

Cultural Reconstruction in the 'Post-Modern' World: Aspects of a Renewed Worldview*

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How can one reconstruct a culture? After all, we have seen the *decline* of certainty during the present century and the rise of various perspectives that have greatly complicated our view of the world. The idea of cultural reconstruction can all too easily suggest a kind of *hubris* that is unjustified in post-modern conditions. The construction metaphor itself implies a tangible subject and an assumption of control that may seem inappropriate in this context. So why use it?

This is a good time to remind ourselves of the *active* role of humans in shaping their present and future. If there is a central idea underlying the foresight principle, it is that humans are creators of culture, makers of meaning, conscious *agents* in the social/historical process. Of course, there are limits on our ability to do any or all of these things. We never have objective knowledge, never achieve perfect understanding and never accurately foresee the full consequences of everything we do. From these objections, some will construct a philosophy of despair, saying in effect, that issues of cultural design are simply too difficult. That is the default stance of the mass media and the educational establishment in the mid-90s. But it is an unhelpful one.

The post-modern movement has tended support such a view. The subject (IE us) we are told, has been 'de-centered'. There are frightening gulfs between the sign, the signifier and the signified. Deconstruction has torn away many of the old certainties leaving a sense of radical emptiness at the heart of things. Values and other meaning structures are seen as provisional and culture-bound. Some buildings have even been given architect-designed cracks - a reflection of epistemological 'cracks' in the worldview, perhaps. A vapid pop culture fills many of the sophisticated, newly available channels made possible by satellites and fibre optics. Amidst all this chaos, where is certainty?

Yet perhaps too much weight has been given to post-modernism and its fashionable angst. It is, after all, not a culturally monolithic enterprise, but one several found in the arts and humanities. It cannot speak for culture as a whole, nor be taken as an authoritative commentary on the world. It is an *interpretive framework* and, as such, has all the strengths and failings of its kind. I conclude that we should feel free to take from post-modernism what we can, and also free to resist its over-extension into other areas. So, rather than share in the prevailing mood of pessimism, I want to complete this book with a perspective that is optimistic, but not naive.

My starting point is to acknowledge the difficulty of the enterprise suggested by the term 'cultural reconstruction'. There are two points. First, culture is not something we operate on as if it and we were separate. Rather, it is something we are immersed in and deeply conditioned by. So the notion of reconstruction I am using here should not be taken to imply merely an external operation, still less a return to Cartesian dualism. *It will necessarily be a process in which people change even as they exert their reason and intentionality upon cultural phenomena.* Second, we must acknowledge that there is no clear 'rule book' to guide our attempt to reconstruct late industrial culture. Such 'instructions' as we do have are gleaned from many sources: from our interpretations of the past and present, critiques, non-Western cultures and, of course, from foresight. Such sources are open, provisional, and even problematic.

Yet rather than take these real difficulties as reason for despair, I want to see them as indicating the need for a certain modesty as we contemplate vast and hidden forces. In other words, we have both to feel free and empowered to re-negotiate powerful cultural commitments and structures inscribed within the present and, at the same time, to avoid the over-stated confidence that we know fully what we are doing; for manifestly we do not. The key point is that *between the extremes of despair and over-confidence lies a profoundly significant arena of freedom.* Its boundaries are uncertain and contested but the arena is certainly broad enough to provide us with a substantial

degree of steering capacity. This is a central claim of the present book: we cannot possibly know everything, but we are far from helpless.

Given these qualifications, how, then, can we begin to reconstruct the culture? One answer is implicit in the previous chapters. We can look back, discern the origins of the industrial system, trace the consequences and, finally, look ahead with every means at our disposal to form judgments about the entire perspective. I use the term 'judgment' advisedly. For while technique is certainly part of foresight work, judgment remains primary. That is why this book concentrates on the latter. If our forward view indicates that a terrible and devastated world is likely, then the loop of futures thinking directs us back to the roots of that devastation in the present. In other words, *reconstruction begins with a cultural diagnosis*. This was the subject of Chapters 1 - 3.

The use of foresight lends valuable weight to scenarios that will become more likely if we continue with the business-as-usual outlook. It provides part of the motivation that will enable us to engage in serious system change, re-design, before changes are forced upon us. What, then, are the next steps? Here are some possibilities.

1. Discard aspects of the old world view and re-constitute the social and economic structures that flowed from it.
2. Consciously intervene in some of the processes of meaning making through which present-day social reality is mediated.
3. Employ the notion of 'design' to develop and implement new, or more appropriate, ideas, principles, practices and structures.
4. Create a shared vision of a future worth aiming for.
5. Institutionalise foresight in order to make the coming transition clearer and easier, and so that such efforts can be monitored and evaluated.

The first point was discussed above in chapters One (under the heading of 'the metaproblem') and Two. The second and third points are taken up in the present chapter. The fourth point is the subject of Chapter Ten. The fifth is a thread connecting all parts of the book.

Processes of meaning making

1. Using cultural editing

Back in 1935 Ruth Benedict published a book called *Patterns of Culture* that took the view that no one looks at the world through 'pristine eyes'. Rather, Benedict showed how we all see it *edited* by a particular configuration of customs and institutions and ways of knowing. This is no longer a new insight, but its importance has been widely overlooked.

On the negative side, the cultural editing that has taken place within the industrial worldview has had a number of powerful consequences. We have come to view the world in certain ways and these have powerfully affected how we have used and abused it. But foresight tells us that many of the resulting 'habits of perception' are not viable in the longer term. *If we want to create a sustainable culture we will have to find ways to 're-program' some of our cultural editing processes*. This is a very positive option; one that puts back into people's own hands the means to achieve a real cultural transition.

Current dilemmas suggest that we need to re-construct our worldview - literally change some of the ways we construe the world. So it is well to recognise that this is an historically unprecedented task. It will not be accomplished overnight. Nevertheless, we can clarify some aspects of the task and propose others that may qualify for inclusion in a renewed worldview. For example:

- A sense of temporal process embracing past, present and future;
- A more conscious and strategic use of time-frames, matching them appropriately to different activities;
- A global and systemic view;
- Recognition of the rights of future generations;
- A recovery of participating consciousness; and
- A commitment to higher-order human development.

Some of these are examined in this and the following chapter.

It is not clear to what extent a culture can consciously change its own editing processes. Looking back, however, at successful examples of systemic change (such as have been to some extent achieved by the environmental and women's movements), there is sufficient evidence to justify optimism. *Change is possible when the time is right and the ideas involved are compelling enough to win wide support.* This does not mean that all problems can be solved. Many will only be resolved when their deeper dimensions are more fully understood and more widely appreciated. Yet even now there are numerous ways ahead.

2. Re-negotiating meanings

The notion that words simply mean what they say and that texts embody a coherent experience or account of the world is a deeply held and comforting one. It is comforting because it preserves a simple view of language and meaning which naturalises a commonsense, taken-for-granted, view of the world. Yet, like the boundaries they enshrine, the comforts of realism are illusory. They obscure the ideological character and uses of language and leave individuals open to mystification and exploitation. There is insufficient latitude here to permit the full flowering of human communicative ability and expressiveness. In order even to notice ideological and linguistic traps (let alone to penetrate the fog of misdirection and escape them) it is essential to yield some degree of comfort and certainty. Yet in so doing, what is lost in narrowness and naivety can be gained in breadth and freedom to 'speak one's own word'.

Traditional literary criticism concentrated on understanding 'what the author meant' and classifying his/her stylistic attributes according to a pre-defined system of taken-for-granted criteria. Now the writer occupies a less privileged position and texts have been said to provide an open framework for the *construction* of meanings. While this view may readily be overstated, the reader has become much less a passive observer and more an active participant in the communication process. The reader is fully capable of calling forth meaning, purpose and intentionality from a range of sources, including texts. While in practice some texts may be susceptible to only a limited range of interpretations it is, of course, always possible for the reader to reject textual assumptions and claims, indeed to leap beyond them to quite new areas of concern. This is a key point: *knowledge is never 'finished' and therefore meanings are always fluid and negotiable.* The ramifications of this view are of great significance for people facing up to the decline of their worldview.

This is so because, in presuming a more equal status between author and reader, an important principle can be established which applies equally to other contexts: advertisements, editorials, newscasts, political speeches and images/projects of the future. Moreover *the concept of 'text' can be utilised as a metaphor and applied it to cultures and traditions.*

Contrary to received wisdom (if that is the right term), our present transition from industrial ways of life is not centrally a matter of economic and technical change. These features are 'noticed' and exaggerated by viewpoints founded upon or conditioned by, instrumental reason. Opposed to this perspective (which stresses externalities) it seems to me that *by understanding the present cultural*

transition not so much in terms of the external regulation or control of techniques and technologies, than as a transformative process involving breakdowns and renewals of meaning, we penetrate to the core of all our major concerns.

In a critical futures view those concerns are perennial. They relate to the essentially human process of constituting meaning, significance, purpose and value. It follows that *if individuals are free to reinterpret texts they are also free to reinterpret inherited traditions and normative views of 'desirable' futures.* (In fact, we should doubt if they can do otherwise since meanings are never simply copied, duplicated, taken over intact.) If there can be no final or authoritative reading of history or futures, it follows that in principle each person has the same potential right of access to the crucial councils and commitments of the day. Those who so choose can, therefore, without regard for social status or academic qualifications, participate in cultural reconstruction and renewal at a very fundamental level.

3. Encouraging social learning and social innovations

Social learning is always necessary when a society must adapt to changing conditions. Yet there is always a time lag between perception, decision-making and response. In the 20th Century we saw some highly effective group learning and innovation in areas like medicine, computing and space exploration. Yet in the wider arenas of public policy such as health, economics and the environment, we also witnessed a string of long-term failures. These were multi-dimensional failures of understanding, imagination, vision and response. Today our societies, environments and children are more at risk from a variety of significant threats than ever before. Something is therefore clearly very wrong with the social learning processes now in place. In brief, they are slow, ineffective and non-systemic.

Social learning can take place at a number of levels and in a number of ways (Figure 9.1). *Surface learning* refers to changes that can take place regardless of underlying structures. *Organisational learning* refers to changes in patterns of human activity within organisations and groups. *Deep learning* refers to changes in cultural programming at the level of epistemologies, fundamental values and ways of knowing. Social learning can occur informally, through planned incrementalism or via what has been termed 'crisis learning'. A further option is that of deliberate systemic change.

Figure 1 - Social Innovations

Surface Learning	Byke helmets Speed bumps Credit cards	Play groups No-fault divorce Safe sex
Organisational Learning	Health insurance Ethical investing Futures workshops	Strategic planning Neighbourhood watch schemes Publically funded foresight institutions
Deep Learning	Universal suffrage Deep ecology Intergenerational ethics	Intrinsic value Post-materialist economies Critical and epistemological futures study

Our present crisis of social learning is at least five-fold.

1. The world is too complex to be understood easily. This makes it very hard to achieve consensus.
2. The cultural programming now in use is defective in certain major respects (manifested, for example, in short-term thinking and lack of foresight capability). This means that major social formations (politics, economics, commerce, education, entertainment) operate according to redundant principles.
3. Social and political leaders seldom have access to the necessary tools, understandings or policy options. They are hamstrung by questionable pre-judgments, self-interest and industrial-era imperatives.
4. There are too few forums where social learning can be facilitated. The 'official' organs of the state that could facilitate social learning (the judiciary, the parliament, the church etc.) are, by and large, still playing old games by old rules. Few within them appreciate that the game itself has changed.
5. Diversionary 'surrogate worlds' intervene between individuals and the reality of the social/economic/ecological context in which they live. The former have come to play a powerful role in shaping perceptions of the world. But they occupy the human nervous system in an often closed and unproductive loop, exerting tranquilising and mystificatory effects that serve to *obscure* major systemic problems.

Clearly there are no simple solutions to this mismatch between a deteriorating world picture and inadequate human responses. Yet social learning can be facilitated in many ways. Some possible responses include the following.

- Expose the theoretical and applied defects of the industrial worldview.
- Pay careful attention to the critiques presented by marginal groups.
- Seek social support for necessary innovations.
- Highlight the critical role of social innovation and the role individuals can play in supporting it.
- Seek to re-write rules, principles, procedures that are now unhelpful.
- Develop foresight capacity in many locations and link them with long-term, sustainable visions.
- Reconceptualise present dilemmas as opportunities for human and social inventiveness.

Such a list should not be taken to suggest that social learning can be planned, manipulated or imposed from above. There are no blueprints. The process is much more subtle and diffuse. It's also important to note that social innovations are not limited to grand plans and schemes. The Institute for Social Inventions has fostered and collected many more modest examples. Yet the *collective* impact of many small innovative changes could be significant in the long term.

Social learning will, in all likelihood, take place through each of the means noted here. Some will be directed, purposeful change, some will be incrementally achieved from the margins, and some will be crisis learning driven by the social experience of disaster. The latter cannot be avoided. But there is much that ordinary people can do to understand the shifts they are living through, find appropriate means of responding to them and therefore participate in the task of cultural innovation and renewal.

4. Balancing instrumental rationality with participating consciousness

As noted in Chapter One, instrumental reason (IR) is goal-oriented reason. It draws upon those parts of the human mind that follow clearly laid-down rules in order to carry out certain kinds of

tasks. Reason is one of the greatest human and cultural achievements. It allows us to learn from experience and to perform a very wide range of mental and physical operations upon each other and the world. Using reason we transform the chaos and contradictions of sensory experience into rules, procedures, laws and devices of great technical sophistication and practical power.

The entire edifice of science and technology has been built with the power of IR. It is the cognitive force behind the industrial era. The scientific experiment is the heart, the powerhouse, of IR. The wealth of instrumental knowledge that supports our civilisation has poured forth from its steadily reproducible rhythm.

Many of our difficulties with IR stem from the fact that it has certain features that must be kept in check and not generalised into other domains. A key problem is that while IR provides us with very powerful tools (means), it can say little or nothing about the purposes (ends) those tools can serve. Another is the constant danger of reductionism: of saying that something is *only* this or that, when in fact it is arguably much more. Reductionism rears its head when something cannot be measured, and that something is assumed not to be important, or worse, not to exist.

The sheer practical power of IR, and the range of enabling devices it has helped to create, have made other aspects of human life and culture seem less important. Indeed, IR has been 'read upon' domains (such as spirituality and myth) where it has very little explanatory power at all. *The end result of this long process of cultural imperialism has been that we are rich in means, but poor in ends.* An industrialised culture is one that has exaggerated the role of IR and thereby created for itself a one-sided view of the world. Without other countervailing principles, IR expands to take over the whole world, thereby providing fertile ground for the now-familiar technocratic nightmares described in SF and elsewhere.

On the other hand, participating Consciousness (PC) is not instrumental or goal-oriented. It draws on our capacity for empathy and awareness. It is not precise and cannot be measured. It breaches the boundary of 'I' and 'other'. But this is not achieved by pretending that differences are illusory. Rather, boundaries are seen as *provisional* and *permeable*. Self and not self do not exhaust all available categories. Some categories (and their boundaries) overlap. This means that a range of modes of awareness is possible. These modes are not in the making and doing field at all, but in the common underlying processes of knowing and being.

PC identifies elements of self in its environment. It perceives an unending flow of interactions between an extended self and its broad, long-term environment. These interactions occur in various ways: through physical structures, body functions, energies, symbolic exchanges and so on. What emerges from all this is a sense of *a larger self*; a self which merges into the environment and also extends into past and future. It is *an involved self* that contrasts plainly with the model of the uninvolved scientist 'objectively' operating upon nature.

A strong experience of PC has many powerful consequences. *Among them are that it permits the direct experience of intrinsic value in nature.* (See below.) This perception is pivotal. It means that nature is no longer of value only for use or for exchange. It is seen in non-instrumental ways. If this perception of intrinsic value were to displace existing use-, or exchange-oriented, notions and become embedded in the foundations of our culture, the whole edifice would change. The qualities of participation support a responsible ethical stance toward the rest of the world. Empathy merges into responsibility, and this into a notion of service and pursuit of the higher good. PC therefore stands as a contrast to IR, and to some extent, a countervailing force. Yet the two modes should not be seen in simple opposition.

The way forward is not simply to reject instrumental rationality, empiricism or technology in any simple-minded way but, rather, to situate each of them in their wider context. This sounds

reasonable enough but the suggestion therein is radical. It is that rather than approaching knowledge in the usual narrow ways - through subjects, disciplines and specialities - we look for ways of *beginning* from this wider, broader context in space and time. There is, perhaps, no better way to start than with the search for new worldview commitments. Fortunately, there are many available options.

New, or renewed, worldview commitments

1. Developing a global, systemic view

The present lack of systems consciousness is one of the greatest dangers to the future of this planet. Without it we cannot comprehend the consequences of our actions, nor anticipate their effects. It is the *smallest* frame within which to view human affairs. Anything less lacks the capacity to deal with the interconnectedness and systemicity that characterise the global system.

Such a view would not have been possible a few short years ago. But with the development of ecological, systemic and holistic perspectives it has rapidly become practicable. Furthermore, at the (admittedly low) level of data (as distinct from knowledge or wisdom) such a view is technically supportable. For example, every classroom and home could now have access to remote sensing via satellite on a real-time basis. That this has not yet happened widely is, to some extent, a consequence of the way that the agendas for info-tech (IT) have been subverted by vested interests and obsolete frameworks of understanding. As in so many other areas, a highly sophisticated technical capacity exists but the consciousness directing it remains preoccupied with marketing, power and control.

It is not merely that the nation state in its monolithic form is obsolete. As argued in Chapter Two, many of the institutions and power structures which took shape in the industrial era are reaching the end of their useful lives. Yet they persist in enforcing and sustaining radically limited interests rather than universal ones. For example, the systematic application of merchandising recommends the misleading strategy of self-absorption to millions, and millions have believed it. The dynamic and imperative so created owe nothing to a fragile, interconnected world and everything to the abstracted nullities of money, profit and power. This is a system that feeds upon itself, devours its own children and is parasitic upon the shared foundations of life. Yet, properly understood, it also offers a powerful stimulus for rising above the compulsive escapism of cultures in crisis.

Many technical fixes have been put forward for dealing with social and ecological breakdown but it is becoming clear that solutions are increasingly unavailable upon the level at which they are experienced. The lack of global systems consciousness cannot be rectified merely by installing computers and fine-tuning the economy. The answer to television is not media education but a recovery of human identity and purpose. The most significant step toward global consciousness would be a qualitative shift in human thinking beyond the present limitations of mental/egoic life to more universal concerns which are both global and long-term.

2. Taking a broader view of time

I, and others, have written above about the drawbacks of Western linear time: its unidirectionality, narrowness and fractured, unlivable present. The whole edifice of this notion of time reflects an obsession with measurement, the empiricist's particular conceit. If empiricism and measurement were merely to occupy their legitimate place in the overall scheme (at the level of rationality and technical operations) there would not be a problem. But since they have become universalised, their correspondingly underdimensioned epistemology has been read upon the whole world, not least of all through time.

But Western linear time cannot represent, model or sustain for us the 'rootedness' of our origins in the past, our very broad cultural present or our deep participation in many of the structural continuities of the future. It overlooks the fact that a globally distributed culture equipped with powerful technologies *already occupies a very broad span of space/time*. The dislocation between existing structures and processes and their conventional representations places severe limits upon the coherence of the Western world view. It serves to sanction and obscure the unabated assault upon the planet's ecology and resource base. That is partly why we are now receiving such uncompromisingly powerful messages from the global environment.

In the heady years of post World War 2 expansion it suited the powerful to sponsor an ideology that harked back to the past for its inspiration and rationale. But in present conditions it is very clear that we require credible models, coherent visions of a wide variety of futures in order to guide our choices in the present. There is a very large gap between the frequently mentioned 'speed of change' and the imaginative capacity to articulate credible future alternatives. A more careful use of time-frames, however, would do much to overcome this limitation.

Time frames are distinct periods of time, some of which can be associated with certain human activities. Yet periods measured in, say nanoseconds, fall below perceptual thresholds and geological millennia exceed our usual requirements by orders of magnitude. For most human purposes, time frames range between seconds and years. For each human activity there is an appropriate time frame. Driving a car or typing each requires a very short one (seconds or less). Listening to music typically requires a longer one (minutes to hours). Taking a course may extend over a year. Raising children obviously takes many years.

At a cultural level, time frames vary. Yet for planning purposes, they seem to range between one year and perhaps five years. Typically, in politics a year is regarded as a very long time, and the ultimate time frame is the next election. Yet human activities have implications that extend over millennia. Two test cases are the extinction of species through human action, and the creation, use and storage of fissile materials such as plutonium (which has a 'half-life' of 250, 000 years). Such examples suggest that some time-frames have a 'default' status which may be mismatched with the activity in question. This is certainly the case with most major institutions which tend to regard the past as authoritative and to heavily discount the future.

It is tempting here to suggest that time frames should just be extended. But that is too simple. The point is, can particular time frames be matched with certain activities? For the purposes of social policy, economics and education, for example, there is a case for establishing a more extended time frame (but not one which is unmanageable). The 'two hundred year present' may represent a more adequate 'default' standard for broad cultural purposes than the one-to-five-year plans now in evidence. If the areas just mentioned were to reflect *both* halves of this period then the frame of reference would shift accordingly. This would be a major achievement.

The underlying point, however is yet more subtle. While, in general, some activities need to be matched with longer time-frames (so as to cover impacts, implications, responsibilities etc.) the more important shift is toward *the conscious use of time-frames*. The study of human cultures in time lags far beyond their study in space. Yet the interaction of temporal process with culture is a fascinating field of study with important implications for the organisation and pacing of human affairs.

By opening up the futures dimension beyond the technical/instrumental imperatives of forecasting and planning humans can move out of the isolation and alienation of the minimal present and create 'a space in time' to re-negotiate futures worth living in. Within a wider, extended present there arise many possibilities that invite criticism, selection, reconceptualisation and choice. In this way the perceptual field may be extended such that we do not need to experience catastrophe

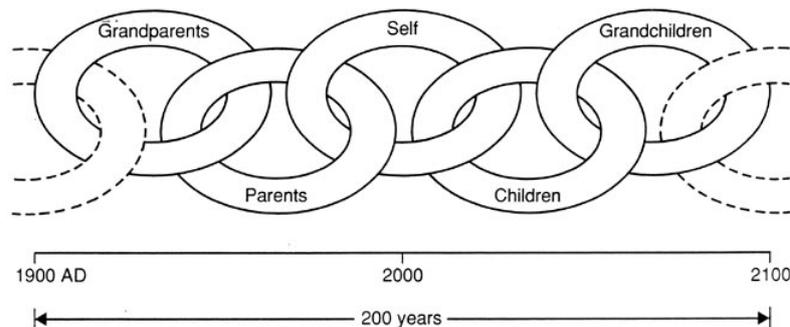
before we act to prevent it. Once again, this corresponds to a shift in consciousness toward higher, more inclusive levels.

3. Recovering a sense of the future

Many cultures, including Western ones, have, and have had, a clearly-articulated relationship to the future. Some American Indians, for example, were known to consider the seventh generation in their decision-making councils. Yet the cultural editing of most contemporary Western cultures has had two contradictory effects. In some ways it has misrepresented the futures dimension as a kind of empty space, an abstraction, not worthy of serious attention. That is one reason why school curricula embody so many references to the past, but so few to the future. On the other hand two very different types of futures images have become current in late industrial cultures. One is the optimistic, high-tech, machine-dominated version found on popular TV and in young peoples books. The other is the dark vision of Dystopia, of decline, decay and eventual destruction.

Now while it may be true that both represent real alternatives, with roots in aspects of the present, neither even begin to do justice to the much wider range of options and possibilities that lie ahead. Activating a developed sense of the latter has therefore become very important. How may this be done? Futures concepts and ideas are of enormous importance here. The reason? Though they have been widely overlooked, *they provide the means by which to consider futures*. Like the language and symbols of any area, they give substance to what may otherwise seem vague and unreal; they provide clarity and definition so that hitherto obscured ideas and possibilities spring into sharper focus. Equipped with these resources, the ability of the human mind to grapple with futures concerns is greatly enhanced. Figure 9.2 illustrates this idea.

Figure 2 - The 200-Year Present



As suggested above, SF, or science/speculative fiction, also has a major role to play. Many novels and short stories serve to *elaborate futures potentials*. That is, they illuminate futures and aspects of futures tend to be inaccessible to reason in general or 'hard-headed' (empirical/analytic) futures research in particular. A working familiarity with this literature demonstrates, as perhaps no other source can, that the idea of the future as 'empty space' is not valid. On the contrary, many futures-related stories actually *demonstrate* the wider range of options, dangers and possibilities that lie ahead. Instead of remaining an abstraction, the imaginative and intellectual space of the future begins to coalesce around a variety of themes, scenarios and lines of development. Figure 9.3 outlines a rationale for re-integrating the futures dimension into daily life and culture.

Figure 3 - Why Futures Are Essential

- Decisions have long-term consequences
- Future alternatives imply present choices

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- Forward thinking is preferable to crisis management
- Further transformations are certain to occur.

4. Repairing the damage, reducing risk

Given the enormous costs that the industrial system has exacted upon the world, repairing the damage has become a major imperative. There are very many areas and ecosystems they have been completely destroyed. Others have been severely compromised; entire species of plants and animals have been lost. *This dynamic of destruction must be replaced with a new dynamic of restoration.* Hence there is scope for a series of new professions to develop from the confluence of ecological science and environmental activism.

Beyond this there is a dawning possibility that humans may, in some sense, be able to 'reinvent nature.' Of course, this instantly recalls the notion of *hubris*, or unjustified pride. But in a different cultural context, i.e., one which had re-established a sense of the sacred and developed a strong stewardship ethic, it is conceivable that one part of nature (humans) could act *with* other parts (animals, plants, ecosystems) to create new patterns of life. If habitats can be recovered and restored there may be no reason why future humans should not reanimate extinct species (by reconstructing their DNA from numerous individual samples), adapt existing species (as is now being done with many crops and transgenic transfers) and invent new ones. *When guided by a higher ethic humans might actually improve upon what nature has achieved blindly.*

However, for any of this to happen, and to be viable, the present serious risk factors would need to be reduced or eliminated: stocks of nuclear weapons, military action, overpopulation, further deterioration of ecosystems and genetic pools. Resolving these is a *sine qua non* of a viable future. Systematic foresight will be needed to establish the dimensions of risk involved.

5. Creating sustainable economies

This will not be easy, but in a sense it could be inevitable because a non-sustainable economy is just that. However, there are many contradictions to resolve. Advertising, consumerism, materialism, competitive individualism and the pursuit of old-style growth all make it difficult to embark on the transition.

Growth will need to be re-defined. Resources will need to be re-valued and seen in their wider context. The environment will need to be brought fully into all economic calculations instead of being dismissed as a mere 'externality.' Energy will need to be conserved and used much more efficiently. At a deeper level, the ideologies and power systems that drive the technocratic machine will have to be challenged and replaced. Similarly, the time frames that are applied to human economic life will need to be re-assessed. Most importantly, it will be necessary to escape from the chronic short term thinking now common in business, government, industry and education.

It is important that such developments are seen together: a critique of industrial era economics, the rise of a different time sense and the implementation of a range of conserving measures and practices all reinforce each other in the longer term.

6. Finding new purposes and meanings

The purposes and meanings that powered the social system over some two hundred years have created a world of contradictions. The process of selecting new ones will not be an easy one since powerful groups always have interests bound up in the way things were. Yet the de-legitimation of redundant social principles and practices is overdue. This is a major focus of critical futures

work. As shown above, it begins with the critique of what is wrong, redundant, no longer helpful in contemporary cultures. It proceeds to develop alternative ways of knowing and being. These alternatives thrive upon new purposes and meanings, examples of which have been given above. I want here to touch on three more: stewardship, selfless love, and obligations to future generations.

A stewardship ethic could well be a motivating force in the establishment of new intentional communities that will spring up in formerly ravaged areas. Such communities will not be like the self-indulgent communes of the 1960's. Rather, they will exist to repair landscapes and re-invigorate ecosystems. They will be part of a shift toward long-term responsibility for the well-being of the earth.

Selfless love will be part of a shift away from the 'me-ness' and materialism of the 20th Century. It reflects an established trend from outer-directedness to inner-directness, or, from having to being. This is a vital distinction. The having mode is insecure, needing constant re-assurance and material inputs. On the contrary, the being mode is self-sufficient. It is centered in 'that which is' and sees the material realm as only one among others.

Obligations to future generations will emerge as a new (or renewed) social/cultural concern. Humans will no longer see themselves as cut off from past and future, but as participating in a cosmic process with no discernable beginning or end. In that process the generations are partners in time, each contributing to the overall journey.

Such developments will be supported by changes in worldviews which reveal the interwoven, interconnected, layering of reality. The latter will no longer be seen to reside primarily in material objects and physical powers, but will embrace other domains: emotional, mental and spiritual.

7. The recovery of intrinsic value

It seems clear that present-day negative views of futures are driven by fairly primitive human instincts which are magnified and augmented by powerful technologies (particularly tools of communication and the mass media). The interaction of an industrial worldview with the political and commercial opportunism of the 20th Century has permitted a crass, short-sighted marketing culture to become dominant. So it's hardly surprising that a positive view of the future is lost. It cannot be overemphasised that *the simple extension of present trends leads inexorably on to a devastated and impoverished world*. That fact underlies all the reasons why young people get depressed and makes it clear why business-as-usual assumptions are no longer viable. We are caught up in a giddy pattern of dynamic change and chronic unsolved world problems.

Yet it is entirely possible to 'breach the bounds' of present social reality and to imagine a very different world structured according to different values and assumptions. This could be the role of a 'wise culture'. It may not be achieved tomorrow, next year or even next century. What it does do is much more immediate and practical. It creates a contrast which, like the best speculative fiction, de-familiarises the present, makes it seem strange (ie. historically contingent). A compelling vision therefore appears which transcends the catastrophic futures endemic to technocratic scenarios.

How can one define a wise culture? This is discussed in Chapter Ten. The actual details are less important than *the quality of consciousness* that they evoke, for it is this which is arguably the pivot, rather than the technical or other means by which it is expressed. Nor need this quality be wholly displaced into future time. *The startling thing is that people have always been capable of it*. Today one such person may be Thomas Berry. His *The Dream of the Earth* seems to presage exactly the kind of shifts outlined here. He points toward a 'new sense of reality and value' that, perhaps, is one of the keys to a new historical dynamic. The new sense turns not on the intellectualization of experience, and still less upon the reductionist interrogation of nature by naturalistic science; but

rather upon *the direct experience of intrinsic value*. This stands in stark contrast to use-value and exchange-value that still remain core assumptions of the late industrial era. Imaging workshops that can bring participants to this point in living experience are clearly promoting social change at a very profound level.

Intrinsic value gives back to the earth, its wildlife and ecology the right to independent existence, regardless of the needs or uses of human kind. In this way, nature can be re-constituted at the heart of the social order.

Towards a new worldview

As noted above, the way we see the world dictates the way we use it. So the commitments embedded in the foundations of industrial culture can be examined and, where necessary, transformed or discarded. A renewed worldview will retain much that is good and useful from earlier times. It will retain notions of justice, equity and so on. But it will also include other elements such as sustainability, stewardship and a global, long-term view. Such developments are not immediately obvious because they are not tangible and visible. It takes time to understand them and to feel empowered to address them. They are, however, powerful tools in the re-shaping of the epistemological, and hence the cultural, order.

The foregoing supports a view of the world in which we recognise our embeddedness in a series of contexts. We begin to see only too clearly that our understanding of reality is dependent upon the quality of the models used *and* the quality of consciousness using the models. Problem solving is no longer about making small, isolated changes. It is about participation and intervention in mutually interacting webs and processes. In this sense, solutions tend not to be 'right', but elegant. As ever, the threads that create the social world lead directly back to us.

The final chapter suggests that such a culture can arise in part from the inner dynamic of higher-order human capacities, founded on wisdom. But we must also bear in mind the limitations noted above. The fact is, no one knows in detail how we might move from one culture to another. What follows on from industrialism cannot be specified fully in advance. But that is by no means the end of the story.

What is certain is that if the human race is to survive in a world worth living in, a world rich in other life forms, rich in resources, rich in human and non-human options, then it will be with a culture based on assumptions very different than those now operating. So, finally, we turn to the outlines of the new. What would a wise culture be like?

***Note**

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