



HOPE
HOPE
HOPE

HOPE
HOPE
HOPE

RECLAIMING HOPE:

Navigate (un)certainty,
imagine better futures

EDITORS

Ivica Mitrović

Dora Vanette

PUBLISHED BY

Centre for Creativity / MAO

Nova Gorica,

2025



<i>Table of Contents</i>	p.
Navigate Toward Better Futures Ivica Mitrović	7
DESIGN PERSPECTIVES	18
Fictions and Memory Work as Resources for Hopeful Futuring Natalija Majsova	21
Designing with and Through Despair Dora Vanette	33
Sailing Against the Wind <i>Ezio Manzini</i>	43
Reclaiming Hope – from whom or what? James Auger	55
ENTANGLED FUTURES <i>Ákos Schneider</i>	69
Existential Solutionism <i>Silvio Lorusso</i>	81
Instead of Solutions Time's Up	91

CASE STUDIES **102**

The Tidal Garden **105**

Filippo Grassi, Lodovica Guarnieri, Lorenzo Barbasetti di Prun

The Right to Prototype **109**

Guillem Camprodon

The Museum in Community **115**

Maja Šuštaršič

Pirate Care Syllabus **119**

Pirate Care

Borderlands Broadcasting Collaborations **123**

Jimmy Loizeau

Teach the Future **127**

Lourdes Rodriguez

Futures Garden **131**

David Martens



**NAVIGATING
THE TOWARD
TOWARD BETTER
FUTURE
RES**

Ivica Mitrović

NAVIGATE TOWARD BETTER FUTURES

Ivica Mitrović



Sunset on the Adriatic Sea.
Courtesy of Ivica Mitrović.

The World

We are living in a time of polycrisis, an era when two major global planetary threats of the so-called Anthropocene (or Capitalocene) are intertwined for the first time in history—the nuclear threat awakened from the “Cold War” and the omnipresent climate crisis. These two real and at the same time unimaginable crises produce extreme catastrophic scenarios that are likely to take place in the near future, reflecting the fact that the future did not turn out as bright as envisioned by the Western world in the second part of the 20th century. Our recent history has shaped the futures of those who come after us, and the ongoing threats are already outlining those futures. Therefore, it is not surprising that this century has already been called “the century of dystopia” or “beyond utopia”—a time when the mythical and romantic Futures of the 20th century have slowly faded away and dystopia has been normalised and commodified.

Such futures bring drastic changes not only to the natural environment but also to our social, cultural, economic, and political relationships—changing power relations and deepening social inequalities. Our futures have been colonized by the dominant economic system, which has been based on resource exploitation through solutionism. This logic is reflected in manufacturing, production, and distribution systems that end in a “society of desire”, which have led our living environment to its current state of emergency. The existing frameworks for problem-solving also contribute to this polycrisis, constantly limiting opportunities for

radical, systemic change. Today, capitalism—via colossal projects of “techno-heroic” entrepreneurs and billionaires—is imposing topics that were once reserved for science fiction narratives and employing them as tools for global-scale privatisation of the future commons. The current system, though repeatedly perturbed and shaken, remains quite homogeneous and resistant to possible alternatives for building a more just society for all peoples and the planet.

As individuals trapped in this global state of emergency, we are increasingly burdened with the responsibility for systemic failures. Stressed with rising insecurity and future uncertainties, we have less and less time to engage meaningfully with the future. It has become difficult for individuals to think about different and brighter futures, to imagine alternatives to our everyday lives. The dominance of and demand for dystopian scenarios in mainstream popular culture over recent decades has led many to accept catastrophic scenarios as inevitable. This has resulted in moving them away from imagining different futures and contributed to widespread passivity (instead of proactive engagement). The present, burdened by such dystopian futures, which are characterised by various catastrophes such as diseases, wars, terrors, climate disasters, immigrant crises, totalitarian states, technological control, unequal distribution of goods, etc., most often generates the same dystopian futures again, creating a dystopian loop. Living in such a global dystopian present, we feel that the future has been taken from us and that we have no agency in building the future. We are caught in a melancholic limbo, shaped by traumas coming not only from the past, but also from the future.

Living on the margins or periphery—understood not only in geographical, political, or economic terms at the state, city, neighbourhood, or village level, but rather in cultural or subjective terms regarding the power of local communities—reflects those global crises and pressures. Global threats are present in the local community on an everyday basis and on multiple levels, from the social, economic, technological, and environmental to the psychological. Even more, as the environmental breakdown driven by globalisation accelerates, the planet itself is treated as a periphery.¹

In the local context, those global crises are reflected, on one hand, in passive local communities, adapting to the “new normal”, which is not and never was normal, characterized by social and economic insecurity, inequalities, poverty, conflicts, permanent migrant crisis, radical political polarisations, and human-led environmental degradation. On the other hand, we see action-orientated local communities on the peripheries that do not have options other than building resilience to mitigate the crisis and to survive in the forthcoming challenging future. These efforts unfortunately often fail to be inclusive and their emphasis on resilience contributes to the normalization of the current state of emergency. Looking at both these passive and active local communities, it appears that—despite their everyday struggles—they have lost their ability to look beyond everyday concerns, to imagine and build futures. And yet, these local and peripheral places are also spaces where new identities, based not only on geography, environment, economy, culture, heritage, and traditions but

also on very local, specific, unique community practices and social relationships, have been generated constantly.

This poses a crucial challenge: how can people in these communities respond to their specific, local challenges while also drawing inspiration from and connecting with other local and global visions, imaginaries, and practices? How can they build futures based on equality, solidarity, peace, and justice? Although these activities, when they move beyond the immediate struggle for survival, initiated and limited at the local, micro-scale level, could resemble forms of personal or collective psychotherapy or self-help rituals that restore hope, they are important as individual and community activities which could generate paths to actionable plans.

Hope

Imagining and speculating are vital in envisaging alternative futures. Historically, design and architecture, as worldmaking agents, have had the agility to explore diverse versions of the world.² **Tomas Maldonado**, responding to the crisis of environmental destruction in the early 1970s, stressed that rejecting hope in designing would be nothing less than an act of consent towards the agents of that crisis.³ For Maldonado “hope” in design refers to its potential to inspire positive change. He stresses the importance of optimism in design thinking—believing in the capacity of design to address global challenges such as inequality and environmental degradation. Therefore, it is today’s challenge to rethink again how design and architecture thinking and doing can contribute to reclaiming future imaginations and constructing bright and different future paths. This is particularly relevant in an educational context where universities,

research communities, and design and art institutions should be some of the most dynamic speculative zones.

Speculation in design and architecture is expanding today, showing the potential of this approach in a broader context, as a critical practice of transition and exploration. Unfortunately, this has resulted in many failed projects and strong criticism of the field. Criticism has focused on the practice's Western-centered, academic perspective and its preoccupation in dystopian futures. Critics are pushing speculative practitioners to explore new methods that engage more directly with social issues and prospects. They recommend integrating local and marginalized communities to foster and focus on actionable, participative, and inclusive outcomes, addressing socio-political concerns, experimenting with ways of engaging with more-than-human dynamics, and aiming to actively shape future realities. However, all those important transformations of the practice should not replace imagination through speculation that carries (as **Darko Suvin** calls it) a "novum", as a bold and brave way towards different societal horizons.⁴

The Challenge

Maybe in this constant reminder of the significance of what is being lost—the loss of a horizon, a world, a species, the known—which results in a pervasive melancholy in the form of strong personal and communal feeling of loss, lies the potential to initiate meaningful change. Drawing from **Donna Haraway**'s vision of *worlding* as a situated and responsible act of shaping shared realities, this challenge invites us to imagine speculative paths toward more just and livable futures—for both people and planet.⁵ It brings active imaginations that see

and encourage potential in the present, moves beyond anthropocentric paradigms, and brings about a space where individuals and communities have the power to shape their futures.

The real challenge is to unite often disparate practices, to mediate between global and local action, between the central and the peripheral, toward creating a new imaginarium of hope for all. Through practices ranging from pragmatic to speculative, from discursive to activist, design and architecture could bring reflexive, imaginative, and generative pathways toward those more just future paths with an emphasis on cooperation, mutual aid, and solidarity. Starting from education, and in collaboration with other disciplines, it is important to work on devising practical, actionable pathways toward the goal of systemic transformation and transition. The neo-colonization of the future could be avoided by building futures based on inclusion, solidarity, and partnership on commons and commoning. It is important to re-think what design tools, approaches, and techniques might be applied to contribute to the complex challenge of reclaiming our futures.

This publication explores those Europe-based speculative, future-oriented, and critical design-oriented practices. It brings together educators, theorists, and practitioners with the aim of detecting present and addressing future challenges. The contributors also explore what are better, i.e. more preferable, futures and for whom, and suggests possible paths and actionable plans toward those futures.

The publication includes seven design perspectives and seven case studies that move between past, present, and future, articulating key challenges while offering alternative paths forward.

Natalija Majsova, a researcher in cultural studies, opens the Perspectives section and discusses projections of the future and imaginaries of the past, and how gradual technological transformations contribute to nostalgias for past utopias. Co-editor of the booklet, design historian **Dora Vanette** examines despair not as a passive condition, but as a generative force, an entry point to more equitable, care-driven futures rooted in repair and responsibility. **Enzo Manzini**, a pioneer of design for social innovation, reflects on two decades of transformative practice and considers its potential for today and tomorrow by cultivating imagination and political courage. **James Auger**, educator, practitioner, and one of the founders of speculative design, investigates our continual fascination with the future and hope from a design perspective. He questions Western modernist narratives and the notion of “the future” as a cultural and political obsession.

Ákos Schneider, design culture researcher and educator, explores speculative design pedagogy through a more-than-human lens, opening paths to stronger

relational and ontological dimensions of design that move beyond the limits of human-centered frameworks. **Silvio Lorusso**, writer, artist, and designer, continuing his inquiry into design culture, deals with the concept of the “designerly unconscious”—a framework for understanding how designers think, feel, and act, critiquing “existential solutionism” wherein design (and life) itself are approached through a continuous line of surface-level, technical fixes. **Time’s Up**, the Linz-based collective known for constructing experiential scenarios, reflects on how bottom-up, participatory futures can emerge from everyday practices.

Time’s Up work resonates directly with the case studies presented in the booklet second section, which highlight design interventions ranging from **Fab Lab Barcelona**’s critical explorations via prototyping, and food cultivation infrastructures in salinised croplands like **The Tidal Garden**, to community platforms such as the **Pirate Care Syllabus**, which fosters knowledge-sharing in response to intersecting crises of care and governance, and **EU Policy Lab**’s *Futures Garden*, which engages speculative imaginaries and artefacts.

Together, these contributions propose a navigation system for uncertain times—anchored in collaboration, reflexivity, and an unwavering commitment to reclaiming our futures.

References

1

Ivica Mitrović, Mia Roth-Čerina,
and Tonči Čerina, eds.,
*Designing in Coexistence:
Reflections on Systemic Change*
(Croatian Architects'
Association, 2023).

2

Ivica Mitrović, James Auger,
Julian Hanna, and Ingi Helgason, eds.,
*Beyond Speculative Design:
Past – Present – Future*
(Arts Academy, University
of Split, 2021).

3

Tomás Maldonado,
*Design, Nature, and Revolution:
Toward a Critical Ecology*
(Harper and Row, 1972).

4

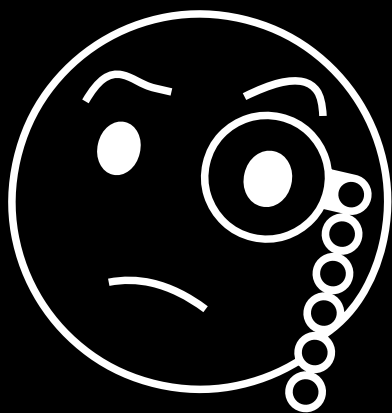
Darko Suvin,
*Metamorphoses of Science Fiction:
On the Poetics and History of
a Literary Genre*
(Yale University Press, 1979).

5

Donna Haraway,
*Staying with the Trouble:
Making Kin in the Chthulucene*
(Duke University Press, 2016).

DESIGN
PERSP
ES

**AN
PERSPECTIVE**





**FUNCTIONS
& MEMOR
WORK AS
RESOURCE
ES**

Natalija Majsova

FICTIONS & MEMORY WORK AS RESOURCES FOR HOPEFUL FUTURING

Natalija Majsova

When it is not obscured by trivial distractions and mundane temptations, the future glares menacingly at us, its inadvertent makers. An abyss—but a mesmerizing and kaleidoscopic one—screaming with projections, speculations, and references to innumerable failures, naïve and cynical narratives of heroic conquest, efficient management, and optimal solutions. The texture of the present seems catastrophic: a patchwork of military, ecological, health, welfare, and humanitarian crises that are either too close or too distant to make sense of, and to take systemic action against. The shiny keys to prosperity, peace, and comfort—the so-called lost futures of global modernity—are rusty, the lock seems broken, and the door is nowhere in sight. The world before us appears profoundly out of joint. At the same time, there is no other world for us to move to. In fact, there are many worlds that urgently require our attention. For just as we, the reluctant makers of today and of the day after, are neither copies of a universal individuum nor members of standardized collectives, the world we inhabit is not a single, homogenous, unchanging, or unchangeable entity. As a multitude of interspecies entanglements, communities, and alliances, we are thus participants in parallel presents, responsible for worlds that we are implicated¹ in making, whether we choose to or not. Paradoxically, the will to acknowledge and remember our own implication—and therefore agency—comes with a glimpse of potentiality, a fragile horizon of possibilities, and perhaps hope.

This essay engages with fictionalization and memory work as tools for practicing hope in the outlined stifling *zeitgeist*. I contextualize the apparently prevalent “future deficit” as the product of a specific kind of amnesia, resulting from a flattened understanding of the dialectic between the past and the future in Western culture. In an epistemically decolonial gesture, the essay

makes an argument for memory work as a tool for future oriented fictionalization. Ultimately, I urge the reader to (re)consider herself as both an involuntary partaker in crises that are not of her own choosing, and as a receiver of experiences with the power to re-member, re-work, and re-design—to fictionalize the real so that the idea of “tomorrow” begins to make sense.

Futures as Necessary Multiplicity

Despite the great amounts of capital invested into trend analysis, prognostics, and forecasting, the future remains beyond immediate reach or precise articulation. In futures studies—an interdisciplinary research field preoccupied with understanding how we have made, and still make, sense of the future, this conjecture goes hand in hand with the observation that there is no one future.² The future of life on Earth does not neatly coincide with the future of the oceans and the mountains, nor does the future of men seamlessly map onto the future of other genders, to give just a few examples. Hence, futures studies, rather than future studies. The “extra ‘s’”—which does not necessarily translate neatly into all languages—serves as a constant reminder that the potential impact of studying futures is not in finding an ultimate recipe for peace and prosperity on Earth and beyond, but in confronting and establishing polylogue between diverse speculated, imagined, and prognosed futures articulated from diverse positions.

The historian **Edward P. Thompson** saw his professional mission as striving to “rescue the poor-stockinger, the Luddite cropper, the ‘obsolete’ hand-loom weaver, the ‘utopian’ artisan, and even the deluded follower of Joanna Southcott, from the enormous condescension of posterity”³ because “[t]heir aspirations were

valid in terms of their own experience; and, if they were casualties of history, they remain, condemned in their own lives, as casualties.”⁴ Analogously, the mission of futures studies could be paraphrased as documenting and generating diverse future projections from as many different positions as possible.

Although easy to subscribe to, monolithic and monological—ideas of *the* future—unidirectional, rather than designed to generate a conversation that could transform them—obscure horizons of possibilities by sneakily replacing them with the horizons of expectations of a select few: the gatekeepers, decision-makers, and owners of the means of production and communication.⁵ The future deficit that plagues much of the world today is one consequence of this conflation. Abundant in images and narratives of crisis, complexity, and imminent collapse, the popular imaginary we encounter in the media every day encourages passivity and dissociation from the idea of personal accountability. Popular narrative templates that prioritize “the hero’s journey” effectively downplay the significance of everyday existence, of the uneventful, and of gradual change and slow transformations. Thus, the future deficit is not only the result of the multiple overlapping failures of global governance, but of a deficit of the imagination that is inextricably linked to—echoing **Fredric Jameson**’s influential reflections on historical amnesia in the time of mass media⁶—a concerning deficit of memory.





Memory as a Condition of Possibilities

During a keynote event at a recent international conference that brought together researchers with an interest in memory, the renowned Bulgarian writer **Georgi Gospodinov** thoughtfully remarked: “The unhappened things shape us even more than those things that happened to us.” Gospodinov was alluding to his parents’ fascination with cities they had never visited. Specifically, he stressed the superiority of his parents’ knowledge about and their attachment to these cities—acquired through books and films—to his own empirical experience, gained through travel.

“I don’t really like travelling to Europe. It’s far away, and all the cities look alike, with their crowded historical centers where tourists admire historical buildings and eat expensive food. You don’t get the sense of experiencing a different culture; you get the sense of attending a performance of culture for foreigners. And it is nearly impossible to really connect with the locals.”, a political scientist from Lahore whom I met at the same conference, had remarked a day prior to Gospodinov’s keynote. Examined in conversation, these two observations

highlight both a remarkable similarity and a disconnect. While the speakers' opinions of famous European cities are similarly reserved, the memory of an empirical experience is in contrast with the memory of an imaginary experience, offered by fiction, referred to by Gospodinov. The former disillusioned, the latter hopeful. The former based on observation of the present, and the latter rooted in encyclopedic knowledge of culture, with all its ideas and potentialities.

While neither of the two types of memories offers a precise recollection of "the past", they are both potential anchors of identity or starting points for reflexive narratives about the present and speculations about the future—elements of memory work,⁷ intended to put the past to use in the "now".

"The past, just like fire, cannot be looked directly in the eye," Gospodinov had written in the awarded novel *Time Shelter* (2020), where a clinic for patients with Alzheimer's disease is designed as a carefully organized repository of different decades of the past. "For those people who lose their memory, the past is not a foreign country, the future is a foreign country," he also stressed in the conversation about the book at the aforementioned conference. In this one sentence, the writer articulated a conundrum that seems key to the question of "reclaiming hope": knowledge about the past and present does not, by itself, yield hopeful ideas for better futures. To connect experience from the recent and distant past to agendas for the present and future, people rely on memory, where experience—of doing, acting, or just thinking—becomes inseparably entangled with the imagination, and fictionalized. And to fictionalize is to give comprehensible form to the contradictory, confusing, and endless sensation of being in and of the world.⁸

Memory Work as a Futuring Tool

From literature to film, music, video games, walls, and canvases, the present is abundant in media tools that allow us to take in and design different fictions. Some are more, and others less memorable. Some are there to entertain—to “take off the edge” when the world becomes too much to bear. Others may be sources of despair or inspiration, conveying complex ideas in resonant ways and articulating perspectives on the past, present, and future that are not necessarily prioritized in the daily news. Thus, fictions are not only products, but also sources of memory, offering unassuming but sometimes life-changing points of entry into dialogue with the past, for the future.

Historically, fictions have served a profoundly decolonial function: giving voice to marginalized, oppressed, and colonized groups; serving as custodians of forgotten practices and relationships; generating tools for the visualization of the multiple scales of our existence; and facilitating our understanding of complexity. It is therefore not surprising that facets of fictionalization, such as imagination, creativity, and speculation have routinely been associated with the “utopian impulse”—the will to act toward better futures.⁹ With recent technological shifts, seemingly bringing more and more of the world’s knowledge to our fingertips, notions like speculation, creativity, and imagination need to be profoundly re-thought, as their components—the time, resources, and labor involved, as well as their entanglement with personal and collective memory—are being transformed in the context of generative artificial intelligence, supported by extractivist neocolonial capitalism.¹⁰

Research initiatives designed to document the impact of cultural participation indicate that to fictionalize—to speculate, imagine, and, ultimately, to design

hopefully for the future—means to participate in complex, open-ended meaning-making processes grounded in nuanced understanding of the identities of the persons, communities and environments involved. To perform hopeful memory work, in this context, means, first of all, to do radically contextualized and reflexive research: to acknowledge the historical complexity of all individual and collective identities; to re-inspect various narratives, from the institutional to the excluded and suppressed. Secondly, to harness memory work for future-oriented design means to carefully consider how to integrate the promises of the local past into the infrastructures available in the present, and sustainable beyond tomorrow, aiming to create communities of practice and affect, rather than generating financial profit. And thirdly, to perform memory work means to fictionalize playfully, rather than faithfully to historical fact. The future is not the past, and memory work has the power to show that it need not be haunted by it.¹¹ Thus, this essay cannot but end with an unassuming call: to consider fiction seriously, as a transformative process of reclaiming memory, developing agency, and reconstructing hope—starting with micro-pockets of contagiously creative action.



Street art district,
Helsinki, 2025.
Courtesy of Natalija Majsova.

p. 20
Lenin monument
in Prague, 2025.
Courtesy of Natalija Majsova.

p. 25 – 26
Plaque in Konjic
in front of Tito's bunker, 2023.
Courtesy of Natalija Majsova.

1

Michael Rothberg,
*The Implicated Subject:
Beyond Victims and Perpetrators*
(Stanford University Press,
2019).

2

Cf. Patricia Waugh and
Marc Botha, eds.,
*Future Theory:
A Handbook to Critical Concepts*
(Bloomsbury Academic, 2021).

3

Edward P. Thompson,
*The Making of the English
Working Class*
(Random House, 1963), 12–13.

4

Ibid.

5

Robert T. Tally Jr.,
The Fiction of Dread
(Bloomsbury Academic, 2024).

6

Fredric Jameson,
*Postmodernism, or, The Cultural
Logic of Late Capitalism*
(Duke University Press,
1991), 21–25.

7

Cf. Annette Kuhn,
“A Journey Through Memory,”
in *Memory and Methodology*,
ed. S. Radstone (Berg, 2000),
179–196.

8

Cf. Jacques Rancière,
“Coordinates: Fiction of Time,”
in *Rancière and Literature*,
ed. Grace Hellyer and
Julian Murphet
(Edinburgh University Press,
2016), 25–41.

9

Darko Suvin, “The State of the
Art in Science Fiction Theory:
Determining and Delimiting
the Utopian Impulse,”
Science-Fiction Studies 4, no. 2
(July 1977): 120–129.

10

Amir Baradaran,
“Towards a Decolonial ‘I’ in AI:
Mapping the Pervasive Effects
of Artificial Intelligence on the
Art Ecosystem,”
AI & Society 39 (2023): 7–19,
[https://doi.org/10.1007/
s00146-023-01771-5](https://doi.org/10.1007/s00146-023-01771-5).

11

For examples of memory work
in the context of popular
culture, see the outputs of
the “Mnemonic Aesthetics and
Practices in Popular Culture:
Murals, Film, and Popular
Music as Memory Work”
ARIS-HRZZ-funded research
project (2023–2026,
project ID J7-50215 and
IPS-2023-02-5149,
PIs Natalija Majsova and
Vjeran Pavlaković),
<https://www.mempop.eu>.



**DECONTAMINATING
WITH and
d THROU
GH DESP
AIR**

Dora Vanette

DESIGNING WITH and THROUGH DESPAIR

Dora Vanette

← An event at *H.earth*,
photograph by Stephanie Ayala.
Courtesy of Territorial Empathy,
[instagram.com/territorialempathy](https://www.instagram.com/territorialempathy).

In the introduction to her popular history book, *A Distant Mirror*, **Barbara Tuchman** explained her decision to focus on her topic as a result of an enduring fascination with “a period of anguish when there is no sense of an assured future”.¹ One could not be faulted for assuming she was speaking of today. But Tuchman was not referring to our present—or even 1978, when the book was originally published—but to the fourteenth century. “A violent, tormented, bewildered, suffering, and disintegrating age”, the fourteenth century faced a litany of crises: war, bad governance, insurrection, religious zealotry, church turmoil, and most notably, the Black Death, which wiped out an estimated third of the population living between India and Iceland in the span of just two years.

For Tuchman, part of the appeal of writing about the fourteenth century lay in its unsettling resonance with the period in which she began writing the book, the 1960s. A time of upheaval in its own right, the 1960s were marked by civil unrest, political assassinations, and war fatigue. What united the 1960s with its “distant mirror” of the fourteenth century, in Tuchman’s view, was a shared *sense of futurelessness*. The instability of the times, not attributable to any one cause, undermined confidence in the very notion of a future, let alone a desirable one.

Tuchman is far from alone in searching for historical parallels in moments of crisis. As she put it, history provides us with “a more revealing image of ourselves and our species [...] than is visible in the clutter of circumstances under our noses.”² Historians like **James Westfall Thompson** looked to the fourteenth century during World War I, and **Édouard Perroy** revisited the Hundred Years’ War during World War II. But what drives this return to the past in times of present

despair? Is morbid fascination with suffering the source of our interest? Is the past a grim reminder that, for the majority of the population, things have always been bad? Perhaps it is the inverse, and these stories are meant to give us relief that disasters are often not continuous and ubiquitous but rather sporadic in time and place, allowing us an opportunity to delude ourselves that perhaps we, exceptionally, will be spared. Or are we perhaps searching for reassurance that even the darkest periods are not permanent? Do we return to history hoping to hear the reassurance: “We’ve been here before. It wasn’t easy, but we made it through”?

DESPAIR AND ITS ECHOES

Today, the “clutter of circumstances under our noses” is overwhelming: ecological collapse, democratic erosion, and social polarisation. It may be tempting to look back for inspiration on how to move forward. But if we turn to Tuchman’s fourteenth century for comfort, we are likely to be disappointed. In her book, she describes how the “sense of vanishing future created a kind of dementia of despair”—quoting a chronicler from Neuberg on the Danube who observed how people abandoned their fields and left cattle to stray because “no one had any inclination to concern themselves with the future”.³

Despair is not just a historical sentiment; it is a defining feature of our own moment. Shards of it break through our daily routines in the form of climate grief, doomscrolling, and digitally mediated alienation. In a recent article, American poet **Hanif Abdurraqib** reflected on the role of despair in contemporary life and discourse.⁴ “We are perhaps coming to a collective understanding that there is a door closing, more quickly for some than for others, and that most of us are on the wrong side of it”, Abdurraqib noted. Yet for Abdurraqib, despair is not simply a dead end—it is worth “staying with”.

He asks whether despair signifies a point of despondency that cannot be overcome, or whether something generative can emerge from the emotion.

Indeed, even in Tuchman's bleak account of the fourteenth century, life persisted. Amid relentless crises, seeds were planted, books written, and tools repaired, all micro-acts of stubborn, everyday futurity. Perhaps it is more accurate to say that people both despaired and hoped, sometimes simultaneously. They continued with the work of everyday life even while they believed no future awaited them, and they held on to a hope for a better future when the present was worthy of despair. Even the chronicler who recorded the pervasiveness of fourteenth-century despair was, in their way, enacting hope. The very act of recordkeeping presumed continuity. It assumed that someone, someday, might care enough to look back.

HOPE THROUGH DESPAIR

While hope and despair are often seen as opposites, it might be more productive to approach them as entangled. Despair can be a fertile ground—a terrain from which more grounded, imaginative forms of hope emerge. Hope that is not naïve or detached from reality, but humble, strategic, and situated. Indeed, research has shown that resilient people tend to apply optimism and pessimism strategically.⁵ Optimism helps them persevere while pessimism enables them to assess risks more accurately, to adapt more quickly and effectively. Hope, then, is not the denial of despair, but its transformation.

Hope may be intrinsic to design. As **Silvio Lorusso** has argued, optimism is built into the discipline's very premise—design as a continual preoccupation with how things *ought* to be, always better.⁶ But what if design's role is not to erase despair, but to work *with* and *through* it? This is

not an abstract provocation. Many Black, Indigenous, and queer communities have long worked under conditions where the present is precarious and the future uncertain. Their creative practices—including ways of thinking and making—model how hope can be held alongside grief. They show us how futures can be imagined and built even in the face of ongoing harm. This tradition offers urgent lessons for designers and policymakers: not to “solve” despair, but to listen to it, sit with it, and build through it. One needs to dwell in the friction: to see “design for uncertainty” not as failure, but as ethical responsibility.

Martinican philosopher **Édouard Glissant**’s concept of the *jardin créole* (Creole garden) offers a powerful metaphor.⁷ Historically, Creole gardens were small plots cultivated by enslaved people in the Caribbean and the Americas. These gardens were vital spaces of desperate, despairing survival—yielding fruits, vegetables, herbs, and medicinal plants that supplemented meager rations and enabled these communities to continue amidst oppressive conditions. As such, these gardens function as archives of colonial violence, symbolizing enforced necessity and resilience. But Glissant emphasizes that these densely planted, biodiverse gardens also represented a powerful alternative to the tightly regulated monocultural, extractive plantations reliant on exploited labor. The gardens were then not only a source of sustenance, but an autonomous space of dignity and community in the face of colonial erasure and a way to resist dependence on colonial plantation systems.

Numerous designers and artists have drawn on this metaphor to explore relational and decolonial design. One recent example is *Greenhouse*, an installation by artist-curators **Mónica de Miranda**, **Sónia Vaz Borges**, and **Vânia Gala** for the Portuguese Pavilion at the 2024 Venice Biennale. The project transformed the Palazzo Franchetti into a living

Creole garden, what the curators described as “a polyphonic assemblage” in a nod to **Anna Tsing**’s framing of interdependent, heterogeneous entanglements—assemblages that do not form a single, unified system, but instead hold together multiple, coexisting rhythms, histories, and forms of life.⁸ “Multiple rhythms are happening in the Creole garden”, Vânia Gala noted in an interview. Plants flourish at different times and, working side by side in collaborative ways, they make new worlds.”⁹

A related approach can be seen in *H.earth*, a community garden in the South Bronx—one of the poorest districts in the United States, where both long-term residents and recently-arrived migrants have trouble accessing basic social services. A collaboration between nonprofit design collective **Territorial Empathy**, the Oaxacan restaurant La Morada, and the Bronx Land Trust, the project responded to overlapping challenges of food insecurity, climate migration, and urban disinvestment.¹⁰ The revitalized garden became a hub for La Morada’s mutual aid kitchen, which began serving 500 free meals per day during the Covid-19 pandemic. As immigration raids across the United States have intensified in recent months, the space evolved into a trusted site for offering nourishment and support to undocumented community members. The garden also serves as a site of cultural preservation and education, where the restaurant owners teach children about Indigenous plants and medicine. At the center of the garden is a tall, chimney-like hearth inspired by traditional Indigenous architecture—a reclamation of the outdoor kitchen, once stigmatized as a symbol of rural poverty. Here, it stands as a monument to sustenance, resistance, and collective care.

These gardens are not simply counter-projects; they are proposals for living otherwise in the ruins of systems that no longer serve us. The question of what comes next

is not new. For historians, part of the lesson of the fourteenth century was that its upheavals helped usher in the Renaissance. The Renaissance may not have been a just or desirable outcome for everyone, but it emerged from the ruptures of the preceding century. Today, the challenge is not to recreate the Renaissance, but to imagine and shape futures that are more equitable, more attentive to repair, and more embedded in care. After all, moments of collapse often prompt the rethinking of structures that previously seemed unshakable. They can disrupt dominant imaginaries and make room for new ones.

Today, we find ourselves as actors within a long historical continuum of reckoning and rebuilding. We need to merge individual despair and tenacity with collective and situated modes of making-hope to foster collaborative survival in precarious times. So, what does working with and through despair mean in the context of design? It can imply crafting experiences or artifacts that hold space for mourning, that introduce slowness or friction, that resist the streamlined flow of technosolutionism. It means refusing the binary of hope *versus* despair and instead embracing their interdependence. The work ahead is not just about endurance but about designing narratives and infrastructures for collective benefit. In the friction between despair and hope, new futures become possible—not utopian, but livable. To design through and with despair is to recognize grief as a form of knowledge, uncertainty as a condition of making, and care as a political act. It is design as a counter to loss, but from within it.

REFERENCES

1 Barbara Tuchman, <i>A Distant Mirror</i> (Penguin, 2017), xx.	6 Silvio Lorusso, <i>What Design Can't Do: Essays on Design and Disillusion</i> (Set Margins', 2023), 63.
2 Barbara Tuchman, "History as Mirror," <i>The Atlantic</i> , September 1, 1973.	7 Édouard Glissant, <i>Poetics of Relation</i> (University of Michigan, 1999).
3 Tuchman, <i>A Distant Mirror</i> , 105.	8 Anna Tsing, <i>The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins</i> (Princeton University Press, 2015), 24.
4 Hanif Abdurraqib, "In Defense of Despair," <i>The New Yorker</i> , May 16, 2025.	9 Emily Dinsdale, "The Venice Pavilion Using Gardening as a Metaphor for Decolonisation," <i>AnOther</i> , April 19, 2024.
5 Anne Helen Petersen, "The Resilience Myth," <i>Culture Study</i> , June 30, 2024.	10 Diana Budds, "Home Is Where the Hearth Is," <i>Dwell</i> , May/June 2025, 41.

CALLING AGAINST the WIN

D Social innovation, twenty years on: the scenario of collaboration, proximity, and care in an era of war, walls, and hatred

Ezio Manzini

SAILING AGAINST the WIND

Social innovation, twenty
years on: the scenario of
collaboration, proximity,
and care in an era of
war, walls, and hatred

Ezio Manzini

45 **T**WENTY YEARS of transformative social innovation have shown us that it is possible to sail against the wind. In other words, it is possible to envision, bring about, and construct aspects of the world that stand in contrast to prevailing trends.

- Today, with headwinds stronger than ever, sailing against them can be particularly challenging. And yet, it is even more essential. The ideas and practices of collaboration, proximity, and care that have emerged during the past two decades of transformative social innovation can still guide us in the right direction. However, we must learn to apply them in a new context. That is, by opposing the winds of war, the building of walls, and the culture of hatred that are coming our way.



Social Innovation and Its Context

The social innovation we are referring to (*transformative social innovation*) was first recognized and discussed about twenty years ago in many regions of the world. It was observed that, despite the prevalence of individualism and consumerism, certain groups of people were choosing to tackle everyday issues by collaborating, regenerating systems of proximity, and caring for each other and the environment.

- In the decades that followed, what were initially isolated cases gave rise to a constellation of experiences resulting from widespread social innovation—and in some instances, institutional and entrepreneurial innovations—undertaken by citizens, associations, policymakers, administrators, and planning professionals. The lessons to be drawn from this history can be discussed on two levels: what these innovations generated in terms of ideas and social practices, and how they fit into the broader context.

• The first level allows us to recount a story of success: many of the ideas and practices initiated two decades ago have been implemented and widely adopted. They have led to the development of design and management skills and tools. They have fueled social discourse with ideas and projects that, in turn, have given rise to larger-scale programs and policies—from mutual aid networks to community welfare; from social streets to the 15-minute city and the city of proximity; from libraries and schools that double as social hubs to a new concept of collaborative public services.

• The second level, concerning the relationship between social innovation and the broader context, presents a much more complex and contradictory story. For instance, is successful social innovation in a neighborhood contributing to its gentrification? Do collaboration agreements with citizens undermine the public sector? Why does social innovation tend to mobilize the middle classes more than those living in poverty? These issues have been discussed at length, often rather heatedly. In my opinion, some of the criticism is well-founded and needs to be taken seriously. Much has already been written on this subject (my own contribution can be found in the book co-authored with **Michele d'Alena**),¹ which is why I do not wish to focus on it here. Instead, I would like to address the following question: how does transformative social innovation, with the potential and limitations we have been discussing in recent years, fit into the new and, in many ways, dramatically different context in which we now find ourselves?



- 47 Twenty years ago, we were already facing numerous environmental, political, and social challenges. Yet there is no doubt that these issues have become even more pressing and tangible in recent years. This has given rise to widespread anxiety, uncertainty, and fear and, in response, to environmental denialism and the emergence of insular, identity-based communities.
- As a result, the social innovation we have been discussing, with its ideas and practices of collaboration, proximity, and care, and the open, project-based communities it tends to foster, now finds itself at odds with mindsets that invoke war, hatred, and the building of walls (both literal and metaphorical) to defend against those who are different. This has led to the construction of the insular, identity-based communities mentioned above.
 - Therefore, we find ourselves in a quandary. It is true that over the past twenty years social innovation has made a major contribution to our understanding of what it means to challenge the individualist and mercantilist neoliberalism that has dominated our era. However, it has certainly not been able to significantly alter those dominant dynamics. Worse still: the current political, social, and cultural meteorology is now warning us that a massive cyclone is coming our way. Or, perhaps, that we are already caught in the middle of it.
 - The working hypothesis I would like to put forward is that despite all this—and indeed precisely because of this new context—social innovation has much to teach us. Now more than ever, I believe the ideas and practices of collaboration, proximity, and care point the way forward, both in terms of outcomes and in terms of how to pursue them.

- So here is the question: As we find ourselves in the midst of the **Trump+Musk** cyclone, what can we do? How do we put to use what social innovation has taught us?
- To return to the nautical metaphor, we might say that we must sail *upwind*. That is, we must zigzag into the wind without losing our bearings. After all, this is what those who have been involved in social innovation have always done, consciously or not. Social innovations arise where they can, which is why they never move entirely in a straight line. But they do contain a component that represents a valuable shift: certain ideas, practices, and institutional changes that strike us, at the local level, as a systemic break from dominant models. With a goal in mind, one proceeds like a bricoleur, adapting as at hand. To extend the nautical metaphor, the course is not set by pointing directly towards a destination, but by zigzagging and harnessing the wind to move forward.
- Nowadays, if we are to continue doing things this way in the present weather conditions, we need sturdier boats and highly experienced sailors who can stay on course and maneuver the sails in the most adverse conditions.
- Stepping out of our metaphor, this means recognizing and consolidating collaboration, proximity, and care as core values across all ventures. It means making the most of resources that may gradually appear to take incremental, imperfect steps that lead to progress in the desired direction. It means deepening planning know-how and cultivating the imagination and political courage to act.

✿ A Post-Human and Post-Terrestrial
Future: A (Dystopian) Perspective

As I see it, the present time is marked not only by a stronger headwind, but also by the fact that other powerful

proposals are in play—proposals that, to the writer, appear dystopian and even catastrophic, but which, nonetheless attract many. Keeping with the nautical metaphor, not only is the wind stronger, but there are also multiple diverging lands to sail to, making it harder to stay on course.

- Let us go back twenty years. At that time, the dominant headwind was classical neoliberalism (in the style of **Margaret Thatcher**). Its central claim was that there were no societies, only individuals. It promised universal prosperity through the accumulation of products, services, and money. Prosperity meant consumption, and consumption meant happiness. This idea proved popular, even though it offered no real future. There was no future to strive for at all, only a perpetual present of global consumerism.
- Eventually, however, this idea clashed with the harshness of reality: economic crises, environmental catastrophes, wars, and a pandemic that made it clear that this path to promised happiness was illusory for most. The reason was simple: Earth—the only Earth we have—is simply not big enough. The feast of consumption, promised to all, turned out to be a feast for the select few. This growing sense of precarity has amplified feelings of anxiety and fear, which have become a breeding ground for the ways of being and doing that are so rampant in the world today: denialism in the face of environmental issues and the formation of closed-off and hate-fueled communities in the face of social issues. This is a hybrid kind of neoliberalism, Trump+Musk style, whose ingredients are Far West individualism, religious fundamentalism, and fantasies of post-human and post-terrestrial futures.
- A brief reflection is warranted here: Neoliberalism did not promise a different future, but only the extension of its promises of consumerism and civil liberties to all. The hybrid neoliberalism that is now emerging denies civil

liberties on the one hand and, on the other, proposes a bold vision of the future: a new frontier of space travel, neural connections, and artificial intelligences capable of changing the world. And us humans along with it. 50

- All this is reminiscent of the origins of fascism in Italy, when reactionary ideas and interests intermingled with the ideas and energy of the futurist movement. I am not suggesting that history is repeating itself, but pointing out that futuristic visions can be co-opted to serve deeply conservative power structures.
- The contradictions within this hybrid neoliberalism—and the unfeasibility of its vision—do not seem to hamper its appeal. In the age of fake news and communication bubbles, neither consistency nor feasibility seem to matter. For the same reasons, it also seems irrelevant that what is being proposed is, for all intents and purposes, an “*everyone for him/herself*” scenario—in which “*everyone*” means the ultra-wealthy.

✧ To Be Terrestrial: Capable of Collaboration,
in Proximity, with Care

Today, not only do we find ourselves having to sail against the wind, but a new lighthouse with unlimited powers of communication at its disposal steers many in another direction. Better yet, since it is steering us towards an inevitable shipwreck, we should refer to it as a siren song, much like the one from the story of Ulysses. And it is steering us straight towards a catastrophe.

- To avoid falling into the trap, Ulysses put some candle wax in the ears of his crew. There is no similar solution for us. We simply cannot prevent everyone from hearing these sirens. What we can do is make our own message louder and clearer.

- Our first move should be to make it clear that we cannot all be *great again*. That, in the zero-sum competition they are proposing to us, in order to have winners there must be a large number of losers. The bright future being promised is reserved only for those who can afford it.
- This marks a historic shift. For the first time in the West since the French Revolution, the idea of prosperity for all gives way to the prosperity for the select few. The rest are destined to be castoffs: useless by-products of the success of the top few.
- To counterbalance this, we must make the alternative scenario we've been building stronger and more visible. This means making it more convincing and demonstrating that it is the only scenario that will allow us to address the issues we face. The problems neoliberalism cannot solve require a rethinking of the very conceptual frameworks we use.
- Trump and Musk's solution is powerful in its own way. It implies a paradigm shift wherein universalism is eliminated. That is, the need for the proposed solution to apply, at least in principle, to everyone. There is no pretense anymore that solutions are for everyone. Trump and Musk explicitly state that their solution only applies to whoever wins (i.e., them). One might argue that, in practice, this has always been the case. However, conceptually, it was not. Back in the day, for a proposed solution to be acceptable in the West, it had to be presented as one that, at least in principle, could apply to everyone. Trump and Musk have broken this taboo: they openly declare that, on this Planet, there cannot be prosperity for everyone. Winners win. The losers are discarded, or stowed away someplace where they will not get in the way (as it was emblematically proposed to be done with the Palestinians of Gaza).
- In contrast, when faced with the intractable issues posed by classical neoliberalism, social innovation has taught us

that we can tackle these challenges by choosing to collaborate, in proximity and with care. The paradigm shift here is one that leads to the recognition of collaboration, proximity, and care as the ingredients with which we can build a world where we can all be saved together. 52

• This vision, and the practices that follow from it, needs to be better understood and re-envisioned. In lieu of Trump+Musk's "everyone for him/herself", we must affirm **Pope Francis's** message of "no one is saved alone"—we can all be saved if we stand together with each other as humans and with all that constitutes the network of life. To combat "Let's colonize Mars," we must reaffirm **Bruno Latour's** "Down to Earth". This is not to suggest that we all become farmers, but rather that we must emphatically affirm that to be human is to be terrestrial. That to be human is to be part of the network of life on this planet. That to be human is to be on Earth.

✿ Making a Terrestrial Policy: Contestable Spaces and Usable Resources

Of course, implementing all that has been discussed so far will be difficult. But social innovation teaches us that it is not impossible. Even in the current storm, we can find a route to salvation, for everyone.

• What we need are projects and policies that are both radical and relational. Radical, because they do not make compromises with the ideas, practices, and power structures of the new neoliberalism. Relational, because they require us to put ourselves on the line, to relate to others. And to do so with a positive attitude and openness to confrontation, trusting that collaboration, proximity and care are relational modes inherent to human nature—meaning that they can emerge even in the most difficult of terrains

and among people who are in many ways miles apart from each other. In order for this to happen, we need to provide opportunities and tools that stimulate and support these values. We need to open up areas of opportunity: “contestable spaces” where differing intentions and interests can confront each other. Where the “everyone for him/herself” ethos can be confronted and challenged by the idea of “let’s save each other together”. Political spaces where the conversations and practices of collaboration and care have the opportunity to be voiced.

- Even in the midst of the ongoing storm, we must not retreat into bunkers to protect our ideas until the weather improves. Instead, we must take to open waters and make our vision more visible and compelling.
- Returning to the nautical metaphor: we need to make the most of any and all favorable currents, even when they are not perfectly aligned with our goals and find ways to harness the wind even when it blows directly against us. Ultimately, this means getting involved in politics: the politics of policy makers, but also and above all, the politics of the everyday, enacted by everyone else. We need to integrate a large number of design activities at different scales and on diverse terrains, all moving towards the same goal: an ecological and just society. A society where we can learn how to be terrestrial once again. ■

REFERENCES

- 1 Michele D'Alena and Ezio Manzini,
*Fare assieme: Una nuova generazione
di servizi pubblici collaborativi*
(Egea, 2024).

RELATIV ING HOPE

E

– from whom or what?

James Auger

**RECLAIMING
HOPE —
from WHOM
or WHAT?**

James Auger

The theme of this discussion suggests the existence of two temporally related conditions: a) a historical situation in which hope was perceived as more authentic, appropriate, or valid, and b) a contemporary moment in which hope has become compromised or complicated, and therefore is in need of *reclaiming*. This, in turn, prompts a critical question: *From whom or what must hope be reclaimed?*

In order to effectively address the issue of *hope* in this context, I will draw from **Sheila Jasanoff** and **Sang-Hyun Kim's** concept of the Sociotechnical Imaginary (STI), defined as "collectively held, institutionally stabilised, and publicly performed visions of desirable futures, animated by shared understandings of forms of social life and social order attainable through, and supportive of, advances in science and technology".¹ STIs essentially encode not only the visions of what developments in science and technology might bring, but also an entrenched notion of a society's shared value systems—the invisible forces that inform and shape pathways to the future. The (loose) focus for this study will be the motorcar, which for the writer **J.G. Ballard** was the key image of the twentieth century:

" The styling of motorcars, and the American motorcar in particular, has always struck me as tremendously important, bringing together all sorts of visual and psychological factors. As an engineering structure the car is totally uninteresting to me. I'm interested in the exact way in which it brings together the visual codes for expressing our ordinary perceptions about reality. For example, that the future is something with a fin on it. And the whole system of expectations contained in the design of the car. Expectations about our freedom to move through time and space, about the identities of our own bodies, our own musculatures. The complex relationships between ourselves

and the world of objects around us. These highly potent visual codes can be seen repeated in every aspect of the 20th century landscape. What do they mean? Have we reached the point now in the 70s where we only make sense in terms of these huge technological systems. I think so myself, and that it is the vital job of the writer to try to analyse and understand the real significance of this huge metallised dream.”²

All of the elements that make up the motorcar assemblage (of the motorcar) are present in Ballard’s opening statement to the BBC short film *Towards Crash*—the relationship between the human and the designed artefact, the artefact and its related systems (technological, cultural and social), expanded notions of function, myth, desire and the future. As a writer, Ballard was situated outside of the “metallised dream”, articulating and making sense of its numerous elements as an observer. Designers, by contrast, operate at the core of the system—shaping ideologies, constructing myths, and actively participating in the fabrication of the dream. Jasanoff and Kim’s concept of the STI is particularly useful here as it elucidates the designer’s role in bridging temporalities—from envisioning and marketing a potential technological future to shaping its realisation as a tangible, present-day reality.

The Historical Situation

At the dawn of the twentieth century, the foundations of the machine-age ideology emerged through the bold declarations of the Futurists, who exalted the promise of the future: “The era of the great mechanised individuals has begun, and all the rest is palaeontology...”³ Their radical break from the past and wholehearted embrace of technological potential established the ideals that would define the century—the

glorification of speed, power, and the obliteration of spatial and temporal boundaries. This uncompromising vision of progress would grow increasingly nuanced and sophisticated throughout the century, reflected in aesthetic movements such as Streamline Moderne, which fused contemporary scientific research into aerodynamics with potent visual symbolism—most notably, through the tailfin as an icon of the future.



1940 Plymouth Deluxe convertible coupe and 1959 Cadillac Series 62. Earlier designs were more subtle and largely based on the teardrop form that emerged from the wind tunnel testing of aeroplanes. By 1948 car designs were becoming increasingly symbolic and influenced by the arrival of the jet aircraft and supersonic travel.

Peak modernity—and peak hope—is perhaps best illustrated by the car manufacturer General Motors’ promotional film *To New Horizons*, which was commissioned to accompany their *Highways and Horizons* exhibit at the 1939 New York World’s Fair. The film opens by invoking “the mystery and the promise of distant horizons [that] always

have called men forward”, offering a vision of a brighter future—a future driven by technological progress. The imagery accompanying the voiceover is the settlers’ view of America, complete with covered wagons and frontier forts: moving West to conquer and colonise new territory, finding new ways to subjugate nature and apply the logic of extractive capitalism, always enabled by the advent of new technologies. In the film, the frontier becomes a network of futuristic highways “for men to go places”, symbolising American freedom and dominance. The core message of *To New Horizons* is that this new world is in a constant state of flux, “opening before us at an ever-accelerating rate of progress” with the related imaginary representing “a greater world, a better world, a world which always will grow forward”.

Visitors to the GM Pavilion received pin badges declaring, “I HAVE SEEN THE FUTURE”. In retrospect, this bold claim proved remarkably accurate—*Highways and Horizons* played a significant role in shaping America’s future landscape, and the public were enthusiastic participants in the process. The petroleum-based imaginary continued to evolve into the 1960s, with advances in the internal combustion engine, such as jet propulsion, pushing the horizons ever further outward and into space. President **John F. Kennedy**’s iconic Rice Stadium speech captured this same spirit of utopian ambition, echoing the colonising rhetoric of GM’s *New Horizons* voiceover: “We set sail on this new sea because there is new knowledge to be gained, and new rights to be won, and they must be won and used for the progress of all people”.⁴

Just three years later, the 1964 World’s Fair—held at the same venue as the 1939 fair—reaffirmed this narrative of progress. Once again, visitors were invited to envision their own utopian futures, this time through the alluring prospect of space travel and tourism, and the previous success

of *Highways and Horizons* infused these imagined futures with a growing sense of inevitability.



The Space Park at the 1964 World's Fair featured various NASA rockets and space capsules that had recently carried Americans into space and would ultimately lead to the Moon landing 5 years later.

There were, however, fundamental differences between the two fairs. By 1939, the motorcar had become a familiar feature of everyday life for many Americans, and the collaboration between big government and major corporations to promote the road-building agenda was widely accepted as a logical step forward in American progress. In contrast, the 1964 fair presented a markedly different dynamic. As social theorist **Richard Barbrook** argues in his aptly titled book *Imaginary Futures*, the technological

visions on display functioned primarily as public-facing façades, masking a deeper Cold War agenda.⁵ Iconography and fetishisation were, for the first time, “being used to deny the principal use value of these new technologies through neatly disguising them as profound benefactors to humanity”.⁶ While the imaginary of space exploration was captivating, it was a dream that would remain symbolic for the majority of the population. By the 1970s, the stark realities of the oil crisis, the decline of the auto industry—culminating in the downfall of the once-prosperous motor cities—and the cultural upheaval sparked by the civil rights movement had largely dismantled any lingering optimism in a collective future in space.⁷ As J.G. Ballard observed in a 1979 interview, this vision had been effectively neutralised:

“The world of ‘Outer Space’, which had hitherto been assumed to be limitless, was being revealed as essentially limited, a vast concourse of essentially similar stars and planets whose exploration was likely to be not only extremely difficult, but also perhaps intrinsically disappointing ... The number of astronauts who have gone into orbit after the expenditure of this great ocean of rocket fuel is small to the point of being ludicrous. And that sums it all up. You can’t have a real space age from which 99.999 percent of the human race is excluded.”⁸

From the perspective of those responsible for maintaining the STI, however, hope for the future does not simply end with the decline of a particular technological pathway. As one vision fades, another begins to take shape—and at the 1964 World’s Fair, a new imaginary was already emerging: one that gestured toward the ultimate collapse of time and space. At the centre of the IBM Pavilion stood a multimedia, multi-sensory spectacle designed by **Charles and Ray Eames**. This immersive experience conveyed, in

strikingly aesthetic terms, the promise of a new technological frontier: the computer. Its significance was once again echoed in the prophetic words of J.G. Ballard:

“ The ability to pass information around from one point in the globe to another in vast quantities and at stupendous speeds, the ability to process information by fantastically powerful computers, the intrusion of electronic data processing in whatever form into all our lives is far, far more significant than all the rocket launches, all the planetary probes, every footprint or tyre mark on the lunar surface.”⁹

By the 1970s, rapid advances in computer technology revived a key future motif from earlier in the twentieth century: the automation of everyday life. This theme had remained somewhat dormant since the push-button homes of the 1950s, but the IBM Pavilion made such sci-fi predictions seem increasingly plausible. As Barbrook asks, “Who could doubt that—by 1990 at the latest—the majority of Americans would be... living in a world where sentient machines were their devoted servants?”¹⁰ The robot age, it seemed, was only a generation away.

The Contemporary Situation

If *Highways and Horizons* represented the relatively straightforward value system of the twentieth century, then the Tesla Cybertruck might well serve as the quintessential symbol of the more confused twenty-first. Modern era Electric vehicles (EVs) began to emerge in the 1970s, largely as an antidote to the OPEC fuel crisis. The Enfield 8000 went into production in 1973. It measured 2.84m long (30cm smaller than the Austin Mini) and at its launch the company’s technical director boasted that the Enfield had “only eight moving parts—and four of them are wheels”.¹¹ Despite its charm,

appropriateness, and novelty, the Enfield was a failure for reasons well-articulated by **George A. Hoffman** in his 1966 article for *Scientific American*:

“ The design of [an electric] car must be based in the first instance on the realization that the American public is highly resistant to radical change in its automobiles. The electric car will therefore have to conform as closely as possible (at least at first) to the pattern now popular in gasoline-powered cars.”¹²

Sixty years later, this observation remains uncomfortably relevant. The design of EVs continues to be shaped, if not shackled, by (status enhancing) expectations inherited from the machine age. This enduring constraint is exemplified by the latest generation of electric vehicles, including the Tesla Cybertruck, the Range Rover EV, and GM’s Hummer EV.¹³



Enfield 8000 (1973) and Tesla Cybertruck (2023).

At the launch of the Cybertruck in November 2023, **Elon Musk** proclaimed that “finally, the future will look like the future.” Paradoxically, he concluded his remarks with a more dystopian observation: “Sometimes you get these late-civilization vibes [that] the apocalypse could come along at any moment ... Here at Tesla, we have the best in apocalypse technology”.¹⁴ In this framing, the notion of a collapsing future is not rejected but rather integrated into the product’s appeal. The marketing strategy thus situates hope

not in the prevention of crisis, but in the promise of surviving it—stylishly and securely—through technological innovation.

CONCLUSION: *Three types of hope today:*

1. Hope in the re-creation of a past that never was.

The *futuristic* future has become either implausible or overwhelming—the ever-receding horizon becoming increasingly irrelevant. The solution is found in (the illusion of) a past that never was. In his essay for *Aeon*, **Venkatesh Rao** describes this strategy through the concept of the “American Cloud,” the vast industrial back-end of our lives that we access through a theatre of manufactured experiences.¹⁵ He uses the example of a Whole Foods store, where “sale items peek out of custom-made crates, distressed to look like they’ve just fallen off a farmer’s truck,” and every detail—from the font used on the signs to the rustic finish of the countertops—is designed to create the illusion of a nostalgic country market. This description, in many ways, encapsulates the messiness of postmodernity: the essential (political and corporate) values of modernity continue to drive largely unchecked technological developments. However, these are now concealed behind a thick façade of nostalgia, evoking the symbolism of simpler, more innocent times.

2. The regurgitation of past futures like some tire-some recurring dream.

Elon Musk’s Mars base, smart toasters, self-driving cars, smart homes—and, of course, robots. When first imagined, these concepts were at best contentious and at worst simply banal. Yet their impossibility at the time gave them a kind of speculative allure. Today, advances in computing and other technologies have made *some* of these dreams almost plausible—like a self-fulfilling prophecy. But the persistent

fixation on such familiar future tropes distracts from more appropriate, and perhaps more necessary, alternatives.

3. **Hope in technology's ability to save the world—and the reinforcement of the status quo.**

At the Future of Britain Conference 2024, former British Prime Minister **Tony Blair** outlined the opportunities presented by technological change, particularly in the field of artificial intelligence (AI):

“ But there is only one game-changer. Harnessing effectively the 21st century technological revolution. There is absolutely no doubt that this is an era of transformation. Things which were impossible will become possible; advances which would have taken decades, will happen in a few years or even months; the value we can add, the improvements in efficiency we can make, the radical benefits in outcomes we can secure, could be truly revolutionary.”¹⁶

Blair's message is very similar to that of *New Horizons*. However, the backdrop has changed entirely. In the 1930s, hope in the future was both genuine and warranted—people's lives were being dramatically improved by technological advances.¹⁷ Today, politicians convey a different kind of optimism: a stoic belief that, even in the face of climate change and the urgent demands of reaching net zero, everyday life can, and must, continue as normal.

And here lies the fundamental issue, while we are tinkering with fanciful ideas about what is to come, we risk neglecting the present. Hope must be reclaimed through present-day action—ironically, much like how things were before “the future” became a cultural and political obsession. This shift will be difficult for many, as it requires accepting that the comforts, expectations and ideologies normalised in the twentieth century are no longer appropriate.

Returning to the concept of sociotechnical imaginaries: the imaginary itself must change, just as it did when *modernity* became the dominant framework at the turn of the last century.

References

- 1
Sheila Jasanoff and Sang-hyun Kim, *Dreamscapes of Modernity: Sociotechnical Imaginaries and the Fabrication of Power* (University of Chicago Press, 2015), 4.
- 2
Towards Crash!, directed by Harley Cokeliss (BBC, 1971).
- 3
Umberto Boccioni, as cited in Reyner Banham, *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age*, (The Architectural Press, 1960), 102.
- 4
John F. Kennedy, "We Choose to Go to the Moon" (Rice University, Houston, TX, September 12, 1962).
- 5
Richard Barbrook, *Imaginary Futures* (Pluto Press, 2007).
- 6
Barbrook, *Imaginary Futures*, 33.
- 7
The spoken word poem "Whitey on the Moon" by Gil Scott-Heron powerfully captured the irony of situation from the African-American perspective—his sister can't afford her medical bills after being bitten by a rat "(but Whitey's on the Moon)."
- 8
J. G. Ballard, "The Space Age Is Over," interview by Chris Evans, *Penthouse* 14, no. 1 (1979).
- 9
Ballard, "The Space Age Is Over."
- 10
Barbrook, *Imaginary Futures*, 32.
- 11
Konstantine Adraktas, as cited in "The Pioneer Electric Car – The Enfield 8000", <https://www.lancasterinsurance.co.uk/news/2022/september/28/the-pioneer-electric-car-the-enfield-8000/>
- 12
George A. Hoffman, "The Electric Automobile," *Scientific American* 215, no. 4 (1966): 34–41.

13

The Hummer EV weighs more than 4000 KG, nearly twice the weight of the petrol-powered version. Its battery alone weighs roughly 1400 KG and contains enough lithium, nickel, and other high-demand minerals to power nearly 400 e-bikes.

14

“Elon Musk unveils the Tesla Cybertruck,” CNBC Television, posted November 30, 2023, YouTube, <https://youtu.be/68Mzinor9V8?si=f7E9vJKFurR59Rxp>

15

Venkatesh Rao, “The American Cloud,” *Aeon*, 11 July 2013.

16

Tony Blair, “Reimagining the State: Governing in the Age of AI,” Future of Britain 2024, July 9, 2024, <https://institute.global/future-of-britain-2024-opening-session#os2>

17

Even if we are increasingly experiencing the negative consequences of this behaviour today.

p. 59

1940 Plymouth Deluxe convertible coupe by Erik Holmén is licenced under CC BY 4.0: <https://digitaltmuseum.se/011013839264/i-en-bil-av-market-plymouth-oppen-med-sufflett-sitter-tva-kvinnor-i-framsatet>

p. 59

1959 Cadillac Tailfin by Christer Johansson is licenced under CC BY 4.0: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cadillac1900r.jpg>

p. 61

National Aeronautics and Space Administration, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:255-CC-65-HC-223,_front.jpg

p. 64

Enfield 8000 parked in Mount Street, Mayfair, London by Constantine Adraktas is licenced under CC BY-SA 3.0: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_E8000ECC_parked_in_Mount_Street,_Mayfair,_London.jpg

p. 64

Tesla CyberTruck in Barre, Vermont by Kenneth C. Zirkel is licenced under CC BY 4.0: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tesla_CyberTruck_in_Barre,_Vermont.jpg

ENTANGLED FUTURE RES:

A More-than-Human Approach
to Speculative Design

Ákos Schneider

ENTANGLED FUTURES:

A More-than-Human
Approach to
Speculative Design

Ákos Schneider



IN 2018, a video captured global attention: a dummy in a spacesuit, seated serenely in a cherry-red Tesla Roadster, floating through space with Earth in the background. Named *Starman*, the driver and vehicle were launched into orbit as the unconventional payload of a SpaceX test rocket. It was a surreal yet concrete manifestation of techno-optimist imagination.

Starman lends itself to multiple interpretations: from a symbol of planetary exodus to a marketing stunt for private space travel. I treat it as a snapshot that captures the tensions of our time. Never before have we had such technical mastery over the environment: satellites map the planet's surface, we edit genes, and our machines speak. And yet, at no other point in human history has the living world—the ecological web that sustains us—been under such systemic threat. Control and loss of control intensify in tandem.

This image shows not just Earth, but two overlapping worlds: the ancient and organic *biosphere*, and the rapidly expanding, semi-autonomous, and human-made *technosphere*. These realms are no longer separable. As **Deleuze and Guattari** wrote, “there is no such thing as either man or nature now, only a process that produces the one within the other [...] the self and the non-self, the outside and inside, no longer have any meaning”.¹ This is not merely a philosophical provocation but a call to rethink how we live and relate to the world.

The binaries of “subject” and “object,” “nature” and “culture” are dissolving in an era where human activity has left its mark on every corner of the planet. In this relational reconfiguration, the question shifts from

what sets humans apart to how we come into being through our entanglements—ecological, technological, social, and affective.

Amid planetary urbanization², anthropogenic climate change³, and algorithmic culture⁴, design is caught between its pragmatic, human-centered past and a future it can neither fully envision nor control. Much of contemporary design remains bound to the logics of immediacy: user experience, iterative optimization, and growth metrics. These guiding principles, once liberating, now appear increasingly constrained. As **Matthew Wizinsky** argues, many design practices, whether knowingly or not, help reproduce and stabilize a system whose harms are not anomalies, but consistent outcomes of its underlying structure.⁵

This entrenchment is further amplified by the rise of data-driven technologies, where prediction and optimization not only shape design methods but redefine what the future is allowed to be. As **Douglas Rushkoff** observes, digital capitalism thrives on behavioral predictability: “the more predictable the users’ behaviors, the more certain the bet”.⁶ The future is no longer a space for collective imagining or ethical commitment; it becomes a statistical projection, shaped by predictive algorithms and venture capital interests. Can design still open pathways to futures not already prefigured by behavioral data and computational forecasting?

Critical speculative design, as it emerged in the early 2000s, offered a rupture. It traded problems for provocations, solutions for scenarios. As speculation becomes professionalized and institutionalized, one wonders: can it still unsettle? The answer, perhaps, lies in going further: not by abandoning speculation, but by deepening its ontological commitment.⁷

Design is never neutral. As **Anne-Marie Willis** explains, “we design our world, while our world acts back on us and designs us”.⁸ This ongoing mutual conditioning shapes not only artifacts but also subjectivities, social structures, and cosmologies. This dynamic becomes especially apparent in the case of active-adaptive digital technologies, which respond continuously to our actions, and eventually envelop us through recursive feedback loops. It is particularly evident in data-driven, personalized digital products and interfaces, where design actively employs psychological tactics for behavioral nudging and “cognitive automation”.⁹

When reoriented toward the more-than-human, speculative design takes this world-shaping potential more seriously. It does not merely propose alternative futures in aesthetic or technological terms; it makes foundational claims about how the world could be organized differently: who or what counts as an agent, and what kinds of relations matter. Speculation might be reclaimed—not as a neoliberal UX foresight tool, but as a force for ontological disruption.

TEMPORAL EXPANSION: *Designing beyond the Present*

TO DESIGN with more-than-human futures in mind is to enter into a different relationship with time. A river basin, a fungal network, a decaying building—all unfold across durations that challenge human perception and economic logic. These are not simply “slower” systems; they are entangled temporalities where cause and effect are dispersed and recursive.

In this sense, time is less a neutral dimension than a textured medium of interdependence. **Tony Fry**’s concept of “defuturing” captures the tension well: many

design practices today inadvertently undermine the conditions of their own future viability.¹⁰ Designing otherwise means recognizing time as an ethical and ecological substrate. It demands new forms of prototyping that operate across decades, speculative narratives that trace long arcs of consequence, and participatory practices that ask communities to imagine futures beyond immediate gain.

Consider the temporalities involved in designing seed banks for post-climate agriculture, or in data servers designed with their material afterlives in mind. Or take the living root bridges of Meghalaya, India—grown over decades by Khasi and Jaintia communities guiding the aerial roots of *Ficus elastica* across rivers. These structures, shaped over generations, embody patience and responsiveness rather than immediacy or novelty. Such practices suggest that sustainable futures may require not only “smarter” technologies but also enduring forms of relational commitment.

The goal is not to control futures; it is to engage with time as something thick, layered, and shaped by more-than-human concerns. In doing so, speculative design begins to operate less as a predictive tool and more as a philosophical practice. It cultivates attentiveness, and reminds us that hope—if it is to be meaningful—requires a sustained attunement to futures that unfold unevenly across scales and species.

MATERIAL-SPATIAL EXPANSION:

Designing within Entangled Infrastructures

GOOD DESIGN tends to isolate objects from the networks they inhabit and transform. Space and matter are often flattened into surfaces of usability; interfaces are streamlined, and the systems that sustain them—from

data servers to supply chains—are rendered invisible. A more-than-human approach to speculative design problematizes this flattening.

As emphasized in the *More-than-human Design Manifesto*: “We design (into) relational systems, rather than (contributing) single artefacts”.¹¹ While temporal expansion detaches design from anthropocentric timelines, material-spatial expansion challenges its tendency to focus on discrete solutions. From a more-than-human perspective, every designed artifact is the outcome of entangled interactions—between human intentions and nonhuman affordances: mineral extraction, planetary logistics, microbial activity, and algorithmic infrastructure. In this light, design becomes a form of *worlding* through the orchestration of matter and meaning.

The implication is clear: designers are not creating within a closed studio environment; they are intervening in vast sociomaterial networks. This invites tools that map and trace hidden layers and agencies. In this mode, design becomes speculative not by imagining distant possibilities, but by revealing the deep structures already shaping what is possible. Ultimately, to design speculatively is to engage in infrastructural re-imagination.

Consider how UX design presents cloud computing as weightless and seamless, concealing the planetary infrastructures that underlie and enable it. In their 2024 installation, *Hybrid Ecologies*, **Martín Tironi** and **Manuela Garretón** deconstructed the immaterial imaginaries of AI by re-situating it in its material dependencies. Their project reveals how generative models like Stable Diffusion are embedded in relations between data infrastructures, natural resources (such as water and minerals), and the ecosystems that support them. By visualizing AI’s vertical ecology—from raw material extraction and data center

cooling all the way up to Python algorithms, image generation, and screen-based experiences—they show AI not as a mere technical artifact, but as an assemblage of interconnected sociotechnical and ecological elements.

In order to re-materialize the technological, **Revital Cohen** and **Tuur van Balen**'s *75 Watt* (2013) employs similar unmasking tactics. By commissioning the manufacture of objects with no function other than to choreograph factory workers' movements, the designers reversed the usual logic of design. Instead of solving for user needs, they exposed how design shapes bodies and routines behind the scenes. The project dramatizes what design usually hides: the human body as infrastructure in a global economic system.

To develop a situated philosophy of speculation, we can draw on a wide range of interdisciplinary sources—from **Bruno Latour**'s actor-network theory¹² to **Jane Bennett**'s theory of vibrant matter.¹³ These perspectives expose how design is both a participant and a modulator of distributed networks of agency.

AGENTIC EXPANSION: *Co-Creation beyond the Human*

THE MOST radical move of a more-than-human approach to speculative design is to abandon the assumption that design is a uniquely human endeavor. Co-creation with nonhuman agents repositions the designer not as a sole author, but as one participant among many.¹⁴ Following **Laura Forlano**, we might ask: "how, and in what ways [...] are capabilities, agency, and power distributed across humans, machines, and natural systems" within a design project?¹⁵

Ron Wakkary has proposed the notion of "designing-with" as a practice of entanglement, where

human and nonhuman entities co-influence the shaping of environments.¹⁶ Rather than treating nonhumans as resources or constraints, this approach positions them as collaborators. The goal is not to mimic natural systems or to instrumentalize matter, but to cultivate relational encounters that open new design logics.

Drawing on the *More-than-Human Design Manifesto*, which speaks of “co-creative capacities of living entities, lively matters, and machines,” we begin to see the designer as a mediator between different modes of being, rather than an autonomous creative subject.¹⁷ For example, in *Pollinator Pathmaker* by Alexandra Daisy Ginsberg (2021), we find an attempt to design from the perspective of nonhuman actors. The project uses an algorithm to generate garden compositions tailored to the preferences of pollinators—bees, butterflies, and other insects—instead of human aesthetics. Users can input location and environmental variables, and the system generates a planting scheme that reflects local ecological needs. By framing co-creation as a process that links human, machine, and insect agencies, the project challenges both human-centered design and anthropocentric notions of authorship.

This invites us to consider design not just as something we create, but as a way of coming *to know* the world. Can we treat design as epistemology in action? For example, designing with mycelium isn’t merely “using fungi”; it’s learning to understand the world through the sensory and relational patterns of fungi. Speculative design could become a kind of epistemic rehearsal with nonhuman partners—speculation not as fiction, but as relational prototyping. Such practices imagine futures not optimized for human control, but attuned to possible worlds in which other-than-human needs, rhythms, and constraints become generative forces.

WHILE CRITICAL speculative design generates “what if” scenarios, it also works to suspend the normative logic of the present. In this sense, **Benjamin Bratton** speaks of “tactical exceptions”—institutional practices where rules are temporarily off.¹⁸ Universities, design studios, and art spaces serve as *speculative zones*, enabling experiments that momentarily escape the gravitational pull of optimization and efficiency. In **Franco Berardi**’s terms, the future is not a projection of present patterns, but an emergent field of “vibrational concurrence”.¹⁹ We are in a liminal moment: no longer able to rely solely on the strategies of modern design, yet not fully responsive to the scales and modalities of the *posthuman condition*.²⁰ Speculative design inhabits this transitional space, holding open the possibility for alternative ontologies.

If a more-than-human approach to speculative design invites us to reimagine what design *is*, then speculative pedagogy must reimagine how design is learned and practiced within institutions. At its best, speculative pedagogy encourages students to explore how different configurations of the world might be enacted. It positions education as a site of ontological inquiry, where students are not just motivated to imagine better futures, but to extend design’s temporal, material, and agentic dimensions beyond the limits of human-centered frameworks.

To that end, we might experiment with conceptual, design-philosophical tools. What would it mean, for example, to work with an *entangled brief*: a design prompt that emerges not from client needs alone, but from multi-species consultations, material constraints, and temporal deferrals? Or to conduct an *ontological audit* of a project: mapping which beings and relations are

foregrounded, which are silenced, and what assumptions about reality are embedded in its processes and outcomes? These speculative devices do not replace traditional design methods; rather, they shift their orientation. They encourage designers to approach their work with greater attentiveness to the relational and ontological dimensions of design.

REFERENCES

- 1 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (University of Minnesota Press, 1983 [1972]), 9.
- 2 Neil Brenner, ed., *Implosions/Explosions: Towards a Study of Planetary Urbanization* (Jovis Verlag, 2014).
- 3 Hans-Otto Pörtner et al., eds., *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability*, Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (Cambridge University Press, 2023).
- 4 Ted Striphas, "Algorithmic Culture," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 18, no. 4–5 (2015): 395–412.
- 5 Matthew Wizinsky, *Design after Capitalism: Transforming Design Today for an Equitable Tomorrow* (MIT Press, 2022), 142.
- 6 Douglas Rushkoff, *Survival of the Richest: Escape Fantasies of the Tech Billionaires* (W. W. Norton and Company, 2022), 9.
- 7 By "ontological commitment," I mean the basic assumptions design makes about what exists and what matters—who or what is included, and how relationships are structured. This aligns with Tony Fry's notion of "ontological designing," which holds that design always participates in shaping the world we inhabit: "we design our world, while our world designs us." See: Tony Fry, *Defuturing: A New Design Philosophy* (Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2020 [1999]), 5. In this light, design ontology explores how design practices do not simply reflect the world but participate in constructing its very structure.
- 8 Anne-Marie Willis, "Ontological Designing," *Design Philosophy Papers* 4, no. 2 (2006): 69–92.
- 9 Franco Berardi, "Self-Engineering," in *Superhumanity: Design of the Self*, ed. Nick Axel et al. (University of Minnesota Press, 2018), 330.

10 Tony Fry,
Defuturing: A New Design Philosophy
(Bloomsbury Visual Arts,
2020 [1999]).

11 Poikolainen Rosén et al., eds.,
More-Than-human Design in Practice
(Routledge, 2024), xxviii.

12 Bruno Latour,
*Reassembling the Social:
An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*
(Oxford University Press, 2005).

13 Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter:
A Political Ecology of Things*
(Duke University Press, 2010).

14 Agency, here, is not limited to conscious intent, but includes the capacity to bring about effects, to be affected, and to express varying degrees of reflexive responsiveness. Diana Coole, for instance, suggests that agency should be understood as a spectrum of agentic capacities, reflecting the fluid and dynamic emergence of action across bodily, social, and material domains—including, but not limited to, rational human actors. This stance of “ontological agnosticism” allows us to consider nonhuman entities as participants in agentic constellations—without anthropomorphizing them or erasing their difference. See: Diana Coole, “Rethinking Agency: A Phenomenological Approach to Embodiment and Agentic Capacities,” *Political Studies* 53, no. 1 (2005): 124–42.

15 Laura Forlano,
“Posthumanism and Design,”
*She Ji: The Journal of Design,
Economics, and Innovation* 3,
no. 1 (2017): 16–29.

16 Ron Wakkary,
*Things We Could Design: For More
than Human-Centered Worlds*
(MIT Press, 2021).

17 Poikolainen Rosén et al.,
More-Than-human Design in Practice,
xxviii.

18 Benjamin H. Bratton,
“On Speculative Design,” in
The Time Complex: Post-Contemporary,
ed. Armen Avanesian
and Malik Suhail
(Name Publications, 2016), 82.

19 Franco Berardi,
*Futurability: The Age of Impotence
and the Horizon of Possibility*
(Verso, 2019 [2017]), 14.

20 The posthuman condition is a term I borrow from Robert Pepperell, who uses it in relation to an “‘embedded’, ‘enworlded’ or ‘embodied’ conception of human existence,” which deconstructs the traditional body/environment and human/nature dichotomies. It underscores the complexity of sociomaterial relations in which the autonomous human subject is decentered as the primary locus of agency. See: Robert Pepperell, *The Posthuman Condition: Consciousness Beyond the Brain* (Intellect Books, 2003), 30–31. Pramod K. Nayar, meanwhile, approaches the posthuman condition from a technological perspective, describing the “networked body” shaped by “info-flows” which are “materially produced through a mix of human and non-human actors.” See: Pramod K. Nayar, *Posthumanism* (Polity Press, 2014), 92–93, 105.

**EXISTENTIAL
TIAL
SOLUTION
ISM:**

EXISTENTIAL SOLUTION ISM:

A Dive into
the Designerly
Unconscious

Silvio Lorusso

the designerly unconscious

Within design studies, a lot of attention has been given both to the thinking in and on the actions of designers¹ and to their peculiar ways of knowing,² as well as to their tacit knowledge.³ This scholarship was partly self-fulfilling: by asserting the existence of a “way of knowing” specific to designers—a category perhaps too diverse and protean to be treated as such—a distinct epistemology, separate from that of other practitioners, would come to exist. Whatever the case, far less interest has been given to what I propose to call the *designerly unconscious*: the “givens” of (a) design culture, automatically employed and rarely questioned, without which (that) design culture would not exist as such. These are the conditions that make designerly thinking and knowing possible.

The designerly unconscious should not be seen as ‘metadesign’—it is not something that underpins or towers over design, but that which lies beside it. It is made of the invisible forces that perturb design ideas and orient its activities. To approach the designerly unconscious, we must ask: which aspects of the design activity are removed? A tentative answer might be: first and foremost, the designer-planner—a subject with *their* own unconscious and *their* removals—who, to a great extent, disappears into the very activity of designing and planning. Furthermore, the designerly unconscious needs to be tied to a social configuration specific to a time and a place, as well as to the operations that produce such configuration. In other words, it should be tied to a *Gesellschaftsgestalt/ung*, akin to the double character of nature as *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*. That is, how “figures”⁴—myths, issues (e.g. “the social question”), institutions, ideologies, conspiracies—stand out from the background of the social-historical magma to acquire a structure. The designerly unconscious is what lies on the surface of this magma.

- 3 To be clear, this notion should be understood first as the hypothesis of something akin to a collective unconscious of design culture,⁵ in which case it has the same self-fulfilling potential of the designerly ways of knowing: by naming it, one brings it to existence. Second, it should be seen as an investigative lens for examining the seething foundations of design culture. These foundations are not only concepts but also attitudes tinted by emotion.⁶ Take optimism, for example: since the purpose of design is to focus on how things *ought* to be, optimism should be seen as a given of design culture.⁷ While localized expressions of pessimism certainly exist—especially today, when the prevailing “structure of feeling”⁸ is far from enthusiastic—they remain marginal and are typically neutralized by a “constructive” stance. In fact, the very opposition between constructing and destroying, that is, how this binary is framed, belongs to the sphere of the designerly unconscious.
- 4 In the field of theoretical physics, **David Ritz Finkelstein** briefly explains the method by which the givens (what he calls the “absolutes” of a theory) can be elucidated:
- “As we have seen, we cannot always detect important absolutes easily from within a theory. By never moving, some idols make themselves invisible. We must step outside the theory and examine both what physicists say and what they do, and especially the connection between these two modes of action—the semantics of the theory—to discover what absolutes are tacitly assumed”.⁹
- 5 There are two main reasons for stepping outside the theory and dive into the designerly unconscious. The first is purely inquisitive: we must strive to truly know what we think we know, to catch sight of the submerged iceberg beneath the visible tip. The second is corrective: by getting a sense of the content and operations of the designerly unconscious, we might be able to expand the scope of conscious designerly activity and redirect its trajectory. This effort would parallel the systemic role that **Gregory Bateson** attributed to art, namely, an antidote to the mere purposive rationality of solutions.¹⁰ If unaided by

art, religion or dream—an aid he calls “unconscious mediation”—the “primary processes” of rationality become “necessarily pathogenic and destructive of life”. In this view, art is a corrective to utility because it maintains systemic “wisdom”. This also explains why what we generally consider irrational is not always anti-rational, but rather more-than-rational, so to speak. There is a further advantage to the study of the designerly unconscious: it might enable the researcher to identify foundational issues that not only underlie the specialist knowledge of professional designers, but also that of the layperson. This entails stepping once again outside the magic circle of design culture,¹¹ as a designing individual immersed in the cultural and operational context of radical modernity.

One of these foundational issues is the notion of *problem*, a key term in design culture and a common concept in everyday life. Within designerly consciousness, a problem is regarded as something to be solved—that is, cracked, unraveled, or disentangled like a puzzle—or something that must first be identified and framed, and thus constructed, structured, organized. In the first case, the problem is tautologically defined by the aim of problem-solving: it exists to be brought to a solution. In the second case, the activity of problem-framing becomes an evaluation of the situation at hand through a set of cultural values. Yet, neither approach truly addresses what a problem really *is*. From within the designerly unconscious, the key question is neither “how to solve the problem?” nor “how to frame a problem?” but rather “what is a problem?” and “what does the problem do to me?”. That is, how can a more or less inert piece of reality come to be recognized and treated as something animated, something that calls our attention, that transforms us? Since a full answer to this question is beyond the scope of this text, I’ll instead offer a definition of “problem” from **Flusser**, one that is deeply resonant with the idea of the designerly unconscious in its metaphorical framing (problems stand for obstacles, progress stands for tractability, etc.)

“‘To live’ means to proceed towards death. On the way, one came across things that blocked one’s path. These things called ‘problems’ had therefore to be removed. ‘To live’ then meant: to resolve problems in order to be able to die. And one resolved problems either by transforming intractable things into manageable ones—this was called ‘production’—or by overcoming them—this was called ‘progress’. Until eventually, one came up against problems that could not be transformed or overcome. These were called ‘last things’, and one died of them. This was the paradox of living surrounded by things: One thought one had to resolve problems so as to clear the way to death, so as to ‘escape from circumstances’, and it was the unresolved problems one died of. This does not sound very pleasant, but it is basically comforting. One knows what to hold on to in life—i.e. things”.¹²

existential solutionism

- 7 Flusser shows how problems are tied to things, and therefore how we, as human beings, are existentially tied to both. This existential bond found its own technological formulation in what **Evgeny Morozov** called solutionism, namely, an over-reliance on technical quick fixes which reduces complex issues to solutions.¹³ As an epigraph to his book, Morozov places the following statement by **Eric Schmidt**, CEO of Google between 2001 and 2011:

“In the future, people will spend less time trying to get technology to work [...] because it will just be seamless. It will just be there. The Web will be everything, and it will also be nothing. It will be like electricity. [...] If we get this right, I believe we can fix all the world’s problems”.¹⁴

“Everything and nothing”: Schmidt’s Internet-centric solutionism carries a strangely Zen-like, almost unconscious quality, as it seems to move against—or perhaps beyond—the principle of non-contradiction. Certainly, Schmidt was not wrong to predict that the Web would become ubiquitous and therefore on par with electricity. But how does this help us solve the world’s problems? Because the Web gives us, according to Schmidt, immense knowledge, among other things. It is not surprising, then, that solutionism thrives in the technological sphere, in an era where technology has enveloped everything. However, “everything” includes *us*, so Schmidt’s external approach to problems, which are “the problems of the world”, extends to the personal sphere, increasingly involving the problems of the individual person. This way, solutionism becomes a way of life, a mentality, an attitude—it becomes *existential solutionism*. Is solutionism different from utilitarianism? In its most distilled form, utilitarianism sees everything as a means to an end, which in turn becomes a further means, thus eliminating any ultimate purpose. Similarly, solutionism turns the *what* into the *how*. But while utilitarianism generates tools, solutionism produces obstacles—what we call problems. This is why, when solutionism shifts from the external techno-social sphere to the existential one, it becomes a burden. At the individual level, the rhetoric of easy solutions collapses in the face of unavoidable complexity and ambiguity. Morozov gives the example of obesity: “The solutionist says: everyone has a cell phone so we have to make an app that alerts people when they eat too much or walk too little. A band-aid, not a solution”.¹⁵ When we move from an abstract “obesity issue” to the lived experience of a concrete person, what existential solutionism actually achieves with its techniques (digital or otherwise), is not only to offer a patch instead of a solution but also to make the obstacle more imposing, the mountain steeper and more disorienting. Morozov effectively captures the simplistic thinking of some technologists. Yet, even attempts to confront the causes of problems “in their complexity” can slip into the realm of

existential solutionism, as they tend to expand problems indefinitely, without offering resolution. The risk, then, is that a 'complexist' approach not only leaves us with unresolved problems (some of them unsolvable by nature) but also burdens us with an excess of information over which we have little power and limited use. We remain, in this sense, within the domain of Schmidt's "everything and nothing".

- 11 The issue, then, lies neither in the simplicity nor in the complexity of how problems are approached, but in the very notion of *problem*. It is perhaps no coincidence that it is **Michael McClure**—a Beat poet from San Francisco, the city that would later become the cradle of Silicon Valley and technological solutionism—who grasps this more deeply than either problemists or solutionists.¹⁶ This is what says the man standing alongside **Bob Dylan** and **Allen Ginsberg** while wearing a flashy crucifix:

"Everybody wants a solution instead of realizing that the universe is a frontier, that the universe is a messiah for this whole total... this beatific complex meat structure that you are a tentacle, an aura, an extrusion, an experiencing of. They say instead, we want a solution, we want a utopia, we want bliss, we want progress, we want revolution, we want this, we want that. These are all simplistic solutions. It's like we are all trapped in *solutionism*. As one solution fails, another solution is tried. Everybody wants a solution. When they realize the defeat of a solution they split as rapidly as they can to another solution to rid themselves of any anxiety".¹⁷

- 12 We can therefore speak of existential solutionism even when the solutions are not explicitly technological. In fact, they cannot be otherwise: problematization itself is an operational form, a technique/technicalization, a 'modal' way of seeing the world that unconsciously underpins designerly modes of thinking and knowing.

references

- 1
Donald A. Schön,
*The Reflective Practitioner:
How Professionals Think in Action*
(Basic Books, 1983).
- 2
Nigel Cross,
“Designerly Ways of Knowing,”
Design Studies 3, no. 4 (1982):
221–27; Nigel Cross,
“Designerly Ways of Knowing: Design
Discipline versus Design Science,”
Design Studies 17, no. 3 (2001):
49–55; Nigel Cross,
Designerly Ways of Knowing
(Springer, 2006); Danah Abdulla,
*Designerly Ways of Knowing:
A Working Inventory of
Things a Designer Should
Know* (Onomatopoe, 2022).
- 3
Michael Polanyi,
The Tacit Dimension
(University of Chicago Press,
2009).
- 4
Cornelius Castoriadis,
*The Imaginary Institution
of Society* (MIT Press, 1998).
- 5
Carl Gustav Jung,
*The Archetypes and the
Collective Unconscious*,
vol. 9, part 1 of
Collected Works of C.G. Jung
(Pantheon Books, 1959).
- 6
László Moholy-Nagy,
Vision in Motion
(P. Theobald, 1947), 42.
- 7
Herbert A. Simon,
The Sciences of the Artificial
(MIT Press, 2019), 111.
- 8
Raymond Williams,
The Long Revolution
(Penguin Books, 1965), 65.
- 9
David Ritz Finkelstein,
“Emptiness and Relativity”
in B. Alan Wallace, ed.,
Buddhism and Science
(Columbia University
Press, 2003), 373.
- 10
Gregory Bateson,
*Steps to an Ecology of Mind:
Collected Essays in Anthropology,
Psychiatry, Evolution and
Epistemology*
(University of Chicago
Press, 2000), 144–7.
- 11
Silvio Lorusso,
*What Design Can’t Do:
Essays on Design and Disillusion*
(Set Margins, 2023), 17.
- 12
Vilém Flusser,
*The Shape of Things:
A Philosophy of Design*
(Reaktion Books, 1999), 85.

13

Evgeny Morozov,
*To Save Everything, Click Here:
 The Folly of Technological
 Solutionism* (PublicAffairs, 2014).

14

Eric Schmidt,
 "The Story of Humans Is Connectivity,"
 October 16, 2012, YouTube, 1:31,
[https://www.youtube.com/watch
 ?v=kUHF43xjMJM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kUHF43xjMJM).

15

Evgeny Morozov,
 "Una rincorsa infinita
 per combattere la tecno-noia,"
 interview by Riccardo Staglianò,
La Repubblica, June 30, 2013.

16

But not Morozov himself,
 who has a soft spot for hippies.
 In fact, he mentions the Aquarius
 Project (1971) in one of his podcasts.
 As the project's manifesto states:
 "'Technology' does nothing, creates
 no problems, has no 'imperatives',
 etc. [...] Our problem's not
 'Technology' in the abstract but
 specifically capitalist technology
 (and, in the case of the USSR, etc.,
 state-capitalist technology)."
 See: Aquarius Project,
 "Revolutionary Engineering:
 Towards a 'Counter-Technology,'" *Radical Software* 1, no. 4 (1971).

17

David Meltzer,
*San Francisco Beat:
 Talking with the Poets*
 (City Lights Books, 2001).

INSTEAD OF SOLU TION S:

Tools for Navigating
Uncertain Seas

Time's Up

INSTEAD OF SOLUTIONS:

Tools for Navigating
Uncertain Seas

Time's Up

The future and hope have much in common, including one popular misunderstanding: that they are primarily things. That the future is something “out there” that can be predicted, aimed for, calculated, controlled, strategised towards—a place where we will end up. Similarly, hope is treated as a thing, something that can be given, taken away, built, or destroyed.

- We say no. Neither of these things is primarily a noun. They are, however, useful verbs. Thinking of them as verbs changes their meanings and their power. Future is not a thing, but an action. One “futures” when imagining possible, probable, unlikely, and impossible futures—futures that are desirable and just. We future best in groups, co-creating imaginations of future possibilities.¹ And hope is not simply a thing one can have or not have, but it is something one can exercise, a form of action, a discipline that one might dedicate oneself to, like a martial art or meditation, learning it by doing it. Hope is active.

- **Mariame Kaba** has talked about this, her assertion that one can practice hope, develop one’s ability to hope, is powerful.² There are many people who feel hopeless, who have surrendered to the implications of racial injustice, climate change, political turmoil, ecological collapse, or economic death spirals, and who see no value in imagining or developing alternatives. And so they stay with what they know and sit with that most special stage of grief: denial. If we pretend

something isn't happening, then we can carry on as if everything were normal. In that case, we do not need to carry any hope, or think about a possible future, because the future is just like today, only happening at a later time.

- Hope and the future are intertwined. Hope is imagining that things will not go the way they seem to be going, that the stability of oppression is an illusion that can be shattered, that the death spiral can be broken out of. To hope is to imagine a future unlike the one that is being offered. Hope is an act of defiance. **Viktor Frankl** wrote about the hope of Shoah survivors, observing that those who lived for something or someone outside themselves were more likely to survive.³ Similarly, prisoner of war **James Stockdale** noted that those who held on to overly specific and optimistic hopes, such as being released by Christmas, tended to give up when those hopes were dashed. One must be fully cognisant of the situation that one is within. Frankl noted, for instance, that his love for his family helped him survive, even though he did not know whether or not they still lived. Hope must be realistic and valid and grounded.⁴ And one must always accept that those hopes could be dashed.

- It can be challenging to be hopeful, or to meet someone who is full of hope. Having hope, especially “in times like these” can be regarded as a privilege that the hopeful person is unaware of. Frankl and Stockdale were not peasants who had previously lived hand to mouth; they were successful professionals before their horrifying experiences. Did their privilege enable their survival? Perhaps. But this should not be a reason to abandon hope, it is a call to demand those privileges for all. To create them for each other. Because hope creates privilege; it enables long-term thinking, learning, and action. The act of hoping enables the act of futuring, thinking beyond survival towards what is possible tomorrow.

- Futures thinking is not simply about creating visions of the future and targets to aim for. Futures thinking is about

developing a curiosity for exploring future possibilities. None of these need be usefully predictions, or even realistic goals, rather they will act as navigation aids, directions, and reference points. Seafarers plot courses to their next harbour, as well as having contingency plans for storms, illness, piracy or GPS spoofing. These might include back up ports of call, emergency procedures and planning to pass the Strait in daylight to avoid confusion and danger.

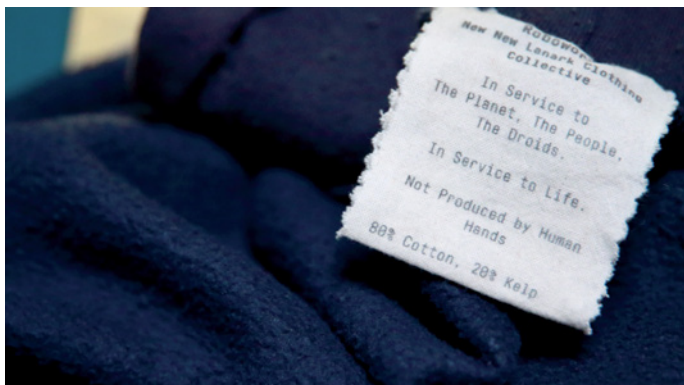
- Beware the futurist bearing a single scenario, story, or hope—or the politician, entrepreneur, or anyone else trying to portray the inevitability or the power of their offered hope. A singular hope, “our only hope,” is a promise that can rarely be sustained. Hope should never be singular. It suggests that there is only *one* solution, and we know that *the* solution is rarely all that it is cracked up to be. Instead of singular solutions, we need multiple options. Experiments and adaptations. Waiting, care, and camouflage. We need to be developing imaginations of what might be possible, as a community, together. Our imaginations need to encompass the unresolvable conflicts and unsolvable dilemmas of our existence. We need to find ways forward to enable us to collaborate widely and navigate uncertainties, even when we are not sure of the goal, only that we need to keep moving from the unbearable here and now. Sometimes that is all we can do. We cannot agree on what a vision of the future should be but we can imagine ways that it might be—and agree that change is necessary. Imagining possible futures helps us decide what to do when we need to collaborate with our enemies.⁵
- A word of warning: do not let any future colonise you. Future imaginations are just that, imaginations. They may be well-founded, but they are still abstractions and necessarily ignore many details of lived reality. We need to become comfortable living with uncertainty. We cannot plan an exact way forward. Rather, we must feel for the next step slowly and

carefully. There is no teleological endpoint, no ultimate goal, but rather a collection of experiments and changes. Perhaps this is something like artistic intelligence because it does not aim at an optimal outcome but is essentially and deeply engaged in the process of becoming? Or perhaps is it a kind of explorer intelligence? A form of action research?

- Futures thinking is the process of working with imaginations of the future and playing with them, not as engineering marvels that need to be designed in their entirety like a Saturn V rocket, but rather a bricolage, a tinkered-together collection of bits and pieces that somehow fit. Futures thinking is much like the world we live in; our society is not a coherent vision of a past genius but the emergent result of generations of tinkers, slowly making their way forward, imagining and creating small local changes and cobbling together things that are not solutions in some overarching sense, but are things that just might work. If drinking is a problem; drink a little less. The unrealistic goal to go dry will be your undoing. The call here is for more futures *thinkering*: thinking and tinkering, and then thinking some more.

- The belief in solutions, sometimes called *solutionism*, is widespread. But the real world is full of approximations, complexity, and feedback, thus so-called solutions often turn out inadequate. In mathematics, some equations have exact solutions. We know exactly how many of what type of solutions a quadratic equation has by examining its coefficients. The same is true for cubics and quartics. But there is no general solution in terms of radicals for quintic equations. And this is in the highly refined, long-studied world of polynomial equations over numbers. We cannot expect solutions to real world problems; we must accept that, in general, solutionism is bogus.⁶ We are reminded that **Newton's** method gives us good approximations to polynomial equations quickly, in spite of the impossibility of getting exact solutions at all.

• Unfortunately, Design, with a capital D, sometimes employs solutionist thinking. The Designer, also with a capital D, creates a vision of a thing that should be made and creates *the* solution. Fortunately, many practices have superseded this genius model of design. Now, we have iterative design, agile processes, and many other ways of muddling our way from a problem to the possible ways of dealing with that problem. Contingencies will work for a while. Adaptations allow us to leave the problem as it is and change only how we react to it; perhaps this is stoic design? Retreat allows us to abandon our attempts at conquering the cathedral and perhaps finding solace in the bazaar. Like with equations, we can decide that we are happy to have approximations instead of solutions. Or perhaps all we can do is garden and create small pockets of fertility in a problematic landscape with a regime of care and attentiveness to the dynamics of the soil and the environment.⁷ There are so many approaches and paths forward instead of solutions.





In the fictional city of Turnton ecological collapse is coupled with socio-political and economic changes, in service of life in all its forms. Courtesy of Time's Up.

- The storyworld within which we have based much of our speculation is oriented around a fictional near-future European coastal city by the name of Turnton⁸. The core speculation that led to the world was not hopeful: during site visits with ocean ecosystem scientists in 2016 we learned that the necessary changes in human treatment of the oceans were unlikely to occur in time. As a result, maritime ecosystem collapse, while perhaps not imminent, appeared nevertheless unavoidable. To this dystopian scenario, we speculated a utopian response that arrives (too late) by instigating changes that are ridiculed as impossible or unrealistic in the early twenty-first century. Thus, the scenario of *Turnton* emerged as a combination of ecosystem collapse and climate catastrophe with socioeconomic justice and adaptation. *Turnton* does not imagine a solution to the climate crisis, whether CCS or AI-driven energy optimisation, but rather accepts collapse and explores the possibility of improved lived experience in that world, by tinkering with imaginations of community and how we live together.

- In a world that is becoming less hopeful, it is vital to maintain and increase the diversity and dissemination of visions of a life well-lived. Whereas late-stage capitalism offers consumption as the primary way to living well, such a narrow metric of life quality is hardly useful. We argue that, by creating and examining possible futures, especially the details of everyday life within them, we can begin to imagine alternatives and, in doing so, actively hope that better alternatives—for us, our communities, and societies—might be possible. Instead of waiting for a one-size-fits-all solution, we anticipate myriad paths forward. Most will be discovered through exploration and tinkering.

- This is not to deny the need for big changes. Fiddling with marginal tax rates for millionaires will not be enough. Design reminds us that unexpected results are to be expected; the very rich are waiting for turbulence to make yet more profit.⁹

- Scenarios operate as distant, even unreachable points of reference that help us navigate by sensing distance and direction, steering away from the maelstroms and reefs of unpreferred futures and toward more preferable ones.¹⁰ Good scenarios emerge from well-facilitated, inclusive discussions with many perspectives, as does good navigation. Navigators need to have directions to aim for—next steps and next harbour goals. But they must also take into account what is actually happening, instead of ignoring them like **Captain MacWhirr**.¹¹

- In conclusion, navigation in ever more uncertain seas requires adaptation, speculation, preparedness, and observation, undertaken jointly as a group. As designers, we could learn a thing or two from seafarers.

Acknowledgement

This research was funded by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF) within the project “How Dare You: Arts-based strategies for maintaining useful hope in the climate and other emergencies” [10.55776/ART6101324]. For open access purposes, the author has applied a CC BY public copyright license to any author accepted manuscript version arising from this submission.

References

- 1 Time's Up, eds., *Futures Brought to Life: We Are No Futurists* (University of Applied Arts Vienna Publishing, 2023).
- 2 Mariame Kaba, "Hope Is a Discipline: Mariame Kaba on Dismantling the Carceral State," *The Intercept*, March 17, 2021, <https://theintercept.com/2021/03/17/intercepted-mariame-kaba-abolitionist-organizing/>.
- 3 Viktor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning: The Classic Tribute to Hope from the Holocaust* (Rider, 2008).
- 4 Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone, *Active Hope: How to Face the Mess We're in without Going Crazy* (New World Library, 2012).
- 5 Adam Kahane, *Collaborating with the Enemy: How to Work with People You Don't Agree with or Like or Trust* (Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2017).
- 6 Richard Heinberg, *There's No App for That: Technology and Morality in the Age of Climate Change, Overpopulation, and Biodiversity Loss* (Post Carbon Institute, 2017).
- 7 Anab Jain, "Calling for a More-Than-Human Politics", *Medium*, June 10, 2021, <https://medium.com/@anabjain/calling-for-a-more-than-human-politics-f558b57983e6>.
- 8 Time's Up, *Turnton*, 2017, <https://timesup.org/activities/exhibitions/turnton-docklands>
- 9 Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (Penguin UK, 2014).
- 10 Wendy Schultz, "Crazy Futures: Why Plausibility Is Maladaptive." *APF Compass*, October 2015. DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.1.2897.9921.
- 11 Joseph Conrad, *Typhoon* (G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1902).

CA
IES ST

SE STUDIES





The Name For World Is Tide, a performance by Gaia Ginevra Giorgini.
It was produced for “Convivial Tables: Sapid Soil”, a public programme
curated by The Tidal Garden for TBA21-Academy in 2023.
Courtesy of The Tidal Garden.



Halophice-cream,
produced by Gelatoteca
Suso. Courtesy of Camilla
Glorioso for marea.world.

THE TIDAL GARDEN

**Filippo Grassi,
Lodovica Guarnieri,
Lorenzo Barbasetti
di Prun**

The Tidal Garden is a Venice-based research agency that explores the edible potential of halophytes—tolerant plants—as a tool for cultural adaptation to climate change. Led by **Filippo Grassi** (environmental scientist), **Lodovica Guarnieri** (designer/researcher), and **Lorenzo Barbasetti di Prun** (chef/artist), in collaboration with a network of farmers and gastronomic professionals, the project establishes a supply chain for the cultivation of new crops and the development of novel culinary products from salinised agricultural fields.

More frequent and unpredictable tides, rising sea levels, and erratic precipitation are altering the agricultural landscape in and around the Venice Lagoon, as well as similar tidal areas. The infiltration of saltwater into land gives rise to unique ecological zones where freshwater cultivation is no longer viable, pushing once-common

crops out of production. As these fields become more akin to intertidal environments, they begin to host wild edible halophytes—such as samphire and sea purslane—that traditionally grow in salt marshes and brackish swamps. Neither wetlands nor drylands, these salinised croplands defy conventional categorisations and challenge fertile-infertile binaries that underpin modern Western agriculture, their salinity holding the potential to ground adaptation in ecological and social justice.

In response to these shifting conditions, *The Tidal Garden* explores salinity as a model for restoring intertidal commons. Specifically, it examines how halophytes that grow in salinised fields can help counter the structural dispossessions embedded in the region's environment. As the largest humid area in the Mediterranean, the Venice Lagoon and the surrounding wetlands have undergone extensive land-reclamation processes over the past 150 years. Infrastructural and industrial projects were built on the erasure of brackish life-worlds—a cultural and ecological suppression that was instrumental in shaping the Italian nation-state as an extractive entity. By portraying salinised soils as barren wastelands, the extractive spatial logic behind past expulsions continues to shape contemporary attitudes towards salinised croplands around the Lagoon. As their fields are deemed infertile, local farmers are confronted with the risk of losing their livelihoods and land to escalating property speculation driven by the real estate industry.

Against this backdrop, *The Tidal Garden* establishes a nourishing infrastructure centred on salinised croplands, redefining food systems as decolonial and reparative interventions for past and future saline worlds. Since 2021, the project has collaborated with the municipality of Cavallino-Treporti and farmers in the northern

Lagoon to develop cultivation methods for samphire and other halophytes on expanding areas of brackish soil. This work includes establishing a local seed repository for indigenous halophyte varieties, alongside collaborations with research institutions across Italy and the Mediterranean working under similar conditions.

In parallel, *The Tidal Garden* has engaged local gastronomic professionals to co-develop new recipes and food products, resulting in a growing network of businesses producing halophyte-based goods such as bread, ice cream, and kombucha. In 2025, the network and the methodology were formalised through the registration of *The Tidal Garden* as a trademark, encompassing the entire process from field to product.

The project's third component—a public programme that involves artists and researchers—introduces local communities to the taste of sapid soils, situating *The Tidal Garden*'s practice within broader conversations on food sovereignty, climate change, and intergenerational justice.



Autonomous Tree – Krzysztof Wronski.



MykeBoard – Roberto Broce.

Courtesy of the Institute for Advanced
Architecture of Catalonia (IAAC).

THE RIGHT TO PROTO TYPE:

Alternative Presents
for Plural Futures

Guillem Camprodon

Prototyping as a Critical Act

Prototyping is often understood narrowly as a practical step in a linear process, one in which concepts are quickly transformed into tangible artefacts that serve as temporary solutions to predefined problems. This prevalent interpretation significantly underestimates the transformative potential of prototyping.

Founded in 2007 by IAAC, Fab Lab Barcelona was one of the first Fab Labs in Europe. In 2017, to celebrate our tenth anniversary, we launched the Master in Design

for Emergent Futures (MDEF), in collaboration with ELISAVA, as a way to push the boundaries of what Fab Labs are and what they can do. For us, prototyping is fundamentally a critical act: an intervention that challenges dominant narratives, disrupts entrenched power relations, and reveals the underlying systems shaping our realities.

Projects such as *Unseen Exposures* by **Carmen Robres**, which emerged as a part of the Studio of the Master in Design for Emergent Futures (MDEF), exemplify this critical reframing. By deploying high-tech installations employing AI, computer vision, and interactive feedback, Robres makes visible the often-invisible machinery of surveillance capitalism. Similarly, *Autonomous Tree* by **Krzysztof Wronski** transforms a living tree into a participatory, socially authoritative entity capable of levying fines on humans for ecological harm, effectively disrupting conventional human-nature power hierarchies. Both projects illustrate how prototyping serves as a reflective practice, opening pathways to interrogate, challenge, and reimagine the present.

The maker movement and Fab Labs have been instrumental in democratising access to digital fabrication, reshaping our collective understanding of who participates in design processes. Just as personal computing democratised digital technology, personal fabrication has empowered individuals and communities to actively engage in the physical making and unmaking of their worlds. *MykeBoard*, developed by **Roberto Broce** encapsulates this philosophy. Broce prototyped surfboards from biodegradable mycelium composites, challenging the dominance of petrochemical-based production methods in sport and leisure. To harness the full potential of prototyping, we must challenge traditional

views of creative technologies as mere execution tools. Technology can catalyse critical engagement with broader societal issues, facilitating a rethinking of design and social relations. In this way, Fab Labs become spaces for disrupting conventional design methodologies and exploring diverse narratives. This approach ensures emergent technologies actively contribute to challenging existing power structures rather than reinforcing them.

Situated Intelligences and Commoning Practices

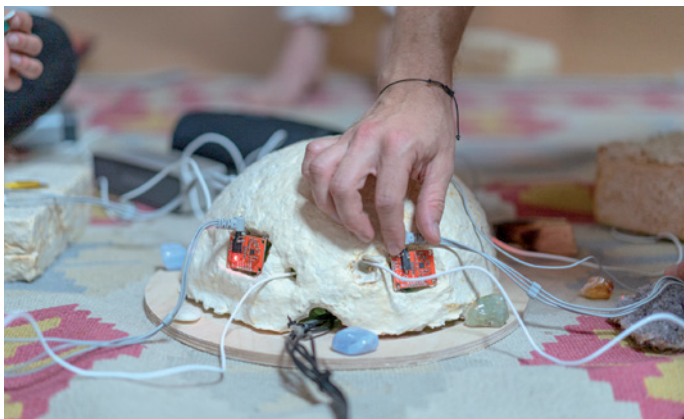
In an era dominated by centralised innovation and extractive AI, we advocate for situated intelligences: ways of knowing that emphasise care, local context, and hands-on making. This approach grounds technological interventions in the lived realities and specific cultural contexts of communities and acknowledges diverse forms of knowledge and learning. The project *POWAR* by **Pablo Zuloaga** offers a tangible example. It employs an open-source climate chamber to simulate future weather scenarios for smallholder farmers, coupling digital fabrication techniques with environmental sensing technology.

Fab Labs, as contemporary agoras, operate at the intersection of technology, community, and creativity, facilitating collective forms of imagination and knowledge sharing. They are spaces where diverse communities engage in collaborative, adaptive practices and cultivate emerging and commoning intelligences. The project *Aquí*, created by **Clément Rames** and **Lea Karrasch**, epitomises this ethos. By designing modular, co-created urban furniture from recycled materials through community workshops, *Aquí* reclaims urban spaces, fostering civic imagination and inclusive participation.

To prototype alternative presents is fundamentally an act of reclaiming hope. By encouraging communities to collectively envision diverse and plural futures, prototyping serves not as a tool for prediction but as an invitation for active participation and agency in world-making. *Future of Jobs x Radical Imagination* by **Wongsathon Choonavan** and **Dafni Gerodimou** embodies this spirit by engaging children through speculative design tools, interactive workshops, and playful artefacts to imagine professions that do not yet exist.

Ultimately, reclaiming hope through prototyping requires acknowledging design as a practice deeply relational, adaptive, and inclusive. Within this reframing, prototyping transcends its conventional role as a tool for testing and validation. Instead, it becomes an exploratory process of inquiry and reflection, facilitating critical engagement with complex social and cultural questions. Prototyping thus serves not just to produce functional objects, but as a dynamic practice that interrogates design's deeper implications within local contexts.

Through prototyping as inquiry, Fab Labs emphasise relational design practices, embracing uncertainty and adapting to plural ways of knowing and doing. This approach grounds interventions in situated, appropriate, emerging, and commoning practices, moving beyond critique alone to foster active reorientation towards collaborative and inclusive transformation. At Fab Lab Barcelona and through the Master in Design for Emergent Futures, we invite designers, makers, and communities to reclaim hope, empowering them to collectively build plural alternative presents from the ground up.



Phygitai Awakening – Josefina Nano, Jasmine Boerner.

Courtesy of the Institute for Advanced
Architecture of Catalonia (IAAC).



The Museum in Community partners: Moste District Community, Fužine Retirement Home, Fužine Activity Center (CAF), Community Programs for Youth (SPM), CONA Fužine, CONA Korak, Črni Mrav Scout Association, School of Health, volunteer group of the Society for Bird Observation and Study (DOPPS), Spominčica - Alzheimer Slovenija, Kindergarden Zelena jama - enota Vrba, Academy of Fine Arts and Design students of the Department of Design with mentors Boštjan Botas Kenda and Emil Kozole, Faculty of Arts students of the Department for Pedagogy and Andragogy with mentor Nives Ličen, 2024. Courtesy of Matjaž Rušt.



Community garden, *The Museum in Community*, 2025. Courtesy of Luka Karlin.

THE MUSEUM IN COMMUNI TY

Maja Šuštaršič

The Museum in Community is an ongoing project developed through a process of cooperation and co-creation between individuals and institutions in the Ljubljana neighbourhood of Nove Fužine. Launched three years ago, the initiative seeks to strengthen the connection between the Museum of Architecture and Design (MAO) and the local community, to open the museum outward into the neighbourhood and, more broadly, to demonstrate the potential that public institutions hold within society.

Nove Fužine is an excellent location for MAO. As the most densely populated neighbourhood in Slovenia, it was designed according to modernist urban planning principles: incorporating large, green spaces, separating pedestrian and vehicular traffic, ensuring functional built environments, and providing essential public infrastructure. The neighbourhood serves as a living example of architectural and design principles in practice, offering a shared language for engaging with the community.

Everything created within *The Museum in Community* originates from the community—we plan together, work together, and celebrate together when we unveil what we've built. We also co-create and share programmes and events. The project seeks to identify areas of mutual synergy, facilitate the exchange of knowledge and resources, promote intergenerational collaboration, and critically examine the potential of design and architectural methodologies in addressing societal challenges, hopes, and futures.

The first iteration of *The Museum in Community* launched in 2023 as a pilot initiative aimed at fostering deeper engagement between the museum and the local community. In MAO Park—a public space that connects the neighbourhood to the museum—we created a community garden, a playground, and a space for socializing in natural surroundings. These installations are still used and maintained by the community.

The participatory co-creation process and acting outside the museum walls proved to be surprisingly successful. We connected with most of the institutions in Fužine and engaged residents of all ages. While we started with just a few organisations, others joined along the way. The programme grew organically, enriched by community initiatives and ideas.

The second edition of *The Museum in Community* built upon the foundation of the first. We hosted a summer semester for master's students from the Academy of Fine Arts and Design and the Faculty of Arts. Using design tools and methods to address community challenges, the students co-created five social innovations, which were later exhibited in MAO Park. The park also served as a venue for public events that were shaped by intergenerational collaboration and knowledge-sharing

between community members, students and mentors, and Fužine institutions. Through gatherings, workshops, and events, we tested the impact of collective action and created a space to pilot these innovations in real life.

This year, *The Museum in Community 3* focuses on bringing the community from the park to the courtyard—and into the museum itself. We continue with outdoor community events that transcend the formal boundaries of MAO. At the same time, we have refurbished a space within the museum's unrenovated section, dedicating it to community meetings, co-creation workshops, museum-related work, and use by visitors, creatives, and students in need of a co-working space.

In the future, we are planning a series of workshops, talks, film screenings, and community gatherings to explore how far we can develop this model. By employing architectural and design methods, we aim to find a shared language—one that brings people together across disciplines, generations, and institutions.



Photographs from the *Pirate Care: A Survey of Practices* exhibition held at Galeria Nova in Zagreb, 2021. Courtesy of Vanja Babić.

PIRATE CARE SYLLABUS

Pirate Care

The *Pirate Care Syllabus* (<https://syllabus.pirate.care/>) is an open, collaborative pedagogical project compiled between 2019 and 2021. It emerged from a transnational field of disobedient care practices that have flourished in response to the ongoing crisis of care. These practices often inhabit legal grey zones or directly confront criminalisation, offering care and solidarity to those denied access by institutionalised regimes of neglect. Whether rescuing migrants at sea, providing reproductive care where it is illegal, or maintaining infrastructures of common knowledge, the initiatives gathered under the banner of “pirate care” assert the necessity of acting beyond sanctioned boundaries, where legal, institutional, or social frameworks fail or refuse to respond to urgent needs.

This project is grounded in the understanding that care is not only labour—often devalued and made invisible—but that it is structurally undermined by the logic of private property. The invocation of piracy in Pirate Care is thus a tactical gesture to rethink care beyond the capitalist matrix of Market/State/Family. It is not a celebration of outlaw status for its own sake, but a refusal of ownership models that obstruct collective wellbeing.

Following the development of the syllabus, a book co-authored by the Pirate Care convenors—**Valeria Graziano, Marcell Mars, and Tomislav Medak**—was published by Pluto Press in 2025.

The syllabus was developed through a process of collective composition. In late 2019, a writing retreat convened in Drugo More, Rijeka kicked off the project, bringing together activists, artists, technologists, and scholars engaged in pirate care practices across Europe and beyond. Participants were not merely asked to describe their work, but to contribute to a learning tool. Each was invited to propose a topic they felt was essential to their practice and should be learned, to select and annotate key resources, and, crucially, to design a pedagogical exercise grounded in their own experience of organising and transmitting knowledge.

The *Pirate Care Syllabus* was inspired by the hashtag syllabi generated within social justice movements, such as #FergusonSyllabus or #StandingRockSyllabus, which responded to political emergencies by gathering learning materials for public use. While these projects often emerged spontaneously in moments of crisis, the *Pirate Care Syllabus* placed greater emphasis on the infrastructure of learning. It is hosted on a custom-built platform that supports collaborative editing, versioning, and offline sharing. The syllabus can be used in both formal and informal settings, downloaded via a USB stick, or accessed through a QR code.

The syllabus is also an intervention into the political economy of knowledge. Drawing on the experience of building shadow libraries, the project integrates software that preserves access to digitised materials regardless of paywalls or commercial enclosures. It proposes that access to learning resources is a condition of

care, and that the refusal of private property rights over knowledge is itself a caring act.

Ultimately, the project asks how we can sustain the capacities for care that are increasingly discouraged or repressed—not just through discourse, but through the creation and reappropriation of tools, technologies, and techniques of commoning. As acts of care for the most vulnerable become scapegoated in a rising global war, *Pirate Care Syllabus* calls for mutiny and federation. Mutiny is not understood here as a personal rebellion or recovery, but as a collective possibility to exit toxic forms of life and relationality, supported by shared infrastructures of care. Federation, in turn, names the effort to organise at scale while maintaining local autonomy and nurturing interdependence, resisting both centralised control and isolated fragmentation.



Stills from collaborative documentary work in refugee camp contexts. Courtesy of Jimmy Loizeau.



BORDERLANDS BROADCASTING COLLABORATIONS

Jimmy Loizeau

Since 2016, **Jimmy Loizeau** has collaborated with individuals navigating the asylum system in refugee camps in Calais and Lesbos, developing co-authored journalistic and archival projects. Emerging in direct response to dominant media portrayals of the “migrant crisis,” the project seeks to create space for alternative narratives grounded in shared authorship. With this approach, he is trying to close the loop between speculations and action, taking the critical and speculative practice out of the safe spaces of galleries and academic environments into everyday life, the “here and now”.

Rather than documenting crisis through spectacle or detached observation, Loizeau’s approach privileges creative partnership, slow storytelling, and the lived

experience. Purposefully imperfect as artifacts, these films and small-scale archives raise questions about representation, authorship, and the ethics of witnessing.

The project asks what truths emerge when storytelling becomes a shared act, when the camera is no longer an extractive tool, but part of a longer conversation. In these moments, learning unfolds, relationships form, and people reveal themselves beyond the frame.

The following diary entry captures such a moment: riding a tandem bicycle down a muddy road in Calais alongside a young Ethiopian man, just before the demolition of the Calais Jungle—a place that, at its peak, held nearly 9,000 people. It marks the beginning of articulation of a method rooted in connection and co-creation.

Diary from Calais (excerpt)

Khalid and I are on the tandem. He's at the front.

Riding a fast bike made for two is a good distraction. It has been an odd day. The camp that should never have been is condemned by the Mayor of Calais and demolition is imminent.

Being in Calais brings up all kinds of tensions and contradictory feelings. The Jungle should never have existed—its emergence the result of political failure, violence, fear, and desperation. And yet, it exists.

As a space and a community, an improvised architecture in a place of transit, it is like nothing we have ever seen. The Jungle has a population the size of a small town, built from almost nothing. It is a kind of bus stop. No other reason to be together other than they are all escaping and the destination happens to be the same place.

People here mostly get along. They pray, they party, children learn, and people try to hope. There is also

infrastructure—social spaces, shops, wifi cafes, barber shops. The Jungle can sometimes appear less wild. This is something that repeats.

This is our fourth and likely final visit. We've come to see people we now consider friends. They're from Oromia and we met them through the bike.

We find Abdi on the perimeter road, his welcome is warm. For a moment, the imbalance between us dissolves, leveled by friendship. A man from Sudan joins our reunion. He is angry and sad. He doesn't understand why the UK won't accept him. He's almost pleading but we cannot help. We're here with people we are beginning to be friends with. We are also white, privileged, with passports, and can come and go as we please.

We spend the day riding bikes, visiting Abdi's house in the Oromian area. The 8×8-foot house is comfortable, dry, and organised. We're offered tea, biscuits, casserole, pancakes, and shisha. The gas we bought for him last time is used to heat up water for tea. Tea and conversation exchanged for gas, a mutually agreed but awkward swap.

In Jungle terms, this is desirable accommodation. In a field in Sussex, we might call this glamping, but here the circumstances are quite different. No CRS in Sussex. No evictions. In Sussex, we can just go home.

Later, riding the tandem, we pass some Belgian journalists filming at the edge of the camp. The final day of the Jungle is newsworthy. The spectacle of destruction draws attention. Despite our good intentions, I feel complicit. There is guilt in recording people's situations.

Khalid stops and asks the journalists what they are filming. He asks them to stop, which they do. Sitting on the back of the bike, I am aware how different my position is.

The journalists ask Khalid if they can interview him. “Everyone wants to interview me,” he replies. Again, I feel part of this. They promise not to show his face. Khalid asks for money: twenty euros. His house will be bulldozed tomorrow. Volunteers are handing out leaflets and telling people to have their belongings packed in a bag and to be ready to leave.

Twenty euros is a small amount to ask. The journalists, bound by a professional code, refuse. I’m sure Khalid does not care about journalistic codes or their money. What they want is access, his words. The camp is generally irritated by people like us pointing cameras and recording. What once felt like a way to connect with the outside world now feels like intrusion.

I’m irritated by their code. It comes from a world that feels morally tidy—but only for the privileged. We’re not in the world of mediators dealing with dirty financial exchanges so that professional codes remain intact.

During this conversation, I begin to feel incredibly privileged. There’s not a huge difference between what the journalists want and what we’ve been doing—but somehow, we are now friends. As far as Khalid is concerned, he doesn’t view us the same way. And I’m flattered.

The conversation with the journalists ends. Khalid does not give them an interview. He politely reprimands them for pointing cameras at desperate people. Before we ride off, he tells them which parts of the camp are safe and which to avoid.

We continue on our ride.

TEACH THE FUTURE:

Exploring Futures Through Education

Lourdes Rodriguez

How can we prepare young people to navigate the complexity and uncertainty they are inheriting? Teach the Future (TTF), founded over a decade ago, works to bring futures literacy into education, helping students explore change, question assumptions, and imagine alternative futures.

Futures literacy, as a capability, invites learners to think differently about time, uncertainty, and possibility. It does not aim to predict the future, but to understand the role the future plays in shaping perceptions, decisions, and actions in the present. While increasingly recognized as a valuable capability, it remains largely absent from formal curricula. At policy level, the European Commission's GreenComp (2022)¹ explicitly lists futures literacy among its twelve competences; UNESCO frames futures literacy as an essential 21st-century

competency²; and the OECD Learning Compass 2030³ emphasizes an Anticipation–Action–Reflection cycle aligned with futures thinking. TTF is bridging the policy-to-practice gap, operationalizing these frameworks via curriculum resources, teacher professional learning, and youth-led projects to create imaginative, participatory, and context-relevant experiences.

One initiative is FutureWISE⁴, a curriculum for middle and secondary schools adapted from the foresight framework developed by **Peter Bishop** at the University of Houston. The program introduces students to the fundamentals of change, how to identify emerging issues, imagine multiple future scenarios, and reflect on both their own and others' visions of preferred futures. These activities are intentionally open-ended and adaptable across cultural and educational settings

Implementation typically begins with capacity building for teachers, where educators complete the student modules themselves with added theory and facilitation practice. In class, FutureWISE is often run as a project-based program: students define a local challenge; scan the horizon; map systems; explore probable, alternative, and preferable futures using critical thinking; and then plan and prototype a small, real-world initiative. Throughout, students build caring leadership and communication skills, listening across differences, and engaging school and community stakeholders, so action is collective rather than individual. Common formats include workshop-style lessons, reflective journals, and student-led research initiatives, culminating in a brief presentation or community showcase.

Including futures literacy in the classroom creates a shared inquiry space for students and teachers. Because the future does not yet exist, there is no “correct

answer” to deliver; the teacher works as facilitator and co-learner. In practice, this means making sure the teacher is creating a safe space for imagination and exploration, welcoming ideas that may sound implausible today, asking open “what if?” questions, and reflecting together with the students on assumptions, trade-offs, and implications.

Another TTF initiative is the Young Voices Council (YVC), an international network of young people aged 12 to 18 who have taken part in FutureWISE training through Teach the Future and who develop their own creative responses to the challenges they see around them. Their work extends into public engagement, through podcasts, school clubs, local initiatives, and contributions to events such as SXSW EDU, the Dubai Future Forum, and the UN Summit of the Future. As Vedant (17, USA) reflects: “Futures literacy helped me ask better questions... It gave me the mindset to explore, imagine, and co-create.”

TTF advances towards a more exploratory, inclusive education, where thinking about the future becomes a shared way of making meaning and a starting point for action in the present. Their programs explore how educational spaces can be reframed as environments for possibility, critical reflection, and shared worldmaking. By supporting young people and educators to explore what might be, rather than simply prepare for what is assumed to come, futures literacy becomes a practice of hope and responsibility, locally grounded, globally connected, and urgently needed.

References

1

Guia Bianchi, Ulrike Pisiotis,
and Marcelino Cabrera Giraldez,
*GreenComp: The European
Sustainability Competence
Framework*
(Publications Office of the
European Union, 2022).

2

UNESCO, *Futures Literacy:
An Essential Competency for the 21st
Century*, accessed August 4, 2025,
[https://www.unesco.org/en
/futures-literacy/about](https://www.unesco.org/en/futures-literacy/about).

3

OECD, *Learning Compass 2030:
Anticipation–Action–Reflection
(AAR) Cycle*. (OECD
Publishing, 2019).

4

Teach the Future, *FutureWISE*,
accessed August 4, 2025,
[https://www.teachthefuture.org
/futurewise-info](https://www.teachthefuture.org/futurewise-info).

FUTURES GARDEN

David Martens

Many might recognise this feeling: being deeply inspired by an artistic experience—a piece of music, a film, a painting, or something you’ve read—that leaves you feeling many things at once, your mind racing with associations you can’t quite grasp. Your pores open, your palate tastes different. You’re engaged with multiple parts of yourself. Until the next morning arrives, and you’re back to the order of the day. How can you go from a moment of inspiration all the way to experimentation and action? How do you shorten that distance?

This is one of the core challenges of *Futures Garden*. Created by the EU Policy Lab, *Futures Garden* is a space to collectively imagine new worlds in order to inspire proactive policymaking. It is a metaphorical garden that hosts many visions of different European futures, growing our *collective capacity to imagine* and planting the seeds of tomorrow.

Drawing from insights generated through the horizon scanning process, *Futures Garden* brings certain future visions to life through art and speculative design, materialising them into stories and worlds that aim to

get under your skin. We refer to these manifestations as speculative artefacts.

The goal of these speculative artefacts is to create a moment of collective imagination and to bring about the experience of a shared new world. We want to engage policymakers and citizens in future topics in a collective and multisensory way, inspiring them to start testing some of these speculative concepts in the current policy landscape—to circle back from deep inspiration all the way to the policymaking processes.

We want to rehearse the future together, believing that such rehearsal can provide embodied, practical experience when those futures eventually arrive. This is a type of anticipatory practice, offering an alternative to reverting to the *old ways* in times of urgency.

Art and speculative design are never the endpoint but the necessary means to gently pierce through conventional thinking and to engage more of a visceral, emotional, divergent, and associative type of intelligence. *Futures Garden* makes space for abstract, odd, frightening, and brilliant associative thoughts, because feeling meaningfully connected in this world and daring to express that connection is absolutely necessary. Even if it happens through a proxy—a provo-type—a speculative artifact showing a vision of a world different from the one we currently inhabit. This is about descending from cognitive knowledge to embodied feeling and finding ways to translate that into everyday action.

The end goal of *Futures Garden* is to test some of the ideas and questions triggered by these artefacts in small-scale experiments. This can mean trialing new (speculative) policies in a certain domain or experimenting with the policy-making process itself. Some may call it naïve to want to build a connection between

inspiration and practice, but the EU Policy Lab operates precisely at the intersection between artistic experience, the imagination of new worlds, and the reality of policymaking.

Take, for example, the speculative artefact *Symbiotic* (a short film), which suggests a world where, through technology, we can feel what other organisms feel. The artefact acts as a starting impulse, a scene-setter, an audiovisual opening memo, designed to provoke personal, curious, and perhaps critical responses. After collecting your own thoughts and feelings about what you've seen, you're invited to make sense of this new common world together. We ask: "What did you feel and notice?"

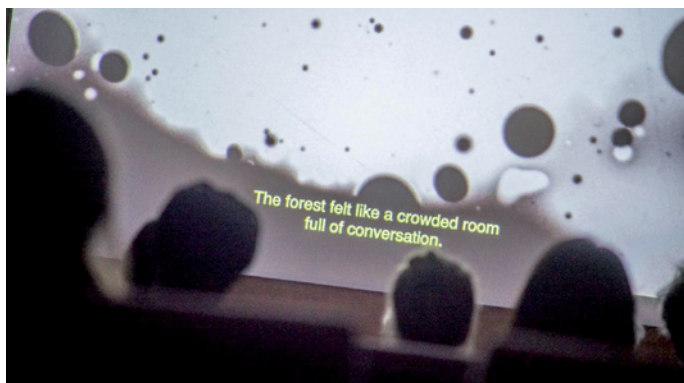
Slowly, we descend together. Through the art of conversation, we begin to connect these insights to policymaking. What can the forest teach us? What happens when we try to include more-than-human perspectives in policymaking? What if we consulted nature just like we consult humans? What are the mechanisms that could support this shift? And how do our personal relationships with nature differ from our professional ones?

As a response to these questions, **Elahe Rajabiani** and the *Futures Garden* team created the *Nature Consultation Workshop*, which helps policymakers reflect on their personal versus institutional relationships with nature and to co-design practical ways to include other organisms in policymaking processes. By combining scientific evidence with imaginative, technological, and participatory methods, we can begin to develop new forms of representation that include nature as a stakeholder.

Still, it is difficult to bring the river to the man. In a system set up to function under urgency, one might feel engaged in designing ways to include the river Danube

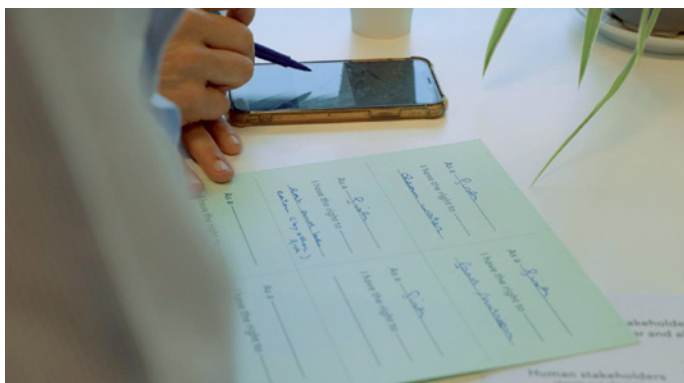
in the next biotech regulatory policy package, until the next morning arrives, and you are asked to get back to the order of the day.

But we are closing in on that distance between collective dreaming and real policy challenges. As it takes time for changes to manifest, it is our task to keep building the imagination infrastructure and create that experimental space for our colleagues, who are increasingly finding their way to the Garden. We hope to stimulate curiosity in the institutions and guide others in setting up their own small-scale experiments.



Screening of *Symbiotic*.

Courtesy of David Martens, European Commission.



Nature Consultation workshop.
Courtesy of David Martens, European Commission.

The **Centre for Creativity** (CzK) is Slovenia's national platform for the development and promotion of the creative sector. Through its programs—ranging from the development of new products and services, education and mentorship, internationalization and networking, to promotion, research, and policy initiatives—it enhances the social and economic value of the sector while fostering connections with the economy and other sectors both domestically and internationally. Together with public calls from the Ministry of Culture, it encourages interdisciplinary collaborations and the development of innovative ideas emerging at the intersection of various creative fields, arts, experimentation, markets, and entrepreneurship. It supports creators, creative businesses, and projects with innovation and business potential that promote a circular economy, sustainable development, or contribute to social progress and well-being.

CzK is a vital part of Slovenia's innovation ecosystem. By designing systemic measures to develop the creative sector, it promotes its successful growth, enables cross-sector collaboration, and places creativity at the heart of sustainable and innovative societal development. This reinforces its role in addressing key environmental, economic, and social challenges of the future. The Centre for Creativity has been operating since 2017 as part of the Museum of Architecture and Design.

Ivica Mitrović is an associate professor at the Department of Visual Communications Design at the Arts Academy (University of Split). Since 2001, the focus of his critical and speculative design practice has been on the implications of important global topics in the local context, such as how recent and emerging technological, economic, social, political, and environmental changes impact the Adriatic region.

Natalija Majsova is an associate professor of Cultural Studies at the University of Ljubljana. She is the principal investigator of MEMPOP – Mnemonic Aesthetics and Strategies in Popular Culture, a research project co-funded by the Slovenian and Croatian research agencies. Her research cuts across the fields of memory and futures studies, film and media studies, heritage interpretation, and (post-)socialist popular cultures.

Dora Vanette is a design historian and theorist whose work explores the material, spatial, and political dimensions of aging, with a broader focus on the infrastructures of care. She has taught at Parsons School of Design, the School of Visual Arts, the University of Southern California, and Rutgers University. She is currently a researcher at the Arts Academy, University of Split, as part of the Speculative Urban Futures ERASMUS+ project.

Ezio Manzini's work centers on design for social innovation as a driving force for a just and ecological transition. From this perspective, he founded DESIS—an international network of design schools engaged in these issues. He currently serves as president of the DESIS Network and is an honorary professor at the Politecnico di Milano.

James Auger is director of the design department at the École normale supérieure Paris-Saclay (ENS) and co-director of the Centre de Recherche en Design (ENS/ENSCI Les Ateliers). Alongside his academic work, James is a partner in the speculative design practice Auger-Loizeau, a collaboration founded in 2000. Auger-Loizeau projects have been published and exhibited internationally, including at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, and the National Museum of China, Beijing.

Ákos Schneider is a design culture researcher and an assistant professor at Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design (MOME). In 2022, he published *The Limits of Human-Centered Design: Speculative Design and the Posthuman Condition*. In 2023, he co-led the Innovation and Design Horizons research project at the Future Potentials Observatory.

Silvio Lorusso is an Italian writer, artist, and designer based in Lisbon, Portugal. He published *Entreprenariat* (Onomatopée) in 2019 and *What Design Can't Do* (Set Margins') in 2023. Lorusso is an assistant professor at the Lusófona University in Lisbon and a tutor at the Information Design department of Design Academy Eindhoven.

Time's Up is a Linz, Austria-based laboratory that constructs experiential models of possible futures to explore contemporary and emerging sociopolitical issues. Since 1996, they have exhibited and collaborated with partners across Europe, Asia, Africa, North America, and Australia.

Lodovica Guarnieri is a designer, researcher, and educator whose work explores the entanglements between ecology and modern infrastructures. She co-founded The Tidal Garden (Venice) and teaches at the Royal College of Art in London.

Guillem Camprodon is a designer and technologist exploring how emerging technologies can empower communities and shape more equitable futures. He leads Fab Lab Barcelona at IAAC, a global reference in digital fabrication and civic innovation.

Maja Šuštaršič is a curator at the Museum of Architecture and Design (MAO) in Ljubljana. Since 2023, she has curated *The Museum in Community*, a participatory co-creation project that extends beyond the formal boundaries of the museum, connects people, and fosters collective engagement by using the methods of architecture and design.

Pirate Care is a transnational research project and a network of activists, scholars, and practitioners who stand against the criminalization of solidarity and for a common care infrastructure. Convened by Valeria Graziano, Marcell Mars, and Tomislav Medak, Pirate Care reflects and brings together those care initiatives that are taking risks by operating in the narrow grey zones left open between different knowledges, institutions, and laws.

Jimmy Loizeau is a designer, lecturer, and MA programme lead in Goldsmiths, University of London's Design: Expanded Practice MA program. His practice critically examines technologies, systems, and institutions, reimagining how we might interact with them in alternative ways.

Lourdes Rodriguez is a senior trend analyst and foresight practitioner with a background in psychology and more than 15 years of experience leading workshops and seminars for organizations, public bodies, and executives around the world. She is co-executive director of Teach the Future, promoting the inclusion of futures thinking into education.

David Martens is a designer and maker currently working as a policy analyst at the EU Policy Lab within the Joint Research Centre. His work investigates how creative practices can open space for experimentation, emotion, and storytelling in policymaking.

TITLE

Reclaiming Hope:
Navigate (un)certainty,
imagine better futures

EDITORS

Ivica Mitrović,
Dora Vanette

CONTRIBUTORS

James Auger,
Guillem Camprodon,
Lodovica Guarnieri,
Jimmy Loizeau,
Silvio Lorusso,
Natalija Majsova,
Ezio Manzini,
David Martens,
Ivica Mitrović,
Pirate Care,
 Lourdes Rodriguez,
Ákos Schneider,
Maja Šuštaršič,
Time's Up,
Dora Vanette

TRANSLATION

Maja Furlanič (Italian)

DESIGN AND LAYOUT

Oleg Šuran

PRINTED BY

Prima IP d.o.o.

PRINT RUN

400

1ST EDITION

PUBLISHER

The Centre for Creativity,
Museum of Architecture
and Design, Ljubljana

CZK & MAO TEAM

Anja Zorko, *head of CzK*
Danaja Batinič, Nika Brajnik,
Kristina Dešman, Maja Dobnik,
Simon Gmajner, Ela Mejlač,
Gregor Mljač, Eva Simonič,
Andreja Širca, Hana Vardjan,
Nika Žigon

IN COLLABORATION WITH

Arts Academy (University of Split)

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced without prior permission from the publisher and the authors.

Every effort has been made to trace copyright holders and obtain permission for the use of copyrighted materials. In case of any omissions or errors, please notify the publisher.

The views expressed in this publication are those of the individual authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the publisher or affiliated institutions.

CIP - Kataložni zapis o publikaciji
Narodna in univerzitetna
knjižnica, Ljubljana
7.05(082)

RECLAIMING hope : navigate
(un)certainty, imagine better
futures / editors Ivica Mitrović,
Dora Vanette ; [translation
Maja Furlanič (Italian)]. - 1st
ed. - Ljubljana : The Centre
for Creativity, Museum of
Architecture and Design, 2025

ISBN 978-961-7247-05-3
COBISS.SI-ID 247479811

RECLAIMING HOPE:

Navigate (un)certainty,
imagine better futures
SYMPOSIUM

Nova Gorica,
18–19 September 2025

CURATOR

Ivica Mitrović, *Arts Academy,
University of Split (UMAS)*

EXPERT ADVISORS

Anja Zorko,
Centre for Creativity (CZK)
Sara Božanić,
*Institute for Transmedia
Design (ITD)*

EDITORIAL

Dora Vanette, *Arts Academy,
University of Split (UMAS)*

ORGANISATIONAL TEAM

Simon Gmajner,
Centre for Creativity (CZK)
Maja Šuštaršič,
*Museum of Architecture
and Design (MAO)*
Maja Dobnik,
Centre for Creativity (CZK)

EXPERT BOARD

Boštjan Botas Kenda,
*Academy of Arts and Design
Ljubljana (ALUO)*
Mario Ciarmitaro,
IUAV–University of Venice
Peter Purg,
*School of Humanities of the
University of Nova Gorica*

© 2025



GOR! 2025
NOVA GORICA
GORIZIA



ALUO
UNIVERSITY OF LJUBLJANA | Academy of
Fine Arts and Design



FA
UNIVERSITY OF LJUBLJANA | Faculty of
Architecture



POLITECNICO
MILANO 1863
SCHOOL OF DESIGN

FH JOANNEUM
University of Applied Sciences

Tomas Bata University in Zlín
Faculty of Multimedia Communications



itd
Institute for
Transmedia
Design



SUrF

Design | Science

HUD
SKLAD

I
- -
U
- -
A
- -
V



Historically, design and architecture, as worldmaking agents, have had the agility to explore diverse versions of the world using speculation and imagination. It is today's challenge to revisit how design and architecture thinking and doing can contribute to reclaiming imaginations of the future and shape new, bright, and viable future paths.