

## Towards a Planetary Conversation?

Anita Kelleher  
Designer Futures  
Australia

I congratulate Halal and Marien for initiating this symposium: self-confessed 'two white American men' with similar worldviews. As the conversation extends outwards from its original two authors I look forward to seeing greater diversity in the literature reviewed; a planetary conversation on the Megacrisis.

### The Butterflies of Global Transformation

Halal and Marien have emphasised the interconnectedness of the challenges that face humanity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. A 'Perfect Storm' of 'Wicked Complexity'. I concur hence question whether the traditional linear Trends Analysis is appropriate for defining a Megacrisis that the authors suggest is the product of a non-linear system. As a way of understanding elements of the Megacrisis, it can produce useful insights but as a means of *defining* the Megacrisis a complex systems map might provide a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of these elements and a means to better appreciate the complexity. As Laszlo emphasises:

'the doomsday arguments [Decline to Disaster scenario] miss a basic point: they do not recognise that humanity is also a dynamic system capable of rapid transformation. As the natural system approaches collapse it is sensitive and responds to small catalysts of change' (2008, p.15).

These small catalysts of change were described in the Tao Te Ching, as 'the ripple effect' (Heider, 1985, p.107). One small pebble dropped into a pond creates multiple ripples. One person can influence a family; one family a community; one community a nation; one nation a world. Lorenz used the term 'butterfly effect' whereby a butterfly flaps its wings in one part of the world and creates a tsunami elsewhere (Hilborn, 2004). The dropped pebble or the flapping wing represents a small change in the initial condition of the system, creating a chain of events leading to large-scale alterations. A non-linear systems map would endeavour to identify where to drop the pebbles.

In that regard, and in answer to the request to identify missing trends, I respectfully offer the view that there are too few trends, counter-trends, issues and perspectives in the article to clearly map the system in the manner I have outlined and suggest that a more comprehensive research project is designed for this important topic.

## Technologies and a Planetary Consciousness.

Halal argues for 'technologies of consciousness' intimating that these both drive, and are driven by, expanding human consciousness. Writers on planetary, postformal and integral consciousness appear to agree that a shift in [human] consciousness is vital, and precedes the successful transition to a planetary civilisation (Gidley, 2007; Laszlo, 2006, 2008; Mickunas, 1997; Wilber, 2002) akin to the ideal global order envisaged in 'Rise to Maturity'. In emphasising the role of technology, however, is Halal underestimating the power of social change and human agency? He writes of IT causing a transition to an advanced civilisation (Halal & Marien, 2011, p.9) but not of the human purpose driving the IT. Marien's analysis of the superficiality of our current 'intelligence' gathering and use, and concerns expressed about WMDs in the paper, provides some support for other views. Eisler, for example, discusses the use of technology in both dominator and partnership societies. In the former technology is used for destruction and domination over the Other; the latter uses technology for peaceful purposes and the advancement of human kind (Eisler, 1995). Halal appears to be suggesting IT as the primary means of facilitating human collaboration to tackle the Megacrisis. However March 2011 statistics for internet use show that almost 5 billion people don't have access.<sup>1</sup> Even if the decision was taken to provide technology, education and training, it is unlikely that sufficient change could be achieved in the timelines suggested by the IPCC or the mean arrival dates of the scenarios. I would like to see this conversation deepened to explore human values and intentions for technology, its diffusion and use.

Hence I echo Marien's hope for an evolutionary path of societal advancement and add that this would need to be 'cultural' and 'purposive' evolution. The respective works of Eisler and Laszlo, for example, suggest this as the safest evolutionary path.

## Scenarios and The Planetary Shift

In response to the invitation to assess the likelihood of the four scenarios eventuating, I will say 0 to each one. For me the utility in these scenarios is not their predictability but the fact that they evoke images of four, amongst many possible, futures that the human family might choose to work towards or work to prevent.

I elected to view the scenarios as possible stages in global transformation rather than an either/or prospect. Seen from that perspective, and based on the mean arrival times presented, the scenarios could be understood as a Muddling Down period where partial action is taken consistent with humanity largely in denial or ignorance. Then Muddling Up as we realise the inadequacy of our responses but by then it's too late to avoid the Decline to Disaster scenario as slow-to-unfold natural systems show the unintended consequences of earlier decisions and inaction. Finally, after the loss of many lives and the breakdown of civilisation as we know it, the Rise to Maturity. A fifth scenario perhaps?

## **Global Governance for a Megacrisis?**

Human consciousness has evolved to the extent that we are aware of the possibility of our own extinction brought about largely by our own actions (Eisler, 1991; IPCC, 2007; Laszlo, 2008). In industrialised, democratic and relatively free societies, human ingenuity has also produced the internet and spending power as means by which individuals can collectively influence decisions previously the province of political and economic actors (Eisler, 1991; Laszlo, 2008; Mason, 2006). Yet there are 5 billion people without internet access<sup>2</sup>, over 3 billion living on less than \$2.50 a day<sup>3</sup>, and almost 1 billion living in extreme poverty of \$1.25 per day or less (Chandy & Gertz, 2011). Tackling the 'Wicked Complexity' of this Megacrisis in the timelines suggested in the scenarios will require an agreed worldwide approach to humanity's common challenges that does not rely solely upon spending power and internet access. A new form of Global Governance is needed; one that values the knowledge and wisdoms of all the world's peoples and appreciates the interconnectedness of the challenges before us. One way this might emerge is through the contraction and expansion of the current world order. Contraction to become 'one world' and expansion to recognise the 2000 nations that currently exist in 200 countries (Galtung, 2007, p.153).

Laszlo writes that the 'butterflies' needed for transformation, to prevent collapse in the natural systems, are the 'thinking, values, ethics and consciousness of a critical mass in society' (2008, p.15). Achieving this critical mass will, I believe, require an understanding of where best to drop the pebbles of transformation and how to engage in a planetary conversation.

## **Correspondence**

Anita Kelleher  
10/114-116 Central Avenue,  
Inglewood, Wa 6052,  
Australia  
Email: designerfutures@iinet.net.au

## **Notes**

1. [www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm](http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm)
2. [www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm](http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm)
3. [www.globalissues.org](http://www.globalissues.org)

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