

Proposal

For a major work, manifest in the form of a short story.

The Project

This project will assume the form of a short story (comprising between six and eight thousand words), with its purpose being (in accordance with personal interests, and based upon the recommendations put forward by others with regard to subject matter) the development of a futurist, dystopian text in order to scrutinise those issues that have previously been neglected (or not yet existing to the extent that they be considered relevant) in such a work. These issues, specifically, relate to the development of collaborative electronic networks, such as the Internet – heralded as the new medium for democracy (much like radio before it).

Whilst, in the past, creative pieces (short or otherwise) have been written addressing the same issues I wish to pursue, the scope of these works does not extend to address more contemporary issues. Speaking of the canon works of the dystopian science-fiction sub-genre, (*Nineteen Eighty-Four*, *Fahrenheit 451* and *Brave New World*) unequivocally relevant issues (such as global communications networks) to our contemporary world are omitted – not as a result of negligence, but simply as a consequence of the time at which these texts were composed. Thus, there is a requirement for the continued creation of “futurist” texts – ironically, in order to address the previously unforeseen future.

Specifically, global networks such as the Internet could not be envisaged (or rather, were not envisaged) when the aforementioned were penned. The potential application of these networks as change agents has been explored widely in essays, reports and the media (self-referencing media in this instance takes special prevalence, due to the open nature of the Internet – at present); however, there is little in the way of short creative pieces (or more extended works) which address the potential these networks have as catalysts for change, and, perhaps just as importantly, the potential change itself has to impact on these networks, by virtue of Government control, war, terrorism, poverty, globalisation, or any other of myriad influences globally relevant today.

The Audience

The audience for this work is broad in nature, given the subject matter being addressed. The nature of the work dictates it is globally pertinent – insofar as Internet connectivity is available – and the issues *relating* to the Internet, as (it is envisaged) will be presented in the work, have an even broader reach again. In the interests of engaging the audience (a requirement of the syllabus) and maintaining the relevance of the text to the widest audience (as I believe the message should be worth hearing, in order to bother embarking on its creation!), technical references should be kept to a minimum. If nothing else, this will permit a greater degree of critical review, both by non-technically minded peers, and teaching staff.

The Direction

Futurist writing is inherently grounded in known fact, from which predictions regarding the future state of the world (or some component part of this) are drawn. Any aspirations I may have for the composition to function as a futurist text *require* a substantial degree of investigation (as does the course – see page 92 of Stage 6 English Syllabus), lest it become a work of pure fantasy – something that I believe to be quite valid, yet clearly not synonymous with the understood nature of the (sub-) genre.

This composition, therefore, will require investigation into several aspects of the subject. Aside from investigations regarding the basic direction of the Internet itself (much of which, seemingly, may be achieved simply through the process of collating existing knowledge in a form more relevant), it is anticipated that more specific research will be conducted into, amongst other things, the issues of:

- The Digital Divide (both inside the “developed” world, and globally);
- Globalisation;
- The potential for electronic networks to be applied as a means for activism, in both the domestic and global arenas;
- The reliance of the “developed” world upon global electronic networks for operations, and the effects a breakdown of this network (or networks) would have, examining both social and economic impacts of this;
- Censorship, and specifically how (or indeed *if!*) it can be applied (or is being applied) to electronic networks;
- Government controls, in both Western and other nations, applied to media – a case study may be found in Belgrade radio station B92; and finally,
- An examination of what difference, if any, the Internet (in fact, any electronic network) has made upon people and the way in which they communicate with others.

Logically, this research must be undertaken prior to the development of the story in its entirety, although, having said that, I wish to experiment with the various forms this may assume (in terms of text types, issues explored, the various ways in which aspects of the text – the criticisms made – interact with one another, and, perhaps most significantly for me, the creation of characters which are plausible and genuine in their nature).

The factual origins of the composition will be clearly reflected in the final composition, through the use of foot and endnotes (not included in word count) detailing sources and events to which the text makes reference.

The Content

As suggested above, this text is to be an exploration of those issues not covered by other futurist texts. With regard to genre, it is a science fiction work; having said that, I wish to define this more

explicitly: it is a dystopian futurist text, in which a continuation of current events is explored in terms of the consequences they carry. This could encompass a number of things:

- The breakdown of communication as we understand it, or a metamorphosis of existing communication mediums to create new “multi-mediums” (multimedia), or simply redefining the way in which we communicate ⁶;
- An examination of media activism, such as is made possible through the Internet – exploring case studies (Huaren, B92, Indymedia, McSpotlight et al.⁷);
- The impact of global electronic networks upon existing mass media, and efforts made by these to resist change (or embrace and move towards altering their own media, and the form which this takes ^{5, 11});
- Determining or exploring the wider impact of the “digital divide” phenomenon, and the effects this may have upon society as a whole (in a global sense) – specifically, in connection with changes in communication mediums (as with the first point) in some cultures, but not others. ¹²

A protagonist (or protagonists), in one of the situations outlined above (or an amalgamation of several of them), is faced with issues created through the continuation of existing circumstances evident in our immediate present. One such scenario realises a polarised society, in which the digital divide has extended to a point where an experience of the world by people on either side of the divide is radically different. The unfurling of a sequence of events from opposing perspectives would be an interesting way in which this could be explored. Clearly, not all of the above scenarios are likely to coincide: at some point, a choice must be made regarding the option to be pursued (refer to timeframe table for further information).

The Resources

In order to undertake research into the areas outlined above, a variety of resources will be employed. The subject matter dictates that computer-based research and electronically published texts are intrinsically relevant, if the message of the text (or at least one message of the text – reflecting the power held by an electronic medium) is to be realised in the research itself. Whilst the work itself will be fictional, it is to be based upon contemporary reality, and research methods should hopefully reflect this.

Other sources, such as printed works (be that books, magazines, newspapers, essays, or any other article), will be accessed through libraries and various other means. Details of the nature and titles of such works may be found in the annotated bibliography, later in this document.

I hope to interview (physically, or by electronic exchange) at some stage people who have knowledge in this field; this may include technology evangelists (figures such as Eric Meyer of Netscape Communications/Complex Spiral, amongst others), lecturers (Graham Meikle, author of *Future Active* ⁽⁷⁾), and other such figures.

Anticipated Challenges

As with the creation of any research-based work of fiction, I fear that the magnitude of events which *have* taken place will threaten the work, in such a way that the composition may cease to exist as a futurist vision of what may come, and transform into an examination of past events – an essay of sorts. For the reasons outlined above, I want to create a story, and there is a very real danger that the project could stray from this goal; the volume and nature of ideas I wish to convey may force the text type to change into something which no longer reflects a work of (factually grounded) fiction, instead becoming a dissertation on the impact and potential of technology in a future context, devoid of any significant character development, suspense, common engagement, and accessible message such that a wider audience may become aware of the concerns (which, as outlined above, necessitate the creation of such a text).

Additionally, it is foreseeable that interest in this project may wane, or at least transform; this is not necessarily undesirable, yet in the interest of preserving the value of prior research, I must attempt to retain some flow of relevancy in the progression of this work.

Further, the constraints imposed by the Board of Studies with regard to word limits (the directive regarding short stories dictates that the work be between six and eight thousand words) present a challenge to me – I shall need to develop an ability to write concisely, yet not at the expense of content.

Requisite Skills

Considering the issues this addresses, there is a need for intricate knowledge about the direction of communication technologies in general (from a social standpoint, not a technical one – although the two are linked). Additionally, research skills are required in order to effectively glean information from various sources, and develop this acquired information into a text that is engaging, entertaining, chilling, and, above all, challenging to the reader.

This requires adequate character development, such that the responder may empathise with the protagonist, and subsequently come to share their opinions: as a dystopian text, the aim is to influence and change the opinions of the responder, such that the message is effective.

Timeframe

November

Proposal due. Identify potential sources for investigation (reading). Record ideas, concepts, potential plots in journal.

December

Holidays. Time for reading, experimenting with text forms, writing, characters. Identification of (some) more texts for investigation.

January

Look into conducting interview-based research (electronic and in person). Further reading. Move towards identifying one specific area of research.

February

Reach decision regarding plot and specific focus of this in terms of topic.

March

Develop several forms of plot (using different techniques, etc.), experiment with form employed.

April

Determine which forms and techniques shall be used in creation of final composition, begin writing of actual text.

May

Revise and reform text – multiple drafts.

June

Finalise composition, check foot/end notes, begin reflection statement.

July

Finish writing reflection statement, submit.

Annotated Bibliography

Which identifies key reference information, offers an explanation of the text's relevance, and details the availability of the text.

1. Packer, R. and Jordan, K. "*Multimedia: From Wagner to Virtual Reality*".
An exploration of the development of multimedia, from its Wagnerian origins to our contemporary understanding of the concept. Bowen Library.
2. Bush, V. (1945) "As We May Think". *The Atlantic*. July 1945.
An article in which a device known as the "Memex" is proposed, commonly identified as the precursor to modern day "hypertext". See also work of William S. Burroughs (cut words of texts for reuse in other texts). Reproduced/available online.
3. Wiener, N. "*The Human Use of Human Beings*".
Psychological/sociocultural implications of human-machine interaction (also HCI – human/computer interaction). No source identified.
4. Wagner, R. (1849) "The Artwork of the Future".
Wagner's original essay regarding multimedia in performance. Available online. Printed.

5. Given, J. *“The Death of Broadcasting: Media’s Digital Future”*.
As the subtitle of this text suggests, the work explores the digital future of media (specifically, broadcast media focussing upon Television – there is a chapter on digital radio, however this is less relevant). Covers data-casting, government regulation, etc. Bowen Library.
6. Baron, N S. *“From Alphabet to Email”*.
Follows the history and development of language and linguistics through time, from (prior to) the advent of the printing press, through to electronic media – there is some debate in later chapters regarding the classification of email: Baron is trying to neatly class email under the same heading as an existing medium, likening it to formal writing, or spoken word (written), and a variety of other things – none of which accept it as a medium in its own right! Bowen Library, UNSW.
7. Meikle, G. (edited by Wark, M.) *“Future Active: Media Activism and the Internet”*.
Explores potential for the application of Internet as an activism platform, with case studies. Book, purchased from UNSW 2nd hand bookstore (prescribed text for media and communications there, perhaps?).
8. Orwell, G. *“Nineteen Eighty-Four”*.
A dystopian novel, in which the protagonist is brought to betray himself under the reign of a war-oriented totalitarian government. Book, purchased. Most libraries.
9. Huxley, A. *“Brave New World”*.
Futurist text, exploring notion of a genetic-engineered caste society. Debateable whether this text is dystopian, in some regards – opinions of the author in other matters would suggest he supports some future aspects this society offers (echoed in later works, such as *“The Doors of Perception”*). Book, purchased. Most libraries.
10. Bradbury, R. *“Fahrenheit 451”*.
Dystopian world in which fire-fighters start, rather than extinguish, fires, in order to destroy books and other such records. Concludes on a more positive note than perhaps the other texts do, in that there is a surviving group of those who have been ostracised for their preservation of books and knowledge in this way. Book, purchased. Most libraries.
11. Stephens, M. *“A history of news from the drum to the satellite”*.
Similar to *From Alphabet to Email*, focusing more on technology (and, as the title would suggest, the evolution of news sources rather than communication in general). Bowen Library.
12. Warschauer, Mark. *“Technology and Social Inclusion: Rethinking the Digital Divide”*.
A work of independent research, exploring the application of technology in undeveloped nations (or, nations on the have-not side of the digital divide). Concludes with finding that development of infrastructure without training is futile: equipment is either neglected, misused, or of no functional benefit to the people who potentially (with appropriate training) could use it. City of Sydney library (Town Hall).