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**The Struggle for the Long-Term in Transnational Science and Politics**  
Forging the Future

**Edited by Jenny Andersson and Eglė Rindzevičiūtė**

INION	Institute of Scientific Information on the Social Sciences of the Academy of Sciences of the Soviet Union
KEA	Kernforschungszentrum
MIT	Massachusetts Institute of Technology
MSU	Michigan State University
MUA	Archive of Masaryk Institute of Czech Academy of Sciences Prague
NASS	Nigerian Agricultural Sector Simulation
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
OECEI	Oficina de Estudios para la Colaboración Económica Internacional
PPBS	Program-Planning-Budgeting System
RAND	RAND Corporation (Research and Development)
RCP	Romanian Communist Party
RGAE	Russian State Economic Archives
RWE	Rheinisch-Westfälisches Elektrizitätswerk
RWI	Rheinisch-Westfälisches Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung
RWP	Romanian Workers' Party
SCOPE	Scientific Committee on Problems of the Environment
SPD	Social Democrats
SPRU	Science Policy Research Unity at the University of Sussex
STR	Scientific-technical revolution
STS	Science and Technology Studies
TseMI	Central Institute for Economic Mathematics of the Academy of Sciences of the Soviet Union
UN	United Nations
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WFSF	World Future Studies Federation
WWTC	Woodrow Wilson International Center
VNIISI	All-Union Scientific Institute for Systems Research of the Academy of Sciences of the Soviet Union
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association

## Foreword

*Michael D. Gordin*

The central, overwhelming contention of this volume is that the future has a history. I do not mean by this the basic observation that, in order to transition into the present, there must have been a future in the past. Of course the future has a past. What is more significant, and less often recognized, is that it has a *history*: that is, an account that is built in the present from the shards and traces that have descended to us from the past. History is written by a historian in his or her present to answer pressing contemporary questions using the past. Questions about the future, asked either in the present or the past, partake of the same techniques of history construction, and are just as powerful. Precisely in the same manner that at every moment in the past individuals constructed histories out of the times that had preceded them, so too did they build futures for themselves.

Some of the futures they imagined were reasonable, some dull, some fantastical, some delusional, some obscure, and some revelatory. As a point of historical methodology it matters less what the contents of these various past-futures were—and how sensible or dreamy their creators appeared to themselves or others—but rather that we see those futures-of-the-past as *historical exercises*, as an assemblage of traces to understand the future that symmetrically resembles how we routinely attempt to understand the past. This is what I mean in saying that the future has a history, and it is surely in the domain of historians to make sense of how these futures worked, both *as* history and *in* various historical epochs.

*The Struggle for the Long Term in Transnational Science and Politics: Forging the Future* decisively demonstrates the benefits not only of treating the futures of the past as matters for historical rumination, but it exposes to our gaze some very significant characteristics about the history of the future. The topic is so vast and so potentially metaphysical at its extreme edges that there is risk of getting lost in the weeds before one begins. Yet the editors and contributors of this volume have managed to ground a complex story in historical bedrock, and they have done so by creating a rarity in today's historical profession: a genuine collaboration. This volume consists of a diversity of essays ranging around the globe and across decades and methodologies, producing a totality that is significantly greater than the sum

of its (already robust and informative) parts. We not only learn a good deal about the history of futures past, we also encounter a striking, emergent argument about the *structure* of the history of the future.

The stakes of this argument are large, and equally significant are its implications. There are, in my reading, three core lessons this volume teaches, and I will take each in turn.

The first is that, although there have surely always been futures past, and even historical futures, The Future blossomed at a particular historical moment. Reading through the essays presented here, it is impossible not to notice how rapidly certain similar approaches to projecting the future—call it future studies, futurology, futurism (not to be confused with the Italian art movement of earlier years)—began to proliferate in quite different parts of the world in the 1960s and 1970s. Whenever a historian sees a phenomenon like this, she is well-advised to cycle through three possible scenarios. First, that it is a coincidence, just a freak happenstance that futurological projects in Ghana happen to resemble conversations taking place in Rome, Moscow, Bucharest, and Cambridge, Massachusetts. This is always a sensible point to entertain, and it serves as the null hypothesis. The historian can always return to this if the other two major explanations do not cohere. The next explanation is diffusion: a model of future studies developed in one site and then spread throughout the world. To be sure, this happened: the Club of Rome's projections into the future, published as *The Limits to Growth* in 1972, were appropriated in multiple different contexts. We see throughout these essays central institutions and pivotal individuals who transmit specific ways of thinking about the future to another node in the network. This cannot, however, explain everything, for the globality of this proliferation (which I will get to in a moment) took place within several different networks, not within just one. The final possible explanation is that something structural was happening worldwide that accounts for the great shift toward future tense.

The essays present a convincing case that the third explanation, the structural approach, was at work regarding the sciences of the future. As becomes clear, there was not a single nucleating cause but several. The key to these types of explanations is always in the timing. Why at the cusp of the 1970s, and why worldwide? One root force was demographic: the generation coming of age at this moment was the first that did not personally experience (or, in any event, remember) the Second World War. The world order that its parents had assembled no longer suited the aspirations of this generation, and ferment emerged from below. It erupted in Paris; in Washington, DC; in Frankfurt; in Hanoi; in Prague; in Beijing under various guises—for example the Prague Spring, the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution—and is now often called “global 1968.”<sup>21</sup> (In this case, too, there was diffusion as activists from around the world communicated across borders; the same was true with “global 1989.”)<sup>22</sup> Most of the actors in these pages were older than this generation of disaffected youth, but they responded to its discontent and felt something analogous themselves.

This demographic trend converged, however, with a separate, technological emergence: the transition from the large industrial mainframe computer to the much cheaper minicomputer, accessible to a far wider range of users around the globe. Calculating became easier, and this made dreams of what might be calculated all the more ambitious, even hubristic. (The rise in attention to software, Egle Rindzevičiūtė shows us, was crucial in this transition.) Finally, widespread recognition of ecological webs, energy trade patterns, and an interconnected economy came to a head as pollution crises, oil embargoes, and linked recessions prompted intellectuals from a diversity of origins to reconceive of the future in the light of new patterns. In this moment, starting from the high Cold War and moving forward, the future became, as Jenny Andersson and Egle Rindzevičiūtė put it in their introduction, a “powered affair.”<sup>23</sup>

Interconnected with this first point is the second core lesson of the volume: the history of this period can only be written from a global perspective. Our present, so we hear endlessly, is globalized.<sup>24</sup> So was the past—and so, this volume insists, were the futures generated in that past. Yet we cannot forget that the postwar world was not just one world but, in the idiom of the time, threefold: a First World, the loose agglomeration of mostly capitalist societies under the vague leadership of the US; a Second World, Marxist politics that traveled with or sometimes against the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics; and an ostensible Third World, which made up the remainder (and, as it happens, the majority of Earth's population). Ironically—or perhaps not?—for the Club of Rome, the über-futurologists chronicled beautifully in the essay by Elodie Veille Blanchard, there were also three worlds: World 1, World 2, and World 3. (Tellingly, in this case they were computer models.) Despite the penchant of many to split the world, like Gaul, into threes, the geopolitical boundaries were sharp only in the fantasies of Cold War strategic planners; the People's Republic of China, for example, veered between Second and Third according to circumstance. Nonetheless, we find in these essays family resemblances among the projections of the future depending on the sphere of origin, a confirmation of Jenny Andersson's astute observation in her contribution that these scenarios of the future were both manifestations of the Cold War and a means to protest against it. So, whereas Andersson, Veille Blanchard, and Stéfan Cihan Aykut (writing on West Germany) show us mostly a First World perspective, Rindzevičiūtė, Vítězslav Sommer, and Ana-Maria Cătănuș show us the Soviet, Czechoslovak, and Romanian approaches, respectively. Nor is the Third World—caught between American and Soviet spheres of contestation—excluded, as Kevin Baker demonstrates for Nigeria and Jeff Grischow and Hölger Weiss for Ghana. And, in the end, Paul Warde and Sveker Sörlin present a comparatively *longue durée* view in this temporally-tight volume by focusing on environmental projections from the 1920s onward. We get, therefore, an international history, a transnational history, and a global history in one.

Last but certainly not least, we find a third set of stakes in the history of knowledge (or, as it is known in German, *Wissensgeschichte*).

Projecting the future was not a matter of random guessing or science-fictional epiphanies—for these actors, it was a *science*, an important and emerging field among the social sciences. In an intriguing pattern, the academic discipline of the history of science—which owed a good deal to Auguste Comte's famous doctrine of positivism, first articulated in the 1830s—has traversed the same path as Comte's much maligned hierarchy of sciences: from physics to chemistry to biology to psychology to, finally, sociology, which Comte considered, *qua* “social physics,” as the most important science for the social order. Only now have historians begun to apply the same powerful battery of historical techniques and interpretive frames to the social sciences. This historiography has tended to focus, not coincidentally, on the Cold War era, the moment when the social sciences mushroomed across the social order—on both sides of the Iron Curtain—to cope with the nuclear age.<sup>5</sup>

Yet for all the attention now lavished on the social sciences, the study of the future using social scientific techniques—the highest-stakes, most stimulating, and provocative incarnation of the interdisciplinary social sciences—has eluded attention. That is, until this volume. Again and again across these essays we see interactions between economists and sociologists, operations researchers and demographers, and many others, all trying to make sense of their present by projecting data from the past into the future. As Warde and Sörlin implicitly show, the transition from economic thinking to ecological thinking and back again complicates even the supposedly clear boundary between the social and the natural sciences. What has been missing from the history of the social sciences is now clear: the history of “The Future.” This was the area that connected all the others, that brought models from one science into the heart of another, and that fused those sciences with the global moment of the 1960s and 1970s, embedded in lines of computer code, all over the world. The future always lies ahead, but its history is what energizes the present. It was true in the postwar moment, and it is true in the post-Cold War moment as well—much as it seems to hold today.

The reader of this volume is in for a treat. What these contributors have assembled is in itself a wonderful interdisciplinary approach to a slice of the past, a moment when the future was not only a playground contemplated by woolly-headed dreamers, but equally a terrain for hard-headed technocrats attempting to shape their present with rigorous knowledge. The future was a serious and gripping affair in the past; the history of the future is no less so.

## NOTES

1. See, for example, many of the essays in a similarly wide-ranging collaborative project: Kathrin Fahlenbrach, Erling Sivertsen, and Rolf Wereniskiold, eds., *Media and Revolt: Strategies and Performances from the 1960s to the Present* (New York: Berghahn, 2014).
2. On the latter event, see George Lawson, Chris Ambruster, and Michael Cox, eds., *The Global 1989: Continuity and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

3. Historian W. Patrick McCray, focusing on a similar period in the wake of the Club of Rome report, has called these attempts to apply engineering techniques to understanding the future “visionering,” and his analysis displays many resonances with that offered in this volume: *The Visioneers: How a Group of Elite Scientists Pursued Space Colonies, Nanotechnologies, and a Limitless Future* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).
4. An exemplar of the pundit's-eye-view of this matter is Thomas L. Friedman, *The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2005). More sober-minded histories have extended this “globalized” picture back substantially before the dot-com boom, as in Jürgen Osterhammel and Niels P. Peterson, *Globalization: A Short History*, tr. Dona Geiger (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).
5. For example, Paul Erickson, Judy L. Klein, Lorraine Daston, Rebecca Lemov, Thomas Sturm, and Michael D. Gordin, *How Reason Almost Lost Its Mind: The Strange Career of Cold War Rationality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013); and Mark Solovey and Hamilton Cavens, eds., *Cold War Social Science: Knowledge Production, Liberal Democracy, and Human Nature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

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