

Charles F. Kettering, in perhaps the greatest display of deliberative rhetoric ever, famously argued, “We should all be concerned about the future because we will have to spend the rest of our lives there.”

Rhetoric and the Future considers some of the ways we talk about the future, how we argue for and describe it, in order to better understand what sorts of arguments are successful and what “successful” means. Taking seriously William Gibson’s claim that “the future is already here — it’s just not very evenly distributed,” we are most interested in how the future is figured now, for whom it is being offered, what these visions say about our own wants, and what we can learn of the motivations and assumptions behind those offerings.

Readings will be various and may include work from rhetorical theory, design and human/computer interface theory, literature, design fiction, and new futurism. Some of the coursework will be born-digital — it’s the future — but no prior knowledge or ability in specific computer applications is required. Class will be divided between seminar discussions and studio work and will consist of both solitary and collaborative projects, including several presentations.

Required Accounts:

- a Tumblr page devoted to this course

Recommended Accounts:

- Evernote, Pocket, Dropbox, Hypothesis, anything else you could use to save, share, and annotate the web; share your methods

Reading List:

- *The Private Eye* Vol. 1 (issues 1-5) — Brian K. Vaughan, Marcos Martin, and Muntsa Vicente
- *The Epic Struggle of the Internet of Things* - Bruce Sterling
- *No Speed Limit: Three Essays on Accelerationism* — Steven Shaviro
- *Normal: A Novel* — Warren Ellis
- *Four Futures: Life After Capitalism* — Peter Frase
- *Speculative Everything: Design, Fiction, and Social Dreaming* — by Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby

Projects:

Critical Tumblr-ing

Mostly, people post stuff on Tumblr because they like that stuff. Often, the page has a focus to start with. Sometimes, these posts start to create a context or focus outside of what the blogger intended. Use your course Tumblr account to gather anything course-topical that you find interesting and follow others in the course, too. It's a different, public way of taking notes and keeping track of inspiration. See what happens. Also, do the below for a grade.

Make a minimum of one course post a week (title it COURSE POST #: SOME SNAPPY TITLE HERE) with the following criteria. Each of these posts must consist of a minimum of

- two images
- either a link or a quote relating to or commenting on the image(s)
- a text box in which you make clear the connection(s) to the course readings and/or “the future” as we’re discussing it.

Your post may be in response to someone else’s post, but you cannot repost someone else’s image who is in the class. We’ll have a master list so that we can all follow each other.

We will discuss some of the most engaging or thought-provoking of these Course Posts as a group.

Speculative Archaeology - Kickstarter

Find three (3) Kickstarter projects that haven’t closed yet and that you find particularly engaging, promising, whatever. Choose projects that you think you’ll want to spend some time with. Be prepared to present them to the class and make an argument for what’s special and deserving of attention therein (in 5 minutes)

After these presentations, you’ll use class responses and discussions to choose ONE of these Kickstarter projects to use for the assignments below throughout the rest of the semester.

- **Kickstarter Archaeology #1**

Pull together the information the Kickstarter pitch gives you. What need or desire is the project addressing? What do the different levels tell you of the organizers’ expectations of audience? What do the actual numbers of backers at each level tell you? What promises about the future does the pitch make? Do you think it will be funded? Why or why not? Prepare this as a presentation to the rest of the class (with slides, etc.).

- **Kickstarter Archaeology #2**

Trace an incremental, speculative history for the project. In six (6) steps, extending 300 years back (so, from 1718 or so), trace the evolution of the technologies or innovations that made the proposed project possible. These could be products of engineering or invention, social changes, laws, population shifts, whatever. Make charts, timelines, reenactments, whatever. Make it “historical” and compelling.

- **Kickstarter Archaeology #3**

Now, speculate in three (3) steps about advancements that will transform or otherwise affect the project in the next 20 years. Your final project should take the form of a design fiction (as most broadly understood) and may take a variety of forms: prototypes and sketches, a fake Kickstarter page, print advertising series, “serious academic article,” product video, etc. Consider the population it is directed toward, what economic model it supposes, etc. You should append/include detailed rationalizations/evidence to support your project (with works cited; see Hyperrhiz 13 for examples). Feel free to work and present solo, or to combine your efforts with one or two other students whose subjects or explorations overlap your own in interesting and useful ways.

Grades will be determined via a modified version of The Learning Record. There will be a midterm portfolio and a final portfolio in which you will write summary interpretations and evaluations of your development in the course based on specific criteria and with specific examples from your work.

Course Schedule:

Jan 17	Course Introduction Warren Ellis, "Myth and the River of Time," "How to See the Future"
Jan 24	Initial Readings: G. L. Ercolini and Pat J. Gehrke, "Writing Future Rhetoric" Tim Chatterton and Georgia Newmarch, "The Future is Already Here" Jussi Parikka, "Introduction: Cartographies of the Old and the New." <i>What is Media Archeology?</i> Kickstarter pitches
Jan 31	the Past and Present Future Venkatesh Rao, "Welcome to the Future Nauseous" Bruce Sterling, <i>The Epic Struggle of the Internet of Things</i> Mark Blythe, "The hitchhiker's guide to ubicomp" Steven Shaviro, <i>No Speed Limit: Three Essays on Accelerationism</i>
Feb 7	James Bridle, "Something is wrong on the internet" Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, "Crisis-Crisis-Crisis; or, The Temporality of Networks" Joichi Ito, "Resisting Reduction: Designing our Complex Future with Machines" Shannon Mattern, "A City Is Not a Computer" Hanna Hurr, "Panic City" Maureen Meadows and Matthijs Kouw, "Future-making: inclusive design and smart cities"

Feb 14	<p>Sarah Sharma, "Exit and the Extensions of Man"</p> <p>Erin Griffith, "The Other Tech Bubble"</p> <p>Lab time</p>
Feb 21	<p>Grace Wong, "It's not a bug, it's a feature: the rise of glitch art"</p> <p>booktwo.org — James Bridle</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land Art for the Internet • Impersonating the Machine • Starbooks and the Death of the Work • Everything wants to be digital • Network criticism • Network Realism: William Gibson and new forms of Fiction • The New Aesthetic and its Politics • Hauntological Futures • Starpunk <p>Charles Beckett, how to think about the future: hauntology</p>
Feb 28	Kickstarter Archaeology #1 presentations
March 7	<p>Anthony Dunne & Fiona Raby, <i>Speculative Everything: Design, Fiction, and Social Dreaming</i></p> <p>How to make cool stuff in Unity tutorial</p> <p>3D Printing Basics</p> <p>Rachel Armstrong, "Where did the future go?"</p> <p>Lab time</p>
March 14	SPRING BREAK

March 21	<p>Midterm LR Portfolio due</p> <p>Peter Frase, <i>Four Futures: Life After Capitalism</i> (Intro, Ch.1-2)</p> <p>Lab time</p>
March 28	<p>Peter Frase, <i>Four Futures: Life After Capitalism</i> (Ch. 3-4)</p> <p>Lab time</p>
April 4	Kickstarter Archaeology #2
April 11	<p>Brian K. Vaughan, Marcos Martin, and Muntsa Vicente, <i>The Private Eye</i> Vol. 1 (issues 1-5)</p> <p>xDxD.vs.xDxD, "Transmedia Narratives, simulacra, simulation, fake and design fiction"</p> <p>Lab time</p>
April 18	<p>Warren Ellis, <i>Normal: A Novel</i></p> <p>Lab time</p>
April 23	Lab time
April 25	Lab time
April 30	Kickstarter Archaeology #3
May 2	<p>Kickstarter Archaeology #3 cont.</p> <p>Final LR Portfolio due</p>