

The underdistanced

Three things about our workshop

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Three things about our workshop

Gabriele Ferri & Inte Gloerich

These days, you stumble upon methods for imagining (im)possible futures in every corner of the web. You could play with *The Thing From The Future*¹ from SituationLabs, or with *Peek*² by Evan Raskob and Paris Salinas. You could listen to podcasts like *Flash Forward*³ by Rose Eveleth, or *Deep Futures*⁴ by Annalee Newitz. If you're looking for professional networking, go find a local chapter of the Speculative Futures network⁵. The academically-inclined could take a look at what's going on at institutions such as the Designed Realities Lab at Parsons in New York, or the Futures Now group at ELISAVA in Barcelona, but these are just two names among a galaxy of very active design researchers. And if you want a website that collects all sorts of initiatives about design and the imagination of possible futures, head over to SpeculativeEdu⁶. These are truly exceptional times for speculative design and, in a context like this, what could our little workshop script offer that hasn't already been said and done much better? Well, not much, but there are three things that are close to our heart and that we'd like to shine a spotlight on.

First, we commit to imagining everyday, mundane experiences rather than something extraordinary. We're tired and bored of ultraclean design fictions where sidewalks are always immaculate, and where the protagonists are only scientists and business executives⁷. This is why we included in the methodology a part called "It was a dark and stormy night..." where we ask participants to delve deeper in a few minutes of their own mundane routine, with the objective of "making it strange" by transporting it in the future. If speculative design has any insights to give us, they'll likely come by imagining how to prepare your morning muesli, and not (only) from dreams of flying to space⁸.

Second, as much as we have a blast imagining (im)possible futures, we stress that speculation is futile if it doesn't loop back to today and reflects on the lessons learned, on the issues discovered, and on the actions to take to (not) arrive to the future that we envisioned. That's why we dedicate a whole section of the workshop to self-reflection and to concrete actions to be taken today. Frankly, we're worried about how tame a certain type of design fiction has become. We expressly connect our work, and this workshop script, to the tradition that stems from 'critical and speculative design', and what's the point of imagining a future if we don't use it to critique the present? Every speculative workshop that we conduct isn't complete if we don't address a very simple question: "I've seen the future: now what?" The step from imagination, to critique, to political action is shorter than it seems.

The third and last point is that this workshop script is here for *you* to use and to share as you wish. Lots of scholarship on speculative design is hidden behind academic paywalls (and, yes, as researchers employed in higher education we're guilty of feeding this system we're

¹ <http://situationlab.org/project/the-thing-from-the-future/>

² <http://spoke.flkr.com/>

³ <https://www.flashforwardpod.com/>

⁴ <https://mailchimp.com/presents/podcast/deep-futures/>

⁵ <https://www.futures.design/chapters>

⁶ <https://speculativeedu.eu>

⁷ <https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/research/video/productivity-future-vision/>

⁸ <https://andreabauer.org/the-experiential-future-of-payment/>

critical of). Imagining our collective future is fundamental for our democratic society, but it takes people from all walks of life to take part in speculation to build imaginaries that are truly collective and inclusive. Please, take our workshop and do what you want with it.