

Tomorrow's Yesterdays

When we look back over our century, over the years from AD 2000 to the present, 1st January, 2099, we can see how many of our present benefits have their roots in the twentieth century, and even earlier.

The Twenty-First Century has been a brilliant one, in contrast with its predecessor, with war - and the greed which often inspires war - largely in abeyance. While we celebrate its fruits, we look ahead to new challenges. And, as ever, to the unexpected - even the unlikely.

Some developments which seemed promising in AD 2000 have not matured. The expectation that we would have robot and android servants, for instance, is no more. Androids were too cumbersome and energy-consuming. The first models gave off hydroxyls of a poisonous nature, and were banned. We have superseded them with something more adaptable - our dupes.

Let us leave that topic aside for a while, in order to consider the larger socio-economic benefits of Our Twenty-First Century.

Ambitions for closer cooperation between neighbouring countries, the striving for longevity, and the understanding that better health is achievable through better housing, sanitary improvements, and diet: the fulfillment of these concepts, and the abolition of most diseases, has transformed the world in which the majority of us live. As a result, consumerism has largely given way to contemplationism.

One thing we must expect from the future is the unexpected. Chaos Theory and experience combine to teach us that much. No one, a century ago, could have conceived that a handful of truly remarkable, benevolent, and charismatic individuals would arise simultaneously, strongly to influence the course of history. Nor would those predecessors of ours have expected the human species to turn to a mode of life so much less dependent on technology than was theirs.

At the start of this century, which we now think of as the Age of Idealism, six men and women came to power in the various nations that then existed, in Europe, the Americas, Russia, Central Asia, China, and Africa. This happened between the years of 2009 and 2023, as if six Nelson Mandelas had been born. What were the odds against these six powerful, enlightened and incorruptible people emerging at the same time? Perhaps no greater than the odds against such leaders as Stalin, Hitler, Franco, Soekarno, and others emerging almost simultaneously in the twentieth century. The Twentieth had the ill luck, we the good.

The world at this time was aghast at a nuclear conflict which had broken out between North and South Korea, practically destroying both countries and afflicting all surrounding areas. As a result, a new world order - if possible free of national rivalries, old grudges, and ideologies - was actively sought for.

The Six Idealists inspired the will of the people to fashion the better world. A Global Unity Proclamation was signed in 2050, on the first day of the new year.

Norway cut itself off from the rest of the world, declaring itself a Utopian State in 2055. Norway still remains a small isolated republic, at a time when the rest of the globe has grown closer via the Ambient. With its abundant oil and fish, Norway is able to maintain a low economic level of independence.

The Ambient (originally the American Bio-Electronic Network*) had its origins in last century's Internet. The Six Idealists encouraged the propagation of this new mode of communication. A simple implant of a slice (the sophisticated heir to the 'chip') in the brain of seven-year-olds has meant that we can commune with anyone anywhere, via the watch on our arm.

The Ambient has proved to be a great amusement, as well as a profound advance. It was universally installed from 2059 onwards. As well as trading information, we can share in the joys and sorrows of distant populations. Ambient has also proved to be the cure for xenophobia. Xenophobia could not withstand understanding. The most optimistic prophesy of last century could not have anticipated this.

As frontiers dissolved, so the universal currency, the Clasp, pervaded market after market, washing away all little local coinages, those symbols of nationalism. By 2069, there remained but the one currency in the world - and that mainly electronic.

We are still really at the beginning of entire new regions of experience. It is fortunate that medicine now permits us to enjoy life until we reach the age of two hundred or more.

We are more spiritual than previous generations. We enjoy better sex with more people from all round the world. SWA, or Sex-with-Ambient, has proved a great human joy, a true sharing of being.

One result is that travel has increased exponentially. Most people are - in the old sense - homeless. It is nothing to visit the colonies on the Moon or Mars, or to stay in Solar Study City on Mercury. The more adventurous visit the far more distant satellites of Jupiter, with their remarkable celestial scenery.

Travel now has a new meaning. It is slow and comfortable. Our avions are virtual stratospheric villages as they float round the globe at a mere eight hundred kilometres an hour.

This new development, of which as yet we have seen only the beginnings, has caused other seemingly promising technologies to stagnate. We have already mentioned the failure of robotics. The computer, on which the Twentieth Century set such store, has lost its place in our thinking. No doubt this is because the old hypothesis that increasing computer complexity would generate consciousness has been exposed as a fallacy. The computer has shrunk to the ring we operate on our index finger. It has not conquered the world as the world once expected. Although, when that has been said, it conducts our avions in safety through the stratosphere and our traffic in safety over our highways.

The Idealistics, as the community is known, still exhibit great creativity. They have inspired the quest for a global religion which has yet to bear fruit. Scholars still quarrel. Global currency is evidently easier to negotiate than spiritual currency.

One development is certainly of this century alone - the coming- into-being of the dupe. Dupes are the tangible result of pure science. We, in this fortunate century, do not share in the apprehensions with which our predecessors greeted bioengineering. The genetic engineer is now a lauded member of society.

Through the researches of these scientists, the origin of human consciousness was discovered. This may prove to be the most far- reaching event since humankind first developed its own special conscious mind. Many animals have consciousness, but only humans are self-aware, and have knowledge of life and death.

Human consciousness has developed within the slim fault line between the Newtonian macroverse and the microverse of quantum physics and particle mechanics. Within this vital wafer, we have generated the ability to see into ourselves, our dreams, and to view the external universe. With this consciousness, we have changed the world - and continue to change it.

The genetic Idealistics managed to alter genetic structures so that this wafer could be engineered out of existence. A small sample culture was bred along these lines. It then became a simple matter to clone the resultant semi-humans. They are today's dupes.

Dupes walk among us. More importantly, they work among us. They can be trained as obedient dogs can be trained. They are faithful. They do not dream. They have no music. They have no aim in life. They cannot be said to think. And they have obviated human labour.

Gone are all the mechanical and electronic devices with which the houses of our predecessors were cluttered. Instead, we have our dupes. Dupes do not mind work. They do not mind being a subject race. They do not mind anything. They have no minds.

There are those who claim that these seemingly innocent dupes are embodiments of the Shadow side of human life. When we regard their bland, expressionless faces, it is hard to concede the truth of this contention.

It is a fact that a dupe's lifespan is brief, no more than a century long. But dupes have freed human beings to enjoy living. The long-held dream of no work with no guilt has at last been realised.

Admittedly, there is a negative side to this great boon. Men and women have been freed either to become wanderers and philanderers or to concentrate on the inner life, according to their personalities. But dupes were sent out to colonise Ganymede and Europa, satellites of Jupiter and neighbours to each other. Some thousand dupes were despatched to those distant worlds - and beyond, as far as Pluto. The Jovian dupes, improperly supervised, ran wild. Since they have retained the ability to reproduce, we must fear that they have evolved, and are no longer amenable, as once they were.

They are now developing a new form of consciousness, adapted to the harsh conditions under which they live. The most recent spaceship to arrive on Ganymede from Earth was sabotaged on landing, and its human passengers slaughtered.

It is to be feared that we have inadvertently brought a version of alien life into being. The dupes have already rejected the name of 'dupe'. They now proclaim themselves to be 'Desses' - perhaps a shortened form of the word 'descendants'. This suggests that they mean to supercede us. Happily, they are some way distant from Earth. There are hopes we can live in peace with this new variety of human species when - as must happen - we encounter each other.

*For more about the Ambient, see *White Mars*.

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