Programme

Improbable Forum

Artificial realities: politics, persuasion and storytelling

Thursday 23 – Friday 24 February 2017 | WP1535

Held in Los Angeles

in partnership with Improbable and in association with BAFTA LA

In 1934 the poet T S Eliot contributed these words to The Rock, a pageant play:

'The endless cycle of idea and action

Endless invention, endless experiment

Brings knowledge of motion, but not of stillness [...]

Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?

Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?'

Over 80 years later, in this world of seemingly endless data and ambiguous truth, his words echo in our ears. Dialogue, which has been Wilton Park's mission for 70 years, can break the pace of idea and action to create a stillness from within which a new story can be told in new ways. Negotiating a treaty, breaking a cycle of violence, or persuading people of the rightness of a policy is government telling a story. We want people to believe that change is possible, imagine a different future and act on that belief. The purpose of our dialogue is not so dissimilar from that of a book, a play, or a film. Through political and collective action, new realities are born.

Our present reality could be enhanced or narrowed by a digital world. Many of us have cultural and interpersonal experiences through a machine interface. Today, physical and digital realities are interconnected in ways previously imaginable only in science fiction. People, young and old, have meaningful relationships and experiences in digital worlds. For millions of us, emotions are transmitted and received over airwaves, downloaded through cables, expressed in emoticons or argued over in social media. In politics, we feel ill-prepared for the transformation that digital technologies have wrought: our political battlefield is a blended reality and we need to upgrade our arsenal to be as persuasive there as it used to be in print.

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As digital technologies advance they may create a new expression of artificial reality. New experiences created by machines are immersive and increasingly indistinguishable from the physical world. Once there are no perceivable limitations of action in a digital world people may cease to think of that state as anything other than real. If truth is mutable and socially constructed, if imagination is no less constrained than in the physical world, if choice of action is as varied, and if the digital world feels as bewilderingly random and complex as the physical, then an artificial reality is as significant and meaningful as any other reality.

Throughout our forum, we will listen to the ideas of others and create a common bond. Then we can move forward with new, open, transparent collaborations that can share compelling, truthful and persuasive stories to people across the physical and artificial world. We share in Improbable's conviction that stories can and will be told in new ways, to many more people, using the best of new technological platforms. Our world is very different from T S Eliot's: we face more motion, more noise, more confusion. What will make us wiser is virtuous meetings of minds: technical, political and creative.

This forum begins but does not end with dialogue. We invite you to come with ideas that with the right allies you could be energised to create over the months and years following our first meeting. Those ideas should be at the edge of your imagination: they could be how to shape, frame and describe our future; or a manifestation of what technology can learn from art; or agree a framework for what you as leaders will do to make sure the future is one that works for humanity and which brings humanity with it.

Artificial realities disrupting politics, persuasion and storytelling

One of the first futurists, Alvin Toffler, called reading fiction the only preventative medicine for future shock: Frankenstein raising questions about the notion of synthetic life; Brave New World grappling with the idea of modified humans; Ready Player One imagining a world where entertainment is humanity's escape from a dystopian corporate reality. Our reality is no longer represented only in print. The twenty-first century citizen makes sense of the world through digital means - games and social media - as much as traditional sources of understanding. All our forms of digital experience have profound political and social possibilities. While we may be sceptical of the impact of virtual reality (for the moment) few of us can disagree that the machine, be it a computer, mobile phone or maybe a driverless car, has altered our way of life.

In 1993 Myron Krueger saw "the encounter between human and machine as the central drama of our time" and so wrote Artificial Reality to explore the future interface between man and machine. He argued that simulated worlds allow people to interact with computers in profoundly new ways for problem-solving and recreation. The philosopher Jean Baudrillard saw the combination of technology, information and media as bringing about a rupture between premodern symbolic societies and modern ones. Premodern society was organised by symbolic exchange, modern societies organised around production and postmodern societies organised around simulation: the cultural modes of representation that simulate reality as in television, computers, virtual reality and knowledge industries. In a society of simulation, "identities are constructed by the appropriation of images and codes and models determine how individuals perceive themselves and relate to other people". He described this as living in the 'hyperreal' of simulation.

In The Gulf War did not take place, Baudrillard argued that the conflict was a hyperreal simulacrum. That the Gulf War happened was uncontested. But the representation of the

Gulf War was a post-truth by another name. In Patton's introduction to Baudrillard he wrote that "the absurdity of the media's self-representation as purveyor of reality and immediacy broke through, in moments such as those when the CNN cameras crossed live to a group of reporters assembled somewhere in the Gulf, only to have them confess that they were also sitting around watching CNN in order to find out what was happening. Television news coverage appeared to have finally caught up with the logic of simulation". In this theory, people are in a state of consciousness saturated by images and spectacles with little relationship to an external reality. Without stable boundaries, fixed structures and a shared consensus, the concept of meaning itself dissolves.

Theories outlined by Baudrillard, Krueger, even Nick Bostrom's proposition that we probably exist within a simulation created by another species, are structured simplifications: an imagined explanation of how the world is or could be.

Nevertheless, people exist within the world we are attempting to explain and their agency creates our social reality: we create meaning as much by our actions as by our ideas.

Assuming that our world has features of these theories does not make their conclusions absolute, predestined, or even right. We are a technologically-advanced society that consumes and creates meaning using machines. Social media and other technologies have already made it difficult to distinguish between what is real and what is an abstraction or a simulation, of reality. But we, particularly at this forum, are the practitioners, influencers, thinkers and decision-makers who create content, shape opinion, design and implement policy on and about these trends. By working together we have the potential to shape these artificial realities toward a better near future.

Films, games, television, art and fiction creatively consider the power of technological and scientific advances and the responses of people to these uncertain changes. The creative industries are compelling storytellers, capable of capturing the imagination of millions of people in ways that government rarely achieves. Our forum brings together government, technologists and academics with all manner of storytellers, from authors to games developers, to deepen our knowledge, to take steps towards wisdom, and to discuss how we use all our collective assets to better each of our professions, decisions, or creative art.

We will imagine what might happen to humanity as 'true' and 'artificial realities' become indistinguishable, how we can be prepared, what stories we need to tell, and how we can use new technologies to build inspirational and aspirational worlds that embrace the better aspects of artificial realities. We hope that these collaborations will result in more compelling, truthful stories about major future challenges and inspire the public to change behaviours that threaten the world.

Thursday 23 February

0900	Arrival and registration
0940-0950	**Welcome and introduction**

Chris DeFaria
President, DreamWorks Animation, Burbank

Oliver Lewis
Visiting Programme Director, Wilton Park; Vice President, Improbable Worlds Ltd, London

0950-1030	## 1. Technology, politics and artificial realities
	Chair: **David Rowan**, Editor-at-large, WIRED, London
	Herman Narula Chief Executive Officer, Improbable Worlds Ltd, London
1030-1245	## 2. Challenge sessions and discussion
	Chair: **David Rowan**, Editor-at-large, WIRED, London
	### Dystopia or utopia: can science and science fiction navigate a path? **David Brin** Scientist, Public Speaker and Author, Futures Unlimited, Encinitas
	### Open storytelling and intellectual property legislation **Cory Doctorow** Activist and Author; Special Consultant, Electronic Frontier Foundation, Burbank
	### Scientific discovery in a soundbite society **Nergis Mavalvala** Professor of Astrophysics, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Cambridge
	### How technology and creativity is changing political decision-making **Edward Vaizey** Former Minister for Culture, Communications and Creative Industries; Member of Parliament; House of Commons, London
	### The importance of virtual reality for entertainment **Chantal Rickards** Chief Executive Officer, BAFTA Los Angeles and **Roy Taylor** Corporate Vice President, Advanced Micro Devices Inc (AMD), Los Angeles
	### How do we use storytelling and immersion to get people to think well about global risks and radical futures? **Anders Sandberg** Senior Fellow, Future of Humanity Institute, University of Oxford
	### Warfare in the information age **Richard Barrons** Former Commander, Joint Forces Command and UK Chief of Staff, London
	### Vision of future technology and the choices we must make **Arati Prabhakar** Former Director, Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), Washington DC
1245-1400	Lunch
1400-1600	## 3. Breakout sessions
	Introduction: **Kirsty Cockburn** Director of Policy and Programmes, Wilton Park
	Break into five groups to discuss the following: • Political identity in entertainment • Constructing 'truth' in politics and entertainment • Linear narrative and emergent behaviour • Engaging new generations in politics using artificial worlds • National security and entertainment

1600-1700	## 4. Decision-making and imagination
	Zach Snyder Filmmaker, Los Angeles
	Deborah Snyder Producer, Los Angeles
	Jim Miller Former Under Secretary of Defence for Policy; Senior Fellow, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University; President, Adaptive Strategies, LLC, Washington DC
1700-1745	## 5. Discussion and feedback from breakout sessions
	Chair: Chris DeFaria President, DreamWorks Animation, Burbank
1745	Optional tour of Warner Brothers Studios
	Cocktails and canapés at the Warner Brothers Museum
1930	Dinner in the Car Vault

Friday 24 February

0900	Arrival
0930-0945	## 6. Opening remarks
	Kim Darroch Her Majesty's Ambassador to the United States of America, British Embassy, Washington DC
0945-1230	## 7. Challenge sessions and discussion
	Chair: **Oliver Lewis** Visiting Programme Director, Wilton Park; Vice President, Improbable Worlds Ltd, London
	Frivolity and playfulness to discuss serious ideas **Kate Reardon** Editor, Tatler, Condé Nast, London
	Winning the story wars **Jonah Sachs** Co-founder, Partner, Chief Storytelling Officer, Free Range, Oakland
	Hollywood and Silicon Valley **Talulah Riley** Actress, Los Angeles
	Virtual and augmented reality's place in the world **Keith Boesky** Principal, Boesky & Company, Pacific Palisades
	The open metaverse **Michael Capps** Former Chief Executive, Epic Games; Executive Director, Open Metaverse Federation, Raleigh

Radical transparency
Sophie Hackford
Director, Sophie Hackford Ltd, London

Protecting citizens from technology
Matthew Gould
Director General, Digital and Media, Department for Culture Media and Sport, London

Reflections and remarks
Brad Lewis, Producer and Animation Director, Los Angeles
Allison Abbate, Producer, Los Angeles
Akiva Goldsman, Screenwriter, Los Angeles

1230-1330	Group photograph followed by lunch

1330-1430

8. Creative, professional and personal drive

Joanna Coles
Chief Content Officer, Hearst Magazines, New York
and
James A 'Sandy' Winnefeld Jr
Former Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; Consultant, McLean, Washington DC

1430-1530

9. Breakout sessions

Introduction: Kirsty Cockburn
Director of Policy and Programmes, Wilton Park

Break into five groups to discuss collaborations for 2017-2018
Completion of eQuestionnaire

1530-1630

10. Games and politics

Ian Bogost
Ivan Allen College Distinguished Chair in Media Studies and Professor of Interactive Computing, Georgia Institute of Technology, Atlanta

Jo Twist
Chief Executive Officer, The Association for UK Interactive Entertainment (UKIE), London

Herman Narula
Chief Executive Officer, Improbable Worlds Ltd, London

Martin Clements
Former Director General, responsible for technology and transformation, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, London

1630-1715

11. Concluding discussion and feedback from breakout sessions

Chris DeFaria
President, DreamWorks Animation, Burbank

Oliver Lewis
Visiting Programme Director, Wilton Park; Vice President, Improbable Worlds Ltd, London

1715

Participants depart