

Institute for **Social Futures**

Inter-Futures 1

Welcome to the first edition of the ISF Newsletter, Inter-Futures. Why Inter-Futures? Launched in September 2015, the Institute for Social Futures is a new future-forming inter-disciplinary research centre based in Lancaster University. We draw on several disciplines, largely though not only from the arts, humanities and social sciences (hence the 'inter') to think about and help shape futures that are social, grounded locally, and with a clear concern for the global, what Mike Berners-Lee, an ISF'er, calls the 'big picture'.

Inter-Futures will give us the chance to tell you more about who we are, what we're up to and how you can get involved. In this first issue, we focus on recent past events. Subsequent editions will give you more information on future projects, events, and other relevant initiatives.

Who we are: Our People

Past Futures by Carlos López Galviz

Think about Lancaster, say, 100, 400, or, 800 years ago. The city's streets, shops and houses, the castle, the riverside, the weather,

the people. Try and imagine what the future looked like as it was envisioned then, by whom, with what motivations and consequences. Arguably, envisioning and preparing for the future is one of the characteristics that makes us human. The legacies we have inherited from past generations and the legacies we will leave behind are part of the things we grapple with when thinking about our families, our society, the worlds around us. Cities, towns, and places more generally provide unique insights into how we can explore those legacies and, perhaps more importantly, how we can rework the relationship between the past and the future.

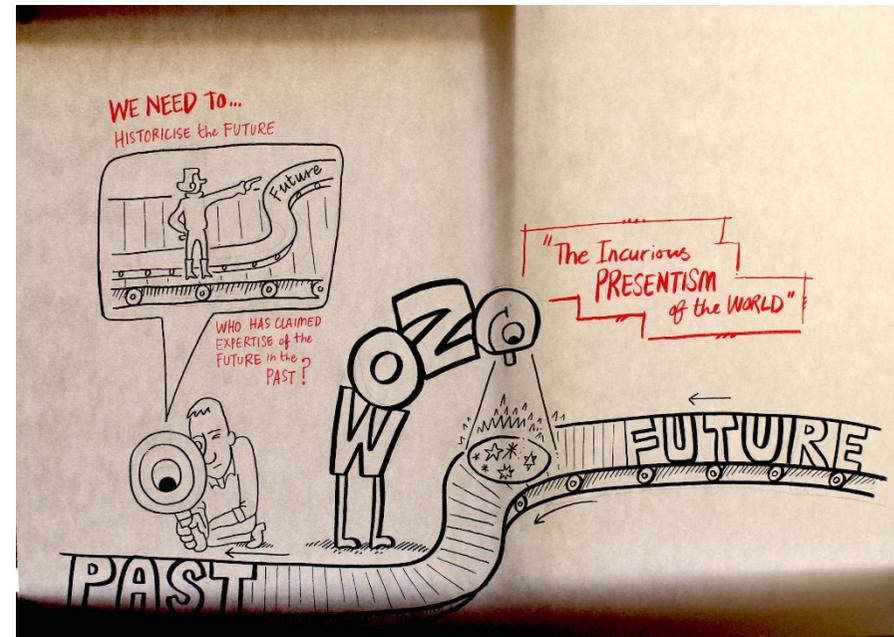
In the sequel to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There* (1871), Alice steps through a mirror to discover a distinct reflection of her own world, filled with new characters. Among them is the White Queen who remembers future events. A fictional character who remembers future events. This may sound like an oxymoron, but only if what connects memory to the future is an irreversible arrow whose trajectory can be described as a line. Consider a somewhat reversed situation: a character who forgets past events. This probably sounds more familiar: patients who can't recall their loved ones, their names, and past lives; cities and towns that obliterate their built and social fabric in the interest of progress and regeneration.

Yet, there is something more powerful at work here when we consider what connects, on the one hand, history, memory, the past, and, on the other hand, prediction, forecasting, the future. Images of the future of cities and places function like mirrors: they project worlds, which are both a distortion and a promise of

realities, a good number of which are yet to come. This is a process that has captivated generations throughout history, over centuries and millennia.

Recognising that the relationship between the past and the future is not as self-evident is important in at least two respects. First, it invites us to think about whether or not we are comfortable with the positions we have adopted –or have been given – in relation to our own past and our own future. Secondly, it encourages reflection on new ways with which to face change in the environments where we live and work.

And so reworking the relationship between the past and the future can be about joining Alice and the White Queen, less in their run across the chessboard –however fun that’d be (!) – and more in the sense of recognising the mirrors around us, daring to step through them, reshape them, and create our own. Often the future is shaped on our behalf, despite of our being conscious or not of the different rhythms that connect change in the past (geological, seasonal, over centuries, or, days) with the rhythms that tend to shape change in the future (the next smart phone, changes to pensions, health, security, education). Our role as citizens can include a different –and, if you like, playful – perspective: One where neither the past nor the future is fixed. One where openness and difference rather than closeness and fear provide hope.



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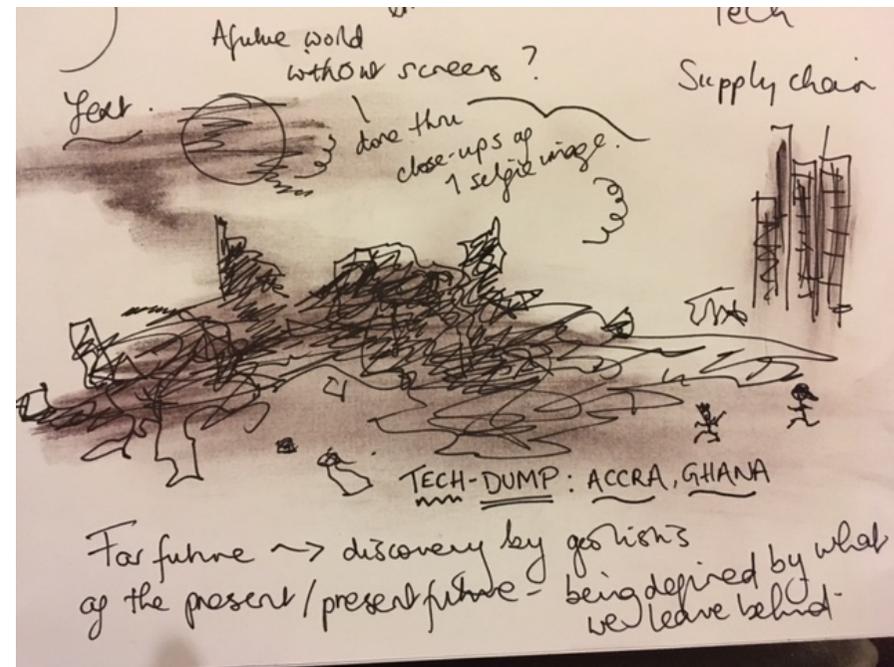
What we do: Events

Global Futures. The latest of the Global Futures events, led by Mike Berners-Lee, had **Sardar Masood Khan**, former Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Pakistan to the United Nations and currently serving as the President of Azad Jammu and Kashmir, speaking on Global Governance and World Peace. Forthcoming talks include:

- 9th January – Qaisra Shahraz, Emily Spiers and Graham Mort – Literary Futures (title to be confirmed)
- 6th February – Sylvia Walby – Towards Zero Violence

Graphic Futures is a project in collaborative authorship. Our aim is to use techniques from graphic fiction in order to explore how social futures are created in the now. As well as getting creative to co-produce our own kinds of comic strips, participants will reflect throughout on the extent to which the creative process brings a different perspective to our existing research methods. Visiting Professor in Graphic Fiction, Benoît Peeters, guides the project across the academic year in conjunction with Rebecca Braun and Emily Spiers, who are heading up the [Creative Futures strand](#) at ISF. The project will culminate in an exhibition and poster session in May 2018 that documents the process of working across disciplinary boundaries and outside our comfort zones. Research Associates Claire Dean (High Wire Doctoral Training Centre) and Ines Gregori Labarta (English Literature and Creative Writing) are helping run the sessions and document the methods development.

Team members: Liz Brewster (Medical School), Andy Darby (Computing & Communications), Catherine Easton (Law), Erika Fülöp (Languages & Cultures), Charlie Gere (Contemporary Arts), Tajinder Hayer (Creative Writing), Joe Deville (Sociology /Management School), Astrid Nordin (Politics), Richard Tutton (Sociology), Johnny Unger (Linguistics)



© Photo by Emily Spiers

Anticipation Conference. Earlier this month (November), the ISF took part in the second edition of the [Anticipation](#) conference. Anticipation is a new emerging field that brings together a number of scholars and practitioners working in future studies (forecasters, futurologists, designers, to name but three). Our curated session was entitled **The time of social futures** and consisted of four conversations with practitioners in creative writing, co-housing, finance, and planning. The session was filmed and an edited version will be uploaded onto our website. Other ISF contributions to the conference were the session **Everyday Futures** convened by Nicola Spurling, a paper on 'The Anticipatory Revolutions of the Earth' by

Bronislaw Szerszynski and Linda Woodhead (ISF Co-director) who was part of the plenary panel 'How do we make a better future in the Anthropocene?'.

Mobile Utopia. Building on the AHRC-funded project Mobile Utopia 1851-2051, Monika Buscher (Cemore and former ISF Associate Director) and Carlos López Galviz co-chaired the international conference Mobile Utopia: Pasts, Presents, Futures. The conference attracted 190 delegates from 27 countries, including the Philippines, Taiwan, Kenya, Brazil and several other countries in North and South America, Oceania, and Europe. Contributions to the conference explored a wide range of themes, from the ethics of automation and datafication to mobility justice, from sleep on the move to sociabilities of sharing, from mobility services to histories of infrastructure, from neighbourhood to interplanetary travel, from vital mobilities to concerns with other species and more-than-human mobilities. More details, including a 'utopian' programme are available at:

<http://wp.lancs.ac.uk/t2mc2c/>.

The conference was preceded by a PhD Bonfire School and a series of twelve Mobile Utopia experiments, which invited locals and visitors to take part in a voyage of discovery that visualised and allowed people to immerse themselves in alternative worlds where different utopias of mobility were realised. The Lancaster Guardian published a call for 'time travellers', which you can see [here](#).

The conference included an art exhibition, sponsored by the Mobile Lives Forum.

Inter-Futures 2 will be circulated by 26 January 2018.