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# **(NO)FUTURE**

## **NOTES ON MEDIA**

**Łukasz P. Wojciechowski\***

*University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius, Faculty of Mass Media Communication, Nám. J. Herdu 2,  
91701 Trnava, Slovak Republic*

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### **Abstract**

The present paper is a synthesized reflection inspired mainly by one verse from a punk rock song opening a question of future or (no) future of media and related technologies and content. Based on some examples and reflections we are trying to answer the question whether we can talk about some real future where something new is being created or is just a new form or cover for previous human products, realizations of needs and behaviour. At the same time, the paper is pointing to obstacles of the free individual surrounded by the world of technology and media and exposed to the risk of yielding to their temptations.

*Keywords:* future, freedom, punk rock, remediation, technologies

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### **1. Introduction**

Future is usually associated with anticipation of new possibilities, incentives, solutions and approaches. Novelty is understood as originality meaning that something has not been here before, it is different from current ideas and solutions, it is fresh and unique. Present can be understood as a future of our past. Hence current products should be fulfilling the expectations of the past and therefore from this point of view they should bring something new and original. According to Margaret Boden [1] in this case we talk about a so called historical novelty (H-Novel). However, usually the originality of products is not that high. For this reason the author also describes the so called P-Novel as psychological novelty regarding thoughts and ideas that are new for individual personality, but they are not original in wider (social) context. Either they have already been present in some form, or they are modified, inspired by older stimuli, adopted from other environment or situation. This paper tries to show stimuli that have been cumulating and suggest that (mainly in the domain of media) we can expect from the future only 'little' creativity called also 'Little c', or 'Small c' [2-4], i.e. P-Novel type of originality.

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\*E-mail: lukasz.wojciechowski@ucm.sk

Adding to reflections on weak future perspectives of originality (meaning something truly new) we consider necessary to present the history and anabasis of a song that is central to our text, mainly regarding its key parts. The song was published as a single record label by Virgin records on March 27, 1977. The single was criticized by media because of its text identifying Queen Elizabeth II with '*fascist regime*' and words '*no future*'.

Typical features of fascist ideology are mainly egalitarian collectivism, authoritative and leadership principle, strained nationalism and militarism, pronounced cult of modernity, youth and strength and at the same time strong economic role of the state that is understood as corporatist in which private possessions have to serve collective good. Sarah Kent described Great Britain of this era as „cultural Stillwater” [5] and for each young ambitious person living in that era and believing in his/hers value, lyrics from *God Save the Queen*: „There's no future in England's dreaming” had to be inherent. Originally, the song should have been named 'No Future' (this will be our main phrase in relation to media), but band's manager Malcolm McLaren decided to name the song 'God Save the Queen'. He justified it by the approaching 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Queen's Elisabeth II coronation. In 1977 on July 7, an attempt to give a concert on a rented ship (named 'Queen Elizabeth') that supposed to sale close to Westminster palace took place in order to present this 'anthem'. This event did not come to a successful end because it was aborted by the police after a fight with one of the reporters. Despite that, for Malcolm McLaren it was a typical *promotional stunt*: band would overpass a ban to play on the ground by playing on the water. Maybe it was this event that caused this song became an anthem of punk movement in England. A song expressing anger and mockery young people were feeling towards the establishment, the manifestation against the politics of British monarchy during that period. It expressed feelings of young people who were feeling estranged and distant from the oppressing rules of old-fashioned monarchy with the Queen being a symbol of all that. Punk rock appeared as an alternative for frustrated young people who did not know how to handle their lives and did not want to listen the elaborated long songs requiring interprets having extraordinary technical skills, loosing sincerity and soul along the way. Punk rock as a nonconformity manifest stood against social order created and represented by existing establishment.

## 2. Interpretation

In terms of our interpretation and application of the lyrics it is important to extract the words 'No Future' and relate it to media in the context of society and freedom.

Freedom is a part of choice that the majority of nonconformist subcultures (punk included) proclaim as one of the main aspects of breaking the old structures [6]. At the same time, freedom is a very important philosophical problem. Nearly all philosophers paid attention to it trying to define freedom by the means of negation – an absence of restrictions or otherwise as the ability to

do whatever one wants [7]. That is why freedom is often associated with spontaneous fulfilment of needs, rationally backed up desires, ability to choose, active attitudes and creating one's own personality within social life. In a wider context, philosophers linked concept of freedom to the prosperity of the man and in a more narrow understanding to the necessity of harmonizing personal freedom and social rights [8]. For many centuries, questions about freedom had remained inseparably in correlation with questions about the nature of power and its forms of impact. Right now freedom is associated with questions of role and place of technology in the life of individual and society [9]. Certain chaos in relation to freedom has currently reaching its apex in times when culture taking its stand on analogue media is transforming to digital culture and mass culture is transforming as well using the possibilities of demassification. Consumers have changed to prosumers (professional consumers who present their own reviews of products on their vlogs) extending their competencies to knowledge and abilities previously assigned only to producers. Media space is given to amateurs who are becoming experts (who are just faking it such as Sex Pistols who didn't know how to play or sing). "In the 2.0 Internet era, the information consumer is becoming the amateur media producer and thus the professional marketing is being replaced by amateur marketing" as explained by Antonio Momoc [10]. The most symbolic sign of this transition is a transformation of previously relatively passive participants of culture into active multimedia users [11] that opened a public discussion about freedom of man.

The increasing number and activity of media users systematically deepen personal beliefs about the abandonment of contemporary restrictions in personal and social life related to the idea of freedom occupying our minds. However, the majority of multimedia users are aware that – as proven by i.a. Lawrence Lessig [12], Yochai Benkler [13] or Jonathan Zittrain [14] – in the era of smart phones, credit cards and internet we are subjected to control more intensively than 'before', when this control being more latent, indirectly felt and perceived. The more visible is freedom, the more invisible is control. Therefore the Internet can be seen as an environment where rules valid for the 'real' world do not apply [15] and social relations are constructed based on the principle of informal system of norms based on respected values [16]. In this sense it is an ideal environment for the defiance to reality subjected to the dominance of despotic states and corporations. We can speak about the movement of cyberlibertarianism [17], the emancipation potential of cyberspace that can provide nearly ideal freedom enabling us to create a diametrically different personality (e.g. avatar). In a totally different virtual world that is either the simulation of the real one, or it is offering only an illusion of a different new world, a man is free from the state control [18] and has the opportunity to form as he wishes his own identity, opinions, taste [19]. In this particular moment, the offered content is providing us way too much immediate pleasures promoting a shallow and selective communication that is just a poor alternative to authentic life experiences [20]. Such content offers us ready-made patterns of problem solving. The problem resides in the fact that sometimes these easy solutions have

side effects that again generate a demand for other solutions (e.g. the unbounded character of media texts). This way the circle is closing.

Above mentioned situations occurs mainly in media, but can also interfere with other areas. The most important is that they effectively question all forms and characters of traditional *ipse (selbst)* we call 'pretended identity' – a type of identification residing in approaching everything in the same manner, because it does not have anything authentic in itself). Even though we suppose the need for the past identity will return, it can be convincingly stated that it will not be the same as it used to be, due to the past experiences embedded to current identities. In this sense the future is questionable in terms of form and media that are subjected to remediation [21] and remodelling in every sense. The example for this is virtual reality redefining television (and film) by the means of absorption strategy. It is not only the fact that virtual reality is causing older visual technologies to be old-fashioned; it will ensure that these technologies will be a reference point to measure the naturalness of virtual reality. Virtual reality changes also in terms of content that inclines towards already mentioned entertainment and shallowness. The next coming is totality and dictatorship of spiritless entertainment programs (e.g. reality shows with quasi celebrities) [22] and living various versions of the moment appealing from digital screens to our senses as 'A potential H-bomb' from the song 'God save the Queen' and to our bodies as a metastasis of intellectual emptiness. The content that will conform to the promises of false truth and reality and will be controlled by automatic algorithm that creates a synthesis of a man and technology with us follows our standing preferences of behaviour. In the future, the majority will be controlled by contents forced for the most part by corporations and political establishment as it is in case of documentary or action movies mainly from Hollywood production. Meanwhile, similarly to the fight with loneliness, the escape in order to find friendships to social networks is assessed by quantity and not the quality of relationship [23] (as it is easier); not the meritorious or artistic value of a news article is being assessed, but click rates are. It has something to do with the fact that we often do not open a commercial webpage without unblocking advertising or logging in to social networks. On the other hand, movie in television can contain propagandistic schemes and ideas using popular personas or be unexpectedly interrupted by advertising. In cinemas we even pay for the advertising as a part of the ticket price, but happiness is not an instant coffee – 'They made you a moron'. Does not it disrupt the work of art integrity the same way we would disrupt it by putting a can of a well-known soft drink in front of a painting in an art gallery?

From the aforementioned reflections we can extract that the new is in terms of function basically the old one adapted to new technologies. And in the middle of these circumstances, as supported by several studies [24], stands a person alone in an anonymous crowd with increasing indifference towards other people.

### 3. Conclusion

Media and technology contents and forms we are encountering these days are just repeated older manifests of human activities. They present themselves as original and new even though de facto the only new thing about them is a name, redefinition, rewriting, redesign, etc. These are the manifests that ephemerally carry us towards abstract future that is perceived in aspects of time. According to Latour “No one has ever been modern. Modernity has never begun. There has never been a modern world. The use of the past perfect tense is important here, for it is a matter of a retrospective sentiment, of a rereading of our history.” [25] In this sense, there is no future. There are just formal repetitions of repetitions, a shadow of Plato’s shadows, as a matrix of future illustrated by a short tale written by Hans Christian Andersen *The Emperor’s New Clothes*. Not only clothes weren’t new, but there were no clothes at all.

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