THREE FUTURISTS

Profiles of Sohail Inayatullah, Tony Stevenson and Richard Somervill

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SOHAIL INAYATULLAH

There probably could be no better background for a futurist than that of Sohail Inayatullah, 37, currently a postdoctorate fellow at the Communication Centre, a research center at Queensland University of Technology in Brisbane, Australia. A citizen of the world at a young age, taught development theory by his father and spiritual mysticism by his mother, Inayatullah is seen by many as one of the brightest of the next generation of futurists.

Tony Stevenson, director of the Communication Centre and also a futurist, already calls Inayatullah "one of the great seekers and thinkers in the world in futures studies, particularly in critical futures research. "He's bringing cultural and spiritual dimensions to the critique of our institutions and the creation of new institutions."

Inayatullah's father, a United Nations development specialist who is now retired, is from a tiny Pakistani village-- the first person to leave there in the last thousand years, according to his son. The village, near Lahore in the Punjab region, first got electricity in 1973 and still has no running water. "He was just lucky," says Inayatullah. "He was very bright." He initially won a scholarship in Germany, then later -- while working in rural development at Peshawar -- received a scholarship from the Hawaii's East-West Center.

"At that time Pakistan was being run by technocrats," Inayatullah recalls. "Ford Foundation and others were there. They were getting money and trying to find young Pakistani scholars who could help the country develop." Recipients in the early 1960s could choose any university in the U.S. So when Inayatullah was 5 years old, he and his family made "a huge move" to faraway Indiana University in Bloomington. Five years later, it was on to New York -- Flushing, Queens. "It was another dramatic change," says Inayatullah. "Indiana was very sweet -- a typical university community like Manoa. In New York, it was a tough neighborhood."

In 1968, the family moved on to Geneva, Switzerland, where his father researched co-ops all over the world. His area of expertise for the U.N. was political development, bureaucracy and economic development. "He was one of the ones arguing for a new international economic order -- it was fun for us," recalls Inayatullah, who remembers at every lunchtime getting a lecture on economic politics and development theory.

After Geneva, it was back to Pakistan for two years, then to Malaysia. By that time, Inayatullah was a 17-year-old high school graduate. "I asked my father what I should do. He said go to Hawaii, it was a multicultural place and I'd enjoy it. And he was right, I loved it. I got there in 1975 and said, 'I'm never leaving this place.' Honolulu had everything for me: spiritual movements, the university, the beach." He

would stay until 1994.

The young world traveler not only had been strongly influenced by his father, but also by his mother, who was an adherent of Sufi, a system of Muslim mysticism. She would meditate late into the night, praying for hours and having visions and dreams, sharing them with her children. "She would tell us about a dream, and three years later it would happen," says Inayatullah. "As a young person it was a bit scary, but later I found theoretical positions that could explain that. It was scary stuff, but also lovely stuff."

As a freshman at the University of Hawaii, Inayatullah remembers, he had no plan of study. One day, he was walking around and saw a sign that said "Free meditation classes." For a guy with no money, that had great appeal, so he began meditating. He also took classes in philosophy and political science, but by the time he was a senior he realized he had no major. He was allowed to do a major in liberal studies, and he created his own program called "spiritual and social change."

It wasn't until his last semester that he was introduced to futures studies, in a class by Jim Dator, a political science professor and futurist. "I loved his energy and the way he was talking about the future. It was new and exciting for me, a better way to frame all those things that I had read," says Inayatullah. "I wanted language to somehow theoretically explain spiritual, cultural and economic perspectives on life, and I felt that I couldn't do that in conventional social science. But in futures studies I could say, 'Here's a spiritual scenario of tomorrow.'"

Futures studies also had the grand social change Inayatullah was looking for -- it could talk about the deep patterns, the levels of transformation behind the day-to-day. "Growing up, I could see what was changing and what wasn't. So there was a psychological need to account for that. For me, futures studies gave me the theoretical and emotional space to do that."

Moving on to the UH master's program in alternative futures studies, Inayatullah served an internship with the Hawaii court system, and ended up staying on for 10 years, even while working on his doctorate, which he finished in 1990. He developed projects on futures research on the judiciary, robotics and technology, but recalls being frustrating doing futures in an institution that basically wanted planning and forecasting.

Futures studies merged perfectly with a new interest that later proved to be a major influence on Inayatullah's life: the progressive utililization theory (PROUT) movement of Indian social revolutionary P.R. Sarkar. "So much of his stuff is visions of the future, and here was a way to talk about it," he says. "Here is an alternative future that has different positions on economics, epistemology and everything. Futures studies allowed my passion for it, but also allowed a distance. In academia, we need that."

Sarkar came along when the 18-year-old Inayatullah, culturally a Muslim, was looking for more universal language. "I don't consider myself a religious individual," he explains. "I do meditation and all those things, but not in that sense of religious. The difference between spirituality and religion is that with spirituality there are many avenues, and one does things because there is some insight into it, not because it's text-based - because we're supposed to do this. I wanted a more direct experience."

Sarkar, who also was a poet, philosopher and linguist, died in 1990, but not before Inayatullah focused on him for his doctoral dissertation, and visited the holy man in Calcutta in 1989. The experience was marred by Inayatullah's extreme difficulty in getting approval to visit India, as well as political harassment once there. "When you go through a spiritual type of experience, it's always a struggle. You don't get those things free. In the old days, you used to have to climb a mountain. Now you have to deal with visa officers and customs people. If you believe there's some other kind of awareness in the world, it's like you're tested for it."

But his visit with Sarkar was inspiring for Inayatullah. "He was a fearless person who spent many years in

jail for challenging Indira Gandhi. Here was someone who could have been like any other Indian guru, living in Beverly Hills, but who stayed right in the midst of the most extreme poverty." Inayatullah recalls being "floored" by Sarkar's spiritual presence, and says the PROUT people, who had little money, were very welcoming. "I was tempted to stay in a nice hotel, but they understood that I was a spoiled person who lived in Hawaii and had his own Honda. So they gave me my own room and blankets and stuff." But after 10 days or so, he wanted out. "It was dirty, and I was in bad shape -- very, very sick. When I landed back in Islamabad, my parents said I looked like a ghost."

But the experience was overwhelming, and Inayatullah continues to be active in PROUTNET, which has nodes all over the world, in Africa, Russia, Japan, South America -- small PROUT groups, PROUT co-ops, PROUT food stores. Some are meditation centers, some are social service centers. The idea, says Inayatullah, is constantly to be interacting with theory, action and values, and PROUT serves as a medium for that.

"I don't consider myself a PROUT leader, but one who writes about it. I find ways to make it more understandable to other people, and show how it is an alternative," he says. "The leaders are the people who are really doing it. Our one group that works more in academics and Internet. I don't sleep on the carpet and spend hours every day doing social service, but all of us have to find some way to contribute, however we can."

Another major influence on Inayatullah was Johan Galtung, a Norwegian futurist, cosmologist and peace theorist who also served jail time in Norway for political activism. "I find him inspiring," says Inayatullah. "A lot of his ideas are very similar to Sarkar's in the sense of cycles and alternative economics." After receiving his PhD, Inayatullah collaborated with Galtung on a book on macrohistory and macrohistorians -- 20 people who had deep theories of social change, including Sarkar. He hopes it will be published in 1995.

Inayatullah says that, in his own development, he looks for "real people who have an integrated self," and Tony Stevenson is another one of those. The two met at futures meetings, and Stevenson pointed Inayatullah -- who had been applying unsuccessfully for futures positions at several universities -- toward a postdoctorate fellowship at Queensland's Communication Centre, where he moved in the fall of 1994. There, he is working with Stevenson on aspects of communication futures.

"We have formed a group meeting weekly to rethink communications theory, and are working on developing new metaphors for the information highway." One example is "netweaving" instead of "networking," which brings in the technology but realizes you want to bring in a tapestry of many colors. "And you also want many types of technologies -- physical, mental, spiritual -- and not just the traditional view of technology," he says.

"My own sense of technology -- traditional social science -- is charts -- technology on one axis and cultural on the other, and the question is how technology transforms culture. The type of reading we're trying to do now is that technology is a type of culture. Imbedded in technology are always cultural values or historical political struggles, so its impossible to remove technology from culture and civilization. So it's less how technology impacts culture, but how does the particular type of culture called technology interact with different types of cultures? That's how I try to reframe it."

One project is trying to imagine libraries from different cultural traditions, something Inayatullah is doing with his PROUT group. "Within our debate, we're asking whether we're a social group or a development group, and I'm arguing that we're none of those things -- that we want to use Sarkar's own categories if we want to work in the paradigm. So one thing besides the important part of social service -- starting co-ops, dealing with human suffering -- is how do we rethink libraries that represent these alternative cultural categories?"

In a normal library, Inayatullah explains, are floors for science, social science, arts, philosophy and religion. But that represents one civilization's view. An Islamic library would not look like that, he argues, because Muslims don't make the division between art, religion and politics. Or a library from a PROUT point of view might be layers of the mind. The first layer is the body, the second is reason, the third is intuition and the fourth layer is superconsciousness.

"So those become theories," he says, "but then how would we devise an information economy based on that? That's something we're starting to play with -- that if we adopt the information economy of, say, a library and its divisions, then of course it's going to be unfamiliar to us. So part of the project is reclassifying knowledge, and that changes how you send information and how you receive information -- and what, in fact, one calls information. Because information is part of that whole wrap which pretends to be neutral, but always imbedded in it are values and historical classification schemes."

Inayatullah is a prolific writer, and his articles encompass areas far too wide to enumerate here. Most of his current work is concerned with post-development and third-world critiques and solutions to postmodernity. He appreciates the efforts by the postmodernists to open up spaces, but sees them as ignoring the process of creating new futures. However, he says that is not to be expected from a "dying" Western culture.

For Inayatullah, schizophrenia as one metaphorical model of the future: The breakdown of the coherent self, leading to a variety of selves that are not integrated by any sense of culture, history or any imposed structural self (such as the self of the modern world). The western vision of the future, he feels, has become hegemonic just as the west has become universal. Within the west's linear evolutionary model, he asks, how can the backward offer visions of the future? They can only be educated and transformed, not solicited for alternatives. Inayatullah says the non-West is filled with compelling alternatives to modernity, with alternative images of time and space.

For futures studies to participate in the creation of the next century, he feels, the non-West will have to break out of the model set up by the West -- that is, strategic international theory and development theory. It will also have to break out of its own recent despotic imitative past.

One of his most recent articles, on approaches for sustaining and transforming the world for future generations, perhaps was inspired by his recent marriage and the birth of a baby son. "We need to develop data categories that measure how well we are preserving the 'Earth' for future generations, find creative ways to understand how different cultures approach the issue of future generations... and create institutions and enact local, national and global legislation to protect the rights of future generations," he wrote. Inayatullah also stresses the need to extend the view of future generations beyond human cultures, to microvita, animals, plants, technologies, "indeed, All-That-Is."

For Inayatullah, the most important thing in my life right now is his son. He and his wife, Ivana Milojevic -- a Russian Serb from the former Yugoslavia who does women's studies from a futures standpoint -- carried on a dangerous courtship, with Inayatullah sneaking in and out of Belgrade, before being married in Pakistan in January 1994.

"It's wonderful," he says of being a father to a 3-month-old. "It's reinforced my image of the future. I want my son's world to be better, and have him grow up in a safe world. I try to meditate with him, although at three months his concentration level is 10 seconds!"

Currently, Inayatullah is involved in setting up two-week futures seminars in Europe and the Asia-Pacific area, sponsored by the World Futures Studies Federation (WFSF), with funding from UNESCO and other sources. The sessions use scenarios, backcasting, emerging issues analysis and imaging workshops. Regarding scenarios, in contrast to futurist Roy Amara's division into preferable, probable and possible futures, Inayatullah prefers:

> **Predictable**: Controlling or taming the future to make uncertainty less fearful. The task is finding empirical indicators of the future (culture as one variable in a complex cross-impact scenario analysis, with economy and policy, for instance.)

> **Interpretive**: Concerned not with predicting the future, but with understanding the meanings we give to that future. (Future is constructed in different ways by different cultures; the task is to explore the range of alternative futures.)

> **Critical**: What are the knowing bodies of what can be? Here, futures research aids not in shedding more light (providing answers), but making events, trends, scenarios and other tools of the future problematic -- asking how it is that we accept conventional categories of analysis in the first place? How does one view of the future privilege a particular episteme (historical boundaries of knowledge) and favor a particular interest group or particular class?

In this context, he says, scenarios become textual strategic tools to distance us from the present, to gain a fresh perspective on cultures. History and structure should guide but not bind our explorations into the future, he believes.

He describes the WFSF seminars as basically an introduction to futures studies, and an effort is made to have at least 20 cultures represented. The workshops "are about how different cultures think about the future, with some methods covered, and a sub-theme. In Andorra earlier this year the sub-theme was communication theory; in the November session in Bacolod, the Philippines, it was peace theory. We try to bring in methods to re-think the subject, whether it's the future of the U.N. or world government or the nation-state."

Inayatullah has developed a recent enthusiasm for the dynamic nature of the course, or "action learning." He explains: "On the first day, if people say, 'We don't want to do this, we want to do that,' we change the course. You don't come with a fixed agenda, or you always change it based on what people want. It's a technique I learned from Tony Stevenson. The whole course is negotiated. You don't have to try to convince anyone of anything, or hit them over the head, or pretend to be the expert."

He said European participants sometimes find that very offensive -- they want the facilitators to be authoritarian, to lecture them. Asians, on the other hand, love the approach, which stunned Inayatullah. "They just can't wait; they get into it right away, especially small groups. They just talk and talk. It's something they've been waiting for for so many years." He says the technique has changed his whole view of education. "I really like this mixture of short courses, research and activism."

TONY STEVENSON

Tony Stevenson's career has seen more twists and turns than a Queensland country road. "My life has been unorthodox," admits the associate professor and director of the Communication Centre at the Queensland University of Technology in Brisbane, Australia.

The 57-year-old Stevenson grew up in the small Australian city of Toowoomba, the son of shop assistants. His early goal was to get into radio, "I didn't care how." Turned down for a job in a station's drama department, he snapped up an offer to train as a radio journalist.

He worked as a radio and television broadcaster for the Australian Broadcast Corp. (ABC) and got married (he has two daughters and two grandchildren) before taking the first turn in his life road. In 1960, he moved to Canada to work for two technical trade magazines -- Canadian Nuclear Technology and Design Engineering.

Another turn: A return to Australia in 1963 to start his own public relations firm. By the late '60s it was a national firm, with an office in Sydney. But once again he became dissatisfied. "I had become too much of an administrator and not a professional," he explains. "And I saw changes coming in public relations and wanted to get into something less involved with the corporate sector." He slowly sold off bits of his firm to partners, and by 1976 was working as an individual consultant in organizational communication.

Then about 1978, Stevenson, who had never completed a BA in journalism, went to the University of Hawaii to earn an MA in communication management. It was there that, like Sohail Inayatullah, he met Jim Dator, who introduced him to futures thinking. "I had been thinking much the same way myself," Stevenson says, "but it formalized it, I guess. It just made sense -- put the discipline or structure to it. It was evolutionary, just a part of my own development, and the time was right."

The futures aspect integrated into a lot of what Stevenson did after he returned to Australia and formed a consultant firm called Issues Management Studies, which looked at more strategic things than public relations, such as emerging issues for business and government.

In 1985, his life took another twist. He was asked to coordinate a new master's program in communication at Queensland University of Technology. Shortly thereafter, he also convened the committee that created the Communication Centre, a research center focusing on communication futures. He has been the center's director since 1990.

"I had made contact with Jim Dator again about 1987," Stevenson recalls, "and asked him to come to Australia. We had a conference in 1988, in which he came down again with several other futurists. It was a symposium called 'Australia's Communication Futures.' I started to get into futures again at that point."

Stevenson explains that the center is interested in anticipating new ways of working, living and learning using communication. It's anticipating communication futures in Australia and the Asia-Pacific region. "We're looking at conception issues at the moment," he says, "but I believe change takes place in a self-organizing way, in a participative way, that we call experiential learning -- learning by experience. My interest in the change within organizations and communities is looking at different participative ways of community decision-making."

The center runs visioning workshops with all kinds of groups -- community, government and corporate -- with the idea of charting their own futures. Within that, the center arranges different processes for visioning, for backcasting from those visions, for group processes that try to break out of paradigms to get into creative thinking, and new areas of imagination or visioning. "We're doing a lot of work in the local area of planning by integrating our health, agriculture, design and all of these dimensions into community processes for designing their future community," he says. "There's quite a range of methods; it just depends on the research question or problem."

Stevenson uses the metaphor of "netweaving" instead of "networking" to describe what is happening in the current so-called revolution in communications and information technologies, because of its usefulness in studying the nature of the social fabric. He argues that the new communication technologies will impact on tensions between global/local, center/periphery and standardization/diversity. The globalization of language, he says, is one way to standardize culture and world view, "shrinking the globe in spatial and cultural diversity," but which opens the way for increased control of the periphery by the more powerful center of powerful, vested interests.

He focuses on the central role of human communication in envisioning alternative futures. He feels our images of the future are formed from our understandings and misunderstandings about it. However, communication, as shared meaning, is largely culture-bound and is more easily achieved among people

from a common culture. The challenge is for individuals to be mobile across diverse cultural contexts in order to create shared meaning without destroying cultural diversity.

He argues that studying the futures of communication is now urgent, given that the global telecommunications system, which he calls the biggest artificial contrivance known to humankind, has the potential to mediate world governance, even to become the world government, in a sense. At the least, he feels, it could certainly facilitate worldwide collaboration.

Stevenson has charted four alternative futures stemming from the emerging C&I technologies:

* **Gold Lame and Sackcloth:** An escalation of the current scenario, with a widening gap between rich and poor. The center controls those at the periphery and further colonizes their labor, minds, lives and spirit. The nation-state is largely replaced by elite transnational networks of vested interests. English is even more widely used as a global language, and education is increasingly centralized to globalize the world society. Individual liberty is mainly for those at the center.

* **Drab Uniform:** A small, powerful elite of business and political interests take centralizing authority, with virtually everyone else subservient. Most people are clothed in the same uniform fabric, and difference is scorned. Efficiency and productivity reign supreme. Nation-states are few, replaced by a central network of business and political interests. English is forcing other languages, except Chinese, out of common use, education is standardized globally and human spirituality is in decline. But guerrilla challenges to global authority threaten law and order.

* **Rich Tapestry:** The gap between information, materials and money begins to close. Difference is encouraged, and threads from all social strata are shared. Labor is owned by individuals and not by a central authority. The nation-state is largely replaced by a network of self-organizing communities, which maintain the information networks in a global consortia. Ecological engineering is a prime social and business function, and technology is increasingly a tool for solving social problems. Individual liberty is highly valued, and there is a new meaning for human potential.

* **Bazaar:** A slight closing of the gap between rich and poor. Difference is accepted, but not uniformly. There is decentralized control in certain regions and autonomy in others, and nation-states still exist but most are waning. There are several centers of control, with a mosaic of networks coexisting with patches of centralized authority. Culture becomes further globalized, but some regions enhance their traditional heritage. English becomes more widely used, but so does Chinese and perhaps another language, such as Indonesian. There are differences between communities on their approach to the environment, technology, human spirituality and individual liberty.

Stevenson says the most-desirable Rich Tapestry scenario is achievable in a situational sense. "I think there will be communities -- and probably are now -- which are achieving that to some degree. But achieving it globally, in the foreseeable future, I would say is impossible -- even in the very long-term future. The most plausible in the global sense will be some combination of those other scenarios. I don't we'll see one world in one social pattern or one social design."

He believes the use of scenarios is made more powerful with backcasting -- identifying changes that need to have occurred along the way to the realization of a scenario. But he feels that "future visioning is not meant as a replacement for history, simply a way of extending the temporal perspective. It is still important to learn from history, and futures-oriented thinking -- by breaking free of past and current conventions -- can often help redefine history."

Stevenson has become more active in the World Futures Studies Federation. The WFSF has had an introductory futures seminar annually in Europe since 1975, and Stevenson started one in the Asia-Pacific

region in 1992. "There is no doubt in my mind that it's having an impact in drawing more people into futures studies," he says. "We already have young people from our courses networking with each other and the federation, and doing things to extend futures-oriented thinking in their own countries. There's quite a lot of evidence of it -- Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, India."

One of the methods he uses in the workshops is to challenge participants to take a new stance in the way they see the world. "We ask them a 'what-if' question, such as what if Delhi became the economic center of the world? What would the world look like? It breaks them out of the current paradigm of seeing New York or London or Tokyo as being the economic center."

Stevenson believes that the strength of futures studies is that it is not bounded, not necessarily structured. While he agrees that there will have to be more rigor in some of the methodological processes, "if we move too much in that direction, to a more specialized discipline, it will die. The very strength of it is that it is more open than most academic disciplines. It's multi-disciplinary or trans-disciplinary."

Asked what was within him that has made him take so many changes in his life, he replies: "I don't know, but I'm doing it again. I'm at another watershed in my life, where I see myself limited by the politics and bureaucracy of academia. It's just me. I've never done things in a normal fashion for too long. But it doesn't really worry me."

Stevenson, who admits he hasn't written a lot about futures topics, says he wants to make more of an intellectual contribution. "I'm doing it through communication at the moment, and communication is very much involved in the way we give meaning to our future visions anyhow, so I see that as totally integrated. I have a couple of projects I'm working on that are too early to describe yet, but one deals with sharing global visions."

He plans to start writing a book next year, and enjoys his involvement with the WFSF. "The federation is an amazingly rich experience -- to build friendships around the globe, to share ideas and visions, hopes and fears with so many really good people in so many cultures."

Stevenson particularly wants to help young people to share their visions with other generations and to challenge the mindsets of the dominant generation. The whole notion of learning is vital and lifelong, he says, across boundaries and cultures. "The future can be an empty space in which we can create new dreams, hopes and fears. If we can get beyond the limits of our current imagination into that space, we can fill it with something more useful."

RICHARD SOMERVILLE

Rich Somerville was born in Minneapolis, Minn., in 1946, in the leading edge of the Baby Boom generation. His parents had met and married while working as surgical nurses in an Army Air Corps field hospital in England during World War II. After the war, his father began his lifelong work as a produce buyer for a large supermarket chain, while his mother continued her career as a nurse. The family moved to Des Moines, the capital city of the midwestern state of Iowa, in 1951, where Somerville had a pleasant, middle American upbringing.

A voracious reader even as a small child, his interest in writing led to the editorships of his high school newspaper and yearbook and, at the age of 16, to a job as a clerk in the newsroom of the Des Moines Register and Tribune, highly respected regional newspapers that were the recipients of more than a dozen Pulitzer Prizes over the years. He continued at the newspaper during his college years, and before graduation from Drake University with BA in English already was a fulltime reporter.

Over the next 20 years, he had a wide range of newspaper jobs, from general-assignment reporting to stints

as wire editor, city editor, news editor and national/foreign editor, with occasional sidelines as a restaurant critic, book reviewer and correspondent for *Life* and *People* magazines.

In 1985, however, came a life-changing experience. He was named a Jefferson Fellow at the East-West Center in Honolulu, a 10-week program designed to make print and broadcast "gatekeepers" more knowledgeable about Asia and the Pacific. The stimulating environment brought together journalists from Asia and the U.S. to study, listen to guest experts on Asia-Pacific issues, and to get to know each other's cultures. A highlight was traveling for a month anywhere in the Asia-Pacific region one desired, meeting experts from business, government, the media and academia. Somerville got a first-hand look at -- and wrote about -- the growing economic power of Japan, the anti-Marcos movement in the Philippines, the Green Revolution in India and the emergence of a new China.

The 20-year rut to which he returned in Des Moines proved too much to hold a new-found desire for change, and by 1989 he was back in Honolulu where, as assistant managing editor of the Star-Bulletin, he assisted in reshaping the design and editorial focus of that newspaper. In late 1990, he was chosen as executive editor of a newspaper in Sioux Falls, S.D., which -- at that time -- was the fulfillment of a lifelong dream, the chance to run one's own newspaper.

Rather than finding broadened horizons and challenges, however, he found himself back in rut, a bureaucratic world of budgets, spreadsheets and corporate straitjackets. The only creative stimulation came from a project developed by the Gannett Corp. called "News 2000." It was developed in 1991 during a recessionary period of declining circulation and revenue for newspapers, a reaction to the fear that the downturn was not a temporary but a reflection of a major shift of readers away from mass print media.

While the project primarily outlined a structured way for newspapers to follow good basic journalistic principals and to reconnect with their communities, there was a strong futuristic element to the plan. Editors were asked to conduct imaging workshops with their staffs and scanning projects in their communities. Unfortunately, "News 2000" was rigidly top-structured, with little leeway for local creativity, and it came with ever-rising expectations at a time of ever-decreasing resources.

Nevertheless, even while going through the lockstep process of "News 2000," Somerville's thinking about the future was stimulated, leading him at the end of 1992 to take a six-month leave (which turned out to be permanent) and move to Maui to research and work on a book, the original subject of which was the changing media world as it related to generational schisms.

In late 1993, his futures juices were stimulated again when he was brought to Honolulu by the Advertiser newspaper to head a massive futures-oriented project examining Hawaii's environment. In the course of his research and planning for that project, Somerville met University of Hawaii futurist Jim Dator, who not only offered insight and steered him toward many sources on Hawaii environmental futures, but also told him about the Manoa MA option in alternative futures studies. This appealed to Somerville's need for a more structured approach to his interest in the future of the news media. Today he is night sports editor of the Honolulu Star-Bulletin pending completion of his MA at the end of 1995.

For purposes of this paper for Dator's "Politics of the Future" graduate course, students have been asked to think of themselves as futurists in terms of theory of social change, methodologies and images of the future. This is problematical for a couple of reasons. First, Somerville feels that at this time (Fall 1994) he is too far from exploring all the theoretical and methodological aspects of futures studies to feel comfortable in fitting himself around specific ones. Second, his journalistic training as a generalist inclines him toward using some parts of all theories and methods rather than being rigidly confined within parameters.

He is interested in the future of the news media -- and mass media in general -- because it is the focal point for change, at least in our Western society and he believes increasingly so for the rest of the world. It is

where technology, culture and spiritual meet to battle over social form. For Marshall McLuhan, the medium was the message. The medium also is a mirror for our own metamorphosis as a society. If we can understand the subtle changes in media, it can be an early-warning system for wider structural changes in the future.

One only has to look around. Our worlds are becoming totally mediated. All social institutions are media institutions. The nature and impact of media on our social life is total, with all experiences influenced by media formats and discourse. As a futurist, Somerville's focus is on those formats -- how information material is organized, the style in which it is presented, the focus or emphasis on particular characteristics of behavior and the language or grammar of media communications. Any attempt to understand societal change must be through these formats and their implications.

As a journalist, what is increasingly clear to Somerville is that journalistic practices, techniques and approaches are more and more related to media formats instead of being situationally directed to topics. And the subjects journalists report on -- issues, topics and organizations -- are themselves products of media, fitting journalistic formats and criteria. Everything in the public sphere now subscribes to these patterns spawned by the electronic age, with institutions often using journalistic formats better than journalists do.

The key point he is striving for is this: This media framework has become part of the social structure, a way of life, because people perceive, interpret and act on the basis of it. Thus, media shouldn't be viewed as just another variable in the process of social change or just one of many pieces to be plugged into a futures model. Social change occurs and is recognized through mass media formats, and our society -- certainly our urban society -- cannot be understood apart from media. And understanding media holds the key to visualizing alternative futures.

As for methodologies, he believes all of them would be useful, depending on what aspect of the future is being explored, and perhaps new techniques born out of technological breakthroughs could be on the way. Certainly scenarios, imaging workshops, Delphi, simulations and models are useful, especially in helping people understand the nature of change and the paradigms in which they function.

He also is partial to age cohort analysis. Media critic Jon Katz argues that the young are abandoning conventional media in stunning and accelerating numbers, and fighting for and building their own powerful media -- some on cable television, others on the Internet. Dator, in his paper Loose Connections, rightly notes that why we shape which "tools," and who controls that action, is highly significant. The cyberpunks are out there, reshaping our media world while we're still trying to understand what the media world is.

Which brings us to the difficulty in presenting images of the future, because with the present constantly shifting under our feet, the alternative futures scenarios are infinite. H.B. Gelatt has said this can give rise to "future phobia," the practitioner of which subscribes to Murphy's law: "If anything can go wrong, it will." The paradox related to future phobia is that when one is exploring what to do about the future, indecision may actually be the best strategy. The indecisive person is more likely to keep looking for alternatives, avoiding foreclosure at too early a point in time.

Gelatt says a cure for future phobia is future euphoria, where one looks at the future and subscribes to the maxim of the Little Engine that Could: "I think I can, I think I can." He advocates what he calls "possipullity" -- the ability to let yourself be pulled into imaging by your dreams and hopes of the future. My optimistic nature pushes me towards future euphoria, prefering to hope and work for a vision of the future where, instead of the world plummeting into a new Middle Ages, technology and the media can bring a new era of peace and understanding.

In such a scenario, Somerville feels, the information revolution will bring the world together, not in a way

to "colonize the Other" and spread a dominant Western culture, but to disseminate knowledge of other cultures and spiritual philosophies to create the "rich tapestry" that Tony Stevenson talks about. From this, we may break open new worlds of development in the fields of medicine, science, the arts and social structures. Out of it would come, not a global <u>uberfuhrer</u>, but a global synergy, maintaining human distinctiveness while achieving unity in solving global problems.

Technological breakthroughs may enhance and refine democracy for a new age, bringing more people into the political process and diffusing the power elite's ability to do evil and enhancing its ability to do good. Technology, though media and science, could tap the hidden potential of the human mind to launch a new millenium of discovery, and a new oneness with our Earth and the universe.

Then, on the other hand, we could all be going to hell in a hand basket, as Somerville's granny used to say. The future is full of "possipullities."

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