

A FUTURE WITH COMPUTERS

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Seminar: Science Fiction and Society

[Assignment: Look at the world around you. What trends, tendencies, important possibilities exist now? Look forward to the 21st century. How will those trends or tendencies develop? What effects will these changes have on the individual, on society?]

(1) In the 1980's personal computers (PC's) began to appear in homes across the country. They were generally used for basic functions such as word processing and filing data. However, in the twenty years since then, the use of personal computers has taken on an entirely different significance. Now computers can perform almost any duty, from reading someone the morning mail to organizing business meetings around the world.

(2) The life style of the single adult has changed drastically because of the home computer. This individual has found that he has much more independence than his 1986 counterpart. The PC has taken over many of his daily tasks, allowing him to pursue other activities. On any given morning he is awakened precisely at 6:15 by the computer's alarm. The computer, which he affectionately calls Lisa, responds to his voice command and begins cooking breakfast by turning on the appropriate appliances. While he sips his coffee, Lisa reads him the mail, sent to his house by modem. After eating, he loads the dishwasher, leaving Lisa to turn the machine on. On his way out the door, he reminds Lisa to confirm his reservation for dinner the next evening.

(3) After a day at the office, he decides to go to the health club for his regular workout. There he meets an attractive woman and the two decide to spend the night dancing. Realizing he will not be home to do any work, he calls Lisa and asks her to type the reports he was supposed to have done for the next day. He knows she can do a better job anyway. The next morning, despite his protests, Lisa again awakens him at 6:15. She also directs him to the medicine cabinet where he keeps the aspirin.

(4) To the single adult the home computer has become an invaluable asset. It has put order into a once semi-chaotic lifestyle. The individual has come to view the PC as a close friend, relating to it in human terms. This is not all that surprising, though, since it does perform at a near human level. The PC has given him a new sense of freedom, allowing him to spend more time with other people who also have more leisure time. Recreational favorites, such as country clubs and resorts, are now everywhere because the demand for them

has increased. People seem to be enjoying life very much since they aren't as bogged down at their places of work anymore. Single people, however, are not the only ones experiencing a new outlook on life. Families have also changed because of the PC.

(5) When personal computers began filtering into family life, parents realized that a lot of the stress of dealing with their children could be shouldered by the computer. The computer never leaves the home, always keeping a watchful circuit on the children. If a young child strays too near a hot stove, the PC responds with a shrill alarm, and the child backs away. Of course the computer is also a source of enjoyment for the children, allowing them to play video games, now in 3-D.

(6) On a school morning, the children, like their parents, are awakened by the PC's alarm. The computer, having checked the weather forecast, has a list of suggested clothes for the kids to wear. It also has breakfast cooking, preparing the food the mother had ordered the previous evening. The parents are awakened slightly after the children because they don't have as much to do in the way of preparing their children for school. School is currently a special terminal in the family room. Each child links up with the school's computers through a modem and begins the morning's activities. The first subject is electronics. The kids learn the basics of electricity and circuits, along with some introductory calculus. The second class is English. The assignment for the week is to write a paper on what they think life in the 22nd century will be like. Little Johnny smiles, knowing he can program the computer to write the paper for him--something students from the 1980's wished they had been able to do. During lunch break they are allowed to "talk" with other children through the computer. The girls begin typing notes to each other while the boys try to get their passwords and intercept the notes.

(7) That afternoon dad comes home from work early to take the kids fishing. Johnny is excited about trying out his new computer aided fishing rod. A small sensor in the tip of the rod locates fish and bobs the lure in perfect imitation of a small meal for the hungry victim. Johnny enthusiastically hauls in his limit in thirty minutes.

(8) After a dinner of fresh fish, the family sits down in the living room to watch their big screen television as the nightly news slowly scrolls across it. Later they watch re-runs of their favorite old-time show, The Cosby Show. Around 11:00 the family goes to bed in anticipation of the next day.

(9) People themselves have not really changed over the years. Their lives have been greatly altered and simplified by computers, but they still enjoy the company of other people. Computers have taken the personal touch

out of some activities, but now people also have more time to spend with each other, so a balance is maintained. No matter what technological advances take place, the human element will always be present. When computers take over one aspect of life, people have the opportunity to explore others.