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We will Shine: Transparent Futures of Consciousness

Jennifer M. Gidley

*'If on some day we find no miracle in our life, then we have merely overlooked it.'*¹

Intuitive 'futurism'

For much of the three decades of my professional career, I have been involved in the praxis of creating innovative educational models as if the future we wanted was already here. Although I have only become formally aware of the field of Futures Studies since the mid-nineties, upon reflection I could say that, intuitively speaking, I have always been a futurist. In my professional work during the 1970s, as a young Psychologist and Educator, I was painfully aware of the inadequacies of the academic and professional models of the time and became actively engaged in innovative and transformative educational practices. This work was deeply motivated by an intuitive sense that we could create a better future by first envisioning it and then by working to change our professional and social practices in the present to better match our ideal (or 'future picture'). During this period I was also engaged as a social activist in issues of women's and gay rights and peace issues. I was disturbed by the fragmentation and materialism of the Western worldview, and made some serious forays into Eastern spiritual traditions (especially through Yoga and Mahayana Buddhism). However, as a 'reflective Western scientist', I still felt the need for a comprehensive conceptual framework which could describe an alternative worldview.

Rudolf Steiner as a 'grand futurist'

In the late 70s I came across the work of Rudolf Steiner, and began what has now been a 25 year odyssey into what is, to my knowledge, the most comprehensive spiritual epistemology that has arisen from the Western cultural tradition. It amazes me that even 80 or so years after Steiner's death, his monumental contribution to a spiritual and practical reframing of Western Culture and consciousness has still been largely overlooked. Through my own personal intensive study of what Steiner gave, including the integrative practice of contemplative and artistic activities, and the application of his educational teachings to founding and pioneering a school in rural Australia, I have come to know Steiner as the first grand futurist of the 20th century. I realise, of course, that he is not generally recognised as such. A macro-historian, he described the evolution of culture and consciousness within a narrative that spanned not just thousands of years in the past but also the potential development of human culture and consciousness for thousands of years to come. His history of the evolution of consciousness tracks similar structures to those described by cultural historian Jean Gebser.² When you understand how Steiner did his research, it is also not surprising that his description of the multi-layered human being, from the most material layer to the most spiritual layer is very similar to that given by renowned Indian master, Sri Aurobindo Ghose.³ The most significant contemporary attempt to map out a more expanded view of human consciousness has been made by Ken Wilber, who draws strongly on the work of

both Gebser and Aurobindo in developing his model of integral psychology.⁴ Yet none of these, apart from Steiner, attempts to provide a broad narrative of cultural futures within which human consciousness might develop and/or expand to include the more subtle layers described by Aurobindo and Wilber or even the integral structure detailed by Gebser. I will return to this later.

My contemporary futurist-mentors

When I returned to further post-graduate academic study in 1994, and discovered by ‘chance’ that there was an academic field called Futures Studies, I felt that I was in familiar territory as I was already conceptually steeped in Steiner’s macro-history and macro-future. The futures studies field, however, was able to lead me to many other exciting facets of research, knowledge and methodologies. I felt such an immediate intense connection with the field and some of the people, that before I knew it I was in the Philippines participating in one of the World Futures Studies Federation introductory courses in futures studies. I have been very fortunate to cross paths with and be mentored by the best of what Australia has to offer and among the world’s most significant futurists. The main influences on my futures concepts and work have been Paul Wildman, who introduced me to the idea of activist futures or ‘futuring’- an idea very close to my heart and one which is only beginning to take hold; Sohail Inayatullah, who awakened me to the breadth of civilizational futures and a deeper understanding of the cultural ‘other’; and Rick Slaughter, through the sheer force and magnitude of his conceptual contribution to the field in initiating the Knowledge Base of Futures Studies and more recently through our shared interest in integral futures.

My Futures Work

Most of my futures work in the past decade (including research, writing and practice) has been in the areas of youth futures and educational futures. As a psychologist and educator dedicated to the importance of developing human consciousness beyond the limitations of instrumental rationality, I am passionate about educational processes that foster imagination and inspiration. Inspired by the futures visioning work with adults of Elise Boulding and Warren Zeigler, I decided to adapt their visioning methodologies to adolescents in my own work. Consequently, my futures work with young people has primarily involved critical analysis of the ‘taken for granted future’ followed by exploration of possible futures and the visioning of preferred futures. As I am also committed to the empowerment possibilities of futures work with young people I always include back-casting from the preferred future vision to the present – what can be done now to create the future that is desired. More recently I have extended my work to include running workshops with teachers through the Australian Foresight Institute to introduce them to these processes.

The other main futures methodology that I am particularly attracted to is the Causal Layered Analysis developed by Inayatullah.⁵ I have used it to analyse some major issues that beset youth (such as youth suicide, and the impact of globalisation on youth culture).⁶ I enjoy the depth of analysis that is possible with this methodology and also the fact that it engages the imagination through the layer of myth and metaphor – the deep story that underpins all our other layers of analysis, including our worldview. This process for me begins to approach some of the higher, trans-rational levels of consciousness such as Wilber’s vision-logic. For me this sets the stage for the beginnings of being able more consciously to access inspiration from spiritual worlds as we analyse a problem or issue.

Forces Creating the Future

*'In future times every human being shall see in each and all of his fellow men a hidden divinity...then every meeting between one human and another will be of itself in the nature of a religious rite, a sacrament...'*⁷

As a result of Steiner's esoteric research into the futures of culture and consciousness, he provided us with a grand future narrative that in my view could only but inspire a more positive, equitable, sustainable and creatively joyful future. In the story he gave there is a tangible world of spiritual beings that works alongside humans in the creation of the future. This invisible world of divine consciousness and divine will creates pictures of a consciously evolving future that we can access with our imaginations if we could only become more conscious of this layer of being. According to Steiner these pictures of the future include three major developments:

1. That in the future no human being is to find peace in the enjoyment of happiness if others beside him are unhappy – this deep impulse of brotherhood/sisterhood has the potential to unify the human race. If we are really able to go beyond our mechanistic views of human nature and deeply see what each 'other human' really is, our social life would be miraculously transformed.
2. If we are able to really see the divinity in each other – to conceive the human being as a picture revealed from the spiritual world, then each meeting between one human and another will be a sacrament and there will be no need for special churches or religious buildings to sustain the spiritual life. This would lead to complete freedom of religious/spiritual life and would leave no place for the religious fundamentalism that is currently wracking our planet.
3. Thirdly, it will be possible in the future for more and more people to reach a perception of the spiritual world through their thinking, to 'cross the abyss and through thinking to experience the reality of the spirit'. This will be possible if we do conscious work to raise our consciousness beyond its current materialistically bound rationalism. Steiner gave many teachings on the integrative contemplative and artistic practices that we can engage in if we want to undertake this path of conscious evolution that leads to perception of, and ultimately participation in, the work of the spiritual world.⁸

For me this is the path of creative futures where humans can participate in the world's own consciousness of itself and where our free will can unite consciously with divine will. There are, of course, other forces working counter to these pictures of positive potential. The two major forces that run counter to the conscious spiritual evolution path for humans are well portrayed by Ken Wilber.⁹ Drawing on both Plato and Sri Aurobindo Ghose he warns of the dangers of the Ascenders who want spirituality for themselves without including others (transcendence without embrace) and the Descenders who negate the higher realms of spirituality for the worship of the material world, which in the process they are destroying (the reductionism of the materialists).

My Futures Passion – Futures of Consciousness Shining through

My current research in spiritual psychology involves developing an approach to understanding future stages of human consciousness based on a synthesis of the work of Rudolf Steiner, Ken Wilber, Sri Aurobindo Ghose, Jean Gebser and others. I am attempting to draw together the big picture conceptual mapping of Wilber, with the depth sounding of Steiner and Aurobindo, utilising the poetic descriptions of Gebser's history of culture and consciousness as a reflector (or rear-view mirror). This multi-layered map will be then transformed into a 'prospective' deep map of the future of culture and consciousness with all its implications for present day psychology and education. All of these cultural giants herald the imminent, and indeed belated, transition from the dominant and deficient mental, rational mode of consciousness (which still in many ways dominates even the futures discourse) to a trans-rational, aperspectival, more spiritual consciousness. According to the views of these evolutionary consciousness researchers, as consciousness develops to the next stage, 'matter' will appear increasingly transparent and energy filled, and the 'ever present origin' of things (to use Gebser's term) will become visible behind and within and will begin to shine through. This state of awareness has been referred to in many spiritual traditions as a mystical land beyond our own visible, physical world. In the Buddhist tradition it is called Shambhala. Steiner referred to Shambhala as: *'the ancient fairyland... woven of light, shone through with light, teeming with wisdom.'*

I like to believe this is the future of consciousness that is just around the corner, where we will all begin to shine...

Notes

¹ Steiner, R. (1918). A Lecture By Rudolf Steiner Zurich, 9th October, 1918 (GA 182). In *Der Tod als Lebenswandlung*.

² Gebser, J. (1991). *The Ever-Present Origin*. Athens, Ohio, Ohio University Press.

³ Aurobindo Ghose, S. (1990 (1914)). *The Life Divine*. Pondicherry, India, Lotus Light.

⁴ Wilber, K. (2000). *Integral Psychology: Consciousness, Spirit, Psychology, Therapy*. Boston, Shambhala.

⁵ Inayatullah, S. (2000). *Alternative Futures: Methodology, Society, Macrohistory and the Long-Term Future*. *Tamkang Chair Lecture Series*. Taipai.

⁶ Gidley, J. (2003). *Giving Hope back to our Young People: Creating a New Spiritual Mythology for Western Culture*. Suicide Prevention Australia 10th National Conference, Brisbane, 14th June 2003, Gidley, J. (forthcoming). *The Metaphors of Globalisation: A multi-layered analysis of global youth culture*. *The Causal Layered Analysis (CLA) Reader Epistemology and Methodology in Praxis*. S. Inayatullah.

⁷ Steiner, R. (1918). A Lecture By Rudolf Steiner Zurich, 9th October, 1918 (GA 182). In *Der Tod als Lebenswandlung*.

⁸ Steiner, R. (1993). *Knowledge of the Higher Worlds: How is it Achieved*. London, Rudolf Steiner Press.

⁹ Wilber, K. (2000). *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality*. Boston, Shambhala.

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