the never (OK: seldom)-ending trade winds. Being in Sinclair is like being under the manifold branches of a huge banyan tree (of which there are many in Hawaii). It is cool, shaded, open, quiet. A place for reflection.

And musty, since it is where all the old books and journals are kept in non-air conditioned comfort, to rot slowly away.

Once the University of Hawaii had made the transition from local cow college to World Class Institution, a new and splendid modern library had been built, called Hamilton Library. It is entirely air conditioned (frigidly so) and constructed from concrete and other thoroughly non-local materials. It also has expanded and grown over the years in order to keep up with the never-ending flow of paper publications. It is not relevant to this essay, but I cannot help noting that God does not seem to like Hamilton Library (or maybe any libraries at all). It turns out that Hamilton was built where Manoa Stream likes to go whenever the stream becomes a raging torrent from heavy, persistent rains, as happens about once a decade. The most recent time it happened, several years ago, the contents of two entire floors were swept away by the flash flood, and strewn for miles downstream until they were dumped into an old quarry (from whence the rocks for Sinclair had been hewn). Repairs are still being made to Hamilton (against my specific advice: I told them to take the hint, digitize everything, and tear down the building, but no...).

So it was with some excitement that I entered Sinclair and went up to the second floor, where old copies of *Futures* are shelved.

What a flood of emotions coursed through me as I opened the mammoth Volume One (*Futures* was originally printed on very thick paper with big print and a gray cover until it became embossed in silverplate). I felt like I was opening an original Gutenberg Bible, it was so large and impressive.

On the first page of *Futures* Vol. 1 No. 1, September 1968 was listed the Editorial Board which included John McHale, Marvin Cetron, Robert Jungk, Yehezkel Dror, and Herman Kahn. The names of G. N. Dobrov, Johan Galtung, and Hidetoshi Kato among others were added, according to later issues of Volume One.

What strikes you when you read those names?

Well, they are all male. And they are largely western. But in the terms of the day, they were very international: John McHale from Scotland (though working in the US), Marvin Cetron and Herman Kahn from the US, Robert Jungk from Austria, and Yehezkel Dror from Israel. Very importantly, Dobrov was from the USSR (The Ukraine) and Kato from Japan.

I call your attention especially to the name of Herman Kahn. *Futures*, like the World Futures Studies Federation (WFSF), was conceived as a Big Tent where futurists of all stripes could share their views. Many WFSF members, and perhaps *Futures* readers, seem to be unaware of the role that Kahn and others of the Hudson Institute played in the founding of the futures field. One of my deepest regrets is that the field soon became fragmented into ideologically “left” and “right” futurists. While “leftwing” and environmental futurists had their day briefly at the outset, from 1980 onward, the “rightwing” futurists have been entirely victorious in the United States, with the Hudson Institute begetting the Heritage Foundation (which brought us Ronald Reagan) which then begat the New American Century which brought us George Bush the Younger. Among those also begat during this era was Newt Gingrich who is among the world’s most successful futurists—right up there with Lenin and Mao in terms of being able to envision a New World, and then figure out how to make it come true. Leftwing futurists, including Al Gore, have been totally ineffectual during this era, tending to restrain themselves from uttering any Inconvenient Truths until they are no longer able to turn the Truths into policy.

Perhaps it is time for the Left to rise again, but I would not put my money on it.

The name of Dobrov is also worth noting. A major reason for the creation of the WFSF (and of *Futures*) was to be a place where people from East and West (meaning Communist and Noncommunist) parts of the world were welcome to share views about the only thing that mattered, and could discuss safely, the futures. I remain indebted to Dobrov for many things, but especially for inventing the word “orgware” to complete the sequence that begins “hardware” and “software” and “orgware” (designating the humans and institutions needed to make the hardware and software function).

Kato also signified the original intention of WFSF/*Futures* founders to be reflective of global, and not just western, ideas about the futures. Kato was the secretary-general of the magnificent International Future Research Conference held in Kyoto in 1970 at which the WFSF was conceived, quickening during the Budapest Conference in 1972 while finally being born in Paris in 1973 in the Maison Internationale Futuribles.

On a final introductory note, there were various people listed as “editors” but most of the real work I believe was done by the Associate Editor, with a last name that persists in looking like a typo: Guy Streatfeild.

And who wrote the very first essay in the very first issue of *Futures*?

None other than John McHale, who was identified as being the Executive Director, World Resources Inventory, University of Southern Illinois, that being the place where Buckminster Fuller was hanging out at the time.

And what was the title and subject of that very first essay in the first issue of *Futures*?

None other than “World Energy Resources in the Future”.

And what did John McHale have to say on that subject?

The abstract stated: “Until quite recently, man did not have the ability seriously to interfere with the major life-sustaining process of the planet. But now he consumes such vast amounts of material resources that he has become potentially dangerous to the overall eco-system. There is a need to diversify the overall world energy economy and to increase its efficiency, so as to preserve the environment for the future, and to mitigate the disparity between the energy-rich and the energy-poor regions of the world.”

Among other things McHale correctly forecast that human population would rise from about 2.5 billion in 1950 to over 6 billion by 2000. He also forecast that global energy production would increase from 3 million “metric tons of coal equivalent” in 1950 to 22 million metric tons in 2000. In other words, even though global population growth was horrifying, the global rate of energy production was even more dangerous.

He strongly urged the development of alternative energy systems, mentioning specifically photosynthesis, direct solar energy, hydro, wind, and geothermal. He also suggested using the temperature difference between low and high altitudes, which I have not heard anything about these days—sort of an OTEC of the skies, I guess.

But wait!

Have I made a mistake?

Was this a 2008 issue of *Futures* I was reading by mistake? Virtually everything McHale wrote is now being written, in *Futures* and in every newspaper in the world, as though it were startling new and urgent information. It is very discouraging to see all these facts that were discussed 40 years ago still being presented as though they are brave new ideas that we “really ought to think about beginning to do something about”!

The second article in Vol. 1, No. 1 of *Futures* was Robert Jungk’s, “Human Futures.” Jungk was identified as Director, Institute for Futures Studies, Vienna. The abstract of his article also reads like vintage Robert Jungk: “Man is not at the mercy of technology. He can control the ends to which it is evolving and can use it to create a society in which people lead lives of greater fulfillment and greater participation in culture and politics.”

These are themes that Bob was tireless in discussing. The title alone – “Human futures” – captures his humanistic concern and perspective on futures, as does his emphasis on humans creating a better future, using technology towards that end, instead of towards social and ecological destruction as we so often do instead.

And what might humans do in such a world? Shop till they drop? No: live more fulfilled lives and participate more in “culture and politics.” What a great combination! I think he meant “culture” in both an anthropological sense of everyday life and in the sense of “high culture”—art, painting, music and other modes of expression. He also discussed “participatory

democracy” and among the few sources he cited were the works of Bertrand de Jouvenel, John Platt, Fred Polak, and Hasan Ozbekhan—also pioneers and giants in the futures field.

The third essay was Yehezkel Dror, “The Role of Futures in Government”. Dror was identified as Professor, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem. As with McHale and Jungk, Dror’s article deals with themes that have occupied him all his life. Again, from the Abstract: “If current problems are to be successfully managed and not allowed to develop into crises, futures research must be incorporated into public policy making. This will require a variety of changes in the structure of government, the staffing of government, and patterns of government decision making.”

What a great idea! And forty years later – with past problems having been allowed to develop into current crises – it is still a great idea.

This second issue of *Futures* briefly described the newly formed Institute for the Future in the United States, and soon *Futures* became more formally affiliated with the IFF. Also, under “News” was a headline that read, “Czechoslovak changes prompted by futures work”. It discussed futures research done by Radovan Richter. See also Ota Sulc, “Interaction between Technological and Social Changes” in Vol. 1, No. 5. Sulc was identified as “of the Futurological Society of Prague”. Both of these items again emphasize the role that *Futures*/WFSF sought to play in healing the East-West division. For what it is worth, Ota is one of the few futurists to ever ride on the back of my motorcycle, as he did in Honolulu in the early 1970s.

The “Second Congress of Mankind 2000 International, Japan 1960” was also announced, though the date was a typo and should have read “1970”. Interested persons were to contact James Wellesley-Wesley. This reminds one of the important role that Mankind 2000 played in the formation of the futures field, among other things being responsible for the first world futures conference, convened in Oslo, Norway in 1967. It also highlights the desire of these futurists to involve nonwestern futurists as quickly as possible.

An item that has been discussed recently on the WFSF listserv was also the subject of an article by Arthur Waskow in Vol. 1, No. 2, December 1968, titled, “The Historian’s Role in Futures Research”. Along with some of the other people already mentioned, Waskow played an active part in the 1970 conference on “Hawaii 2000”, especially in interacting with members of the “Youth Congress” that preceded the “main” conference.

Dennis Livingston, “Science Fiction as a Source of Forecast Material,” in Vol. 1, No. 3, March 1969, introduced a theme that he would continue in subsequent early issues of *Futures*. I. F. Clarke’s wonderful reviews of “yesterday’s tomorrows” began in Vol. 1 No. 4, June 1969.

Among other articles of current relevance, N. W. Boorer, wrote on “The Future of Civil Aviation” in Vol. 1, No. 3. He discussed the future development of new lighter and stronger materials for manufacturing airplanes (which did happen); of SSTs and other ultra-fast planes which partly happened, but basically did not; and of the necessity of finding fuel to replace kerosene—which has not yet been done at all and makes careful observers wonder if there will be a future for aviation at all in a few years.

Other currently relevant subjects in No. 3 included Peter Glaser, “Solar Energy—An Alternate Source for Power Generation,” and Georg Borgstrom, “The World Food Crisis”. There was also a review by Erich Jantsch of Aurelio Peccei’s *The Chasm Ahead*. That book served as the intellectual base of The Report to the Club of Rome (founded by Peccei) titled *The Limits to Growth*, arguably one of the most important and contested of all books written in the second half of the 20th Century. The controversy is also illustrative of the “left-right” divide in the futures field that I alluded to above, with the right certainly carrying the day—at least so far (See also, Gordon Rattray Taylor, “Trends in Pollution,” Vol. 2, No. 2, June 1970 and “Environment and Futures Research” in Vol. 2, No. 4, December 1970).

There was nothing by or about women in the first issues of *Futures* until “The Future Role of Women” by Ingrid Fredriksson from Sweden (of course!) appeared in Vol. 1, No. 6, December 1969. It was hardly a bit of flaming feminism, however, instead demonstrating that women are not as equal to men in Sweden as it was often thought they were. I am sure you have already noticed non-ironic references to “man” and “mankind”; this in spite of the fact that women – Magda McHale, Eleonora Masini and others – were in fact active from the very earliest days of the futures field.

Concerning methodology, the results of several Delphi surveys were reported, and discussions of that technique and related methods, such as cross-impact matrices, were contained in various issues of the journal.

Vol. 2, No. 2, June 1970 opened with an editorial titled “In Light of Kyoto”, commenting on Kato’s world conference held earlier that year, and there was the first article to appear in *Futures* by Johan Galtung, “On the Future of Human Society.” It was based on his talk at the Kyoto conference. It featured his patented “matrix method” of thinking about and analyzing the futures. He also cited the “Chinese Example” of how to have a prosperous society without western style economic growth, since, at the time, the Cultural Revolution seemed to be a good idea.

Finally, if you go back and review what I have written, you will see that the terms “futures research” and “futures studies” appeared frequently to describe the field. “Futurology” made its appearance only in reference to Ota Sulc, and it may well have been the term preferred by “Eastern Bloc” futurists at the time. Since the name of the field is still being contested, it is worthwhile to observe what was used by the “founders” in the early days. Please note that there is almost always an “s” attached to “future” in these early articles. (A quick, unscientific, glance at titles in *Futures* and other futures journals recently suggests to me that these terms, especially “futures studies”, have returned in popularity once again.)

With that, I closed the bound journal, breathed deeply of its musty essence, and then laboriously returned the huge volume to its resting place in the stacks, probably never again to be opened and read by anyone. It was such a trip, to go to an actual library and hold an actual book, instead of going online to access a million lies and truths all at once, as I normally do.

I had taken the bound journal to read out on an open “lanai” facing the ocean. I did so in part because it was there that Rosemary and her sisters used to study before I knew them. There could hardly be a better place in the world to sit, read, and

think. I looked at the magnificent scene before me: the sun was shining on the Pacific in the distance, and a soft wind was blowing. I wiped a few tears of nostalgia from my eyes, and wondered about the futures of the futures. Will it ever make traction and move forward, or will we continue to spin our wheels forever in the present? What a great promise it once had. Would giants like its founders ever appear again?

I walked back to the Futures Center, where Jake Dunagan, Stuart Candy, Shanah Trevenna, and Seongwon Park were at work, and I immediately knew the answer to that question. Yes! There the emerging giants of the futures were online with their cohorts around the world, taking over and succeeding where we had failed. While the futures of the world looks grim, the futures of futures looks great.

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How I have lived and live the past and present of *Futures* and how I see its futures

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1. Some articles from the 40 years of *Futures* to which I like to return and read again

The first issue of *Futures* appeared 40 years ago, and I became acquainted with the journal as early as 1970 when I had my first direct contacts with the futurists of that time. In 1970 I attended my first Futures Studies conference where I met many of the scholars crucial for the development of *Futures* at that time. I had come to Futures Studies, or future research as it was then called, by chance, while conducting university research on social change and had encountered writers such Bertrand de Jouvenel, Robert Jungk and John McHale, to whom I wrote letters, at that time by ordinary mail. They all replied, and I hence became increasingly interested and decided to continue with these studies.

Futures was founded in 1968, and it was crucial not only for me, a newcomer to the field, but also for futures studies in general. *Futuribles* was founded in 1975. The International Committee Futuribles Group had published *Analyse et Prévision* in 1966, by Bertrand and Hélène de Jouvenel in order to disseminate the work begun in 1960 in Paris and followed by *Prospective* in 1970. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change* started in 1969 and *The Futurist* in 1967: these two journals were both published in the USA. *Futures* was initially produced in cooperation with the Institute for the Future, at that time located in Connecticut. It was the most widely read futures publication in English in Europe, and its editor was Guy Streatfield, whom I had the opportunity to meet and appreciate in 1973 at the Special World Conference on Futures Studies. I organized this conference in Rome for the newly founded World Futures Studies Federation (WFSF), which was truly international with its more than 200 participants from all regions of the world including Eastern and Central European countries, Asia and Africa.

It is interesting to underline that between the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s many of the most important journals in the area of Futures Studies, were started.

On re-reading some of the articles in *Futures* contributed by so many thinkers over the years, one finds very good examples of how much had not only been already perceived but also deeply analysed.

An interesting example in the issue of June 1971 is the article by Geoffrey Vickers, who argues that “distributive ethics are not the whole all of ethics. They monopolize attention only when collective goals cease to inspire vision and faith needed to achieve them” [1]. I think this is a point which has become increasingly important, and it would be interesting for futurists to analyse what and in which directions this process has changed or reinforced itself, so as to depict what kind of ethics are possible in the future.

In the same issue, Fred Charles Iklè, one of the contributors to the well known *Towards the Year 2000* edited by Daniel Bell, discusses how values affect social forecasting, as it was then called, and writes: “Changes in values will influence the future as much as changes in technology” [2].

These examples show how much had been understood 37 years ago and, in many cases of futures studies, forgotten by many futurists, albeit with important exceptions such as Wendell Bell.

The December issue of 1974 contains Christopher Freeman's [3] discussion of Robert Heibroner on the same lines, as already developed in a special *Futures* issue in 1973, not very long after publication of “*The Limits to Growth*”. The discussion concerned Heibroner's book *Human Prospect* and received contributions from many members of the Science Policy Research Unit at the University of Sussex, which played a very important role in the worldwide debate on the Club of Rome's first publication, and on global models in general.