

Jim Dator

## **Dream Society? Ubiquitous Society? No Society? Futures for Finland and the world as seen from a small Pacific Island**

I would like to start by paying my respects to Pentti Malaska and Mika Mannermaa.

They were both wonderful friends, inspiring colleagues, and frequent pranksters and poets who had an enormous influence on my life and thoughts.

I remember them well here in Finland, in Dubrovnik, at various venues around the world, and in Hawaii where they somehow usually managed to bring what they called a “Finnish summer” with them. It always seemed to be overcast, cool, and rainy when they visited Hawaii, instead of our normal clear and warm weather.

But they never complained.

Well, I am complaining--they abandoned us too soon, with too much work remaining to do, and so the rest of us will just have to work harder on their behalf.

I became interested in futures studies while I was teaching for six years in the College of Law and Politics of Rikkyo University in Tokyo, Japan in the early 1960s. I created and taught what is said to be the first officially-recognized university futures course while I was at Virginia Tech in the 1960s. I went to the University of Hawaii in 1970 just as something called “Hawaii 2000” was being forced by the governor, legislature, unions, business community, and university.

One of the outcomes of that process was the creation, by the Hawaii State Legislature, of the Hawaii Research Center for Futures Studies in 1972, and its placement at the University of Hawaii. I have been director



*Jim Dator (Kuva Hannu Linturi)*

of that Center since then. In the mid 1970s, the Department of Political Science of the University of Hawaii, of which I am a member, created an academic and internship MA option in Alternative Futures. Since that time, a steady stream of graduates have gone on to earn very good livings as consulting futurists. Many also stayed on for a PhD in political science with a focus on alternative futures.

During the 1980s and 1990s, I was first Secretary General and then President of the World Futures Studies Federation. As such, I got to see what “the future” looks like in over 40 countries of the world. During the 1970s and 80s, I also taught in the futures course offered every spring in the InterUniversity Centre for Postgraduate Studies, in Dubrovnik, Yugoslavia.

Very importantly, during the 1980s and early 90s, I went to almost every communist

nation in the world and met with high officials who were interested in a different future from the one ahead of them then.

I can assure you that the future is very different when seen from many different cultures and places.

So it is out of more than forty years of work around the world that I bring you this summary of what futures studies is and is not from my experience.

Futures studies is related to but different from planning and policy-making as planning and policy-making is different from day-to-day administration. Just as day-to-day administration is to be guided by planning and policies, so also planning and policies should be guided by prior futures foresight activities.

Planning and policy-making done without futures foresight is likely to be useless at best and more likely to be harmful. Unfortunately, most planning is done without prior futures work, and therefore is not as robust as it could be.

## Some basic principles of futures studies

Here are some basic principles of futures studies as I understand it:

Futurist can not predict the future. No one can. A prediction is intended to be a true statement, an accurate statement about the futures. Once, we all lived in communities where prediction was possible. Not now, though most people persist in the futile hope that some wizard-machine will do so.

What futurists can and do is to forecast alternative futures. A forecast is intended to be a logical statement, a useful statement about the futures. Futures are plural, alternative, diverse, possible: futuribles. Not THE Futures, but alternative futures.

Most importantly, futures studies helps people envision and invent preferred futures for themselves and their organizations and communities.

To be effective, futures forecasting and envisioning must be done continuously, and not be a “one-shot” activity.

Futures studies as an academic and a consulting activity is based on:

- (1) Images of the futures;
- (2) Theories of social stability and change;
- (3) Methods of social and environmental forecasting and design; and
- (4) the monitoring of continuing trends and emerging issues.

Futurists help people answer the question “what’s next”?

The answer always is: “there are four generic alternative futures.”

The four are:

- Continued Growth (or continue; or grow)
- Collapse (from one or more reasons)
- Discipline (on the basis of certain values)
- Transformation (to a vaguely-perceived new socio-environmental system)

Continued growth is the official image of the future of every country and organization in the world today. All academic, governmental, and economic institutions are focused on one thing: keeping the economy growing. Even organizations opposed to continued economic growth judge their own success by whether they are growing or not.

For most of my experience as a futurist, though collapse of systems frequently occurred, most people refused to think about or prepare for the possible collapse of their organization or community. Now, as many parts of the world teeter on the verge of economic, environmental, energy, and governance disintegration, collapse images have become much more “popular”--almost too much so.

In order to prevent collapse, and since continued growth is “unsustainable”, many are now calling for a disciplined society, or a conserver society, based on principles of “sustainability” (or, perhaps better, evolvability), and/or on the basis of religious, natural, or cultural values lost or marginalized now.

But others see technology and/or spirituality leading humanity to a transformation

into post-humanity and an anthropocene epoch where humans must be responsible for governing evolution.

Please understand that we did not make up these four generic futures. They are not the products of our imagination. They are the conclusion of years of empirical research based on the ongoing analysis of a huge numbers of images of the futures that exist in our minds, our stories, our movies, our strategic plans, our daily actions.

We conclude that all of the billions of images of the futures that exist in the world are variations of one of the four generic alternative futures, or some combination of the four.

It is clear that Continued Economic Growth is the official future for most of the world.

I am very eager to learn if it is different here. There is only One Future being discussed in the United States and in most of the part of the world I am familiar with--Japan, Korea, China, Southeast Asia.

Obama and Romney both argue over who can get the economy growing again. Neither expresses the slightest doubt that the economy can, should, and will grow again. There is nothing in the words of any American politician, or business leader, or university president, or economist who is quoted in The New York Times or any other American newspaper or on any television station to make anyone doubt that the recession will be over and that growth will start again, if we just follow the right policies.

Absolutely nothing came out of Rio+20 in June 2012 to indicate otherwise. No major politicians from any major country attended. Nothing in the final document raised any serious reasons for concern. If we will just let the market place do its magic without hindrance from some monster called "government", then all will be well.

What do you think? I was asked by the people who invited me here to say something about the **Ubiquitous Society**, something you already know a lot about. And of course there

are **Four Futures for a U-Society**:

One U-Society will emerge from the continuation of the dominant economic trends from the past. It will be a marvelous electronic world--led by Nokia it goes without saying--with friendly, alert, helpful, benign chips in the environment, in our clothing, in our bodies, all around us, guiding us, helping us, keeping us well, making us lawful, and making lots of money, while providing lots of jobs for everyone forever.

Well, maybe so. In fact, it must be so since it appears everyone believes that. Or at least everyone says that. Well, to be truthful not everyone says that.

There is a version of *Continued Growth of a U-Society* which looks at the dark side of the technology.

One can make a very, very strong case for the dark side. Especially in the United States, where the inhabitants of the erstwhile *land of the free and the home of the brave* seem, since September 2001, to welcome eagerly every possible technology of surveillance, control, and "protection."

America's new national anthem is the old song by Police:

*Every breath you take  
And every move you make  
Every bond you break, every step you  
take  
I'll be watching you*

*Every single day  
And every word you say  
Every game you play, every night you stay  
I'll be watching you*

*Oh can't you see  
You belong to me  
How my poor heart aches  
With every step you take*

*Every move you make  
And every vow you break  
Every smile you fake, every claim you  
stake  
I'll be watching you*

But that's OK. This version of the U-Society still makes money for electronic manufacturers, so what's the worry? Privacy is a very new--and now obsolete--notion anyway.

Almost everything that I have read or heard about the Ubiquitous Society is a variation of those two versions of Continued Growth. But there are other futures for a U-Society.

## Collapse

The collapse of the kind of society with the kinds of resources and institutions that enable any kind of a Ubiquitous Society.

I have spent a lot of time thinking about collapse. Trying to determine how to make collapse a good thing! a wonderful opportunity! something we should welcome and embrace! Since it may be coming, whether we like it or not. How about you?

Are you concerned about what I call **The Unholy Trinity, Plus One** that may be leading to social and environmental collapse? I call it the Unholy Trinity because, like the Christian Holy Trinity, it is three entities that are actually one. People may focus on one, and ignore the other two--or they may expect the other two to solve the problems of the one they worry about. But they are all related. One can not be understood without understanding the others.

The Unholy Trinity metaphor illustrates our tragedy: three looming, interrelated, but ignored (as a unity) issues. The three are

- 1) the end of abundant and cheap oil with no replacement in sight, in spite of current declarations to the contrary;
- 2) the necessity of dealing with neglected environmental issues, such as global climate change, sea-level rise, water scarcity, soil depletion, and much more; and
- 3) the collapse in 2007 of the global economic system based on advertising and complex debt instruments that enabled a few people to amass enormous fictitious "wealth" unrelated to market factors of actual demand and supply.

"Plus One" refers to the fundamental inability of most governments to deal effectively with these issues, because of decades of insults, tax-starving, indebtedness, and down-sizing.

In light of the Unholy Trinity Plus One, it is very hard to see how a U-Society based on Continued Economic Growth is possible.

We all need to learn how to fish, farm and shoot. No! others say. There is still time. We need to abandon Continued Economic Growth and build instead a Sustainable Society, a Conserver Society, a Disciplined Society. We need Green Growth! or no growth at all of the conventional kind. These words are often heard. But, it may be too late.

Many people argued for a Conserver Society 40 years ago, when we had time to move from oil to renewable energy, to stop population growth, to prevent climate change, to invent a real, fair economy. But it seems too late now.

We are in now living in the future we were warned about then, even though there will be many more changes ahead.

Some of you may remember when I was here before many years ago. I was speaking then of a Transformational Society a High Tech Transformation driven by robots, artificial intelligence, autonomous beings, posthumans, transhumans. I have not abandoned the Transformational Society. That is my preferred future.

Consider my name: Dator. Yes! I AM a computer. I am not a human being I am a human becoming--a post human.

I yearn for a Dream Society a world of dreams, icons, and aesthetic experience. That is the kind of Ubiquitous Society I want: A Dream Society!

As the American poet, Richard Brautigan, wrote years ago

*I like to think (and  
the sooner the better!)  
of a cybernetic meadow  
where mammals and computers  
live together in mutually*

*programming harmony  
like pure water  
touching clear sky.*

*I like to think  
(right now, please!)  
of a cybernetic forest  
filled with pines and electronics  
where deer stroll peacefully  
past computers  
as if they were flowers  
with spinning blossoms.*

*I like to think  
(it has to be!)  
of a cybernetic ecology  
where we are free of our labors  
and joined back to nature,  
returned to our mammal  
brothers and sisters,  
and all watched over  
by machines of loving grace.*

I am still hopeful that such a Transformational Future is possible. That we will have the energy, imagination, and will to create a Ubiquitous Society that merges life with nonlife and transcends both in peaceful harmony.

Pentti Malaska wrote:

*Time flows to the present  
from two directions  
from the past—as  
accomplished deeds  
and material manifestations,  
as can be perceived, and  
from the future—as  
our aims, intentions and  
ideas as conceived.  
At the present they mold  
together and  
form our reality.*

Mika Mannermaa wrote:

*In the not-so-distant future  
I can sit on the shore  
of a remote mountain river  
in Lapland  
with the whole world in my pocket.*

*I don't have to wait for anything,  
because I live in a world of Instantism.*

*Maybe I'll spend this day  
reading through  
Dostojevski's whole production,*

*or maybe, all of  
Harry Potter instead.*

*I can visit the Louvre  
or watch all the episodes of the TV  
series  
Friends,*

*or at least the earlier better ones.*

*I will spend some time  
with my alter egos in  
various virtual versums.*

*In the evening  
I want to meet my children  
in our virtual cottage.*

*But today?*

*I will catch the big one!*

Mika was correct:

Surf's up!

It is time for all of us to prepare to surf some very big tsunami.