

Peter H. Mettler

Epistemology of Futures Research

Paper given at the conference “The future of life and the future of our civilisation”, Univ. of Frankfurt/M., May 2-6, 2005

One of the dilemmas of all sciences is: How much to oversimplify reality? And: What can we learn from “State of the World” reports and computerized “World Models”?

Content

Introduction

Examples of research on today’s situation (3 examples) as well as on possible and/or desired futures (another 3 examples): Malaria, Turkey¹ and Intelligence²

On methodology

Annex

Introduction

This paper is, above all, to put questions forward ! Presently, I don’t have answers myself !

The first set of questions derives out of the almost infinite number of possible futures (examples are):

- a. How to know which futures are imaginable and possible as well as worthwhile to be desired?
- b. What shall we do, if people would like a plurality of futures (all in one)?

The second set is even more “complex”, since it starts from the presence and asks: how did objects and problems come to be as they are and what trends they originate ?

¹ instead of Turkey we could have taken almost every state/political entity, or chosen between e.g. Armenia, Burkina Faso, the Czech Republic, the EU, Iran, Israel, Korea, Tibet, Palestine, the US or Zimbabwe, etc.

² a mental quality hard to define; so far, nobody had been able to present any satisfying definition; or a medical <natural scientific>, a geopolitical, socio/politico-economical and a cross-cutting, psycho-philosophical/natural-scientific/ cultural and yet eventually all-determining “object” or “problem” of research.- The perhaps most modern theory of societal science (and the one most in opposition to economy’s “liberalisms”) is the “theory of civil society as **the most intelligent societal system**”, which, at the same time, also fulfils Popper’s requirement for an “Open Society”. It’s reach can best be demonstrated by the recommendations of the “Cardoso-Report” of the UN concerning its relations with the world-wide civil-society.

But in futures research (**Futures**) the question is slightly different. Futures wants to know: How to turn “visions” into what could be called “future facts” (see below)? What should we do if various such “facts” allow the same visions”? What are the reasons for choosing only one particular set of “facts” ?

Thirdly: How are objects/problems interlinked with methods? Or: What criteria should we use for selecting an appropriate methodology? *Societal research* does not pretend to be better than other research or to be satisfactory. It only talks openly about dilemmas in which it find itself and about the – imperfect – methods it has developed so far to get out of these dilemmas. What others do not want to admit, however, is that they as well are dealing mainly with people, that they are not ready to attribute them a free will and that their topics are technical/technological trends which they interpret as non-influenced by people ...

And then *the central questions* of this paper:

“What can we learn from the relation between researcher and research-topic in view of selecting an appropriate research ”?

All depends on how you (can) prepare your inquiry:

One of the important preparatory questions is, in as far „Wild Cards“ are incorporated? Most often, they will be negated as ephemeral or “That will never ever happen again ...”, as with 9/11 and then Madrid !

Or take climate change: Hardly anybody seems to take it serious: “Weather changes appeared all through history ...”. We had seen the same reaction to population development: it was not taken serious (e.g. the reactions to the book “Live in 2000 and thereafter”, by Rainer Mackensen³ – in German)

Or take the destiny of Robert Jungk’s statement 1988 in Budapest: “There is a likelihood of an implosion of the East” (Hungarian as well as Austrian televi-

³ Rainer Mackensen, Eberhard Umbach und Ronald Jung, arani Publ., Berlin, 1984

sion widely discussed his statement, in Bavaria it was valued as another one of “The crazy Jungk”).

The future is principally unknown, multiple futures are imaginable (that’s why we always talk about „futures“), but the future is not only accidental (with the exception of wild cards, of course) ! A case in point are decisions like the one to built the high-speed railway track between Frankfurt and Cologne, the construction time having been planned for 12 and finally lasted 14 years. Now German Rail esteems that it will use this track at least some 50 years ...the number of big and even ever more gigantic projects is increasing sharply (future facts? ⁴), above all in China and India, where all the West is rushing to.

Every piece of Futures should ask itself:

- a. What do I want to achieve? And: How much am I prepared to give and/or pay for it? What price am I prepared to pay or how many casualties to tolerate?
- b. Will I work all by myself, in a team (composed of?), and why? How do I evaluate our present time, its chances and hindrances? Do I evaluate them differently then others? What are the differences? How can I know how they evaluate them? And what are they inclined to do and why?

How to evaluate the relationship between researcher and his object

- a. *if* I am the researcher myself;
- b. *if* I am researching how other researchers are evaluating their relationship to their object and allow themselves to be guided by their results;
- c. *if* I try to locate changes within my research object, caused by my very research (or the easily misinterpretable philosophical question: Do the objects want to tell me something?).

Examples of research on today’s situation (3 examples) as well as on possible and/or desired futures (another 3 examples): Malaria, Turkey and Intelligence

⁴ Wendell Bell, Foundations of Futures Studies, Vol. I., Transaction Publ., New Brunswick, 1997, p. 148

How about today's Malaria? Malaria spreads through the Anopheles mosquito. We know more than 400 species of it, of which 60 are causal for the infection. Ever more of these species have turned immune against all so far developed remedies. Though Malaria threatens more than 40 % of mankind and kills, above all, undernourished children under 5 years, it receives much less public attention than e.g. Aids (Aids: US\$ 2,4 billion, Malaria: US\$ 84 million). – Further: Though the Chinese medicament Asurmax looks promising, it is far too expensive for most of the patients; and: Nobody knows whatever happened to a drug developed by the Columbian Manuel Elkin Patarroyo, which received an incredible amount of honours. He donated it to the World Health Organisation, but production hasn't started yet and nobody knows why not. Present hopes are also with the artificial gene SM 1 (or with genetic engineering in general) ...

One reason for the relative low research activity and/or the low offer of remedies surely is that the overwhelming part of the victims would not be able to remunerate. Another and equally frightening reason is the mentioned growing immunity or, and malaria is only an example, the permanently accelerating speed of reaction of nature to human intervention (like against antibiotics ...) and, as a counter-measure, human innovation ... a rat-race? In the same direction points the equally ever increasing speed of disappearance of species, which continues to almost totally escape human attention (or the attention of journalists, politicians, researchers, economists, etc.) ...

What futures can we imagine for Malaria (independently of the applied research method)?

- Victory of nature. New waves of epidemics (SARS being a first announcement?), further millions of victims, often aggravated by simultaneous diseases like yellow-fever or bilharzias, etc.. **S₁**;
- Gradual victory of research and humanism, like with polio, etc.. **S₂**;
- Continued battle with big numbers of human victims. **S₃**.

If we then would try to paint three possible attitudes of behaviour of governments, industry and NGOs, etc. into the following three scenarios (the PARDI-ZIPP method ⁵):

- Continued low attention and counter activities. A_1 ;
- Increased attention and counter activities. A_2 ;
- Full fledged “war” against malaria. A_3 ,

we would end with a 9 field matrix:

	A_1 low	A_2 middle	A_3 high
S_1 victory of malaria			
S_2 victory of research			
S_3 muddling through	as today		

we would come to the question: *Which method allows us to talk about which likely future? Or: How to come up with “if-then” assumptions?*

And finally and whatever method is used: Players in the Malaria realm are researchers, pharmaceutical companies, states and politicians, NGOs, the UN and her agencies as well as other interested bodies and, finally, all the patients, etc.. *From whatever standpoint one looks at Malaria’s futures, the result will be totally different (!), including attempts to integrate them all in one future’s piece and including power-plays as well ...*

How to research **Turkey’s presence and Futures of Turkey** or of the Turkish-European relations? They go back very far into history and are still strongly determined by it. Just some few examples: The Ottomans besieged Vienna 1683 ... In WW I, Turkey fought the British on the German side. Her supreme commander was Glubsch Pascha, a Prussian general. In WW II she granted asylum to lots of Germans opposed to Hitler. Today, the Turkish community in Ger-

⁵ see Peter H. Mettler & Thomas Baumgartner, Large-scale participatory co-shaping of technological developments, First experiments with PARDIZIPP (**PAR**ticipatory **D**elphi Procedure for Future Oriented <zukunftsorientierte) **I**nterdisciplinary **P**olicy **P**lanning), in FUTURES, No. 6/98, pp. 535-554, London

many is the largest Turkish diaspora; millions of Germans look down on Turks but spent holidays in Turkey and praise Turkey's hospitality...

Kemal Atatürk forced Turkey to Europeanize more than any other state in the Near East ... After the breakdown of Iran's Shah regime, Turkey became NATO's southern stronghold and the US got more and more engaged (Turkey's chief-of-staff is now almost entirely trained in the US, before it was trained in Germany). And despite Turkey's refusal to let the US invade Iraq through Turkey it is true that Turkey, Israel and the US are forming a super-strong near-eastern Troika (to many experts, the Turkish army is Europe's best).

Together with Tunisia, Turkey is the most modern Islamic state in the Near East (with quite a big population) ... Europe is extremely divided on the question of Turkey's entry into the Union. One side evaluates the similarities as sufficient, wants Turkey in and hopes for a positive effect on EU's relations with the Islamic world. The other side emphasises the differences, evaluates them as too big, endangering Europe's path to unification and too costly (estimates go till € 28 bill. annually – EuObserver 1/10/04) and vetos Turkey's entry.

I personally would welcome Turkey's entry and point to some 500 years of extreme cultural symbiosis between Islam, Judaism and Christianity in Spain under the Moors. Why shouldn't something similar be possible again today?

From here we can draw three possible scenarios:

- Turkey turns to fundamentalist Islam. T1;
- Turkey succeeds in separating state and religion like France did. T2;
- Turkey continues to muddle through. T3,

and form a 9 field matrix with three EU reactions to Turkey's demand to be allowed to enter:

- The EU rejects Turkey's entry and cancels even its special relationship. EU₁;
- Turkey enters the EU as full member by 2015. EU₂;
- The mutual relations continue to muddle through. EU₃:

	T ₁ - fundamentalist	T ₂ - laicise	T ₃ – muddle through
EU ₁ – Turkey totally out			
EU ₂ – Turkey is full member			
EU ₃ their relations muddle through			as today

Which method would be appropriate to talk about Turkey’s future or Turkey-EU relationships? Or: How to come up with “if-then” assumptions? And parallel to the Malaria example: Wouldn’t it be wise to “paint” individual matrix fields into an even more comprising geo-political picture, as e.g. the one I had prepared for the EXPO 2000 ⁶ (in which only few superpower blocs exist in 2070: China, the EU, India, an Islamic Bloc, S-E-Asia under Japanese hegemony and the US <with chances that the EU and the US are forming a “Transatlantic Union”>)?

What is Intelligence (“I”)? What is “I” today? What could “I” be in the future? Do we know how to *define/measure* “I”? How to research “Futures of I”? Or: What would be an appropriate method to research “futures of I”?

“I” is at the same time individual as well as collective. Every individual can only develop its intelligence by constant interaction with others, thereby learning from them and contributing himself to the (level of) “collective I” of the respective group, state, collectivity or even world community.

There are many different sorts of “I” around (often called “logics”, but there are great differences between “I” and logic). Examples could be: mathematical “I”, “I” of physics as well as of natural sciences (e.g. Poppers theory of fallibilism), emotional, economic as well as political “I” (e.g. Machiavelli, but s. FN 3), religious and belief “I”, artificial “I”, knowledge-based “I” and intuitive “I”, environmental “I”, survival “I” (individual as well as collective), medic-

⁶ “Three Scenarios for the Superpower Structure in the Year 2070”. This paper had served the Hannover “EXPO 2000” as a blueprint for hall 9, “The 21st Century”, which was the most visited hall of all pavilions of EXPO 2000. ...Another possibility would be to paint it into the US National Intelligence Council’s “2020 Mapping the Global Future”

al “I”, etc., and, finally, also “collective ‘I’” (or “collective *knowledge-based* ‘I’”).

In particular the latter one is of greatest interest. How to define the “I” of a population? By its degree of education? By its successes in innovation? By its economic-scientific/technological performance and achievements, by what “everybody” knows or is able to handle (e.g. computers) or to achieve? How to increase the “I” of a population or level it up – today, tomorrow and in the future? And what, if people don’t want to improve any more⁷? If the motivation is lacking or gone (psycho-logic)? SOFI⁸ also wants to measure that (statistical “I” !)!

The often observed silence about “futures of I” could be interpreted as a lack of imagination of new forms and achievements of new intelligences and their consequences. One possible hint might be the description of Gaia-intelligence in Isaac Asimov’s foundation cycle⁹, or, another: the latest fashion in R&D policy in the US, Japan and the EU: *Converging Technologies*¹⁰.

As an absolutely urgent research project on how to shape knowledge societies I would propose to imagine on how to create networks (observatories) which report innovations of all sort and proposals on how to introduce them into the (higher; or into all levels) education system (in a way comparable to some of the research on “change”), at least in OECD countries. And to start with, we could screen the science fiction literature for innovations, in particular societal innovations and ideas on new intelligence, as well as to ask as many as possible

⁷ as lots of orthodox or fundamental Islamists seem to

⁸ The State of the Future Index (SOFI) Method, by Theodore J. Gordon, within The State of the Future 2003 by AC/UNU Millennium Project, Washington, D.C., 2003, by Jeremy Glenn and Theodore J. Gordon; Theodore J. Gordon, *State of the Future Index (SOEI): A method for improving Decision Making that Affects the Future*, in Howard F. Didsbury, Jr., 21st Century Opportunities and Challenges, WFS., Bethesda, Md., 2003

⁹ more precise in “Foundation’s Edge, Nightfall Publ., New York, 1982; and a lot more different “I”s at various other locations in this marvellous as well as monstrous collection

¹⁰ if interested, see: “europa.eu. int/comm/research/conferences/2004/ntw/index_en.html”

futurists ...and we should start another research project on “How to measure *societal intelligence levels*” (or on how to design a respective *indicator*). ...

And here as well I want to point at least to one piece of literature: Foundation for the Future, Humanity 3000 Project: “Evolution of Human Intelligence”, Seattle, 2000.

On methodology

The following six points will be elaborated (and please keep in mind that they are meant to be questions):

- 1 The key word is “how”! “How” to come to a coherent vision of a specific future, to prove a point/thesis or to shape the future? etc.;
- 2 Every research (or research based “art”) has to inform the reader of his notion of certainty, secure knowledge, security and truth, etc.;
- 3 Why can we stipulate a parallelism between present and future?
- 4 Why can we stipulate that there is a similar degree of complexity in reality and in scenarios?
- 5 What is the dialectic between object and method?
- 6 How does present research mirror the complexity of its object?

1 The key word is “how”! “How” to come to a coherent vision of a specific future, to prove a point/thesis or to shape the future? etc.;

Particularly the latter problem is one of the focal points of PARDIZIPP: Its last Delphi round has to discuss and come up with action proposals (politically realistic ones) as well as with likelihoods of their realisation.

But the “how” is dialectically linked to the “what”. No method is good for all objects/problems/manoeuvres, some exclude certain of them and vice versa (dictatorships rarely allow polls and polls aren’t necessarily signs of democracy; the same holds true for elections, etc.). Are traditionalists better for re-

forms than liberals or left-wingers? Do reforms have higher chances for realization in times of crisis or in times of booms?

An example would be an attempt on Turkey's entry into the EU. How to go about it? But not in the sense of a prognosis but on what research and with what "appropriate" research method it should be undertaken. Could a PARDIZIPP amongst the 25 EU member states help? What action proposals could they come up with? Or: How to prepare for a Wild Card (e.g. the destruction of the Iranian atomic labs by ...)? Or extended into the "I" example: How to raise a country's collective "I" so that it could built atomic weapons (or couldn't that be done better by tiny elites)?

2 *How does research (or research based "art") inform the reader of its notion of certainty, secure knowledge, security and truth, etc.?*

Beyond statistical/empirical methods and their probabilities, the notion of truth, this sometimes or for many people old-fashioned notion, retains its right in itself. H.-G. Gadamer, recently deceased German philosopher, has formulated the problem of truth the following way: "The security, which is granted by scientific methods, will not suffice to guarantee truth". Good examples are questions like:

- O Talking about reality it is usually impossible to know who started wars (e.g. in Vietnam or Chechnya) or who offered what first to whom in cases of corruption: the donor or the recipient, i.e. *reality is like fiction*, both are too complex to know the truth or to achieve certainty with secure knowledge (e.g. in the case of the Iranian atomic weapons: is there more truth to respective incriminations then to Iraq's weapons of mass destruction?)
- O Which information would have prevented the US from going into Iraq?
- O (Or, and more into meta-theory:) Could a natural-scientific theory of society be possible (which could tell us how not to have a new 1929, how not to have a major water crisis, climate break down, etc., worldwide ... Or: Aren't we sufficiently intelligent yet ... "World-collective "I" ?)?

O (And finally:) If futures are likely to be at least as complex as today's situation and if we are not able to clearly steer our destiny, what type of "certain" statements can we risk in view of futures?

3 Why can we stipulate a parallelism between present and future?

It is absolutely basic truth that we can not inquire about specific features of times which neither exist (in reality) nor existed before (and are known to us through historic sciences and artefacts) ^{*}. People get lots of explanations about today, including ever more data and "facts" they will never ever be able to "verify". These are presented in ways that people feel that they understand; and they are pleased when asked to voice their opinion. Since futures are presented to them pretty much the same way they also feel as being decision makers or masters of their destiny. The future is, in conversation with them, pretty much the same as present reality "speaks" to them.

Though nobody questions the right in itself of "experts" who "digged" deep into a field of specialisation (often for decades; and understand, in their own interpretation, much more than most others, and rightly so), to take part in the decision-making process, should decisions be made exclusively by them, even if everybody is concerned? Or should "everybody", politicians and lobbyists of all imaginable lobbies, etc. decide? Should they decide all together? But how can they be ushered to inform (and listen to) each other and also reach decisions?

Designing societal futures with good conscience stipulates that a certain amount of research, e.g. with PARDIZIPP as applied method, had been made and that methods to their integration are available. But we neither now nor in the foreseeable future dispose of respective methods. Because of that, futurists often do have (or should have) a bad conscience. In order to overcome this situation, they overplay Futures' capability by simple telling people (following the ex-

ample of the famous “guru of futurology” Hermann Kahn): “what’s going to be”.

Even if many attempts have been made to differentiate between situations in the real present and in the future (e.g. in scenario), they principally had to fail not only in view of the precision of the structural analysis or of their temporal development but also in view of the probability of future developments.

Objects can only be known to degrees parallel to methods available and applied. But if the object is oscillating and the methods are weak? In addition, researchers are part of the object as well as of the method, and more often than not the result of the research is already known before research has even started. Or at least the direction, in which the research is directed or for which the researcher is paid to produce evidence. – Finally: What method would be appropriate? One, which is object-specific, which understands exactly “what the object is up to” and which is able to evaluate the strength of countertendencies?

Using Kant’s distinction between Analysis and Synthesis one could say that the researcher of the present is “the analyst”, whilst the researcher of the future is “the synthesist”. Often they can enrich themselves mutually, e.g. when the futurist develops a new structure (material or social) and inquires with the analyst, if he couldn’t see predecessors already today. Or if the analyst warns the futurist that his synthesis has no ground today and the transition might be too long or too risky. Both find parts of themselves in “the long-range planner”.

To Fight Malaria needs all three of them, to bring Turkey into the EU equally. And catastrophes also can only be avoided or overcome by “working hand in hand all together with mutual trust”.

4 Why can we stipulate that there is a similar degree of complexity in reality and in fiction?

Wild Cards as well as World Models would both be worth-while to be elaborated on here ...instead I want to point again to the ever increasing size and

duration/longevity of modern man's endeavours and the shortness of either election periods or of conjunctions ...neither one was taken into account in analyses of the presence nor do we know how we could do it (and even historical interpretations oscillate from one generation of historians to the next because every new generation confronts history with new questions ...). If we then look into the future and/or into the great variety of scenarios on all kinds (issues/objects/problems like countries, regions and continents, economy and industry, armament and wars, the sciences and technologies, cultures and religions, etc.), we discover that both are, in most ways, to the will, liking or preferences of the authors/ researchers. Under the premise that we deal with serious authors/researchers, the only similarity between them is that they have to be more and more complex and both have to stipulate that "Collective 'I'" somehow functions. And finally: Why are so many fears around, that we will experience a new 1929? Because we neither really trust collective I nor do we really have good knowledge of it ...and hardly any respective research is taking place !

5 *What is the present dialectic between object and method?*

Futures of societies have a lot to do with complexity. Many researchers would probably reply that they are not really interested in such a high level of abstraction or in futures of societies, but only in the future of partial phenomena like the future of soap or underwear industry. Which is very understandable but highly risky: most pieces of work of such kind had, in the past, not taken into account e.g. the development of populations, etc. ...and at least the future of the gigantic trans-national conglomerates is in quite a lot of aspects completely comparable with the future of many countries.

On the basis of research like “Global Future – Time to Act”¹¹ or “The Globus Model”¹² (each the biggest of its kind ever) one has to ask: How many individual phenomena have to be taken into account? There can not be an answer to that question because of the seemingly old truth:

“Unless one knows the types and rules of their inter-links, even the greatest knowledge of the greatest number of phenomena of complex structures neither allows to judge them today nor to imagine possible futures for them”.

6 *How does present research mirror the complexity of its object?*

To start, please see first “Excursion on methodology” (Annex II).

Oversimplification is “a must” for strategic reasons but also as an explanation for the man in the street. He, as tax payer, has to consent to huge societal expenditures. But “vulgarisation” (as one can also call it a bit malicious) will only be successful if one has mastered the omnipresent complexity of both ways of presentation. And masterly “vulgarisation” is not denying the underlying complexity nor pretending new truths. It only wants to “translate” into everyday language.

One of the problems with today’s “virtuality” is that people are not informed what “machines” (the computer, AI, etc.) do for them. Thus, instead of leveling societal intelligence up, we breed technological elites which, in turn, are in danger to loose contact with society’s reality. ...

**Futures are full of miracles, discoveries, developments
and chances. Let’s go for them!**

Annex

I. *Excursion on Complexity (the three examples revisited)*

¹¹ report to president Carter 1980 – I draw on it via the German translation by A. Bechmann/G. Michelsen (Hrsg.), *Global Future – Es ist Zeit zu handeln*, Freiburg 1982, later also published by “Zweitausendeins”

¹² Edited by Stuart A. Bremer, Campus Publ., Frankfurt/M. and Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado, 1987, 940 pages, 249 graphs and tables

Let's first inquire on the researcher: Who is he? An individual, a group, an institution, an enterprise, a university, a sponsor, a ministry? Often, a futures analysis is written by an individual but then accepted as an official document (or even as the policy) of an institution ...

Research on the situation of Malaria today as well as on its future certainly is quite complex. But how complex and of what sort of complexity? The object (the disease, its biological base as well as its consequences on humans) is seemingly clear, though, when looking more closely, it's loosing clarity, like: does it have to do with food and sanitary situations, living conditions, climate, vaccines applied so far, etc.? In short: the object is more like a problem. If an individual researcher in the North (of whatever profession ...) writes about Malaria, she/he is, more often than not, not really personally affected ...and wouldn't it be similar if he would write about Turkey?

Research on today's as well as on future Turkey definitively is also quite complex and one could ask as well: "how complex and of what sort of complexity"? But the object is less clear ...what do we really want to know (people and mentality, religion and culture, economy, political systems and policies, relations with Turkey's neighbours and/or with the EU or the US, level of her "collective intelligence – her civilizational level", life expectancy, etc.)?

If a second generation Turk in Germany is working on how the brain drain from Turkey to Germany could be increased in order to also overcome Germany's low birth-rate and/or to strengthen Germany's position within the international innovation race ...Would he be personally affected? More so than if he would be the one researching Malaria, e.g. in Bulawayo in Zimbabwe and, more specifically, fighting Malaria with intelligent mass-behaviour?

Then: how about the specialist in biological engineering (of what origin what so ever) who wants to contribute to mankind's ability to develop humans into creatures less troubled by weaknesses of their body, and does that in collaborating in genetic research against Malaria and in generalizing from there?

And finally the researcher in today's situation of intelligence (at what level? National, Europe/the West, Asia, Islamic countries, world-wide) and in possible and yet realistic and imaginable future situations of intelligence: data-banks on intelligence would be at his disposal like his own memory. And yet: Where to would his research be geared to?

Even if we could employ a set of methods (often a question of time, funds and skills), we (or critics) would never be really satisfied. On the other hand ...

All single methodological approaches do have a right in themselves. The art of applying them in a multi-methodological approach still has a long way to go. But basic questions like those outlined here, i.e. methodologies of a different kind, also need further considerations: participatory attempts at futures orientation and enthusiasm or the creation of feelings of vocation (wherein lots of possible pitfalls could be hidden, e.g. chauvinism or religious fanaticism).

II. Excursion on methodology

"The old school of futures: It masks itself in talk about futures "methodology" rather than perspectives, but I believe some of the fundamental assumptions behind this so-called "methodology" are the same because it is methodology steeped in progressive idealism, "positive" extrapolism founded on the proposition that science and technology are the new gods and saviours of humanity while those who propose sustainability are the "negative" extrapolists. It's the same problem with language pejoratively reflecting its old futures prejudiced idealism, a reactionary futures perspective that is used to safeguard the power structure and relations of the ruling classes, nations and societies.

So, in my opinion, futures has to completely rid itself of this old world reactionary idealism and completely embrace sustainability if it is to effectively bring about global change. I don't think that global futurists can afford to continue to be "neutral" on this question, as a matter of professionalism, etc. Again, neutrality is just a mask for protecting the status quo. As a matter of fact, you can say that neutrality and status quo are one and the same. In reality, there is no neutrality. It's a myth. You're either pro (sustainable) futurist for the sake of all the people and preservation of the planet, or else a reactionary futurist protecting the reactionary ideology and power base of the elite who are (miss) guiding humanity and the planet towards destruction.

Once again, Buddhism and sustainability are cousins. Sustainability is not just a way of managing - it also involves a way of thinking and living. In this respect, it can learn a lot from Buddhism. Buddhism is essentially a way of peace. Have you ever known Buddhists to be at war? The old view that progress is more enlightened than staticism is prejudiced. Of course, staticism implies conservatism, but it's conservatism in the true sense of the word - not just political. Is it utopian? Perhaps”.

(Quotes from an e-mail dated September 2, 2004 by Dennis Morgan from Incheon, Korea to the chatroom of the World Futures Studies Federation)

*

Some of the features of our times are that

○ its time passes faster than in previous times;

○ its future comes ever closer and faster;

○ the present is ever shorter;

○ we have more and more artefacts to keep and to fill our museums with (where we store artefacts of the past);

Or in other words: The speed of our evolution is, at the same time, the speed of outdateding and of rendering old: everything new produces new history and turns its predecessor into an artefact.

Very dynamic civilisations attribute higher values to very old artefacts or stories than to less old artefacts or stories, since their speed of aging is relatively slower.

Planning means, in “temporal” terms, an attempt to produce past times of the future, like schedules of trains or planes: they predict, when I will arrive, because in the past it had happened the same way. Or even further: If I want to be sure to get a connection, I assume that things in the past had happened in ways allowing others to offer services in the future which will work because in the past they worked in the same way.

Planning turns into an ever greater necessity the more certainty diminishes that the future offers conditions similar to today. – Very important is the fact, that the ever shorter product-renewal-cycles historically have a totally new effect: whilst equipment was replaced by new ones in former times only when it was worn out, it nowadays has to be replaced as soon as (or shortly after) new ones incorporate functions which prove indispensable to have in order to stay connected or compatible, which the forerunning model didn't provide.

A wonderful case in point are time-perceptions or rather time-relativities (which, just to mention it, is appropriate in the present Einstein memorial year).

First some examples for illustration: The ever growing fondness for museums or fondness of “things old” probably is a counter-movement or force of counter-balance to the equally ever growing number of new products, methods or standards.

Visiting countries of quite different history and culture and yet staying in centrally planned hotels with the never changing world standard and doing one economic deal after another and then jetting off in the ever equal planes (only different in size) can be interpreted as a sign of a-historicity. And even more appealing is the custom to stage, e.g. a copy of the Eiffel Tower within the hotel chain's Paris house in order to remind the client where he spent the night. And yet, such queer phenomena are compliments to the expansion success of chains like Mc.Donald's in as far as they are equally a sign of (artefactual) historicity or museality.

The west's (with others floating in the same direction) unprecedented “evolutionary dynamics” and “time-compression” is hard to digest for almost every other culture or civilisation with a-synchronous dynamics, driving them into emotions somewhere between sadness and lethargy on the one side and uproar and revolution on the other.