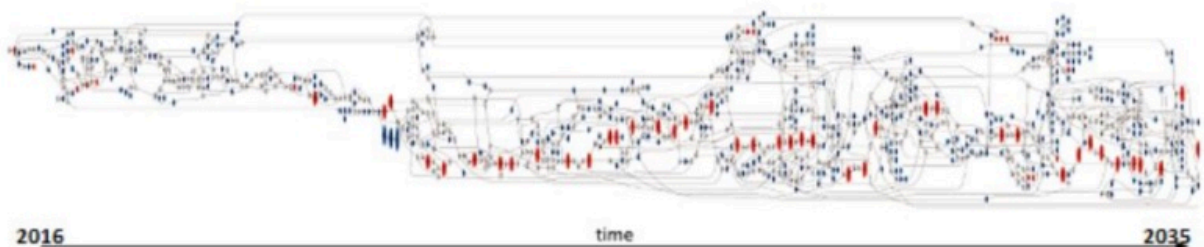


NO CLUE by Charles Cameron @hipbonegamer

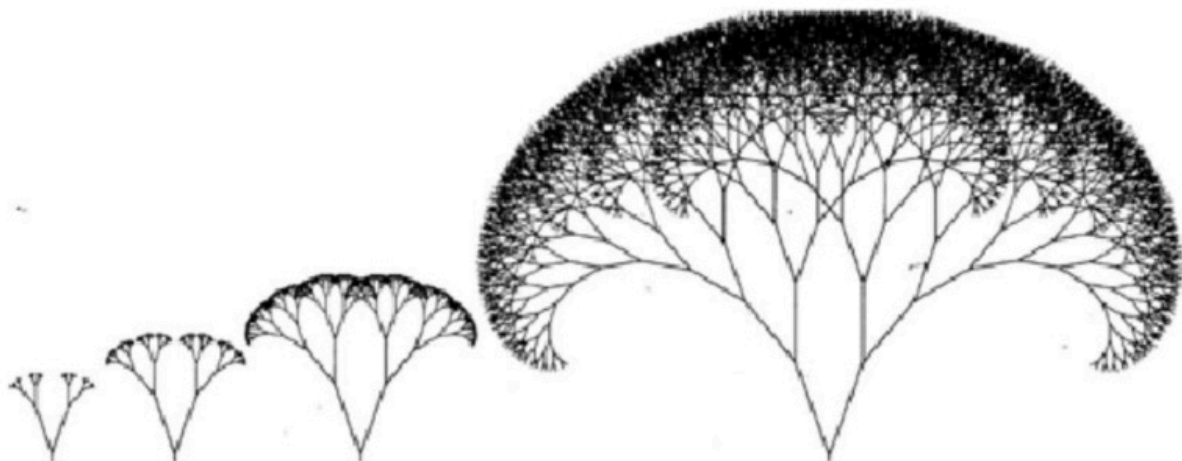
I shall lie quietly under the greensward by 2035, either oblivious, deep into my next incarnation, or something close to omniscient. Oblivion offers the near certainty of being right about the future, but lacks communications skills, so I won't linger there. From the point of view of my next incarnation, finding myself once again a yak herder in Nepal – yaks haven't changed much since my grandfather's day, and his grandfather's day before him – may I offer you a bowl of *tsampa* and butter tea? So that leaves us with semi- or quasi-omniscience.

Time – previously a Torah-like scroll with the far past rolled up and vanishing on the left just as the future unspools and becomes present, legible, then recent, on the right – is now laid out in all its simultaneity and glory in the Museum of Timeless Reality. Walking up and down it, noting the Art of Future Warfare challenge of 2016 and inquisitively visiting 2035 to see what unfolded over the timespan between them, I'm grateful for the tweaknology that permits me to select 2016 as my point of origin and observe in broad outline the probability tree across a 19 year spread from there.

Here's the outline, not yet zoomed for detail:

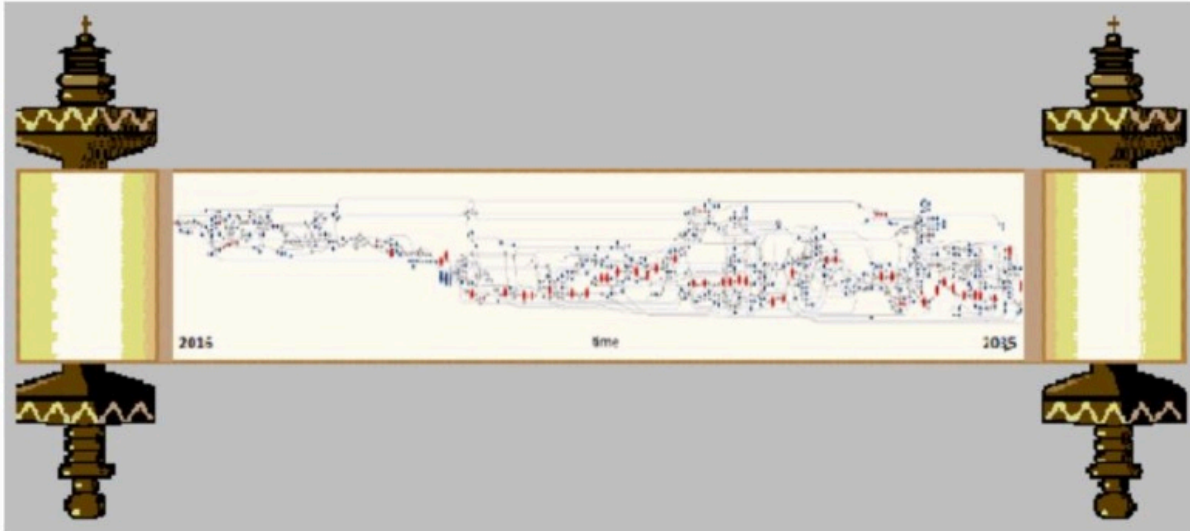


As for myself, of course, I loved the old symmetries of the Platonic Broccoli, as we used to call it back in the day:



If god were mathematics, that's what we'd have, of course – an equitable branching of realities – but hey, reality is stranger than fiction, even science fiction, amirite?

So let's give time it's proper sanctity, okay?



That's the angel's eye view of the period in question, nothing to get upset about, although it took the recording angel 19 nanoseconds, or call that an eternity, to record and annotate it.

And bingo, as you can see, the wave functions kept on collapsing, which thankfully gave us only a few basic timeline options for prophets, predictors, prognosticators, and flat-out prospective Art of the Future contestants to worry their little heads over.

No world-devastating nuclear warfare – unless the deity around whom the angels traditionally gather in serried choirs hit some kind of rewind button that even the recording angel can't or won't record – and if that Splendor-Beyond-Belief™ hit a rewind button in the approximate mid-point of All Eternity, it's hard to see why He-She-It wouldn't have done the same at least after Nagasaki, if not Hiroshima...

Although of course there may have been a rewind after Kyoto, and we just don't know about it...

Argh, back on track – multiple track, since the cosmos is a branching enterprise, and thus inherently contrapuntal, like a Bach fugue gone fractal on its self. From my point of view under the ground, then, and with the capacity to roam the Museum of All and Whatever, even if I still don't have the macro-mind for details (which is where, they told me, both God and the Devil hide) –

Drum-roll! Trumpets: **Tarraah!**

There's an elegance to it. Cockroaches didn't win. It was drone-swatting drones that finally cluttered the once pure and simple air, and thus our nostrils, until our lungs collapsed. Considerable efforts were made at geopolitical international, corporate international, national, failing-, ungoverned-, sub-state, local, and individual levels to fight the plague, but money was still the priority, ranking way above quality of life, science, the global ecosystem, food or water...until food and water trumped them and dumped them all with the urgencies of hunger, thirst and lack of oxygen.

At which point, *mutatis mutandis*, for each appropriately sentient individual and perhaps cellular – hell, even I in my decomposing / composting phase don't truly know – and sub-cellular down even unto the improbable probabilities of the nether quarktic regions – timelines, I mean lives, crashed.

And though worms destroy this body, as George Frederick Handel said – but we'll get to that.

Well, I don't know about any of that, I am oblivious. Or perhaps I know too much, and s/he who knows does not speak, s/he who speaks does not know.

Look, shall I lay it out for you? Forecasts blur the probabilities: the further out they look, the more they blur, and there's even a curve for that.

One black swan, one unpredicted political assassination can cause a world war, one atom first split in Lise Meitner's lab can end a second, one ballistics calculator can spawn the computer, the internet, the internet of things – get real, the world tree branches way more than the possible moves in a game of Go, and AlphaGo cannot compute the result, Hari Seldon is a figure in fiction, Psychohistory a keen idea, Peter Turchin a very bright guy and Nassim Nicholas Taleb his contra-positive, let's call it even.

The 2016 US presidential election alone could be a major bifurcation point, and my point is, Who knows? 20/20 vision will not reach 2035.

So, back to the drawing board, ahem, writing bench, err...ansible from the grave?

Here, under the sod, in the catacombs, holding ghostly counsel. Are you aware of the Geoffrey Hill poem?

I will consider the outnumbering dead:
For they are the husks of what was rich seed.
Now, should they come together to be fed,
They would outstrip the locusts' covering tide.

Arthur, Elaine, Mordred; they are all gone
Among the raftered galleries of bone.
By the long barrows of Logres they are made one,
And over their city stands the pinnacled corn.

Arthur is gone, a historical figure flayed with myth – and so they all are, Ozymandias, the Buddha, Plato, Smuts, Gandhi, Truman, and the rest – what can they know of 2035, of 2016, those who knew Homer's Atreides if not House Harkonnen, Athena's hand if not the ways of Ents?

**

It is Memorial Day, again or ever – and whether in Arlington or Colleville-sur-Mer, our serried ranks of gravestones, some named for corporals or captains, some for the unknown, rise above us, dragon's teeth, while in other less certain places, water flows, or sand blows.

Those of us somehow still remembered stir in our burrows, take ghostly council together – this year, this day or always, it is so hard to know. Here, underground, for us the buried, things do not so much exist as loom, vague shifting shapes, history and the future's probabilities likewise, bifurcations. The future world – what does Ozymandias make of it, or blind Tiresias who was man and woman both, our Father Plato, even Napoleon? From some far hall Homer calls, his Atreides muffled with Atreides of Dune who fought House Harkonnen: follow Helen, he cries, follow the Spice!

Dimly, then, and with dumbed words, we must speak to you of the murmur of drones – of mosquitos, of bees innumerable in Arquilla-Ronfeldt swarms with the all-sensing multi-optic eyes of flies – of bacteria immune to our defenses they unleash, of deaths of multitudes by plague, of drones as locusts, of an old book and the loss of each last firstborn, save of them they saved – of the decay of the dead, the exultant delight amidst grief and guilt of those living still while all around them fall like flies – what is it with flies, drones, mosquitos? From micro multitudes, macro effects.

A drift or swarm of birds wheels, turns, we see Trump triumphant nuking Tehran, claiming it is ISIS we destroyed, the swarm morphs, a wave of revulsion sweeps the earth, never again, not Jews this time but nukes. Newton mutters to della Mirandola of alchemy, of Revelation. Lise Meitner – I saw it all, esprit de l'escalier, the moment the future began to emerge from the fog of –

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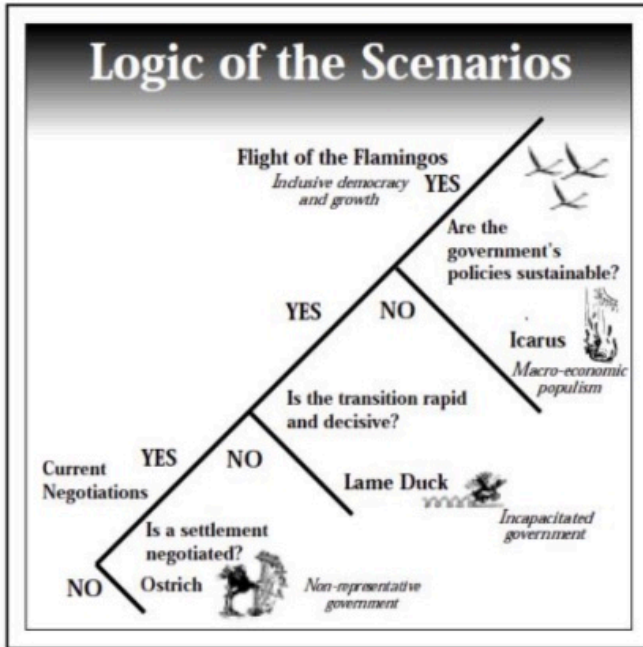
Days have passed, *the trend lines haven't changed* -- still below ground in 2035, I peer at Johari's mirror, which deals in Rumsfeld manner with personal knowledge:



I think to myself, there must be some futuristic equivalent of this, a quadrant mirror that Pierre Wack, Adam Kahane & their colleagues at Shell would recognize, a scenario-planner's window on the world.

I'm secretly thinking of the Shell scenario planners because of the Mont Fleur scenarios Kahane put together, offering South Africans of all hues via billboards, early in the negotiations which would end apartheid, a choice of futures between:

- an **ostrich** future in which the government did nothing and apartheid remained
- a **lame duck** future in which government moves too slowly to negotiate a change
- an **Icarus** future in which the change is made too quickly and goes down in flames
- a **flight of the flamingos future** in which a sustainable path is found to inclusive democracy



My proposed Scenario window, if I may call it that, looks like this:



Those are the four panes of my window on the future, and I think it's worth looking into each of them in turn.

What any bright analyst can project from widely known trends is essentially what you will get from a committee of the living, or from those whose specialty is seniority, if I may blurt it out bluntly. There's nothing unexpected there, it's Rumsfeld's **known knowns** all the way, it's the sagging *zeitgeist* on its way down the tubes and into the landfill of unfulfilled assumptions.

What other analysts can project from trends my biases hide from me – or perhaps, **trends our biases or lack of clearances hide from us** – is what special communities of interest will come up with – still group think, but with what I'll call a **genre bias**.

That bias may be the **IC bias** that tends to weight secrets more heavily than open source data points, information, knowledges or (for that matter) wisdom.

It may be the **military bias** that tends to be personnel and munitions heavy, and light on human psychology and anthropology, thus missing matters of esprit and morale in the course of heavily quantified war games...

It may be the **narrative bias** – which often curves towards overly desperate *worst case* scenarios or overly optimistic *happy endings* with scant regard for the spectrum between those poles.

It may be – and I must watch my words here – **science fiction bias** – not always as insightful and creative as Chip Delaney, and sometimes regurgitating Larry Niven with weaponry out of the DARPA catalog.

Let me put in my pitch here for the true mad-persons of science fiction, the Cordwainer Smiths, the RA Laffertys, and the Ursula Le Guins of a bygone age...

All of these biases jump you out of the box into a box – that's their partial glory, but also their partial problem.

What I can project from trends I am almost uniquely aware of is an interesting category not just for myself in particular – for it's where my own best value to the wider community will be found – but for each and every bright and interested outlier.

It's why DDI Jami Miscik testified to the 9/11 Commission:

Questions that always need to be addressed in intelligence analysis include:

- *How do we free ourselves from inherited or untested assumptions?*
- *How do we make sure that indicators and predictive tools we are using continue to be weighed appropriately, and are still relevant?*
- *How do we make sure alternative analysis is pursued seriously as an integral part of our analysis and not as a "tack on" at the end?*

and very specifically:

- *To truly nurture creativity, you have to cherish your contrarians and give them opportunities to run free.*

A cluster of individual outliers – not a red team, but a cluster of individual contrarians – is where we'll get the finest array of fruitful trend extensions, and is – as far as I can see – what the Scowcroft Center & Art of the Future Project are aiming at.

But.

But the farther out we look, the more likely we are to run into our fourth territory, the terrain of **What nobody predicts because black swans disrupt trend lines.**

And look, I'm figuring all this out in my below the ground bunker, along with my fellow dead from a number of centuries and indeed more than two millennia, my oldest companions drawing bison onto the wall, Merlin shapeshifting and oracular (which isn't terribly helpful to be honest), more recent comers moving little lead horsemen around on maps, my contemporaries from back in 2016 consulting their various e- and i-devices, AND THE FUTURE AS YET UNSEEN.

Nobody, not even Hari Seldon with his Seldon Plan nor Peter Turchin with his Cliodynamics, has figured out the distribution of black swans along the timeline from, shall we say, two thousand years before the common era to the end of the third millennium after it, let alone to the extinction of all intelligence, artificial or otherwise.

And so we talk.

Our spirits talk, and worms devour – but I'll try to be sensitive in my language, the *mores* even twenty years hence may be less forgiving than those who heard Ginsberg read *Howl* can easily appreciate.

And we know nothing.

We don't even know that we are pushing daisies – the world we once habited may be radioactively barren of daisies by the appointed time.

But I'm waxing apocalyptic, which moves us back into the region of **trends I am almost uniquely aware of** – since Islamic eschatology has long been my specialty.

**

Apocalypse, in my opinion, is the wave of the future. But that's just me, still kicking in time for the AotF contest, long dead by the time it envisions. Apocalypse, to be more to the point in terms of current threats, is what Martin Dempsey called the Islamic State's "apocalyptic, end-of-days strategic vision."



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Apocalypse soon?

Seriously, though?

Timeline:

Stage 1. Late 2016. Anger that feels empowered because Trump won the 2016 election – or under-represented because he lost it – raises the US temperature, psychologically speaking, enough that a steady trickle of the more peaceable Americans head for Canada. Initially, some citizens of San Diego move to LA, LA to SF, SF to Southern Oregon, Ashland to Portland, Portland to Seattle, and yes, feeling the squeeze, some of Seattle swims across to Vancouver. The Canadians stay put.

Stage 2. The Canadians consider building a wall. Oregon closes all off-ramps on I-5 from the Californian border to the border with Washington.

Stage 3. Trump – whether he won or not – decides anywhere south of Oregon is a lost cause, abandons his wall idea. Canadians debate in which language to discuss their own wall project, seriously.

Stage 4. Global warming propels half the population of Mexico into Texas, California, and as far north as Colorado. The ripple effect spreads north as before.

Stage 5. The Canadians build a wall, a serious wall. Americans who can say both “please” and “I’m sorry” are granted admission at gates in the wall.

Stage 6. The city of Dis rises from the California desert just like in James Blish’s *Black Easter*, and aerial combat between tactical nukes and demon legions ensue. The demons hold all the cards.

Stage 7. Evacuation of some Mexicans and the remainder of the US American populations into Canada are foiled by presence of the Canadian wall.

Stage 8. Wall-vaulting is recognized as an Olympic sport.

Stage 9. The world’s top athletes and shamanic herdsman survive in Alaska, across the Athabaskan zone of Canada to Baffin Island, and in Antarctica.

Stage 10. 2035: the freshly-titled and isotopically rejuvenated “Ras” Putin rules his world empire from Murmansk, 83 years old and still a match – bagpipes vs. jet-skis – for the Shetlander James Bond VII.

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Those of us below ground think the General Resurrection [1 Corinthians 15.50-55] can’t be too far off, surely? Or as George Frederick Handel suggests in his *Messiah*, HWV 56 part 3, *I know that my Redeemer liveth*, “And though worms destroy our bodies, yet in our flesh shall we see God”.

Sadly, for the purposes of black swans and apocalyptic deadlines, however, no date certain is proposed.