

Conversation: Demain's dialogues: awakenings in future lands**Abstract**

Design and foresight share an in-between space of potentialities, of worlds that might become. To engage with this space, storytelling serves as a powerful instrument to make collective sense of new conditions, needs, opportunities and possibilities shaped by the outlines of potential futures.

This conversation is framed as an immersive storytelling experience, an experiment in performative design approaches to worldbuilding in foresight. Through artefacts and the de/recontextualisation of participant's identities, roles and relationships, basic scaffolding for a potential future world is given. By means of scripted interactions between participants, further detail is added to the characters and systemic functioning of the future world.

'Demain's dialogues' is a double edged conversation. On the one hand it is a design-driven, performative method to grow the detailed contents of a future world seeded through fragments. On the other hand it is a reflection on that very method, from the perspective of the participants within this experiment.

How can live, improvisational roleplays stimulate more profound future personas and deeper worldbuilding in a collaborative way, enhancing empathy building with (people in) future worlds? How diversely do people envision the future world as it unravels from their introspective conversations?

Keywords: design fiction; design performance; enacted futures; worldbuilding; future personas;

1. Convenors Information

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2. Context of Conversation Topic

In a previous workshop/performance held during DRS2016 (The Neological Institute) a fictional environment and series of procedures was crafted to explore the role and potential of language as an instrument of design, to generate and explore future worlds and meanings through the creation of new words. The performative setting in which the workshop took place involved a light element of roleplay, which turned out more powerful than expected. Through their activities participants 'grew' a character in line with the boundaries set by the fictional environment as well as the content of the activities, enhancing the depth, consistency and originality of their creations.

In "Demain's Dialogues" we would like to continue our experimental quest into the role and power of performative design in foresight, this time by engaging in conversations, dialogues with participants' 'de/recontextualised' selves. The approach bears some resemblance to the use of personas as instruments of empathy and concretisation in traditional design research, yet instead of constructing an archetypical character out of gathered data/insights or through engaging and empathizing with a known context (real or scenario-based), in this setting character and context co-evolve through dialogue and interaction.

3. Conversation research question

How can live, improvisational roleplays stimulate more profound future personas and deeper worldbuilding in a collaborative way, enhancing empathy building with (people in) future worlds? How diversely do people envision the future world as it unravels from their introspective conversations?

4. Set-up of your session

The session takes a minimum of 2hrs. Nik Baerten will lead the conversation, supported by Virginia Tassinari and Elisa Bertolotti as key facilitators.

Upon arrival, participants are handed an ABC set of

- a) A series of artefacts (belonging to their future selves)
- b) A brush & diary scroll (to draw and write a diary about their encounters with others and)
- c) Chalk and/or tape (to draw/delimit spaces on the floor).

They are asked to take 10mins to figure out key elements about who they are (using the artefacts) and try to empathise with their future selves using the few fragments handed over to them. New to an unknown environment their mission is to find out more about who they are and what this world that they inhabit is all about. Their core means of discovery is through dialoguing with others (in the same situation). For the next 60-90mins they meet each other in facing chairs set-up across the room to discuss (freely or on the basis of clues/questions provided by the facilitators). After each conversation participants open their diary scroll and paint and write a small 'diary entry' of what they learned about themselves and their world from the conversation. Slowly they unravel their world and their personalities.

Nik, Elisa and Virginia will be silent influencers/storyshifters, providing verbal and non verbal clues to disclose further information on the outlines of the future world. How soon, to whom, how (verbally/non verbally) and to what extent they release that information is entirely up to them. They are only 'minimal' authors of the future world through the

creation of the characters + a few constraints/clues. Co-creation of the story lies with the participants.

The final 20-30mins of the session will be used to reflect upon each other's diaries and the experience as such.

5. Type of space and equipment required

In order to guarantee depth of interaction, we would like to limit the number of participants to ±15-20 people. The organisers will bring working materials. The room ought to be spacious with the ability to stick posters on the walls. In terms of furniture basically only chairs are needed and a few tables which can be moved aside. It should be allowed to stick tape or draw with chalk on the floor.

6. Dissemination strategy

The organisers aim to share the outcomes of the workshop:

- a) during the conference by putting up the diary scrolls and inviting others to explore the redefined space (cf. tape & chalk on floor) + recording short testimonies from the co-created/-performed future world
- b) after the conference by sharing excerpts from the future diaries + short interviews as videos/podcast through their resp. media channels

The organisers will engage in discussions on the online forum provided by the conference team and draft a concluding document following the conversation.

7. References

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About the Convenors:

Nik Baerten is co-founder of the foresight and design studio Pantopicon in Antwerp (Belgium) and lectures at LUCA School of Arts (Belgium).

Virginia Tassinari is Assistant Professor in design and philosophy at LUCA School of Arts (Belgium) and Visiting Professor at Politecnico di Milano. Virginia is also a member of the International Coordination Committee of DESIS Network, co-initiator of the DESIS Philosophy Talks, and design researcher at Pantopicon (Belgium).

Elisa Bertolotti lectures in communication design at the University of Madeira (PT). Her work and research lies at the intersection of storytelling, moving images and communication design.