

Special Edition on the Communication of Foresight

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Communication as an issue is both ancient and modern, enduring and undergoing transformation. Communication reaches the depths of what it mean to be human and cuts across every aspect of life: whether singing a song to a new born baby, reading a newspaper, engaging in a civic meeting, sending and receiving an email, posting a photo on a social networking site, creating propaganda to mis-mobilize a population to war, censoring / fire-walling a populace against subversive content, or creating media platforms to conscientize us to our wicked challenges - from the political-economic to the institutional and personal - every aspect of our lives is inter-woven within practices and processes of communication.

This is why, in 2006, I penned a short essay expressing some frustration with the futures field's capacity to communicate with the wider world.¹ By this time I had witnessed the transformational potential and value of futures studies, while simultaneously seeing the field's limitations in impacting public discourse and awareness. I began to question futures studies as a purely academic exercise, and wondered whether a 'hybridized' practice should and could be developed:

“An apparent dissociation, that between futures research, with its natural depth, and larger, mainstream popular debates about human and planetary futures, is at the heart of meeting the challenges of the new century. While the corporate-colonized media showcases consumerist techno-futures, valuable futures-oriented research is ignored and margin- alised. When an emerging media oligopoly has media access to most of the planet's peoples, and promotes news bordering on propaganda, what matters of rigorous and deep futures work? All the valuable insights in the world, all the deepest understanding of the challenges we face in the 21st century, are worthless if they cannot be communicated more broadly and influence change. It appears to me that Futures research must move beyond its academic enterprise into the domain of the media, through coordinated and intelligent communications strategies, through a hybridised foresight practice that is both epistemically reflexive and aesthetically infusive.”²

Six years later I wanted to revisit the theme of the communication of foresight in a different way. I sensed a groundswell of innovation in this area, and wanted to find out what is being created. Casting a wide net, this special edition would be concerned with communication in the field of futures studies in its broadest sense. More specifically, however, it was a search and exploration to find and draw out people from many different locales in our communication's

ecologies who were integrating their foresight practices with new communications pathways, or who inversely (and this is more common than acknowledged) twine their communications practices with foresight. This issue is thus about discovery, but more concretely about the new pathways and practices for communicating futures.

What was discovered is incredibly exciting. The articles and essays in this special edition are the opposite of witty academic diatribes on how the futures field “should” and “could” incorporate communications strategies. There are no theoretical musings divorced from practice. Every one of the articles and essays provides detailed descriptions of new practices, embodied and efficacious. Thus, six years later, I can only express deep appreciation and gratitude for the innovators in the futures field (or communications / media fields) that have pioneered many new ways forward. This special edition is dedicated to those pioneers blazing new pathways in the communication of foresight.

The Articles and Essays

We begin with Oliver Markley’s article “Imaginal Visioning for Prophetic Foresight”. He makes the case that rational / analytic approaches to futures “need to be complemented by ‘imaginal’ visioning methods that are based on higher intuition.” The transformative changes we face call upon integrative and holistic strategies, using personal, interpersonal and transpersonal processes for communicating wise futures and “prophetic foresight”. The foundations of the communication of foresight must first be grounded in wise futures: “ecologically sustainable, socioeconomically just, psychospiritually fulfilling, and protective of the needs of future generations”.

In “Scenario Art: A New Futures Method that uses Art to Support Decision-Making for Sustainable Development” author Aleta Lederwasch continues the theme of integrative ‘whole-of-mind’ communications strategies. She describes a newly innovated practice whereby visual art is used in conjunction with scenario building, which “has the capacity to increase a person’s level of empathy, creativity and responsiveness to risk.” Combining research from futures studies, brain sciences, and art therapy, the article provides rich insights for new approaches to developing and conducting scenario workshops.

Author Sabina Head bring together the ancient and the modern in her article “Forward Theatre and Causal Layered Analysis”. While storytelling is an ancient practice, and futures studies is relatively new, her article describes a type of theatre, “Forward Theatre”, which brings performance and anticipation together. Using a number of narrative examples, Causal Layered Analysis is used to explore the underlying discourses and metaphors operative in the mediation of power. Forward Theatre looks to be a nuanced and dynamic approach for “communicating futures content to newcomers”.

In “Experience-based exploration of complex energy systems” authors Andreas Ligtvoet and Emile J. L. Chappin turn our attention to computer mediated strategies. They detail the use of agent-based modeling and serious games for experiencing decision making processes “when dealing with an uncertain, complex future.” Using large scale energy systems as case examples, their article provides a rich picture of the implication of these new approaches for understanding and foresight communication.

In the last of the articles, “Foresight in a network era: Peer-producing alternative futures”,

Tim Mansfield, Gareth Priday and I explore the implications of the network era for the development of Anticipatory Democracy. Detailing the emergence of network practices in futures studies, we argue that network centric strategies for Anticipatory Democracy will center on issues concerning “instantiation, replication, openness and, control.” How these dynamics play out may determine whether the large scale peer production of alternative futures can be achieved.

Venessa Miemis, John Smart and Alvis Brigis in their essay on “Open Foresight”, provide a rich overview of the Open Foresight Project and Future of Facebook project. They distill the deep rationale for open and public foresight processes, also offering reflections, insights and principles for making open foresight projects a success. For all those who want to run open and public foresight processes using social networks / media, this is a must read.

Finally, Dana Klisanin details the development of an explicit framework for the communication of foresight in her essay “Evolutionary Guidance Media: an integral framework for foresight communication”. She discusses how the framework came to be developed, as transformational “narratives required a new system of communication in order to be effectively communicated.” She gives a detailed description of the various parts of the framework, and a useful guide in its application.

I would also like to mention and express deep gratitude for the important work of Dr. Wendy Shultz in pulling together the concurrent symposium on “Complexity, Narrative, Participation, and Images of the Future”. The symposium, based on a panel of the International Research Conference on Foresight (YIRCOF ’11) in Turkey, has dynamic and strong overlaps with the special edition on the communication of foresight.

Together, the special edition and symposium in this issue of the Journal of Futures Studies represent groundbreaking work that I believe will invariably enrich the field, offering practices, pathways and potentials for a new generation of hybridized practitioners to make the difference that makes the difference.

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- 1 Ramos, J. (2006). Consciousness, culture and communication of foresight. *Futures*, 38(9), 1119-1124.
- 2 Ibid (2006)

