# Modern Mythopoeia & The Construction of Fictional Futures in Design




Figure 1. *Cassandra.* Anthony Fredrick Augustus Sandys. 1904

# Modern Mythopoeia & the Construction of Fictional Futures in Design

Diana Simpson Hernandez
MA Design Products
Royal College of Art
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION: ON MYTH 10

SLEEPWALKERS 22

A PRECOG DREAM? 34

CONCLUSION: THE SLEEPER HAS AWAKEN 45

APPENDIX 77

BIBLIOGRAPHY 90

# LIST OF IMAGES

Figure 1. *Cassandra*. Anthony Fredrick Augustus Sandys. 1904.

Available from: <http://culturepotion.blogspot.co.uk/2010/08/witches-and-witchcraft-in-art-history.html> [accessed 30 July 2012]

Figure 2. *Evidence Dolls*. Dunne and Raby. 2005.

Available from: <http://www.dunneandraby.co.uk/content/projects/69/0> [accessed 30 July 2012]

Figure 3. *Slave City-cradle to cradle.* Atelier Van Lieshout. 2009.

Available from: <http://www.designboom.com/weblog/cat/8/view/7862/atelier-van-lieshout-slave-city-cradle-to-cradle.html> [accessed 30 July 2012]

Figure 4. *Der Jude.* 1943. Hans Schweitzer.

Available from: <http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/posters2.htm> [accessed 15 September 2012]

Figure 5. *Lascaux cave painting depicting the Seven Sisters constellation*.

Available from: <http://madamepickwickartblog.com/2011/05/lascaux-and-intimate-with-the-godsbackstage-pass-only/> [accessed 05 July 2012]

Figure 6. *Map Presbiteri Johannis, Sive, Abissinorum Imperii Descriptio*

by Ortelius. Antwerp, 1573.

Available from:

<http://www.raremaps.com/gallery/detail/9021?view=print >

[accessed 30 May 2012]

Figure 7. *Mercator projection of the world between 82°S and 82°N*.

Available from:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mercator_projection>

[accessed 05 July 2012]

Figure 8. *The Gall-Peters projection of the world map*

Available from:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gall–Peters_projection>

[accessed 05 July 2012]

Figure 9. *Still from Blade Runner Movie*

Available from:

<http://www.dvdtalk.com/reviews/33292/blade-runner/> [accessed 30 May 2012]

Figure 10. *Tyrell Corporation. Still form Blade Runner.*

Available from:

<http://www.amtraq.com/?p=1367> [accessed 30 July 2012]

Figure 11. *Stills from the Procter and Gamble ad for the 2012 London Olympics.*

Available from:

< http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E_HWPxnRHxE> [accessed 15 September 2012]

Figure 12. *The Lord of the Rings. Fellowship of the Ring*.

Available from:

<http://www.englishmoviez.com/the-lord-of-the-rings-the-fellowship-of-the-ring/> [accessed 30 July 2-12]

Figure 13. *Fictional Object: Human Behaviour Control Machine.* Diana Simpson. RCA, 2012.

Figure 14. *Fictional Object: Lightning Harvester.* Diana Simpson. RCA, 2012.

Figure 15. *Fictional Object: Prayer Transmitter.* Diana Simpson. RCA, 2012.

Figure 16. *Fictional Object: Dream Time Machine.* Diana Simpson. RCA, 2012.

Figure 17. *RAG chair.* Diana Simpson. RCA, 2012.

Figure 18. *Beast from the East (detail).* Diana Simpson. RCA, 2012.

Figure 19. *Beast from the East.* Diana Simpson. RCA, 2012.

Figure 20. *Crystal Spheres.* <http://utopiaordystopia.com/tag/crystal-spheres/> [accessed 30 July 2012]

Figure 21. *SF collage based on SF text cut ups*. Diana Simpson. RCA, 2012.

Figure 22. *Stills from the Welcome to 2035… the Age of Surprise*. USAF 2012 < http://www.kurzweilai.net/welcome-to-2035-the-age-of-surprise#!prettyPhoto> [accessed 18 September 2012]

Figure 23. *Camorr, on the Iron Sea, from The Lies of Locke Lamor.* Scott Lynch. <http://fuckyeahfictionalmaps.tumblr.com/page/12> [accessed 16 July 2012]

Figure 24. *Copyright Easter Egg map.* Diana Simpson. RCA, 2012.

’Night is also a sun’, and the absence of myth is also a myth: the coldest, the purest, the only true myth."

Georges Bataille

# ON MYTH

My interest in the subject of myth developed as a result of realising the importance of belief systems in the manufacture of material culture.

There have been several attempts at defining what myths are, from the structural approach of Levi Strauss, where myths are viewed as a structure of 'semantic units'[1] (p. 154), to Victor Turner's conception of myths as explanations for mysterious questions:

> Myths relate how one state of affairs
>
> became another; how an unpeopled world became populated;
>
> how chaos became cosmos; how immortals became mortal;
>
> how the seasons came to replace a climate without seasons;
>
> how the original unity of mankind became a plurality of tribes or nations;
>
> how androgynous beings became men and women; and so on. Myths are liminal phenomena: they are frequently told at a time or in a site that is 'betwixt and between'[2]

The Encyclopaedia Britannica online, give us yet another definition of Myth:

> A symbolic narrative, usually of unknown origin and at least partly traditional, that ostensibly relates actual events and that is especially associated with religious belief. It is distinguished from symbolic behaviour (cult, ritual) and symbolic places or objects (temples, icons). Myths are specific accounts of gods or superhuman beings involved in extraordinary events or circumstances in a time that is unspecified but which is understood as existing apart from

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[1] Mary Douglas. *The Meaning of Myth* in *Implicit Meanings. Essays in Anthropology.* (London: Routledge, 1975)

[2] Victor Turner. *Myth and Symbol.* Available from: < http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G2-3045000845.html> (page NA)

> ordinary human experience. The term *mythology* denotes both the study of myth and the body of myths belonging to a particular religious tradition.[3]

However, Myth has no universal definition, there is no ideal or essential concept for what myth is or should be; furthermore, myths vary considerably in their structure and their cultural, social function.[4] (p. 7)

There is, nonetheless, one definition of *myth* mentioned by Michael Richardson in his introduction to Georges Bataille's book *The Absence of Myth*, which I have found to be the most flexible and, in my opinion, yet the most accurate, and it positions myths as 'communication devices which allow knowledge to be passed seamlessly through the social structures.'[5] (p.13)

This particular definition of Myth as a tool for social communication points to the most important aspect of these narratives, and that is to create cohesion between the individual minds in a society. This social consensus, through the common acceptance of a particular narrative, allows for the presence of civilization.

For the purpose of this paper, I will focus on the approach that looks at myths as stories that help communicate and perpetuate ideologies; ideologies which will determine the direction we take for the future, and which will shape every aspect of it, from what we think and believe, to how our world will look like and feel like.

These mythic stories, if engrained in the social psyche, create the foundation of the codes of conduct of a culture, because '[O]ur whole belief systems are mythic'[6] (p. 29), and this mythic grasp covers every aspect of our daily lives, our place in the societies we inhabit, and the structures that support them. Moreover, myths construct the very essential moral codes by which societies live and evolve; they are our 'symbolic interface with the world'[7]

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[3] '*Myth*' in Encyclopaedia Britannica. Available from: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/400920/myth> [accessed on 21 July 2012]

[4] G.S. Kirk. *Myth. Its Meaning and Functions in Ancient and Other Cultures.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970)

[5] Michael Richardson in the introduction to *The Absence of Myth. Writings on Surrealism* by Georges Bataille. (London: Verso, 1994)

[6] James Curzio *The Immanence of Myth*. (Surrey: Weaponized, 2011)

[7] Curzio p. xiii

Contemporary narratives are the stories that guide our behaviour and make up the canons by which we live our lives; they are '[M]etaphorical concepts... not just passive pieces of apparatus. They have their own influence. They are living parts of powerful myths- imaginative patterns that we all take for granted- ongoing dramas inside which we live our lives. .. They decide what we think important and what we ignore […]'[8](pp. 3-4) actively dictating the decisions we make every day.

Myths are contextualized stories which serve many different purposes, from political doctrine[9], social cohesion, transfer of knowledge, or inspiring the creation of new technologies and utopian drams for the future. 'Myths, so to say, are public dreams; dreams are private myths.'[10] (p. 12)
And public dreams have always influenced the direction societies take, shaping every aspect of it, from its values to the material output it creates. Through myth, cultures can find an expression for their most intimate truths. 'The myth of contemporary society, therefore, was an 'absence of myth'[11] because it had tricked itself into thinking that myths are primitive arcane structures based on fear and the mysteries that nature posed to the primitive mind, however, once we conquered nature, the need for a mythic framework was gone and thus myth came to be seen as a false and naïve story. But contemporary society needs myths as much as previous societies have done, and by denying its existence, civilization is denying itself.[12]

Myth has many functions culturally, socially, economically, personally, hence the difficulty in defining it. It is however, a creative social process where we actively construct our sense of reality.[13] '[…]and so there is no way to dissect it, label its parts, and offer it up for analysis without rendering yet another

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[8] Mary Midgley *The Myths We Live By* (London: Routledge, 2003)

[9] James L. Ford, Ph.D *Buddhism, Christianity, and The Matrix: The Dialectic of Myth-Making in Contemporary Cinema* Vol. 4, No. 2, October 2000 < http://www.unomaha.edu/jrf/thematrix.htm> [accessed 01 May 2012]

[10] Joseph Campbell. *Myths to Live by. The Collected Works of Joseph Campbell*. (London: Viking, 1972)[Kindle Edition published in 2011]

[11] Richardson p. 13

[12] Ibid p.13

[13] Curzio p. xiv

myth.'[14] Today we are perpetuating certain narratives, which were created a long time ago. The prevalent beliefs of the past still influence our everyday lives, they are embedded in our language, in our values, in our whole cosmology; in other words, these narratives have created who we are today. Moreover, myths are continually being created, shaping our modern world as much as they did since the beginning of time.

Joseph Campbell gives an interesting example of the extent in which we still live with the traces of past mythological thought when he describes in his book Myths to Live by, how in the Middle Ages one of the most popular beliefs was the earth '[…] was not flat, but a solid stationary sphere in the center of a kind of Chinese box of seven transparent revolving spheres, in each of which there was a visible planet: the moon, Mercury, Venus, and the sun, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn, the same after which our days of the week are named'[15] Furthermore, the sounds corresponding to each of these spheres make up today's five tone and two semitone music scale.[16]

So, mythological belief continually builds and moulds our world, and just like the traces we still have of ancient mythological thought, today we are constructing new language that reflects our current mythologies and most elemental beliefs, which in the future will continue to live as traces of the past.

Myths are not only important because of their connection with our past and our world's transit through the ages of history but because '[U]ltimately there is no better way to express the questions, trials and tribulations of life than in the form of myth, whether they take the form of narratives or meta-narratives that express the significance of these questions that wrestle with them, and often, in one way or another, define the way that we exist within the world.'[17]

They create a continuation for our cultures, they help the transition of new generations by providing road maps and guidelines for civilization to continue and endure. Myths evolve, just as we do, constantly adapting and transforming to help us dream up new and better worlds, and to make them happen by the

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[14] Ibid p. xiv

[15] Campbell p. 1

[16] Ibid p.1

[17] Curzio p. 28

sheer strength of our desires. These narratives shape our gaze, they turn our heads and our attention to specific horizons and this gaze will impact the dreams of generations to come. The myths we are constructing will shape our world tomorrow; the dreams of yesterday and the consequences of pursuing them, are being felt today.

For example, designers like Dunne and Raby often deal with the social implications of emerging technologies. Their project *Evidence Dolls* (See Figure 2) is a series of collectable male dolls for women, for the purpose of storing samples of semen from different sexual partners. Through this project they are extrapolating a future ritualistic behaviour where flesh and reproduction have lost their 'sacredness' due to technologies like '[…]genetics-- designer babies, desirable genes, mating logic, DNA theft'[18], which would have made our natural reproductive systems obsolete and imperfect, hence, developing ritualistic behaviours around our decaying sense of what is natural.

[18] Dunne and Raby *Evidence Dolls* 2005 <http://www.dunneandraby.co.uk/content/projects/69/0> [accessed on 21 July 2012]



Figure 2. Dunne and Raby. *Evidence Dolls*. 2005

G.S. Kirk explains in his analysis on mythical functions, that the enactment of the stories in myth serve as catharsis which help these narratives penetrate the cultural psyche of societies. [19] 'We may use myths to explore why something is the way it is, or what we are to do with it, but given myth remains just an interface, it is through us, through embodiment and direct interaction, that it is made immanent. [...] The myth is living because we are ever changing and transitory. In other words, we are living, and myth too is living.'[20] These narratives, to be perpetuated and to infiltrate the social structure need to be enacted; they need to have a bearing in the everyday life. Myths need to be performed. Through the daily enactment of our myths, we are building our sense of identity, and effectively constructing our sense of self, and through them we promote and perpetuate the dominant ideologies of today, which effectively shape our personal mythologies.

Likewise, neuropsychological studies have demonstrated how narrative has a direct impact on how the brain behaves, and hence, directly affects how we view and interact with the world. In fact, neuroscience today supports the idea that we are actively constructing ourselves through myths and tales.[21] These narratives become a behavioral rulebook, they shape our behaviors and more importantly they shape how we live our reality, so making a new narrative is essentially creating a new reality, a new version of the world.

In short, myths are chronicles, stories that we have socially constructed to reflect our culture's most basic belief systems, they are perpetuated through their performance and embedded unconsciously in everyday life. These narratives determine the dreams and aspirations of the generations to come; they gradually create a vision of the world which will sustain the technologies and ideologies that are congruent with them, and these narratives are so pervasive that we barely notice them operating in our daily lives. We believe in them because all of our belief systems are based around these narratives, they guide us through the chaos and uncertainty of everyday life; they give coherence and create a foundation on which our structures are built.

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[19] Kirk p.16

[20] Curzio p. xiv

[21] John Bickle & Sean Keating. *Storytelling 2.0: When new narratives meet old brains.* (page NA) <http://www.newscientist.com/blogs/culturelab/2010/11/storytelling-20-when-new-narratives-meet-old-brains.html> [accessed on 20 February 2012]

Furthermore, the manner in which these narratives are perpetuated, what they hold important and what they focus on; their particular structures and the spirit that inspires them varies depending on the context of the storyteller. For instance, according to Walter Benjamin, during the Middle Ages, craftsmen and seamen or travelers worked together in workshops, since every craftsman had been a traveler before settling down. The storytelling of the craftsmen was based around traditions, the local landscape and rituals, stories of the past; whilst the nomadic seamen and travelers would tell stories about adventures in faraway lands and referred to the experiences on sea. These two types of narratives had myths of their own and once joined together they merged to create a new one that combined both epic stories.[22] (p. 2)

[22] Walter Benjamin. *The Storyteller. Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov.* <http://slought.org/files/downloads/events/SF_1331-Benjamin.pdf> [accessed 30 May 2012]



Figure 3. *Slave City-cradle to cradle.* Atelier Van Lieshout . 2009

New narratives can alter the social fabrics, inspiring and guiding a new set of behaviors and new dreams, whether these are utopian dreams or nightmarish dystopias that warn about our possible futures. For instance, Atelier Van Lieshout's project, *Slave City- Cradle to* Cradle (See Figure 3), is a city where people are measured according to productivity and efficiency. Old, sick or unproductive people are recycled, and the smart ones are used in organ donation programs. This project comments on a scenario where we have become commodities ourselves, and our role in society is measured, like with machines, in productivity terms.' The city has been designed to maximize rationality, efficiency and profit of a city'[23] mimicking the behavior of a contemporary corporation.

This project, amongst others is working with the human, cultural, social implications of the narratives we are building today, which in turn, generate a whole series of longings and questions about who we are, what are we here for, and what the future holds for us.

New technologies and technological frameworks have always sparked both excitement for the possibilities to construct a better world, and likewise, concern for the negative impacts these advances could have on humanity and our psychological, social, political and economic structures.

English philosopher Mary Midgley gives an example of how new technologies and the ideologies that support them transform how we interact with the world when she describes how '[...] the reductive, atomistic picture of explanation, which suggests that the right way to understand complex wholes is always to break them into smaller parts, leads us to think that truth is always revealed at the end of that other seventeenth century invention, the microscope. Where microscopes dominate our imagination, we feel that the large wholes we deal with in everyday experience are mere appearances. Only the particles revealed at the bottom of the microscope are real. Thus, to an extent unknown in earlier times our dominant technology shapes our symbolism and thereby our metaphysics, our view about what is real.' [24]

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[23] Designboom Website. Atelier Van Lieshout *Slave City. Cradle to Cradle.* 2009 <http://www.designboom.com/weblog/cat/8/view/7862/atelier-van-lieshout-slave-city-cradle-to-cradle.html> [accessed on 21 July 2012]

[24] Midgley p.1

So it doesn't matter whether myths are based on real facts or not, the power they hold is because they are pervasive in our every day. Hence, they act upon us. They are like live organisms building entire worlds. They are often seen as dead stories with no bearing in modern life. Nonetheless, myth making is a live organic cultural process which continues to actively shape our contemporary world, our objects and our cities. Myths are organic, flexible social codes that help bond the social machines, shaping who we are, but more importantly, shaping who we will become.

Throughout this paper, I will explore the role of mythopoeia in the design process, and how Design can use this system to both represent modern mythologies or to challenge them. I will investigate the impact of ideologies on the production of new technologies, and how popular culture might be shaping new ideologies today. Contemporary myth-making will shed light on the possible direction of the future of our world, by injecting desires and building myths about who we are as human race and what our destiny might be.

...these stories [...] form a chromosome of the future which will divide and grow in the reader's mind, dreams of the day after tomorrow waiting to enfold us as we move like sleepwalkers towards them.

JG Ballard

# SLEEPWALKERS

Myths have often been defined as fantastical stories used in ancient and primitive times to explain natural phenomena which at the time seemed obscure and unexplainable. Once science and the scientific method restructured the creation of new knowledge, and began explaining the once unexplainable, these mythic stories became relics of the past and started to be seen as primitive, ignorant and especially false. However, '[B]elief in gods, of whatever description, has motivated human history, thus if it were argued that all myths, all revelations of every religion, are nothing but lies, one could only conclude that for millennia we have lived under the dominion of the false'[25] (p.2)

Yet, the reality is that we don't understand the intricate knowledge that was communicated through myths and just like today's science is our almighty truth, myths were then as well. The axioms communicated through mythic stories were the truth of the day; they represented the known world and they explained in the current language the face of the world. Today's language just happens to be the scientific language, which to gain dominance, rejected any truth that was not build upon its methods, and labeled it as a lie.

The modern language of truth is scientific, so for any knowledge to have validity today it has to be constructed in the fashions and structures of scientific knowledge. Today we believe in science, and the reason we blindly believe what science tells us is because we have been indoctrinated into this modern mythology, just as before mythology was the recognised and universal truth. However, we must acknowledge that the scientific truths that we so fervently cling to, are only the expression of the limits of our current knowledge, '[f]or the great and essential fact about the scientific revelation-the most wonderful and most challenging fact- is that science does not and cannot pretend to be the 'true' in any absolute sense. It does not and cannot pretend to be final. It is a tentative organization of mere "working hypotheses" […] that for the present appear to take into account all the relevant facts now known.'[26] Nonetheless,

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[25] Umberto Eco. *Serendipities. Language and Lunacy.* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999)

[26] Campbell p.15

some of these 'truths' or narratives are so institutionalized that they are represented as facts, and its validity rarely contested. Mythology, then tried to explain the unexplainable, just as science tries to do the same today.

Mythic constructions are organic social experiences which 'stabilize the collective and are stabilized by the collective: that is, it requires the legitimacy and the support of a community that is solidary around it.'[27](p. 11) In other words, myths become legitimized as long as enough people agree with them, since '[...] solidarity around a myth validates and consecrates it.'[28]

In fact, '[W]ithout a mythic framework, […] massive cultural shifts could never occur. The evolution of such co-related myths is often symbiotic; for instance, it is through the spread of industry as the backbone of civilization that myths which better serve industrialization spread. These in turn effect the further growth and spread of an industrialized infrastructure.' [29], and this framework is made up of several narratives which are all aligned with the all-encompassing meta-narrative, and it is this structure which consecrates and gives validity to all of our belief systems, without the meta-narrative, the whole system collapses.[30] For a meta-narrative to work and be culturally, socially and personally ubiquitous, all the small narratives around it must be coherent with its core values.

Furthermore, shocking examples can be found throughout history of the extent in which narratives have exerted power over the social consciousness of people. For instance, some of the totalitarian governments in the twentieth century have supported progressive Enlightenment ideals which 'attempted a project of transforming humanity', and these leading narratives were used as a

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[27] Lois Lee *Myth by Modern Media. Stabilising Uncertainty in Pluralised Societies.* Cambridge Faculty of Politics, Psychology, Sociology and International Studies. 17 March 2009 : <http://www.ppsis.cam.ac.uk/working_papers/PPSIS_WP_09-03-17_Lee.pdf> [accessed 01 May 2012]

[28] Lee p.11

[29] Curzio p. 17

[30] Ibid p. 29

sanctifying method for their worst atrocities.[31] (p.50) A trace can be found between Enlightenment ideals and the 'scientific racism' that sought to justify Nazi extermination policies.[32] Indeed, '[T]he peculiar achievement of Enlightenment racism was to give genocide the blessing of science and civilization'[33]

However, the project of Nazi nation building was not only based on pseudo-scientific claims, but on a mythic framework revived by Romantic writers and thinkers, such as Wagner, Emerson, Thoreau and Whitman, which sought to develop a strategy 'consciously to produce myths in order to influence contemporary society'[34](p.328). German romantics wanted to use myth as a method to heal the fragmentation thought to have risen from the Enlightenment, and myths were seen as a way to unite all the small communities scattered throughout Germany,[35]and '[I]n the eyes of the romantic scholars the 'mythopoetic' formed a unique form of art designed to integrate the individual into society and in general to give shape and stability to existence. The production of myths, therefore, was looked upon as crucial for nationalistic politics to be successful.'[36]
During the unification of Germany, this view became a more belligerent reaction against the Jews, which 'came to represent everything that at the time was wrong.'[37]

Additionally, '[M]ass unemployment, hyperinflation and the humiliating impact of The Great War produced a wrenching sense of insecurity and loss of identity among Germans'[38], so the need to create a sense of national identity and pride, one which could unite all the German peoples under one single ideology became of vital importance. The result was the creation of a

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[31] John Gray *Black Mass. Apocalyptic Religion and the Death of Utopia.* (London: Penguin, 2007)

[32] Gray, p.52

[33] Ibid, p.87

[34] Stefan Arvidsson *Aryan Mythology as Science and Ideology*. Journal of the American Academy of Religion, Vol. 67, No. 2 (Jun, 1999), pp.327-354. Oxford University Press. Available at: <http//:www.jstor.org/stable/1465740>

[35] Arvidsson, p.331

[36] Ibid, p. 331

[37] Ibid, p.339

[38] Gray, p.91

religious-scientific justification, which emphasized the superiority of the Aryan religion and language over the Semitic ones. [39]




Figure 4. *Der Jude*. Hans Schweitzer 1943.

(The caption reads: "The Jew: The inciter of war, the prolonger of war.")

One of the ways in which myths are transferred and propagated is through imagery. Maps in particular have been a hugely important tool used to spark our imaginations and our dreams since the first maps, depicting the heavens, were ever conceived, (see Figure 5) '[T]hus, the perception of graphical images is not a purely psychological reception of information but a complex

[39] Arvidsson, p.337

social play of images present and absent, in the context of other symbolic, ideological and material concerns. '[40](p. 44)



Figure 5. *Lascaux cave painting depicting the Seven Sisters constellation*. 16,500 BCE

Maps are products of very specific ideologies and beliefs; they are cultural products which help in the construction of 'cultural projects such as nation building, colonial expansion or cultural hegemony.'[41] Representing a reality through mapping has helped to inspire and boost magnificent enterprises which transformed the face of our world, '[…]for example, the belief in the Kingdom of Prester John, in Marco Polo's 7,448 Spice Islands in the Far East and in the possibility of a second great river, a Western Nile, in Africa. Today, with any part of the world only hours away, it is perhaps hard to imagine the intense excitement and the intellectual ferment created among

[40] John Pickles. *A History of Spaces. Cartographic reason, mapping and the geo-coded world.* (London: Routledge, 2004)

[41] Pickles p. 31

scholars in general, and geographers in particular, by the knowledge that it was possible to sail 'around the world' and not be lost 'over the edge'.[42]

One incredible example of how maps have been a tool for world building comes from the medieval belief in the fictional Kingdom of Priest John (See Figure 6), which was sparked by the mysterious discovery of a letter '[…] telling how in the far-off East, beyond the regions occupied by the Mussulmen, beyond those lands the crusaders had tried to wrest from the dominion of the infidel only to see them returned to that same rule, there was a flourishing Christian region, governed by a legendary Priest John, or Presbyter Johannes, or Prester John, *re potentia et virtute dei et domini nostri Iesu Christi*. The letter began by saying:

> *… know and believe firmly that I, Priest John, am lord of lords; and in every wealth that exists beneath the sky, and also in strength and power I surpass all the kings of the earth. Seventy two monarchs pay us tribute. I am devout Christian and everywhere I defend and support with alms true Christians governed by the dominion of my Clemency...*
>
> *Our sovereignty extends over the three Indias: from the greater India, where rests the body of apostle Thomas, our domains extend into the desert and press the confines of the Orient, then turn toward the Occident as far as Babylonia Deserta, by the tower of Babel... In our domains live elephants, dromedaries, camels, hippopotami, crocodiles, metagallinari, cametennus, tinsirete, panthers, onagers, red and white lions, white bears and blackbirds, mute cicadas, gryphos, tigers, jackals, hyenas, wild oxen, centaurs, wild men, horned men, fauns, centaurs and women of the same species, pygmies, men with dog's heads, giants forty cubits tall, monocles, cyclops, a bird called the phoenix, and almost every kind of animal that lives beneath the vault of the heavens... In one of our provinces the river known as Indux flows...This river, whose source is in Paradise, winds its way along various branches through the entire province and in it are found natural stones, emeralds, sapphires, carbuncles, topazes, chrysolytes, onyx, beryl, amethyst, sardonics, and many other precious stones...*
>
> *In the extreme regions of the land... we possess an island... where throughout the year, twice a week, God causes an abundant rain of mana to fall, which the people gather and eat, nor do they subsist on any other food*

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[42] David Banister. *Myths and Legends in Old Maps.* (page NA) <http://www.antiquemaps.co.uk/book/chapter10.asp> [accessed on 09 of March 2012]

*save this. IN fact, they do not plow, do not sow, do not reap, nor stir the earth in any way to extract its richest fruit from it... All of them, who are fed only on celestial food, live five hundred years. Still, on reaching the age of one hundred, they are rejuvenated ad regain strength, drinking three times the water of a spring that rises at the root of a tree that is found in that place... Amongst us no one lies... Amongst us none is an adulterer. No vice has power in our midst. '* [43]

This letter, translated in different languages and disseminated in different parts of Europe, proved to be a decisive tool to justify the Christian European interest in the Orient.[44] 'The geographical fantasy' began to infuse the collective imagination to construct a political program of European expansion. An event as insignificant as a fictional anonymous letter describing a fictional, paradisiacal and Christian territory, had the power to transform the course of history, rearranging kingdoms, and costing the lives of thousands of people.[45] Because maps don't just represent reality, instead, they represent a version of reality which is being forced upon us in order to change the path of history, '[…] it lets us see the world how others have seen it and how they want us to see it. '[46]

[43] Eco pp. 11-12

[44] Eco p. 12

[45] Ibid pp. 11-12

[46] Pickles p. 61




Figure 6. *Map Presbiteri Iohannis sive Abssinorum Imperii Descriptio by Ortelius.* Antwerp 1573

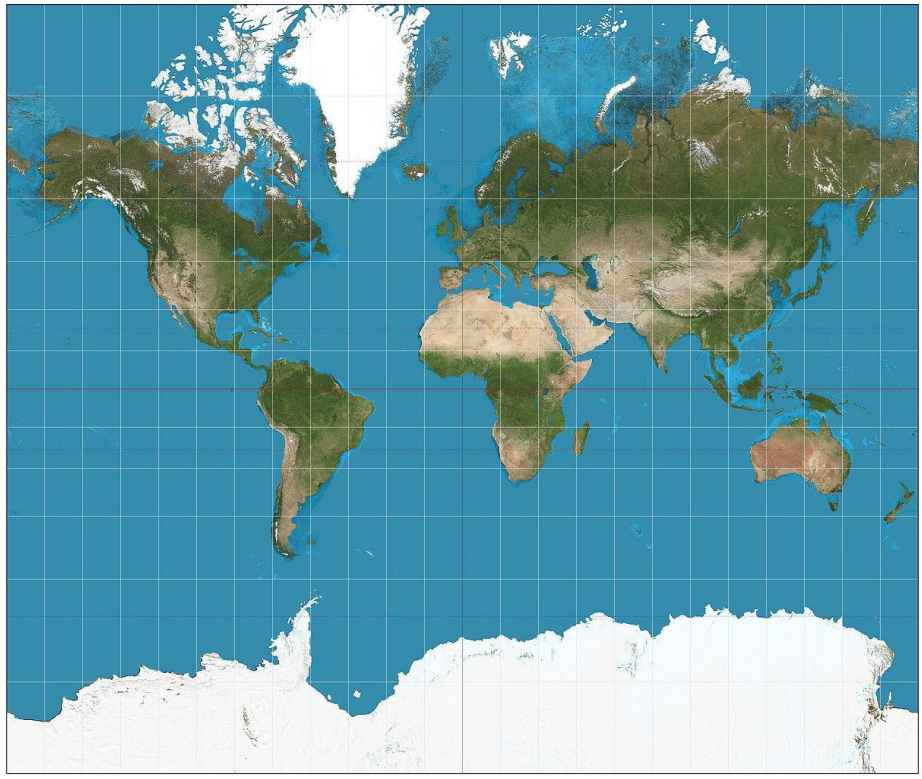


Figure 7. *Mercator projection of the world between 82°S and 82°N.*

(Based on the 1569 Mercator's edition)

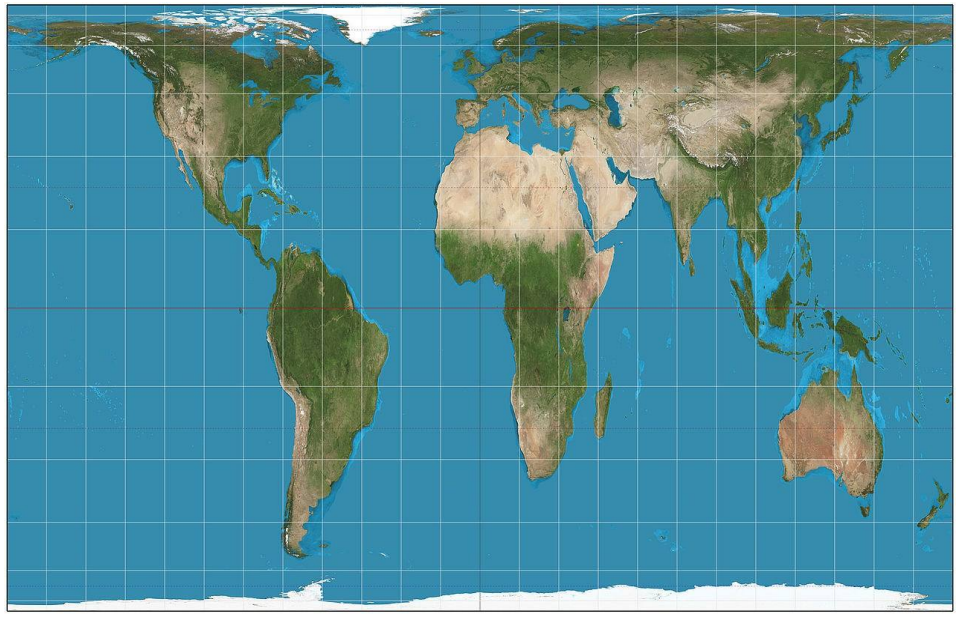


Figure 8. *The 1967 Gall-Peters projection of the world map.*

Not surprisingly, we don't need to travel back in time to find examples of maps being manipulated to impress the social psyche. One very current example is the Mercator map made by the Flemish cartographer Gerardus Mercator in 1569[47] (See Figure 7), which is still in use today, and which most of us used when learning about world's geography in school. However, the interesting thing about the Mercator is that it is a completely false representation of the earth, and it was mainly created as a navigational tool to aid European sailors during the sea exploration explosion during the 16th century. 'The Mercator projection increasingly inflates the sizes of regions according to their distance from the equator. This inflation results, for example, in a representation of Greenland that is larger than Africa, whereas in reality Africa is 14 times as large.'[48](See Figure 8)

Likewise, this representation of the world considerably inflated the size of European and northern hemisphere countries, further helping create a collective psyche ready for imperial expansion.

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[47] Matt T. Rosenberg. *Peters Projection vs. Mercator Projection* <http://geography.about.com/library/weekly/aa030201b.htm> [accessed 30 July 2012]

[48] Wikipedia <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gall–Peters_projection> [accessed 22 July 2012]

‘Every time you make a choice, you are turning the central part of you, the part of you that chooses, into something a little different from what it was before. And, taking your life as a whole, with all your innumerable choices, all your life long you are slowly turning this central thing either into a Heavenly creature or into a hellish creature…’

C.S Lewis

# A PRECOG DREAM?

The modern imagery machine has always relied on mythical communication to reach the most number of consumers in order to sell brands. In fact, our modern mythologies are created and maintained by what we buy.[49] (p. 45) Furthermore, branding has been shaping our cultures since the beginning of times, as marketing Professor Walt Kuenstler puts it, 'it […] is as old as mankind. Branding made civilization possible. Heck, maybe branding is civilization.'[50]

Likewise, myths, acting as communication devices, transmit the messages necessary for culture building, and when they are perfected through the advertising engine, the power of myths becomes ubiquitous, since '[t]he best advertising functions as mythology.'[51]

Roland Barthes further exemplifies how advertising helps create a mythology around objects in his analysis of the New Citroen where he compares cars to Gothic cathedrals: '[…] the supreme creation of an era. Conceived with passion by unknown artists, and consumed in image if not in usage by a whole population which appropriates them as a purely magical object' [52](p.88)

Brands like Apple have built an almost religious fervour around their products, housing them in temple-like stores where we go and find redemption amongst their various gadgets, a safe place where we go worship and propitiate the new god of our times: technology. But technological worship is not only related to brand building, but part of a larger machine which feeds both a scientific utopia and the capitalist market for new technological solutions and

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[49] Walt Kuenstler. *Myth, Magic and Marketing: an Irreverent History of Branding from the Acropolis to the Apple Store.* (Pensylvania: Zolexa Publishing, 2012) [Kindle Edition]

[50] Kuenstler p.36

[51] Ibid p.42

[52] Roland Barthes. *Mythologies*. (London: Vintage, 2000)

advances. It is often the case that when new technologies emerge there is speculation about how these technologies will make our lives better and feed our utopian dreams.[53] (p.2)

Moreover, new technological dreams have always shaped our views, and belief systems. For example, the machine visions which permeated culture in the Seventeenth Century are still patent today, and we often use this imagery to explain our world, our daily experiences, and even our very bodies; these machine analogies evidence the narrative that underlies and gives cohesion to the industrial metanarrative endorsed. [54] And that narrative is being merged with contemporary tales about the virtual, the networked, the ephemeral self, gearing us toward a connected world, a networld. Platforms like Facebook, Twitter, SecondLife, Wikipedia, Google, etc. are neatly positioned to boost this vision of our future.

Marshal McLuhan writes in his book The Mechanical Bride of 1951 'Quantum and relativity physics are not a fad. They have provided new facts about the world, new intelligibility, and new insights into the universal fabric. Practically speaking, they mean that henceforth this planet is a single unit'.[55] (pg.3) Technological breakthroughs such as those spark a new set of narratives around them, which in turn transform the way we conceive our reality, and thus, shape our futures. One could argue that quantum and relativity theories led to the creation and embrace of network based technologies, which are some of the most important technologies shaping our world today.

Furthermore, the Web 2.0, Twitter, Facebook, and other social networks and platforms of peer to peer exchange and collaboration are challenging some of the oldest and most engrained narratives, such as the Christian belief of a 'hieratically organized universe'[56], and implied a complex web of power

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[53] Fred Turner. *How Digital Technology Found Utopian Ideology: Lessens From the First Hackers' Conference*. Department of Communication. Stanford University

<http://www.stanford.edu/~fturner/Turner%20Hackers%20Conference%20Chapter.pdf> [accessed 01 May 2012]

[54] Midgley p.1

[55] Marshal MacLuhan. *The Mechanical Bride*. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1951)

[56] Campbell p. 3

hierarchies and titles. This traditional structure of our world is already changing to a more horizontal, and democratic one, where technology is giving access to knowledge to everyone, not only the elite.

Similarly, popular culture and science fiction are both challenging and endorsing emergent technologies. Several cinema and literary classics have been toying with future scenarios where present technologies are being extrapolated to create hypotheses about how these will affect us, how technologies are shaping our humanity or what humanity really means; questions about human nature, the existence of a human soul, and the future of our natural habitat are all addressed in these stories.

One example comes from Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*, where technologies such as robotics, colonization of space, biotechnology and genetic engineering have shaped our future. A dystopian future scenario in 2019 where scientists have created a race of humanoids –replicants- to work in their off-world colonies doing dangerous and undesirable jobs. However, at some point replicants rebel against humans and are banned from returning to earth under the pain of death. Some, nonetheless, defy the law and return. Blade Runner detective Deckard is entrusted with the task of terminating them one by one.

This movie is an excellent example of popular media both evaluating and extrapolating a hypothesis of the future based on emergent technologies. It proposes the fictional scenario where robotics has become so evolved to mimic humans in almost every way, plus being equally or more intelligent and superior physically, so much so that a test, the Voigt Kamppf, has been developed to differentiate humans from replicants based on emotional responses to scenarios where empathetic values are measured.

Blade Runner initially prescribes to the ideas that what makes us human is our capacity for empathy and emotional dimensions, but it seems, as the movie progresses, that replicants have developed a sense of existence, building emotional relationships and most importantly, a sense of mortality, which has always been a human trademark, even being depicted at the mythic moment of the expulsion of Paradise, by eating from the tree of knowledge. So by the realisation of mortality, these replicants are placed at the same moral level of humans, as the offspring of humanity trying to better itself, which in turn, reminds us of the myth of Prometheus, who steals fire from the gods and gives

it to humanity; the gods as a result sentenced him to eternal punishment. As we can see, these concerns have been with us for a long time, in fact, one could argue that they are anxieties inherent to the human condition.

Are these robotic, humanoids the future of our species, the next step in evolution? Perhaps. And what the makers of the movie seem to allude to is that maybe we are on that path already without realising it; a statement with which many leading scientists and futurists would thoroughly agree.



Figure 9. Ridley Scott. *Blade Runner*. 1982

These conceptions of the human flesh and its weaknesses as something that has to be overcome and fixed, has its roots in the platonic belief of the body as a cage for the soul, as the imperfect and decaying flesh which must be overpowered, and the real vulnerability of our bodies has only reinforced this. Narratives in popular culture, like *Blade Runner* have proposed versions of a world where technologies have become intertwined with our bodies, where cyborgs live amongst us. These narratives have been preparing the territory for the technologies that are seen to be the next step in evolution for the human race, the post-human. New technologies are likely to change the manner in which we construct new narratives, but these will be based on the structures of the ancient mythic ones.[57] It is not surprising then, that the designers of Blade Runner chose a sort of Mesoamerican temple aesthetic to create the mythical Tyrell Corporation headquarters (see image 10), further reinforcing allusions to ancient religious fervour.

However, these life-enhancing, social, technological dreams are anything but new. John Gray gives us a brilliant example of a utopian dream for the future of the human species which has survived through the decades. In his *Literature and Revolution* Trotsky writes:

> *Even purely physiological life will become subject to collective experiments. The human species, the coagulated Homo sapiens, will once more enter into a state of radical transformation, and, in his own hands, will become an object of the most complicated methods of artificial selection and psycho-physical training [...]. Man will become immeasurably stronger, wiser, and subtler; his body will become more harmonized, his movements more rhythmic, his voice more musical. The forms of life will become dynamically dramatic. The average human type will rise to the heights of an Aristotle, a Goethe, or a Marx. And above this ridge new peaks will rise.* [58]

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[57] John Bickle and Sean Keating. *Storytelling 2.0: When new narratives meet old brains*. <http://www.newscientist.com/blogs/culturelab/2010/11/storytelling-20-when-new-narratives-meet-old-brains.html> [accessed 20 February 2012]

[58] John Gray quoting Leon Trotsky's work *Literature and Revolution* <http://www.marxists.org/archive/Trotsky/works/1924/lit_revo/cho8>

In this perspective, humanity's destiny is to control nature and its holds on human kind. For him there are no limits to the possibilities for human enhancement and perfectibility, a vision that we are all too acquainted with in today's technological society, where nanotechnology, cryogenics, bioengineering, etc. promise to deliver us from mortality and the weaknesses of our bodies.[59]



Figure 10. Ridley Scott. *Blade Runner-Tyrell Corporation.* 1982

In fact, the Wellcome Collection in London recently put together an exhibition entitled *Superhuman: Exploring human enhancement from 600 BCE to 2050,* in which it traces the human desire to achieve perfection and immortality to the dawn of civilization. This exhibition ran during the London Olympics

[59] Gray, p.56

2012, where expressions of superhuman power and resistance were stretched and displayed for the world to see. Interestingly enough the TV ads that made up the Olympic advertising campaign reinforced the current politics of PM David Cameron's Big Society, where he calls for 'a more socially active Britain - in which volunteers would step in to take the place of an over-mighty state'[60], and the role and responsibility of the common people in the achievement of greatness if thoroughly emphasized and encouraged. In addition, the Olympic ads, especially those launched by Procter and Gamble (See Figure 11), where caring mothers are portrayed as the backbone of Olympic success, are some examples of the advertising machinery strengthening a narrative that seeks to become pervasive, and thus giving the message that only together in this Big Society can we achieve superhuman greatness.

As we can see, throughout history, narratives have been built to consciously guide the actions of the people, and allow for policies and ideologies to become ubiquitous.

[60] Brian Wheeler *Big Society: More than a soundbite?*. BBC News Website. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-12163624> [accessed 15 of September 2012]

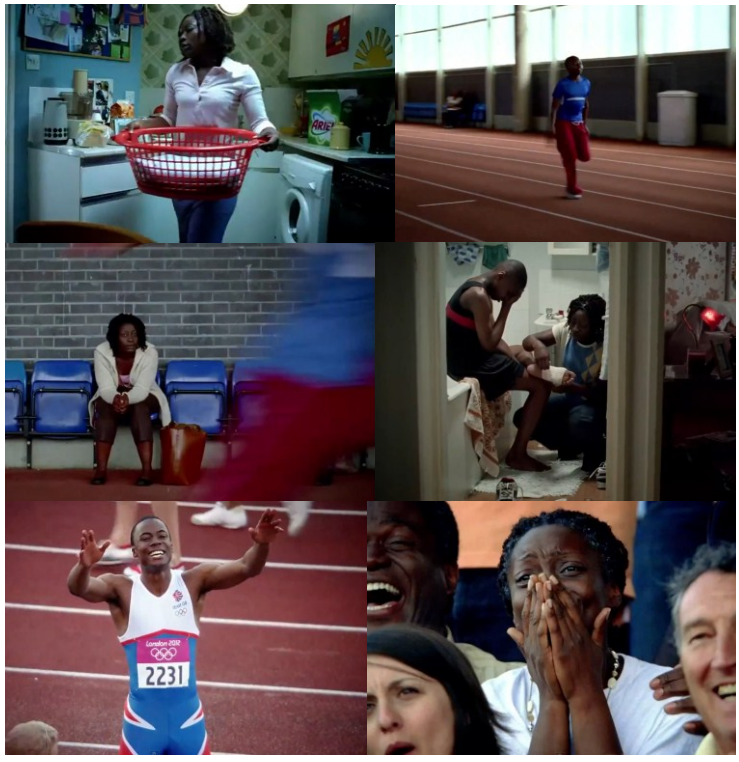



Figure 11. Stills from P&G 2012 Olympic campaign

Another myth- making popular culture example comes from The Lord of the Rings. This is a classic fantasy work where J.R. Tolkien built a whole fictional world based on the sense of an unknown mythological history, where he effectively uses the mythical language to construct a place that is not real, but nonetheless, belongs to a certain unknown past, a past with which we identify ourselves. 'The Lord of the Ring setting is not another world, but a historically unfamiliar portion of this world: its mythical past.'[61] (Loc. 184-85)

Michael D.C Drout makes a clear distinction between science fiction works and fantasy works in the sense that although both attempt to create a fictional scenario, Fantasy is characterized by a focus on a mythical past, based

[61] Peter Kreeft. *The philosophy of Tolkien: The worldview behind the Lord of the Rings.* (San Francisco: Ionatus Press, 2005) [Kindle Edition published in 2009]

on alchemy and magic, whereas Science Fiction, or SF, focuses on the future based on technologies and science. [62]

In the case of Tolkien, what is most important for the purposes of this paper is the ability to create a whole world which can be understood as an uncharted place in our historical past, a past where the human challenges we face today seem to find a mythical beginning. A place where all of the archetypes of valor, courage, friendship, loyalty, the idea of the quest, the unknown, and the forces of evil, all seem to find a genesis. As if the history of humanity had started then. And this is achieved, in part to Tolkien's ability to create archetypes for each of these values, which allude to a morally higher realm. Peter Kreeft's analysis of The Lord of the Rings explains that 'In The Lord of the Rings everything seems to be more itself, more Platonic. The earth is more earthy, nature is more natural, the history is more historical, the genealogies more genealogical, the tragedy more tragic, the joy more joyful, the caverns more cavernous, the forests more foresty, and the heroes more heroic.' [63] Because, Kreeft continues, '[a]great mythmaker awakens the longing for these Platonic archetypes, which are buried deep in human knowledge, through using a magic language: the language of myth.'[64] And this magic language is magic to the extent that we can all understand it and relate to it, because deep in our mental structures we have learnt and understood our reality by the use of it.

The practice of world building based on mythical structures and meta-narratives is essentially mythopoeia; we are forecasting and making hypothesis about our future (or past), developing scenarios and alternative realities to what we know or expect today[65]; and this process when it is built using a current living metanarrative gives the result, not only credibility, but also a sense of truthfulness.

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[62] Professor Michael D.C. Drout. *From Here to Infinity. An exploration of Science Fiction Literature.* Modern Scholar Publishers. [Audio book edition 14 August 2008]

[63] Kreeft Loc. 506-9

[64] Ibid Loc. 543-44

[65] Curzio p. 29



Figure 12. *Advertising for the Lord of the Rings movie.* Peter Jackson . 2001.

‘The empires of the future are the empires of the mind’

Sir Winston Churchill

# THE SLEEPER HAS AWAKEN

Ideologies prepare us for the future, they enable technologies to be easily accepted and embraced; they seduce us with ideas about the possible future these technologies would bring humanity: the possibility of human enhancement and the end of the vulnerability of the flesh. 'For both Jung and Freud, [...] pure, pre-historical human tendencies, drives and fears, will be detectable through myths.'[66], and as civilization moves through time, it leaves a trace of these ideologies that were used on the way. Myths are a fuel that inspires a movement forward, towards the future, on the path of time and history. However, for stories to penetrate the social psyche and become mythic, they must be explained '[…] not as a fact but as a metaphor for truth."[67] (p. 10)

Our modern myths are pervasive, but they are hidden in the realm of the everyday, and not as much on the sacred and holy spheres, the myths we normally call myths are old stories that have ceased to exert their power on society, and they are perceived as old nonsense. However, we fail to realize that they have been replaced by new modern stories, which represent a different set of interests and desires, and these stories we often don't notice, we only notice them when they have stopped being functional.[68] These stories guide us towards a future we are unaware of; the future we are unconsciously constructing through them. 'We are building our future today, and the products that surround us are,' shaping and mediating our experiences, dreams, fantasies and desires.'[69]

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[66] Marina Warner. *On Myth.* The Liberal Magazine Website. <http://theliberal.co.uk/issue_11/artsandculture/myth_warner_11.html> [accessed:19 of February 2012]

[67] William K. Ferrell. . *Literature and Film as Modern Mythology.* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2000)

[68] Curzio p. 23

[69] Dunne & Raby in conversation with Troika. <<http://www.dunneandraby.co.uk/content/bydandr/46/>

The role of design in the manufacture of alternative futures is immense, and the values and priorities that we choose to establish will determine the direction of our future.

The practice of future gazing not only can help designers design for the futures to come, but it also raises awareness about the implications of ideologies and modern narratives on the conception of these futures, and that is why it is imperative to understand the invisible forces that pull and push us in an endless ideological battle which will decide the fate of mankind. And due to the exponential speed at which a future is approaching, this realisation is the more urgent.

In my work I am interested in exploring the way we are constructing these alternatives today. I do not think of designers as just manufacturers of the embodiments of the myths, consciously designed, by marketers and advertisers, but rather as future shapers, actively helping build what our world will look like. Today more than ever, we need to gain awareness of the values we are endorsing as we dream up objects and products.

An important question I try to explore in my work is: Can design have a more direct role in the creation of new myths? Or even, could it change modern mythical narratives?

I believe it can. Many technologists, designers, and futurists seem to think so and encourage it; because although technological advances have made us conceive our history as a before and after technology, the history of humanity is one continuous line of a quest for knowledge, and '[t]he history of civilization is, at one and the same time, the history of myth.'[70] Myths are not detached form their surroundings and historical context, in fact, they help create it. Furthermore, they are closely related to the political, cultural and religious cohesion process. 'In other words, myths serve any number of social, religious, ideological, or pedagogical functions.'[71]

Many have proposed version of our future, some Utopian scenarios where we triumph over our 'corrupted' natures, others where we succumb to

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[70] Curzio p.23

[71] Ford p. n/a

them as an inevitable consequence of the human nature. And although none of these have ever been totally proven, they have actually created the foundations of world orders which have resonated through history, to the point in which we still have engrained in our minds decayed ideologies of the past.

New mythologies are being constructed, narratives about cooperation, ecology, sustainability, communities, natural materials, etc. These new narratives are competing with the old individualism and competitiveness myth. [72] Mythic stories are essential in understanding cultures, they are intertwined with the traditions and rituals a group holds close, and which determine the whole structure and purpose of it; if looked closely they shed light onto why these beliefs were treasured and they might even help forecast the future of a civilization, because myths encapsulate not only our past but also our future, they contain our most sacred values.[73]

As philosopher and cultural historian, Richard Tarnas explains in *Cosmos and Psyche*, 'Our world view is not simply the way we look at the world. It reaches inward to constitute our innermost being, and outward to constitute the world. It mirrors but also reinforces and even forges the structures, armorings, and possibilities of our interior life. It deeply configures our psychic and somatic experience, the patterns of our sensing, knowing, and interacting with the world. No less potently, our world view—our beliefs and theories, our maps, our metaphors, our myths, our interpretive assumptions—constellates our outer reality, shaping and working the world's malleable potentials in a thousand ways of subtly reciprocal interaction. World views create worlds.'[74](p.16)

We are the result of an age long history of beliefs and cultural and religious influences. Our future is being determined by these steps into a direction which was not constructed freely by the individuals in a community effort, but by elites constructing a future which serves only the few. It is our responsibility to awaken. Since, "[A]s with all powerful myths, we have been, and many perhaps remain, largely unconscious of this historical paradigm's

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[72] Midgley p. 174

[73] Ferrell p.11

[74] Richard Tarnas, *Cosmos and Psyche*: *Intimations of a New World View* (New York: Penguin, 2006)

hold on our collective imagination."[75] It is important to see where it is that we are being steered towards, and question whether this direction is what we really desire. Design has a massively important role in this process. Designers, artists and architects build new versions of our world; we materialize the beliefs that guide the gaze of humanity into the future. How can we not stop and question what kind of future these beliefs are constructing through us? Moreover, how can we not want to be part of the process of future-making that is being planned today?

I recently went to a lecture by futurist Giulio Prisco about Transhumanism as the future religion.[76] He talked about Russian Cosmism, which essentially calls for humankind to achieve its cosmic destiny through the colonization of space. What was most interesting about this lecture was the notion that for us to achieve this destiny and conquer the stars we needed a meta-narrative strong enough and pervasive enough to guide humanity towards this cosmic goal through all the centuries that could possibly take to achieve it. Only an immensely cohesive system like religion could propel humanity towards this epic direction.

And I would agree with this, because since the space age we have been too busy exploring the earth, exploring the human genome, constructing capitalist empires, manufacturing pharmaceuticals, etc.; too busy to focus on a task of this size, which would require a new world-mythology that could inspire humanity to take its gaze to the skies once again. And, although I am not advocating for a new, planet-wide space effort in this paper, this highlights the importance of collective participation in order to achieve great visions for humanity's future. Interestingly enough, positivist thinkers such as Auguste Comte and Henri de Saint Simon had great admiration for the medieval Church, not for its ideologies and practices but for its impressive hold on society.[77]

Technology has never moved so fast, transforming how we relate to each other, how we live our daily lives, how we love and how we dream. Whereas in the past, massive change took generations, now it can take only a few years, and this is becoming even faster as technology evolves exponentially. As designers

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[75] Tarnas, p.12

[76] Giulio Prisco. *Transhumanist religion 2.0* . London Futurists Meetup. Birkbeck College London. 14th of July 2012

[77] Gray. P.83

we need to react swiftly, imagining and projecting the consequences of these technological changes. Forecasting the implications for humanity which is moving rapidly towards a future that is not a lifetime, but merely years away.

Adapting to these changes will challenge every aspect of our psyche, we will need to find alternatives in which humanity is not merely following the path of a historical linear version of progress, but consciously creating a future in which humanity is at its core. That is why our mythic structures will prove a light at the end of the tunnel; these ancient and modern stories will remind us of what is important, will remind us of what it means to be human in a world of circuits, they will help us construct in harmony a world where technology serves us to become the versions of humans we have always dreamt of becoming a better version, where we live in harmony with nature.

In recent times there have been new approaches and outlines to construct a new awareness of reality, one which seeks to create a more plural and encompassing understanding of our through a 'multidimensional' perspective.[78] Design's role is of extreme importance in these times of transformation, restructuring and of innovation. We need to propose alternatives for the continuation of our cultures, our technologies, our natural world, and ourselves. By supporting myths which value heterogeneity, pluralism, ecology, sustainability, community, we can create a technological future which has humanity at its core. Only through the understanding of our contemporary metanarratives will we be able to for see what sort of futures we are being geared towards.

But the practical question here is how do we change the direction of our future? Intel's futurist  Brian David Johnson has been trying to discover some insights into this big question by interviewing sci-fi writers, scientists and thinkers; and one of the most insightful answers came from science fiction author Cory Doctorow, who explained that the way to change our future is to change the stories we build around it. 'Change the story people have imagined the future will be. Change that and you change the future. […] just change the story we tell ourselves about the future and you change the future itself.'[79] (p. 3)

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[78] Tarnas, p.26

[79] Cory Doctorow and others. *The Tomorrow Project Anthology.* 2011. <http://www.intel.com/content/www/us/en/research/tomorrow-project/the-tomorrow-project.html> [accessed 24 July 2012]

Science fiction can be used as a tool to create alternative worlds, prototypes of hypothesis about other realities that could have happened or that could possibly happen; objects within these scenarios help bridge our world with the imaginary world. 'They are assemblages of various sorts, part story, part material, part idea-articulating prop, part functional software. The assembled design fictions are component parts for different kinds of near future worlds. They are like artifacts brought back from those worlds in order to be examined, studied over.'[80] (p. 7)

Science fiction writers have both inspired new technologies by imagining them and especially by describing them, and also they have use emerging technologies as the stepping stone to imagine future scenarios. Using storytelling and extrapolating current issues, SF creates stories that help us see and feel how technologies will affect us; through the building of different utopian, dystopian or more realistic scenarios, our possible futures are being presented to us to test them, and determine whether these outcomes are desirable. The most important element of this method is that all throughout the process the central focus is on the human element; the everyday life impact, the birth of new rituals these technologies inspire, the social and cultural implications, and the discovery of new niches for the production of products amongst other results.

I strongly believe that Science fiction prototyping is of immense value in the design process, both to imagine and assess technologies, but more importantly to evidence the path in which our current narratives are leading us to. Science fiction accumulates the collective imagination of humankind, and as such it is a receptacle for the most profound desires and fears for the future of mankind, and it should be looked upon as a starting point to imagine possible futures and possible consequences, because Design is not about objects only, it involves imagining the future context in which we, our material culture, our dwellings, our cultures will thrive or wither, and so '[W]e can use future gazing as a tool for future shaping.'[81] (Loc 122-123)

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[80] Julian Bleecher. *Design Fiction*. A Short Essay on Design, Science, Fact and Fiction. 2009. <http://nearfuturelaboratory.com/2009/03/17/design-fiction-a-short-essay-on-design-science-fact-and-fiction/> [accessed: 24 July 2012]

[81] Christopher Barnatt. *25 Things You Need to Know About the Future.* (London: Constable, 2012)[Kindle Edition published in 2012]



## Off the grid dreams

*"She woke up just before dawn, this time she wasn't panicking. She had a plan. The screen on the wall told her it was just 5:26 am and that she should go back to sleep. She didn't though instead she closed her eyes, hoping the REM sleep sensors on her pillow wouldn't set off the alarm. She tried to remember what her father used to tell her about the days when humans were free, when metal and flesh were separated and people would decide what to do, and when. Unlike now; impossible to imagine how to be free of machine control… constantly monitoring, sending data, evaluating, measuring, and ordering. But today she had a plan… she would just unplug herself. Just like that, she would walk away and not look back. She would go and join all those crazies that were supposed to be surviving off the grid since it all started. Yep, she would try that.*

*The alarm went off. Loud as always, forcing her out of her thoughts. She got up and took the allowed 5 minute shower, got dressed and took a big breath before ripping the paper slip that contained the list of tasks for her day."*



Figure 13. *Human Behaviour Control- Text Machine*. ©Diana Simpson H. 2012.

*This machine is used as a way of controlling human behaviour by printing a series of required tasks which the machine chooses from a database.* *(see Figure 13)*

*Humans have become so dependent to machines at this stage that they follow the orders given by a computer mainframe, which chooses tasks for humans. Since all the calculating and hi-tech work is taken by smart machines, humans are allocated jobs in order to keep the system going, and machines manage and safeguard the keeping of the system.*



## DIY survivors

*"We need it Jin!"*

*"You need to go back there and get it, they do have it, and you only need to show them you know what you are doing."*

*"Okay, okay, I'll go back tomorrow. There's a storm coming and I don't wanna miss it! Alice, is it ready yet?"*

*"Will be, just a few tweaks here and there."*

*"Shit, I hope we get enough juice this time. We barely have enough to run the mills, and the metal sorter won't work for long without a massive kick-start."*

*"By the way, Jin… how much did those guys want for it? Did you ask?"*

*"Yeah… not cheap that thing you need… they wanted 300 grams of copper."*

*"See, that's what I mean, if we don't get it going with the storm tonight we'll have to do the sorting by hand, and I ain't doing that again."*



Figure 14. *Lightning Harvester*. ©Diana Simpson H. 2012

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*Due to increasingly scarce and expensive energy people are looking to alternative ways in which to harvest nature.*

*Open Source technologies and DIY knowledge allow users to create their own gadgets and harvest lightning to power up their homes.*

*Open Source Energy Networks become mainstream and this creates a surge of free energy for all which is counterbalanced by energy companies seeking to make money from other technologies and services around this new free energy, such as selling new better technologies for harvesting energy, or by charging how this free energy gets delivered, etc.*

*Lightning harvesting has now become safe and reliable, allowing people to use this technology to power up their homes, cars and gadgets.*

*The Lightning harvester* (See Figure 14) *works by spontaneously generating small amounts of lightning and harvesting this energy into a battery which can then be plugged in to your home electrical supply.*

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## Hacking the Vatican

*"Excuse me sir… we seem to be receiving some strange noises on the Holyradio frame."*

*"Check the codes..."*

*"I did sir, we have tried everything, but we can't seem to shake them loose"*

*"What is it that we are receiving?"*

*"…well, they seem like…like prayers sir."*

*"What?! prayers? On this line?! That's nonsense…let me hear it!"*

*"What the…"*

*"Is this getting through to the main line? Have you isolated it?!!"*

*"Well, sir… it's being transmitted everywhere… we can't seem to stop it spreading…"*

*"Blessed Virgin Mary!, we need to do something fast! We can't let those prayers get through to the Holy Father!"*

*"Call the swiss guard!"*



Figure 15. *Prayer Transmitter*. ©Diana Simpson H. 2012

*My first idea came from thinking about controlling our own spirituality by sending our prayers and thoughts out to the ether as radio signals to be picked up by a higher being. This is an object that relates to our relationship with deities creating a personal space of devotion and prayer.*

*However, the prayer transmitter* (See Figure 15) *intends to establish a direct radio communication with the representation of God on earth, the pope himself; by hacking into the Vatican's radio signal, the devoted can deliver their daily prayers.*

*It works by scanning your face using face recognition technologies, thus establishing a safe (hacker free) connection. Your prayers are sent by speaking into the microphone, and then transmitted by the radio antenna.*

## The stuff of dreams

*"I can't believe this… those bloody hackers! I wonder how much they are getting for them, fuck, they were great ones! They didn't leave me a nice copy, they took it all!"*

*"How did they get into it though?... do you have it secured? See you should do what I do, you get one of those ghosts, you insert it in your dreams every time they get recorded and the ghost hooks onto the hacker once it gets in… it freaks them out, hell! they can't even make sense of the dream because it mixes all the images up, so they give up and leave you alone. "*

*"Yup, I might have to do that, good thing though they didn't get much, my fmri is a bit fucked up, so it hasn't been recording all the time… just a few fragments here and there… its really depressing… haven't been able to watch mine in a while…"*

*"Really?!, jesus how are you coping…?"*

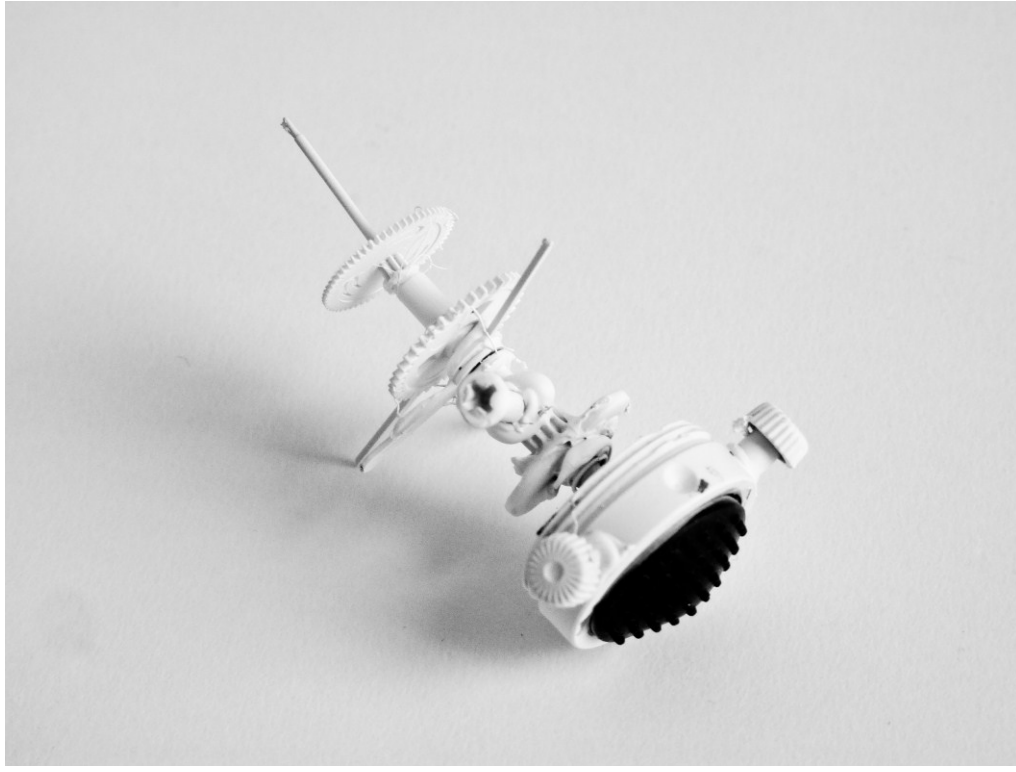


Figure 16. *Dream Time Machine.* ©Diana Simpson H. 2012

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*fMRI scanning has become high definition so we are able to translate brain information into a realistic 3D holographic projection of the imagery in our minds.*

*As a backlash to meaningless TV, people are seeking new experiences in the domestic space.*

*Through the combinations of these technologies we can now record our dreams and daily experiences, and access them whenever we want, just like a TV of our minds, creating the new generation of a life-book.*

*The dream time machine* (See Figure 16) *would create new daily rituals, where the user wakes up, approaches the scanner embedded in the time machine to get his brain scanned and download the dream content. It then gets fed into the internal memory, storing it chronologically.*

*When the user comes back from their daily activities, this process is repeated, generating an accurate map of the images from both the day and night.*

*When the user wants to review this imagery, he/she sets the time to go back to, by rotating the cogs and positioning the rulers in the specified time.*

*Once the time has been set, a 3D holographic projector embedded inside displays and accurate 3d rendition of the imagery.*

*Lastly, different privacy settings could be determined to allow the users to share their dreams and memories, creating a subculture of dream content trading and selling, and raising new questions about the nature of copyright.*

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## Scavenging at the city- RAG series

*10th December 2020- after the epic flood,*

*We found a few more rags, this time we had to look real hard for them. Ben, Fran and Luz went west, so maybe they had more luck. I did find lots of strong branches, something we always find, good 'ol English weather… always rainy, even now, after so much of the other land is a desert. Anyhow, I got all of the stuff me and Jay found walking east. Our motor bike got damaged since the flood and we haven't found the parts to fix it, so we are stuck walking for now… unless we can trade some of our rags to the bike lads, maybe they can spare one? Nah, they probably rent it to us, more business for them, or they'll steal it back… those dirty bastards. They need our rags though, everyone does. What kind of world they would live in if they didn't have our rags? A cold, hard world that would be.*

*Anyway, it's getting dark and we need to start cleaning all these newbies for trade day tomorrow.*



Figure 17. *RAG chair.* ©Diana Simpson H. 2012

*The RAG chair* (See Figure 17) *is part of a series of objects made from discarded rags, joined with jesmonite. The seat is made by casting the shape of an injection moulded chair found on a skip. It is extremely strong because of the qualities of the jesmonite, and extremely light because of the quality of the rags. The legs are made from park tree trimmings joined together and tied with a rope, to create the base of the chair.*

*The RAG series is part of an exploration into alternative ways to create objects using urban waste. Found objects are cast using rags and jesmonite or bioresin and branches are used as legs, joins or caps. The result is a series of objects that are using discarded urban material to create functional objects for everyday use.*



*'As terrified men once got ritually and psychologically into animal skins; so we already have gone far to assume and to propagate the behaviour mechanisms of the machines that frighten and overpower us'*

Marshal McLuhan

The Mechanical Bride



Figure 18. *Beast from the East (detail).* ©Diana Simpson H. 2012.

*'A genetically manufactured beast, generated by merging traits of the most fearsome local mythological beasts is set loose on the extreme landscape of Iceland. Initially designed to have no reproductive or social capabilities, it seems to have developed naturally by adapting to the geography and weather conditions. Evolutionary biologists have initiated studies to determine exactly what kind of developments the beast has undertaken.'*

*My interest in this project comes from wanting to explore the role of myths in contemporary life. The mythological beast project is an experiment in creating a contemporary myth and inserting it into a specific culture and landscape and making it merge with its existing mythology.*

*For the exhibition in Iceland's Design Week, I made a shamanic ritual costume, which includes the skull of one of the beasts found by a hunter in the East fjords, further confirming the existence of the mythical beast.* *(See Figure 19)*

*The next step for the project is to cast the skull as one piece in aluminium, referencing our modern relationship with technology.*



Figure 19. *Beast from the East*. ©Diana Simpson H. 2012.

# APPENDIX:

*some methods*



*Figure 20. Crystal Spheres.*

## Myth as device

Doing some research for this paper, I came across an analysis of the works of Anton Chekhov. The work is titled *Myth as Device in the works of Chekhov* by Thomas G. Winner, published in the book Myth and Symbol, published by the University of Nebraska Press in 1963. [82]
Within this article, the author examines Chekhov's use of myth as device. Myth in his works is used to create contemporary narratives; however, he takes the archetypal characters and inverts them, thus creating a series of dysfunctional and highly disappointing heroes and heroines. The ancient myths are reflected in his stores, but the outcomes of these are obscured and sabotaged by these inept versions of ancient heroes. These characters '[…] may be alluded to only indirectly or they may be inverted'[83]

Winner goes on to explain, that 'the Chekhovian hero who echoes an archetypal hero if often only a weakened version, a pathetic echo, a satire or parody, of his prototype."[84]

Franz Kafka also uses myth as a way of creating narratives, however, in his case, the use of myth is subverted by distorting the purpose of the quest and making it impossible and futile, hence neutralising the ultimate objective of these mythical stories, which is to communicate and inspire behaviours; by manipulating the ultimate function of the myth, its message is inverted, thus creating an alternative version of it.[85] (p. 72)

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[82] Thomas G. Winner *Myth as Device in the works of Chekhov* in Frye, Northrop, Knights, L.C., and others. *Myth and Symbol.* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1963)
[83] Winner, p. 72

[84] Winner, p.72

[85] Michael Foley. *The Age of Absurdity. Why Modern Life Makes it Hard to be Happy*. (London: Simon & Schuster, 2010)

One way to actively and consciously manipulate current narratives is by anatomizing its objective and manipulating its delivery, like inverting its axioms, exaggerating them to the extent that they lose the initial coherence, by combining them with narratives seemingly contrary and opposite.

Through these artificial methods, we can actively propose alternative solutions, alternative dialogues between the future we are heading towards today, and the possible futures we can construct for ourselves.

These approaches allow us to conceive our contemporary narratives as raw material to construct new alternatives, new points of view. The resulting eccentric stories give us inspiration to conceive new hypothetical 'what if…' scenarios

## Science Fiction Cut-ups

If science fiction and science fact are so closely related, inspiring each other and building on each other, then we could use science fiction technologies and combine them with one another, just like science combines different emergent technologies in order to create new applications. This method takes some excerpts from classic science fiction novels, and making a sort of collage to generate random new technologies.

Tom Maddox's short story *Snake Eyes*

*"There is no way of removing the implants without loss of order in your neural maps. We can't remove them."*

*"Oh shit, man…"*

*Charley Hughes said, "Though the snake cannot be removed, it can perhaps be charmed. Your difficulties arise from its uncivilized, uncontrolled nature-its appetites are, you might say, primeval. An ancient part of your brain has gotten the upper hand over the neocortex, which probably should be in command. Through working with Aleph, these…*

*propensities can be integrated into your personality and thus controlled!.* (Taken from the anthology Mirrorshades, p.22)

William Gibson's *Idoru*

*"Why did people make things like this? There was no narration, no apparent structure; some of the same fragments kept repeating throughout, at different speeds…*

*In Los Angeles there were whole public-access channels devoted to things like this, and home-made talk shows hosted by naked Encino witches, who sat in front of big paintings of the Goddess they'd done in their garages. Except you could watch that."*

(p.94)

Aldous Huxley's *A Brave New World*

*"Two hundred repetitions, twice a week from fourteen to sixteen and a half,' was all his comment. The mad bad talk rambled on. 'I want to know what passion is,' she heard him saying. 'I want to feel something strongly.'*

*'When the individual feels, the community reels,' Lenina pronounced.*

*'Well, why shouldn't it reel a bit?'*

*'Bernard!' "*

(p.84)

Using these three excerpts from science fiction works, we can create a collage of a scenario for the emergence of new technologies, which are already hinted at in these works.

For example, as a result of these three excerpts we can construct a hypothetical scenario which would house all these three realities, and form there, imagine the objects that would be required in such case.

*We are constantly being monitored by government agencies or private companies, we have physical implants which form part of our neurological construction, it is impossible to divide humanity and machine, trying it would destroy both.*

*Through virtual realities and hacking we can control or divert this control.*

*We control objects around us through sound and noises.*

*Human nature is seen as a thing to be controlled and bettered so anything connecting humans to its primitive or genetic past is seen as bestial. Emotions have been controlled, monitored and essentially frowned upon. New generations have amygdala implants to cancel out any emotional instinctual and primitive emotion.*




Figure 21. *SF collage based on SF text cut ups*. ©Diana Simpson H. 2012.

*The ideas of love, passion, destiny and essentially all the epic-inspiring emotions in humans are seen as distant traces of a primitive and undeveloped past.*

*Our every emotion and the content of our lives are directly and automatically fed into the network, where peers monitor and check up on each other. The entertainment becomes spying on your neighbours feeds and reporting any prohibited behaviour. The concept of lying becomes irrelevant, since all of our lives, emotions, and deepest thoughts are being observed.*

In this scenario, we would look to think about how all of our objects can start to become networked objects. A plate of food which reads and shares its caloric content, a chair which measures your weight and time seated, giving advice and exercises to do whilst you are forced to take a break and stand up; objects around us that are spying on our behaviour and transmitting information to the manufacturers and governments as a means of control.

Online government tracking programs record the rate of consumption of raw and recycled materials and food, in every purchase you make, charging an according tax.

Another even more interesting approach could be to take this scenario and instead of designing for it, you design for its subversion, creating objects which would do precisely the opposite of what would be required in these realities, hence creating an army of rebellious or outcast products, for example, a series of objects that would act as primitive humans would, doing all the things that would be considered too irrational, emotional or regressed. This could lead to a suicidal object which is constantly looking for the edge of the surface it sits on, and carrying on into the void, until it's broken and its main purpose is accomplished.

## SF Prototyping and product design

Intel's futurist Brian David Johnson (See bibliography for reference) has developed an interesting method to create scenarios that can be used to extrapolate emergent technologies into fictional futures. He has called his method SF (science fiction) Prototyping. Through this method, designers can take an emergent technology and use it to test and evaluate the implications of these for the future, having as a focus point the social, cultural, emotional and behavioural side effects they could have on humans.

This method is a lot of fun since deep knowledge of the science behind it is not absolutely necessary, and the imagination is free to envision a future without the constraints of scientific rigour. Nonetheless, the starting point of the method is a new technology, scientific paper or article.

I have taken an article from the website www.kurzweilai.net by Ray Kurzweil (futurist, author, thinker and inventor), and used it as a starting point for the creation of an SF prototype, according to Johnson's method, and applied it for design products.

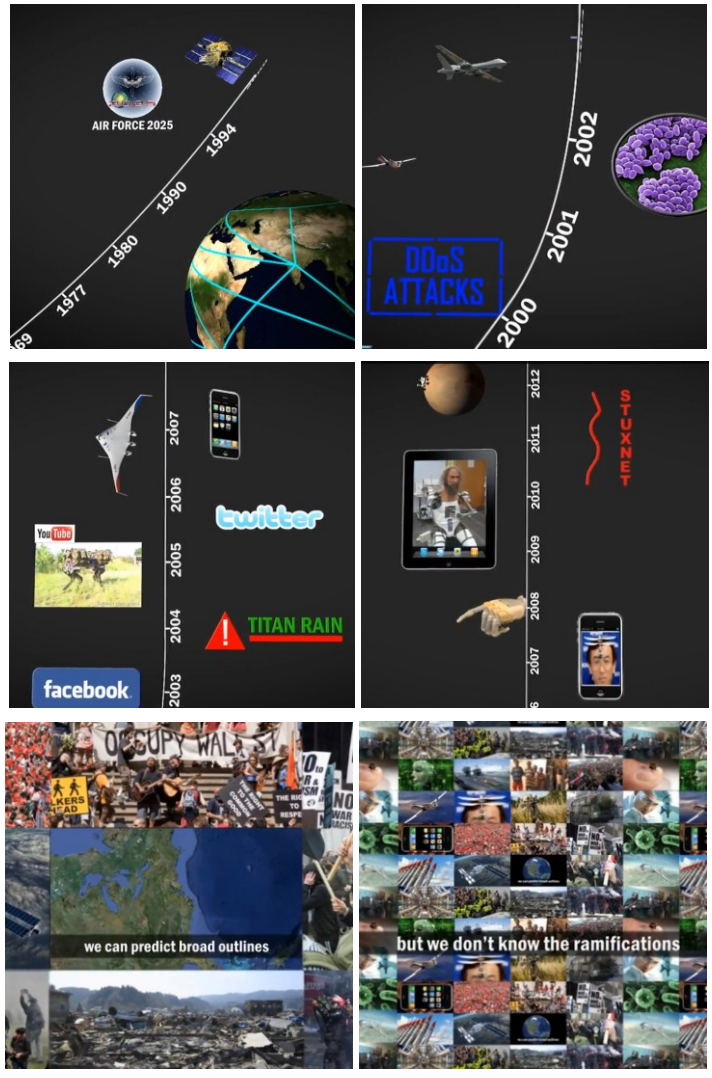



### Welcome to 2035...the Age of Surprise

September 10, 2012 by Amara D. Angelica

'Produced by the U.S. Air Force Center for Strategy and Technology at The Air University, the video was based on Blue Horizons, a multi-year future study being conducted for the Air Force Chief of Staff, a "meta-strategy for the age of surprise." ' (excerpt taken from the Kurzweilai.net website)

*In this video produced by the US Air Force, there are several issues that are hinted at, such as the fact that we are on a technological curve that is becoming extremely steep and hard to forecast, idea that many scientists and thinkers have discussed for a long time and they call it the Singularity. Another issue is the individual power granted by mobile technologies and the ease of access of information through the net; the potential threat to nations brought about by this explosion of individual power; the emergence of new territories both for innovation and conflict.*



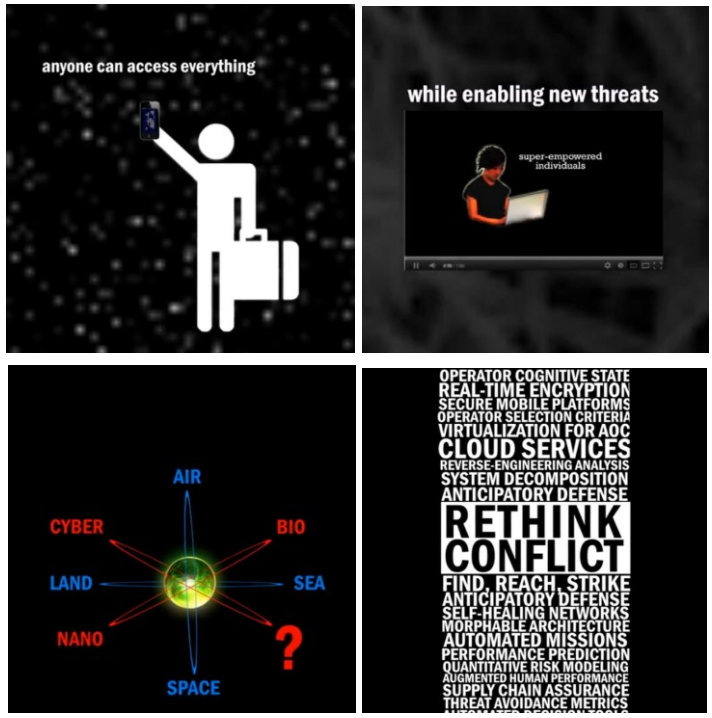



Figure 22. Stills from the Welcome to 2035… the Age of Surprise.

USAF 2012

*Segment of the interview with Ruby Zed about the newly updated SeeSafe*

*The technology supporting the seers goes way back, you know… It all started back in the day when bees were all dying off and people were scared shitless about what would happen with ecosystems, so labs started implanting devices on a few lab bees and set them free. They wanted to track them and see why they were dying off so quickly, I don't think the project came to much since all bees died off anyway, but what it did lead to was the idea of making beebots or seers as we call them today. I mean… of course today we have all sorts of kinds, each with the signature of the maker, but it all started with the bee problem.*

*Shortly after that thousands of independent makers started to develop their own kinds of bots, there was no legislation yet you see… so before the government and the lawmakers caught up, there were millions of illegal seers flying around. So they started the Program, and USAF Major General Willis declared a war against all illegal and unregistered bots. That was way back and since then it's been really tightly regulated, especially since most of these seers were thought controlled… and the US having so many enemies… anyhow, the thing about these new seers is that many brands started to make them and they are totally clean, well, at least the ones you get*

*in shops, so the typical kid can go in, buy a couple hundred and place a thought in them… and there they go all together to do this. They are mainly used to FETCH information and share it on the AIR but sometimes they can really do harmful things. I remember a case when some smart teenagers hacked a few thousand of legal bots and reprogrammed them to do some serious damage to the structure of some rival gang's hideout, which happened to be an abandoned government lab, so they got caught and the Program now has their own CLEAN THE AIR bots, so it's really hard for those things to happen again.*

*The black market? … Sure, they still sell unregistered ones, totally blank for you to do whatever you want, and that's where the Program's attention is focused on. These ones are really dangerous in the wrong hands… spying, reprogramming for bio warfare, stealing data, even change the qualities of stuff around you… imagine waking up one morning and finding all your knowledge boxes turned into dust particles… very unpleasant stuff… so the Program oversees all of this.*

*I for one saw a business opportunity here and took it! I realized these buggers are really sensitive to electromagnetic waves of a certain frequency, so I made these range of gear that constantly emits it and keeps you safe in a range of 3 meters, so you always have a safe zone around you. Here, look at this necklace… once you put it around your neck you are protected. You do need to update it quite constantly, but if you can pay monthly for automatic upload. These things are amulets, doing exactly what they have always done since the beginning of our civilizations… protecting us from harm.*

These SF prototypes can be continued as a way to explore the implications of a technology, by creating new characters- each from a different walk of life- you can imagine the effects this technology could have on the lives of different sectors of society. You could explore how a teenager would engage with it, a businessman, a housewife, a professional, a security firm, a brand of whiskey, etc. Once the SF prototype is developed it's easier to see an application of the ideas behind it in real life, in a near future scenario.

## Maps

Maps have always sparked the imagination, since mapping the skies, the known territories and the Garden of Eden, maps have always been a way to understand and depict our version of the world.

Several Fantasy and Science fiction author use maps as a way to create the setting of a new world. By depicting in detail the geographies, the world spring naturally to life.

It is interesting to take this approach since geography has had such an impact on the destiny of civilizations, making them and destroying them, as droughts and floods reshape territories.

So, starting a hypothetical world by drawing a fictional map[86] also allows the designer to understand and foresee the circumstances that will create different type of civilizations. For example, if the land mass is fragmented and scattered in several islands (See Figure 23), them it would be a sea-faring civilization, as its relationship with the oceans would determine most of its existence. Its wars would be engaged at sea, and perhaps swimming robots and waterproof gadgets would be a norm. Maybe the islands are connected to each other by a complex network of bridges and roads or perhaps long cable cars. Furthermore, if the islands have lots of rivers, it could be likely that floods would be common and perhaps the main transport would be a series of floating vessels, or shoes that would allow floating above water.

[86] For a detailed description of this method, author Holly Lisle explains it at the following website: <http://hollylisle.com/maps-workshop-developing-the-fictional-world-through-mapping/>

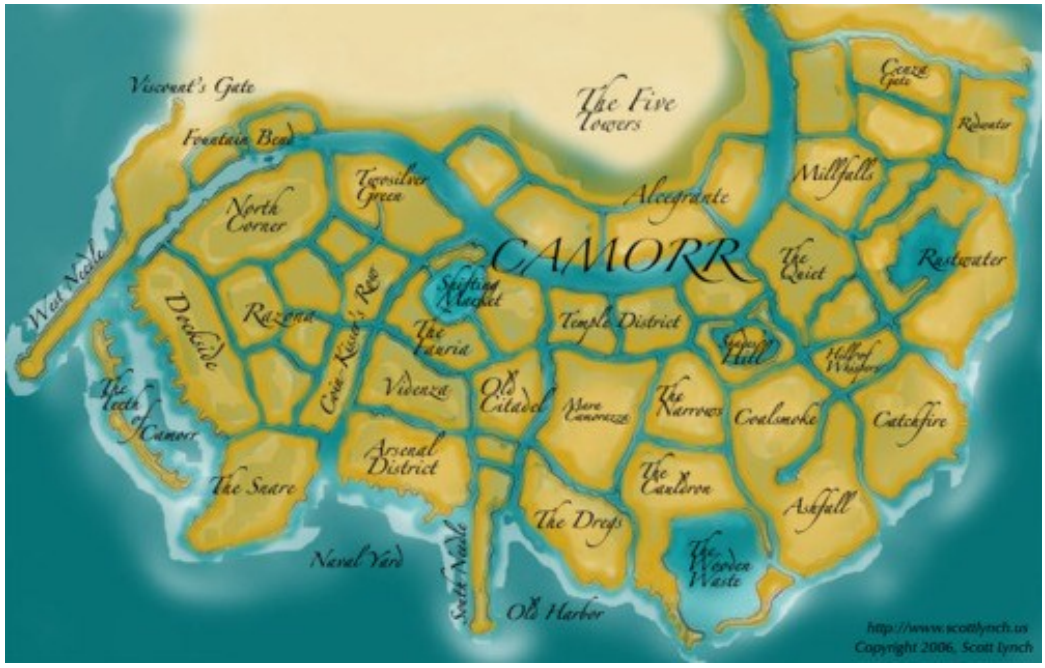



Figure 23. *Camorr, on the Iron Sea, from The Lies of Locke Lamora*. Scott Lynch

It is a common practice amongst map designers to insert a fictional feature in the maps they are designing, in order to protect against copying. In other words, a map designer would invent a street or a river or a park and insert it randomly in the map of the real city, so if the fictional feature is reproduced in the map of another designer, that would be proof of copyright infringement. These fictional features are called Copyright Easter Eggs, and Wikipedia has a whole list of all the recorded ones all around the world. The thing about these entries is that they are in effect a sort of parallel universe living inside maps of reality, almost like portals to a different world, a world that the Copyright Easter Egg rightfully inhabits. The *Copyright Easter Egg Map* (See Figure 24) gathers all the fictional entries recorded in Wikipedia and generates a fictional map in which reality merges with fiction.

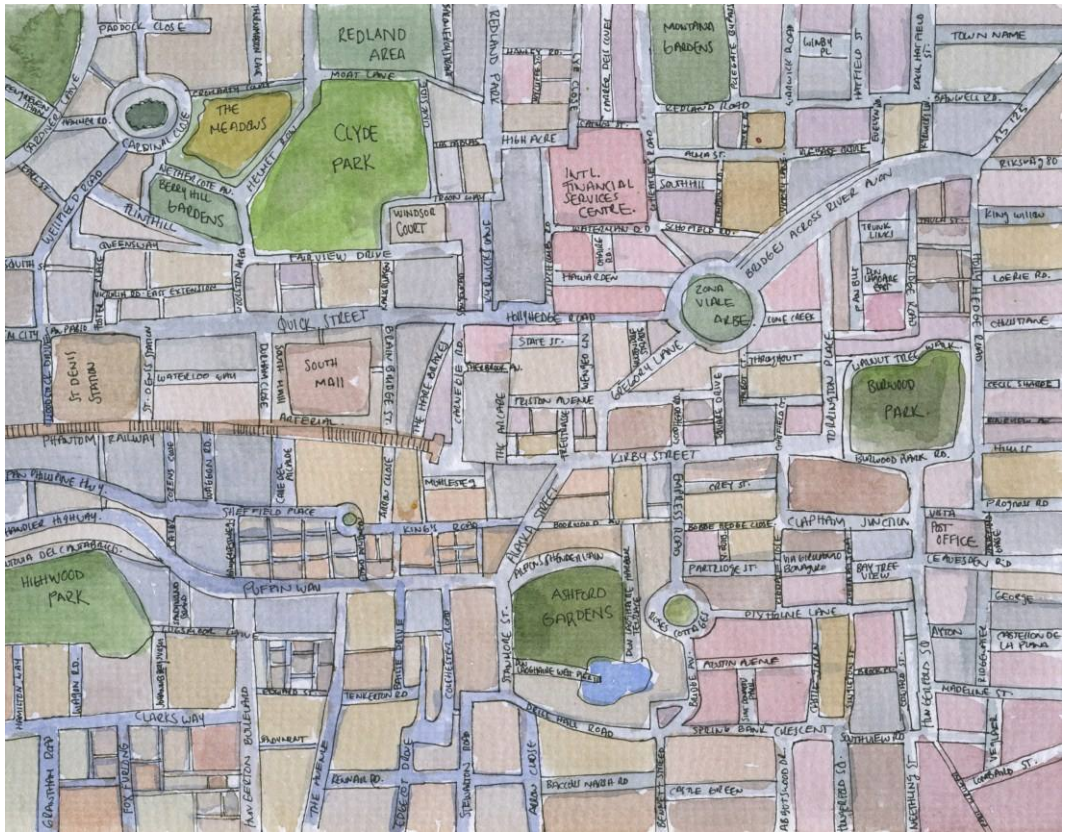



Figure 24. *Copyright Easter Egg map.* ©Diana Simpson H. 2012.

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