

Theme: Unexpected Futures

Briefing



EMERGING MEDIA EXPLORATION



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Project Consortium: University Babelsberg KONRAD WOLF (Germany); Tampere University (Finland); Tampere University of Applied Sciences (Finland); University of Lincoln (United Kingdom); University of Central Lancashire (United Kingdom)

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Introduction

Over the past 20-30 years, practically all areas of society and culture have been radically disrupted by some form of emerging media. Modes of communication, interaction and entertainment that were once the realm of science-fiction have now become commonplace, with the media culture of the 21st Century continuing to evolve in unexpected directions.

This brief is all about speculating what the next 20-30 years has in store in terms of emerging media technology, projecting into the future to imagine the potential social, cultural and environmental impact of these developments. Throughout this project you will work collaboratively in transnational teams to develop a speculative design project that responds to the following provocation: *What will the media culture of the year 2050 look like?*

Problem Description

The Unexpected Futures brief presents an opportunity to stretch your imagination as you experiment with speculative design processes to address the challenges of the future. This is not simply about predicting what media technology will exist in 2050, but rather about developing boundary-pushing prototypes of our media future, free from the current constraints of technology, culture and politics.

This brief aims to go beyond typical utopian and dystopian visions of the future that have become popularised within our media culture. We instead want you to leverage speculative design processes in response to the complex socio-economic, ecological and ethical challenges facing the world over the next 30 years. Speculative design is all about imagining what possible, probable, plausible and preferable future(s) could come to pass by developing design fiction prototypes, hypothetical appliances and concepts visualisations that embody these imagined scenarios. This approach can be a useful method for reflecting on the present by addressing what we want and do not want to see in our future as a society.

Potential topics for you to consider:

- The future of Europe
- Imagining a post-Covid world
- Climate change and the environment
- Alternative social and economic systems

- The smart home and the smart city
- History and cultural heritage
- Wearable devices, implants and bio-technology
- Artificial intelligence and machine learning
- Transportation networks
- What it means to be human in an increasingly technological world
- Designing more healthy and sustainable ecosystems

Target group / Audience

Speculative design is open and participatory. It aims to be a catalyst for debate and discussion about how we might design a better future. For this project we would like you to target 'digital natives' 'millennials' and 'generation z', using your prototypes to engage this audience in a reflective form of future gazing. This might help the decision makers and designers of tomorrow better understand the impact that their actions can have on the world, steering them on a path towards a more positive future.

Approach

Speculative design seeks to raise awareness and debate of social issues by creating fictional scenarios that challenge assumptions, preconceptions and expectations about the role of design objects in everyday life. This involves creating hypothetical or imaginary appliances that address the potential impact of technological change in the world.

The term was coined by Anthony Dunne, professor and head of the design interactions programme at the Royal College of Art, and Fiona Raby, professor of industrial design at the University of Applied Arts in Vienna. The two popularized the concept in their book, *Speculative Everything: Design, Dreaming, and Social Dreaming*. For Dunne and Raby, speculative design is a method for imagining alternative ways of being, opening up a discursive space to critique the social, cultural and ethical implications of emerging media.

Throughout this course you will be introduced to the key principles of speculative design. You will participate in various ideation activities to help inform your future scenario, then develop design fiction prototypes and concept visualisations in response to these imagined scenarios. You will be encouraged to think laterally, experimenting with a variety of media practice skills and discovery-based learning methods.

What you need and what you get

Needed competencies include creative minds, collaboration skills and an interest to push boundaries and think about the future. This project will require multimodal design skills and the ability to tell a compelling story, although any media practice skills will come in handy in response to this brief.

Skills/competencies acquired: Speculative design, international collaboration skills, future research, pitching competences; technical fluency, visioning skills, futuristic prototyping.

Output

The output should be a potential future scenario in the form of an experienceable concept visualisation, which makes the audience understand and feel the circumstances of the possible future that you have imagined. Depending on the skills and the interests of you and your team, this may be a prototype for a hypothetical device or service, an interactive wireframe or animated storyboard, a 3D or mixed-reality environment (built in Blender, Unreal, etc.), a series of digital composites or audiovisual assets that might help communicate your fictional scenario. There are actually no limits here, as long as you transport your vision to the recipient. Try to think of all the senses to make the experience holistic and to fully immerse your audience in your speculative future scenario.

Production

You will address the potential evolution of contemporary media culture by imagining what our relationship with media technology might look like in the future. You are free to explore any topics you like, and utilise whatever tools and practices you feel most suitable. Depending on the needs of the project, your tutors will provide guidance on appropriate production methods. The amount and effort in actual asset production should be measured according to the goal of creating a speculative design prototype, not a full and final product.