

## Ghosts of Future Past

Gerard Briscoe  
Arts Research Centre  
School of English and Drama  
Queen Mary University London

Chris Speed  
Design Informatics  
Edinburgh College of Art  
University of Edinburgh

The ubiquity of digital technologies continues to increase, including documentation of the past, knowledge of the present, and predictions of the future. So, what will be the nature of our relationship to this omnipresent temporal surveillance, including what what forms of interaction would be appropriate. We offer Charles Dickens 'ghosts of past, present and future', from his 'A Christmas Carol', as a framework for understanding our relationship to emerging omnipresence. We consider that an avatar of some form would be the only way to interact with the vast amounts of information that would be required, dwarfing what is currently considered in Data Science and even Big Data. Predictions of the future through digital technologies, such as Google Now and Amazon's proposed preemptive dispatching (they dispatch before you order), are akin to ghosts of future past. These ghost of future past might offer preferable futures or inevitable ones, appropriately representing the potential of seeing the future, while suggesting that there may also be risks, such as self-fulfilling prophecies. While information of the present and past would potentially be more complete (absolute and objective), there would still be the potential to be reminded and informed. The potential of forgetting has been affected by the digital era, with some considering that it is important to do so, if not paramount. So, recollections of the past that would be rather forgotten, would be akin to a ghost of the past. Equally, undesirable information of the present would be considered to have a ghostly haunting nature. The 'ghosts' are not necessarily of a dystopian nature, in the novel they are haunting a character to create a preferable future. However, it does highlight the importance of who controls our relationship to omnipresence, otherwise we may well become haunted by ghosts of future past.