The future is not a single grand vision or an inevitable consequence of trends, but rather an object of manipulation, discussion, debate, and eventually, perhaps, even consensus.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Dare to Dream
Bringing Futures into Planning

Sam Cole

Futures studies and planning follow parallel and sometimes overlapping paths. Both are idealistic activities seeking to make people’s futures more secure and more fulfilling. Many futurists wish that their dreams could be implemented, and many planners dream that their work could be less shortsighted and parochial. If only to fulfill these needs, these groups should pay more attention to each other. In this article, I attempt to strengthen the bridge between futurists and planners. My observations come from the perspective of someone with a professional and pedagogical interest in both planning and futures studies. I illustrate past, current, and potential contributions of futures studies to planning as follows: (1) the beginnings of futures studies in science fiction films, journals, and international development; (2) the role of envisioning, polling, and forecasting methods; and (3) the challenges of linking futures studies methods to planning. I then argue for a diverse approach in terms of methods and participants and assert that if planners are to embrace the future, their plans must begin with the future.

In a provocative article “Dare to Plan: An Essay on the Role of the Future in Planning Practice and Education” Andrew Isserman (1985) remonstrated that planners may well have lost sight of the future. He entreated planners to become experts in the study of change—past, present, and future—and to begin to develop methods for studying the future. It is not evident that planners have heeded his admonition. In the United States there is, at best, a growing recognition of the need for more imaginative thinking about the future in urban planning. This is witnessed by recent book titles such as Visions for a New American Dream (Nelessen, 1994) published by the APA Planners Press and also by the topic of the 1998 Association of American Collegiate Planners conference, “Tomorrow’s Cities Today—Building for the Future.” Unfortunately, there is still rather little “future” in contemporary planning education and practice. In particular, while many U.S. planning schools are introducing courses dealing with globalization and teaching forecasting techniques, few have futures studies courses or a futures specialization. It is not surprising, therefore, that Dowell Myers and Alicia Kitsuse (1998) recently have reiterated Isserman’s plea.
A Planner’s Plea for Futures Studies

Futures studies, both as a movement and a discipline, is as eclectic as planning. Thus, it is understandable that futurists do not all agree on even its overall goals and overarching symbols. Nonetheless, as a futurist I would maintain that futures studies—broadly defined—has a great deal to offer planning. This arises because of both their similarities and their differences. Futures studies and planning have much in common. The issues they deal with are ambiguous, multifaceted, and contentious and the outcomes are complex and uncertain. They share goals of providing “better futures” whilst avoiding unacceptable risks. Not least, they share ethical dilemmas of representation and manipulation related to their operational contexts and methodological problems of balancing a wide variety of information, approaches, participants, and outlooks.

The differences provide opportunities for enriching these overlapping fields. Futures studies focuses on the longer term and strives to provide a wide diversity of views and alternatives. This is why futurists emphasize the plurals in “futures” and “studies.” With this focus, futures studies has evolved methodologies and visions that can contribute to more imaginative and holistic planning and deal with a sufficiently wide range of possibilities in a systematic, comparative, and systemic fashion. For example, futures studies has made some progress with the problem, shared by planning, of how to bring together information from several disciplines or groups. Since much of futures studies deals with “global” issues (in geographic, secular, and temporal senses), it provides essential context to the more specific policy concerns of sector, city, regional, and national planners.

There is an essential symbiosis between planning and futures studies. Planning is the vehicle whereby futures studies is manifest in physical and social reality and also the means by which futures studies can remain anchored to real problems, rather than drifting into fantasy. If there must be a division of labor between futurists and planners—accepting that the future is everybody’s business—then futurists’ responsibility is to help people to articulate their beautiful dreams, and planners’ responsibility is to help make those dreams come true. Thus, I certainly agree with Myers and Kitsuse (1998) that planners have a unique responsibility towards the future.

Futures Studies versus Projections

Planners are quite familiar with long-term projections. In the past, especially in Western and Eastern Europe and several Third World nations, we saw a variety of integrated national long-, medium-, and short-term plans and the planning institutions designed to support them. Today, the forecasts used by urban, regional, and national planners (including, for example, the projections of county and metropolitan employment and economy by federal agencies and the world regional forecasts of the United Nations agencies) typically extend to the year 2025. In these forecasts, possible variations from the central trend are indicated only as modestly differing “high” and “low” trends.

Many futurists reject such projections as being less than useful since they offer an overly confident view of the future, which leads to doomed plans. For example, in the 1970s overoptimistic demographic projections for declining industrial cities in the United States led to misguided investments in infrastructure. Similarly, in the 1980s overoptimistic World Bank forecasts encouraged developing countries worldwide to overborrow. These projections also underrepresent uncertainty, so that the plans based on them are not sufficiently robust to account for actual outcomes. They are often univariate and so take little account of the complex interactions within and between domains. They focus on measurable economic, demographic, and some environmental variables and underplay the less tangible social, cultural, and political variables. The quantified methods used often exert an intimidating authority, which can be quite bogus even with respect to the not-so-distant future. Their greatest perceived failing, however, is that they abjure imagination by attempting to focus on what will be rather than on what could be. In contrast, many futures studies are unapologetically utopian, even those best remembered for their dismal projections. For example, the famous report to the Club of Rome, The Limits to Growth (Meadows et al., 1972), is still cited widely for its warnings about the tendency of our overconsuming industrial society to overshoot and collapse. But its message was that we should mend our ways and find a less risk-prone equilibrium pathway to the future.

To be fair to planners, often they are institutionally caged in a cautious and conservative role and they don’t wish to appear too off-the-wall to policymakers who want concrete answers. In contrast, futurists often pride themselves on their creativity, normative visions, thinking outside the box, and so on, and they have developed forums that allow license in this respect. Thus, futures studies can be a useful adjunct to many planning exercises, especially if together they combine imaginative thinking with empirical analysis.

Having enjoyed much time in the company of futurists, I believe that, for truly committed futurists, a futures study is realized by anything that is “beyond the turning point,” that is, any scenario or event that is beyond our abilities to extrapolate. This might be some-
thing that appears quite improbable or lies well beyond a 25- or 50-year time horizon, where even the most utopian visions may seem achievable. Over such time spans it is assumed that human intervention can be effective, even with respect to “heavy trends” like population growth and environmental exhaustion. Typically, futures studies looks to a longer time frame, 2025 and beyond. But, since achieving the vision is paramount, horizons are elastic.

**Futures Studies and Strategic Planning**

Futures studies is sufficiently related to strategic planning that Antoni Ventura (1998) argues that they can easily be confused. He argues, however, that they should be differentiated by more than time scale. He sees futures studies as a science that studies the future in order to understand and influence it, and strategic planning as the method to use available resources so as to obtain a given result. He poses three possible relationships between futures studies and planning: (1) futures studies versus planning, clearly differentiating between one and the other; (2) future studies ante planning, considering future studies as a prior phase in the planning process; and (3) futures studies ad planning, integrating futures studies and strategic planning.

Ventura prefers the last relationship, arguing that good futuristic reflection—or, rather, a futuristic attitude—feeds our vision of the future, and that a futuristic attitude at all phases of strategic planning will help to orient strategic objectives and endow them with flexibility in the face of uncertainty. I prefer this direction, but would go even further to view planning as a subarea of futures studies, rather than the other way around—planning as futures studies’ window on the world. In this view, planning is that part of futures studies that deals with real issues that will have real outcomes. To see planning in this way obliges practitioners to embrace the future and pushes futurists to know reality. Temporarily suspending this challenge, I now turn to a discussion of futures studies’ origins and methods.

**A Brief Survey of Futures**

**In Ancient Times**

All civilizations have had their seers, but in Western literature the Greeks and Romans are cited most often. For example, in his review of 20th-century visions of future cities, “The City: Heaven on Earth or the Hell to Come?” I. F. Clarke (1988), a well-respected historian of futures studies, observes that

Plato initiated the great tradition of utopia that has reached us through the centuries. In his wake, many thinkers, philosophers, poets and visionaries have given us the possibility to dream and hope. To think about the ideal city, as Plato knew, was to think about the desirable, the not-yet-achieved future. (p. 582)

From that initial proposition, Plato moved on to lay the moral and political foundations of the ideal city-state.

Eleonora Masini (1998), one of the founding mothers of modern futures studies, also explores what the Greeks and Romans thought and wrote about the future and change. From Heraclitus we hear that “Nothing is more enduring than change,” and from Ovid “To what avail is the wind if we have no direction?” Such observations are cornerstones of contemporary futures studies. My favorite quotation for students of the future comes from Plato’s *The Republic* “I wonder if we could contrive … some magnificent myth that would in itself carry conviction to our whole community” (Cole & Lucas, 1979, p. 1). Accepting the need for futures studies, for me the important question becomes “What must we do to make the myth convincing?” At a minimum, it must be desirable, possible, and not carry unacceptable risks. At the same time we must respect Aristotle’s admonition that common folk should beware of fortune-seeking myth makers. Many of these ideas underpin contemporary planning and futures studies.

**Futures of the Imagination**

Science fiction is an important component of futures studies, even though some futurists feel that it undermines their efforts to gain academic respectability. A more enlightened perspective is to view science fiction—both movies and literature—as providing the necessary imagination for the future. For example, Miquel Barcelo (1998) remarks

While future studies uses rational models in imagining the future, science-fiction concentrates on the use of dramatic models to imagine what it will be like to live in this future and to think up other alternatives only some of them attainable. (p. 32)

Indeed, the father of modern science fiction, H. G. Wells, emphasized this role. In 1906, in a speech to the British Sociological Society, he recommended that sociology adopt as its “own differentiating method” the creation of utopias and their exhaustive criticism (Wager, 1996, p. 887).

Science fiction, whether inspired by visions of a new technology or a new society, is especially rich in the portrayal of urban futures. As I. F. Clarke (1988) observes, dreams of metropolitan splendor have always been the central image in futuristic fiction. Perhaps the best
known is Fritz Lang’s 1926 film *Metropolis*, which juxtaposes the promise of perfected technology in the skyscrapers of New Babel with its multilevel proletarian subterranean hells. Since the 1930s, writers of fiction have used the description of the future city as a most useful means of dealing with the pace of change. The chosen themes have reflected contemporary anticipations and apprehensions. Most of these stories take the form of parables for their time. For example, the dangers of an overpopulated world have encouraged authors to project the most menacing possibilities. There are relatively fewer positive visual images of the future—perhaps because it is easier and more exciting to portray dystopias. Nonetheless, there is a recognized need for futurists to find better means of propagandizing attractive futures once they have convinced themselves of their plausibility. To this extent there is unrealized potential in using the skills and techniques of science fiction to create convincing representations of alternative planned futures. The technical possibilities for these representations have arrived with the advent of virtual reality, animation, the Internet, and the like.

**In Present Times**

In the modern era, futures studies is traced to the end of World War II. According to Eleonora Masini (1998), futures rapidly became crucial in a fast changing society in search of direction. But futures studies became a tool for different purposes on the two sides of the Atlantic. In the U.S. it was seen as a strategic instrument, while in Europe it was seen as a tool to help rebuild a shattered spirit, often involving leading national planners and intellectuals. This resulted in two distinct ways of looking into the future that lasted until the 1970s (see Homann & Moll, 1993). Partly in consequence, American futures studies is less soul-searching, more often instigated by technological breakthroughs, but ultimately has sought primarily to be reassuring. A typical message would be “Yes, the present is turbulent and the next few years are uncertain, but in the end America will prevail politically, economically, and technologically, and everything will be A-OK” (Cole, 1987, p. 1). The current activities of the two leading futures organizations, the internationalist World Futures Studies Federation and the American-based World Futures Society, still reflect these origins. But even within Europe there have been different schools, such as the expressive and synthetic French “Le Prospective” approach and the subtly critical Eastern European “Praxis” group (see Clarke, 1989). Today there are many new perspectives from other parts of the world, first from Japan and India in the 1970s, then from Latin America, and more recently from China and South Korea. Even though, according to Masini (1998), the various schools have begun to amalgamate into their global role, among futurists there are many opinions as to what is meant by “futures studies” (Inayatullah, 1996). This frustrates even the bravest efforts to describe the futures paradigm (Riner, 1987) or define futures studies as a discipline (Bell, 1996). Futures studies may equally be seen as a political movement under the broad umbrella of a greater concern for all future generations.

While one task in this essay is to suggest definitions of futures studies that may be of relevance to planners, the following quotations give a sense of how my own mentors—the founders of modern futures studies—viewed its importance:

- “To build a future means linking the knowledge of the past and present to choice and action.”—Bertrand de Jouvenel, founding grandfather (1964)
- “Assuming a future makes the present endurable and the past meaningful—having a project about the future is the most important moral endeavor any human being can have.”—John McHale, founding father (1969)
- “The future does not simply happen—it is consciously or unconsciously built.”—Eleonora Masini, founding mother (1983)
- “Any useful statement about the future should seem ridiculous.”—Jim Dator, founding sibling (2000)

Each perspective brings essential goals and tasks to any futures project. In the next section, I explain how this impacts the ways in which futures studies are carried out.

**Futures Methods**

For me, following the earlier quotation from Plato, the primary aim of a futures study is to tell a convincing story about the future. In modern parlance this involves building one or more *scenarios* (see Kahn & Wiener, 1967). Scenarios may be characterized by seemingly simple quantitative criteria—such as high versus low economic growth, high versus low energy prices, public versus private transportation—or by more qualitative criteria—such as centralization of governance versus expanded civil society, a world dominated by rich countries versus cooperation between developing countries, and so on. The outcome may be a set of contrasting snapshots of the future or a more process-oriented “history of the future” or both.

Over the years, futurists have developed a number of techniques, such as multifold trends (a set of interacting projections), Delphi (a repetitive survey), and...
cross-impact analysis (a table of interactions between variables) and co-opted many others, such as extrapolation, brainstorming, and simulation (see, e.g., Glenn, 1999). To simplify discussion, it is useful to consider a futures study to involve three activities: forecasting, envisioning, and polling. Each of these activities has a different foundation (e.g., is driven by quantitative data, imagination, or opinion, respectively) and so tends to draw on different techniques, provides different kinds of forecasts, and treats uncertainty differently. For example, forecasting typically draws on formal models, such as econometric and demographic extrapolation; envisioning draws on science fiction imagery and metaphors, historical analogy, and incidents; polling draws on media culling, the wisdom of experts, and surveys. Most approaches to futures studies involve all three activities to some degree, even when they appear to emphasize a particular technique. For example, most econometricians and demographers use their own judgment and expectations to fine-tune their extrapolations.

Each activity requires special skills and appeals to a different kind of audience. For example, policymakers appear to prefer the quantified forecasts offered by extrapolation, futures for the general public often include creative visual or verbal imagery, and business and community groups often favor participative polling-based approaches. Forecasters typically concentrate on a restricted range of issues for which there are “hard” data such as that found in government statistics and account only implicitly for “soft” variables such as political convictions. In contrast, these same “soft” variables may be the driving force behind envisioning- or polling-based approaches.

The emphasis across these activities, the mix of techniques used, and the overall approach used in any given futures study reflects a host of issues—for example, the topics to be considered; the time scale; the orientation/perspective, philosophy/skills, etc. of the futurist(s); and the anticipated audience. These differences are summarized in Table 1.

### Recurring Debates over Methods

Along with other disciplines, futurists have furiously debated the relative merits of hard and soft methods over the last few decades. Statistical or econometric models by design attempt to explain as much as possible with as few variables as possible, which makes them appear simplistic and deterministic. In turn, qualitative methods appear imprecise and fuzzy. On the whole, the richer but less empirical methods are now in favor. Unfortunately, there does not appear to be a shared middle ground, even though this might enhance both forecasts and futures studies. At the very least, statistical trends and relationships provide insights into historical and present structures and processes that condition and constrain the future, even though they do not determine it. Some futurists (myself included) have attempted to develop heuristic methods for merging together quantitative and qualitative data and ideas and “sketching” the implications. This debate tends to confuse ideological with methodological issues. The controversy over Urban Dynamics and World Dynamics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 1. Summary of futures methods and activities.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Activity</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Feature</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Forecasting</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data-based projections using economic, demographic, or environmental data, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory, current or historical events, issues, or imagination</td>
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<tr>
<td>Representative viewpoints solicited from participants</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Envisioning</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Limited number of quantifiable items</td>
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<td>Selected variables</td>
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<tr>
<td>Diverse variables</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Polling</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Statistical estimation of historic change</td>
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<tr>
<td>Explanation of historical processes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Experience of participants</td>
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<tr>
<td>Extrapolation of trends</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stylized storytelling</td>
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<tr>
<td>Survey of participants expectations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Narrow range of probabilities for the future</td>
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<td>Map of possibilities for the future</td>
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<td>Set of desirable futures</td>
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<td>Statistical uncertainty</td>
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<td>Plausibility of overall story</td>
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<td>Variation across responses</td>
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<td>Public policymakers</td>
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<td>Business and community</td>
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(Forester, 1969, 1971) is one example. Ultimately, I would suggest that while there are distinct techniques such as trend forecasting, cross-impact analysis, and Delphi, what actually happens in a futures study must be determined by the goals, skills, and interests of the authors and the audience. Essentially the method becomes the vehicle for the organization, synthesis, and communication of disparate ideas, information, and intentions.

**Futures Studies as an Integrative Endeavor**

It is evident that even when a futures study is focussed on a specific policy issue such as transportation or energy, a broad range of expertise is needed. Thus, most futures studies become an integrative endeavor. It is useful, therefore, to identify the knowledge and skills that different kinds of futurist and participating academic disciplines can bring to the futures table. These contributions are summarized in Table 2, which indicates the types of information provided by forecasting, futures studies, science fiction, engineering and science, planning, history, anthropology, and political science. It also exposes the potential limitations of the contributions. For example, Table 2 shows the temporal scope of the analyses forwards and backwards in time. So, for example, forecasters use econometric methods to make narrow, short-term projections, whilst anthropologists employ a variety of ethnographic methods to discover community-level concerns and images for the future (Razak, 2000). Much science fiction appears to recreate medieval institutions, in “Star Trek” form, whilst historians have recently begun to manufacture “virtual histories” (for example, Ferguson, 1998). The natural and engineering sciences provide informed assessment of technological breakthroughs and trends. I note here that one seemingly quite naïve extrapolation, Moore’s Law, which is a prediction of the trend in the cost and performance of computers, is remarkable both for its accuracy and for its uniqueness in this respect. I have commented earlier on the balance of imagination and pragmatism in planning and futures studies that is reflected in the different time scales and techniques adopted. Obviously, other disciplines also contribute to futures studies, approaches vary with individuals, and historic circumstances affect the forecasts that are presented. One welcome change, for example, is that the passing of the year 2000 has released futurists from this fixation and stimulated provocative studies directed at the next millennium (Sardar, 2000; Velamoor & Heydon, 2000).

** Probable, Possible, and Desirable Futures**

As explained earlier, futurists like to emphasize the plurals in futures studies. In their Web-based *Introduction to Futures Studies,* for example, Linda Groff and Paul Smolker (2000) remark on the wide range of views and perspectives among futurists. They note that futurists represent the gamut of views. “Doom and gloom” futurists...
ists focus on current real world problems without easy solutions, such as nuclear dangers, the population explosion, world hunger, depletion of nonrenewable energy sources, and environmental degradation and pollution. They theorize that if current trends continue, the future will be much worse than the present. In contrast, “positive, visionary, and evolutionary” futurists focus on creating positive images of the future and empowering people to achieve their goals.

Groff and Smolker’s (2000) idealized formula for conducting a futures study proceeds as follows:

1. Accept as a premise that there are many alternative futures.
2. Distinguish between and among possible, probable, and desirable futures.
3. Set out possible futures: anything (good or bad, probable or improbable) that could happen in the future.
4. Highlight probable futures: what is most likely to happen in the future (based on extending past trends or developments into the future in some way).
5. Elaborate preferable futures: what is most desirable to happen in the future.

In practice the relationship between scenarios and the underlying story line is more convoluted. Like planning, futures studies is a manipulative exercise, and futurists are sensitive to their leverage points in the relevant ongoing debate. Futurists often portray a range of scenarios only in order to build a case for a particular strategy. The more rhetorical formula for futures studies in practice runs as follows:

1. Suggest that present trends are leading to disaster (probable future).
2. Explain that the alternatives currently in vogue are insufficient to avoid the disaster (undesirable possible futures).
3. Emphasize the need for dramatic new thinking (proposals leading to the futurist’s preferred outcome).
4. Demonstrate the robustness of the proposals (anticipate and assuage criticism).

This formula dictates the details of many techniques—how alternatives are presented, which charts are shown, which anecdotes are recited, and so on. It also means that planners (who use futures studies) and futurists (who are informants to decisions) should be well aware of the values, assumptions, and manipulations at play.

Mapping the Future

In practice, it is not uncommon for scenarios to be differentiated according to thinly disguised mainstream ideologies. Futurists have developed a number of devices with which to structure value-laden discussions and provide a framework for clarifying and elaborating alternatives. The general approach, using the metaphor of a map, is to set up a theoretical (or ideological) grid upon which to plot and explore alternatives. In World Futures: The Great Debate (Freeman & Jahoda, 1975), for example, global development alternatives were characterized as high growth and low growth, and explained in terms of conservative, reformist, and radical perspectives and policies. Each alternative was then elaborated across policy sectors (e.g., trade, education, work relations, environment, etc.) to provide a map of competing “histories of the future.” This type of approach may be used to build up quite detailed, internally consistent plans. The axial variables are selected so as to focus attention on the key policy choices. The relevant policy sectors are systematically subdivided to the level of specific policy.

Macrohistories and Virtual Futures

Futurists have become increasingly aware of the need to recognize and account for “alternative pasts” and “alternative presents” as well as “alternative futures,” each with their competing ideological, folkloric, secular, religious, or theoretical interpretations. Any event is likely to have multiple explanations and implications. Ambiguity, indeterminacy, and bias expand hourglass-like as we look further forwards and backwards in time. Histories and futures are constantly rewritten to account for new knowledge and perspectives around the events and institutions of the present. Indeed, many historical accounts are no more neutral than prognoses for the future, since they are often written with an eye to the future (usually to justify the preservation of the status quo.) Futurists such as Ziauddin Sardar (2000), following Said (1978), for example, have observed that historians have colonized the past of developing countries in order to colonize their future.

In futures studies the balance between imagination and reality is always tenuous. Edmund Burke (circa 1790) reputedly said “You can never plan the future by the past” (p. 81). Winston Churchill (1940) stood this notion on its head, observing that the further back you look, the further forward you see. Both are true, and so a continuing dilemma for futurists is how much weight to place on “history.” Some futurists—rightly or wrongly—denounce as overly deterministic and conservative others who place too much weight on the continuation of historic empirical trends. But equally, there is a danger in
building our future like pundits on the turn of each and every fresh event. Inevitably, there is continuing discussion as to how history does and should play into the future. In this, again, European and Asian futurists favor a more theoretical approach than their American counterparts, for whom pure extrapolation or technological advances, rather than historical contradictions, tend to be the starting point for the futures study.

Among leading early futurists, Lewis Mumford (1974) especially emphasized the need to properly interpret our history in more human terms than those imposed via the myth of the machine. More recently, Johan Galtung and Sohail Inayatullah (1997) have argued that futurists should make more use of the historical record. Understanding the stages of history allows us to speculate more confidently how to assess the stages of the future. Moreover, they claim that looking backwards gives the distance needed to review the many claims of paradigm shifts and allows us to distinguish between what are mere perturbations and what are genuine historical transformations.

**Ethnographic Futures**

It has become a cliché for futurists that questions of culture are a critical component of futures studies. For example, UNESCO’s Futures of Culture Project maintains that “culture in the future is the crux of the future” (Masini, 1994, p. 1). For more than 2 decades now, futurists have argued that science fiction movies and made futures, and she identifies many pitfalls when outsiders intervene in local affairs. But despite this awareness, the juxtaposition of scenarios that she describes, summarized in Table 3, exhibits many of the ploys and stratagems referred to above.

**Changing Paradigms**

Over the years there has been considerable soul searching by futurists about methods and modalities, leading to a steady emergence of “new paradigms.” European-style prospective and praxis grew up alongside American-style technological forecasting and structured scenario approaches. The Limits to Growth (Meadows et al., 1972) and subsequent Club of Rome models had a considerable impact on the futures movement worldwide, with divisions on the issues becoming confused with divisions on the validity of the method. There remains a division between econometric forecasting and mainstream futures studies similar to that, for example, between regional scientists and human geographers (Batty & Cole, 1997).

According to van der Meulen (1999), futures studies has made a remarkable comeback. But, he says, more than a decade was necessary to overcome the disappointments in the 1970s about the demise of the technocratic idea that the future could be explored by scientific means. Thus, for some futurists the idea of forecasting has been replaced by the new paradigm of “foresight” (Slaughter, 1995). Rather than trying to forecast, futurists should present visions that stretch the time horizon of policy and challenge actors to take part in developing the future. A futures study therefore should focus on the process of exploring possible futures rather than on making specific predictions of how the future will be.

A related paradigm that has emerged from policy-oriented futures studies is that of “post normal science” (Funtowicz & Ravetz, 1999). This represents an effort to bring more honesty and a greater diversity of insights...
and interests into policymaking. The realization behind this approach is that in the issue-driven science relating to environmental debates and similarly complex issues, typically the facts are uncertain, values are in dispute, the stakes are high, and the decisions are urgent. In such situations, scientific evidence has to be balanced against other, more traditional forms of knowledge held by the stakeholders who will be impacted by the decisions. While this may not seem like a revelation to planners, it does indicate, once again, that mainstream futures studies—even when viewed as a separate discipline—has bridging points into planning.

As noted earlier, futures studies is a diverse subject area. Table 4 offers some Web sites and journals that describe futures methods and issues in general and have links to other topic-specific sites.

### Confounding Institutions

Policy-oriented futurists face institutional challenges. In my own experience, attempts to marry futures studies and practical policy can become an uncomfortable balancing act over which the futurist has limited control. I cite some examples, of which I participated in two. The first, the Europe Plus Thirty Project (Kennet, 1976), was conducted some 25 years ago to explain how and why the European Community should look to the future. Despite its failure to make any noteworthy predictions, the study is recognized for laying out the steps for a successful European research and development strategy. The project’s success was due to its influential political patrons, a leading European commissioner and eminent academician, Ralf Dahrendorf, and the project coordinator, former British minister Lord Wayland Kennet (1976). In contrast, in the U.S., the promising Global 2000 Project begun under President Carter disappeared in the Reagan years. A United Nations Development Program project to prepare a manual of futures studies for African planners (World Futures Studies Federation, 1986) led to World Bank funding for the National Long-Term Perspectives Studies now being undertaken in several African countries. The putative reason for the World Bank’s support for this project appears to have been that the Bank was being criticized for its bleak forecasts and hoped that this criticism could be deflect ed by dreaming ahead to some brighter future. A technically excellent study, The Interfutures Project (see Lesourne, 1975), carried out by the Organization for Cooperation and Development in the early 1970s, was funded by the Japanese purportedly to carry the message to the U.S. that they (the Japanese) “had arrived.” A last difficulty, observed by Myers and Kitsuse (1998), is that even when futures studies are included in policy studies, illustrated by those in New York State, these are token efforts to be relegated to an appendix of the final report.

The lesson is that when futurists become engaged in planning and policy, they tend to become someone else’s political messenger or are simply ignored. This makes the role of freelance futurists and nongovernmental organizations and the worldwide communication and camaraderie among independent futurists especially important. It also gives planners, who may be more adept at dealing with the institutions of policy, the central role in affecting futures.
Turning Dreams into Futures

Having described some available resources for planning-oriented futures studies, I return to the modus operandi of linking futures studies and planning and the rationale for doing this. Obviously, how this is done and how much futuristic “creativity” is possible depends on the topic and the venue. A basic rationale for planners engaging in futures studies is that certain areas require one to take a long-term outlook, and it is important that underlying assumptions and prejudices are made explicit. This position is exemplified by the work of the Dutch Planning Commission in Scanning the Future (1992). Another well respected study, the United Nations Millennium Project begun in 1996 (Glenn & Gordon, 1997), emphasizes that

The primary purpose of futures research is to give coherence and direction to planning processes. Futures research distills a vast array of information

### TABLE 4. Selected futures studies Web sites and journals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name, location, and URL</th>
<th>Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Millennium Project</td>
<td>Global participatory futures research think tank of futurists, scholars, business planners, and policy makers in international organizations, governments, corporations, NGOs, and universities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Council for the United Nations University Washington, DC <a href="http://www.millennium-project.org">http://www.millennium-project.org</a></td>
<td>Created by the Hawaii State Legislature in 1971 as a futures research arm for public agencies, private groups, and individuals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institute for Alternative Futures Washington, DC. <a href="http://www.altfutures.com/">http://www.altfutures.com/</a></td>
<td>Links to foresight-oriented futures studies sites, including professional journals and organizations, lists and news groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Foresight Institute Swinburne University of Technology Hawthorn, Victoria, Australia <a href="http://www.aboutforesight.org/">http://www.aboutforesight.org/</a></td>
<td>Forecast of technology and strategy. Virtual think-tank brings experts together online to forecast potential breakthroughs and strategically plan for their impact.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GW Forecast George Washington University Washington, DC <a href="http://www.gwforecast.gwu.edu">http://www.gwforecast.gwu.edu</a></td>
<td>Links to many futures sites: comprehensive, scholarly and professional periodicals, academic programs and courses, organizations, lists and news groups.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
from many academic disciplines about dynamics that have shaped the world and how those forces might change to create new opportunities, threats, and uncertainties. (p. 1)

Guidelines for the proposed U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Early Warning System show how this philosophy offers a valuable checklist for futures-oriented policy, a methodologically admirable but daunting prescription. To summarize, they recommend that such efforts should

draw from a wide range of sources, operate in a continuous rather than a “one-shot” mode, maintain an historic data and ideas base, be subject to outside scrutiny, make goals and values explicit, recognize that many futures are possible, encourage imaginative and “far out” views, and accept that no analytic method will eliminate uncertainties, but nonetheless be quantitative wherever possible to facilitate analysis. (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 1995, p. 12)

For planners to achieve the “futuristic attitude” advocated by Ventura (1998), they will have to spend time and effort thinking about the future. This means allocating departmental resources and focusing imagination departmental resources and focusing imagination on the futures aspects of policy studies (i.e., describing the desired future and showing how it can be achieved, as opposed to simply extrapolating current trends and problems). The institutional barriers noted above imply that futures studies probably have to be promoted and fostered by courageous senior planners who are prepared to foster far out views, to break out of their present molds, and put the future first. Adding to Isserman’s (1985) challenge that planners should “dare to plan,” I would say that planners should also “dare to dream.” As a planner and a futurist, I would hope that we do more than simply stretch the time horizon of policy and more than simply bring more people into the future dreaming process. We need to have the audacity to look beyond the turning point. We need both to dream and to implement those dreams.

REFERENCES

Demographic Futures as a Guide to Planning

California’s Latinos and the Compact City

Dowell Myers

Demographic futures are proposed as an empirical and normative guide for planning. Projections of demographic change help planners prepare future-oriented plans that are better targeted to the needs of a changing clientele. As an example, population changes in California highlight the growing importance of Latinos to the development of more compact cities. Demographic futures also entail normative interpretations of future scenarios as much as they do empirical relationships projected into the future. Several alternative stories are related of Latinos’ future situation, each highlighting different value premises, problems, and conclusions. To effectively use demographic futures, planners must be conversant with both projected trends and competing interpretive stories.

The overarching purpose of planning is to meet the needs of residents in communities more effectively. As the nature of planners’ clientele changes over time, so must the plans themselves. Effective planning and policymaking require us to think prospectively about changing demographics. At a minimum our “current” data are always out of date. By the time the 2000 census data are released in detail, it will already be 2002 or 2003. Unfortunately, relying on such uncurrent data continually places our understanding behind reality.

Even an accurate picture of the present is hardly enough. So often we forget that projects or plans designed today will not yield their intended benefits until a future date. Who will be the users at that time? In effect, we should aim our plans to satisfy the needs of the future population, not the people we know from the present or the past.

Demographic futures—which include population projections, detailed descriptions of changing characteristics (population analysis), and normative interpretations—have special advantages for planners. They direct our attention to the future residents of the community and keep our attention focused on people as the object of planning. Not only does population analysis keep planners focused on the changing needs of residents, but