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***The Time Machine*: Leisure Science (Fiction) and Futurology**

Introduction

At the end of 2016, a number of news reports about the future of work and leisure caught my attention (e.g., Brooks, 2017; Finley, 2016; Stewart, 2016; Sodha, 2016; Otlermann, 2016; Overly, 2016). Debates about leisure only occasionally enter into mainstream media (Shaw, 2007; Rojek, 2010), and these high-profile reports (e.g., *BBC News*, *The Guardian*, *The Washington Post*, and *Wired*) asked: what will happen in the future when (if) millions of people lose their jobs to automation, artificial intelligence and robots? Will there be a new crisis of (un)employment? Will those educated and skilled in science and technology become an employed elite, while the vast majority of unemployed are idle, supported by some form of Universal Basic Income (UBI)? In the absence of work, what would people do? While these are familiar questions for leisure scholars, philosophers, sociologists, political scientists and economists (e.g., de Grazia, 1962; Clarke & Critcher, 1985; Dumazidier, 1967; Rifkin, 1995; Rojek, 2002; Parker, 1971), I was certain that I had read this story elsewhere before. In this essay I (re)turn to science fiction.

In H.G. Well's (1895) *The Time Machine*, the protagonist travels to the year AD 802701 and encounters two post-human societies: Eloi are naïve inhabitants of an undemanding leisure utopia, while crude Morlocks toil with machinery underground, providing for the Eloi. The first science fiction novel written for an adult audience, *The Time Machine* is cautionary futurology—an attempt to predict possible futures based on the present and the past. Roughly contemporary with Marshall's (1890) and Veblen's (1899) foundational texts on wealth and leisure, *The*

Time Machine called critical attention to leisure and class inequities too. It is as much an indictment of the industrial revolution and capitalism as it is a work of fiction. While widely read, like most fiction (and especially sci-fi) Wells' tale has received less academic attention than its contemporaries (Scott, 2010; Veal, 2009). While Scott (2010) expressed surprise at the absence of Veblen's work in analyses of current leisure, in this essay I offer that *The Time Machine* is also insightful and instructive in considerations of leisure, work and social class. More importantly, I offer that texts like *The Time Machine* alert us to the social construction of the future (Adam, 2008; Harrison, 2015); the ways that leisure scholars envision the future have significant impact on the actions of the field and its practitioners today.

Across its quadragenarian run, little scholarship in *Leisure Sciences* specifically addresses the future. It does find particular form, as futurology, in wider leisure debates, such as the "leisure society" (Bramham, 2006; Rojek, 2010; Veal, 2011) or an "age of leisure" (Sessoms, 1972). Unlike Wells' Eloi, the leisure society foreseen by leisure scholars included arts, self-actualization, learning, and other "noble" pursuits when people are freed from work. In the 1970s, when *Leisure Sciences* launched, this ideal had been in circulation for decades due to perceived shorter working hours and labour-saving technologies (Parker, 1971; Sessoms, 1972). For Sessoms (1972, p. 312), an "age of leisure" had already arrived:

> There is much evidence to support the view that we are entering the leisure age. Our advances in technology have freed many from the drudgery of routine work. We are moving from a hard industry-based economy to a service-based one. For the most part we no longer hold work to be the

> central interest of life […] In fact we are rediscovering the concept of homo ludens […].

Automation could free people from work to pursue the leisure society – but what kinds of leisure, what kind of society?

By the millennium, the leisure society thesis was generally viewed as naïve and under-theorised, and the concept had largely disappeared (Aitchison, 2010; Gilchrist & Wheaton, 2008). It endured in Rojek's (2001, p. 115) "post-work thesis" that re-asserted "society is moving into a condition in which the cybernation of labor dramatically reduces the working week and the concomitant notion of the work career." Although the lines between work and leisure have blurred (Lashua, 2015), the cybernation of society is increasingly viewed as creating new and interconnected crises of leisure, (un)employment, and education. To think through these crises, I first turn to "futures studies", in particular, the work of time and futures scholar Barbara Adam. Following this, through the work of Veal (2011) and others (Bramham, 2006; Rojek, 2002) I revisit "the leisure society" concept as a kind of futurology – what kind of a future of leisure does this notion allow us to construct? What are the impacts of this potential future in our lives today? Finally I return to debates about Universal Basic Income and a world without work, before drawing some conclusions about the kinds of possible futures that *Leisure Sciences* might envision and enact.

Futurology, and the History of Leisure Futures

Leisure scholarship often trades in futurology (Parker, 1998). Futurology (or futures studies) involves systematic attempts to forecast possible, probable and preferable

futures, based on historical trends and current contexts. That is, given what we know now, and what has happened in the past, what is likely to happen in the future? Because such perspectives are shaped by the production of particular sets of ideas, or knowledge(s), it is important to understand the future as a social construct (Adam, 2008, 2010).

For Adam (2010) the social sciences have been too focused on the construction of the present and past (e.g., historiography), and inattentive to the future. We should particularly focus on how ideas of the future have been conceived historically, of how scholars used to envision what the future would be like:

> social scientists [should] engage with the fine-grained knowledge provided by historical study of past futures. On the basis of this history of the future, they can begin to identify larger patterns which form the foundation for social science analyses of social future-making and future-taking. (Adam, 2010, pp. 362-363)

Shifting away from commonsense or taken-for-granted views of the future, Adam (2010, 2008; see also Adam and Groves, 2007) offer two views of the history of the future: the future as fate or God(s)' gift, versus the future as a commodity. Both views assert that the origins of the future are historically contingent (e.g., how we think of the future has changed over time), ideas about the future are shaped by particular methods of knowledge production (e.g., mythologies or cosmologies of time, versus scientific or industrial 'clock' time), and both views are constructed by different experts or 'owners' of the future. For example, in "a future that belongs to gods and ancestors" (Adam, 2008, p. 112):

> [the future] is conceived as a pre-existing realm because it has been

> predetermined by its owners. Here, knowledge of that future does not empower experts to change the predetermined fate, not enable them to alter it. Rather, the expertise grounded in knowledge is intended to help people prepare for their fate. Thus, for example, Greek and Nordic mythologies abound in stories of predestined futures and unsuccessful attempts to avert fates that had been foretold.

Such a view contrasts starkly with today's secular societies driven by clock time. In these the future is a commodity and it is assumed that we "own the future. The future, we say, is ours to take and shape. We treat it as a resource for our use in the present. […] we plan, forge and transform the future to our will and desire" (Adam, 2008, p. 112).

The idea of future-as-commodity is one of both risk and potential. While we are freed to shape and alter the future, Adam cautions against a commodified future that "can be traded, exchanged and discounted without restrictions or limits. […] Imagined as an abstract, empty territory it is amenable to colonisation and control, plunder and pillage" (2010 p. 366). However, with historical, contextual knowledge and planning, the future-as-commodity holds vast potential, where the future "is a realm destined to be filled with our desire, to be formed and occupied according to rational blueprints, holding out the promise that it can be what we want it to be" (Adam, 2010, p. 366). By foreseeing the future as malleable and changeable, we become not only future-takers but also future-makers:

> Every deliberate future-making inevitably involves future-taking: it prefigures and shapes successors' future present […] the assumption of the future as free resource for present use, upon which much of western and westernised

> societies' affluence and global dominance has been created, becomes today difficult to uphold as past empty futures begin to impose themselves on the present, restricting choices and options. Amidst debates about climate change, environmental degradation and pollution, we are beginning to recognise that our own present is our predecessors' empty and open future: their dreams, desires and discoveries, their imaginations, innovations and impositions, their creations. […] Our present was their uncertain future, where all that was solid melted into air, their discounted future, exploited commercially for the exclusive benefit of their present. (Adam, 2010, pp. 368-369).

In other words, how we think or construct knowledge about the future affects how we act in the present. Desirable futures are part of the construction of present behaviours and actions, where "the future loses its determined quality and emerges as a domain of possibility, as a realm of pure potential, which we influence, co-produce and realise in and for the present" (Adam, 2008, p. 113). If our present was once someone's future, how has leisure scholarship, and particularly *Leisure Sciences*, constructed and shaped this *future present*? Based on recent debates about the coming crisis of cybernation and Universal Basic Income, I explore a handful of examples of futurology in leisure scholarship related to the idea of the "leisure society" and the current perceived crisis of leisure in higher education.

A Crisis of Possible Futures?

In times of various perceived crises, leisure's past has been deployed to examine the future of the field (Bramham, 2006; Henderson, 2010; Roberts, 2015; Spracklen,

2017). For example, Fletcher, Carnicelli, Lawrence and Snape (2016) recently responded to the perceived crisis of the future of leisure studies in UK Higher Education in neoliberal times. Set against diminished support for social sciences, arts and humanities, and increasing support for STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering and mathematics), the word "leisure" has nearly disappeared from the titles of UK Higher Education courses. Fletcher, et al (2016) quote Carrington (2015, p. 393), who warned:

> In our neo-liberal age of public sector austerity and instrumental learning, wherein grant-driven scientization and the biomedicalization of research dominates the corporate university, trying to convince undergrads (let alone Deans) to appreciate the relevance of Antonio Gramsci's writings to the sports they love seems nostalgically utopian.

That is to say, the current state-of-play in the social sciences of leisure and sport, and higher education more broadly (at least in the UK), is worryingly shortsighted and (ironically) lacking "utopian" visions of preferred futures. Aitchison (2006) and Rojek (2014) also noted a shift in university degree programs away from leisure studies toward instrumentally vocational "events management" types of courses. Such shifts, most of these scholars appear to agree, are attempts to apply current trends to (near) future employment opportunities for students. In this, predictions about the soon-to-be future (projections for employment) are shaping, if limiting, present possibilities for leisure courses and curricula. Fletcher, et al (2016) proposed that, in order to reclaim the "L word" (leisure), we need to engage in interdisciplinary "ideational 'border crossings' to advance thinking on leisure in the social sciences" (p. 1). For Fletcher et al, the current crisis of leisure is one of representation rather

than a "crisis of relevance" (p. 1). Such a crisis of representation is evident in my opening examples of popular press items concerned with future work and unemployment but not particularly attuned to leisure.

Amidst the fragmentation of leisure studies in neo-liberal Higher Education that "thirst[s] for vocational courses with a priority for employability, rather than academic rigour" (p. 9) Fletcher et al foresee the challenge before us as one of "determining the core mission, place and value of Leisure Studies and communicating these to other subject fields and wider society" (2016, p. 10). A decade ago, Shaw (2007, p. 59) voiced similar concerns: "Despite several decades of academic research and growing numbers of books and journal article publications, the field of leisure studies has received relatively little recognition or attention outside its own disciplinary borders." While scholars (Parker, 1971; Veal, 2012) have discussed a range of future-oriented projects, Rojek (2010) noted the "leisure society thesis" was one possible future that had received wide recognition:

> nothing before or since has been as successful in capturing the public imagination. For students of leisure, the results of the gradual submergence of the thesis in public life have been serious. The discipline has suffered a relative decline. [...] leisure studies is left with an identity crisis of major proportions: it is embarrassed about where it has come from (the promise of a shorter working week, early retirement, and well-funded activities for all), and it has not generated a new idea, one big enough to put leisure back on the agenda of public debate and make student enrolments in the subject expand. (p. 277)

In addition to the leisure society thesis, other responses to the crises of leisure futures have been considered (Henderson, 2010; Veal, 2012). Writing in *Leisure Sciences*, Henderson (2010) used the fable of "Chicken Little" to draw attention to instances when the field of leisure studies has been perceived as worryingly near, or approaching, a crisis (e.g., "the sky is falling"), and "offer[ed] suggestions for how researchers and educators might move forward in the near future" (2010, p. 392). Learned societies have invited leisure scholars to ponder the future too, such as the *Future of Leisure Studies Seminar* held by the Australia New Zealand Association for Leisure Studies (ANZALS) in 2009. Other anniversaries have inspired moments of futurology too. In his commentary on the 50th anniversary of de Grazia's (1962) *Of Time, Work, and Leisure*, Sylvester (2013, p. 253) noted de Grazia's "treatment of technology and consumerism foresees the future" however, this view is lost on contemporary readers: "even if *Of Time, Work, and Leisure* were to regain an audience, my concern is that de Grazia's message and challenge would resonate very little in leisure studies, and the inattention would just continue." In this, Sylvester hints that not only ideas about leisure, but about *the future of leisure*, have changed.

Ten years ago, in a moment of "retro-futurism"—examining predictions of the future as envisioned by people in the past, or "historical (past) futures" (Adam, 2010, p. 362)—the 2007 Leisure Studies Association (LSA) conference theme asked "What ever happened to the leisure society?" The conference invited papers to draw from "Critical and Multidisciplinary [Retro]spectives" of over 30 years of leisure scholarship to better understand work-leisure shifts in contemporary society. From this invitation, Veal (2009, revised 2011 in *World Leisure Journal*) provided an extensive review of academic trajectories, within and without the field of leisure

studies, of how a future "leisure society" (or "age of leisure") was envisioned. Veal's (2009) superb review of nearly 70 texts was driven by two lines of enquiry: first it sought to discern if, in its origins, leisure scholarship was "preoccupied with the concept of a predicted future idyllic leisure society" (p. 84), and second, to link these debates with predictions of reduced working hours and increased leisure time. I will take up this second point again in relation to increasing automation and "Universal Basic Income" later in this essay. Regarding the first point, Veal concludes that the leisure society concept is complex, problematic and elusive—even something of a myth or "exaggeration"—in the literature. First appearing in the 1920s, the leisure society concept builds on ideas in Marshall (1890) Veblen (1899) (and, I would argue, *also* Wells, 1895) and asserts that increasing automation and decreasing work will eventually deliver human society to a leisure utopia of some sort. Veal traces the presence of this idea through a broad swath of academic literature, for example, from Haywood, Kew & Bramham (1989, p. 254) "For many writers the future is seen as 'the leisure society'", to Gratton (1996, p. 1) "We do not have to go back very far to find many commentators [who] predicted that by the end of the twentieth century (i.e., now!) we would be moving towards a 'leisure age'", to Brown and Rowe (1998, p. 89), "In the 1970s many social commentators predicted a 'leisure revolution' driven by automation and new technologies in industry and in the home." Referred to as "the leisure revolution", "age of leisure" (Sessoms, 1972), or "leisure society" (Rojek, 2005), Veal comments that, although invariably noted, few scholars offer much detail and often use such terms in passing. In this, ideas such as the leisure society take on mythic capacities.

Myths are more than fables or falsehoods; they involve the social construction of shared social realities and meanings (Barthes, 1972). A myth can be considered "a story by which a culture explains or understands some aspect of reality or nature" (Fiske, 1990, p. 88). The stories that we tell ourselves about possible futures are thus important myths. Myths serve "to organize shared (coded) ways of conceptualizing often under-theorized cultural practices" (Manan & Smith, 2014, p. 207). At this level of myth, a crucial question that resonates throughout the literature relates to what kinds of leisure will dominate in any so-called leisure society. This echoes from Marshall:

> [...] human nature improves slowly, and in nothing more slowly than the hard task of learning to use leisure well. In every age, in every nation, and in every rank of society, those who have known how to work well, have been far more numerous than those who have known how to use leisure well. But on the other hand it is only through freedom to use leisure as they will, that people can learn to use leisure well: and no class of manual workers, who are devoid of leisure, can have much self-respect and become full citizens. Some time free from the fatigue of work that tires without educating, is a necessary condition of a high standard of life. (1890, p. 720)

The (in)ability to use leisure well echoes in the work of Sessoms, who raised similar questions about the limits of the 'age of leisure':

> For those who are unprepared for this adventure, it is frightening and overpowering. Consequently, we demean the importance of recreation and fill our free time with busy work, neurotic phobias, and narcotic consumption. […] Unfortunately, they are not always sure how to achieve it,

> so like lemmings, they scurry to the countryside seeking fulfilment. (Sessoms, 1972, pp. 312-313)

Sessoms' (1972) admonishment that many people do not use leisure well echoes Marshall (1890), and others (Sylvester, 2013; Parr & Lashua, 2004). Furthermore, predictions about the role of leisure and education in shaping identity and citizenship are readily linked to more recent debates about leisure, social class and social capital (Glover & Hemingway, 2005).

Social capital is well-considered terrain in leisure studies, particularly in *Leisure Sciences* (see Glover, 2004, 2010; Devine & Parr, 2008; Van Ingen & Van Eijck, 2009). Dorling (2014) also reminds us that for most people social class is no longer about occupation (and perhaps never was). Rather, social class is a construct (like the future) that is ever changing, given the prevailing 'winds' and technologies that shape the present:

> The current classes we recognize are classes of the machine age, of cities, of the age we think of as modern. We call these 'social classes' as if they were cast in stone, as if they were akin to taxa of species, but they are only a very recent rank ordering and they will soon be replaced in their turn. The older social classes that predated our current occupational hierarchy we now call castes. It did not take long after the start of industrialization to recognize that it was the machines which made current class systems so different from the agricultural class systems before them: 'The soil grows castes; the machine makes classes'. (Dorling, 2014, p. 455)

In an era of computers, networks and information (Castells, 1996) we might ask: if soil made castes, and industrialization made classes, what does technology make us

now? If we have indeed reached an "age of leisure" or a nascent "leisure society", are we already more like Morlocks and Eloi than we realize?

Back to the Future? Leisure and Universal Basic Income

Following recent socioeconomic crises and critiques of neoliberalism (Roberts, 2015), the leisure society concept has reemerged, particularly in debates over "Universal Basic Income" (UBI). A response to increasing class inequalities and the (continuing) crisis of automation, UBI involves a flat government payment to all citizens whether or not they are in work. UBI infers people freed from work would be creative, take entrepreneurial risks, and pursue their dreams (Stewart, 2016). Switzerland held a 2016 national referendum on UBI, asking voters "what would you do if your income were taken care of?" (The measure was overwhelmingly defeated.) In 2016, US Democratic presidential candidate Bernie Sanders championed UBI. The UK Green Party has UBI within its platform, and Finland and the Netherlands are trialing UBI programs in 2017 (Otlermann, 2016); Scotland plans to trial UBI in two counties in 2017 (Brooks, 2017). The future leisure society is *now*.

British commentators dismissed UBI as "the right to be lazy" (Sodha, 2016), claiming it encourages idleness, hyper-consumerism and State dependence. This is perhaps, echoed again in Wells' *The Time Machine* where the time traveller can see no machinery, no evidence of industry of any kind, and the Eloi:

> displayed no vestige of a creative tendency. There were no shops, no workshops, no sign of importations among them. They spent all of their time playing gently, in bathing in the river, in making love in a half-playful fashion,

> in eating fruit and sleeping. I could not see how things were kept going. (1964 [1890], p. 60)

Wells presents a dim view of this leisure utopia, and by extension, such idle views of leisure offer a scant better prospect for UBI: someone, somewhere is exploited. For Wells it was Morlocks toiling underground with infernal machines—an analogue for Victorian Britain's industrial working-classes; in (post)neoliberal times, it is often the unskilled labourers of global capitalism locked into an uncertain "gig economy" who are exploited. Someone, or something, has to "keep things going." In recent news, the focus has been, rather futuristically, on robots.

In the popular press, the twinning of UBI and automation has been treated with both skepticism and mild alarm. An article in the technology magazine *Wired* titled "The White House's Fix for Robots Stealing Jobs? Education" (Finley, 2016) opened:

> the White House warns that millions of jobs could be automated out of existence in coming years. But it cautions against one much discussed solution: giving away free money.

The emphasis on education, unfortunately, refers not to education about what to do with increased time for leisure, but rather education for employment in science and technology-related jobs. The concept of leisure remains out of the frame. Writing a decade ago, Shaw (2007) recalled similar instances where leisure has received wider, if similarly oblique, attention:

> One such moment goes back to the 1950s and 60s when there were many predictions about the coming 'Age of Leisure' (e.g. Dumazedier, 1967; Larrabee & Meyersohn, 1958), based on the assumption that rapid

> technological progress would reduce the need for labour and thus for paid employment. When it became obvious that these predictions were not going to be realized, the issue was dropped as a topic of debate, with a surprising lack of interest about why the predictions were so inaccurate and/or why work continued to dominate people's lives despite technological progress and efficiency. What is noteworthy here is that the interest in this debate focussed less on an interest in leisure *per se*, and more on concerns about unemployment, underemployment, and the resultant social unrest that might occur. (p. 60)

This final point is the nub of the matter, as it reduces leisure to questions of idle masses and measures of social control. An article in the *Washington Post* (Overly, 2016) worried that "growing popularity of artificial intelligence technology will likely lead to millions of lost jobs, especially among less-educated workers" yet celebrated the potential for "higher average wages and fewer work hours" for those educated and working in "technical fields". Like many of the press items I've read about these debates, the article seems unconcerned with the vast social divide such a position would create:

> To reconcile the benefits of the technology with its expected toll […] the federal government should expand access to education in technical fields and increase the scope of unemployment benefits. Those policy recommendations, which the Obama administration has made in the past, could head off some of those job losses and support those who find themselves out of work due to the coming economic shift. (Overly, 2016)

As Spracklen (2017, p. 3) noted in his review of Parker's (1971) classic *The Future of*

Leisure and Work, "if we are to be replaced by robots, we need to invest resources into planning how we find meaning and purpose when we no longer have our work." The stark division of social classes along lines of skilled technology workers and universally-supported unemployed reminds me very much of Wells' (1895) predictions of Morlocks and Eloi in *The Time Machine*. In other words, current policy and visions of leisure futures drive us precisely towards the kind of world that Wells envisioned, with educated (if only technically so) Morlocks in work, and uneducated Eloi who blithely enjoy a form of UBI.

Conclusion: Leisure Future-makers

Leisure scholars often, and rightly, read the past. In this essay I have argued that we can also read the future, both in terms of futurology and science fiction. In his essay on the legacy of de Grazia's (1962) *Of Time, Work, and Leisure*, Sylvester (2013) repeats de Grazia's warning that "conceptions of leisure 'live in two different worlds'" (p. 8). Whether looking back at classical Greek and Roman concepts of leisure like Sylvester, or looking forward through Wells' early science fiction, both attempt to use the past to foresee some kind of possible future(s). As argued by Harrison (2015, p. 24, original emphasis), different practices "enact *different* realities and hence work to assemble *different futures*."

So what of the future of leisure and *Leisure Sciences*? Arguably, the journal presents a kind of time machine itself: looking back, it offers a space to read issues and trends that demand greater attention, to explore the ways that both the history and future of leisure research have been written. Similar to science fiction literature, it too provides a space to explore the kinds of future(s) that have been envisioned

for leisure. Here the journal is increasingly a space for critique of unjust and discriminatory leisure, and in this *Leisure Sciences* points toward better future-making. Recent emphases on social justice (Johnson, 2009, 2014; Parry, Johnson & Stewart, 2013) offer hopeful examples. In this sense I find Adam's (2010) ideas about desirable futures exciting and useful: if we place leisure at the centre of broader movements for social justice and other struggles for creating "different worlds" (e.g., environmental justice, fostering a more democratic society; addressing class inequities) then these futures become more possible too. In this, instead of hoping for wider recognition to come to the field, we also can take the field to wider debates in the popular imagination. In doing so, leisure scholar-practitioners become better future-makers. Science fiction can help to alert us to these possible future(s)—or the at the very least, such as in Wells' *The Time Machine*—the futures we would prefer not to make.

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