



A Monthly e-Newsletter From:

 Institute for Alternative Futures

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IAF will be offering its Wiser Futures Workshop at the World Future Society's Annual Meeting on workshop on July 17th, Chicago, IL. Registration information is available [here](#).

Forward Perspectives

2050: The End of the Future

[Eric Meade](#), Futurist and V.P. for Business Development

Editor's Note: This article was written in the future, apparently in the year 2050.

Being a "futurist" was fun while it lasted - back when you could make a living helping people think about time in one linear dimension. But by 2050, most people have recognized that linear time is a social construct that shaped our reality, but was not fixed - for the Chinese it ran top to bottom, in Europe it ran left to right. But we're getting ahead of ourselves. Let's start with a brief history of how people have thought about time.

Concepts of time have always followed from a society's scientific and technological understanding. The recognition that a woman's menstrual period matched the lunar cycle, for example, led to a cyclical view of time and all its manifestations - agricultural settlements, astrology, pagan rituals, etc. As literate peoples began writing their own histories, they began to see time as linear - a straight line from "Creation" to the "End of Time" along which mankind moves steadily in one direction. Linear time produced an era of political dynasties, apocalyptic religions, and morality plays to instruct people how to earn their reward when the world ends. Newton's laws of physics suggested that the universe was a mechanism like a watch - this view is found in Deism (where God is believed to have created the world but does not interfere in its workings), the complex separation of powers found in the U.S. Constitution, and Adam Smith's fundamental laws of economics.

Starting around 1900, scientists discovered that Newton's laws do not hold in all situations, particularly when things get very small (subatomic particles) or travel very fast (near the speed of light). Furthermore, Albert Einstein showed that time is not an objective measure but in fact depends on the particular frame of reference in which it is measured. Time slows down as velocity increases - that is, a man traveling around the world in an airplane will age less during the flight than the friend who dropped him off and picked him up at the airport. While these findings remained within the realm of science for more than a century, by 2050 they have permeated society and fundamentally reshaped its institutions.

When asked to explain relativity, Einstein said, "Sit with a pretty girl for an hour, and it seems like a minute. THAT'S relativity." If he had lived in the early 21st century, he may have added, "Send an e-mail to which you need an urgent reply, and one minute seems like a week." E-mail represented the first collaborative use of what is called "asynchronous time," where people participate in the same activity in different times. The opposite is the more familiar "synchronous time," in which people engage in an activity - a telephone call, for example - in the same way and at the same pace.

Technological developments in the decades leading to 2050 created more and more types of time. "Networked time" is time that has been expanded into new dimensions by leveraging the global communications network. "Parsed time" is time that has been bundled up and sent digitally across the network for use elsewhere. "Nanochronistic time" exists only for new technologies operating at a very small scale in infinitesimal units of time.

Concurrently with technology-mediated time, a post-conventional focus on "living in the moment" challenged the use of time altogether. Developmental psychologists were the first to recognize that a shift to post-conventional thinking implied a shift to post-Newtonian time. Enlightened people in 2050 experience "infinite time" or "non-time," acting in a way that reflects their instantaneous integrated consciousness rather than past memories or future aspirations. For these people, time is simply a construct to be used where it serves a practical purpose, as in keeping time during a sporting event.

This is difficult stuff. People are not born with the ability to work within this conception of time from Day One. Many in the older generations are too steeped in traditional concepts of time to function properly without assistance. So there is still work for us futurists, even if the future itself has become irrelevant. Instead, futurists have become "polychronologists," training people how to shift between various modes of constructed time, and how to apply the right kind of time to the right situation.

Eric Meade heads IAF's Authentic Futures Project, which links emerging technologies to the psychological processes of human evolution. For more information, contact him at emeade@altfutures.com.

A Tweet Heard Round the World

[Kati Wilkins](#), Project Manager

By 2019, through the use of social networking sites, future revolutions will go viral, drawing not only global viewership, but also global participation. Social media will become a cross-cultural tool which creates personal connections without media or government filters, and elicit global participation in order to exert pressure on local and international governments. We are witnessing the beginnings of this shift as Western news agencies and reporters are being expelled from Iran and the government is imposing a virtual lock-down on all communications

in and out of the country. Despite this, what some are calling the 'geek class' has found a number of ways to bypass control and get their messages out to the world using social networking sites such as Twitter and YouTube. The 'geek class' of Iran has created an international stir, forcing outside observers to take a closer look at the Iranian elections, raising serious questions about their [legitimacy](#) and putting the Iranian government on the defensive.

In the future, street protests will merge with online social networks, creating a two-layered system of resistance which relies heavily on both 'boots on the ground' and a sustained global public interest. To accomplish this, opposition movements will act as 'citizen journalists,' recording what is happening on the streets, and creating a buzz online through well-executed pages on social networking platforms. This buzz will help bring more people out to the streets should they agree with the cause, creating more news for the 'citizen journalists' to cover. Meanwhile, many news agencies will depend much less on professional reporters, and rely on these domestic, 'citizen-journalists' to gather the raw information on situations where the media has been blacked out. Instead of reporters being sent to cover opposition movements, they will work out of multi-media offices monitoring social networking feeds, scouring them for the latest news, and acting as fact checkers. This will create a positive feedback loop that provides multiple outlets for scrutinizing a corrupt government.

The protests in Iran are the first indications of a new model for citizen participation that will impact not only Iran, but also the Western world. Online videos, pictures and blogs are eliciting shared feelings of kinship from Western observers from all sides of the political spectrum. One of the most prominent examples is the 40-second clip (warning: the clip is highly graphic) of [Neda Soltani](#), a young female observer who was shot and killed during a demonstration. [In another popular video](#), a large group of protesters approach a smaller group of anti-protest guards, quickly overwhelming them. When the citizens of the West look at what is taking place in Iran, through the unfiltered screen of in-person storytelling, they see a group of people fighting for the basic rights that are often taken for granted in established democracies.

The protests in Iran are showing that revolutions of the future, while still intensely local in focus, will be international in scope. The protesters are asking, to their government and to the world, 'where's my vote?' The leaders of the Iranian protestors have been very vocal about not wanting or accepting help from foreign governments, but they have been consciously courting a global audience through the language of globally accepted concepts of democracy and human rights. Many international leaders, President Barack Obama among them, are aware of this, and have walked a fine line between non-involvement and pointing out humanitarian abuses. There are a number of Twitter users, including Mir Hussian Mousavi, who are tweeting or blogging (as many tweets often link to their own blogs) in either English or in both English and Farsi. This multi-language uprising, playing out on the international stage, has brought many everyday citizens around the world into the story and has created both internal and external pressure for more transparency.

We have seen the beginnings of this trend elsewhere, but the movement remained largely within national borders. In Pakistan, for example, during the so-called 'Pakistan Emergency,' of March 2007 through February 2008, the nation's government imposed a state of emergency, suspended its constitution, and imposed media censorship after the President suspended the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court ([Old and New Media: Converging During the Pakistan Emergency](#)). During this national crackdown, local citizens used a combination of SMS text messaging and blogs to inform others within the country where street fights were taking place, and to organize demonstrations. To get the message out to the rest of the world, Pakistani bloggers worked with Americans and others to post their videos to YouTube, where they were

eventually picked up by CNN and other international news agencies.

In the future, as social networks and the tools to connect to them become more powerful and integrated, large swaths of the population will be able to act as journalists. Through the use of social media, an uprising in the Middle East can become a worldwide uprising in which everyone can take part. The videos and feeds appearing on YouTube, Twitter and similar platforms will provide an important outlet for raw information unfiltered by the lens of governments, media or other agencies. In the West, we are now capable of instantly showing our support with the content provider, and the rest of the world. The revolutions of the future will no longer be isolated affairs, but global revolutions drawing support from both the people on the street and their 'virtual compatriots' on the web.

News & Events

IAF Speaks to the Future at WorldFuture 2009

The World Future Society's annual convention is fast approaching. On July 17th -19th, [WorldFuture 2009: Innovation and Creativity in a Complex World](#) will be held in Chicago, IL. IAF will hold its regular Wisser Futures Workshop as well as a number of panel discussions.

IAF Futurist Eric Meade will join Social Technologies Futurist John Cashman and Bertelsmann Foundation Senior Project Manager Ting Xu to explore the Futures of China. This presentation will put China's recent economic growth in a longer-term perspective and consider the key forces that will shape China's future. Panelists will provide forecasts on several key challenges facing China.

IAF Futurists Clem Bezold and Craig Bettles will discuss the exciting opportunities for the future at the Health Care System Worth Creating panel. The session will provide real insight into the future of healthcare by drawing on the extensive experience of Bezold and Bettles. The panel will discuss some of the major healthcare reform changes underway as well the IAF model for a healthcare system worth creating. IAF looks forward to meeting you at [WorldFuture 2009: Innovation and Creativity in a Complex World](#). You can register for the conference and the IAF Wisser Futures Workshop online.

IAF Welcomes New Interns

IAF is happy to welcome four new interns to its ongoing internship program. Our interns come to IAF with a wide range of skills and knowledge. Our ongoing internship program allows us to learn from our high-quality interns while introducing them to professional futures.

Patricia Tynan Williams comes to IAF from the graduate program in Future Studies at the University of Houston. Patricia's focus includes the driving forces that are changing the world of marketing, the future of privacy, identity and beauty, and growing businesses through communities. While at IAF she will work on the future of the pharmaceutical industry and assist with marketing strategy. Earlier in her career, Patricia worked at a financial services start-up contributing to triple-digit growth and as a consultant with Accenture helping public and private sector clients implement and navigate organizational change.

Nathan O'Neill has joined IAF from the American Graduate School in Paris, where he is pursuing a Master's degree in international relations. Nathan received his bachelor's degree from DePauw University in political science and chemistry. Nathan has completed research

projects in chemistry and environmental public policy, and has worked in the business consulting industry. While interning with IAF, Nathan will focus his efforts on the future of international water management, a field of inquiry which corresponds with his long-term research interests in water scarcity and international environmental politics.

Huyen Nguyen came to the U.S. from Vietnam two years ago to complete her master's degree in Social and Applied Economics at Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio. Before coming to the U.S., Huyen worked for the Central Bank of Vietnam. During her time with IAF, Huyen will work on developing scenarios on pro-poor foresight.

Stella Han is a senior at the University of Pennsylvania studying Health and Societies and concentrating in Health Policy. She has a deep interest in religion and leadership. She has served in leadership positions on the Newman Catholic Student Council, Programs in Religious, Interfaith, and Spirituality Matters (PRISM) and the St. Agatha-St. James Parish Pastoral Council and Parish Financial Committee. While at IAF she will be assisting with the DRA project, in assessing the state of the health equity movement.

Upcoming Events

AMEDD Futures, MSC (Major Subordinate Commands) 3, IAF President Jonathan Peck, July 24th, San Antonio, TX.

Wiser Futures Workshop, [WorldFuture 2009: Innovation and Creativity in a Complex World](#), IAF Futurists Clem Bezold, Craig Bettles and Eric Meade, July 17th, Chicago, IL.

Health For All and a Health Care System Worth Creating, [WorldFuture 2009: Innovation and Creativity in a Complex World](#), IAF Futurists Clem Bezold and Craig Bettles, July 18th, 2:00-3:30 PM, Chicago, IL.

The Futures of China, [WorldFuture 2009: Innovation and Creativity in a Complex World](#), IAF Futurist Eric Meade, Social Technologies Futurist John Cashman, and Bertelsmann Foundation Senior Project Manager Ting Xu, July 18th, 2:00-3:30 PM, Chicago, IL.

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