

Preface

To grasp a glimpse at the futures, you must always begin with the past. Understanding the roots from whence we have come and how we have arrived at our present situation with all its guts and glory is foundational to thinking about where we may go in the years ahead. When we first began thinking about the notion of innovation and the technologies of communication we went way back to the beginning and have in fact returned several times to ponder foundational questions like whether Neanderthals had the capacity to speak and how oral societies adjusted to the world of written words. These and other monumental moments in the history of human communication technologies have helped us to think about the ways in which human communication might radically change in the futures. Will we someday soon be part artefact, part human with the ability to program our own internal software and download information to and from our friends? Will we be able to 3D print our clothing, new shoes, or the food we eat? Will synthetic biology allow us to manage our own genetic structures to enable longer, healthier lives? All of these burgeoning technologies appear within grasp and yet there are the looming potentialities of systems collapse with us at the very same moment. Will we be able to create truly clean energy to continue all of these technological advances? Will our population growth and economic fragility conspire to create an even deeper socio-economic inequity in the future? Will climate change overwhelm our capacity to feed ourselves and will we see millions of climate refugees with no nation to call home creating increased geopolitical insecurity? All of these are very possible realities as well.

This volume is the final product in a stream of presentations, publications, and other activities resulting from a research project based on a proposal titled, “Communicating Power: Technological Innovation and Social Change. Past, Present, and futures.” We submitted our research proposal in May 2011 in response to an invited call on “Technology, Innovation, and Society,” specifically focusing on “How does technology change the balance of power in society?” We were awarded a small research grant by the University of Hawaii Foundation and agreed to conduct that research for the 2012 calendar year. While we fulfilled the requirements of

the grant during that period, we realized we had enough material to write a book on the subject. You are now reading the results of that decision.

In our proposal we stated that, “We propose to examine how communication technologies have contributed to changes in the structure of societies, and hence to the distribution of political power, in the past, and at present, and in four alternative futures. We propose to rely on a survey and analysis of existing studies for our past and some of our present research; on original research on several current instances; and on certain techniques of alternative futures forecasting in order to develop and present the possible four alternative futures.” We approached this proposal with some preconceived notions born of years of thinking about these very issues. But as social scientists and futurists, we endeavored to remain open-minded and as unbiased as possible as we carried out our research.

We proceeded as follows. First, we reviewed the proposal, and assigned specific tasks outlined in it to each of us. Dator took responsibility for the theoretical and historical portions from the evolution of human language through to the establishment of television and the Internet. Yee took responsibility for gathering and analyzing information about communication technologies and their impacts from the emergence of social media into the futures. Sweeney took responsibility for research on theories of power and for the development of the interactive game, which was actually co-devised with Aaron Rosa—to whom we owe immense gratitude. In addition to coordinating significant aspects of the game, Aaron made significant written contributions to Chap. 5, which developed from a report published in *The Journal of Futures Studies*. Aaron is also the artist behind the cover image for this monograph. He is a true renaissance man, and we are fortunate to have him as a colleague!

In addition to our individual responsibilities for these various sections of the project, the three of us worked cooperatively on all aspects of the research throughout the course of 2012. We established a pattern whereby we engaged in our research individually on a daily basis, sharing electronically ideas and items we encountered not only as they related to our own *kuleana* (responsibility) but also to each other. Once a week, we met for several hours and discussed what each of us had done since our last face-to-face meeting. At the end of each face-to-face session, we assigned tasks and made commitments for research over the coming week. As the final months and weeks of the project neared, we intensified our individual research, our electronic correspondence, and our face-to-face discussions of ideas and concerns.

The research process was both exhilarating and exhausting. Our weekly meetings were animated discussions of new findings as well as revisions of earlier assumptions. There have been various products of our labor along the way:

1. Presentation of research in progress by Aubrey Yee to the Department of Political Science, University of Hawaii at Mānoa, as part of a masters degree culminating experience. “Communicating Power: Technological Innovation and Social Change in the Past, Present, and Futures”—Honolulu, HI, May 2012. *Link to presentation:* <http://prezi.com/wnlwvoni8t/technology-innovation-and-society-grant-2012/>

2. Presentation of research in progress by John A. Sweeney at the University of California Santa Barbara, *Contagion and Control: Speculative Futures Graduate Colloquium*. The presentation was integral in thinking through our research into the futures of communication technology, specifically the affects of new media. Looking at two recent incidents related to viral media, Sweeney charted some trends and emerging issues that became critical aspects of the scenarios for our larger project. Santa Barbara, CA, May 2012.
3. Presentation by John A. Sweeney and Aubrey Yee, “Communicating Power: Technological Innovation and Social Change in the Past, Present, and Futures,” Session 15 on “Futures, values and sociological theory, Part II,” Research Committee Futures Research (RC07), International Sociological Association, Buenos Aires, Argentina, August 3, 2012. The connections made in Argentina and the feedback received from our conference presentation were an important part of the development and evolution of the final stage of our project and the futures immersive game in particular. *Link to presentation:* <http://prezi.com/wnlwvonipn8t/technology-innovation-and-society-grant-2012/>
4. Jim Dator, “Communication Technologies and the Futures of Courts and Law,” in Sam Muller, Stavros Zouridis, Morly Frishman and Laura Kistemaker (editors), *The Law of the Future and the Future of Law Volume II*. The Hague: Torkel Opsahl Academic EPublisher, 2012. Chapter 3.7, pp. 211–221. Portions of Chapter Two of this monograph are based on that article.
5. John A. Sweeney, Aubrey Yee, Aaron Rosa, Jim Dator, “Emerging Futures, Emerging Futurists.” A one-day futures symposium organized by the researchers to facilitate networking and presentations of academic works. Attended by over 30 academics in the field of futures studies from around the world. Honolulu, HI. November 30, 2012.
6. John A. Sweeney, Aubrey Yee, Aaron Rosa, Jim Dator, “Gaming with the Futures” (<http://www.gamingwiththefutures.tumblr.com>). We developed a portable gaming platform entailing experiential alternative futures to immerse players within a variety of power relations relative to an array of communication technologies. Participants included both undergraduate and graduate students from the University of Hawaii at Mānoa, undergraduate students from Kapiolani Community College, and visiting Futures Studies’ scholars and researchers from Australia, Bahrain, Canada, Finland, Germany, and the mainland. In total, “Gaming with the Futures” or “Gaming Futures” (as it was also called) utilized 12 gamers, 8 actors, and 5 facilitators. Honolulu, HI, December 1, 2012.
7. Jim Dator, John A. Sweeney, Aubrey Yee, Aaron Rosa, “Communicating Power: Technological Innovation and Social Change in the Past, Present, and Futures.” Report on TIS research and Gaming Futures published in *The Journal of Futures Studies*, June 2013, 17(4), 117–134. <http://www.jfs.tku.edu.tw/17-4/R01.pdf>
8. Aubrey Yee, John A. Sweeney, Jim Dator, Political Science Departmental Colloquium. Our research was presented to a group of students and faculty as part of a weekly colloquium series in the Department of Political Science, University of Hawaii at Mānoa, April 2013.

Since that time, the three of us have worked on writing, revising, and rewriting our various sections of the book as well as commenting, adding, and editing each other's work. We continued the rhythm with which we began our work: virtual meetings alternating with face-to-face meetings until we produced what you see here. As with all projects of this magnitude and certainly all projects dealing with alternative futures, one of the greatest challenges is knowing when to stop. There will always be more emerging issues, more relevant research, more ideas, and more revisions ... especially more revisions. So, while we feel that this manuscript is a complete vision of our ideas, it will never (to us) feel fully completed. It will always be a thought experiment in progress. We hope that it inspires in you some thoughts about how you see the futures, some vigorous debates about the past, and some critical lenses with which to view the present. This is our collective vision, but it is quite surely not the only or the "right" one.

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Honolulu, HI
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