

Narrative Foresight Techniques for Scenario Generation using “Eventuality”

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A core problem in the governance of emerging technologies is their speculative and uncertain qualities. Though policy interventions have the most far reaching effects in the embryonic stages of technological development, in the absence of metrics for evaluating the risks and benefits of a new technology, this kind of speculative ethics is misleading by presenting far off concerns or thought experiments as relevant to contemporary issues. (Nordmann, 2007, “If and then: a critique of nanoethics”). Scenario planning is a standard technique used to generate humanistic potential futures, encompassing social, ecological, economic, political, and technological dimensions, however many practitioners have found that the products of scenario workshops are not accepted as trustworthy by end-users such as policy-makers and the public (Selin, 2006, “Trust and the illusive force of scenarios”). Traditional scenarios do not contain a relatable protagonist, move a plot towards a resolution, or compellingly use metaphor, imagery, or any of the other emotionally persuasive techniques of literature. Conversely, foresight that draws extensively from the literary tradition of science-fiction has an extension track record of mobilizing action around emerging technologies, such as genetically modified organisms, space colonization, and personal computing (McCray, 2012, *The Visioneers*).

This presentation will explore the theoretical basis of narrative foresight exercises, and explain the use of “Eventuality”, a narrative foresight engine developed by the author. “Eventuality” is a system for generating provocative, interesting, and realistic stories about future technological challenges and social conflicts. Grounding speculative ethics in the concrete processes of narrative conflict, development, and resolution serves to make visible concerns about values, differing versions of the future, and possible ways of achieving consensus, even in the absence of specialized technological or policy expertise.