Waking up in the 21st Century

Structured abstract

Purpose of this paper	This paper explores metaphors of human awakening in four recent futures works and proposes a research agenda on the nature and future trajectories of awakening.
Design/methodology/approach	The paper reviews metaphors of awakening in Slaughter's 'The Biggest Wake Up Call in History', the Great Transition Initiative, Gilding's 'The Great Disruption' and Inayatullah's Waking Up to the Future. It identifies seven characteristics of awakening and uses these to create an environmental scanning framework. It reports on a preliminary application of the framework and proposes a future research agenda.
Findings	The paper identifies seven signals of awakening: futures literacy, shifting values, activism, collective agency, engaged dialogue, distributed leadership and inspiring visions. While evidence for most of these signals can be found, it is often weak and dominated by other trends.
Research limitations/implications (if applicable)	The environmental scanning framework needs to be expanded using additional literature and testing. The question of when confrontation with apocalyptic future images can deliver positive outcomes remains unresolved.
Practical implications (if applicable)	Perhaps the single most important thing that could be done to help rouse sleeping humanity is to begin to make connections between the diverse movements identified in the paper and to see them as pieces of the larger puzzle of how we wake up. Maybe an 'awakening movement' could provide a common goal in the 21st century.
What is original/value of paper	The paper is an original exploration of the metaphor of awakening in four prominent works on sustainable futures. It will have value to foresight practitioners and change agents that are building movements for sustainable futures.

Introduction

In *The Biggest Wake up Call in History,* Richard Slaughter (2010) paints an alarming picture of a slumbering humanity, largely blind to the threat of ecological overshoot and collapse, that desperately needs to wake up to reality. This idea of awakening is a recurrent theme in sustainability and futures discourse (Bowman, 2012a; Gilding, 2011; Inayatullah, 2005; Kriegman et al., 2006; Raskin, 2010; Slaughter, 2010). As the interlocking threats to human sustainability worsen and our responses continue to fall well short of what is required to avert these threats, the image of humanity asleep at the wheel is a powerful one. Not least because this image holds out the possibility that the sleeper will awaken, become aware, face up to reality and take appropriate action.

In a recent application of the metaphor, Tom Bowman (2012b) argues that we are suffering from the 'big sleep'. He argues that the characteristics of the big sleep include: complaining about the lack of national leadership rather than taking action yourself; accepting the limitation of your role in society rather than embracing your moral obligation to find ways to lead; and convincing yourself you are a leader when you have 'done nothing that truly stretches you, changes you, or entails material, social or psychic risk'. For Bowman, waking up is an 'epiphany' that leads you to embrace your own moral obligation to lead.

While the metaphor of awakening is a powerful one for those concerned that humanity is heading in the wrong direction, it deserves critical examination by futurists and foresight practitioners. Slaughter (2010) invokes this metaphor as a way of salvaging a positive image of the future from an otherwise negative analysis. Slaughter (2010) argues, convincingly, that human civilisation is headed towards collapse or decline and running out of options for alternative futures. He then uses the possibility of a 'wake up call' to conjure a positive image of the future out of the gloom. His goal in doing so is to inspire action rather than despair.

It is entirely understandable that Slaughter (2010) would seek to communicate a positive image of the future rather than a dystopian one. Polak (1973, p. 19) argued that:

> *The rise and fall of images precedes or accompanies the rise and fall of cultures. As long as a society's image is positive and flourishing, the flower of culture is in full bloom. Once the image begins to decay and lose its vitality, however, the culture does not long survive.*

In other words, presenting a bleak, negative image of the future is likely to be counterproductive and, indeed, to contribute to decline. Eckersley (2008) presents a similar view, arguing that fears of an apocalyptic future have the potential to generate maladaptive nihilistic and fundamentalist responses, alongside adaptive activist responses.

Recent work in psychology and communication supports Polak and Eckersley, indicating that fear-inducing images of the future can lead to emotional numbing and prevent people taking action to create better futures (CRED, 2009; Futerra, 2009; O'Neill and Nicholson-Cole, 2009). In the specific case of climate change, dramatic, fearful or shocking images of climate change are:

> *likely to distance or disengage individuals from climate change, tending to render them feeling helpless and overwhelmed when they try to comprehend their own relationship with the issue* (O'Neill and Nicholson-Cole, 2009, p. 375)*.*

In my own work communicating and engaging communities on sustainability issues, I have also found that bleak, apocalyptic images of the future are more likely to lead to apathy than agency.

In this light, Slaughter's (2010) attempt to deliver a more positive image of the future is laudable. However, the viability of his positive image of the future rests entirely on the possibility that humanity will 'wake up' and change direction. If 'waking up' is the only way to salvage positive futures from our current situation, as Slaughter (2010) contends, then it is vital that futurists and foresight practitioners critically examine the feasibility and future trajectory of human awakening. Simply hoping for an awakening is not enough – we need to actively explore and prospect for realistic pathways towards positive futures.

Of course, there are likely to be multiple pathways towards positive futures. Dahle (2007) identifies a typology of five potential transition pathways towards a sustainable society. These pathways are characterised by distinct responses to a series of questions:

- Are solutions possible within the existing institutional framework, or is a new social order necessary?
- Is change led by elites from the top down or by the grassroots from the bottom up?
- Can change happen now, or does it require crisis or collapse?

My contention, like Slaughter, is that waking up is a common theme across all of these pathways. Waking up may happen within existing institutions, or may generate new institutions. It may be elites or the grassroots that awaken. Awakening may happen gradually over time, or in response to a crisis. Regardless, I believe the metaphor of awakening is a common theme across all of these pathways and there is value in exploring its characteristics in more detail.

Consequently, my objectives in this paper are to: identify common characteristics of human awakening in a selection of futures works; critically examine the way in which awakening is represented in these works; scan emerging trends for signs of human awakening; and draw out implications for futurists and foresight practitioners. Underlying these objectives is a personal concern that negative images of the future are currently dominating positive images and that this is a poor foundation for human agency.

In this short paper, my intention is not to provide a comprehensive overview of metaphors of awakening in futures work. Instead, my goal is to examine a small number of prominent works as a starting point for a broader research agenda. I chose futures works for review that: were concerned with the future of human civilisation on a planetary scale; included a prominent metaphor of waking up; and offered a perspective on waking up that was not already evident in Slaughter (2010). I identified these works by drawing on a previous scan of the futures literature undertaken as part of the State of Play in the Futures Field project (see Slaughter, 2009) and additional searches of futures and foresight journals. In addition to Slaughter (2010), I reviewed: the Great Transition Initiative (Kriegman et al., 2006; Raskin, 2010; Raskin et al., 2002); Paul Gilding's *The Great Disruption* (Gilding, 2011); and Sohail Inayatullah's *Waking up to a New Future* (Inayatullah, 2005).

The metaphor of awakening in four futures works

As noted above, my intention in this section is to review the ways in which four futurists apply a metaphor of awakening in recent works. This review provides a starting point for identifying the characteristics of an awakened humanity in the next section. Given the topic of this special issue, my core focus is on Slaughter (2010); I draw on other authors to the extent that they broaden the view of awakening presented in Slaughter (2010).

The Biggest Wake Up Call in History

Richard Slaughter's book *The Biggest Wake Up Call in History* (Slaughter, 2010) follows in the tradition of the best works on sustainability by providing both a warning about our present trajectory and an optimistic alternative pathway. The warning is stark and confronting:

> *Although it seems to have crept up on us almost without warning we are in fact already right in the middle of a planetary emergency with no simple solutions, no easy exits. It is not merely an economic or financial crisis but a systemic one that is simultaneously global and also reaches into the deepest recesses of individual lives* (Slaughter, 2010, p. ix)*.*

Slaughter pulls together the many threads of evidence to weave a compelling picture of the environmental, economic and sociocultural emergency we face. He makes it clear that the collapse of human civilization is now a real possibility and that the vast bulk of humanity is asleep to this possibility, wrapped up in comfortable dreams or denial (Slaughter, 2010, p. 151). In his review of the book, Andy Hines (2011) notes that it 'will splash some cold water in your face' if you have been overly complacent about these issues. This kind of abrupt awakening is the 'wake up call' that forms the central metaphor of the book.

It is Slaughter's hope that this wake up call will provide a foundation for individuals to take positive action. The risk, as Bowman (2012c) points out, is that this wake up call or epiphany can lead to 'overwhelming dread', paralysis and a belief that 'resistance is futile'. Likewise, Eckersley (2008) argues that fears

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of an apocalyptic future can easily lead to nihilism and fundamentalism, rather than the activism that Slaughter seeks. In this light, delivering a wake up call by confronting people with the threat of civilisational collapse is a risky strategy. While it may provide the impetus and drive for individuals to strive for better futures, it may also deepen the apathy and denial that Slaughter (2010) documents.

If an individual is able to avoid nihilistic and fundamentalist responses, they open up the dual sense to Slaughter's use of the awakening metaphor. While a wake up call can be painful and confronting, it provides the foundation for a more positive awakening to our own agency and capacity to respond:

> *As we allow ourselves to open to what are sometimes called the 'signals' that are being constantly generated within the global system, as we become aware of their import and actively respond to them, then a deeper, richer, understanding emerges. Then, out of that understanding new and renewed values, motivations and capacities can also emerge* (Slaughter, 2010, p. viii)*.*

Slaughter is very clear on this point; for him, waking up is about both embracing reality and enhancing awareness. For Slaughter, the latter involves 'becoming aware of the internal characteristics and dynamics' of our interior selves and using these and other practices to 'support an expanded frame of awareness and understanding' (Slaughter, 2010, p. xi). It is 'an invitation both to greater self-knowledge and to a more modulated and respectful understanding of human and cultural difference' (Slaughter, 2010, p. 162).

Slaughter (2010, pp. 158–161) points out that waking up looks different to people with different worldviews and can be communicated in ways more likely to resonate with those worldviews. However, he is ultimately dissatisfied with reliance on existing values, arguing that the future of human civilization relies on interior development towards more inclusive values (Slaughter, 2010, p. 167).

Waking up, then, is a process of becoming self-aware and expanding our consciousness to take in the planetary scale of human civilization. This, as both Slaughter and Bowman (2012b) point out, requires individuals to exhibit the moral courage necessary to stand out from the crowd and become leaders. It requires individuals to move beyond conventional thinking, step outside the norms of society, 'gain clarity about their own interior gifts' (Slaughter, 2010, p. 170) and wake up to their personal capacity for leadership.

Two particular passages from Slaughter (2010) provide an eloquent summary of his view of awakening. After telling the stories of three individuals that he believes exemplify the process of waking up (Muhammad Yunus, James Hansen and Joanna Macy), Slaughter identifies a common pattern:

> *First, the experience of some sort of dysfunction in the world; second, the personal awakening that leads to the activation or development of new or renewed capabilities; and third, taking this work from individual vision to social implementation, thereby opening the door for others* (Slaughter, 2010, p. 179)

Then, in his concluding remarks, he provides advice on how we should act:

> *Very briefly we can perhaps say that we act by gaining clarity about the global context and our own capacities for growth and development. We seek to act with all those others who are themselves awakening from the slumber of taken-for-granted immersion in social and cultural contexts. The ends are both to do with moving on personally while, at the same time, engaging in acts of cooperation, grace and purpose whenever and wherever they are needed* (Slaughter, 2010, p. 188)*.*

In summary, Slaughter (2010) identifies three characteristics of awakening. First, waking up means embracing reality, letting go of unrealistic dreams and denial and facing up to the truth that our civilization is in crisis, heading towards overshoot and collapse. Second, this confrontation with reality leads to a personal awakening or epiphany that expands our individual consciousness and reveals new capabilities for moral leadership. Finally, the awakening to personal agency needs to be translated into collective agency. Individuals engage in acts of 'cooperation, grace and purpose' to bring about better futures.

Slaughter's vision of what awakening *can* be like is an attractive and inspiring one. However, for me, it provides only a shaky basis for hope and raises two key questions for foresight practitioners and change agents that I will take up later in the paper. First, is confrontation with realistic images of apocalyptic futures a *necessary* precondition to bring about positive action to create a better future? Would it be enough to offer inspiration and leadership without dwelling on doomsday scenarios? This question seems particularly germane in light of Eckersley's (2008) argument that fears of an apocalyptic future can just as easily lead to nihilism and fundamentalism as activism. Splashing cold water in the collective face of humanity may be a counterproductive strategy that deepens malaise. Yet, I agree with Slaughter that a wake up call *does* have the potential to deliver positive responses. He provides rich examples of individuals that have travelled this path. This leads to a second question: under what conditions can confrontation with realistic images of negative futures bring about positive activism rather than negative nihilism and fundamentalism?

The Great Transition Initiative

Other futures works draw attention to additional characteristics of awakening and potentially engage with the questions raised above. Over the last decade, the Great Transition Initiative has laid out a vision for an alternative future in which new values emerge that 'emphasize the quality of life and material sufficiency, human solidarity and global equity, and affinity with nature and environmental sustainability' (Raskin et al., 2002, p. 15). The Great Transition vision is one in which humanity awakens to a deeper basis for human happiness and fulfilment. This vision is expressed as an alternative to other possible global futures, including breakdown scenarios and more conventional futures in which humanity grapples with sustainability through market and policy reform.

While metaphors of awakening are not used explicitly in the original exposition of the Great Transition (Raskin et al., 2002), they have emerged in more recent work under the banner of the Great Transition Initiative:

> *Dominant institutions have proved too timorous or too venal for meeting the environmental and social challenges of our time. Instead, an adequate response requires us to imagine the awakening of a new social actor: a coordinated global citizens movement (GCM) struggling on all fronts toward a just and sustainable planetary civilization (Raskin, 2010, p. 1).*

This new social actor is described as 'a vast movement of global citizens expressing a supranational identity and building new institutions for a planetary age' (Raskin, 2010, p. 3). In this view, awakening requires people to move beyond their individual concerns, find a collective basis for agency and act together. It is a view of an 'aware and engaged citizenry' experiencing 'a profound shift in values' (Kriegman et al., 2006, p. 2). The new values include an expanded sense of self, consistent with a planetary civilization:

> *Our concern and accountability, indeed, our very sense of self, must expand across the barriers of space and time to embrace the whole human family, the ecosphere, and the unborn* (Raskin, 2010, p. 2)*.*

Thus for the Great Transition Initiative, awakening is a metaphor for the emergence of an expanded ecological self that values the planet enough to take collective leadership in bringing about more sustainable futures. In another sense, it represents the awakening of global civil society as a potent force in governing human affairs. This view of awakening is largely consistent with that of Slaughter (2010) with one important difference: it does not specifically identify embracing the likelihood of apocalyptic futures as a precondition for awakening. Further, the focus on awakening of global civil society offers a more detailed exploration of the mechanisms through which individual agency might be expressed as collective agency. Kriegman et al. (2006, p. 17) argue that the emergence of a coordinated global citizens movement would require '**a shared vision** emerging from a process of **engaged dialogue** effectively coordinated through **new forms of leadership**' [emphasis in original]. This will be important later when looking for signs of awakening.

The Great Disruption and the Great Awakening

In *The Great Disruption*, Paul Gilding (2011) argues that humans have exceeded the Earth's carrying capacity and that a global economic crisis is now inevitable. He thinks it is likely to happen within the next decade and that the Global Financial Crisis was a taste of the cascading, overlapping crises that lie ahead. Thus far, Gilding's argument echoes familiar works such as *The Limits to Growth* (D.H. Meadows et al., 1974). Gilding's unique contribution is his argument that these crises will initiate a necessary and inevitable 'Great Awakening'. He sees this as:

a tipping point when denial ends, and the reality that we face a global, civilization-threatening risk will become accepted wisdom, virtually overnight. At that point, we will respond dramatically and with extraordinary speed and focus. This moment, when it finally arrives, will be the Great Awakening. It won't be consistent or smooth, but this will be the overall direction (Gilding, 2011, p. 106)

When the threat to human sustainability can no longer be ignored, Gilding (2011, p. 106) argues that humanity will respond with 'extraordinary, imaginative transformation and political shifts that will in this case be capable of bringing us back from the brink'. The Great Awakening will include 'a major evolution in human values, politics, and personal expectations' and 'profound shifts in how we behave personally and collectively' (Gilding, 2011, p. 97). It will include the construction of a new economy that does not rely on traditional economic growth or consumerism.

While Gilding is vague on the details of the Great Awakening, he sees the tipping point as widespread acceptance that 'we face the risk of worldwide collapse and the descent into chaos' (Gilding, 2011, p. 108). That is, awakening is the end of denial. He also stresses the adoption of a stance of hope and awakening to a sense of individual agency:

> *Most of all, we need to stop waiting for someone else to fix it. There is no one else. We are the system; we have to change* (Gilding, 2011, p. 263)*.*

Like Slaughter, Gilding argues that embracing reality is the key to waking up. However, he differs from Slaughter and the Great Transition Initiative in his view that awakening will happen rapidly in response to crisis, rather than through gradual awakening of individuals into a global collective movement. For Gilding, external events will trigger a rapid, collective awakening to a post-material culture. In looking for signs of awakening, then, it would be appropriate to look not just at the gradual evolution of values but also at the potential for sudden, systemic shifts.

Waking up to a New Future

In *Waking up to a New Future*, Sohail Inayatullah (2005) offers a view of awakening that emphasises the evolutionary dimension of waking up. He argues for 'an evolutionary jump to the world state or at the very least strong global governance' (Inayatullah, 2005, p. 55). This evolutionary jump entails 'expanding our circle of compassion to include more and more of others' (Inayatullah, 2005, p. 56) and 'a unity based on our common humanity' (Inayatullah, 2005, p. 60). Inayatullah's view resonates with both Slaughter and the Great Transition Initiative, each of which stress the expansion of values to a planetary scale.

Likewise, Inayatullah calls for a 'new type of leadership' (Inayatullah, 2005, p. 61). However, Inayatullah introduces a subtly different type of leadership that I think is important in light of the questions I raised earlier. For Inayatullah (2005, p. 61), leadership is the act of creating a 'vision that can pull us, give us hope, and

move us from the present'. It entails inspiration and support for positive agency, without necessarily dwelling on apocalyptic trends.

Discussion

While each of the works reviewed here tries to present an optimistic view of future human possibilities, I am concerned that each relies on an almost magical awakening as its key source of hope. If that awakening does not materialise, then we are left with dystopian futures. It is therefore crucial to take a realistic look at the possibility of awakening and start to sketch out the details of how foresight practitioners and change agents can support awakening. In other words, we need to move from an idealised normative view of awakening to a realistic, empirical investigation of awakening. A possible place to start is to scan for current signs of awakening.

To identify such signs, we can draw on the characteristics of awakening laid out by the four authors reviewed here. This is complicated by the tensions between the four accounts, which can be expressed as unresolved questions. First, is confrontation with realistic images of an apocalyptic future (or present) a *necessary* precondition to bring about positive action to create a better future? Slaughter and Gilding explicitly answer yes to this question, while the Great Transition Initiative and Inayatullah implicitly answer no. Second, under what conditions can confrontation with realistic images of negative futures bring about positive activism rather than negative nihilism and fundamentalism?

Instead of trying to resolve these questions prematurely, I have identified seven possible signals of awakening that draw on all four accounts:

- Widespread availability of realistic information about the possible futures humanity faces, so that embracing reality is possible (i.e. futures literacy)
- Evidence that values are shifting towards an expanded ecological self or becoming more attuned to the planetary scale, gradually or rapidly
- Evidence that activist responses are becoming more prevalent than nihilistic or fundamentalist responses
- Signs of collective agency and cooperation, such as the emergence of a global citizens movement
- Signs of engaged dialogue out of which such movements can grow
- Emergence of new forms of distributed leadership
- The existence of inspiring visions that motivate action.

These seven signals constitute a preliminary environmental scanning framework that can potentially be used to scan for signs of awakening. In scanning for these signals, I hope to both identify signs that awakening is occurring and shed some light on the questions about the nature of awakening raised above. I do not contend that the characteristics of awakening identified by these four authors are complete and comprehensive, but I do think they are a useful starting point for further research.

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Signs of awakening

This section reports on a preliminary application of the environmental scanning framework developed in the previous section.

Futures literacy

Having access to information about the possible futures humanity faces could be described as having 'futures literacy'. Almost 40% of the global population now have access to the Internet and access in rich countries is often above 90% (ICT, 2013). This explosive growth of information technology, and the new social networking practices it supports, is making it easier, in theory, for people to access information about possible and probable futures. Social media, citizen journalism and the blogosphere help to expose the reality of a civilization in crisis and to hold those in power accountable. When someone is always watching, and sharing what he or she sees, it is harder to maintain the illusion that business as usual is fine. Certainly, knowledge about many environmental issues does seem to be growing (NSW OEH, 2013).

On the other hand, the fragmentation and diversification of the media that the Internet also supports means that people can choose to hear their own views reflected back to them and avoid a broader reality. Access to information does not equate to engagement with that information. Public debates in the media seem obsessed with short-term politics, celebrity culture and endless consumption; it is tempting to conclude that futures literacy is low. In reality, there is a lack of data on futures literacy, making solid conclusions impossible. What we do know is that a strong infrastructure exists for sharing information about future realities if we choose to use it.

Trends in human values

Evidence that values are shifting towards an expanded ecological self is more conclusive. Tibbs (2011) argues that human cultural values have been changing over the last few decades, shifting towards post-material or trans-modern values. Among other sources, he draws on Ray and Anderson (2001), who identify an emerging group of 'cultural creatives' characterised by ecological values and an emphasis on self-actualisation and authenticity. Cultural creatives tend to get actively involved in progressive social movements and create links between them. Tibbs (2011) argues that these emerging values are poised to become dominant.

These trends are heartening and seem to constitute a gradual awakening of ecological and planetary values that is consistent with three of the accounts of awakening reviewed earlier. However, Ray's (2002) research indicates that it typically takes five to fifteen years for an individual to move through this process of awakening, often with little social support. What we are seeing is a gradual shift in values that raises questions about the viability of Gilding's vision of a sudden awakening in response to crisis. It remains unclear whether a

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confrontation with apocalyptic future trends is a common trigger for beginning this process of personal development.

Activism, nihilism or fundamentalism

Eckersley (2008) argues convincingly that nihilism and fundamentalism are possible responses to apocalyptic fears. In the absence of specific empirical research on this question, it is difficult to determine how common activism, nihilism and fundamentalism are as responses to the future. There are both positive and worrying signs. On the positive side, only 6.6% of young Australians in a 2012 survey felt negative or very negative about the future, compared to 70.6% who felt positive or very positive (Mission Australia, 2012). This is not the kind of result we would expect if nihilism or fundamentalism were widespread, although the situation may be very different outside rich, western countries. Further, the activist movements documented in the next section are indicative of a more positive orientation towards creating better futures.

More worrying is evidence that concern about environmental issues is falling and there is an increasing tendency to deny that climate change is happening. While belief in anthropogenic climate change and concern about its impacts rose steadily until about 2007, it has since declined in Australia and other Western countries (Hanson, 2012; Leviston et al., 2011), coinciding with increasingly strident public communication about the dangers of climate change. While there are many sources of climate denial (Washington and Cook, 2011), it can be a psychological response that we use to protect ourselves from information we do not want to deal with (Norgaard, 2011). The rise in climate denial is another reason to exercise caution when using confrontation with apocalyptic trends as a way to wake people up.

Collective agency and cooperation

One of the identified characteristics of awakening is the ability to move from personal agency to collective agency. Here, there are strong grounds for optimism. In *Blessed Unrest*, Paul Hawken (2007) documented an emerging grassroots environmental and social justice movement, involving many different types of organisations and diverse individuals. This nascent global citizens movement is exactly the type of movement sought by Slaughter and the Great Transition Initiative.

Further, signs of more cooperative values are evident beyond this global justice movement. There is also an emerging collaborative consumption movement that prioritises sharing (Botsman and Rogers, 2010). Collaborative consumption is a term that:

> *describes the rapid explosion in traditional sharing, bartering, lending, trading, renting, gifting, and swapping reinvented through network technologies on a scale and in ways never possible before* (Collaborative Consumption Hub, 2012)*.*

Botsman and Rogers (2010) argue that the 20th century economy was one of 'hyper' consumption fuelled by credit, advertising and individual ownership whereas the 21st century will be an era of collaborative consumption where reputation, community and shared access become central.

Collaborative consumption is part of a broader commons movement that recognizes that there are many things that we own together and need to manage together (Walljasper, 2010). Initiatives like Wikipedia, Creative Commons and the work of the Nobel-prize winning economist Elinor Ostrom (e.g. Ostrom, 1990) are breathing new life into the idea of sharing and creating the foundation for the shared post-material values that the authors reviewed here see as central to human awakening.

Engaged dialogue

The movements discussed in the previous section grew out of dialogue between people already engaged in creating more positive futures. There are diverse other initiatives that seek to engage people in dialogue about sustainability issues, key decisions that affect them and future issues. For example, practitioners of deliberative democracy (Gastil and Levine, 2005) attempt to bring ordinary citizens into political decisions through initiatives like World Wide Views on Global Warming (Danish Board of Technology, 2009). The Great Transition Initiative has launched The Widening Circle (The Widening Circle, 2012) with the explicit goal of enlarging and strengthening a global citizens' movement. Wiser.org (http://wiser.org) is a social network for sustainability that provides an online space for people working towards 'social justice, indigenous rights, and environmental stewardship to connect, collaborate, share knowledge, and build alliances'.

The challenge is that these initiatives tend to reach a very small proportion of the population. Many of our political institutions seem deadlocked and dysfunctional, unable to cope with the new scale of our global challenges and certainly unable to support the kind of engaged dialogue needed to deliver widespread awakening. Taking dialogic initiatives like those above to scale with mainstream audiences is a key challenge for proponents of awakening.

New forms of distributed leadership

The global citizens movement, commons movement and collaborative consumption movements discussed above are examples of new forms of distributed leadership. Hawken (2007) makes it very clear that the global justice movement has no recognised leaders, as leadership is distributed throughout the movement. This kind of distributed leadership is supported by the spread of information technology and social media, which allows people anywhere to connect and organise. For example, it is said that the youth of Egypt used social media to schedule the revolution that initiated the Arab Spring (Ghonim, 2012).

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The integral movement, which Slaughter (2010) refers to explicitly, is another potential source of distributed leadership. Growing out of the work of Ken Wilber, the integral movement has given birth to diverse initiatives that encourage participants to take broader perspectives and prioritise personal development. For example, Integral Life (http://integrallife.com) is a social media hub founded in 2007 that acts as ground zero for the emerging integral movement, providing a space for people to learn about the integral perspective and interact with others. To date, the integral movement only reaches a 'cognitive minority' (Walsh, 2009). However, it offers a pathway for participants to awaken to their personal capabilities and transform their values that could develop into an important source of awakening in the 21st century.

The emergence of social entrepreneurship (Martin and Osberg, 2007) – the application of commercial principles to address social problems – is another growing source of distributed leadership by individuals that have woken up to pressing social issues.

Inspiring visions

Inayatullah (2005) called for leaders to offer inspiring visions that motivate action. It is surprisingly difficult to identify inspiring visions of positive futures that have gained widespread traction. Dystopian futures seem to dominate mainstream media and popular culture. Nevertheless, there are nascent movements that promote and support a shared vision for humanity based on global, ecological values. The integral movement described above is one such movement. The Earth Charter Initiative is another. The Earth Charter is intended to be a 'universal expression of ethical principles to foster sustainable development' (The Earth Charter Initiative, 2012). It is the product of a 'decade-long, worldwide, cross cultural dialogue on common goals and shared values' (The Earth Charter Initiative, 2012). Thus it is perhaps the closest we have at present to the kind of shared vision developed through engaged dialogue that the Great Transition Initiative is calling for. It documents the values of an awakened humanity.

While the Earth Charter is a laudable initiative, it is little known and much more work is needed to create visions of positive futures that can act as a source of inspiration.

Conclusion: Rousing the sleepers

In this paper, I reviewed four recent futures works that make prominent use of a metaphor of awakening. I used the review to develop a tentative environmental scanning framework for identifying signs of awakening. The signs or precursors of awakening identified in the framework included:

- Widespread availability of realistic information about the possible futures humanity faces, so that embracing reality is possible (i.e. futures literacy)

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- Evidence that values are shifting towards an expanded ecological self or becoming more attuned to the planetary scale
- Evidence that activist responses are becoming more prevalent than nihilistic or fundamentalist responses
- Signs of collective agency and cooperation, such as the emergence of a global citizens movement
- Signs of engaged dialogue out of which such movements can grow
- Emergence of new forms of distributed leadership
- The existence of inspiring visions that motivate action.

A preliminary application of the framework, described above, provided mixed results. While signs of the kind of awakening identified by Slaughter, Gilding, Inayatullah and the Great Transition Initiative are clearly evident, they are often weak and dominated by other trends.

I identified two unresolved questions emerging from the accounts of awakening reviewed here:

- Is confrontation with realistic images of an apocalyptic future (or present) a *necessary* precondition to bring about positive action to create a better future?
- Under what conditions can confrontation with realistic images of negative futures bring about positive activism rather than negative nihilism and fundamentalism?

The environmental scan did not resolve these questions but it did find some evidence of people retreating to nihilism and fundamentalism in response to fears about the future. Given this evidence, foresight practitioners would be wise to exercise caution when invoking apocalyptic images of the future. Further research is needed to explore under what conditions a confrontation with scenarios depicting overshoot and collapse could deliver positive outcomes.

The implications of this research for foresight practitioners are as follows. First, this paper introduces a research agenda for exploring the nature and future trajectories of human awakening. The environmental scanning framework developed here drew primarily on depictions of waking up in four futures works. A broader review of the literature relevant to waking up, including work in values and development psychology, is likely to identify additional signals for inclusion in the framework and to clarify the nature of the signals already identified. A more thorough and detailed application of the framework would also be beneficial. In addition, specific research on the two questions raised above would be valuable.

Second, foresight practitioners can work to strengthen the signals of awakening identified in the paper through prospective work that broadens values, supports activism, promotes cooperation and dialogue, builds the capacity for leadership and offers inspiring visions. We need to move beyond the idealised, normative visions of waking up presented in the literature reviewed here towards a realistic, empirical understanding of how to support waking up.

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Finally, perhaps the single most important thing that could be done to help rouse sleeping humanity is to begin to make connections between the diverse movements identified in this paper and to see them as pieces of the larger puzzle of how we wake up. All of the initiatives discussed here have the potential to support and reinforce each other, but they often act in isolation. It seems, from this review, that the metaphor of waking up covers enough common ground that it could provide a symbolic foundation and shared vision for drawing together these disparate initiatives under a common banner. Maybe an 'awakening movement' could bring diverse movements together with a common goal in the 21st century.

Acknowledgements

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