8

Variability

At a closer look, Mundania is constantly re-created. Order is, as we have seen, merely temporarily and situationally fixed. Mundania is like an image on a computer screen that seems to be static, but beneath and beyond the glass surface of the screen there is a constant flow of energy, processes and invisible work upholding what is experienced as a motionless image. Mundania keeps on emerging as people experience it.

What is experienced as ordinary and what is experienced as inertia or transformation is contextual. The different experiences of change, interferences and suspensions are furthermore unevenly distributed. There is variability and mutability in Mundania. Conditions might change and differ between time and context. Shifting tempi, temporalities and horizons of possibility for different people. This variability is related to social processes and stratifications and to the ways imaginaries unfold. What is possible, how does variability emerge and how is it maintained? The here and now of Mundania is influenced by projections into different times and possibilities, by expectations of what could come and what is remembered.

Elsewayness

How to capture the fleeting now, the emergent contemporary, and all the complex processes that continue, emerge and enmesh throughout time? How to capture all the varied rhythms and processes that uphold Mundania? How is the very local connected to distant places and to larger and stronger ongoing changes? Futures to pasts? All the incalculable potential entanglements. Uploading of files to a cloud service and climate change. Configuration of a webcam and the fluctuations of stock values of tech corporations on Nasdaq, the cosy hue from the light of a smart lamp and the death and suffering radiating from conflicts over rare earth metals? What is linked to what, and what is relevant to consider?

How the future of Mundania is manifested is not predetermined. It is important not to fall into the trap of technological determinism, to think

that the specificities of the technologies that we are enmeshed with will inevitably steer us into one specific future (Rahm and Kaun 2022: 24). The future is inherently uncertain, unknowable and enigmatic, and attempts to steer or predict what will happen often fail. This is why it is relevant to think about futures in plural (Pink 2022: 14–15).

It is important not to tell that linear and straightforward story about inevitable technological progress or peril once again (Jasanoff 2021: 16). Yet, technologies are imperative. They do not predetermine, but they influence and nudge into position, and they autocorrect and suggest according to specific designs, logics and criteria. Futures are shaped by practices, influenced by what technologies make possible. In this sense technologies are orientational, but they do not predetermine and inevitably steer us in one specific direction. A strong influential force comes from that which is inherently intangible, from imaginaries. Fleeting and often variable ideas about coming futures. Visions that spark missions. These can turn to something very concrete. Ideas and imaginaries can be a remedy, or they can set the world on fire.

Imaginaries, albeit fuzzy, have the potential to crossbreed the contemporary with alternatives, with alterity, with that which could be different. Here and now is amalgamated with elsewhereness, with that which is beyond. It is also amalgamated with projections of what might become or should not become. Imaginaries can evoke what could be called *elsewayness*. That which could be fundamentally different. In this sense, imaginaries have a transformative potential. But drastic elsewayness does not seem to be the modus operandi. Imaginaries seem to be hard to shift in radical ways. Imaginaries are indeterminate, but patterns recur. Just like there are path dependencies in the development of technological systems, there are certain preconditions for the ways imaginaries often develop. Imaginaries seldom reach escape velocity. They often gravitate towards certain larger prevailing constructs that determine their (fuzzy) arrangement and orientation. It is, for example, hard to think about a world without money or financial systems like the ones prevailing today. To conceptualize societies and the world as some variation of capitalism is a major gravitational force from which imaginaries can hardly escape today. It is also hard to envision societies without humans entering certain roles, careers and professions. It is hard to think about renewal and improvement without drifting towards established tropes, such as innovation models or evolution. Even ideas about radical innovation and revolution are rule-bound.

Imaginaries can be oriented towards what could be different, towards elsewayness, but the elseway is often tinted by preconceptions, and by biases and specific interests. The faint hum permeating Mundania whispers of inevitability and inescapability. Annette Markham discusses a similar dilemma in an article about what is possible to imagine when it comes to technologies.

Any telling of ourselves, individually or culturally, is part of a pre-existing narrative environment, as Judith Butler's extensive work on the performativity of gender illustrates so poignantly. Thus, anything we might call an imaginary is in some ways stuck within (or departing from) a predefined template for context, content, and genre, and sometimes all three. (Markham 2020: 385).

It means that the way humans imagine worlds is determined by that which Markham calls predefined templates (Markham 2020: 385). By discursive frames. These very frames are often invisible until they are challenged or destabilized. These templates, together with routines and procedural and recurring behaviour, keep some things as they are. Generate continuity. Despite a lot of talk about disruption and transformation, much stays the same. The rhythm of Mundania is this peculiar mix of change and repetition. Some conditions change, while others remain. That faint hum is still here.

Another 1984

October 2022. Ding! Another email arrives. This time it is a brief notification. It tells me that an amount has been withdrawn from my credit card. This specific withdrawal happens once a month. Every time I feel a slight relief that it works. Seamlessly. Simultaneously, I feel a slight annoyance. A feeling of dependence. This withdrawal gives me access to cloud storage for one more month. It means that files, films, photos, works and apps are stored somewhere in a distant data centre. What if I would like to change this deal? How would I end this subscription? How should I start moving files and start to deal with all that which has taken place beyond my attention for some while? Which bindings are connected to this cloud account? Which relations? What are the implications to end this? Often one deal would affect several others. The thought provokes a slight vertigo. It is not impossible, but quite troublesome to leave a brandverse. Sometimes I feel like a mindless drone that just keep on paying to get access to some labyrinthine relationscape that I can neither escape nor live without. How did I get here? Gradually I guess, step by step, file by file, click by click, nudge by nudge.

Through the years a kind of tentacular embrace has taken form. I have confirmed agreements that I have not read in detail. I have confirmed that I agree to terms and conditions by restlessly clicking when I have started to use some service. Clickwrap agreements are all over Mundania. To the technological and economical ungraspability of Mundania, we can add the legal. These circumstances started to build up some time ago.

A certain year that is often evoked when it comes to matters of control, dominance and systems hard to escape is 1984. At that time, Apple aired a television commercial for their Macintosh-computers that has become iconic

in advertising circles. It appeared on television through several outlets, on one occasion in a break during the Super Bowl, the final of the US National Football League (NFL). The commercial was partly aimed towards new creatives who wanted alternatives to the business machines provided by the computer giant of those days, IBM. In the short commercial directed by Ridley Scott a theme from George Orwell's novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was taken as the point of departure to convey the message that Apple's small 'more human' computers should break the regime of the prevailing computer industry. The plot takes place in a large industry-like environment, in drab and uninviting corridors and halls. Grey colour in the corridor, and when entering the hall, a cold bluish hue. IBM was called 'Big Blue', and the corporation was hinted at as a kind of Big Brother in the commercial. Rows of drone-like bald and uniformed people march in rows and sit down in front of a gigantic screen (Wikipedia, 1984 (advertisement) n.d.)

In this blue-grey bleak environment, something pops out. A blonde-haired woman in athletic clothing comes running. She wears a white top and bright red shorts. Her colours are graded differently than the rest of the footage. She looks bright and colourful against all the drab darkness. In her hands, a huge sledgehammer. She is hunted by threatening men in protective gear. They appear as militia or law enforcement officers from the dictatorship of some dystopic science-fiction film.

The sound of the commercial is based on heavy boots against the floor, a siren or horn that repeatedly sounds and reverberates in the hall. On top of that a male voice. It has an authoritative and commanding tone. The voice of a leader, possibly Big Brother, who also appears on the huge screen. The voice announces that:

> Today, we celebrate the first glorious anniversary of the Information Purification Directives. We have created, for the first time in all history, a garden of pure ideology – where each worker may bloom, secure from the pests purveying contradictory thoughts. Our Unification of Thoughts is more powerful a weapon than any fleet or army on earth. We are one people, with one will, one resolve, one cause. Our enemies shall talk themselves to death, and we will bury them with their own confusion. We shall prevail! (Quoted in Wikipedia, 1984 [advertisement] n.d.)

Before the voice shouts "We shall prevail!", the woman spins round and hurls the hammer. Like an athlete from the Olympic Games. The hammer hits the screen with an explosion. White light spreads through the room. The rows of people stare, shocked, with open mouths at the disruptive action. Then comes Apple's message in text and voice-over: "On January 24th, Apple Computer will introduce Macintosh. And you'll see why 1984 won't be

like '1984'" (Wikipedia, 1984 (advertisement) n.d.). The commercial ends with the Apple logo, which at the time was rainbow coloured.

This was around forty years ago. The ideas about tech-based creativity, as promoted in the commercial, have to some extent taken over much of computer business and the way consumer electronics are understood. Now there are new giants reigning. One of these is Apple. The underdog has grown into a powerful position. Sporting a more cheerful and laidback appearance than earlier providers of business machines, but yet very powerful and influential. There are also new stakeholders, roles and business dynamics. Much has changed since 1984, but much has also remained. Revolution and disruption, as it was evoked by Apple in 1984 for example, has become routinized, almost fetishized within Big Tech and digital cultures.

Cheerful colourings and cartoonish appearances have become the main tenor of several of the prevailing brandverses. Even if Apple has changed its rainbow-coloured logo to a sleeker monochrome appearance, the colourfulness appears in many other places of their brandverse. Power and trustfulness are often conveyed differently in the 2020s than forty years earlier. One of the world's most powerful corporations, Google, can have a brand identity colour-coded more like a preschool than earlier global business conglomerates. But the question is what remains, under the cheerful colours and playful designs. How would you escape the entanglements of conglomerates and brandverses and the rhythms they instil?

Acceleration imaginaries

One persistent template of imaginaries that has been around in Mundania for a long time is about rhythm and tempo. It is about increased speed. Over the past decades computing power has undoubtedly increased. The technological possibilities of a computer have multiplied compared to those that were promoted in 1984. The increase in computing power has, together with broader technological development and certain economic circumstances, fostered imaginaries about perpetual acceleration.

The increase in computing power and acceleration has often been associated with what has been called Moore's Law. In 1965, the American engineer Gordon Moore saw that the number of transistors in a silicon chip had doubled every two years. For a special issue of the journal *Electronics*, Moore made a projection into the future. He expected that this trend would continue, and that the power of computer components would increase exponentially, while simultaneously decreasing in relative cost. Since then, this trend has been approached more or less as an inexorable truth, almost comparable to laws of nature as formulated by Newton or Einstein even if there has also been debates about when and how the trend would end (Britannica, Moore's law, 2023; see also Rotman 2020).

Computing power has undoubtedly increased over the years, and Moore's law has been influential in tech-based businesses, visions and imaginaries. But how far can this logic be stretched? It is like the dreams about speed and fast, streamlined mobility that emerged during early 20th-century modernity and in Modernist art have been ingrained in imaginaries and repeatedly come back in space races, cyberspaces and computer-driven AI-visions. Are the imaginaries about increased speed and computing power related to unspoken ideas about escape velocity, about leaving the old world and the bads of the past behind by embracing acceleration?

Moore's law and its associated logics have been associated with inevitability, a march of technological progress and a kind of persistent upgrading ethos (Willim 2003a). It says that upgrades will continuously come, that they will provide us with new opportunities and that people better align with this pace to 'not be left behind'. Trains, planes and AI. An upgrading ethos says that technologies will continue to increase in power and their benefits will spread over the world, leading to Society 1.1, followed by 1.2, 1.3, … 2.0 and so on. This is one of the most persistent templates of Mundania. The imaginary about upgrading. Based on ideas that new versions and things will come and that they will foster transformation. A promise epitomizes the upgrading ethos. It says that even if present things are far from perfect, they will be fixed in a coming upgrade. Rest assured, the upgrade will solve things.

Upgrading can also be associated with a physical thing getting new features, maybe by the installation of electronic components and software. Like an upgrade of a lawnmower or an oven. The newly upgraded thing gets a new quality, it becomes electronic, digital or connected. Often this upgrade has been promoted by the word 'smart'. Smart toothbrushes, hairdryers, lamps and materials. A couple of these were discussed in Chapter 3, 'In-between'.

In this sense, an upgrade can be a qualitative or quantitative enhancement, but foremost it is an incremental change that improves what is already there. New and tweaked functions or more capacity, like more memory or bandwidth. An upgrade is same, but different. An accumulation or enhancement on a fixed scale. It is based on the power of addition and increase, the power of plus. The idea about incremental improvement has been a crucial aspect of Mundania. It has to do with the development of new electronics components such as microchips, but it is foremost associated with the development of software. It has become a given that, regularly, new versions of software will be developed and introduced.

Upgrading does not always come smoothly. It is in practice based on rhythms that are not always in sync. Which software versions work with specific hardware? New processor architectures or other changes of hardware often require that software is rewritten. The releases of hardware components and compatible software does not always coincide. There might be lags and different tempi leading to compatibility issues. Neither do new generations

of software support hardware that has reached a certain age. When new software platforms or major upgrades of operative systems are released, earlier versions of third-party software might also stop working. This is more a rule than an exception. Then it is worthwhile to wait. A rule of thumb is that the more components from different producers and brandverses that are part of a system, the longer the wait before it is safe to install a new system upgrade. One of the competencies of Mundania has been to get hold of these rhythms of compatibility. To believe in coming better versions, but to also know when to wait before installing. When can and should I upgrade software? What happens with my order and routines and my software when I change hardware? What is compatible with what? Upgrades are supposed to make experiences smoother and smarter, while the process of upgrading per se is a more intricate matter.

Temporal alignment and getting hold of different rhythms are an important part of mundanization. The cyclical shift between day and night and the yearly cycle of seasons are accompanied by such phenomena as upgrades as well as update cycles, subscription periods and charging times. There are variations between all these different rhythms. One specific difference is the one between upgrades and updates. When it comes to most software, upgrades are more drastic and obvious changes, while updates are more frequent fixes of the code. The latter often include security patches and removal of glitches and bugs, and this becomes more of a requirement. Users are supposed to update and to stay in sync. Just as they are also supposed to back up data regularly. These practices are from security angles, referred to as Cyber Hygiene or Digital Hygiene (Dharampal 2021). Moral demands to be 'hygienic', to act responsibly and to align with the rhythms of updates, security patching and the recurrent management of passwords and file systems give rise to ideas about the good compliant digital citizen (Dharampal 2021). The good digital citizen keeps products alive by updating them. Software, or objects that are not updated are dead, as Wendy H.K. Chun has put it. 'Things and people not updating are things and people lost or in distress, for users have become creatures of the update. To be is to be updated: to update and be subjected to the update' (Chun 2016: 2).

In Mundania you are supposed to update to stay in sync and to be 'hygienic'. To be alive? This can be compared to how citizens of Sweden in the mid–20th century were nudged into position by specific designs of homes and everyday environments (as described in Chapter 7, 'Order'). The question is, which stakeholders are involved in these different corrective agendas?

People are nudged into certain rhythms. And it has become increasingly easy to keep up with the pace of updates. During the first years of the 2020s, updating has become more of an automated process. People are asked if they want their software to update 'in the background'. Once they agree to this, updates become part of continuous ambient improvement. It

removes conscious practices of updating. This is a further strengthening of tech-infused Mundania. Improvements happen in the background. Variations and transformations take place beyond awareness of the person using the system. You automatically stay in sync, quantized. This ambient improvement must however be foolproof when it comes to compatibility. If it should break some of the functionalities between installed software and connected hardware, the convenience of ambient improvement could instead lead to major concerns. Despite this, the trend towards more and more automated processes was strong. Several processes became ambient in the early 2020s.

Conceptual congruity

Imaginaries do not take form in a vacuum. Tasks and thought are entwined. Imaginaries often emerge, and become strengthened when people engage with, think about and with, and feel for things, technologies and systems. 'There's a general argument in the history of technology that we use the dominant technology of the day to think about the world arounds [sic] — the brain was hydraulic (think Freud) when dams dominated; a switchboard when there were telephones abounding and is now a computer' (Bowker 2020: 96). This is how Geoffrey Bowker put it when he discusses how imaginaries around archives have developed and mutated. Technologies and imaginaries merge. Cybernetics and electrical circuitry merge with imaginaries about mental energy, with bodies and mind to be charged like batteries. Drained and supercharged. Neural computing and GAN (Generative Adversarial Networks) merge with organizational competition and contest as generative processes of quality enhancement. Technological concepts amalgamate with the ways in which people imagine and conceive the world.

When Lev Manovich in 2001 wrote about 'The Language of New Media' he stressed the importance of conceptual transfer, how concepts and ideas from computers would transfer to social and cultural patterns. He proposed that 'cultural categories and concepts are substituted, on the level of meaning and/or language, by new ones that derive from the computer's ontology, epistemology, and pragmatics. New media thus acts as a forerunner of this more general process of cultural reconceptualization' (Manovich 2001: 47). This standpoint harmonizes with the way Bowker discussed imaginaries in the previous quote . It is also exemplified by the way in which upgrading has become a broader concept, beyond software development and use.

Conceptual transfers are hard to avoid. In Manovich's effort to extend media theory to encompass also computer-generated work, he himself contributes to the transfer when he takes concepts from computer science to use in media theory (Manovich 2001: 48). It seems to be a recurring

issue, how prevailing technologies seep into the way humans, individually and collectively, imagine the world. We use such words as 'shift gear' and 'hack' to describe practices beyond the engagements with technologies. Also in this book these reconceptualizations occur quite frequently. The black-box metaphor is a good example of how a technological concept seeps into more and more contexts and also influences the way the world is imagined. It becomes a template; it directs associations and make certain thoughts and imaginaries possible. The black-box metaphor in itself paradoxically frames, steers and encloses the ways in which we think. As noted in Chapter 7, 'Opacities'.

When at the turn of the Millennium I was studying the rise and fall of the Swedish internet consultancy company Framfab (an abbreviation for the Swedish name that translates as The Future Factory), I tweaked (yes, a word related to the practices of mechanics that is often used in tech-contexts and beyond) the ideas about conceptual transfer to instead use *conceptual congruity* (2003a). I proposed that a kind of mimetic mirror play between technological concepts and processes and other related phenomena took place. At Framfab, for example, they used the toy LEGO as part of their promotion and as a playful prop in their offices. The qualities of LEGO, its colourfulness, its associations with play, as well as its modular affordances, were mirrored both in the organization (Framfab's organization was characterized by playfulness as well as a modular structure of smaller offices) as well as in some of the digital products and offerings by the company (like the product Brikks) (see also Coupland 1995; Willim 2003b).

Conceptual congruity is something that reinforces specific imaginaries in certain times and contexts, not just through conceptual transfer from technology to the surrounding world, but in a more intricate play between concepts, technologies, aesthetics and practices. This is how clouds and mist merge with the industrial, with grids and algorithms. How (technological) upgrading and (economic) value increase merge. How ideas about machines getting human features, such as smartness and intelligence (or also having hallucinations) comingle with the ways humans should be orderly, professional, uniform, follow procedures and protocols. Things, stories, concepts and processes seem to just 'fit'. Simultaneously creating both congruities and variation. They seem to be part of an unwritten but noticeable meaning-making scheme or pattern. Congruity. Correspondence, or Resonance. The latter word, 'resonance', is often used in electronics and in relation to sound. In Chapter 2, 'Vanishing Points', I discussed it in relation to the tweaking of rotary knobs. Anthropologist Susan Lepselter uses resonance to discuss how collective narratives and poetics emerge and are maintained, and how these can also be influenced by the uncanny, by the power of the unseen, by affect and *apophenia* (Lepselter 2016). 'Resonance is not an exact reiteration. Rather it's something that strikes a chord, that inexplicably rings

true, a sound whose notes are prolonged. It is just–glimpsed connections and hidden structures that are felt to shimmer below the surface of things' (Lepselter 2016: 4). Resonance can be something that excites and enforces, that feels right, like conceptual congruity. But it might also have a darker tenor, evoking the uncanny. Resonance and conceptual congruity can also be strengthened by atmospheric attunement and ecstatic things, as discussed in Chapter 3, 'In-between'. The ambience, the atmosphere, and the ways we engage with things are entwined with the ways in which imaginaries unfold and varies. How they resonate with the world.

Citius, altius, fortius

To further put the focus on conceptual congruity, let us once again think about the static screen image that introduced this chapter. It is maintained through fluid and rapid processes that go unnoticed by the onlooker. Let us use it as a metaphorical vehicle. Under the surface of the screen and in its connected peripherals, quick variation and alternation keep things in their places. Electricity and processes in and between circuits. The experience of the static image on the screen is not problematized until some process seizes, is interrupted, or slowed down. The emergence of a flicker or unwanted change of the static image might mean that something beneath the surface has stopped working.

These circumstances might be good to think through. The speedy processes that uphold something seemingly static. When is speed and variability experienced and when can it even be experienced as stasis? In an advanced system, with many components and people involved, a lot of running must be done to keep things in place. But who or what does the running and where does it take place? A thought experiment in Mundania might be to ponder on what processes and labour are required to keep conditions as they are. When and where are increases or decreases in speed or workload noticed and how are they experienced? By whom?

The subheading for this section of the chapter is Latin, it means Faster, Higher, Stronger, and has been the basic motto of the Olympic Games for around a century. Anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen writes about the motto and how sports, as well as today's prevailing logic of business and technology, are based on a conundrum of competition that can be referred to as 'The Red Queen Effect' (Eriksen 2021). To what extent does this effect characterize Mundania? The Red Queen appears in Lewis Carroll's novel *Through The Looking Glass*. In the fictitious and strange realm of the book, a race takes place between Alice and the Red Queen, a race in which Alice must constantly run faster to stay in the same place. When Alice, exhausted after the run, says that in her world you used to get to somewhere when you ran very fast for a long time, the Red Queen answers that it sounds

like a slow country, and that here it takes all the running you can do to stay in the same place. This fictitious race has been used to describe everything from evolutionary biology to competition in economics. This paradoxical logic of competition is sometimes referred to as 'The Treadmill Paradox'.

> Although it may look like an accelerated standstill, treadmill competition drives evolution, forcing species and individuals to improve their achievements relative to others over the generations. The 'competitive edge' often invoked in technology and business refers to a quality enabling a company, product or activity to 'edge' ahead of the others, who will in turn have to follow suit. There is a resemblance, in other words, between the cheetah evolving greater speed to catch gazelles who are nimbler and faster than their ancestors, and mobile phone developers looking to eclipse their competitors with a sleeker design, better camera or larger screen. (Eriksen 2021: 2)

Eriksen relates this phenomenon not only to the ethos of continuous improvement and acceleration that has characterized modernist ideas about progression, but also to several societal areas in which competition is intrinsic, such as sports and capitalism. Just like the computers from some years ago are slower and less powerful than the ones launched today, athletes are supposed to run faster, jump higher and be stronger than their predecessors. Citius, Altius, Fortius. Olympic Games and Moore's law. There seems to be a conceptual congruity between several societal fields. A kind of Champions League tenet from the worlds of sports resembles the way businesses and technological innovation are supposed to develop. New resources and innovation of technologies and techniques are coupled to quite a frail idea about fair play, an idea that is challenged repeatedly when the outside world seeps into playing fields and markets. What is fair and what is sustainable? What feeds acceleration imaginaries and the Red Queen race? Where are resources unearthed? Oil money that boosts football teams and venture capital that is pumped into businesses is often based on extraction and gains from unsustainable practices. This is the backside of the acceleration ethos that takes place in the limelight of stadiums, on radiant screens as well as in the most widespread systems and services of Mundania. All the labour and running taking place somewhere else to keep the image in place.

Curve surfing

Another template of imaginaries that has prevailed for decades is that innovation is fostered by disruption. To some extent it stands in stark contrast to the incremental improvements of upgrading. The innovation–through–disruption–imaginary is based on ideas that products that are more fit than

earlier ones will replace what was before. Often in ferocious ways. That was why Facebook for a while could have 'Move Fast and Break Things' as their slogan. The ideas are often underpinned by the economic theory about *creative destruction*, as it was introduced by economist Joseph Schumpeter in 1942 (Schumpeter 1994). Creative destruction has been a kind of ethos among tech entrepreneurs, and businesses for decades. According to this logic, the future becomes a better place through entrepreneurial competition and disruption.

What does happen when something old is disrupted and something new is about to be introduced? How do technologies and novelties spread and gradually or abruptly change people's lives? There are several imaginaries about technological innovation that prevail. These can often be coupled to specific temporal patterns, and they are often visually represented by curves and charts. Mundania is full of *curve surfing*, of imaginary rides along curves that show transformations and variations. The progress of technological innovation is imaged and imagined through curves. So are stock market fluctuations, pandemic contagion and so on. These rides are imaginary spatial moves across a grid, along *x*– and *y*–axes in a two–dimensional field. Curves show progress and temporal variation, and they have become hugely mundane and are therefore often taken-for-granted. What does all this curve surfing do to uphold certain imaginaries about progress, fluctuations, trends?

A recurring format for curve surfing has been the S–curve. It has for some time been used to show how innovations are spread. I have seen it in old ethnology books that showed the geographical spread of new variants of rakes and other tools in the Swedish countryside (Bringéus 1976/1986). But I have foremost seen it in numerous forms when it comes to emerging technologies. The S–curve has also been outfitted with phases and stages that should evoke technological progress and adoption. A good example is the *Gartner Hype Cycle*, provided and promoted by consultancy firm Gartner. It is a model, a graphic representation that is supposed to show how rumours appear around a coming technology and how the technology then (eventually) become popularized and pervasive (Gartner Hype Cycle n.d.). According to Gartner, their clients use 'Hype Cycles to get educated about the promise of an emerging technology within the context of their industry and individual appetite for risk' (Gartner Hype Cycle n.d.).

In the first phases of the S–curve, the line stretches out almost horizontally, to then climb exponentially, and to then once again become almost horizontal. At the very beginning of the first part of the curve there is a lot of hype about 'the next thing'. At this phase, there is yet no concrete product or offering available. The possibly coming thing is what is sometimes called *vapourware*, alluringly noticeable in a hazy future (Atkinson 2013; Willim 2017a). Then the curve starts to rise slightly. This is when there are quite few people who have adopted the novelty. Then comes the exponential

climb, where the thing becomes really popular. This is followed by the last almost horizontal phase, when there are relatively few new people who adopt what is no longer broadly considered to be a novelty. There are several varieties to the uses of the S-curve, but many utilize ideas about the anticipative power of hype. The curves and the imaginaries about hype become templates that direct associations. These models have also become something of a vernacular imaginary surrounding technologies. They are built around the 'performative force of expectations' (van Lente et al 2013: 1615). The logic of the S-curve is underlying how technologies are imagined in Mundania.

Adoption and adaptation

The first part of the S-curve can be associated with ideas about 'being first' or early adoption. For many, early adoption is something remote, but in a society in which ideas about progress through innovation are prevalent, early adoption gets a certain meaning. Sweden is this kind of society. Of course, it all depends on what is adopted, but early adopters are sometimes considered the heroes of innovation economies, the avant-garde, the pioneers, the progressive, the trailblazers. The ones that help bold innovators, entrepreneurs and start-ups in their imagined pioneer work. Often, technological adoption is a consumption endeavour. Therefore, early adopters are sometimes called *Lighthouse Customers* or even *Alpha Consumers* (Wikipedia, early adopter, n.d.). They are, according to this logic, brave enough to embrace the new, to be ahead of the curve, to jump the train early, to be early onboard the ride to the future. They are not just in fashion; they are supposed to be ahead of their time (Klinkmann 2005; Löfgren 2005). Role models. Influencers. They take some risk by engaging with beta-versions and early versions of technologies and products under development. They are hailed in the rhetoric about innovation.

The early-adopter concept comes from Everett Rogers' ideas and book about *Diffusion of Innovations* (1962). How, why and at what rate do innovations spread? Rogers' model includes innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority and laggards. It describes how early adoption turns to mainstream adoption, then to a later phase when 'laggards' or late adopters start to, maybe reluctantly, allow an innovation to be part of their lives. One point of the curve has become somewhat like the holy grail of prediction industries, advisors and consultancies working with prognoses and forecasts. It is where the curve starts to rise, the point between early adoption and majority use, when something reaches critical mass. To know when this happens can be valuable knowledge. When does something start to become successful, what will become 'the next new thing', and when?

Rogers' model and ideas, like many predictive models, do not expound that much on social and cultural complexity and various irregularities that can be

related to technological change. It is based on a simple and straightforward scheme, which has also made it very persistent and widely used to describe and maybe forecast the processes around emerging technologies. The question is what practices and imaginaries this kind of model brings with it. Does it feed acceleration imaginaries, and the Red Queen effect or Treadmill paradox?

How do the ideas about the virtues of speed and early adoption influence how Mundania is experienced and imagined? What does it mean to adopt something? Adoption is not that far from adaptation. Both words point at a transformative process. Some new element is introduced in a context, and it changes what was there before. The change can be slow and barely unnoticeable, or it can be dramatic. New conditions, opportunities, threats and, after a while, also new habits and routines. The early adopters are ready to take on this transformation, to adopt a service or device and to also be adapted to a system. Early adoption is often promoted as a proactive manoeuvre, an acquisition or takeover. But it is often disregarded that it is also a submissive action. Adoption is, to some extent, adaptation, a defiance, acceptance and submission to a system or technology. When this process is seen as almost a law, a certain pattern of inevitability is reproduced and contributes to a reinforcement of mundanization processes.

Patterns of adoption are central templates when emerging technologies are imagined in the 2020s. These patterns reproduce narratives about progress and revolutions as well as 'origin stories' (Mattern 2017: xxviii). Imaginaries about innovation and how the new emerges have become routine and ordinary. Variations on the same theme. When these imaginaries turn to models, they frame what to expect, how futures are evoked, and which processes are taken-for-granted. The reproduction of these imaginaries about time and technologies seems to stabilize Mundania.

Repetition

Circumstances have definitely changed during the last decades. New technological possibilities and new normals. New devices and greater infrastructural depth. The buzz about the novel has, however, repeatedly turned into a faint background hum. Hypes have emerged and receded. The temptation of the novel has recurrently appeared and faded away. Things have withdrawn or disappeared. Become part of the infrastructures or the media environment or, for that matter, faded into oblivion in the graveyard of failed products.

In Mundania, innovation imaginaries might stabilize. A path dependency of the mind arises. There can be something comforting when the expected rhythms of change keep on repeating. Despite the hyperbole and the promises that a thing, an innovation, or technological achievement will be

something completely new, it often feels quite familiar. Hypes and curves. A new supposedly revolutionary thing is promoted, again. It feels like 1984, when the Mac was supposed to shape the future and ensure that 1984 did not become like the version evoked by George Orwell. Or it feels like the 1990s, when Microsoft was supposed to start things up with Windows 95 and their new Start Menu. Or the shift of the Millennium, with all the promises of escape velocity into cyberspace. Or like the time of Web 2.0, some years later. Revolutions, speedy shifts, and disruption have been repeatedly hailed, and sparking novelties put in the limelight. All this recurrent buzz about change and innovation can, in itself, feel numbing and almost static. Maybe comfortingly predictable, even boring.

In this sense, Mundania seems to be stable. Like a static image on the screen. The treadmill spins, things get started and terminated, while nothing much seems to happen. Upgrading processes are going on, according to quite a predictable pattern. Then, buzz, some disruption gains attention. Again. Followed by a period of upgrading. Until another buzz sounds, another disruption occurs, followed by adaptation and upgrading. Then it is all repeated. Routinized revolution. A new normal keep on emerging.

Meanwhile conditions also change. Cycle by cycle. Gradually, while people are busy doing something else. It might be in the accumulation of incremental changes that the radical lies. The infrastructural depth become greater, layers crop up, the role of logistical media becomes different, the atmosphere technologically thicker. The beyond comes closer and closer, and ever more intimate. Mundanization takes further hold. Fundamental change happens, but gradually. While people are repeatedly captivated by the loud buzz of incoming novelties, the faint background hum of the ordinary gradually shifts.