The future is already here; it's just not very evenly distributed.

Tim Chatterton, University of the West of England

Georgia Newmarch, Lancaster University

This title quote from the American speculative fiction author William Gibson[1] alludes primarily to the fact that the things that will constitute the 'normal' or 'everyday' within the lives of those living in the future, already exist for some today. Most of what will constitute change, at least in the short- to mid-term, is simply the spread of these niche, or minority, 'things' to become more pervasive. However, Gibson's quote can also be interpreted by considering that 'the future' itself will be characterised by inequalities in a way that is similar to the present. In order that these inequalities are not reproduced, or that their reproduction is minimised, it is necessary to ensure that those processes in the present which 'write' the future are not irredeemably tainted by these same inequalities.

It is hard to clearly identify what elements of the present will become more widespread in the future. Over the 20th Century, social transitions in the West have often involved the trappings of wealth becoming more accessible to wider sections of society, such as automobility, better quality housing, high quality healthcare and consumer technology. Many contemporary future scenarios present the future to be a utopia of wealth and health furnished by a panoply of high-tech gadgets and permitted by continued economic growth. However, it is also possible that the future for some, or all, will involve either a gradual or rapid reduction in standards of living. Thus, the future might consist of the expansion of the current lifestyles of either the rich and powerful, or of the poor and oppressed.

The future is always created on uneven foundations. In order to understand how we can create futures that do not exclude, isolate or exploit we have to understand how the future is written in the present. More specifically, we are interested in how minority elements are, in this moment, unequally distributed; how these inequalities are likely to be reproduced or altered in the future; and how these inequalities may actually determine what future or futures we arrive at. Through exploring how existing differences create unequal futures, we can begin to understand how to look forward in a way that is beneficial to those who are often excluded from mainstream narratives of change.

By considering three key domains of the social, the spatial and the temporal, this essay will briefly describe some of the ways in which we may be able to see the future as being unequally distributed in the present. It will then consider what impact these distributional inequalities play with regard to those who may play a significant role in attempting to write the future. We close by offering some possible ways of dealing with inequality that involve technologies.

Social Inequalities
It is often the case that certain social groups (identifiable by gender, class, race, physical ability, etc.) are omitted from official/institutional visions of the future created by experts

(politicians, managers, interaction designers), be that intentionally or not. However, because these visions shape policies and technologies that affect everyone, these social inequalities open up questions of power. Moreover, the unofficial futures of everyday experience, hopes, dreams and imaginations are often not considered in these future visions.

Efforts to incorporate everybody in views of the future often result in dystopian images, because they highlight current differences in exaggerated ways. Science Fiction literature offers some clear examples. J.G. Ballard's 1975 novel *High Rise*, presents us with a fictional interpretation of class and futures which is useful when assessing how social inequalities within the everyday are constructed and consumed. In the novel, class divide is physical (the higher the floor in Ballard's tower block, the higher the class of resident). Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) also portrays fundamental inequalities at the heart of the imagined society, though here these are built into genetics and conditioning, not just architecture.

Whilst these fictional futures extend and emphasise current inequalities, in many ways, fragments of utopia exist already. For example, in the 'Western world', the majority of people can access clean drinking water in such sufficiency that they flush their toilets with it; calorific food in such quantity that they can become obese; and free health care to treat the consequences. It might be churlish to expect utopia to only exist as an endpoint or final destination . Such a view highlights that we should recognise and cherish these fragments as and when we find them, and realise that it may be necessary to fight hard to keep them.

Spatial Inequalities
The rural-urban divide is one spatial axis that highlights differences that are apparent across potential elements of the future. Access to new transport modes such as car clubs or Uber are increasingly available in cities but have little reach into rural areas. It is questionable how far these sorts of systems will be able to practically reach these areas, highlighting how different futures may emerge as a result of location. Moving from physical mobility to virtual mobility, access to high speed internet is another example of something that is 'the present' in urban areas and may soon constitute a (relatively near) future for rural ones.

In terms of global distributions of lifestyles and wealth, the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century have seen an increasing dispersion of modern, westernised, 'middle class' lifestyles from Europe, North America and Australasia, to parts of Asia, South America and Africa. In the latter we can see a rapid transition towards futures that are very different to their recent pasts, due to extended energy supply networks, availability of consumer goods or the introduction of emergent technologies, such as the internet. In parallel, the last decade has also seen what might be considered by some as less 'progressive' futures developing, such as the descent into civil war and collapse of infrastructure in parts of the Middle East (e.g. Syria and Iraq) as well as uneven distributions of the consequences of the global financial crash hitting Portugal, Italy, Greece and Spain particularly harshly.

Sometimes though, space causes less of a divide. Mobile phones provide a fascinating case study of how fast a new technology can establish itself globally, rapidly levelling access to the services that a technology can provide. Mobile phones highlight not only the speed with which futures can arrive, but also a 'virtual' shift in the everyday, from one which is only

experienced through direct contact to one where connections are not just physical. Here the future may also hark further back to the past. Computing and the virtual realm can be seen as an extension of the oracles and shamans of the past (Davis, 2015), our desire for knowledge and foretelling is transplanted from chicken entrails to Wikipedia and social media. We haven't moved far from the past, and the past will always remain with us, as Wright and Pooley discuss.

Social media highlights the nature of 'information inequality'. During a time of 'post-truth', access to information and how we use it has become a vital part of our present. From initiatives to develop algorithms to reduce information overload bringing undesirable consequences such as Eli Pariser's "Filter bubbles'' to dubious initiatives such as Facebook's infamous experiment of tweaking people's timelines to affect their emotions (http://www.forbes.com/sites/dailymuse/2014/08/04/the-facebook-experiment-what-it-means-for-you/#1a63a08e1cbc. Personal newsfeeds often dictate the information that is visible to users and access to (good quality) information may be thought as more important and influential than ever before.),Thus spatial inequalities can as extending into virtual/cyber space.

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Temporal Inequalities
Short-term events and disruptions such as blackouts and supply chain disruptions represent snippets of insight into more precarious unstable futures, as increasing energy consumption and aging generating plants mean that energy supply systems become progressively overloaded. Disruptions to systems may appear sudden, but they occur within the context of long build ups of dependencies and allow not just for a greater understanding of the nature of innovation in the moment, but also reveal much about the undisrupted, everyday 'normal'. What is taken for granted now (e.g. a reliable energy supply, or a stable climate) cannot be taken for granted in the future.

But how should these potential future disruptions be handled? Are we just trying to maintain the current system to stop an unstable future? If so, for whom is the current system actually stable? What is considered disruption in the first place? This is clearly relative, because in many other parts of the world, black/brownouts are considered normal.

Temporal inequalities can also manifest across generations: the aging population may be a picture of the future for today's young. Although attempting to avoid the consequences of aging has been a long-time concern of much of the human race, this has, in the modern West, led to a failure to adequately consider the well-being of the old. By improving life for those who are old now, younger sections of society could help design the future for themselves when that time comes.

At the other end of the age spectrum, the comfort with technology shown by Generation Z/'Digital Natives' provides an insight for older sections of society as to how digital technology can rapidly become a given within everyday life. But it is not just in technological practices that a generation gap may be widening. In 2016, both the 2016 UK Referendum on leaving the European Union, and the US General Election showed very significant differences in voting patterns between the young and the old. In both these cases it

appears there has been a tension between those whose views have been ignored for the last three decades and those who haven't had voices yet (the young). It seems that the youth vote lost out, potentially condemning them to live in societies determined by victors who won't live to see them played out fully.

Structural Inequalities

The three domains above - social, spatial and temporal - are just three ways of identifying inequalities. What matters most, we argue, is not whether differences exist, but the extent to which they result from the way society and institutions work (as opposed to say 'individual choice'). When they arise from social structures, and particularly when leading to negative impacts, these become issues of inequality that should be a concern from a justice perspective. How these differences become structural inequalities is usually related to issues of power. Unequal power relationships determine who gets to write the future, at least at a macro level, for example, through decisions about long-term infrastructure provision and the built environment, corporate (R&D) strategies, government policies and research agenda's that will shape many people's everyday lives for years to come. These decisions are often made by a particular section of society – typified by being white, (upper) middle class and male. Although the demographics of decision-makers are now beginning to broaden, many of the organisational structures in which these decisions are made constrain the ability for ideas from outside the cultural mind-sets of these groups to have much traction. Additionally, incomes associated with these types of positions mean that where people from other class backgrounds enter these roles, they often become separated from the day to day experiences of those from similar situations, for example believing that if they have 'made good' then this is possible for any and all. However, even when apparently benign, current differences in power have a strong impact on how the future is being written. For example, the power of people like Bill Gates and Mark Zuckerberg to deploy their wealth in prioritising medical rather than public health research and action determines wider contexts of what a future free from global disease will look like.

Dealing with Inequality

How can we move forward to a more equitable future? From a Marxist perspective, many of the inequalities described above arise from discrepancies in access to and control of capital. Marx saw a potential for automation to relieve the worker from the mindless tasks brought about by the division of labour. 150 years later the very real issue of wide-scale automation offers a mechanism through which to assess class and everyday futures. Incorporating a new economic model that is being posited not as utopian socialism, but rather *Postcapitalism.* Automation is often viewed as the reason for workers losing jobs, zero-hour contracts and a lower standard of living. However, recent work (Mason, 2015; Srnicek and Williams, 2015), highlights how the increase of technology that eliminates aspects of labour may see the future change in a way that is beneficial to those who have till now depended on state welfare and been excluded. Through becoming part of a narrative that views leisure and reduced work as integral to the everyday, the un/underemployed will be able to 'demand the future' and become stronger participants in their own futures, rather than having their lives dictated by the structures of labour that are currently in place. The extreme view is that increased technologies in the workplace will allow for everyone to work less, resulting

in what Srnicek and Williams (2015) call 'fully automated luxury communism'. Other views of the future have been put forward that, rather than automating all work, propose a refocussing on work that is less efficient whilst being more fulfilling. For example, Jackson (2011) in *Prosperity Without Growth*, potentially reflecting William Morris' (1885) *Useful Work versus Useless Toil*, suggests a vision of the future where worth and meaning might be seen as something to be obtained through work, rather than as something to be purchased from proceeds of work. This may, however, need to be partly obtained through automation of drudgery.

How automation will be deployed and how the wealth generated from automated processes will be distributed is currently unclear. It is far from certain that automation will be used to create a better everyday for all. The futures described in the works listed above may not be that different from the present, yet they can provide a way for inequalities within wage income and work processes to be considered. Alongside full automation, is the idea of a universal basic income, a concept already being suggested as part of an everyday future in several countries, such as a recent experiment in Utrecht, Holland and a referendum in Switzerland[i]. Basic income is a guaranteed unconditional amount of money, regardless of employment or social position. Changing economic and social infrastructure in such a way means state welfare becomes something beneficial to all. However, the idea that a person should be entitled to payment for being a citizen of a certain state is controversial, perhaps because those who are already financially stable view a livelihood as something which people have to earn and are not necessarily entitled to. This highlights the importance of developing social and cultural change alongside technological changes.

Futures narratives require an understanding of how inequalities could be changed, culturally, economically and politically. Significant change in current systems may be more likely to occur (at a large level) from the bottom up via revolution than from the top down – indeed Morris clearly saw that the wealthy would not relinquish their power without a struggle. The voices of some who have perceived their influence as being diminished over the last few decades, are now being heard to call an end to the future being "more of the same". These struggles can be seen to be not about what the future will actually be like, but simply about the ability to have a stake in its writing. In recent years social protests and networks dedicated to changing social standings have increased in visibility. For example, the #BlackLivesMatter network highlights the ways in which black people are deprived of certain rights by the state and 'intentionally left powerless'[3]. Creating a movement that is both digital (the use of the hashtag in the network's name is demonstrative of its dependence on digital technologies and social media) and physical (through protests), shows how those who have an unequal footing in certain structures are changing their position and getting others to change as well. In order for injustices to be remedied in the future, they must be addressed now. The longer they are left, the more embedded they will become.

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