

**As If I Virtually Said This to Pepsi Executives
During a Futures Discussion at their Headquarters**

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Jim Dator

Perhaps because I live on an island which has more frequently been shaped by sudden, unexpected, and catastrophic events (volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, truly massive landslides, and countless tsunamis) than by slow, predictable forces of change--and surely because, as a longtime professional futurist, I have come to understand quite well that social and environmental change is proceeding at a rate so rapid and unprecedented as to defy the ability of most people and institutions to comprehend it by conventional tools and paradigms--I have come to see that is better to believe that the future is approaching us, rather than that we are moving into the future.

And I believe it is useful to imagine the future as rushing towards us in the form of great tsunamis (previously mistakenly called "tidal waves"). In this analogy, most of us are ignoring those tsunamis. It is as though we were having a picnic on the beach with our backs to the ocean. We are arguing and squabbling among ourselves about things we think are quite serious--the sand in our drinks, the ants in our sandwiches, and who forgot to bring the mustard (this is the level of most social and political discourse in the US, I believe, in comparison to the issues which should command our attention). In the meantime, there is a dull roar penetrating the consciousness of some of us as the massive waves mount and build towards us.

I recommend we take the attitude of a surfer. That we get off our butts, face the ocean, study the waves (seeking other surfers' opinions about their shape and magnitude), get ourselves in the proper physical and mental condition, wax up our boards, and paddle out to surf those oncoming tsunamis of change.

If we do not do this--and for the most part we are not, as individuals, institutions, or communities--then we will be swept away. It is too late to stop the tsunamis (we could have altered their course when they were first noticed several decades ago). And it is too late to hide. They are coming, like it or not. Our choices are only two--to study and try to surf them (and in doing so, to enjoy the ride!) or to ignore them and be swept away.

Now, at this point, I would normally go into a more or less lengthy discussion of the major tsunamis, and of their possible interaction in to various "alternative futures"--different scenarios of the actual present-at-a-late time which we call "the future."

But instead I will only make a few introductory points, and then mention some aspects of two of what I believe are the major tsunamis facing you, and all humanity.

First of all, you need to know that I do not deal with time frames of one, two, or even five years. "The future" doesn't begin to interest me until it is 10, preferably 20, 25, 30--or maybe even 50 years away. So, generally speaking, I am of no use to you in discussing what might be happening in the one or two years--although there have been, and are, instances where I have been able to say that major discontinuities are about to happen within a year or two--the peaceful collapse of communism being one that I specifically forecast, but which no one believed, a year or two before it happened, on the basis of my extensive personal contacts with people "behind the

Iron Curtain" in the 1980s while I was Secretary General of the World Futures Studies Federation and traveled widely in Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union, China, and the People's Republic of Korea--as well as other parts of the world. I could see it coming, but not many others would believe me, and we all have suffered from the consequences.

Which brings up a second point. Dator's Second Law About the Future is: "Any useful statement about the future should appear to be ridiculous" and to elicit responses of disbelief, shock, horror, or disgust. If you nod your head in agreement about some statement about the future, then forget it. It may be true, but it is not particularly useful to you. What you need to know about the future is what you don't already know, and which you find difficult if not repugnant to hear.

Remember that in what follows.

And my third introductory point, which flows from the previous two, is to ask you to imagine our having a meeting like this 100 or so years ago.

It could not have happened. It was impossible, and unimaginable, in all relevant aspects. Imagine I am talking to you in about 1890 or so, and I "prophesy" the following:

A group of very well-paid men and women who work in one of the most famous and wealthy business enterprises in the world meet to discuss how to sell more of their product.

So far, so good.

That product is utterly worthless, arguably harmful, and wasteful of people's scarce resources. It is nothing but tooth-rotting flavored sugared sparkling water! And their main concern is with a competitive purveyor of an essentially identical product who is even more prosperous and wealthy worldwide.

Impossible to imagine in the world of the late 19th Century!

But wait, there is more.

This worthless, but highly profitable, product is sold by "advertising" (what is that?), most powerfully on a medium called "television" (what is that?) and it is sold by alluding to sexual and athletic qualities one will exude by drinking (or even just holding) the product, and not by any real benefit that one gets from the product itself. And--this is too ludicrous to even state (100 years ago)--the people who purvey the product in the advertisements are usually "professional athletes"--men and women who get paid for doing nothing but playing sports, often running around in their underwear, trying to throw a ball in a basket which, because it has a hole in the bottom, always falls out, and must be thrown in over and over again to no avail. And these athletes are fabulously rich. Millions of people pay big bucks to watch them play, and are willing to buy your product so they can identify with them.

And most amazing of all (be still my racist heart!) many of these highly paid and wildly popular professional athletes hyping your worthless product on

"television" are African-Americans (make that Afro-Americans, or Blacks, or Negroes, or....well, you know the terminology of 100 or more years ago)!

No. It is impossible to believe! Pepsi Cola can NEVER happen. Send that futurist packing. What he envisions is utterly ridiculous--from the viewpoint of 100 years ago--or even more recently (such as now).

But here we sit, in the resplendent Pepsi Headquarters in Somers, New York, worrying about how to sell more tooth-rotting flavored sugar sparkling water to people than the even more wealthy and successful competition does.

Believe it or not. And I, for one, find it very hard to believe.

The useful future should seem similarly ridiculous to you. If it doesn't, then we haven't helped you.

So on to two of the many tsunamis racing towards us.

The first one has been very well discussed already by most speakers, especially by Pepper Schwartz and Chuck Morrison--demographics.

Look around this room. You do not, by any conceivable stretch of the imagination, represent, much less embody, the future demographically. There are far, far too many white people in this room and only one person of color. You do not represent the future of the US, and certainly not of the world. And because of that, you will find it very, very difficult fully to comprehend what the future will be like, though I hope you will try.

The following statement is roughly true:

One hundred years ago, the population of the world was (and for the very first time) roughly equally divided between whites and nonwhites, and so it was possible for Western civilization, with its superior military technology and unusually large numbers, to rule the world.

Because of differences in fertility between the so-called "developed" and "developing" areas, the nonwhite proportion on the globe is roughly 80% and the white has reduced to 20%. So while the West still rules, its numerical dominance is rapidly fading away.

If these demographic trends continue, as seems highly likely, by the mid point of the 21st Century, the white portion of the globe will be roughly somewhere between 5% and 1%, with 95-99% being nonwhite.

Farewell, whitey. It was nice to know you. Do the future a favor and take a white person home for Christmas. Let's sponsor a Walk for the Great White Race.

And while the statistics are not quite so dramatic for the US as they are for the world, the trends are clearly moving in the same direction. To this extent, Hawaii (where there is no ethnic majority, but many peacefully co-existing "minorities") is the harbinger of the future for the entire US, not only in terms of many minorities, but also in terms of out-marriages: most people in Hawaii do not marry someone of their own ethnicity. Indeed, it is a sign of ignorance, closed-mindedness, if not outright prejudice to in-marry. As a consequence, "local" children of "mixed ancestry" are

privileged above any "pure bloods" in Hawaii. We are, as the late Governor John A. Burns once said, happily becoming "the Golden People of the Pacific." Some of my Micronesian friends noting that this as a global phenomenon, are calling the future, "The New Bronze Age."

There is much more to be said about demographic changes in the US and the world, and Dr. Schwartz and Mr. Morrison said many of the most important things, including the fact that the US, and the West (but not the world!) is rapidly aging.

But let me move on to what I think is an even more important tsunami.

To put it bluntly, "nature is dead". We live in an increasingly artificial world. There is no point in trying to "save" or "restore" nature. The processes which "killed" nature began with the emergence of agriculture, 5,000 to 10,000 or more years ago. It is certainly the case that the last 200-300 years of industrial activity have hastened nature's demise. And as countries like China and India (each having almost one-third of the present world population) grow and develop and attain a standard of living which uses resources the way we do in the West--then you can just kiss Mother Nature's sweet ass good-bye. Indeed, there is virtually no "nature" left in either India or China already, since they have been active civilizations for a very, very long time.

So I agree that THE major challenge to humanity in the immediate future is (in the words of a title of a book by Walter Truett Anderson) "To Govern Evolution." If there is to be life in the future--most certainly some kind of human life beyond the 21st Century--then we must learn how to imagine, create, and manage "artificial life" within a wholly "artificial environment" very, very quickly.

Yet most of us are worrying about selling more tooth-rotting flavored sugar sparkling water rather than with imagining, inventing, and managing artificial life. And those few who are worried about the fragility of all natural systems are hopelessly trying to stop an utterly unstoppable tsunami by endeavoring to restore nature to some prior, mythical, balanced and sustainable state, which is not attainable, in my judgement.

I should add that most current social systems are in jeopardy too. For example, both the political and economic systems of the present (that is to say, what we call "democracy" and "free market capitalism") are completely unsustainable over the 21st Century as well.

We might have been able to "save" nature several hundred years ago, or even a few decades ago (though I am not sure about that). But now "preserving nature" is not an option because there is no "nature" (by which I mean "processes which operate entirely without human interference") anywhere on the planet. Even those few areas which seem to be "natural" (but actually are either already being managed by humans, or are vainly struggling to survive) will be gone as human population swells, rural communities vanish, and the entire world becomes one throbbing megalopolis.

Now, in such a world, Pepsi has one hell of an important contribution to make. Here's why.

I have already pointed out that Pepsi is a totally artificial product which has been at the forefront of the transformation of the "real" world of the five senses into the "virtual world" of images, myths, and dreams. That transformation is by no means finished. Infinitely more powerful and seductive technologies and processes than "television" and "advertising" are being developed which seem likely to wholly engulf what is left of "the real world."

Developments in genetic engineering, artificial life, and artificial intelligence also are racing towards us, sweeping aside the old "reality" and creating a myriad of kaleidoscopic virtual realities.

Thus "Pepsi" in the 21st Century (should it exist as such--highly unlikely given the increasingly predatory, if not suicidal, nature of "capitalism") could be a major player in all aspects of artificiality, not only in terms of the myths and dreams which it will help create, but also (for one example) in the creation of wholly artificial food. This surely will be one of the many transformations of the 21st Century: just as "agriculture" ended "hunting and gathering" (except for "sport" which is what everything, once vital, becomes when it is no longer essential), so also will artificial, synthesized, nanotech/biotech fabricated "food" replace that which is grown in the ground (more or less--discounting the fertilizers and pesticides: agribusiness is very nearly producing "artificial food" now). Indeed, at some point in the 21st Century it will be declared illegal to waste land by growing food on it. I hope that point will be reached before the last available acre of arable soil is paved over by the global megalopolis, but I can't be confident of that.

So I hope to see Pepsi become a leader among the handful of surviving global megacorporations creating artificial life for an artificial world. And it might start by acquiring back the junk food operations it recently divested, and slowly sneaking more essential vitamins, minerals and roughage into its products--which already are the primary food source for more and more people worldwide anyway.

Let's see if I am right about any of this. Let's agree all to meet here (wherever "here" might be) on January 31, 2027 (not that such obsolete cultural time reckoning is likely to still prevail) and see what, and who, is the Real Thing then. And then, let's agree to meet one hundred years after that.

As if.