

Research Assignment at the Crossmedialab

Title

History of the Future: Popular Culture

Problem environment

The future has already inspired many people to envision how our – technological – society would or even should look like. The first visions of ‘television’ at the end of the 19th century come close to what we would call now interactive television. The arrival of electricity inspired people to reflect on “telegraphy without wires, posts, cables, or any of our present costly appliances”, which bears a strong resemblance to our 'wireless' hotspots.

Sometimes, these expectations about the future were recorded on video, which include, for example, Apple’s *Knowledge Navigator* video (1987), a video called *Starfire, A Vision of Future Computing in the Year 2004*, made by Sun Microsystems in 1995, which shows a clear vision of the office of the future, or, more recently, Sony’s *Blendo* video (2001) about interactive television interfaces.

These types of representations of the future are not only found in the realms of science or commerce, but also in the popular culture of films, games and cartoons, particularly those in the science fiction genre. Ranging from H.G. Wells’ *Time Machine* and Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis* and more modern films that portray a technological society (*Blade Runner*, *Gattaca*, *Minority Report*), to films that play on people’s fears that machines will conquer humanity (*Terminator*, *I Robot*) or films that purport to unmask reality (*Dark City*, *The Matrix*), and films that question the role of technology in evolution (*2001: A Space Odyssey*) or rather admire technology for its possibilities (*Jurassic Park*), films that pose moral questions about thought control and identity (*Total Recall*, *A.I.*) or films that play with technology just for the fun of it, such as the animated TV series *The Jetsons*. The recurring question is: where is the *fiction* in science fiction, so many years later.

The main purpose of this research is to deepen our knowledge of new media by putting it into a historical and analytical perspective. A historical perspective implies the identification, classification and description of earlier visions of technology and/or the development of ‘revolutionary’ products in the areas of communication and media. An analytical perspective requires that we interpret technology with the aid of questions, such as the underlying assumptions surrounding use, interaction, purpose, support and the like, and the extent to which they are still recognisable in present-day products and visions.

Research question

What is the relationship between ‘old’ visions of the future of communication and media and ‘old’ products, and present-day visions of new media content and new products? And what does this relationship say about present-day visions of communication and media?

Relationship with the Crossmedialab’s research project

This research is part of the 'History of the Future' project.

Business description:

The Crossmedialab (<http://www.crossmedialab.nl>) is a workplace within the Faculty of Communication & Journalism for applied research into cross-media content. The areas of research include media, cultural heritage, marketing and education, and focus on individual experience of cross-media, organisational value exchange processes and societal developments concerning media literacy. Research is conducted through a series of projects carried out by project teams, in which students, lecturers and external researchers and business partners participate.

Desired researcher profile:

You possess strong writing skills; you are pro-active and demonstrate a positive critical attitude. You have a broad interest in the research subject and you are ambitious. You enjoy working in a dynamic and challenging environment.

Contact information:

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Project assignment 30 ECTS (Graduation Project)

Examine and analyse the historical roots of present-day media content in the popular culture of the past 50 years.

Project approach

1. Select a theme, such as mobility, communication, interactivity or networks.
2. Collect examples to illustrate how this concept is represented and how it used to be represented in popular culture – for example, in science fiction films, cartoons, games, and commercials.
3. Collect present-day examples of ideas, concepts and products for the chosen theme.
4. Compare present-day and historical representations in popular culture with real-life developments and products with the aid of tools, such as conceptualisation, implementation, occupier's role, etc.

Project results

1. Graduation thesis
2. Contribution to Wiki 'History of the Future'
3. Presentations at the Crossmedialab
3. Contribution to the 'LabRats' book series.

Standard documents (all can be found at <http://www.crossmedialab.nl/curious>)

- Doing your graduation project at the Crossmedialab
- Templates for a research proposal, a research plan and a research report
- Case analysis
- Literature references.

Examples (all can be found at <http://www.crossmedialab.nl/impact>)

- Wiki 'History of the Future'
- Graduation thesis from Thomas Tjink
- Essays: Cyrano de Bergerac/Voyages to the moon and sun.

Respond

Please consult the guidelines for graduation projects at the Crossmedialab to complete the required steps if you want to participate in this graduation project.

Project assignment 15 ECTS (Graduation Project)

Examine and analyse the historical roots of present-day media content in the popular culture of the past 50 years.

Project approach*

1. Select a theme, such as mobility, communication, interactivity or networks.
2. Collect examples to illustrate how this concept is represented and how it used to be represented in popular culture – for example, in science fiction films, cartoons, games, and commercials.
3. Collect present-day examples of ideas, concepts and products for the chosen theme.
4. Compare present-day and historical representations in popular culture with real-life developments and products with the aid of tools, such as conceptualisation, implementation, occupier's role, etc.

Project results

1. Graduation thesis
2. Contribution to Wiki 'History of the Future'
3. Presentations at the Crossmedialab
3. Contribution to the 'LabRats' book series.

Standard documents (all can be found at <http://www.crossmedialab.nl/curious>)

- Doing your graduation project at the Crossmedialab
- Templates for a research proposal, a research plan and a research report
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- Literature references.

Examples (all can be found at <http://www.crossmedialab.nl/impact>)

- Wiki 'History of the Future'
- Graduation thesis from Thomas Tjink
- Essays: Cyrano de Bergerac/Voyages to the moon and sun.

Respond

Please consult the guidelines for graduation projects at the Crossmedialab to complete the required steps if you want to participate in this graduation project.

* Note: the difference with assignment 30 ECTS lies in the number of examples and the scope of the chosen theme.

Project assignment 5 ECTS (Practical Assignment)

Examine and analyse the historical roots of present-day media content in the popular culture of the past 50 years.

Project approach

1. Select five 'old' films or cartoons, magazines, commercials, books, games.
2. Assess, describe and analyse how communication and media content are used/represented.
3. Collect present-day examples of comparable ideas, concepts and products.
4. Compare present-day and historical representations in popular culture with real-life developments and products with the aid of tools, such as conceptualisation, implementation, occupier's role, etc.

Project results

1. Case description
2. Contribution to Wiki 'History of the Future'
3. Presentations at the Crossmedialab.

Standard documents (all can be found at <http://www.crossmedialab.nl/curious>)

- Case analysis
- Literature references.

Examples (all can be found at <http://www.crossmedialab.nl/impact>)

- Wiki 'History of the Future'
- Graduation thesis from Thomas Tjink
- Essays: Cyrano de Bergerac/Voyages to the moon and sun.