

CHAPTER 21



Future Shock

The End of the World as They Knew It

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SINCE THE END OF THE COLD WAR, historians have come to understand that a preoccupation with the U.S.-Soviet confrontation distorted our understanding of the rest of the world. A more global and transnational perspective reveals that long before the end of the East-West struggle, interdependent capital markets, population growth and movement, environmental challenges, new media, and international and nongovernmental organizations were combining to cause radical change of a recognizably new kind. This broader vision, less centered on interstate relations, can show the roots of the contemporary phenomenon called globalization.

Of course historians differ on when and where to begin. There are different ways to define globalization, and it has proceeded in episodic fashion. Whether any particular development really had worldwide impact is usually debatable, and one can often find precursors from earlier periods, such as in the rise and fall of world migration and commodity flows. The problems are particularly acute when we try to analyze changing perceptions of space—"the shock of the global"—with a unit of analysis defined by time. The most important historical developments do not usually organize themselves by decade. What seems distinctive about a period as it was experienced or remembered may not help explain an ongoing geopolitical process.

This essay explores this space-time relationship by focusing on how contemporaries understood their times. As it happens, long before historians began studying the 1970s, even before the decade began, people expected it to bring rapid and dramatic changes that would be global in scope. His-

tory seemed to be accelerating, and over the course of the decade people became extraordinarily focused on the future.¹ These changing perceptions of time help explain how people began to see the world as becoming more interconnected. New transportation and communications technologies promised to collapse space and make the world one. But global crises also annihilated distance while at the same time making differences between people all the more palpable. What made the global seem local, and shocking, was that people in the 1970s believed that the world—all of it—was rapidly changing, but with radically different effects for rich and poor, the “developed” and the “underdeveloped.” While some were stuck in gas lines—or breadlines—and seemed to be living in the past, others were booking advance tickets on supersonic transports and speeding into the future.²

In the 1970s “futurology” itself became a site of political conflict. Forecasts, projections, and future scenarios became common tools of governance in the public, corporate, and philanthropic sectors. Some of these exercises had a real-world impact, such as the “Team B” assessment of a growing Soviet advantage in waging nuclear war, which became a keynote of Ronald Reagan’s presidential run in 1980. The Club of Rome report “The Limits to Growth” inspired scientists in China to use similar forms of systems analysis to calculate the need for a one-child policy.³ Beyond government forecasting and projections, the 1970s also witnessed the revival of millenarian fervor among evangelical Christians and the increasing popularity of paranormal beliefs and practices, especially astrology. These too could have a real-world impact, such as in the growing support for Israel, which evangelicals believed was the fulfillment of prophecy. In time, government agencies began to offer fanciful and frightening visions of the future to marshal public support, especially for building up U.S. military capabilities against the Soviets. Some of the most important political struggles would therefore turn not just on contending visions of the future—such as different scenarios for World War III—but on whether it was even possible to plan and prepare for it.

How do we explain why people became more preoccupied with the future in the 1970s, to the point where even intelligence agencies began to employ psychics and “futurology” became a lucrative field for business consultants? Can we generalize about larger trends—such as the public’s disenchantment with earlier, more optimistic visions of technological progress and a new taste for more dystopian visions that were also

more global in nature? Considering the very limited utility or reliability of most forecasts, projections, and scenarios—which usually failed to anticipate the most important events and trends of the era—could they be seen as serving other, unacknowledged purposes? As we shall see, what historians now call the shock of the global was experienced by contemporaries as the shock of the future, shocking because—for all their efforts to forecast and plan for it—the future arrived suddenly and without warning.

In 1970 Alvin Toffler published what would become one of the best-sellers of the decade, a foundational work in the fast-growing new field of futurology. A former editor at *Fortune*, Toffler focused on emerging trends that indicated new business opportunities, such as increasing labor mobility, lifestyle drugs, divorce, and gay marriage. But Toffler made a larger argument about how the pace of historical change was overtaking society's capacity to cope, coining the term "information overload." He predicted that some people would suffer "future shock" and become increasingly disoriented and irrational, a phenomenon he thought was already evident in the emergence of anarchist and terrorist groups. People needed help in adapting to the pace of change, including "enclaves of the future" in which they could learn how to interact with new technologies, "enclaves of the past" where they could find refuge, and ombudsmen who would challenge technocrats and delay disruptive innovations.⁴

By the late 1960s there were already popular movements afoot aiming at historical and environmental preservation, each in its own way reflecting a protest against the nature and pace of change. The National Historic Preservation Act was passed in 1966, and the following decade witnessed rapid growth in degree programs, grass-roots campaigns, and historic districts across America. Concern about environmental conservation also grew apace during the same period with the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency in 1970 and the Endangered Species Act three years later. In 1972 UNESCO combined the two agendas with its Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, or Heritage Convention, which provided funding, expert advice, and international recognition for similar efforts around the world.⁵

Historians now recognize this impulse to preserve and commemorate the past as resulting from a perception that the pace of change is accelerating.⁶ But Toffler was not the only one to foresee how it would also lead people to be more preoccupied with the future. The idea of "future shock" was first introduced by the prominent defense intellectual Herman Kahn

in 1967 in a more optimistic Hudson Institute study, *The Year 2000*, a book that forecast undersea colonies and weather control. That same year the American Academy of Arts and Sciences published a special issue of *Daedalus* presenting the work of some three dozen luminaries charged with considering the long-range consequences of contemporary policy decisions. They included Zbigniew Brzezinski, Karl Deutsch, Theodosius Dobzhansky, Samuel Huntington, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, and Roger Revelle. The chairman of the Year 2000 Commission, Daniel Bell, used the opportunity to introduce his concept of a “post-industrial society,” another idea that Toffler would appropriate and popularize.⁷

Whether known as futurology or futurism, the field grew to become an international phenomenon. The First World Future Research Conference was held in Oslo in 1967, and by 1980 the World Future Society claimed fifty thousand members.⁸ Hudson had its European counterpart in France, where Bertrand de Jouvenel directed the Association Internationale Futuribles. He, like Bell, described his work as exploring alternative futures in a way meant to illuminate the scope of human agency.⁹ Like the American Academy, the English Social Science Research Council created a Committee on the Next Thirty Years. The rise of futurology also transcended Cold War divisions. A Czechoslovak Futurological Society was founded in 1968, and the Soviet independent Scientific Forecasting Association grew to more than 1,500 members before authorities shut it down in 1970. The party leadership insisted that this work be done through proper channels, but also gave ten- and even fifteen-year forecasts increasing weight in research and capital investment decisions.¹⁰

Different forms of futurology also made deep inroads in the private sector in the 1970s. Shell Oil began to use future scenarios for long-range strategic planning, now considered a model of prescient corporate leadership. Many more corporations created long-range planning departments or hired “strategy boutiques” like the Boston Consulting Group. This was also the heyday of economic forecasting, which would grow to become a \$100 million industry by the early 1980s. In annual gatherings of the World Future Society, reporters described the emergence of a new profession as a host of consultants jetted about the world offering their services as trend-spotters.¹¹

In the United States the increasing interest in forecasting was both bipartisan and competitive. In the 1970s a series of presidential commissions and reports examined issues such as “Population and the American

Future” and “Critical Choices,” culminating with the Carter administration’s Global 2000 Report. Nixon created an Office of Net Assessment under Andrew Marshall in 1971 to forecast technological developments and the shifting correlation of forces with the USSR. A concern that the executive branch had developed an edge in evaluating prospects for technological change prompted Congress to create the Office of Technology Assessment in 1972. In 1976 the House of Representatives implemented a rule that required committees and subcommittees to undertake futures research and forecasting.¹² Toffler went on to become an adviser to another self-described futurist, Congressman Newt Gingrich. Gingrich and Senator Al Gore would later cosponsor legislation to create an office in the executive branch charged with determining whether laws and regulations adequately took account of “critical trends and alternative futures.”¹³

The professional success and political influence of futurology was only part of a broader public fascination with prevision. Toffler’s book sold more than 6 million copies, but it was not actually the best-selling work of nonfiction in the 1970s. That was a work of prophecy: Hal Lindsey’s *Late Great Planet Earth*. The book was an extended commentary on how current events were portents of the impending Apocalypse. Most important among them was the creation of the State of Israel. Lindsey also used scripture to describe how the battle of Armageddon would unfold, drawing sweeping arrows across the Middle East to indicate the coming Soviet assault on Israel. And he translated scripture into modern weapons systems, such that fire and brimstone were said to signify nuclear weapons. Starting with a religious publishing house in 1970, Lindsey continued issuing new editions for the trade, revising the predictions that did not pan out—such as the notion that, once it had ten members, the leader of the European Community would be the Antichrist. He inspired a legion of imitators as well as documentaries, popular films, and radio talk shows.¹⁴ Here again, the renewed interest in millenarianism was not only an American phenomenon. The 1979 seizure of the Grand Mosque at Mecca was intended as preparation for the Apocalypse, and eschatological writings would flood the Islamic world over the following decades.¹⁵

The Late Great Planet Earth began by noting that many were turning away from religion in their search for insight about the future. For Lindsey and other evangelicals, the contemporary boom in astrology constituted one of the signs of the last days.¹⁶ Beginning in 1968, astrology books also began to appear on best-seller lists, and by 1975, 1,250 of

1,500 newspapers offered regular columns on the subject.¹⁷ Whereas the preachers warned of a new period of unprecedented violence and destruction, for astrologers like Linda Goodman, humanity was entering the “Age of Aquarius,” marked by “higher love, every man is my brother.”¹⁸ The term is usually associated with the 1960s and the musical *Hair*. But for believers the “New Age” was supposed to last over two thousand years. What seemed remarkable to social scientists in the 1970s was that, far from being a fringe phenomenon, belief in astrology and other paranormal phenomena was becoming mainstream. In a 1978 Gallup poll, 39 percent of respondents reported that they believed in precognition, or the ability to foretell the future.¹⁹

Futurologists like Toffler insisted that their work had nothing to do with astrology and prophecy (one reason he preferred the term “futurism”). “Today’s futurists, for the most part,” he maintained, “lay no claim to the ability to predict.” Accordingly, they used a range of methods, and those who offered projections and scenarios were usually careful to specify that they were not intended as forecasts. Population projections, for instance, could never be wrong if they were properly understood as calculations based on specified assumptions about fertility, mortality, and migration. Similarly, future scenarios were usually described as thought exercises meant to provoke people to question their assumptions and think harder about how their decisions would open up or foreclose opportunities.²⁰

Yet it is doubtful that so much demand would have developed for this kind of work were it not for expectations that it offered a privileged vantage point on the future. And those expectations shaped both how the work was performed and how it was sold. Given the infinite number of possibilities for projecting a population, “high” and “low” projections were inevitably taken as confidence intervals, with the medium projection interpreted as the one that seemed most likely. The confidence people had—and continue to have—in population projections helps to explain why they are so often the starting point for speculation about the future.²¹ In addition, the scenarios that are described as the most successful are not the ones that persuaded policymakers to change course, with the result that the scenario itself diverges from events as they unfolded. Instead the success stories invariably refer to the rare instances in which scenarios actually anticipated reality, such as Shell Oil’s early consideration of a price shock in the 1970s.²²

Moreover, many futurists did offer explicit predictions, and claimed

credit for those that came true. In the 1970s the U.S. intelligence community in particular began to adopt new methods of forecasting that promised to overcome the groupthink and “defensive writing” that had rendered national intelligence estimates (NIEs) virtually useless for policymaking. The Delphi method anonymously polled experts and shared peer reviews in order to produce an unbiased consensus on a given question. Previously used by the RAND corporation for technological forecasting, in the 1970s it began to be applied to political problems and policymaking. In the same period, Bayesian exercises had CIA analysts assessing the probability of specific events and the predictive weight of individual indicators. After a series of these exercises, in which they estimated from zero to 100 percent the probability of Sino-Soviet hostilities or the likelihood of a new Middle East war, analysts themselves could be assessed for their success in predicting the future.²³

For their part, astrologers and interpreters of biblical prophecy were usually more guarded in their predictions, instead indicating possibilities and probabilities without associating specific events with specific dates (though 1982 was a tough year for Pat Robertson). Astrologers, like futurologists, offered vague advice more often than actual forecasts. And like scenario writing, the prophetic tradition was dedicated to warning people about the possible consequences of their actions. All of these fields claimed to be evidence-based, even if the rules of evidence differed. “Astral analysis” and biblical exegesis could actually be quite sophisticated, in their own way, with recognized gradations between levels of expertise. And astrologers and biblical interpreters, no less than economic forecasters and Bayesian analysts, seized on the use of computers, claiming that it would make revolutionary advances in accuracy possible.²⁴

An increasing interest in prevision was therefore both an elite and a popular phenomenon in the 1970s. The different forms it assumed cannot easily be disaggregated. Thus in the same period in which the CIA adopted new methods of expert forecasting and the Defense Department conducted elaborate war games based on future scenarios, both the CIA and the Defense Intelligence Agency also hired psychics. Beginning in 1970 these programs in “remote viewing” were assigned a range of intelligence problems, from the location of kidnapped servicemen to the launch date of Soviet submarines. Subjects were asked not merely to see places where they had never been but to peer into the future.²⁵

The same people—and some very important people—sometimes dis-

played a fascination with both prophecy and astrology, with no apparent sense of inconsistency. Ronald Reagan's 1967 inauguration as governor of California took place at 12:16 AM, the moment when Jupiter was highest in the night sky.²⁶ Reagan's chief of staff, Donald Regan, would write that astrologers were consulted about "virtually every major move and decision Reagan made," from the invasion of Grenada to disarmament negotiations with Mikhail Gorbachev.²⁷ But Reagan was also someone who believed, as he said in 1971, that "everything is in place for the battle of Armageddon and the Second Coming of Christ."²⁸ The same 1978 Gallup poll that found high levels of belief in the paranormal also indicated that Christians and atheists were equally likely to believe in astrology.²⁹

There was also overlap and cross-fertilization between futurologists and eschatologists. The movie version of *The Late Great Planet Earth*, for instance, cited respected futurologists who shared Lindsey's pessimism, albeit for different reasons. They included Nobel Prize winner Norman Borlaug; Paul Ehrlich, author of *The Population Bomb*; and Aurelio Peccei, president of the Club of Rome, who predicted that "we are a few minutes before possible disaster." Whereas preachers increasingly pointed to political developments as portents, such as Communist coups or EC enlargement, Ehrlich and Peccei—like latter-day millenarians—invoked famines, freaks of nature, and natural disasters as signs that humanity was beginning to pay for its sins and faced inevitable doom.³⁰

There are several reasons why so many both in the United States and abroad, both at the popular level and among intellectuals and policy-makers, seemed preoccupied with the future in this period. An insightful early commentator, Michael Barkun, began by noting the obvious: the late 1960s and 1970s were a turbulent period. The events of 1968, 1973, and 1979, in particular, reverberated around the world. But he also pointed out how the different strains in apocalyptic thought appeared to be developing in parallel, in conscious or unconscious imitation, and could be mutually reinforcing. Even Barkun could not resist the temptation to end with the dark premonition that panic created by the combined efforts of secular and religious Jeremiahs might produce a self-fulfilling prophecy.³¹

One reason why people were prepared to listen to them was that more mainstream experts repeatedly failed to predict the most important crises of the decade. In the field of economic forecasting, the failures were overwhelming and impossible to deny. U.S. government agencies and the leading private firms were all surprised by the 1974 recession and also failed

to anticipate the severity of the 1980 downturn. Government agencies, whether the Federal Reserve, the Council of Economic Advisers, or the Congressional Budget Office, were particularly poor at forecasting inflation. Over the course of the decade, the U.S. consumer price index more than doubled.³²

Of all economic phenomena, inflation is particularly pernicious in stoking anxiety about the future. It forces people to readjust their expectations continuously, since their wages are worth less every day, while the goods they need cost more all the time. In the 1970s many opted to hedge risk in new futures markets—another consequence of the free-floating dollar and commodity inflation—or simply hoarded gold and silver bullion. Uncertainty itself began to sell in the form of stock options. With the founding of the Chicago Board Options Exchange in 1973, speculators could gain and lose fortunes betting on volatility. Communist societies officially had no inflation or commodity markets, but these were hidden: consumers lined up to pay the same price for increasingly shoddy goods, or simply bartered for basic necessities.³³

Another trend that would have accentuated personal insecurity was the rise in divorce rates in virtually all the industrialized nations. At the same time, more people were delaying marriage. And those who did marry tended to plan smaller families. Fertility rates were falling in almost every region of the world in the 1970s. Many parents were made to feel guilty about the few children they did choose to raise. Ehrlich called the birth of each new American a “disaster for the world.” Family planning campaigns in dozens of different countries depicted large, unplanned families as hungry and violent. In the 1970s the most common contraceptive method worldwide was not the pill but sterilization.³⁴

The 1970s were also a period when more wars and revolutions were breaking out all across the world. There was a discernible trend from interstate to intrastate and transnational conflict. Civil wars were particularly unsettling, and not just for those directly involved. Many created refugee flows that brought these events home to people in distant regions, including Bangladesh, Vietnam, Lebanon, Afghanistan, Iran, Nicaragua, Guatemala, and El Salvador. So too did satellite television broadcasting. For international terrorists, the media outlets constituted the main target. From 1968 to 1978 the number of groups engaged in terrorism that crossed or challenged state borders increased from eleven to fifty-five. In a period when the number of international air passengers carried and miles trav-

eled doubled, the international hijacker became an emblematic figure. In 1970, the same year Toffler published *Future Shock*, there were sixty-four international hijackings, an all-time high, and an apt metaphor for the anxiety of the age.³⁵

Finally, this was a period when no one appeared capable of restoring order. U.S. power was discredited and appeared to be in decline, a trend personified in the office of the president. Before he was driven from power, Richard Nixon reneged on a long-standing commitment to back the dollar with gold and signed a Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty that seemed to concede Soviet nuclear superiority. Gerald Ford could not stop Communist advances in Southeast Asia and Africa, even if he preferred to blame Congress. And Jimmy Carter appeared powerless even to protect American diplomats.

In the most famous speech of his administration, Carter argued that the true crisis facing the country at the end of the decade was a “crisis of confidence,” a loss of faith in institutions and the very idea of progress. “The erosion of our confidence in the future,” he warned, “is threatening to destroy the social and the political fabric of America.” Sympathetic to Carter’s predicament, some asked whether the presidency itself had become too big a job for anyone to perform effectively. After three decades during which presidents had free rein in setting foreign policy and the United States exercised hegemonic power in the world, even critics were unsettled by the sense that the center could no longer hold.³⁶

There were thus many reasons why people in the 1970s would have been more than usually apprehensive about their future and proceeded to act on these anxieties in ways that changed history. Some of the key struggles of the era reflected contending ways of coping with an uncertain future. This would include efforts to impose wage and price controls in the industrialized countries, but also successful demands for automatic cost-of-living adjustments, more generous pensions, and health insurance. Developing countries troubled by population projections tried to orchestrate “incentives” and “disincentives” to pressure couples to have fewer children, but many subverted these schemes, and fertility rates largely reflected couples’ own preferences for large or small families. And while the superpowers collaborated in controlling the pace of nuclear weapons development, many people began to take to the streets to demand an end to the arms race, culminating in calls for a nuclear “freeze.” While all politi-

cal struggles relate to the future, each of these struggles centered on specific forecasts, projections, and scenarios.

No struggle seemed more fateful than that surrounding nuclear weapons, in which people were asked to choose between equally frightening visions of the future. Since the 1960s, when Robert McNamara tamed the Pentagon through cost-benefit analyses and long-term programming, the U.S. nuclear arsenal was meant to match the projected Soviet threat five years out. CIA analysts, having been so wrong about the bomber gap and the missile gap, tended to be conservative in their estimates. By the early 1970s, senior military officers and defense intellectuals were increasingly determined to challenge these estimates and demand a more rapid U.S. buildup. Soviet technological advances were said to be creating a “window of vulnerability,” a period in the near future when a first strike could eliminate land-based U.S. strategic forces and Moscow would hold American cities hostage.³⁷

In May 1976 CIA director George H. W. Bush agreed to bring in an outside team, including Richard Pipes, Paul Wolfowitz, and Paul Nitze, to offer an alternative assessment of Soviet intentions and capabilities. “Team B,” as they were called, argued that the Soviets, unlike the Americans, did not believe in nuclear “sufficiency,” but instead were seeking to develop the means to win a nuclear war. These means included more accurate nuclear warheads, large numbers of strategic bombers, and a new means of locating ballistic missile submarines that—amazingly—would not depend on sound and would therefore be undetectable.³⁸

At the same time Team B was at work, Ronald Reagan was gaining ground in his campaign for the Republican presidential nomination by warning that the United States was losing ground to the Soviet Union. Although President Ford defeated him in a close vote at the convention, Reagan was invited to deliver impromptu remarks to close the proceedings. He noted how he had recently been asked to deposit a letter in a time capsule to be opened on America’s tercentennial. He wondered aloud whether, in 2076, there would be anyone left to read it, or whether—if some survived nuclear war but lived under communism—anyone would have permission. The speech brought delegates to their feet, and many regretted that they had not chosen Reagan as their candidate.³⁹

After Carter won the 1976 election, Team B members decided to leak their findings to the press. Several went on to found the Committee on the

Present Danger and continued lobbying to increase U.S. defense spending.⁴⁰ Meanwhile a new wave of fictional accounts of a future Soviet attack began to appear, starting in 1978 with *The Third World War: August 1985* by General Sir John Hackett. It depicted a blitzkrieg attack which, upon faltering, leads to a nuclear strike on Birmingham. After NATO retaliates against Minsk, the Warsaw Pact finally falls to pieces. The book concludes with a warning that a less happy result was becoming increasingly likely, and that those who were reducing defense spending “live in a land of total make-believe.”⁴¹

In the late 1970s preachers like Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson continued to predict that a Soviet attack on Israel would be followed by nuclear war. During his 1980 presidential campaign, Reagan reiterated that “we may be the generation that sees Armageddon” in an interview for Jim Bakker and the PTL network. The Republican Party Platform of 1980 was filled with references to “signs” and “signposts” portending American decline, and evangelical Christians would become a key component of Reagan’s winning coalition.⁴²

But conservatives did not have the field all to themselves. Antinuclear activists fought back with their own vision of the future: a post-apocalyptic landscape, or what Jonathan Schell called “A Republic of Insects and Grass.” The *New Yorker* journalist explained that “since we cannot afford under any circumstances to let a holocaust occur, we are forced in this one case to become the historians of the future.” But unlike Hackett, Schell spent only a few pages speculating about how a nuclear war might begin, instead devoting his book to describing its aftermath. What mattered to him and his readers was not who would start a nuclear war but how it would end. It would not merely kill hundreds of millions of people and wreck the planet; it would also—by extinguishing generations to come—constitute a “murder of the future.”⁴³

The global movement to “freeze” the arms race grew to become one of the greatest challenges to confront the Reagan administration. In a March 1983 address to the National Association of Evangelicals he was defiant, relating a story about a young father he had heard speaking about the threat of nuclear war:

I heard him saying, “I love my little girls more than anything—” And I said to myself, “Oh, no, don’t. You can’t—don’t say that.” But I had underestimated him. He went on: “I would rather see my little girls die now, still be-

lieving in God, than have them grow up under communism and one day die no longer believing in God.” There were thousands of young people in that audience. They came to their feet with shouts of joy.

In the most memorable words of the speech, Reagan concluded by declaring that, as long as the Soviets “preach the supremacy of the State, declare its omnipotence over individual man, and predict its eventual domination of all peoples on the earth, they are the focus of evil in the modern world.”⁴⁴

Two weeks later the president offered a different, more appealing perspective in a nationally televised address, one that looked not to heaven but to space. He vowed “to break out of a future that relies solely on offensive retaliation for our security.” The United States would instead create a shield to defend itself against nuclear attack. Glossy magazines such as *Popular Science* responded with cover stories showing how fleets of space-based “battle stations,” electromagnetic railguns, “nuclear-pumped x-ray lasers,” and “giant mirrors” would engage and destroy Soviet intercontinental ballistic missiles. Defense contractors such as TRW provided full-color illustrations of what these space weapons would look like, while scientists on staff projected the funding required to make them work. But a legion of critics rose up and derided the whole idea as “Star Wars.” Nuclear activists depicted it as not merely science fiction but dangerous fantasy. The *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* moved the doomsday clock to three minutes to midnight, closer than at any other time since the Korean War.⁴⁵

Any effort to trace the origins of the post-Cold War era to the 1970s must acknowledge the many ways in which this period was quite unlike the present. After all, the Cold War did not end during this decade but instead entered a dangerous new phase. But the renewal of the Cold War was at least in part a struggle over contending visions of the future that began in the 1970s. For Reagan and his supporters, there was no negotiating with the Soviets as long as they planned to take over the world, even if that meant bringing on Armageddon. His opponents warned that continued confrontation endangered not just life on earth but future generations too. And what neither side realized was that, even when the Soviet Union self-destructed, their conflict would continue. For religious nationalists—Muslim as well as Christian—the demise of communism did not end the danger of godless hedonism, while environmentalists warned that other-

worldly thinking served as a distraction from the continuing threat to life on earth.

In tracing these different strains of eschatology, especially among evangelicals and environmentalists, we can discern what truly distinguished the 1970s from what came before and after, while at the same time discovering some of the roots of our own time. Forecasters have proved no better in predicting the recent period of turbulence than they were in foreseeing the economic shocks of the 1970s, a decade that was supposed to bring unprecedented prosperity. And yet they continue to offer their forecasts, revising as necessary, and the public still listens with rapt attention. We expect, even need, our leaders to see the future better than we can, never so much as during the most uncertain times. If history provides any guide, the years to come will be boom times for forecasters, astrologers, and prophets. Looking back to the 1970s, the shock of the global, and the shock of the future, may also bring a shock of recognition.⁴⁶