Alien Futuring: shifting perspective from a one-world-world to a world of many worlds

Alien Futuring is a response to the problematic nature of rhetorical futures devices, such as the futures cone (Voros, 2003), used in design to help concretise possible futures. In particular we argue that rather than acknowledging the prospect of a plurality of futures the cone embodies a number of problematic attributes most particularly a one-world-world view (Law, 2015). Although there are different versions of the futures cone it is generally presented in terms of cones emerging from a single point representing the present defined by qualifiers, the most common being probable, plausible, possible, and in some cases the addition of preferable within any of the other qualifiers. As these qualifications are subjective, they are open to interpretation but could be considered as: possible (might happen), plausible (could happen), and probable (likely to happen). The notion of preferable, which can exist within any of the other qualifiers, has is increasingly contested as it is effectively promoting privileged views leading to the assertion that ‘preferable’ should be a question the designers ask of themselves within the design activity rather than an aim of the design. Further, whilst ‘possible’ encompasses all potentials when addressing particular challenges, it is plausible and probable which are most often utilized by designers although again these are open to individual interpretation. A main problematic aspect of this cone is that it assumes a collective (western) acceptance of a particular historicity and notions of time when developing futures. The single point representing supposed accepted present reality and takes no account how history, beliefs, values, and fiction are all implicated in the cultural construction of past, present, and future realities. The paper will present alternate framings developed through a research through design approach of a design fiction practice of world-building (Coulton et.al, 2017) to enable “a world in which many world fit” (De La Cadena & Blaser, 2018). The frames presented draw from a characterisation of historicity based on the work of work of Brazilian philosopher lvaro Vieira Pinto (Gonzatto et.al, 2013) viewed through the lens of Ian Bogost’s interpretation of Object Orientated Ontology (OOO): Alien Phenomenology (2012). This framing acknowledges allows not only different cultural perspectives of futures to be considered but also that human actants exist with complex assemblages of human and non-human actants that have interdependent relationships but may operate with different perspectives such as their relationship with time.

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