

A futuristic cityscape with floating platforms and advanced architecture. The scene is set against a hazy, golden-brown sky, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The city is built on a hillside, with numerous skyscrapers and modern buildings. Several large, circular platforms are suspended in the air, supported by thin, vertical columns. These platforms appear to be part of a larger, multi-level urban structure. The overall atmosphere is one of a visionary, speculative future.

Participatory Speculative Fiction: co-creating understandings for shared futures

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What is Participatory Speculative Fiction?

- A departure from conventional story-telling methods
- An effort to step aside from confession or blame
- A chance to express what is imagined as well as what is (thought to be) known
- A shared process of story-construction
- A recognition that meaning-making and decoding are not straightforward
- Followed by deliberate, careful analysis of stories:
 - commonalities and differences in visions of the future
 - what does / does not happen?
 - what is / is not said?
 - who is / is not present?
 - where is the locus of power?

What is Participatory Speculative Fiction?

- Not limited in timescale: free to imagine near and distant futures
 - Helps reveal hopes and fears
 - Helps identify what people struggle to imagine
 - Helps identify what parallels people draw
- Not reliant on detailed technical/scientific understanding
 - Helps provide a space for marginalised/less-often-heard voices
- Frees participants from fear of being technically/scientifically wrong
 - Helps identify technical/scientific misconceptions

Example: Telling Surveillance Stories in Higher Education

- Edinburgh Futures Institute-funded project – Jen Ross, ANW, Amy Collier, Jane McKie, Pat Lockley
- Context:
 - Increasing use of digital technologies offers increased possibilities for surveillance
 - Decisions about software and processes generally centralised, top-down
 - Uncertainty about who has access to data and how it is used
 - etc. (sound familiar?!)

Example: Telling Surveillance Stories in Higher Education

- Research process:
 - Identify range of stakeholders - Learning Technologists, academics, casualised staff, students
 - Provide prompts/stimuli - questions, objects, images
 - Create structured opportunities for story-generation – workshop-style sessions, interactive web-based story-generating tool

Example: Telling Surveillance Stories in Higher Education

- Research outcomes:
 - What is currently happening (some surprising practices!)
 - What are people afraid of? – deprofessionalisation, loss of trust, loss of academic freedom
 - What do people hope for? – personalisation, care, safeguarding
 - How do people talk about responding to surveillance?
 - **acquiescence**
 - **obfuscation**
 - **resistance**
 - **enculturation/adoption**

Example: Telling Surveillance Stories in Higher Education

- Research outcomes:
 - Misconceptions about scope of current surveillance practices (e.g. through Office365) – total versus none
 - Widespread linking of surveillance to health and wellbeing agendas
 - Widespread linking of health and wellbeing agendas to controlling and even exclusionary practices (e.g. through HE entry and continuation requirements)

References

- Wilson, A., Ross, J., McKie, J., Collier, A., & Lockley, P. (2022). Telling data stories: developing an online tool for participatory speculative fiction. In *SAGE Research Methods Cases*. <https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781529603514>
- Anna Wilson, Jen Ross, Pat Lockley, Amy Collier & Jane McKie. (2021). Assembling an Ed-Tech Imaginary: Telling Data Stories About Higher Education After Surveillance. SRHE Conference, Dec 2021. <https://srhe.ac.uk/arc/21/SRHE2021-0301.pdf>
- Ross, J. & Wilson, A. (2022). Data stories: speculative methods for researching digital surveillance in higher education. Proceedings of the Networked Learning Conference, in press.
- And for more work-in-progress, see <https://campuspress.stir.ac.uk/wastestories>