Responding section Prep. (and composing section)

Pale Blue Dot notes for exam

Carl Sagan’s truly moving, pro-humanitarian speech; The Pale Blue Dot, was composed in 1990 in response to an image of earth, that had never been seen before, being taken from a record of approx 6 billion kilometres away, as Voyager 1 went past Saturn. This image was so fascinating that it prompted American astronomer Sagan to publish it in his book; The Pale Blue Dot; A Vision of Human Future in Space. This interpretive text is a philosophical meditation, which emphasises the idea that humanity must transcend its ethnocentrism and anthropocentrism to truly appreciate and understand the earth’s fragility and uniqueness. The speech is an articulation of values, beliefs, opinions, perspectives and cultural backgrounds, and aims to appeal to our ethics.

Sagan employs figurative language in the form of allusions, anaphoras, and rule of threes in order to hammer home his points. The anaphoras he employs also count as the rule of threes; “On it, everyone you love, everyone you know, everyone you’ve ever heard of” the use of the word “everyone” illustrates to viewers the fact that outside our world, there are no other humans; we are extremely isolated. Furthermore he then adds “That’s here. That’s home. That’s us,” another clause which applies to the rule of threes and is an anaphora. This phrase creates a sense of familiarity for listeners through the use of inclusive language, such as “us”.

Sagan’s use of allusion sets the foundation for his propositions. The allusion to Act V Scene V of Macbeth; “The earth is a very small stage in a vast cosmic arena.” On the surface, this passage may read as a way for Sagan to emphasise the size of the universe, however informed readers will realise it is an allusion to Macbeth’s soliloquy. This adds a greater amount of depth to the passage and reinforces Sagan’s point, as the soliloquy is about how helpless we are as humans in the greater scheme of life. This supports Sagan’s proposition as it creates a sense of scale and time, as readers will realise we are “…just another player on the stage…” simply playing out our dreams on “… a very small stage in a vast cosmic arena.” This sense of scale forces readers to take a moment and think about how we as humans conduct ourselves, and our anthropocentrism. Therefore it forces readers to realise that the earth’s existence and life is fragile and unique.

These language features generate empathy or controversy, depending on the context of the audience, and thus how different audiences read this text. Americans in 1990 at the context of production woould have had the dominant reading of welcoming and agreeing with this speech as a welcome-relief from 45 years of anxiety and suspicion in the Cld War period. Americans longed for world peace, as for the least nearly half a century, the threat of nuclear war loomed closer and closer. Sagan’s speech emphasised the popular idea to them (and the world) that we should all be united and work together as a coalition, instead of causing war after war. These underlying values and attitudes of the text of love, world peace, sustainability, human rights, and equality were agreed with by most viewers and hence was the dominant reading of the text.

However, an alternative reading of this text is the question of where is the justification in spending an extremely ridiculous amount of money on space technology, when we can’t even fix problems here on earth such as the starvation and poverty of millions, and pollution. Sagan clearly is pro-science, and speaks from a privileged position. He was part of the organisations that invested in splashing out billions to achieve things like the image of the “pale blue dot”. The period of the Cold War kicked off not only the nuclear race, but also the space race, as Russia launched the first ever satellite and dog into space in 1957, the first man in 1961 and first woman 1963, and the Americans countered by landing the first man on the moon in 1969. Between 1961 and 1969, NASA spent a whopping $23 billion on manned space missions, and between 1970 and 1988, there were 47 different space missions world-wide, majority by the USA and Russia.

Additionally, NASA’s 2011 budget was $18.4 billion. The United Nations (UN) has stated that ending the problem of world hunger would cost $30 billion. NASA had enough money in 8 years to nearly end this long-lasting, world wide problem alone. Their 2011 budget was over half way to that amount. Now that we, as humans, have established that, to our current knowledge, we are the only planet containing life, and we have already discovered all the other planets in our solar system, then what is the point in continuing the enormous, ridiculous amount of spending on space programs? What are we going to achieve by this when we could end some of the long unanswered questions here on earth for the same price

People who experience the extreme poverty and hunger first-hand, as well as the high levels of pollution, would have this alternative reading of Sagan’s text. Poverty-stricken countries in Africa such as Liberia and Namibia, other counties where millions live in slums, such as Bangladesh, where 2.2 million people live in slums, Brazil, where 22% of the population of of Rio De Janeiro live in shantytowns, likewise with Pakistan and India. Additionally, the countries which witness the high levels of pollution first hand, such as Beijing in China, where the UN states that the air quality is the equivalent of smoking 40 cigarettes per day. Whilst the people of these countries would agree with Sagan’s views of equality, peace, an his attitude of being pro-humanitarian, they would view him as a hypocrite as he is advocating for everyone to save the world, however the extreme amount of money being spent on his industry of space travel could be used to preserve our world- not to create technology to escape our world! The UN stated hat in 2006, 34 o the 50 least developed countries on their list were from Africa, surely this has to be prioritised as an area of improvement, rather than space travel.

Another alternatvie reading would be the context of reception of modern day 2018 viewers in Australia, who can relate what Sagan says to things they are aware about. For instance; “Our posturings and self-imagined importance, the delusion that we have some privileged position in the universe, are challenged by this point of pale blue light,” is a phrase Australians can use to relate to the Australian government, who don’t care for what is best sustainably for the planet, but rather what will keep their seats at elections. These policies have gone on for the best part of this century between the Liberal and Labor Party of Australia. Another example; “Think of the rivers of blood spilled by all those generals and emperors so that in glory and triumph they could become the monetary masters of a fraction of a dot” which is accompanied in this hybrid text by visuals of medieval knights going into battle, the Nazi Party marching, and the KKK marching. Furthermore, the phrase “…thousands of confident religions, ideologies and economic doctrines” is a phrase Australians can relate to the ongoing conflict in Syria, and the fight against ISIS. ISIS believes that failure to believe in Islam is worthy of death, mutilation or slavery. Therefore Sagan’s points are something Aussies can relate to, as they constantly witness on the news the conflict going on in Syria.

The Robots are Coming-feature article

Feature article: The robots are coming- Ever wondered what life will be like in 30 years time? With robots taking over and devices controlling our daily existence, Genevieve Gannon discovers the future looks vastly different to the world we know now. Australian Women’s Weekly (AWW).

Provides a disturbing, realistic vision of future, with the way we’re heading with robotic and technological development. The vision is more realistic than people/readers think.

Therapeutic robots,tailored foods, and driverless cars-perhaps drone-like flying cars- are closer than we think. Robots can already perform delicate surgeries and are used in the treatment of mental health patients. Robots that care for the elderly, diagnose disease, suture wounds, was our bodies and clothes, cook food and manage our lives could soon be as unremarkable as traffic lights.-satire, exaggeration.

Articulation of Expert opinion, anecdotal evidence, statistical evidence. Provides lots of anecdotes, opinions and statistics from experts.

In addition juxtaposition and rhetorical questions.

Artificial intelligence, machine learning and networked devices are poised to transform society the way steam power once did. -juxtaposition.

* Experts predict that by 2020 more than 200 billion devices will be connected to the internet and responsive to speech. “The front door will answer you. Every device will be networked,” University of NSW Artificial Intelligence Professor Toby Walsh says.

The world is likely to be completely transformed by 2050. 9 billion souls will walk the earth, creating unique challenges to food security, and forcing us to rethink food production-which will need to almost double. Artificial intelligence and robotics will be integrated as seamlessly as electricity.

* Loss of jobs-future problems. As technology around us changes at an unprecedented rate, tech leaders such as Tesla CEO Elon Musk are warning the next era may bring danger and disruption. The Centre for Economic Development of Australia (CEDA) has predicted that five million Australian jobs-roughly 40%-will be automated within the next 10 to 15 years. CEDA; “The extension of computerisation into almost all aspects of human activity threatens to radically reshape the workforce of tomorrow.” There have been calls for the introduction of a universal wage, a sort of basic allowance to compensate for the fact that all of our jobs will eventually be done by robots and algorithms. CEDA; “Jobs that involve low levels of social interaction, low levels of creativity or low levels of mobility and dexterity are more likely to be replaced by automation”.
* Rhetorical questions: But does all this advancement mean our lives will be improved? That’s the question many are grappling with now. What will happen if robots take jobs currently performed by humans? Will there be widespread unemployment? Will robots be able to think for themselves? Moreover, will they be dangerous?
* NSW Artificial Intelligence Professor Toby Walsh; “We tend to over-predict what we’ll do in the short term but under-predict what we’ll do in the long term.”
* IBM released the personal computer in 1981. Now, more than one in three people on earth carry a smartphone-which is essentially a tiny computer.-statistics of how far we’ve come.
* Justin Lee, LG’s smart product planning team leader; “AI will infiltrate every aspect of our lives. New homes are already being built with smart-home capability in mind, and the advancement of AI will bring the spread of more innovative robotic products.” “Voice recognition capability and AI devices, such as robots, will quickly spread and become commonplace”.
* Note: Companies like Amazon, Apple and Google are already selling in-home connected assistants that respond to voice commands.
* Melbourne University Professor Jeff Borland says “History shows new technology does not translate to human obsolescence, and that such fears arise because humans are biased to think they live in special times.” “Productivity rises so income rises, so people spend that income on extra goods and services or new kinds of goods and services. Until humans discover that they don’t want to consume extra stuff, it seems that is the response to new technology.”- very similar to Saga’s quote; “Our posturings and self-imagined importance, the delusion that we have some privileged position in the universe, are challenged by this point of pale blue light.”
* The rest of our devices-including some that don’t exist yet- will keep an aye on us throughout the day. “Your fitness watch will automatically monitor many of your vital statistics: your pulse, your blood pressure, your sugar levels, your sleep and your exercise. Your toilet will automatically analyse your urine. Your smartphone will regularly take selfies of you, in order to understand better your health.” It’s likely by 2050 smartphones will have been superseded by more sophisticated health devices.
* The CSIRO (Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial research Organisation) wants people to be able to wake up to a meal formulated to perfectly complement biological markers measured by sweat sensors in your pillow. The food will be tailored not just to your daily dietary needs, but to your genetic predisposition to absorbing minerals and nutrients. Food scientist Amy Logan explain: “We’re envisaging a biosensor that’s capturing information from a person as they sleep, then that’s being sent to a good generator which is intelligently being able to know what food and nutriens needs to be delivered to that person that day.” The “food” would supplement regular meals, not replace them. -argument: how does this end world hunger? It only applies to those very few who can afford it. The rich in Australia, America, Europe will keep advancing whilst Africa and the Middle East fall even further behind.
* Driving Change: In one vision of 2050, every vehicle on the road will be autonomous. The need for traffic lights will be eliminated because the cars will talk to each other. They may even be flying through the air. “Humans won’t actually be able to drive in among all of these autonomous cars because the human reaction times won’t be good enough to be able to slot into the road”. -Professor Walsh.
* Honda Australia’s communications manager Scott McGregor says recent advances in the car industry have been astounding. “The rate of change we’ve seen in autonomous technology in the last five years is more than we’ve seen in the last 100 years” “We’ve got radar cruise control that can maintain a set distance from the car in front and autonomous braking-these sorts of things are real right now.”
* “Such optimism is not universal. 46% of Aussies fear technology will take over in the future and 70% of future jobs will be done by robots and AI”- according to market research company Ipsos data. Argument: if Australians fear this, then imagine how bad the implications for Africans, Pakis, Middle Easterns and Bangladeshis will be- by time they find the money to get a job, it’ll already be taken by robots. They can’t even find jobs as it is, and there’s going to be even less jobs available to them soon.
* Conclusion to AWW feature article: “The truth is technology is advancing so rapidly, by 2050 everything in this article may seem laughably old fashioned.
* Multimodal text- pictures. Robotic dog, flying car, two pics of androids, pic of woman wearing smart contact lenses that measure glucose in tears, which are being developed.
* 34 of 50 nations on UN’s 2006 list of least developed countries were from Africa.
* Beijing, capital of China, WHO developed network to monitor air quality, found that in Beijing was equivalent of smoking 40 cigarettes a day.
* Average European earns 20 times more than average African.
* WHO also stated that 20 of 24 megacities have air quality at levels that can cause serious health effects.
* Approx 26 million tonnes per year of rubbish ends up in ocean. Great Pacific Garbage Patch. Discovered 1984 and ever growing.

**Comprehending notes**

Visual elements to remember: Dyad=two. Triad=3. Salience (determined by colour, image and layout), rule of threes, leading lines. Arrangement of objects within frame, symbolism. Camera angles/framing. Body language, allusions, composition. Depth. Gaze: Intra-diegetic: the character is looking at something within the text. Extra-diegetic: character is looking at something outside of text. Demand/direct gaze is when character looks directly at viewer.