

Think Club
City Canteen, Cardiff Bay, 271107

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FUTURE MATTERS

Futures are made everywhere, all the time.
We are immensely accomplished in producing them,
in our daily lives, through our work, alone, and with others.
Examples from people in the room: new life, innovations, art/efacts.
But our control over outcomes and our knowledge of effects are limited.

Before I talk about a recent research project on the future I ask your input.
When you think about futures – what comes into your mind first?
Can you please represent this on the paper provided?
Then talk about it to the person next to you.
And remember your conversation.

My expertise: social relations of time
Work always ends in future: Future unresolved.
I write and externalise to get to know my intuitions.
The Poem stands at the beginning of the research project.
It set the scene, the tone, the mood & already offered key insights.

Poem: *Futures* (below)

It pointed to different experts on the future and different forms of knowledge.
It identified a variety of means through which futures are created.
It showed different tools for future making and their effects.
And it alerts us to a lack of responsibility for outcomes.

Thus, the relation between Action, Knowledge and Ethics became the project's focus.
Findings: 1. immense capacity to produce futures from the short term to millennia
is not matched by an equal knowledge over potential outcomes & symptoms.
2. Responsibility is made dependent on knowledge of future effects.
In contexts of uncertainty irresponsibility reigns supreme.

It was not me – is a defence in law.
I could not have known – is a defence in law.
I had no control over others' actions – is a defence in law.
I only invented the thing, the problem arises with use – defence in law.
All four defences underpin not just law but the way we conduct our affairs:
in business, in the economy, in politics, in waste management, in planning policy.

Finding 3: our relationship to the future used not to be like this – mark of modernity
When the future belonged to god(s) responsibility for it was NOT in human hands.
Promise and ritual were they key means to ensure predictability & certainty.
Experts sought access to the pre-destined future, to know individual fate.
Today we think of the future as ours to plan, shape, make and change.
Our future is open and empty potential, to be actualised & filled
with our dreams and desires, plans, designs and projections.

We know our future through calculations based on knowledge of the past.
Aggregates, collectives and rates of change NOT individual fates
are subject of our projections BUT past is poor key to future
Freedom of action combined with the pursuit of progress
Or quests for innovation produce unknowable effects
Ownership plus innovation = uncertain outcomes

At same time, assuming ownership over the future brings inevitable responsibility.
This applies whether or not we know or have any control over effects.
It applies whether or not the varied effects were intended.
It applies whether or not we experience those effects.
It applies for outcomes across space and time.

Finding 4: Making futures means we operate in our successors' domains.
We are trespassers, colonising their presents with our deeds/inventions.
We borrow, steal, spoil, change, eliminate, what's rightfully theirs.
But since they have no voice, no vote to object, they don't exist
and we can act with impunity & freedom from blame/redress.
This is the foundation for institutional *ir*responsibility.

Yet, responsibility for our actions is the key mark of a citizen.
Why is this principle not applied across space & *time*?
Why not for effects beyond our own life time?
Why not beyond individuals to collectives?
Why not for users *and* innovators?
Why not for the unknown?

We worry about our footprint.
We are concerned about climate change.
We plan responses into the long term future to 2050.
But our actions have open-ended, ongoing, long-term effects.
Not just the footprints of matter in space but our *timeprints** are at issue.
Action-knowledge-responsibility relation needs to become appropriate to *timeprint*.

Two Questions for discussion:

1. How could this be accomplished?
2. And what would need to be changed to achieve it?

Website: www.cardiff.ac.uk/socsi/futures/

*D: *Timeprint* extends the idea of the ecological footprint by adding the temporal extension of the impact of our actions

FUTURES

We tell futures
Druids & wizards
Oracles & prophets
Astrologers & palmists
Scientists and soothsayers
All but different means & modes

We know futures
From past experiences
Forecasts & forebodings
By prevision & premonitions
Through clairvoyance & intuition
To indeterminate degrees of certainty

We create futures
Through technology
Science & economics
For ourselves and others
Here and in distant locations
With no responsibility for effects

We colonise futures
With clock time values
And unintended outcomes
With econo-political impacts
And techno-scientific innovations
With impunity & freedom from redress

We eliminate futures
Our own & successors'
Through present-orientation
In politics, science and business
With the help of economic discounting
And no guardians to safeguard environments

We risk others' futures
Trading opportunity costs
For personal & political gain
Without being held to account
For potential harm to those affected
With no plans to protect new generations