Media Trends: Unexpected Futures

Methodological Approach

EMERGING MEDIA EXPLORATION

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Martyn Thayne, University of Lincoln, UK;
Sophie Tummescheit; Film University Babelsberg KONRAD WOLF, Germany

Introduction

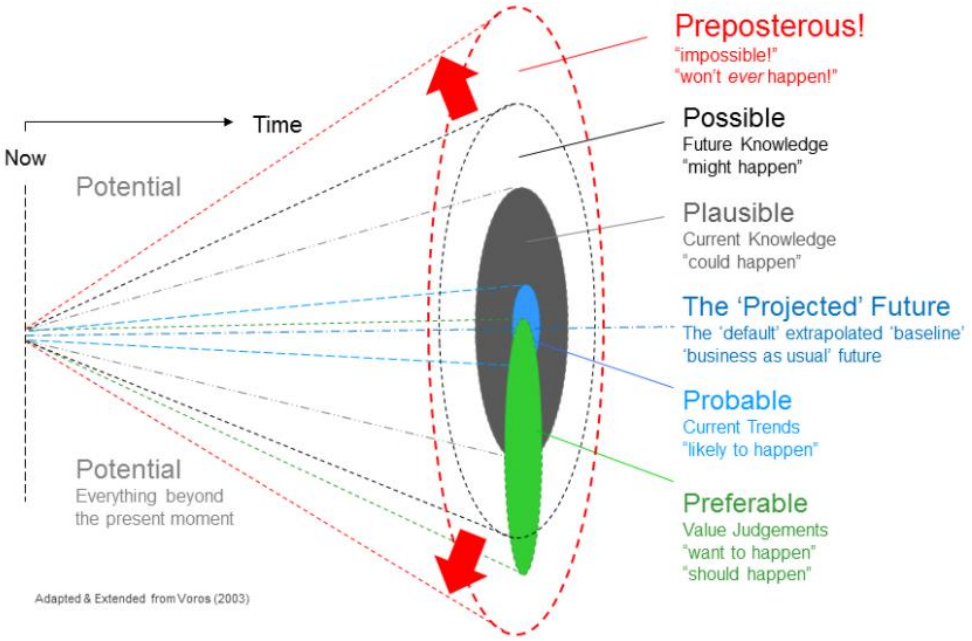
The theme of 'Unexpected Futures' addresses the possible social, political, environmental, and technological factors of the year 2050. The output of this course was the development of a potential future scenario in the form of an experienceable concept-visualisation/interactive prototype that can provide a discursive space for the audience to understand and feel the circumstances of the future.

Methodology

Principles of speculative design and diegetic prototyping are used as methods of socio-cultural critique by designing hypothetical or imaginary media devices that address the potential impact of technological change in the world. An introduction to speculative design can be found on the following website: https://spark.adobe.com/page/Hjn98DAAiC2GK/

The futures Cone

The futures cone is a model for imagining *possible, plausible, probable,* and *preferable* future outcomes. This can be a useful method for reflecting on the present by addressing what we do and do not want to see in our future as a society.



Further background information

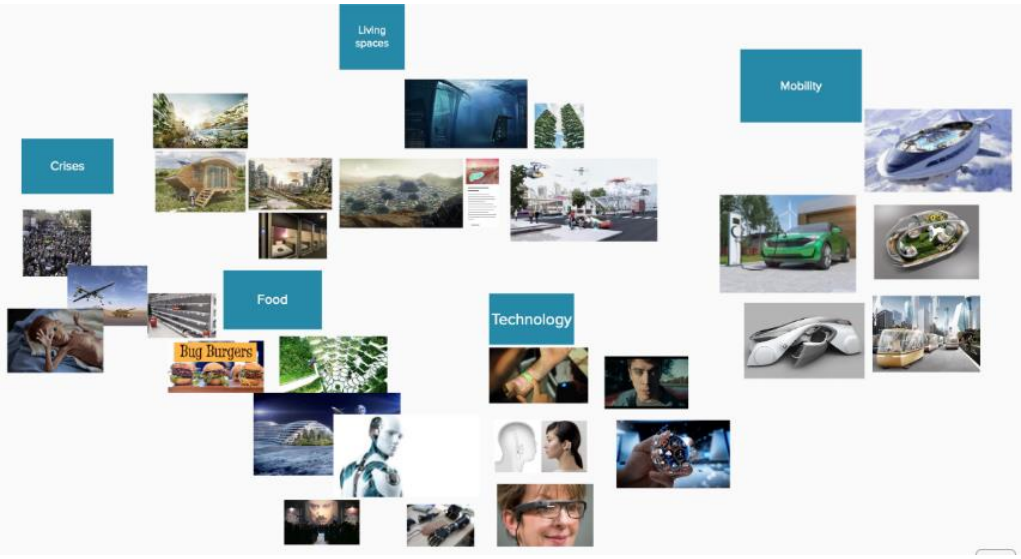
- About speculative Design/Critical Design and Future Design. https://curatella.com/speculative-design-webinar-notes/
- Three examples of design fiction: https://www.invisionapp.com/inside-design/speculative-design/
- How to do good forecasting: https://books.google.de/books?id=45OmCQAAQBAJ&lpg=PP1&dq=Super%20forecasting&hl=de&pg=PP1#v=onepage&q=Super%20forecasting&f=false
- Book: Speculative Everything: Design, Fiction, and Social Dreaming https://www.google.de/books/edition/Speculative_Everything/9gQyAgAAQBAJ?hl=de&gbpv=1&dq=speculative+everything&printsec=frontcover
- Article in: Digital Creativity; Volume 24, 2013 - Issue 1: Design Fictions
- Speculative design: crafting the speculation https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14626268.2013.767276
- Gov.Futures: Exploring the relationship between work and policy making through Speculative Design https://medium.com/work-design/gov-futures-7c6e85b7a165
- Jjoão gil offers immersive consultation experience on the digitization of healthcare https://www.designboom.com/design/joao-gil-biocomputer-digitalization-healthcare-07-12-2016/
- Using a Speculative Design Approach to Explore the Attitudes of Young People Towards "White Burgers" https://medium.com/@hxiaolin96/speculatively-decompose-and-research-on-future-food-for-service-design-draft-fa6465683797

The Process

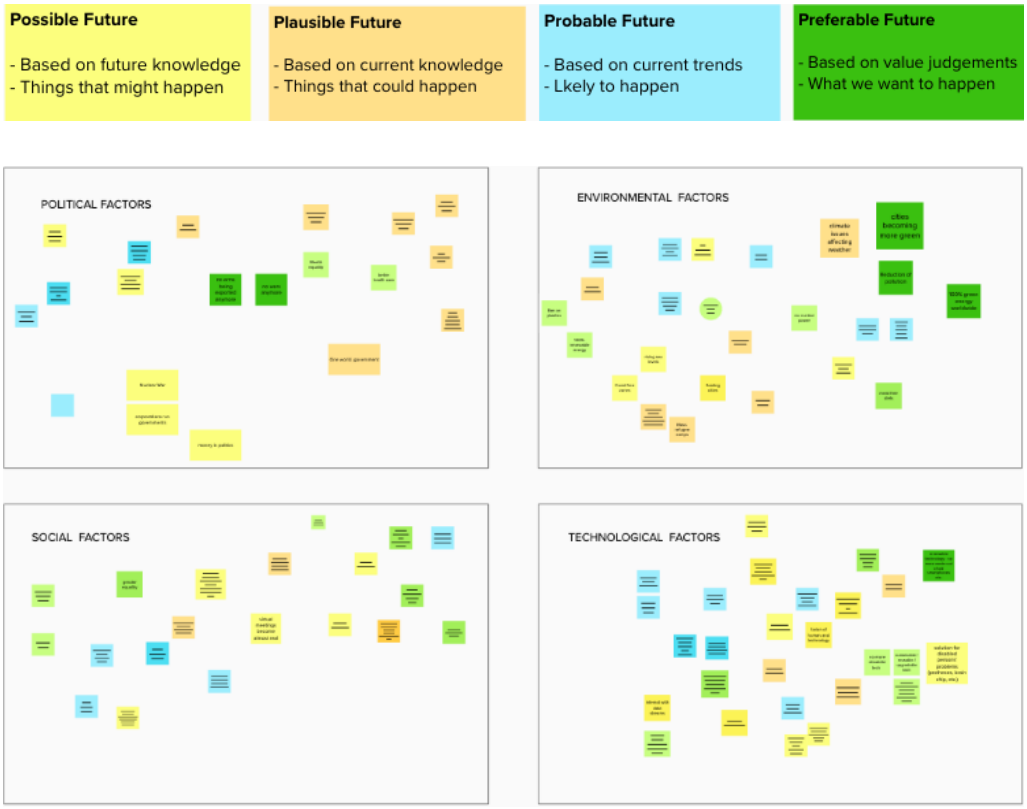
Icebreaker activity
The first workshop began with a short icebreaker activity, which was designed to help the students and tutors get to know each other better and familiarise themselves with using Mural. Each group member was asked to post their name, study subject, contact details and a few images or comments that described them and their key skills.

Reminder of the brief
To ensure that all participants understood what was required from this course, the Unexpected Futures brief and output deadlines were summarised, with students given the opportunity to ask questions.

Picture storming
The first ideation activity asked students to identify and post any images that represented typical visions of the future from popular culture. They then discussed these images as a group, clustering the images together to identify any initial themes that emerged.

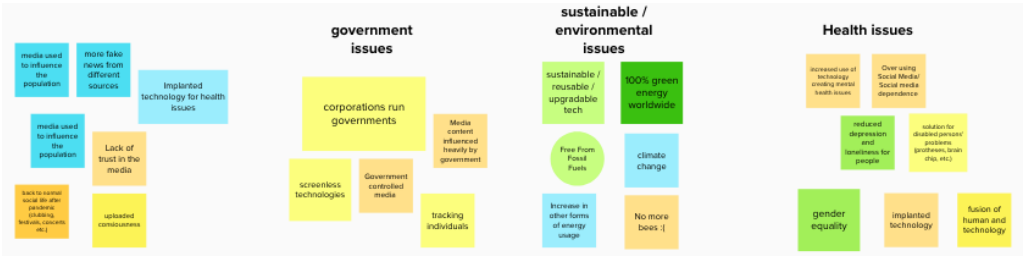


Futurescoping and PEST ideation
The students discussed the Political, Environmental, Social and Technological factors that could potentially impact media culture over the next 30 years. They were asked to consider a wide range of developments that they feel are 'possible', 'probable', 'plausible' and 'preferable'. They then wrote their ideas on a 'sticky note' and added to the relevant section on the Mural.



Selecting and clustering of themes

Following on from the PEST activity, the students selected their preferred topics from each section and worked collaboratively to cluster any similar or related issues in order to identify the key themes they could address in their project.



Scenario Development

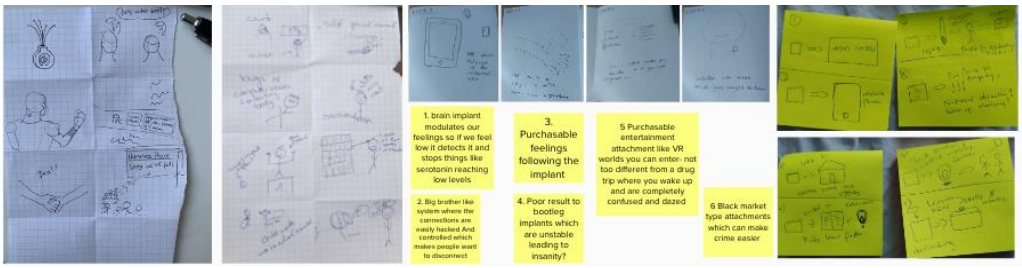
After deciding on a number of thematic issues, the students worked together to develop a cohesive future scenario that they could address with their speculative design prototype. The group imagined that the media culture of 2050 would be centred around 'smart implants' - an implanted biotechnology that would enable users to monitor their health and nutrition, download new skills, communicate telepathically, etc. (see research links below)

To support the creative development of the scenario, the tutors suggested several methods from the Google Design Sprint toolkit. For example, the students undertook the Future Press Release activity to help with the world building of their imagined scenario. This eventually would evolve into one of

their creative outputs, which was a critical review of their speculative future technology.

Crazy 8's ideation

Once the group had established their scenario, they each took part in a 'Crazy 8's' ideation activity. The students each produced number of rapid sketches, which were uploaded to the Mural along with any notes:



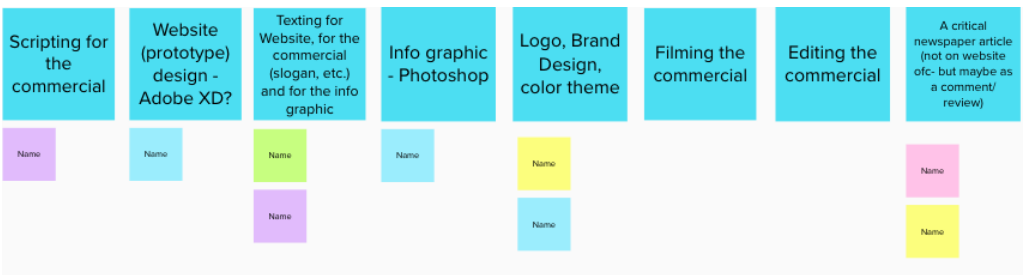
The students were then asked to individually choose their favourite three ideas to develop further. This process was highly successful, as it helped the team to identify any common ideas that were emerging as they began visualising their speculative design prototype.

Voting on the best ideas to take forward

After a second round of Crazy 8 sketches, the team took part in a group vote to decide their overall favourite ideas to take forward:

Deciding on outputs and assigned roles

Once these ideas had been further refined by the students, they decided on the particular outputs they could work on as a team, assigning roles for each part of the project:



Prototype Development and Preparing Final Presentation

Over the last few weeks of the project, the students focussed on producing the various assets for their speculative design prototype, as well as preparing their final presentation. The tutors provided guidance and feedback during this period, as well as suggesting a number of relative tools and tutorials (see below for more details). The group produced a series of outputs that helped to communicate their fictional 'smart implant' technology. Drawing from the marketing of contemporary tech companies like Google and Apple, the team developed a proof-of-concept website for 'MindLink', which featured an overview of the technology, price-plans, apps, information about the implant procedure, as well as customer reviews that help to naturalise this as a popular consumer product. The team also produced a series of storyboards for promotional material [advert 1 / advert 2], in addition to a critical article that reflected on the impact that smart implant technologies have had on the future.

Tools and Tutorials

To support the development and production of the student's prototypes, the tutors suggested a number of online tutorials, tools and software. These were provided in response to what the students were wanting to produce, which throughout the project. The suggested videos were shared on the dedicated group channel on the EMEX Discord.

Create simple videos or video presentations

- Adobe Spark: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vk_ZohCWMAM

Image Editing Tools and Tutorials

- How to Create a Futuristic Eye in Photoshop: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qvQm1wuCYCQ
- Very simple tutorial for PS Mix app: https://youtu.be/sax6kceqjuI
- Quick Cuts In Photoshop Mix App: https://youtu.be/Tag2gRiz8a0

Storyboarding Tools and Tutorials

- Storyboarder: https://wonderunit.com/storyboarder/
  The Storyboarder makes it easy to visualize a story. It helps to quickly draw and test is a story idea works.
- Storyboarding in UX Design: https://uxplanet.org/storyboarding-in-ux-design-b9d2e18e5fab
  The website focuses on storyboards as a medium to help explore solutions to user experience issues, as well as communicating these issues and solutions to others.

Parallax effect for Websites

- Tutorial for creating a parallax effect using a photograph in Adobe after effect. This could bring your images to life: https://youtu.be/7tVyu-rjHbg
- There are also free apps available that do similar things too at the click of a button: https://apps.apple.com/gb/app/motionleap-by-

lightricks/id1381206010
Create moving photos for a unique type of photo art! Animate your photos & magically bring them to life with Motion Leap

Research Themes

When the group decided on body implants as a topic, various sources on the topic were contributed by the mentors and student participants. A dedicated Discord channel was used as a method for disseminating and discussing the research in-between the weekly workshops.

Body implants

- Harvard Business Review (2020): Are You Ready for Tech That Connects to
  Your Brain?: https://hbr.org/2020/09/are-you-ready-for-tech-that-connects-to-your-brain
- Lifehack: 8 Futuristic Brain Implants You Won't Believe Are Possible
  https://www.lifehack.org/articles/technology/8-futuristic-brain-implants-you-wont-believe-are-possible.html
- Data Driven Investor (March, 2020): The future of humanity is genetic engineering and neural implants
  https://medium.datadriveninvestor.com/the-future-of-humanity-is-genetic-engineering-and-neural-implants-611072f8c3ad
- Supplyframe Hardware (March 2019): The Future of Implantable Technology
  "Over the next ten years, neural implants could become mainstream"
- https://medium.com/supplyframe-hardware/the-future-of-implantable-technology-1e674fac9c27
- CleanTechnica (May 2018): Enhanced humans: in five years, wearable tech and implant technology will be the new normal.
  "Mind-reading technology is around the corner"
  https://future.cleantechnica.com/2018/05/14/enhanced-humans-five-years-wearable-tech-implant-technology-will-new-normal/
- CNET (March 2020): Westworld season 3 gets futuristic gadgets and tech so right:
  https://www.cnet.com/news/westworld-season-3-gadgets-tech-aaron-paul-app-marshawn-lynch-shirt-implants-wafers-rico-sliding-tablet/
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Cf7IL_eZ38&ab_channel=CorningIncorporated
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lK_cdkpazjI&ab_channel=TheCGBros
- Insider, (April 2021): Elon Musk's brain-chip company, Neuralink, released a video of a monkey playing video games with its mind
  https://www.businessinsider.com/elon-musk-neuralink-video-monkey-games-pong-brain-chip-2021-4?utm_source=reddit.com&r=US&IR=T

Wearable Tech

- Concept Video /The Cicret Bracelet, 2014: Turn your skin in your new touchscreen - an example of concept for screenless wearables https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9J7GpVQCfms&ab_channel=CicretBracelet
- Ted Talk: The thrilling potential of SixthSense technology | Pranav Mistry https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YrtANPtnhyg&ab_channel=TED
- TED: Unveiling game-changing wearable tech | Pattie Maes https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nZ-VjUKAsao&ab_channel=TED