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VERY VERY FAR AWAY (VVFA) — ‘FROM DISSEMINATION TO ANTICIPATION’ Democratising the future using public co-enquiries and serialised fiction podcasts

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Abstract

Very Very Far Away (VVFA) is a public facing research platform composed of a radio podcast, a website (www.vvfa.space), and a workshop series, seeking to re-ignite future ideologies. Its methodology uses Space Exploration as a lens to examine current ideas and values which may pertain to future societies through technological advances.

VVFA focuses on democratising future narratives, through exploring multiple perspectives simultaneously, and disseminating new cultural fictions. Bringing members of the public and experts together through workshops, we collectively craft a web of stories capturing new space potentials (future roles, future social and organisational structures, and collective aspirations) subsequently documented and disseminated via podcast on dublab.com, iTunes, Acast, and Soundcloud. This process enables the conceptualisation of future worlds, through which newly formed ideologies can permeate the public realm.

Today’s society is based on collectively agreed upon fictions. Cultural beliefs appear to be dominated by a ‘utopia of normality’, characterised by an absence of anticipation, where future projections can be perceived as speculative predictions omitting major societal aspects – social, economical or political – by primarily focusing on technological prowess resulting in nothing more than exercises in escapism.

Conversely, proposing Space Exploration as a lens to examine today’s narratives, encourages participants to take a step back and re-evaluate cultural values informing technological development in space whilst empowering them to create long term cultural projections.

VVFA articulates 2 approaches;

– Collaborative world creation: an inspirational strategy established around scientific, social and ethical questioning induced by space exploration.

– Reverse archeology: the embodiment of future narratives into designed artefacts, services, and other, similarly to the way the Pioneer Plaque then Voyager Golden Record embodied the values of the time.

In this paper we will discuss how VVFA engages with new audiences generating contemporary aspirations to do with space and space education, by examining previously run workshops in Europe (Arduino in Turin, FHNW in Basel, SpaceStudios in London). VVFA’s dissemination emphasises the podcast, a medium whose listenership increased by 73% since 2013, a growth driven by mobility, reaching an audience of 57 million in the US. Dublab.com broadcasts to an international audience of over 350K per monthly streams, age 16 to 40 including creative professionals, social activists, students and technology savvy trendsetters. We will also examine the role of this dissemination in mediating future ideologies from the bottom up, the ability to quickly rally audiences for further co-enquiries, and the underlying feedback loop model enabling an evolving content.

Keywords: Speculative Design, Reverse Archeology, Podcast, Future

Acronyms

VVFA Very Very Far Away

1. Introduction

The space race of the mid-20th century has long been the symbol of technical prowess and mankind’s achievements. The risks, dangers and political climate that fathered space exploration, eclipsed by multiple

extraordinary scientific and technological breakthroughs. Many of these breakthroughs have profoundly impacted our modes of living, from telecommunications and navigation systems to infrared ear thermometers and even virtual reality.

Throughout this technological endeavour, the impact of the space-age has been extremely diverse, fuelling popular culture with the hope of mankind becoming a spacefaring species and eventually creating a sense of

togetherness. This idea is embodied by a vast number of cultural icons, from cinema, architecture, art and design.

From buildings to transportation systems and everyday objects at home, the cultural impact of the space-age has had not only an aesthetic influence, but also has brought about a form of collective aspiration, enabling future societal projections and narratives to emerge. Some of these can be seen as the anticipation of forthcoming achievements.

Whilst we cannot decouple the space-age ideology from the political agenda of the nations involved, we could argue that to some extent, the space-age has fostered a new global identity – a cultural awareness of humanity moving forward and into the future as a whole.

“Greetings, my friend. We are all interested in the future, for that is where you and I are going to spend the rest of our lives.”

Plan 9 from Outer Space – Ed Wood [1]

For the past 60 years, space exploration has been woven into society’s fabric. It is a perspective-altering endeavour that has shaped worldviews and cultures, paving the way to a better understanding of Earth as a living system, but also providing the framework that enables us to think about humanity’s future, be it in utopian or pragmatic terms.

1.1 What about now?

Today, the technological paradigm, engendered by the digital revolution, has led to the acceleration of innovation manifest through a permanent state of disruption. It is a new state of affairs, promoted by fast-moving digital companies in the west, and leading to fast changes that often outpace our social structures. To paraphrase Bernard Stiegler (translated from the French), A headlong rush resulting in legal and theoretical loopholes establishes a lawlessness, where individuals and groups find themselves lost, driving a collective melancholy and diverse forms of desperation, as it increasingly renders public power impotent. (Bernard Stiegler, *Dans la Disruption – Comment ne pas devenir fou?*, 2016) [2].

This status quo has brought about the emergence of a “utopia of normality,” a drive to “get everything back to normal,” and a return for a desire of stability. This sentiment can also be interpreted as a desire for a return to the foundational values of liberal democracy – an urge for an idealistic social structure, characterised by a form of redistribution and regulation that may seem incompatible with the accelerationism advocated by the tech industry in the west.

This disruption causes today to be what Stiegler calls, an “age without an age,” characterised by the lack of positive and shared anticipations, preventing us from looking to the future. Our collective demoralisation leads to a fear-induced paralysis focussing on the projected disastrous effects of climate change, and the potential for regressive scapegoating.

1.2 Collective aspirations

Given today's circumstances, it seems relevant to draw from the cultural impact and enthusiasm brought about by the space-age of the mid-20th century, to reignite a collective idealism — but how can we reinvigorate global aspirations?

Science fiction often uses speculation about the future as a way to analyse the present. In some ways, it seems that science fiction and science reality may be the endpoints of a feedback loop process – Arthur C. Clarke describing the use of communication satellites in *Wireless World* in 1945, William Gibson coining the term *cyberspace* in 1982, or the film *WarGames* in 1983, leading to Reagan’s *National Policy on Telecommunications and Automated Information Systems Security* directive in 1984. We could argue that in these cases that science fiction assumes the role of a conscious metaphor for contextual questions. The fiction here is used to “test” the future, and the cultural impact of future technologies and systems, highlighting what may or may not be preferable. But rather than in the case of predictions, these fictions reveal more about our current prejudices and attitudes towards the future in general.

The author Neil Gaiman [3] likens fictions and stories to “symbiotic organisms that we live with, that allow human beings to advance.” He argues that when considering the scientific definition of life as a process that “includes the capacity for growth, reproduction, functional activity, and continual change preceding death,” stories are alive. “Stories grow, sometimes they shrink. And they reproduce,” he writes, using people as vector. “If they do not change, stories die.” This is a perspective that shares similarities with Yuval Noah Harari’s idea [4] that humanity’s evolutionary success is partly due to our capacity to “cooperate in extremely flexible ways with countless numbers of strangers” — a cooperation mostly facilitated by our imagination and our ability to invent fictional stories, given that “as long as everybody believes in the same fictions we all obey the same laws, and can thereby cooperate effectively.” Thereby the historian considers human rights, religion, nations and money to be among the most successful and powerful fictions ruling our society. Along with their cooperating and organisational force, fictional entities have the ability to offer genuine “escape from or to somewhere,” and can be regarded as tools that can pass

on knowledge. The narratives they convey can be vectors of change.

This paper wishes to describe the exploratory methods implemented in the VVFA project. Whilst VVFA first started as a method for engaging young designers with the values and cultural identities underlying the development of new and emerging technologies at various educational institutions, it organically grew into a public-facing platform focussing on enabling conversations and the elaboration of collectively crafted new cultural fictions.

Using space exploration as a lens to view the collective aspirations, VVFA proposes a framework to help examine and think about future potentials. Its method is primarily inspired by the way individuals may gather and experience information, and the styles of narratives we create to make sense of their potential complexity. Thus, stories appear to be intertwined through a web of channels and media where the observer's interpretation is highly dependent on their contextual perspective.

Although narratives can often be presented as simplified polarisation of good versus evil, utopian or dystopian, the lineage of ideas leading to some future preconceptions provides an insightful understanding of their tacit motivations. In essence, VVFA proposes a bottom-up approach to thinking about the future, and encourages the creation of a web of entangled narratives seen through the perspective of individuals and the design of artefacts and services (bottom), informing global pictures (up). These in turn can be assessed, questioned and critiqued in relation to preconceived aspirations, a process we refer to as "world creation," aiming not only at addressing what technology makes possible, but also what is preferable, whilst enabling us to imagine what these futures might feel like.

This paper will also examine how the dissemination of the resulting narratives can "bridge the disconnect between today and tomorrow" and give "the opportunity to imagine new possibilities," (Anab Jain, *Why we need to imagine different futures*, TED 2017)[5] by providing us with a sense of anticipation.

2. Democratisation

Before discussing in detail VVFA methods and outcomes, it is important to address a few foundational points impacting how future narratives are currently informed.

2.1 A narrative construct

In spite of the fact that everyone's actions today will impact the individuals and groups of tomorrow, the future, as a narrative construct, isn't democratic. In fact, most of us may feel that the future just happens, and perceive it as being an unfamiliar land, mostly inhabited

by technological projections and technological beings with whom we may or may not identify.

For most of us, tomorrow's individual has a technological identity. We often tend to assume that it has come to being in favour of humanity's greater good — that science and future technologies will solve today's issues and enable a better tomorrow. However, it seems that we rarely question or define the foundational values implicit in the normative use of "better." Hence, we equate progress in this field to a few market standards pushing devices and artefacts into our home, workplace and leisures — in a rather non-democratic way.

Our current way of gauging this "better" often confuses scientific inquiries with "scientism," reducing all knowledge to only that which is measured and independent of perspective. We engender sets of regulations driving towards greater good, however we lack the cultural understanding to support these, thus making the quest towards a greater good a perennial endeavour.

This quantification of "better" combined with the absence of cultural drive seems to deprive the social imaginary from its capacity to project and anticipate. Future narratives may appear to be in the hands of a few companies and technology makers — as government space agencies increasingly contract private companies and outer space opens up new pathways for private ventures with opportunities in telecommunications, tourism and mining. The coming age of space exploitation will certainly fuel the collective imagination, however this will push corporate values onto future societies, and to some extent consolidate the private ownership of a substantial share of humanity's future.

2.2 The role of democratised future

Conversely, VVFA favours diversity and encourages the imagination of new possibilities by democratising future narratives through shared perspectives and understanding, hoping to engage the collective imagination. Its method is intended to help cross-reference future potentials and paradigms shaping our understanding, eventually leading to a more holistic perception of future aspirations.

VVFA proposes to act as a platform from which shared visions can emerge and individual narratives can be questioned and examined. The public facing co-enquiry aims at engaging the public with ideas, values and belief systems intrinsic to the development of technology and therefore the manufacture of future narratives. Its purpose is to reignite future thinking by informing a sense of involvement and anticipation, leading eventually to the identification or rediscovery of

shared sets of values resulting in new, or reinvigorated utopias as new cultural fictions.

These fictions are not the proposals for future modes of living, but rather a wider mapping and exploration of possibilities, seen through a prism that encompasses our social, cultural, political and ethical relationship with potential futures, broadening their predominantly technological scope, whilst focussing on the human experience.

As an example, during a four week co-enquiry run at Casa Jasmina in Turin, an “Internet of Things” pilot apartment founded by novelist and journalist Bruce Sterling and feminist and political activist Jasmina Tesanovic together with Officine Arduino, participants imagined and developed new, critical relationships with “smart” objects and the technology’s mediation of human communication. The outcomes were exceptionally diverse, ranging from a twitter-enabled fire to “empathy warfare” and a growing trash can. The latter focussed on how objects can nonverbally communicate with us and influence our behaviour. Thus, it consisted of a trash can slowly growing as it got filled, forcing the user into a conundrum: submitting to laziness and having rubbish pile up until it was no longer possible to empty it as it became too tall to reach, or taking the initiative of taking the rubbish out before it got out of control. Its designer, Matthew Visco, wrote, “the object itself promotes laziness, but its intrinsic absurdity generates self-awareness and potentially leads to corrective behaviour [6].”

The objects here, although created following a design process, acted as icons opening up a conversation about preferability: how do we feel about technology’s ability to surreptitiously influence our behaviours? Should we be more aware of technology’s potential, and by extension, should users have a say with regard to what it seeks to achieve, as opposed to letting the creators predetermine the outcomes? By questioning future potentials, these objects can subvert potentials and hint at new narratives.

3. Method

VVFA is a wide ranging investigation broadly looking at possible futures, with a view to human, technological and societal engagement with the potential of these futures. The project is constantly evolving, taking on multiple forms and formats as a way to address and engage a wide audience. Over the last three years, three main focus areas have emerged: co-enquiry, podcast and event. Each of these areas serves to inform the development of the others, and through their execution to engender a wider audience:

The co-enquiry is a development on traditional workshop methodologies, employing at once

pedagogical and research processes with an often diverse group of individuals, each bringing their own views, expertise and understanding to the development of concepts during the enquiry.

The podcast is derived from the co-enquiry, as a form of documentation, dissemination and promotion. The podcast takes the form of a designed fiction based directly upon research developed during the co-enquiry.

The events provide a live physical manifestation of the project — these may take varying forms, from traditional gallery installation to more experimental formats such as the VVFA Radio Performance and Workshop at the Victoria and Albert Museum in September, 2017.

None of these three main areas are tied down to a strict format, rather they follow a more evolutionary model, responding and adapting to varying contexts and audiences bound together by a key set of conceptual parameters, leading to the production of multiple designed fictions.

3.1 Academic and cultural precedents

Moving beyond traditions of science fiction — i.e. narratives and fictions stemming from the promises of science and technology, often featuring fantastic developments capturing the imagination of the public at large — the designed fiction takes a more critical standpoint.

The designed fiction’s lineage derives partly from the architectural discourse that took place in and around London’s Architectural Association in the mid 20th Century, groups such as Archigram, embraced the new technology of the age and melded pop cultural iconography in the pursuit and design of possible new worlds. These were told through pop imagery, texts and public engagements with a view to opening up discussions of how we as individuals may be able to live in these bold, brave new worlds.

These speculations on possible futures identified an anticipation, and through their telling offered up a chance for critique and a questioning as to whether or not these futures were the ones we wanted (just because we can do something, should we?). These discussions have been developed through architectural and urban-scale discourse through the latter parts of the 20th century. Architects such as Rem Koolhaas (an alumni of the Architectural Association) challenged the ways in which the city was formed and lived in (*Delirious New York*, Oxford University Press, 1978) [7], and outside of London groups such as Archizoom and Superstudio questioning the scale, speed and development of technology both at urban and more homely scales. Dialogues emerging in London’s Royal College of Art in the early 2000’s coined the term “Critical Design” in

an often technology-centric examination of possible, preferable and potential futures. The Bruce Sterling manifesto “*Shaping Things*” (MIT Press, 2005) [8] examined this techno-social transformation, brought about by the adoption, familiarisation and acceptance of new “things” that incorporate advances in technology. The relationship between industrial design (things) and science fiction became contextualised through objects described within these new, possible futures that were made accessible through our familiarity and fluency with the products that surround us in our present.

Within our practice we have come to define a process which relates to speculations justified and based on real technological or developments set in parallel to a traditional design process, and engaging a wider cultural conversation and dialogue about the preferential aspects of said technology or advance. The popular discourse becomes feedback for future development of technologies themselves — essentially delivering culturally informed technological development.

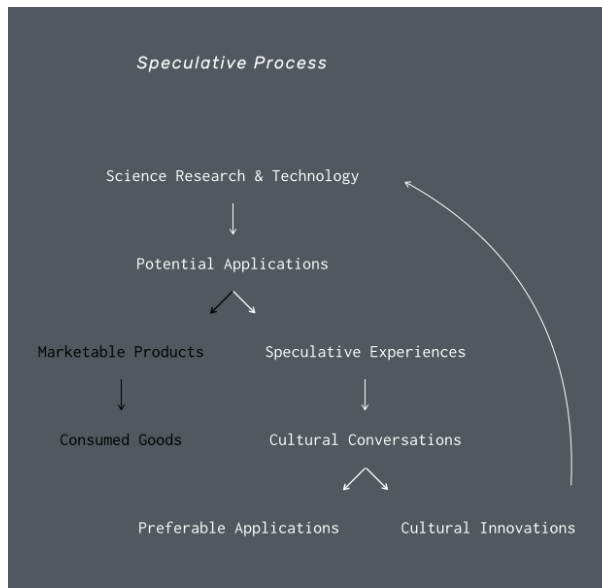


Fig. 1. Speculative design process

“Speculative design could be a valuable addition to public debate about the social, cultural and ethical impact on everyday life of emerging and future technologies.”

Dunne and Raby [9]

VVFA uses guided speculation as a tool for anticipating possible futures. By “guided speculations” we refer to a process not of fantastic or scientific fiction, but that of speculations based on a real, tangible, actual area of research, be it technology or development. The speculation then evolves through the prism of the researcher, adding their own “stance” based upon their individual opinions, experiences and expertise, leading

to plausible, possible future narratives that can be discussed, dissected and critiqued.

These methods can be explored and utilised in varying ways. New York-based research studio The Extrapolation Factory [10] works through the rapid imagining, prototyping and deployment of possible new futures to the creation of hypothetical props or objects. They embody futures in ways that are at once familiar to an audience, yet question their reality, and the reality of their fictional future context.

“A kind of halfway between fact and fiction (...) telling stories that appear real and legible (...) Offering some sort of reflection on how things are, and how they might become something else.”

Julian Bleeker - near future laboratory [11]

3.2 Designed fictions

The VVFA co-enquiry takes the form of a facilitated workshop where, depending on the situation, members of the public or students work to collaboratively build a world of entangled narratives focussing on the potentials of the “Very Very Far Away.” The workshop format varies as to the duration and number of participants, ranging from single-day sessions through to longer, more in-depth enquiries that last up to one month. The initial structure and aim of the co-enquiry does remain consistent — a process of collaborative world building from the base up, developing a detailed context from which to justify and formulate further speculation. It also serves to develop directions for the podcast. This duality in the co-enquiry is made clear at the start of each session - there is a pedagogical aim; teaching a methodology and process to co-enquiry participants, whilst also a research function for the wider VVFA project beyond the co-enquiry itself (the co-enquiry also performs a role in the development of an audience for the podcast and its dissemination).

The workshop begins with an introduction of the overall VVFA project and a description of the session’s goals — understanding a speculative design process in action and developing a detailed context from which to develop informed speculation. Participants are then directed in groups to create a timeline as a basis upon which speculations could be mapped, and their lineage traced, thus providing a level of plausibility to their ideas.

Timelines used in the co-enquiry differ from the traditional single axis format, as a vertical dimension (y) is incorporated. As such, speculations and their associated lineage are mapped on a scale from an infinite point in the past, to infinite point in the future, mapped along the x axis. The y axis provides a scale ranging from the dystopic through to utopic idealism.

The purpose of the y axis is to start to incorporate the opinions and subjective interests of the individuals taking part in the co-enquiry, thus asking participants to take a stance as to how they perceive and relate to the topics that they are mapping.

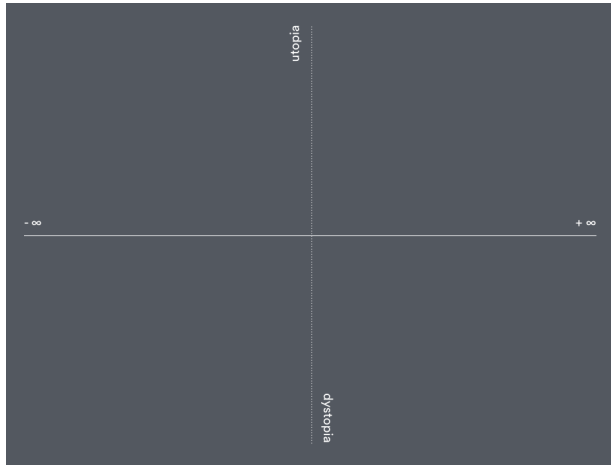


Fig. 2. Blank timeline

Over the course of the co-enquiry, a series of prompts are given to each group, initially offering a series of outline contexts. The prompts are chosen by the facilitators of the co-enquiry, previous context prompts have included: Space mining, Physiology, Resources and Power, Habitation and Farming. These prompts have led to ideas and discussion around topics including the ownership of extraterrestrial services, life “off planet”, physiology in space, and terraforming.

As timelines are developed, it is possible to draw out narrative trends and patterns, both in the traditional sequential (x axis) where a happens as a result of b and c, and the non linear y axis where ideas are grouped spatially in relation to the input parameters of the timeline.

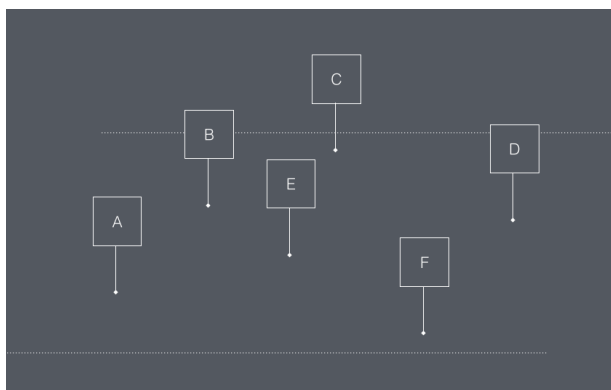


Fig. 3. Spatial distribution of narratives

The resultant timeline can start to form nodes of interest around certain key contextual points. From these nodes, we can start to extract potential narrative or

story elements in a process of story mining. This story mining process engages with the space between the nodes, highlighting potential tensions and possible relationships that can be expanded upon and developed as the timeline is worked further.

3.3 Story mining

This initial context forms a base for a second layer of detail to be added onto the timeline as we start to question “why?” and what the motivations for such development could be.

Participants are given “motivations” and tasked with addressing their timelines through the lens of what that motivation may be. Motivations used in recent co-enquiries include: Profit, Sustainability, Fame, Beauty and Greater Good. The motivations are overlaid onto and around the context layer of the timelines.



Fig. 4. Timeline development, Space Art + Tech

The layering of motivations onto the initial context allows multiple perspectives to emerge. This is partly brought about by the diverse mix of participants attending the co - enquiry, and their individual expertise and experiences being brought into account whilst discussing and building depth to the speculation through multiple understandings.

“People are scared of the notion of death, therefore it has become a human right to keep their minds in an endless simulation of heaven, an afterlife utopia. The price to pay for this is that each mind’s knowledge is accessible to anybody who seeks to retrieve information.”

Script extract, Co-enquiry, Masterstudio, Basel 2016
[12]

Through the timelines created with post-graduate interdisciplinary design students at the University of Northwestern Switzerland, (FHNW), Basel, utopian notions of an afterlife came about, whilst critically

countered by the corporate ownership of data and possible exploitation/ownership of this afterlife. It thus exposed a duality: eternal life versus the possible exploitation of your data and associated rights/identity.

The final set of prompts is the addition of characters, adding perspectives and starting to highlight and focus in on particular narrative and story elements from within the worlds created. This adds a “who” and in so doing a recognition of the stakeholders involved, and depending upon the characters that a group is working with, a set of motivations and associated stance as per the characters themselves. Recent characters from a public co-enquiry held at Space Art and Technology in London during November 2016 include individuals such as the “detective,” “guru” or “labourer,” through to an AI interacting with a householder discussing energy usage, and confusions derived from errors and miscellanies within these systems. With each of these there is an intentional familiarity in terms of being individuals that are recognisable either because of media coverage, or through cultural tropes; participants and audience members should be able to empathise with these characters to some degree, understanding and critiquing multiple perspectives in relation to the topics discussed. Narrative is embodied providing a vehicle for possible ideologies in an accessible format.

3.4 Reverse archeology

The process of crafting narratives from within nodes and key points uncovered with the timeline can be likened to a reverse form of archeology, whereby possible points in the future are identified, and through the development of the world that they inhabit and exist, a new context is imagined. This process allows a wider audience to more easily envisage and relate to the futures proposed.

This works in a two-fold manner: that of fiction with design or technology at its core, and that where the use of a designed icon or diegetic prototype becomes the heart of the fiction and a tool for speculation. Raymond-Millet’s 1947 film *Télévision, oeil de demain* [13] depicts a future where through miniaturisation, television (at the time a very new technology) was made portable and integrated into a Parisian everyday. The film uses comedy and familiarity to portray a slightly absurdist future in a very accessible way. This is a familiar unknown which, when viewed today, bears an uncanny resemblance to the proliferation of screen-based interaction in our current environment.

The creation of the iconic object around which a future can exist, shifts the focus towards the imagined use of a tool or enabling device. The car from Dunne and Raby’s *United Micro Kingdom* [14] taps into the tropes of the technological device (in this case the automobile, the symbol of early 20th century

modernity). However, through the actual design of the vehicle, it purports to describe more than we are totally familiar with, its tall boxy shape and lack of aerodynamic form imposes a new, alternative language of use and of technology underpinning the vehicle. The icon thus becomes a tool for a new reading of a future told through its idiosyncrasies. Sometimes futures described through such icons or objects can be prompts for popular technological development -- a case in point being the Hoverboard from Robert Zemekis’s *Back to the Future 2* (1989, USA) [15], elevated from simple movie prop to cultural meme and (eventually) functioning device.

Through crafting the objects, situations and scenarios that depict possible futures in a way that is accessible, we are able to form perceptual bridges enabling a wide audience to experience and envisage themselves within the speculated future.

The scope of the designed icon can also extend through to the icon as tool for communication to an envisaged future. The pioneer plaque, designed by Carl and Linda Sagen with Frank Drake, attempts to preempt the archaeologist, providing a distilled representation of our present and an embodiment of humanity to be read by unknown entities at an unspecified time in the future. The plaque, along with Voyager’s golden record-providing sample of our world, a time capsule from the mid-20th century.

3.5 Documentation

The final part of the co-enquiry goes through an analysis of the timeline and process of narrative extraction. Key points of interest are highlighted through group conversation -- these are then taken (along with their associated contextual parts) and developed to form the skeleton for a new designed fiction, telling the story through varying means dependant upon the duration and actual context of the co-enquiry in question.

During the co-enquiry at FHNW in Basel, participants were asked to design short interview dialogues and develop these into recorded audio plays. The emphasis here was placed on the design of the questions themselves, and how by using certain prompts and narrative devices it was possible to illustrate the topic in question, and also the wider world (or future) that the subject existed within. The net result of the co-enquiry became an audio archive of potential futures, along with a wide reaching body of research in the form of the timelines themselves.

The VVFA podcast uses this data from the co-enquiries as content generator for new scripts, designed to synthesise key ideas from the workshops and package them in an accessible form for a wider audience. Each

episode is designed to detail an aspect of the overall superfiction. The final superfiction makes use of familiar tropes in terms of podcast language, tone and production values, and aims through the level of detail, ideological lineage and plausibility of narrative elements/characters to craft an illusion analogous to reality, thus prompting further questions from its audience. The use of superfictitious methods in this realm is not new -- perhaps the most famous example is the Orson Welles 1938 radio rendition of H.G. Wells' *War of the Worlds* [16]. Despite disclaimers, through its production values and broadcast it convinced many that an actual Martian invasion was taking place.

4. Dissemination

VVFA uses the podcast and radio broadcast as a means for dissemination of ideas to a wide audience. Since Marconi's first radio broadcasts in the early 20th century, the radio as a means of entertainment has united audiences. Wide swathes of the population have been able to listen to the same content, thus creating a shared cultural experience. The podcast takes traditional radio and democratizes the medium through easily accessible technology new content that can be created without the need for complicated equipment or licenses. By simply uploading to the internet it can be consumed at the convenience of the listener, creating a shared listening experience often more intimate than that of a traditional radio broadcast.

Since the release of Apple's podcast app in 2012, the company has seen over a billion subscribers download and sign on. According to analytics carried out by Edison Research [17], over 21% of Americans over the age of 12 are listening to podcasts every month, and this figure is increasing year over year. It is up 23% from 2016.

The production of the VVFA podcast as a self contained audio file takes place in London, UK and Los Angeles, USA. The digital nature of the medium allows for an easy international collaboration as scripts are written and edited simultaneously online, with files combined to create the final content. The international collaboration in production allows the podcast to address a more global audience through the scripting and design of the narrative, addressing more than just its local audience. The medium also has the practicality of being quite fast to produce, thus allowing a potentially quicker turnaround of episodes/content creation.

Dissemination via podcast/radio is appropriate due to the potential suggestivity of the medium and the simplicity in terms of how data can be interpreted by the audience. Radio is reliant on the imagination of an audience and their interpretation of events described to them, their imagination filling in the blanks within and between delivered audio content. It is also a medium

that we are familiar with. By using this familiarity, we have a chance to educate our audience in areas that may be less familiar to them. Clear narrative arcs can be developed based directly on the data collected from the co-enquiries and fashioned around real world references (these could be companies or facilities, for instance Space X or the International Space Station). These references form anchors basing the narrative in the real world, and a springboard to motivate further research beyond the podcast itself.

The VVFA podcast is broadcast on the Internet/FM radio station Dublab, reaching an audience beyond that of the downloaded podcast. This increases its visibility and draw, countering the main problem with the podcast medium which is that the audience must choose to listen to the content, rather than the traditional radio broadcast where listeners may serendipitously stumble upon content. By combining both broadcasting options, we are able to offer the listener the intimate experience of the podcast and additionally catch potential new listeners with the live broadcast.

To date, co-enquiry participants have come from a wide range of backgrounds and expertise, including people working in similar areas to the project, students, educators and innovation/marketing professionals, as well as finance professionals, scientists and space enthusiasts. The podcast and co-enquiry have developed a symbiotic relationship, with the podcast generating an audience and traction for future co-enquiries, and the co-enquiry developing content and audience for the podcast, thus creating a feedback loop that is serving a wide audience. New perspectives and increased depth and detail are added to the superfictitious world as more people are involved in the co-enquiry, and subsequently more content is created from a wider range of sources. VVFA constantly evolves and forms a growing archive of potential futures.

To date we have delivered 13 co-enquiries in 5 countries to over 120 participants, with further co-enquiries in discussion with institutions in Australasia and North America. The Podcast is available online and broadcast on *Speak My Language* [18] part of DubLab's LA based programming, in addition to being featured by public institutions such as the Getty Centre in Los Angeles, the Antarctic pavilion in Venice, and Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

5. Conclusion

Through the creation of narratives and their dissemination, VVFA hopes to uncover pathways leading to alternative ways of thinking about the future. It uses space exploration to fuel and excite the social imaginary.

VVFA is interested in collating a wide and diverse range of ideas and interpretations from its co-enquiries and events, and compiling them to form a dataset of potential futures related to the public's aspirations.

This collection can serve as a source of inspiration for opening up conversations and debates regarding the ethical and cultural implications of technology on a perceived future, as well as creating an awareness of topics that may initially be preconceived as being for expert practitioners only. This democratisation of potentials and its proposed public involvement are the vector that will empower us to imagine and anticipate new possibilities.

Whilst VVFA may not be the only catalyst for imagining tomorrow's belief system and values, it facilitates a multiplicity of perspectives, thereby encouraging some informed skepticism or positivism and a better understanding, bridging the consequences of current developments and actions with new future possibilities.

The multiplicity and flexibility of its format makes this research platform easily deployable. Working with various public and private institutions has encouraged us to devise a structure and method that can be adapted to diverse needs and timeframes, from single-day workshops, to public performances in large public institutions.

Focussing on VVFA's potential for public engagement, our model proposes an ever evolving structure where through its growing content gathered from co-enquiries, public events and the dissemination of its podcast, it increases its potential for engagement, in turn leading to more opportunities for engage with people and institutions of interest, and wider engagement.

Its serendipitous development is also a key factor, enabling us to connect and work with various people, interested in exploring new aspects of its methodology, leading eventually to unforeseen areas of collaboration. Its organic and collaborative nature has so far brought us to unexpected places whilst the narratives created as a result help us to bring the distant future into a more familiar unknown.

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