

## **A fish in and out of water**

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Since 1967, my main intellectual passion, consuming virtually all of my teaching, research, and consulting energies, has been in futures studies, futures research, and futures consulting, primarily using the techniques and perspectives of alternative futures forecasting and preferred futures visioning.

My formal academic training, however, first at Christ School, in Arden, North Carolina and Stetson University in DeLand, Florida, and then at the University of Pennsylvania, The American University, Virginia Theological Seminary, Yale University Institute of Far Eastern Languages, the University of Michigan, and Southern Methodist University, was focused on the past--near or distant. Still, during that time I was drawn to questions of ethics from Greek philosophy and Christianity (what is "the good life?" What should be the purposes of the state?); grand theories of historical change (St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, Karl Marx, Arnold Toynbee, Oswald Spengler); middle theories of social stability and change (Talcott Parsons, Kenneth Boulding, Elise Boulding); and various theories and methods endeavoring to predict specific social events and actions--part of what was then called "the behavioral revolution" in political science (Glen Schubert, Stuart Nagel). I was also quite naturally infected by the ideas of "development" and "progress" which were a part of the very air any American had to breathe in the tragicomic years after the Second World War.

I was truly fortunate as a child: All of the males in my family--father, stepfathers, grandfathers, great grandfathers, uncles--died or were otherwise missing during most of the time while I was growing up. I was reared by three strong, independent women--my mother, her mother, and her sister. I was thus spared from the burden which I see afflicts so many people, especially men, of having to either follow in or to rebel against patrimony and family tradition.

While we were poor in terms of money and goods, I never noticed it at all because we were strong in intellectual and artistic curiosity and experimentation. It was the life of the mind and of the will which was important, and not (except for books and music!) of any material possessions. Sports were also important. My mother and aunt were as accomplished amateur athletes as they were inquiring intellects.

I was never led to believe that there was women's work and men's work. There was simply work, responsibility, and duty to be assumed equitably, promptly, and as cheerfully as possible.

All of these things contributed to my readiness for encountering "the future."

But nothing was directly more influential than the six years I spent as a professor on the campus, in the classrooms and research facilities, and in the lives and minds of the faculty and students of the College of Law and Politics of

Rikkyo University in Tokyo, Japan where I struggled to develop and express ideas and feelings that emerged while my growing family and I tried to enter a world that would neither accept us or reject us.

It was this quality of Japanese culture and of individual Japanese people (neither accepting nor rejecting Outsiders) which taught me--forced me--to think, value, and act for myself, and not to rely on, nor to rebel against, anything anyone might consider to be either most proper or most profane.

Marshall McLuhan said, "We don't know who discovered water, but we are pretty sure it wasn't a fish." But, as a fish out of water, I discovered that my relationship with whatever was around me was something that I could and should negotiate rather than either blindly accept or stubbornly reject.

In Japan, I also became friends with an American journalist, John Randolph, who asked me to read an essay he had written in which he used the civilizational theories of Oswald Spengler to compare Japanese civilization with Western civilization. Randolph demonstrated that both cultures went through the same sequences of major events in the same order, and for approximately the same duration, but that, in every instance, Japan was roughly two hundred years ahead of the West.

That was the final straw. Whether right or wrong, it turned my world upside down, and made it impossible for me to be concerned any more with the past of anything--my own personal history, that of my family, my culture, human beings, or even life in the universe--as something requiring my awe, respect, obedience, or conformity. I would respect the past, knowing that "once it was all that was humanly possible." But my orientation would forever be towards the future.

As Buckminster Fuller said, "I seem to be a verb;" not a human being, but a human becoming.

I know nothing about my ethnicity, nor the origin of my name, "Dator." I have no cultural heritage of which I am aware or to which I am bound. I am delighted that "Dator" in Swedish means "Computer." I celebrate my constructed robotic identity.

I certainly do not feel particularly "human." I am as distant from "humanism" as I am from any other cultural category. I am, rather, some living thing which is striving to transcend whatever I imagine myself to be; at every moment; struggling to change, grow, transform, improve, whatever those words might themselves morphologically become.

This means I seldom stick to anything very long. I constantly want to try something different, something new, to blindly go where I have never gone before. My guiding principle has always been that of the Balinese, according to McLuhan: "We have no art. We do everything as well as we can."

Oh, I am sure I have my daily habits and steady preferences. Thirty years ago, I let my hair do what it did best--just hang there--and it has been hanging around ever since. And when I am transfixed, as I am, by the redeeming love of Rosemary and Mack, and by the anguished love of Lynn, Tad, Connie and

Tish, I feel guilty because of my constancy and concern while I am at the same time wholly soothed and sustained by it.

I see those loves as manifestations of my weaknesses not as sources of whatever strength and purpose I might have, although I know in reality that I am wholly engulfed by them and could not breathe for a moment were they not there around me. They are the water in which I swim.

So, for the past thirty years, I have "tried to make the world a better place" (a supremely pompous thing to say, much less to try to do); tried to help whoever sought my guidance to focus on the future; on the personal and social consequences of their actions; to learn how to surf the tsunamis of change I see rushing down upon us from the future. In this, I was inspired, guided, and tempered by Eleonora Masini and Magda McHale, two founders and leaders of the World Futures Studies Federation with which I have been affiliated since 1967.

I have learned so much from all of the people in my quest for the future: the University of Hawaii; "Hawaii 2000"; the Institute for Alternative Futures; TVOntario and elsewhere in Canada, and so many more.

Nonetheless, in spite of spending my life in classrooms at the University of Hawaii, the University of Toronto, and the now-bombed out buildings of the InterUniversity Consortium for Postgraduate Studies in Dubrovnik, Yugoslavia, as well as in those of countless other schools and universities worldwide; working with thousands of citizen's groups in Hawaii and across North America; giving future-oriented talks and workshops with hundreds of public and private officials everywhere; producing scores of television, radio, multimedia shows while publishing reams of articles and books; exchanging images of the future with people in the more than 30 different countries I visited during the time I was Secretary General and President of the World Futures Studies Federation--all in all spending years of my life away from my family and friends and in the company of strangers; giving myself, as best I could, to the future--in spite of all of that, I have been a total failure.

After thirty years of futures work, the world is a worse place than it was when I started. I don't think I am alone responsible for making it worse, but I do assume the blame for not being able to make it better.

I just haven't done enough, and I haven't done anything right. It turns out that my "doing everything as well as I can" is pretty piss poor.

As I have said repeatedly before, the world for me, and many others of my generation, was a piece of cake.

Unfortunately for future generations, we ate it.

Thus, what I want for the next thirty years is not likely to be what will in fact happen.

Faith Popcorn says that the present is the future getting back at us. It is beginning to do so with a terrible vengeance.

The 20th Century was the most abnormal century in human history. The Century which saw two brutal World Wars and an all-consuming Cold (and often hot) War, coupled with the domination of the entire globe by a single (Western) culture which itself released upon the world, though the myths and practices of capitalism, an era of avarice and greed unparalleled in its scope in all of prior human experience--this Century is finally coming to an end.

Things may seem calm now; the West--the US--firmly in control. But that is not so. The eye of the hurricane is passing, and the fury of the future getting back at us will be felt for some time to come.

The 21st Century is not likely to be very pleasant for anyone.

I do, however, see some hope for the 22nd Century--or however time will be more fairly reckoned by then. Within a hundred years or so, one way or another, the population of the world will be stabilized; the damaged environment repaired; a new, more equitable economic system invented; global direct democracy achieved; genetic engineering, artificial intelligence, and nanotechnology transforming life on Earth and enabling it on the Moon, Mars and elsewhere in the solar system (and beyond?). And, it will be, as Richard Brautigan very early understood, "all watched over by machines of loving grace."

I plan to avoid the "21st Century" entirely and go directly the future. Will you join me?