

EDITOR'S PREFACE

Last year, Ursula K. Le Guin gave an impassioned speech in accepting the National Book Foundation's Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters. She declared that her "beautiful reward" was accepted on behalf of, and shared with

Writers of the imagination who, for the last fifty years, watched the beautiful rewards go to the so-called realists.

I think hard times are coming, when we will be wanting the voices of writers who can see alternatives to how we live now. Who can see through our fear-stricken society and its obsessive technologies to other ways of being, and even imagine some real grounds for hope. We will need writers who can remember freedom—poets, visionaries; the realists of a larger reality. Right now, I think we need writers who know the difference between production of a market commodity and the practice of an art.

. . . We live in capitalism; its power seems inescapable. So did the divine right of kings. Any human power can be resisted and changed by human beings. Resistance and change often begin in art, and very often in our art: the art of words. . . . The name of our beautiful reward is not profit. Its name is freedom.¹

I believe she was thinking primarily of her fellow writers of fantasy and science fiction, but in my ears her words sounded a clarion call to complete my work on this book. David Fleming's writing is doubtless grounded on the non-fiction side of literature's great divide, but it perhaps begins to bridge the gap, anticipating Le Guin's call for visionary memory and imagination as it reaches towards the future. And certainly it is more artwork than market commodity, with its poetry-spattered prose, radical content and unique structure.

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Surviving the Future is a story drawn from Fleming's masterpiece *Lean Logic: A Dictionary for the Future and How to Survive It*; a hardback that has proved an influential and entertaining read even before its publication, feeding the fire of thinkers, writers, activists and academics in the UK and beyond as drafts circulated. The beauty of the dictionary format is that it allows Fleming to draw attention to connections that might otherwise be overlooked (each definition contains pointers to related entries) without detracting from his in-depth exploration of each topic. It also creates a book perfectly suited to dipping in and out.

Nonetheless, after Fleming's death in 2010, demand grew for the production of this complementary paperback, to concisely present his rare insights and remarkably enjoyable writing style in a more conventional read-it-front-to-back format. It has been necessary to edit the text a little in places in order to ensure the flow of this new arrangement, but my editorial approach has been to leave Fleming's unique voice untouched as far as possible.

In truth, there were many different books ready to be teased from the fertile ground of *Lean Logic*. A feature of its 'linked dictionary' format is that it allows the reader to follow the narrative of their choice as they explore the entries, breaking free of the imposed order of a conventional book. *Surviving the Future* is one of those possible narratives, and I have sought to provide here a real taste of not only Fleming's playful writing, but also his gift for challenging the divine right of economists to pronounce from the heights of mathematical abstraction.

He reminds us that the subject matter they claim for their own consists of essentially straightforward questions such as: Who should work at what? And for how long? And how should our wealth be shared out and distributed? Society's answers to these questions shape the bulk of our waking hours, and so *Surviving the Future* returns them to their rightful owners. In the process, it reminds us of how extreme and unusual today's 'ordinary' is, showing zero tolerance for those who benefit from presenting these life-defining questions as impenetrable, none-of-our-business and, of all things, *boring*.

Whichever version of his work is read, there is no denying that since his death in 2010, Fleming's far-sightedness has become ever more apparent. He predicted the schisms and convulsions shaking the economies of Europe. He was among the first in the world to reveal the ongoing pressure

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on oil supply, and predict the subsequent volatile prices and growth in 'unconventional' oil and gas. Ever-improving scientific understanding of our environmental crises has vindicated his belief that a fundamental change of direction is needed if we are to maintain a benign climate. And above all, his diagnosis of the roots of our cultural malaise looks ever more acute as the years pass. It seems that this book's powerfully different—yet deep-rooted—vision for a post-growth culture may have its time after the passing of its creator.

Yet, as Fleming says within, the future he sketches out is a scenario, not a prediction.

It is only appropriate that society should explore a diversity of paths in response to the challenges of our times, but I for one hope that the future that comes to pass is tangibly inspired by that laid out here. Long before she made it, David Fleming was answering Le Guin's call for those visionary writers "who can see alternatives to how we live now . . . and even imagine some real grounds for hope".

As visions of the future go—and they have long been a particular fascination of mine—*Surviving the Future* is by far the most grounded, inspiring and impelling I have yet encountered. I am honoured to have played a part in its publication.

And on that note, over to David.²

SHAUN CHAMBERLIN, SEPTEMBER 2015