

TECHNOSCIENTIFIC IMAGINARIES & FUTURES

When: Fridays, 14.00-15.20

THIS COURSE WILL BE HELD ONLINE ONLY ON GOOGLE MEET

meet.google.com/mdw-pquc-eog

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Office hours: by appointment (email me)

Course description

Is the future already gone once the world itself is pronounced? When is the future? These questions puzzled philosophers as well as physicists for millennia. This course will, however, advance slightly different, more modest, approach toward the notion of the future – especially in relationship to technoscience. How humans conceive future is central to the understanding of present social life. But how specifically do people make sense of the unknown – and unknowable – future? In this course we will discuss several directions that might help us to tackle – not resolve or offer solutions – and “accept” such vital questions. At the same time, imagining a better future has been constant collective feature (perhaps) of the entire social history, that reached its climax over the course of modernity. Visions of future(s), expectations, anticipations, the role strange of economists in co-shaping collective futures, utopian, anti-utopian, dystopian and catastrophic projections of future are integral components – barely thematised – in private and public discourse. The course will explore how social collectives craft, negotiate, contest and realize such projections. In the course we will be oscillating between technoscientific imaginaries that are inclining to utopian and dystopian science fiction, “profitable futuristic hubris” (e.g. Kurzweil & Harari), modes of anticipation and systematic techniques of expectations, and futures that are profiling themselves as promising in security-related, socio-economic, environmental and psychological sense. Is another technoscientific world possible? – one is tempted to ask nowadays. It remains extremely difficult to come up with definitive answer, but it is surely worth asking this question.

Aims of the Course

- gaining basic knowledge about social scientific streams exploring and problematizing how future(s) is/are dealt with, theorized and analysed
- opening up the question of imaginaries and utopia as relevant concept (and perhaps “activities”) in the world where liberal democracy apparently reached “end of history”, there are many obvious evidences that it has not. The question is an old one, but still pressing if slightly modified: “Is another (technoscientific) world possible”?
- almost every imaginary and future projects involves some sociotechnical artefact, solution, infrastructure etc, thus in the course we will be focusing on such entities and in the second part of

the course relate them to questions around security and related technologies (e.g. pandemics, money, AI, nuclear bomb)

The Structure of the Course

1) Intro: Modernity's Unknowables (23/2)

Is another technoscientific world possible? Donald Rumsfeld's unexpected philosophical moment – I guess even, perhaps mostly, for him: Known-knows; known-unknowns, unknown unknowns; unknown knowns.

2) What is the Future? When is the Future? (1/3)

Looking *at* the future vs looking *into* the future.

Readings:

Urry J (2015) *What Is The Future?* Cambridge: Polity, pp. 1-86

O'Shea L (2019) *Future Histories: What Ada Lovelance, Tom Paine and the Paris Commune Can Teach Us about Digital Technology*. New York: Verso, pp. 1-12 & 65-94.

3) Imagining Imaginaries (8/3)

Language of and rhetoric of techno-scientific futures. What is an imaginary?

Readings:

Jessop B (2013) Recovered imaginaries, imagined recoveries: A cultural political economy of crisis construals and crisis management in the North Atlantic financial crisis. *In Before and Beyond the Global Economic Crisis*, edited by M. Benner. Cheltenham: Edward Edgar, pp. 234-254.

Strauss C (2006) The Imaginary. *Anthropological Theory* 6(3): 322-344.

There will be no class on 15/3

4) Utopia I: A Concept (22/3)

"It is possible to imagine the end of the world, but not the end of capitalism" (Jameson, Žižek). Hmm... is it?

Readings:

Levitas R (2011/1990) *The Concept of Utopia*. London: Peter Lang, pp. 11-67.

Frase P (2016) *Four Futures: Life After Capitalism*. New York: Verso, pp. 1-34.

5) Utopia II: Anti-Utopia & Dystopia (5/4)

Is reality stranger than (science) fiction? Versions of future. What is the difference between anti-utopia and dystopia?

Readings:

Claeys G (2017) *Dystopia: A Natural History*. Oxford: OUP, pp. 3-79.

Featherstone M (2017) *Planet Utopia: Utopia, Dystopia, and Globalization*. London: Routledge, pp. 1-22.

Standing G (2018) 'Taskers in the Precariat: Confronting an Emerging Dystopia.' In *Confronting Dystopia: The New Technological Revolutions and the Future of Work* edited by E Paus. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, pp. 115-133.

6) The Future of Money (12/4)

What will happen to money in the near future? Will cash still be "the king"? Or will Facebook's Libra and other digital currencies replace paper money as we know it? If so what might it mean for socio-economic ordering?

Readings:

Güller A (2019) 'Libra: The New World Currency.' *The Journal of International Social Research* DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17719/jisr.2019.3515>

De Jong E, Tkacz N, Velasco P (2015) "'Live as Friends and Count as Enemies": On Digital Cash and the Media of Payment.' In *MoneyLab Reader: An Intervention in Digital Economy* edited by G Lovink, N Tkacz, P De Vries, pp. 257-267.

Hart K (2015) 'Money in the Making of World Society.' In *MoneyLab Reader: An Intervention in Digital Economy* edited by G Lovink, N Tkacz, P De Vries, pp. 19-31.

Berardi F (2015) 'Is there a Life Beyond Money.' In *MoneyLab Reader: An Intervention in Digital Economy* edited by G Lovink, N Tkacz, P De Vries, pp. 32-43.

7) "Stolen" Future?: The Case of Covid-19 (19/4)

What kind of futures can we expect in post-Covid world? What if a much more deadly virus will spread globally in such a speed fashion? Isn't governmental arrangements associated with Covid overblown? Isn't the lockdown unprecedented opportunity to rethink socio-economic order?

Readings:

Caduff (2020) 'What Went Wrong: Corona and the World after the Full Stop.' *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* DOI: 10.1111/maq.12599

Rosa (2020a) 'All of a sudden we are no longer the hunted - Interview:' <https://filipvostal.net/2020/04/22/interview-with-hartmut-rosa-1-all-of-a-sudden-we-are-no-longer-the-hunted/>

Rosa (2020b) 'We are in a test laboratory - Interview:' <https://filipvostal.net/2020/04/28/interview-with-hartmut-rosa-2-we-are-in-a-test-laboratory/>

Pelopidas B & Verschuren (forthcoming) 'Writing IR after COVID-19: Reassessing Political Possibilities, Good Faith and Policy Relevant Scholarship on Climate Change Mitigation and Nuclear Disarmament.' Unpublished manuscript.

Scambler G (2020) 'Covid-19 as a "Breaching Experiment": Exposing the Fractured Society.' *Health Sociology Review* 29(2): 140-148. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14461242.2020.1784019>

8) Crafting Futures I. Futures of Work (26/4)

Automation, AI, robotics, advanced computing will surely change the future of work or labour. What kind of humans we will be in automated? What will be our – humans – relationship to the world?

Readings:

Benanav A (2019a) 'Automation and the Future of Work – 1'. *New Left Review* 119 (Sept/Oct): 5-38.

Benanav A (2019b) 'Automation and the Future of Work – 2'. *New Left Review* 120 (Nov/Dec 2019): 117-146

9) Crafting Futures II. Will Economics (Keep) Dictating the Future? (3/5)

How come that economics keep dictate the future after financial crash of 2008, when mainstream neoliberal economics embarrassingly failed?

Readings:

Fourcade M, Ollion E, Algan Y (2015) 'The Superiority of Economists.' *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 29(1): 89-114

Irwin N (2017) 'What if Sociologists Has as Much Influence as Economists?' *New York Times*, March 17, 2017, available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/17/upshot/what-if-sociologists-had-as-much-influence-as-economists.html>

10) Crafting Futures III. Prophets & (Hubris) Futurologists – A New "Profession"? (10/5)

Critique of two, arguably most popular, best-selling futurologists: Kurzweil & Harari.

Readings:

Kurzweil R (2005) *The Singularity is Near: When Humans Transcends Biology*. London: Penguin, pp. 21-94.

Harari YN (2016) *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow*. New York: Harper Collins (part called the *New Human Agenda*).

Lent J (2019) 'The Unacknowledged Fictions of Yuval Harari'. *Open Democracy* Jan 9, 2019, available at: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/transformation/unacknowledged-fictions-of-yuval-harari/>

McDermott D (2007) 'Level-Headed'. *Artificial Intelligence* 171(2007): 1183-1186. 12)

There is no class on 17/5

11) AI & (Ro)Bots – Between Substantive Imaginaries & Day-Dreaming (24/5)

Where are we standing with AI and robots now? Socio-economically, scientifically and “futurologistically”?

Readings:

Kainia (2019) ‘Interview with Else B Kania on AI and Great Power of competition by Franz-Stefan Gady’ *The Diplomat*, Dec 31, 2019.

Plebe A & Grasso G (2019) ‘The Unbearable Shallow Understanding of Deep Learning’ *Minds & Machines* 29(4): 515-553.

Niemitz P (2019) ‘Constitutional Democracy and Technology in the Age of Artificial Intelligence’ *Philosophical Transactions A* DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1098/rsta.2018.0089>

Reading List

Please refer to syllabus and SIS. for a detailed list of required and additional readings for each session.

Course Requirements

The students’ performance in the course will be assessed based on the following criteria:

ATTENDANCE/ACTIVITY (25%)

All students are expected to participate in sessions by contributing with their observations and insights based on readings. Attendance therefore also means active participation in discussions. One unexcused absence will be tolerated, more absences will be considered on an individual basis.

PRESENTATION (25%)

The presentations will take place at the beginning of each session and will introduce the readings assigned for the very session. PPT is optional, students are encouraged to present in groups.

FINAL PROJECT (50%)

The project (I accept individual & collective projects) does not have to be a traditional essay i.e., a written text. You are encourage to be creative and bold whilst capturing course-related themes using various media, visuals, digital technologies, podcasts, photography/visual essays and more -- this really depends on your imagination as I am open to experimental ideas, for instance a short film about particular futures and/or technoscientific imaginers and/or anticipations and how they are materially enacted - and with what implications - in the present. The project needs to be complemented with 1-2 pages long synopsis and explanation.

!!BUT PLEASE DISCUSS SUCH PROJECTS WITH ME FIRST!!!

Traditional essay is also possible nevertheless and the essay questions/themes will be provided in the latter part of the course. The essays should be 2500-3000 words in length (incl. bibliography). Co-authorship is possible: max 3 authors allowed however (2 authors = 4000 words; 3 authors = 6000 words).

THE PROJECT DEADLINE IS DUE ON 15 JUNE, 2024 (by midnight), TO BE SENT TO MY EMAIL.

Marking Scale

General Grade	Grade Specification	Percentage
A - excellent	Excellent upper (1)	100 – 96
	Excellent lower (2)	95 - 91
B – very good	Very good upper (1)	90 - 86
	Very good lower (2)	85 – 81
C - good	Good upper (1)	80 – 76
	Good lower (2)	75 – 71
D - satisfactory	Satisfactory upper (1)	70 – 66
	Satisfactory lower (2)	65 – 61
E - sufficient	Sufficient upper (1)	60 - 56
	Sufficient lower (2)	55 - 51
F - fail		50 - 0

Course Rules

The *Code of Study and Examination of Charles University in Prague* provides the general framework of study rules at the university. According to art. 6, par. 17 of this Code, “a student may not take any examination in any subject entered in his study plan more than three times, i.e. he shall have the right to two resit dates; no extraordinary resit date shall be permitted. (...) If a student fails to appear for an examination on the date for which he has enrolled without duly excusing himself, he shall not be marked; the provision of neither this nor of the first sentence shall constitute the right to arrange for a special examination date.”

Any written assignment composed by the student shall be an original piece. The practices of plagiarism, defined by the Dean’s Provision no. 18/2015, are seen as “a major violation of the rules of academic ethics” and “will be penalized in accordance with Disciplinary Regulations of the faculty.”

This instructor believes academic honesty is the foundation of the entire enterprise of a university. The personal integrity policy works for both students and teachers. Students can expect that the instructor will

treat them in a fair, honest, and impartial manner. The instructor also expects students to deal with him and with one another honestly.

Plagiarism* and cheating are violations of academic honesty because they steal from the original creator of the work. In addition, they violate the relationship of honesty between student and teacher as the student attempts to pass off work as his or her own which was produced by another. Further, plagiarism and cheating violate the bond of honesty among students themselves. Students who produce their assignments through long, hard work are being violated by those taking a shortcut through the misappropriation of another's work or knowledge. Most sadly, students who violate academic honesty cheat themselves of the chance to learn. Only in an environment of honesty can genuine learning occur and good citizenship be fostered.

Because academic honesty is treated as a serious matter, the course policy is one of zero tolerance for academic dishonesty. Cheating and plagiarism will not be tolerated. If you are caught cheating at any point during the course, you will automatically fail the course.

*PLAGIARISM – “the unauthorized use or close imitation of the language and thoughts of another author and the representation of them as one's own original work.” Random House Unabridged Dictionary, 2nd ed. (New York: Random House, 1993).