Why is it so difficult to think of new possible worlds?
Imagine, imaginaries, imagination
‘We shape the world through the stories we tell’
‘To tell a story, is to act upon the world’

(Sarah Cobb)
Then why is it so difficult to imagine a post-fossil city?
First Answer

We are better at pointing out the absurdity of the present than at narrating viable alternatives.
Yet we fail to actively bring the future into the present
“Dynamic of capitalism depends on the confidence in fictional expectations”

Jens Beckert
Coalition building is about creation of shared imaginaries.

Imaginaries emerge in dialogue.
Home as ‘machine for living’
‘City of Tomorrow’
by Norman Bell Geddes
(1937)
Through the City of TOMORROW
Without a STOP

—predicts
NORMAN BEL GEDDES

"All vehicles will be routed through the cities of 1960 on throughways specifically designed to carry traffic moving at several established speeds," says Mr. Geddes, authority on future trends.

"A network of 50-mile-a-hour Express Highways in the city will handle all traffic going ten blocks or more, creating a continuous flow of cars, uninterrupted by stop-lights, intersections or pedestrians.

"The Local Streets, elevated sidewalks will carry pedestrian traffic above streets. Building entrances and drop windows will be on secondary level. Buses will be loaded, cars parked in open areas beneath buildings. Thus the entire width of streets from building line to building line will be clear for motor traffic."

...but TODAY,
4 miles in 5 are
Stop and Go

YOU can drive up to ten miles on the amount of gasoline wasted by your 30 daily stops—the nation-wide average!

The costliest kind of driving you do, both in time and money, is stop and go.

While traffic authorities are planning "the City of Tomorrow," Shell engineers have developed a fuel, Super-Shell, to meet today's driving problem TODAY.

Automotive engineers refer to Super-Shell as "motor-digestible," so quickly and completely is its energy changed into power...at ALL motor speeds.

You'll cut the cost of your stop-and-go driving by the regular use of Super-Shell Gasoline. There's a Shell dealer in your neighborhood.
World Expo as modern ‘technique of futuring’
It's happening on a thousand Main Streets!

This year, thousands of new owners have joined the Packard family. Ask any of them what he thinks of his 1949 Packard. Then try to break away from his enthusiasm for the newly-styled Packard lines, for the car’s eerie and quiet, its all-around finesse. And operating costs? He’ll decry his Packard a veritable mine on gasoline—and that he can hardly remember when last he had to “add a quart” of oil.

Add these owner facts to what your Packard dealer will assure you: that service charges on a big, fancy Packard actually compare favorably with those of the so-called “economy cars.” But drives a new 1949 Packard yourself—and you’ll know—immediately, why this promises to be Packard’s biggest year.

ASK THE MAN WHO OWNS ONE

PACKARD

$867

AND UP: Packard 160, 200 and 90; Packard Custom and Coupes. Packard Super-8 prices begin at $1,740. Packard Custom Super-8’s, starting at $2,050, deliver in Detroit, state taxes and white, all-inclusive. Other models available in different colors.

HERE WE ARE....ENYING

Did we say the Detmers in their new Packard? The honest answer is....yes! Emphatically, yes! We had always wanted a Packard. We felt we'd almost give our old right arm to be sitting there like the Detmers, heads in the clouds, with people saying “Haven't they just been making great…” Then we got to thinking—made as much as Ed Detmer. If he could afford a Packard, why couldn't I? Well, why couldn't I...So we walked down to the Packard showroom to look at the new Packard 120 and the new Packard Six, and to ask a lot of questions...

HERE WE ARE....BEING ENYED

And as a result, we're no longer on the outside, anything. We're on the inside being envied. On the inside of our new Packard. We found out that our other car was only half as fast in paint, and that this new Packard was ours for only $867. We've found out it costs no more to service than the small car we used to own. You can't imagine the kick we're getting out of owning and driving a Packard. We're as thrilled as a couple of kids. And we're telling our friends to get one. It's the only way we know how easy it is to be the man who owns on

ASK THE MAN WHO OWNS ONE

envisioningtheamericandream.com
The Politics of Imagination

An uneven battle for the minds?
Smart City

An example of a corporate imaginary
‘Living labs’ and Standardization as corporate techniques of futuring?
The smart city as digitalised, perfected version of the rational city?
The smart city as digitalised, perfected version of the suburban city?
Smart City

Corporate media bombardment

Corporate roadshow

Practice of partnership

Academic reification via Horizon 2020 programmes
Why is it so difficult to think of new possible worlds?

Second answer:

Because fossil-based habits are far more embedded than we (want to) realize
There is no alternative
People are not persuaded by facts, but enticed by perspective
Looking for unusual inspiration

Social Science Fiction
Transmedia World-building

Dan Hassler-Forest
‘Her’, Spike Jonze (2013)
Fictional Futures or Social Science Fiction?

‘Willing suspension of disbelief’ to create new imaginaries
post-fossil worlds

As emerging *across* standing practices of governance and media;
As requiring *active participation* by stakeholders;
Transmedia world-building as a process that resists *narrative closure*

(Cf. Hassler- Forest 2016:5).
Post-fossil city

• Need to rethink energy sources
• Need to rethink mobility, shelter, food
• Need to rethink socio-spatial organisation
• Need to rethink modernist categories of thought:
  – Man – nature; city – country; thinking – action; work – leisure; ...
A critical task for a critical social science is to co-construct new imaginaries.

Can we use idea of transmedia world-building?
Transdisciplinary experimentalism

Two examples
A Call to Arts
Submit your idea for a carbon-free future before February 24 and win €10,000.
Cf. www.postfossil.city
‘2050 – An Energetic Odyssey’

International Architecture Biennale Rotterdam (IABR), curated by Maarten Hajer
Odyssey now available at www.iabr.nl
Odyssey now available at www.iabr.nl
Odyssey now available at www.iabr.nl
Ministers & DGs of 28 EU member states standing around the future
Conclusion

• Lack of coherent imaginaries of a post-fossil future shows ‘embeddedness’ of carbon culture
• Corporate imaginaries capture academic attention
• ‘Critical’ tradition seems reactive, not pro-active
• The university should try and overcome this crisis of the imagination
• A new critical sustainability science should actively work to create and disseminate new imaginaries, understand them, develop them
It all starts with the imagination

Critical futuring is about making alternative futures plausible and attractive
Thank you for your attention! @FuturesStudioUU