VIRTUALFUTURES

"A good science fiction story should be able to
predict not the automobile but the traffic jam."
- Frederik Pohl -

Virtual Futures' Near-Future Fictions series returns in 2019 to continue its mission to reassert the significance of science fiction as a tool for criticising, interrogating, and navigating possible tomorrows.

Our aim is to promote stories that think critically about the sorts of technological developments that are just over horizon, and provide a unique perspective on contemporary concerns related to the perceived trajectory of scientific innovation.

Submission Guidance

As additional guidance, those submitting stories should be aware of the following to ensure their submission stands the best chance of being accepted:

World Building - We are not searching for stories set on fanciful alien worlds or that feature technology so hypothetical it is almost unimaginable. Nor do we want post-apocalyptic landscapes, in which steam-punk bandits with laser guns are fighting mutated zombies. We are looking, instead, for stories of the near-future in which we can see our world, ourselves, and the potential implications or applications of technology currently being used, developed, or researched.

Avoid Cliché - Sci-fi is often the victim of the binary between utopia and dystopia - fiction in which all of our problems are fixed or created by a specific technology or technologies. In reality, our relationship with our technology never follows these simple categories - it is frequently a messier affair. Stories that seek to criticize, predict, or complicate realistically will be more successful than those intended to shock with apocalyptic visions or please with plastic paradises.

Inspiration - Each theme has been furnished with Virtual Futures content that is intended to provide inspiration and background information. Please be aware that it is not intended to provide a stringent direction for your story. Instead, these resources aim to provide you with both a brief introduction to some of the issues and areas, or debates your story may wish to tackle. There is no need to base, or even include this content in your stories - it is there as an aid, not an authority.

Press

Near-Future Fictions has been featured in Vector (from the British Science Fiction Association):

https://vector-bsfa.com/2018/04/11/near-future-fictions-salon-virtual-persons/

https://vector-bsfa.com/2018/05/09/virtual-futures-tomorrows-wars/

https://vector-bsfa.com/2018/06/18/near-future-fictions-post-brain-15-may-2018/

Video

Playlists of Near-Future Fictions stories can be found at:

http://youtube.com/virtualfutures

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ANOTHER LOVING
Event Date: Tuesday 12 February 2019
Curators: Stephen Oram & Britta Schulte

Submission Deadline: Sunday 02 December 2018

Reproduction is the only constant in human history - from our beginnings as single cell organisms to the sexual practices we see today.

Many of our social behaviours have been built and altered by our attitudes towards reproduction and the methods of passing our genes on to the next generation. Technologies frequently manipulate this most basic of human instincts to produce new ways to sexually interact with one another.

We ask authors to consider how technological developments may influence the reproductive process, behaviour related to it, or the products of it. Authors may approach topics of courtship, contraceptives, conception, childbirth, or anything in between.

Reference Materials
Fucking Machines: https://youtu.be/RtaTeotf0ks
Robot Sex - with John Danaher: https://youtu.be/yE8Z1VwPGnQ
Genetic Perfection: https://youtu.be/haxCTmRjztU

Submission Instructions
Stories should be no longer than ten minutes reading time (around 1,000 words for stories). The author should be available to attend the event, preferably to read their work although alternative readers can be found.

Submissions should be emailed as attachments to: fiction@virtualfutures.co.uk

Please follow the guidelines:
- Use the following email subject header template: Near-Futures Fiction, [Title of Work], [Name of Theme]
- Include your name and title of your work in the document name using the following format: [Surname],[Firstname]_[TitleOfWork].doc (e.g. Doe,John_MyScienceFictionStory.doc)
- Ensure attachments are editable file formats.
- Please include a 50-word biography in the same document as the story.
- Include any social media handles (Twitter etc.) and website if applicable.

Submissions for more than one theme are very welcome, but not multiple submissions for the same theme. Please send a separate email for each submission.

Successful authors will be notified in January 2019.

VIRTUALFUTURES

AUTONOMOUS AGENTS
Event Date: Tuesday 12 March 2019
Curators: Stephen Oram & Vaughan Stanger

Submission Deadline: Sunday 02 December 2018

The consequences of automation are a key concern for a society that is exporting much of its decision making to algorithms, automation and artificial intelligence.

These decision-making entities operate on certain assumptions, biases and preconceptions about the world - many of which are inherited from those who programmed them. Despite this companies and institutions are introducing algorithmic thinking into the heart of their infrastructure at a rapid rate. They are allowing algorithmic cognition, whose processes of reasoning remain enigmatic, to manipulate and draw findings from the data it is fed.

From conflict to cosmetics, music to pharmaceuticals, construction to scientific research - and everything in between – we ask authors to intrigue us with stories that explore the potential implications of automating our lives. They may also consider who will be accountable for the results and how we should protect ourselves from accidental and deliberate use or abuse.

Reference Materials
Autonomous Killing Machines: https://youtu.be/SWN89wBMt44
Radical Technologies - with Adam Greenfield: https://youtu.be/L37uYJnDxVY
What Algorithms Want - with Ed Finn: https://youtu.be/tVxt95lslNk
Bot Concepts: https://youtu.be/pauxF0NSYmM

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BOUNDLESS BODIES
Event Date: Tuesday 9 April 2019
Curators: Stephen Oram & Jule Owen

Submission Deadline: Sunday 02 December 2018

Bodies are often a product of the environment in which they are situated. Likewise, minds are partially shaped by both what they receive from the world around them, and the receptors that they use to process reality.

There is no guarantee that the Earth will be able to maintain its current ecosystems, or that the living beings of this world will remain on this planet. We are asking authors to consider how brains or bodies may adapt to different physical circumstances, and whether these changes will occur naturally or synthetically.

They may spin stories of manipulated creatures, novel forms of consciousness, distorted landscapes, or altered beings. They may also consider how lifestyles could be altered, minds may function, or bodies may be changed or even created.

Reference Materials
Harnessing Evolution - with Bret Weinstein: https://youtu.be/nOMLdefHGA8
Alternative Anatomies - with Stelarc and Nina Sellars: https://youtu.be/bWm-32gkOMY
Dawn of the New Everything - with Jaron Lanier: https://youtu.be/aDRN_dZNJUM
Prosthetic Envy: https://youtu.be/-F6igK6rWTo

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LASTING LABOURS

Event Date: Tuesday 14 May 2019
Curators: Stephen Oram & Allen Ashley

Submission Deadline: Sunday 02 December 2018

Due to society's advancement, changing economic systems, and shifts in what the population demands, the world of work will change seismically in the near future. Some jobs will become obsolete, others will change radically, and new roles will emerge. The changes, though, will not be limited to work alone. New industries may be born, new methods of exchange introduced, or entirely new economic systems developed.

Show us what goods we may be trading with, what currency we may be using, how industries may be created or altered, or what roles we may be employed in (if at all) by the time the future becomes the present. You may also wish to consider how, and in what, we will be educated and trained so as to succeed.

Reference Materials
Blockchain Beyond Bitcoin - with Vinay Gupta: https://youtu.be/Yn5kjVYjYvI
How to Fix the Future - with Andrew Keen: https://youtu.be/EfC1Tm-1dP0
Radical Technologies - with Adam Greenfield: https://youtu.be/L37uYJnDxVY

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