

# Making the Futures Present

by

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# Abstract

This research explores personal experiential futures in the creation of a new technique for helping an individual to envision a preferred future for himself or herself living in complex global futures. "Making the Futures Present" is the prototype of a proposed personal futures technique that begins by exploring 'the world out there' before 'the inner world'. By the end of a three-phase interview cycle each participant receives a personalized high-fidelity prototype. That artifact or experience intentionally provokes the participant's perception of the expected future. The proposed technique employs concepts from experiential futures, ethnographic futures research and prototyping processes. This technique is described in this paper step by step with images from every stage of the process. The paper includes a literature review of evolving foresight practices that locating this technique in personal futures, a growing area of interest. The paper refers to comparable narrative therapy practices and other disciplines that can be useful references in the evolution of this technique. Outcomes from this research, by way of participant statements and supporting theory, yield various insights for the development of this technique and why this concept is necessary now.

**Keywords:** foresight, personal futures, ethnographic futures research, prototyping, experiential futures, narrative therapy

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# Dedication

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# Making the Futures Present

Foresight is not a spectator sport. The individual who thinks about the future creates part of what they discover (May, 1997). Understanding reality is not a passive process of adaptation to a fixed reality outside but occurs through feedback between a search outside and a search within (Dobbert, 2000). Thus the individual stands to learn as much about themselves, their own beliefs and worldviews, and the interests they represent as they learn about the world that they co-create (Hayward, 2005, p. 88).

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## 1.0 Introduction

"Making the Futures Present" is a prototype of a technique designed to help someone envision their preferred future. The name is a double entendre. Making the Futures Present means to bring multiple futures into the here and now, into the present. It also means that a Futures Present is a gift from the futures. Making the Futures Present takes a wild approach to personal futures. It was designed to help people to feel the future, not fear the future. The technique uses imagination, emotion and gut felt experiences to help people to think more rationally about the future.

In this paper you will read a description of the proposed technique and why investigating personal futures is important now. This research project is an investigation into a less explored area of foresight practice. It is posited that a futures technique quite such as this did not exist before. We will locate it in the evolution of foresight methods and contrast it with existing social science methods looking for differences and similarities. This research project takes the form of experiential futures and is inspired by techniques from design and ethnography. This technique is at the prototype phase and you will read about where it needs more time to develop. The paper is written to help you to follow the co-design

process step by step as it was designed and prototyped for the first time in the fall of 2016. You will see some of the personal experiential futures artifacts and experiences that were designed for each participant. You will read about who else is doing personal futures projects like this and how it is different from them. You will read how it compares in an evaluative framework and what the scope of work may include to further develop this technique. You will read suggestions on where it needs much deeper analysis to improve it. By the end of this paper you will come to understand the whats, hows and whys of this technique.

Making the Futures Present is a three-phase interview cycle. The three phases are 1) generating scenarios, 2) generating rapid prototypes and 3) generating a high-fidelity prototype. This multistep process is designed to help teach someone how to think about their future self from a fun and new frame of reference. A single participant attends a personalized co-design workshop for the purpose of envisioning their own multiple futures. The participant literally makes their futures present through scenario generation and rapid-prototyping. Hands-on sensemaking, in the form of a rapid prototyping process, engages latent knowledge about one's values, hopes and fears. Generative design gives participants the opportunity to explore their futures in ways that are not typical to personal coaching, psychotherapy or other collaborative disciplines. At the end of the experience the participant is given a personalized high-fidelity futures prototype made by a designer.

The participant's journey is an opportunity to think reflexively about personal values, hopes, dreams and fears in a private space with a facilitator. They are encouraged to disclose their expectations of the future and rethink them optimistically, pessimistically and unexpectedly. In this work someone is provoked to consider their purpose for themselves and situate their impact on others. As they gain insights they begin to see themselves more clearly for what they have to do to in the creation and support of their own preferred future.

The objective of the paper itself is to share a proposed technique to a design thinking, personal coaching and foresight audience. The proposed technique may be useful for

individuals or practitioners in foresight or futures studies. (In this paper the terms are used interchangeably.) The paper also seeks to add to the growing area of interest in personal futures. The technique adapts the activities of ethnographic research, the principles of experiential futures, and prototyping methods. The research project represents an attempt at highlighting the needs for people to reframe their personal stories in the context of complex futures. The intention here is that the technique will contribute to the unfolding areas of both integral futures and experiential futures practices.

### **A Description of Each Section**

You will read a description of a personal experiential futures technique called Making the Futures Present in the **Section 1 Introduction**, a response to the need for a new way of telling a story about ourselves in a complex future.

**Section 2 Locating Making the Futures Present in Time** is a futures history lesson. This section is the culmination of a literature review that charts the evolution of personal experiential futures and compares the technique to narrative therapy and life design.

**Section 3 Emergence of Personal Futures** starts with an overview of other personal futures projects in contrast to Making the Futures Present.

**Section 4 The Design of Making the Futures Present** discusses the unique qualities and theoretical underpinnings of the technique.

**Section 5 The Importance of Making the Futures Present** describes the importance of Making the Futures Present in more detail. This technique is compared to some other personal life philosophies. Sections here describes in more detail why envisioning the future is hard to do and proposes that this technique is also beneficial for society.

**Section 6 The Making the Futures Present Technique** is the step by step description of the technique and insights from the research in the lab.

**Section 7 Research Reflection** discusses emerging clarity, self construction and what happened when the participants received the high-fidelity prototype from the designer.

**Section 8 Evaluating Making the Futures Present** is a discussion of the merits of this technique, alongside doubts and potential areas for further development.

**Section 9 From Apathy to Action** reveals what has to happen next to make this project survive and thrive. The paper shares the the implementation, next steps and limitations of this proposed technique.

In **Section 10 the Conclusion** the paper revisits and answers the research questions with new insights.

The **Appendices A-H** are where you will find additional case studies, descriptions of the participants, consent forms, general observations, the introductory dialogue with the participants and the interview process as it was conducted step by step in September 2016.

## 1.01 My View of Our Story

This is a story about a technique that takes, what seems to be a less explored approach to helping someone imagine their future. Aside from the context in which this technique lies, there are two reasons that this approach appears to be unique, the conversation about the future and the format for exploring this conversation. Both are much talked about in the course of this paper.

### **The Conversation: We are all Connected**

Stephen Hawking, theoretical physicist and cosmologist says in a recent article:

We are at the most dangerous moment in the development of humanity. We now have the technology to destroy the planet on which we live, but have not yet



developed the ability to escape it. Perhaps in a few hundred years, we will have established human colonies amid the stars, but right now we only have one planet, and we need to work together to protect it. (Hawking, 2016)

The intention of Making the Futures Present is to underscore the perspective that we are all connected, it is no longer your story about how you live in this world, it is our story about how we live together. We see impacts of our shared existence everywhere. We hear of the beneficial outcomes to society as a whole as rights for women increase (Hallward-Driemeier, 2013). We also see the impacts of global socio-economic relationships accelerating disease outbreaks as we saw in Toronto with SARS outbreak in 2003 (Ali, 2006). The conversation in this technique is designed in such a way as to force participants to contemplate the larger picture before imagining their place within it. The larger picture includes ecosystems, social dynamics, old and new economies, resource scarcity and other factors. If the future is going to be brighter then we must all act in a more collaborative way to ensure that it is. It is my hope for a successful design of the technique to create an opportunity for participants appreciate that the decisions that they make impact not only themselves but the lives of other humans and nonhumans. The research showed that that idea does not come to the surface organically with every participant. More of the dialogue between participant and facilitator is discussed later.

The design of Making the Futures Present is adapted from organizational foresight techniques and influenced by ethnographic futures research. Each of these concepts will be described in the following pages.

### **The Conversation: It is No Longer Business as Usual**

Society is slow to recognize its current trajectory toward dystopia. Few give thoughts to our proximity to peak oil (Hirsch, 2005), that sea levels are noticeably rising or that we are driving

species to extinction with our pollution, and so on. We see evidence of this dystopia now in that; there is already an estimated one billion people living in slums, the earth is warming (Melillo, 2014), and countries are closing their borders.

The approach to the technique comes from a place of provocation. This technique is built to undermine certainty about a secure future, that unfolds for us the way it did for generations. We cannot expect things to continue on the same utopic trajectory as they have in the past. I believe that we cannot continue to operate with the same world view that we had since the 1950s. After World War II the baby boom generation grew up to achieve, and came to expect, continuous improvement in living standards, notes sociologist Ken Roberts (Roberts, 2012). Due to countless factors, the American Dream is dead for up and coming generations. It is observed, for example in a shrinking middle class in America (Kochhar, 2015), and there is much concern in the media that it is the same for the Canadian middle class (Boudreaux, 2016). There is now a lack of job security, lack of secured pension plans, rise in cancer rates, housing prices are rising faster than the cost of living, and so on. Pioneering environmental scientist Donella Meadows reminds us of the limits to human economic expansion (Meadows, 1972). As much as we want to live in a dream of infinite growth and abundance, we are limited in the resources that are available. She says that there is no infinite resource option but we are still acting like we live a world where there is one. The premise of foresight work is to create an opportunity to consider what futures we want, and to take steps toward increasing the likelihood of a preferred future.

Futurist Peter Hayward says that scenarios are one of the preferred foresight methods helping individuals to prepare for and take actions against challenges (2005).

Rather than accepting the 'default' future of *que sera sera*, there is the possibility of considering what future(s) we wish to live in; and of taking steps in the present to increase the likelihood of 'desired' futures and to reduce the likelihood of the 'undesired' ones. To do this is to employ foresight (Hayward, 2005, p.4).

During the first phase of Making the Futures Present participants were asked to describe mental images of what they expected the future to be like. Participants also created alternate scenarios of optimistic, pessimistic and unexpected futures. Let's take a look at what Participant Tom envisioned in Phase 1: Generating Scenarios for his pessimistic future scenario.

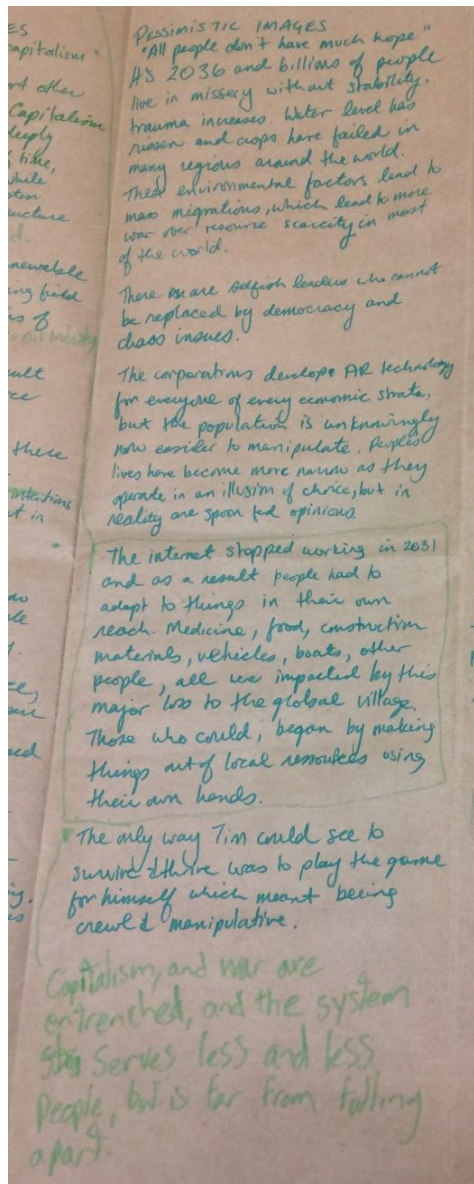


Image 1. Tom's Pessimistic Futures Scenario described from his worldview

*It's 2036 and billions of people live in misery with ability, trauma increases. Water levels have risen and crops have failed in many regions around the world. These environmental factors leave to mass migrations which lead to more war over resource scarcity in most of the world.*

*There are selfish leaders who cannot be replaced by democracy and chaos ensues. The corporations develop augmented reality technology for everyone of every economic strata but the population is unknowingly now easier to manipulate. People's lives have become more narrow as they operate in an illusion of choice but in reality they are spoon-fed opinions. Capitalism and war are entrenched and the system serves less and less people but is far from falling apart.*

*The only way Tom could see to survive and thrive was to play the game for himself which meant being cruel and manipulative.*

Perceiving that the future is simply a continuation

of the past will necessitate reactivity. What I hope to see is proactivity. Walter Gretzky is known to have said to his young son Wayne Gretzky, one of the most famous hockey players in the world "Go to where the puck is going, not where it has been." The hope is that

more people, novice hockey players and beyond, take this cue and move towards their preferred future with intention. It is in my view that we must all realize this and proactively analyze our motivations and restructure our expectations. In an effort to spread these worldviews I want people to recontextualize their preferred future to make their contribution towards better living standards for all and not at the expense of others.

In recognition of these facts the goal of this technique is to help people make new stories for themselves in a complex future. Not the stories of bigger houses for more stuff and years of travelling in retirement. A story of surviving and thriving in the uncertain times now and in years to come. The story about moving people from apathy about our social and environmental situation to action on behalf of the planet and all humans and nonhumans on it.

### **The Format: Feel the Future, not Fear the Future**

Taking a new approach, we are coming to appreciate tactile knowledge and understand things from the unit level and scale up. I propose that using experiential futures can be one of our guides. Futurist Stuart Candy, who began writing about experiential futures practice in 2006, and released a full-length treatment of the approach in 2010, has shown us that system level concepts can be designed and expressed at a granular level (Candy, 2010). Experiential futures does this by making the invisible visible.

Experiential futures is an approach that interested me very much because of its blend of political, design and futures methods. I was interested in the theatrical potential of experiential futures. There are similarities in the usage of roles, props, scripts and setting elements. We live in a world of objects, environments, atmosphere, light refractions, textures, smells, and temperatures that together create meaning around us. We will still have physical things in the future and will still have our sensations of them. I want participants to have a tactile experience with the future, with these roles, props, scripts and

setting to nullify often held perceptions that the future is exclusively utopian or dystopian. Fictional narratives can explore utopic and dystopic environments, while good foresight work must remain coherent and functional (Slaughter, 1999). Experiential futures may intentionally invoke utopian and dystopian futures, but they must be plausible in order to be effective as foresight tools. It is the design of this technique to zoom into the future and grab hold of something real, something tangible or visceral, something that gives some narrative in this space between.

Both futures and theatre employ the use of the word 'scenario'. Theatrically speaking the definition of scenario is, according to the Oxford dictionary, "a written outline of a film, novel, or stage work giving details of the plot and individual scenes." Wherein a secondary definition that applies more to futures thinking is "a postulated sequence or development of events." Both definitions are narrative formats and meant to evoke emotions. In both formats the creator must consider who the audience is, what perspective they bring to look at the scenarios. There are places on the planet that are like that right now (for example Syria, ravaged by war; or islands in the east Pacific that are becoming submerged) but the intended audience for this technique (in the iteration described in this paper) is for those of us who are fortunate enough to have choice in our lives.

As a trained theatre designer I am no stranger to a practice of transforming the essence of a scenario into a physical representation. Experiential futures are different from theatre in that the source of inspiration comes from well thought out futures scenarios that use several foresight techniques in the creation of plausible, probable or possible scenarios. Theatre experiences can be derived from this type of background work, but there is an expectation of rigorous authenticity in futures scenarios (Slaughter, 1998). An audience comes to the performing arts expecting that the creator does not have these restrictions and perhaps employ more creative license. Both narratives are communications from a creator with a particular bias. In both narrative form it is the scenario creator(s) who decides what to emphasize for the given audience.

The main action in Making the Futures Present is to create artifacts and experiences only for the participants themselves - for an audience of one. They are made to be handled and owned by that singular participant. This is the 'personal' in personal experiential futures. The connection that one feels with something that they know, the story that it conjures up in their mind, that is the feeling that the Making the Futures Present prototypes are meant to evoke. It is in these personalized experiential futures that what they perceive to be abstract comes into existence through a physical representation of something that they have a personal relationship with. If successful, the relationship that they have with this artifact or experience feels like something that speaks to their values, hopes, dreams, or fears.

I decided to design the Making the Futures Present technique using the prototyping process to engaging the creative mind of the participant. This appears to be a rarely used method for foresight research, but has some contemporary counterparts such as the work by futurist designer Kelly Kornet in her Master of Design dissertation *Causing an Effect: Activists, Uncertainty & Images of the Future* (Kornet, 2015); and the Futurematic design jam series held by Situation Lab and Extrapolation Factory, *1-888-FUTURES* (Candy, 2016). I was inspired by Elizabeth Sanders, Experimental and Quantitative psychologist and founder of MakeTools. She uses the co-design methods to help a participant connect to their intuitive ability to communicate with objects. It was found in the research that using materials to create low-fidelity prototypes created an enhance dialogue between the participant and facilitator. With a new forum for interaction, the participant selected materials that assisted them in the a more articulated visualization of their possible and/or preferred futures (Sanders, 2008). The paper will later describe that a hands on approach engages the mind in a different way that makes concepts more clear when they are co-designed with the use of objects.

### **The Motivation for Designing this Technique**

The intention in the design is to move participants from apathy about the future toward taking action for a preferred future. This is a proposal to move the participant from

resignation to what is happening in the world at large to proactively helping themselves and, in doing so, helping others.

Making the Futures Present is a technique that uses a design thinking approach to help someone find personal purpose in complex futures. Tim Brown, CEO of IDEO, one of the most influential design firms in the world says "Design thinking is inherently a prototyping process. Once you spot a promising idea, you build it. In a sense, we build to think." (Brown, 2005, p.2). The technique is built to help people find a new question about their place in the world. Now, more than ever, we need to reframe the question for ourselves in ways that invokes our sense of purpose in the wider world. What the technique does not yet do is to try to solve that question for someone. It does not promise to define the sustainable preferred future for a participant in a short period of working together. That role is the domain of many different disciplines such as therapy, coaching, and personal finance to name a few and future opportunities to support or integrate this technique with experts from those disciplines should be explored.

## 1.02 A New Story about our Future Self

It is imperative that we create new stories about ourselves living in the future. We are willfully naive about protecting our future selves given all of the scientific, social and historical evidence that is presented to us now (Slaughter, 2004). Readers, to get our brains warmed up for futures thinking let's try a thought exercise. Let's imagine that you exist with some clarity in multiple futures.

### **Using Multiple Futures for Foresight Thinking**

Let us fold back time like a ribbon from December 2, 2036 back to December 2, 2016. That day in December in 2036 is as real as it is in December 2016. What mental images would you have?

The floor is as hard as you expect it to be, the sun rises and sets at the same time on the 24-hour clock, and as humans we still need the same amount of calories each day. In this expected future, your heating bill still exists. Because of the reduction in Arctic sea ice owing to climate change, it is estimated that the polar bear population could drop by a third by 2050 (Regehr, 2016) and you see the same types of images of a polar bear clinging to a melting glacier as you did in the 2010s.

Image 2. The Polar Bear



"The polar bear is likely to become an endangered species within the foreseeable future" (US Fish and Wildlife Service, 2008).

Three more ribbons get

folded back 20 years from today. One ribbon from December 2, 2036 represents one's optimistic future and two more represent the pessimistic and unexpected futures:

- In the **optimistic** future you are holding a postcard of the descendants of the bear (pictured here) and they are fishing on larger glacial landscapes. This bear has survived shrinking Arctic ice with proactive interventions by humans. You still have a



heating bill, but energy is making less of a negative carbon impact on the environment.

- The **pessimistic** future does not have any polar bears at all, and you do not even think about them. Your heating bill from 2016 has tripled as a result of a near-peak oil frenzy and you are too distracted trying to make a living to think of much else.
- The **unexpected** future has glacier developing technology, that you invested in prior to this date, and it slows down the extinction of the polar bears. The return on investment from this technology covers your heating bill. A climate disaster in 2023 made people realize the connection between climate change, habitat loss and human health.

Might any of these scenarios exist 20 years from now? How can you prepare not knowing for certain which ribbon will unfold as reality? Which of these futures would come to pass?

There are no facts about the future (Brumbaugh, 1966), so we must build our foresight capacity to imagine the unthinkable. This technique asks of its participants, to consider how are they implicated in the problem? How can they become part of the solution?

### **Considering a New Story for our Future Selves**

The future is not as menacing, blurry or unknowable as we perceive it to be. Futurist Richard Slaughter warns us that the future may be seen as menacing because "people grow up fearing the future and therefore early on learn the comforts of denial, evasion and avoidance" (Slaughter, 1996, p.178). To gain genuine knowledge the participant must be actively engaged and able to reflect on the experience. American educational theorists David and Alice Kolb say that we must be able to conceptualize the experience and use the new ideas to problem solve (Kolb and Kolb, 2012).

The future may be described as blurry as studies show, that as the imagined future gets farther away we leave out more detail (Wakslak, Trope & Liberman, 2006). Slaughter also

has observed that "too many believe that you cannot know anything about the future" (Slaughter 1996, p.83). At the same time the uncertain future is more complex than we hope to be. Our personal values, hopes, dreams and fears shape our perception of the future and actions in it. Our identity is shaped by these things and therefore influences the role we play in the future. We don't all articulate what our values, hopes, dreams, and fears are and that lack of insight may be preventing us from envisioning and protecting our future self. We will read in this paper that there are many reasons why envisioning one's self in the future is challenging. We will discuss ways to enhance one's capability for creating successful stories about ourselves living in the future. This personal futures technique is one proposal that hopes to render futures with some clarity.

Creating a personal story gets ever more complicated when we look at ourselves outside of the individual realm. Our life in the future, as it is now, is impacted on many levels, the organizations we belong to, the country we live in and our position in the world. Our future story must encompass who we want to be in the world among all of these dynamic players. More than just multiple players, we have to envision ourselves impacted by multiple different systems at play, too. There are a lot of pieces to an ever changing puzzle that need to be considered in creating the story about one's self in the future.

### **Doubt about the Future**

Perceiving future challenges on both the individual level and the worldview level is the main activity in Making the Futures Present. The technique works with the participant in a step by step process of envisioning challenges across multiple future scenarios. Envisioning multiple futures creates doubt in one's expectation of what may come to pass. The product of the activities in the technique is uncertainty in the mind of the participant about what the future is expected to be. It is significant for people to think about themselves in the future

with uncertainty and doubt. It is in the recognition of this uncertainty that one can create an adaptable plan to help mitigate some risk.

## 1.03 From Purpose to Preferred Futures

The following section lays out the argument that a purpose, an adaptable plan, and foresight capacity are needed in carrying out one's personal preferred future.

### **A Purpose**

Everybody needs a purpose in life however, "frequent job dislocation and career destabilization set workers adrift as they try to chart their futures and shape their identities" says counseling psychologist Mark Savickas (Savickas, 2012). Figuring out a long-range purpose is a struggle for everyone at least once in awhile, which is leading to a new epistemological position called life design (Savickas et al, 2009). There are many forums available to help individuals to find their life purpose with varied approaches to helping someone identify their skills, passion or identity. Some of these structured approaches include life and personal coaching, self-interest groups, counselling methods, narrative therapy and self-help books, to name a few. Perhaps the landscape is too crowded for the entrance of a new technique. Yet, an individual who is developing their purpose now, in these complex times, has more external forces to manage than in generations past (Savickas, 2012). If we look at the structured approaches that help people contextualize their purpose in a worldview it narrows the field of related disciplines considerably. The context chosen for developing the technique is one that is larger than the individual, not just their 'inner world' but the world around them. If we look at the formats that help someone to find their purpose long-range, for example a 20-50 year time span, it narrows the options again.

Unlike many formats employed by job coaches and therapists, Making the Futures Present takes advantage of other learning styles, visual, auditory and kinesthetic. Also, there are few techniques that help people find a personally relevant life purpose by focussing on the external world in the long-range.

It is my view that it is imperative to focus on the external world in the long-range because humans, non-humans and the environment around us are all connected. One person is not alone in their future, they are a part of society, an increasingly global one. It is my hope that people in search of a purpose find one that works in an ever increasingly complex world and makes a positive impact on an increasingly complex world. This purpose must work for the individual, but given our global complex challenges it should support others. Benefit from Making the Futures Present may come in the form of helping with defining, refining or reinforcing a purpose for someone. The aim of this technique sounds lofty, but the preliminary research encourages further exploration as to if and how this technique may helps people in shaping their purpose.

### **Adaptability**

Envisioning the multiple possible futures in context of a complex world is the first step in this technique. The second step in the technique is to ask someone how they survive and thrive in the futures that they envision. From that point onward this current iteration of the technique would need to be integrated with professional services that could enable strategy, planning and achievement of a preferred future. If one's plan prepares for the challenge that any one of many futures that may come to pass it should be more adaptable. Being adaptable is critical in the face of an unexpected life change. Adaptability might mean that external influences make less of an impact on the fulfilment of an individual's purpose. These external influences might come in the form of social, technological, economic,

environmental or political (STEEP) forces (Aguilar, 1967). This technique is designed to provoke one to consider the adaptability of their existing plan.

## **Foresight**

Sometimes we are lucky enough to make a life change on our own terms, and other times it is influenced by unexpected external forces. With an adaptable plan the impact of some of these external forces may be mitigated by a little foresight. Foresight is an ability to anticipate what may happen in the future. Futurist Peter Hayward writes that "the development of foresight capacities give us the opportunity to better respond to our challenges, no matter what they are," (Hayward, 2005). The ability to foresee and adapt to an unexpected life change is a critical skill for surviving in an ever increasingly complex world. Foresight capacity is what we call this ability. Exercising that foresight capacity is important for individuals, as well as organizations, cultures, nations and the world.

## **Foresight Capacity**

A foresight capacity is having the skills to take a long view in considering a situation. People have this skill already, but adding a little structure to enhancing it is helpful. Hayward writes that:

Expanding foresight capacities will give us the ability to anticipate, perceive and act on our present and future challenges and thereby produce a trajectory of preferable futures for ourselves and future generations (Hayward, 2005, p.5).

What he is saying is that there is a lot at stake in developing foresight capacity. Knowing your purpose, being adaptable in a wider context of external forces, and developing your foresight capacity helps one with present and future challenges. One's ability to anticipate, perceive and act on future challenges helps in the fulfillment of a preferred future. This

proposed technique offers a structure for expanding foresight capacity through envisioning future challenges.

### **Going forward**

Here is the sum of what we just read. Thinking about our ourselves in the future with uncertainty and doubt about what will come to pass for us as individuals is not sufficient. We must not expect systems that affect the wider world now will continue to affect us in the same way. We must consider the effect of the long view of perhaps 20-50 years on both us as individuals and the wider world. There are a lot of variables that make the future uncertain. It is for this reason that we need to develop our foresight capacity and one way to do that is to envision multiple futures. The paper has more to say about this pairing of foresight capacity and multiple futures in the description of ethnographic futures research designed by the late Stanford University anthropologist Robert Textor (1978).

### **Scenarios**

Bill Sharpe with Kees Van der Heijden interviewed futurists Napier Collyns and Peter Schwartz, founders of the Global Business Network, who have done much to spread the use of scenarios. Collyns says that scenarios are robust and articulated descriptions of what the systems view of each future looks like (Sharpe, 2007). Collyns and Schwartz agree that it is easier to comprehend the images (mental constructs) of the future as a scenario (Sharpe, 2007). Schwartz says that a scenario 'is an easy fit to the human brain – storytelling is what people do, it is how their brain works' (Sharpe, 2007). It is much easier for people to envision a futures concept as a narrative. With a narrative it is easier to comprehend systemic forces on people, places and things than at a higher-level abstract image. People can talk about

stories, understand them and question them. Creating multiple scenarios creates more uncertainty and doubt that an expected future may come to pass.

### **Creating a Personal Preferred Future**

To repeat what we read at the beginning of this section: it is imperative that we create new stories about ourselves living in the future. The process in Making the Futures Present makes a participant aware of their expected future images. The first step is to have the participant declare their assumptions about what they expect the future at a worldview level will be. The next step of this technique is to generate multiple alternative scenarios to create doubt about their expected future. Following that, the participant is to consider how they would survive and thrive as individuals in each scenario. This is the beginning of a new story about himself or herself.

Having a participant conceptualize that multiple personal futures exist is an integral purpose of this technique. The technique is designed to create multiple personal futures in a wider context. The challenge for each participant is to then shape their preferred future from the context of multiple futures.

When people have conceptualized their personal future they must make it adaptable for the long-range. Creating favourable conditions at both the individual level is already their purpose in life. This technique is intended to help people to focus more on what is important at both the individual level and now the worldview level. The assumption is that people will buttress themselves against negative occurrences.

Each person will create their own strategy for living in these uncertain futures. The more clearly someone can envision that preferred future, the more articulate a personal strategy to ensure it may be. This technique focuses on the conceptualization of personal futures and not the creation and maintenance of personal strategy.

## **Conclusion**

This paper is written to document the proposal for a new technique, Making the Futures Present, designed to help people envision a preferred future in a complex world. People need to find a purpose that works in a larger context to survive and thrive with these external forces. Having an adaptable plan serves that purpose and is a component of foresight capacity. Having a foresight capacity can help an individual to envision a preferred future and work towards enabling and protecting it.

## **1.04 Background to Personal Futures**

Making the Futures Present is for people who are curious about their purpose in life and would use a little structure to get some clarity. The following pages describe why this technique is important now, why an approach that blends personal futures with physical prototyping to form a preferred future has perhaps been done only a few times before, and where this technique sits in comparison to other efforts that have similar processes or outcomes.

### **Using Foresight Techniques**

This research paper describes a new technique using futures / foresight methodology. Typically foresight methods are used to coalesce members of organizations, corporations or governments around the same vision (Sharpe, 2007). A futurist may choose to use scenario thinking to aid the group in developing strategies beyond the horizon of assumed predictability (Sharpe, 2007). This scenario thinking serves to engage the imagination. It is an imperative in critically uncertain times that we force this mental expansion, because we in



fact do not know with certainty what will come to pass. Based on current trends a foresight method typically generates multiple possible scenarios to assist in the development of a preferred future. Scenarios that are rigorously developed (well thought out using foresight frameworks) and are quite different from one another. There is a tension in a well thought out set of imagined scenarios. It is this tension and the space between multiple scenarios that help to facilitate a better rationalized preferred future scenario (Schwartz, 2008).

### **The Type of Foresight Techniques Being Used**

As you will read in the following pages, futures studies and foresight techniques have been slowly opening up their approach to a more human centred approach over the last six decades. It is significant to note that shift for the grounding of this research project. The evolution that we see is in the data inputs from quantitative to qualitative data. The shift is swinging from just crunching numbers to using the power of observation, too.

There is a growing interest and embrace of qualitative outputs too. Thanks to philosopher and synthesist Ken Wilber who created the "Integral Theory on a four-quadrant framework" (Wilber, 1996) some futurists have identified a large gap in the approach to challenges we have now and into our future. This theory integrates many ways of knowing; those which can be measured, and that which is unexplained by logic but still known to be true through experience. These 'other ways of knowing' are now seen as valid sources of input into a futures input (Slaughter, 2004). Slaughter, and foresight scholars since his 2004 book, impart that using 'outer views' alone is insufficient to respond to the real challenges of the world and the part that we all play in it (Slaughter, 2004; Magruk, 2011; Popper, 2008; Voros, 2008; Hayward, 2005). What this means for futures is that the communication of a foresight analysis has changed. Instead of just reports and spreadsheets as tools to interpret futures scenarios the door has opened for different forms of creative communication.

## **Creative Expression of a Foresight Analysis**

We are seeing futurists and designers coming together to show the results of futures scenarios in a developing expression of this communication. The work that a designer/futurist mindset generates comes in formats that are more engaging forms of storytelling. These more creative formats may be anything from a well written story to a reenactment. The proposed technique, Making the Futures Present is a creative expression of foresight analysis.

"Experiential futures" (Candy, 2010) offers an umbrella term for multiple diverse and experimental forms of futures scenario presentations. The format is a combination of political, design and futures elements. Experiential futures involves lifting a rigorous (fully fleshed out) analysis of potential futures off the page and rendering them available in a material or dramatic interpretation that engage the head, heart and senses. These can take the form of artifacts such as design fiction and experiences such as role-play. The intention of experiential futures is to create visceral responses with an essential element from an imagined futures scenario. That one essential element serves the purpose of reinterpreting high-level concepts. That element is a signifier of that concept that can be felt emotionally. The key to that artifact or experience is the generation of meaning and is designed to elicit a visceral reaction in the 'audience' as they come to an understanding in the gravity of a futures scenario. Making the Futures Present is a form of personal experiential futures.

## 1.05 The Intention Behind the Approach

There is an underlying intention in designing this personal experiential futures technique. Many people have an expectation of what their future will be like and we have foresight capacity to anticipate and evaluate different scenarios of multiple futures for ourselves. This is the premise of futures work as a field. If people can imagine multiple possible futures they maybe able to explore the personal significance of them. If the scenarios are significantly different they maybe able to consider choices between them. They may adjust their current direction towards a preferred future with some confidence. Given the tools to see a path one can apply personal strategies today in preparation for success tomorrow. The development of personal preferred futures can help to clarify long-term goals and troubleshoot for blind spots.

This research experience is designed to lead the participant to comprehend the implication of personal choices at the greater systems level. It is the design of the new technique to enhance an individual's foresight capacity. The participant is invited to perceive themselves in futures scenarios via thought experiments. Each activity provokes the participants to reframe their impression of expected futures in their worldview and increase doubt in their preconceived assumptions about the future. Each tool in the interview cycle stretches the mind in the creation of new mental images and ideas. None of this is possible without the full engagement of the individual.

## 1.06 A Proposal for Futures Practice

So far we have read about the reason an individual may benefit from this proposed technique. We have read that it is one of the more unique approaches to helping someone

to envision their preferred future in all of its complexity. In conceptualizing one's preferred future, we create more developed stories about ourselves living in the future.

This paper also intends to demonstrate a need for futurists to consider a new area of inquiry. While foresight techniques have been tested with organizations, corporations, governments and nations for many years, they are only newly applied to personal futures, as observed by futurists Jessica Charlesworth (2010), Verne Wheelwright (2005), Alida Draudt and Julia Rose West (2016). We will talk about their work in Section 3.

This technique is different in that it helps an individual to envision their preferred future instead of the preferred future for a group. We will read in the literature review the historical context for this claim, and compare it to some other personal futures projects.

### **The Research Challenge**

Futurist Richard Slaughter takes the view that:

"Overall, there are two basic motivations for looking ahead and studying the future. One is to avoid dangers. The uses of foresight for this purpose are as old as humankind. The second is to set goals, dream dreams, create visions, make designs; in short, to project upon the future a wide range of purposes and intentions."  
(Slaughter, 2004, p. 2)

In recognition of these two motivations, I, in the role of the designer as change agent, have set out to design a personal experiential futures technique in answer to these questions. Is there a way that futurists can help people to envision their purpose in a wider context? How might a futurist help people to anticipate, perceive and avoid danger for themselves in the context of the wider worldview? How might futurists help people to envision their values, dreams, hopes and fears for themselves, and how might they be more likely to be achieved in the context of wider world view?

The characteristics and theories that shape the response to this research challenge are human-centred, tactile, and exploratory. This proposed technique is inspired by from the disciplines of design, futures and ethnography in the making of a facilitated co-designed experience. The mantra for this technique and myself is "I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand." (attributed to Confucius). I call this personal experiential futures technique Making the Futures Present.

### **The Research Question**

In my search for ways to help people create a new story for themselves, I address this key question to guide this research: How might experiential futures be used to help someone begin to create their own preferred future? In answering this question I also wonder:

- How might the fabrication of prototypes of artifacts and experiences help a participant to envision multiple futures?
- What conclusions can be made from iterating a semi-structured interview process towards developing a new technique?

These three questions are answered through the course of this document, but I would like to outline my approach in the answer to the main question and two sub-questions here.

### **Key Research Question: How might experiential futures be used to help someone begin to create their own preferred future?**

The first challenge is to develop a set of experiential futures scenarios for an individual. People think about the future all the time, but may not feel the agency to create it (Miller, 2007). Personal experiential futures should have the capacity to incite action in the creation of one's future

**Research sub-question: How might the fabrication of prototypes of artifacts and experiences help a participant to envision multiple futures?**

Part of the challenge is to help the participants to fabricate prototypes of artifacts and experiences. I hypothesize first, that a participant can understand the spirit of a prototype. In a prototype, the design process is more meaningful than the aesthetics. My second hypothesis is that a participant needs help in envisioning multiple futures. There appears to be a lack of personal foresight educational programs and the assumption is that thinking through a foresight method will be a new and beneficial experience to most participants.

**Research Sub-question: What conclusions can be made from iterating a semi-structured interview process towards developing a new technique?**

Another part of the challenge is to create an environment in which a semi-structured process can be iterated. My hypothesis is that a semi-structured interview process is an appropriate format for a personal experiential futures technique. Of the many forms personal futures could take, a semi-structured interview is an experiential future. Instead of investigating current personal futures or experiential futures projects In the search for answers to these questions was inspired to explore the creation of a new technique.

## 1.07 The Proposed Technique

This section serves to describe the technique overall, how it was prototyped, and some best practices.

The outcome of this research project is called Making the Futures Present. The technique that is designed is in the format of a personal scenario and prototype generating workshop.

One individual sits with one facilitator in a semi-structured interview. Over the course a three-phase 'interview cycle' they have imagined four scenarios together. At the start of the discussion a participant is typically only able to describe abstract blurry images of the futures. As the interview continues the conversation gets more and more specific. At the end of the interview cycle the participant can actually envision and manifest an artifact or experience that could exist in the scenarios. Step by step activities are described in Section 6 and in detail in Appendix A.

As we read earlier, experiential futures can come in the form of any creative expression, from role-play to artifact. The form of experiential scenario used in Making the Futures Present is a prototype. Low-fidelity or high-fidelity is the description of the technical effort put into a prototype. The prototypes made in the co-design session with the participant are done rapidly and as such they are low fidelity.

### **Phase 1: Generating Scenarios**

This work is spread across a three-phase interview cycle. The first half of the work together the participant and facilitator do the 'heavy lifting' of envisioning mental images of the futures. The facilitator and participant co-design four personal futures scenarios exactly 20 years from the present day (for example September 27, 2036). The term co-design describes how a designer and a non-designer would work hand in hand, both as investigators and neither as expert (Sanders, 2008). The futures scenarios are described as expected, unexpected, optimistic and pessimistic. Using ethnographic futures research as inspiration, Textor had his participants describe optimistic, pessimistic and most probable futures (Textor, 1995). However, four scenarios encourage divergent thinking and are useful for creating vision, says futurist Gill Ringland (1998). An easy conversational question to ask participants was "What do you expect the future to be like?" (Bishop, 2007). Asking them the opposite question, "What don't you expect to happen?" was a natural follow up to what they

had just said. The more supportive the facilitator is of the participant in enabling idea generation the more personal the outcome of the high-fidelity prototype.

The first line of questioning is designed to elicit assumptions about the 'worldview' as it would exist in each future. The participant describes images in that worldview that are important to them, without prompting by the facilitator. The goal is to have participants talk about something that they know well and are interested in.

Next the participant is challenged to envision how they would survive and thrive in each of those four futures. The questions are structured so that a person is prompted to envision future activities, places and things that they would interact with. Asking the participant how they survive and thrive in each scenario removes some of the abstraction fogging the worldview level.

It is important to note that for the purpose of simplicity, only the main exercise has been described in this section. There are additional activities that are not directly part of the futures scenario co-design process. These smaller activities are important to enhance the participant's foresight capacity. Enhancing the participant's foresight capacity is overall a key outcome of the technique. These activities are described in detail later. For now we need simply note that they are; drawing the city of the future, creating a timeline and scenario writing.



Image 3: Robin's family sitting around the dinner table

## Phase 2: Generating Rapid Prototypes

Experiential futures use tangible and experiential assets to provoke thought or incite action (Candy and Dunagan, 2016). The co-design creation of the four scenarios is meant to provoke the thoughts. The



creation of tangible and experiential assets is meant to incite the action.

The second half of the work together is to rapid-prototype some of the visceral images seen by the participant in the scenario generating phase. The visceral images are the clearest and emotion invoking visions that come to mind when thinking about the futures. To rapid-prototype is to quickly use whatever materials are at hand to generate a visual or tangible 'sketch' for the purpose of communication (Sanders, 2008). This visceral image often emerges from the discussion in the form of an artifact or a experience. To prototype something is to render a useful element of a concept for investigation. As noted earlier the value in the prototype is the act of making it.



Image 4: Vera rapid prototyping a group around a campfire

In the making of the prototype the participant starts to resolve a problem of futures 'fogginess', to be discussed further below. For the moment it is important to note that this prototyping process is a co-design experience between facilitator and participant. That activity grounds high-level concepts of the futures in an envisioned tactile reality.

### **Phase 3: Generating a High-fidelity Prototype**

The facilitator now puts on a designer hat. It is important to note that for the purpose of this research project the facilitator and the designer are the same person. That is not a requirement for a successful run of the technique. If the recounting in the interviews is

captured and organized in a format that can be handed over to a designer that generated content will as the source of inspiration for the final prototype.

For the final interaction between facilitator and participant, the designer creates a high-fidelity prototype of a personalized artifact or experience. The designer analyzes the content of the scenarios and other personal information provided by the participant. The designer is noting values, hopes, fears and dreams articulated by the participant. The facilitator is looking for significant images, and not relying exclusively on the input from the low-fidelity prototype created in the workshop session. With a bit of inspiration, perspiration and robust imagining, another visceral image forms, this one is created in the mind of the designer. This new visceral image is manifested for the participant in the form of a high-fidelity prototype and given to the participant directly. (See Section 7 for examples.) At this meeting there is an opportunity for follow up questions about the process and any potential preferred futures envisioning.

## 1.08 Conclusion

The research challenge is for making the futures present for individuals. The challenge is answered with a personal experiential futures technique so named Making the Futures Present. The technique is designed to transform a participant's blurry, unknown, menacing vision of the future into a tangible, manageable artifact or experience in the present. The proposed technique is a multi-phased interview cycle in which a facilitator and participant co-design four personal futures scenarios. Details of those futures become more real in the prototyping process. A final high-fidelity prototype is designed to make the personal futures present in their most provocative form.

The next section locates this technique in the development of foresight practice and makes some comparisons to narrative therapies. It argues that personal futures is an emerging area of research and needs to be explored further.

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## 2.0 Locating Making the Futures Present in Time

### 2.01 A Futures History Lesson

Foresight techniques tended to be assisted by quantitative data and evidence-based decision-making alone. There has been a recent crucial paradigm shift in the employment of statistically-based methods to incorporate a more social vision (Magruk, 2011). Wilber, Slaughter and Hayward among others introduced an awareness that a liveable future must incorporate other 'ways of knowing' and domains of interest, be they physical, mental, or spiritual.

Research in the 1970s by Ken Wilber suggests that we can 'map everything' we know. There was a call for a new society that with an evolved consciousness that integrated that which what could quantified with what could not be. Twenty years later, Slaughter championed the benefit of a 'congruence of insight' in futures practices (Slaughter, 2004).

Less than ten years after that, Hayward added his observation that 'At its essence, the development of foresight is an individual journey.' (Hayward, 2005 p.292).

### **Integral Futures**

Wilber's "Integral Theory on a four-quadrant framework" identifies what he considers a large gap in our collective approach to challenges we have now and on into our futures. In the 1970s he created a four-quadrant model, a 'map of everything' that gives equal attention to interior/exterior and individual/collective phenomena (Wilber, 1979). The 'everything' that he refers to includes an attempt to synthesize all knowledge and all experiences. This attempt synthesizes unproven and eastern religious traditions with western psychology, and all that which can be tested in a laboratory. His ideas help us to embrace and respect the contributions of many different disciplines.

We cannot build tomorrow on the bruises of yesterday... This means a new form of society will have to evolve that integrates consciousness, culture and nature, and thus finds room for art, morals, and science—for personal values, the collective wisdom, and for technical knowledge (Wilber, 1994, p. 336).

In other words, quantitative techniques must be synthesized with 'other ways of knowing' to better society.

### **A Congruence of Insight**

Slaughter and other foresight scholars agree that using 'outer views' alone is insufficient to respond to the real challenges of the world and the part that we all play in it (Slaughter, 1998; Magruk, 2011; Popper, 2008; Voros, 2008; Hayward, 2005). Slaughter writes that "for many years, there has been a near-exclusive emphasis on understanding the external world 'out there'. (Slaughter, 1998 p.77). 'Out there' refers to the visible environment, while 'in here' are described as an individual's belief, motivations and values. Slaughter continues, 'as time

has gone by, so it has become clear that our ability to understand the world 'out there' crucially depends on an underlying world of reference that is 'in here'. Understanding the near-future environment calls not for one or the other but for a combination of 'inner' and 'outer' views that, for example, give as much credence to intuition and judgement as to calculation and modelling." (Slaughter, 1998 p.77)

### **An individual journey**

Hayward describes this phenomenon, traces its history, amplifies what Slaughter says, and makes some suggestions. Now we see evidence in futures studies of a growing interest in applying foresight theories at the personal level. Hayward makes a call for this in his 2005 book *From Individual to Social Foresight*, suggesting that to grasp the implications of the complex future the internal self is the starting place of futures creation.

### **Conclusion**

There is a call for futurists to address foresight at the individual level. Andrzej Magruk, who has been mapping foresight methods, says that there has been a recent crucial paradigm shift in the employment of statistically-based methods to incorporate a more social vision (Magruk, 2011). The work of Wilber, Slaughter and Hayward among others brought the awareness that a liveable future for all of us must incorporate other 'ways of knowing' and domains of interest, be they physical, mental, or spiritual.

## 2.02 Personal Foresight Frameworks and Methodologies

This section covers various reasons to support growth in the area of personal futures. There are also challenges in spreading this technique, too.

The history of personal futures is quite recent (Wheelwright, 2005; Charlesworth, 2010).

Futurist Verne Wheelwright, the preeminent practitioner and scholar in personal futures has compiled a list of quotes from foresight specialists in support of the argument that individuals will benefit from a futures approach to discover and create choice, personal identity and potential (Wheelwright, 2005).

There will be challenges in making personal futures accessible to all. First, foresight methods may only continue to be used by business, government and other organizations because only they can afford the resources to effectively study and plan for the future. Perhaps there is no substantive marketplace for personal futuring if the process is too complex to generate or expensive for the participant. Secondly, futurist Sohail Inayatullah surveyed 108 futurists and found they shared the following assumption: "Futurists generally see their role as liberating the future in each person, and creating enhanced public ownership of the future" (Inayatullah, 2001). Maybe the generation of personal foresight methods have been underexplored because they are sitting in a blind spot behind participatory practices that focus on public ownership.

Wheelwright writes in his doctoral dissertation, *Personal Futures: Foresight & Futures Studies for Individuals* (2005) that he found a 'virtual absence of literature relating to personal futures or personal futures methods' (p.13). He posits the following possible reasons that personal futures methods are apparently not being used by individuals.

- There is no interest in personal futures
- Futures methods are widely used by individuals, it is just not apparent
- People are not aware of futures methods

- Futures methods are too difficult for individuals
- The futuring process is too complex to attract individuals (Wheelwright, 2005, p.14)

There still may be other reasons that personal futures approaches are hard to find.

Eleven years later it appears that there has been little forward activity in this area. However, perhaps there are applications of personal futures methods that could be created, shared and adapted. These reasons these applications may emerge are as follows:

- 1) If it is imperative and possible to create new stories about ourselves in these rapidly-changing times, then people may start to experiment with existing futures methods to develop their own for survival to keep up with the speed of change.
- 2) Futurists may decide that they need more ways to share foresight methods with a larger audience and see personal futures as an untapped arena for commercialization, human development, self-indulgence or simply entertainment.
- 3) Design thinking may employ futures methods with a more human-centred approach in trying to address a need for personal strategies that exist in a wider context.

However, looking to therapeutic practices, we find examples of personal narrative creation that help people look into their future considering the broader context.

## 2.03 Comparable Practices in Social Science

The scenario eliciting process in Making the Futures Present has some traits similar to other social science practices. Practices under broad umbrellas such as narrative therapy and life



design also abstract the participant from their current perspective in consideration the broader context of their lives using narratives.

### **Narrative therapy**

Narrative therapy is a term that applies to several different therapeutic practices with a collaborative storytelling approach between therapist and their client. There is a rich development of social science under this the current work, which psychoanalyst Douglas Ingram describes as about: "the reauthoring of lives, the multiplicity of realities, the transformative value of the performance in life of new stories, and the constitutive power of language" (Ingram, 1997). The conversation always seeks to centre people as the experts in their own lives. Therapist Alice Morgan writes about her experience incorporating narrative therapy into her practice, and the advantages of externalizing the one's story. The conversation between the therapist and the client changes from subject focussed "I worry" to objectively calling it something outside of themselves as "The worry." Once the worry has been externalised as "The worry", the process of re- authoring begins. In this way, the practitioner and the person they are working with re-author the narrative and relationship to the problem which can further locate their story in a broader social context (Morgan, 2002). In both narrative therapy and Making the Futures Present, the person who is being interviewed or consulted has a significant role in the shape of the scenarios and finding their own truth. In both techniques the person who is seeking self understanding is asked questions such as "are there topics that you want to talk about?" and if they are finding the conversation useful. Like narrative therapy, Making the Futures Present also assumes that people have the skills and abilities to influence their lives. In both techniques the person is guided to consider how they would change the narrative to suit themselves. Narrative therapists are also always supporting the direction of the person's journey in an interactive and collaborative fashion. For more information about narrative therapy see the works of Michael White and David Epston, who developed it in the 1980s (White and Epston, 1990).

## **Life design**

Life design is a cluster of career intervention techniques that help people to evaluate the changing world of work in considering their employment options. Savickas describes many different instances of the life design paradigm "share the same goal: to prompt meaningful activities that further self-making, identity shaping, and career constructing" (2010, p.13).

Savickas says that the epistemological origins of life design recognize that stable structures and predictable career paths have set people up to expect stability and consistency that is not there anymore (2012). As mentioned before, modern workers do not have the same job stability as generations past. Similar to life design, Making the Futures Present asks the participant to take on a responsibility of surviving and thriving in the world that he or she has envisioned. In doing so, participants tend to reveal comments about their purpose in life. "By holding onto the self in the form of a life story that provides coherence and continuity, they are able to pursue their purpose and projects with integrity and vitality" (Savickas, 2012, p.13). In this way, both life design and Making the Futures Present help someone to co-create a narrative about their future selves to empower them toward a stronger identity.

Practitioners in life design, narrative therapy and Making the Futures Present techniques co-create a conversation in which a person will author his or her personal truths that then helps them to envision themselves in that context in the future. In each case the facilitator, therapist or counsellor helps them to create micro-narratives or 'thin' stories (Morgan, 2002). These descriptions help define the quality of 'what happened' in this story at first. It is the role of the professional consulting them to understand existing expectations and then construct the 'how' it will happen in the future. It is the evolution of rich and thought-provoking work that 'thickens' the narrative and produces a multi-storied narrative. These stories that are both dominant and alternative link together the past and present with the future in a larger social context.

## 2.04 Conclusion

Making the Futures Present can be located in a field of emerging practices that prioritize external constructions of a personal narrative. Looking historically at the emergence of an integral futures approach we see the trajectory of thinking towards using futures for personal narrative creation in multiple personal futures projects. Futures techniques are used with specific time horizons to author multiple scenarios of either the inner or outer worlds. Similarly, a literature review of the social science practices of narrative therapy and life design describe a collaborative practice of exploring and creating multiple internal and external narratives. A richness in combining the strategies for the social science and futures techniques together would deepen the output of the Making the Futures Present technique. The social science practices focus on the qualities of narrative and process, in format and content, to create rich and true personal stories. Foresight uses the strategy of choosing a fixed date for more articulate images of the future. Together an intended output would be richly developed personal narratives that consider external contexts on a fixed horizon.

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## 3.0 Emergence of Personal Futures

Jessica Charlesworth, a speculative designer and creator of personal futures projects wrote, "Increasingly, people are taking advantage of advanced experiential forecasting techniques to take greater control of their personal futures" (2010). A few of these recent experiences are described in the next section. To note, the personal futures projects list is not exhaustive and these select projects are chosen as examples for discussion purposes only. It is out of the scope of this research to create a generalizable definition of personal futures. It is worthwhile to note that all of the projects described were created within the last eleven years. That said, a few observations can be made about each to show how Making the Futures Present might fit in.

### 3.01 Personal Futures

#### **A Collection of Similarities**

The personal futures projects cited here are all designed as a self-reflective mode of research. Each personal futures project addresses personal values, personal roles, personal

hopes and dreams. They are all seemingly designed to introduce futures to 'newbies', those who have no experience applying foresight techniques to any level - personal, societal, organizational, national, or global. They engage the individual's personal foresight capacity and encourage foresight literacy. I propose that all personal futures works would be meant to help someone strategize and be proactive in sustainably achieving their preferred future. Making the Futures Present can be described this way too.

### **Variations between Personal Futures Projects**

The examples below suggest a non-exhaustive variety of different media and different foresight frameworks used in the personal futures designs. Some of the ways they differ from each other opens up opportunity to locate this proposed technique on several spectrums of variability. The variants could be named and described as:

**Futurity:** The employment of different time horizons alters the degree of futurity of each activity. The term futurity is used to described as the quality of future importance (Ackoff, 1970). If someone is deciding something of nominal consequence vs. something that will greatly influence one's life, we say that the greater the impact, the higher the level of futurity. Choosing the type of toothpaste to buy has less futurity than which job offer to take.

**Uncertainty:** Raising uncertainty is a very important aspect of futuring. The creation of singular vs. multiple scenarios, raises a question as to the degree of uncertainty that is created for the participant in the experience.

**Robust narrative:** The effort to create robust scenarios may be a challenge and calls into question to what granular level of detail is necessary to engage foresight capacity.

**Perspective:** The exploration of the 'inner world' vs. 'outer world' balance may shape the systemic implications of a new personal narrative. Addressing systemic implications on a

person's futures echoes the practice of strategic foresight building with futures techniques used with organizations.

**Volume of engagement:** The quantity/ frequency of follow-ups with the participant calls into question the strategic opportunity for actionable insights with this foresight activity.

**Level of responsibility to others:** An engagement with other people calls into question the power of social influence on an individual's preferred future. Making a participant solely responsible for their interpretation of the experience may have a great effect on the sustainability of the learnings.

Given the growing varieties of foresight approaches in combination with possible adaptations of the technique and intended outcome of the experience, there would be an infinite number of techniques that could be created for helping someone to envision a new narrative for their future selves. My hypothesis is that the collection of inspired approaches are sufficiently described here to make a prototype of Making the Futures Present a worthwhile exploration.

The format of interactive narrative is one lens in which to sort this wide spectrum of projects. There are basic qualities underpinning of an interactive narrative. Some of these include 1) multiple levels of interactivity 2) nonlinearity 3) multi-platform and 4) the relationship between the creator to the audience. It is in this way that the projects are classified in the next section.

### 3.02 Examples of Personal Futures Projects

**Workbooks:** *Personal Futures Workbook* and *What the Foresight?*

There are few attempts at applying futures thinking for envisioning personally preferred futures. Verne Wheelwright (2006), and Alida Draudt and Julia Rose West (2016) are futurists who adapted foresight methods to help people take some agency over their long-term future. Two workbooks *Personal Futures Workbook* (Wheelwright, 2006) and *What the Foresight* (Draudt and West, 2016) transform the essence of multiple established foresight methods into workable formats for individual scenario generation. The activities are intended to help readers to speculate and anticipate what may come to pass in their life. In both cases they focus on the 'inner world' dimensions of personal futures.

### ***FutureTense: a digital concept for a future simulation system***

Futurist Jarno M. Koponen wrote his thesis paper entitled "FutureSelf: Emerging digitized life patterns and a personal future simulation system" (2010). The content of his paper describes the creation of a service that aggregates preferred future activities in a person's digital life. This system serves to raise awareness of the implication of tiny actions upon a wider social, cultural, political, economical and ecological context. He uses the term micro-future to describe the short horizon of each scenario measured in days and weeks generated by real events plotted into an individual's calendar.

### **The Futures Association for Therapy and Entertainment Institute and Futures Therapy**

Two related personal futures projects created by speculative designer Jessica

Charlesworth:

The FATE institute, founded in 2021 is a quasi-scientific institute which applies an holistic approach to developing techniques of future self-knowledge. The institute is divided into three therapy groups: Nature, Nurture and Neither. This system of services implements design-led strategies to create new personalized future forecasting methodologies in times of genetic determinism. If we imagine a future in which personal futures services become more widespread, it follows that there may

be more guidance or 'Futures Therapy' needed to help us understand the impact of these potential paths. (Charlesworth, 2007)

This collection of services is set in the futures context. Similar to a design fiction product, it is presented as if they are actually available to an the audience in that future scenario.

### ***The Delphi Party: a workshop***

The Delphi Technique solicits expert opinion from subject matter experts in successive rounds to gather consensus on a certain topic. Adapting this well known forecasting technique, Jessica Charlesworth created a social personal experience called The Delphi Party:

Transplanted into the world of personal futures - in place of industry experts - friends and family members of a loved one are drawn together under the guidance of an experienced facilitator. Using the collective mindset of the "panel of experts", the facilitator encourages them to generate their own subjective and sometimes controversial predictions of possible and preferable variants of the loved one's future life path. This technique illustrates how we can 'use' or interpret our social network to predict how our life might be shaped by those who know us and those we may know in the future. (Charlesworth, 2010)

Interesting of note, the namesake of the technique Delphi, Oracle of Greece, could foresee the future and provide guidance.

### ***Impact: A Foresight Game***

In the fall of 2016, strategic foresight consulting agency Idea Couture launched a serious board game called *Impact* with intention of preparing players for future knowledge work.

The player dons the mantle of a new persona and gets to play that out in successive rounds as unexpected impacts influence their career prospects. The intention is to sharpen their skills of anticipation, judgement and scenario-building, all skills that a futurist would have.



The interactive nature of a board game and large number of combinations of futures creates a tool for deep discussions.

### **1-888-Futures**

Created by Situation Lab and Extrapolation Factory in 2016 this project uses the imagination of an individual to create a bespoke future present.

1-888-FUTURES is a service that takes a future dream, vision or problem, renders it tangible as a "future present", and delivers it to a specific individual...It is a small experiment in making such future design more personal and personalised; a true gift, connecting the imagining and creation process to a named individual, an audience of one (Candy, 2016).

### **Causing an Effect**

Another project that could be included in this list would be the beautiful and visceral work of futurist designer Kelly Kornet. The abstract of her dissertation describes individual foresight as an inspiration.

Causing an Effect is a futures exhibition and research project that draws from individual foresight, design research, and design fiction to build understanding for activists working in future-minded ways. Seeking to emphasize the work of Canadian and American activists, this project highlights and celebrates these bold citizens in their ability to unearth complex environmental problems that threaten the health and wellbeing of their community. The research aims to generate images of the future, give voice and build empathy for activists, and create a space for strategic conversation around the future of North American industrial communities. (Kornet, 2015)

## **3.03 Conclusion**

The format of personal futures projects tends to be interactive, educational, provocative and strategy forming. The projects mentioned here tend to prioritize experiential learning and

enhance personal foresight building capacities. Personal futures provoke someone to analyse their assumptions about how the future will unfold in some form of artifact, experience or environment for reflection or discussion on futures concepts. The next section describes Making the Futures Present and how it differs from these existing projects.

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## 4.0 The Design of Making the Futures Present

Making the Futures Present shares certain attributes with the previously mentioned personal futures projects: interactive, educational, provocative and strategy forming. However it differs in some significant ways as well, explored below. This project is appearing to be unique from the examples above and in broader searches in the combination of a one-to-one workshop format of personal futures narrative authoring, prototyping processes and specific theoretical underpinnings. We will read more about those in this section. We will also read about other characteristics that separate this project from the ones mentioned in Section 3.

The methods used in this technique are inspired by two futures approaches (ethnographic futures research and experiential futures) that put the participant's hopes, dreams, fears and values at the centre of the conversation. The project can be described as a constructivist approach to reflective scenario building. The participant shares a mental model of the world in the future from their own perspective. The technique prioritizes the interpretation and knowledge of the participant in the creation of the scenarios. Derived in an ethnographic

futures research tradition, the content of the interviews is generated by harvesting perceived future images. Using this approach, the technique then must rely on the facilitator's ability to manage an idea generating conversation and prototyping exercises.

Participants are involved at the early stages of the scenario design. Using a co-design method to make prototypes in the development of the scenario draws out the creativity of both designer and participant in the development of the artifact or experience (Sanders, 2008). In both ethnographic futures research and narrative therapy co-design methods there is no judgement on the part of the interviewer. The participant is expected to judge for himself or herself the what to contribute to the conversation. What follows are descriptions of the approaches that most inform the design of the technique; ethnographic futures research, experiential futures and the prototyping process.

## 4.01 Ethnographic Futures Research

Ethnographic futures research was originally designed by Textor to gather multiple voices to make a coherent view regarding the future of a group or culture. Thoughts, feelings, concerns and hopes about the future of that culture emerge through multiple "expert interviews". The method described in his *Handbook for Ethnographic Futures Research* (1980) has each participant judge what is important, recounting and reflecting on their own perspectives about the unknown futures. In a semi-structured interview the researcher asks them to describe optimistic and pessimistic futures. A third scenario is discussed, the most probable future scenario, which is informed by what emerged from the previous two futures. To get the conversation going the ethnographic futures researcher asks the participant to imagine 100 different futures on a spectrum; 0 is hell, and 100 is utopia. Envisioning two scenarios on this spectrum at 10 and 90, they represent extremes that are not completely unrealistic. He asks both 'what' and 'how' questions to elicit scenarios of a static image and

of the process towards that future. In both techniques the researcher/ facilitator uses deep listening skills to elicit these personal judgements about the futures beyond the horizon. The more engaged the facilitator/research is listening, the more encouraged the storyteller is to create a richer story (McLean, 2007). The facilitator as a guide only serves in reminding, clarifying and re-explaining, but not imposing new ideas.

The ethnographic futures research interview style is useful in prospection activities of Making the Futures Present for generating the output in which a personal experiential futures artifact or experience is designed.

## 4.02 Experiential Futures

Experiential futures could involve any form of creative expression that fits into a diegetic environment. Diegetic means 'of the world' and refers to the connection of all the elements in the story being natural to one another. Futurists with designers or artists create these expressive formats like role playing, design fiction artifacts, film, and audio (Candy, 2010), and so on, to evoke a visceral response from futures scenarios. This visceral response provokes uncertainty in the audience to generate new ideas.

Experiential futures enhance the quality of reflection and debate about the futures they reference. The objective of experiential futures is to not 'break the fourth wall', to borrow a phrase from the theatre. It is the intermediary product in direct communication with the audience that appeals to human senses in a way that traditional foresight outputs do not (Candy, 2010, p.191).

The outcomes of experiential futures are to engage the audience in a new format eliciting stronger reactions than written or presented scenarios. Making the Futures Present is inspired by experiential futures because of a:

- Connection to the head — science, logic and reason. A robust scenario could be described as one that employs deep research using qualitative and quantitative methods. By creating robust scenarios the mind can see a narrative that makes sense.
- Connection to the heart — passion. The connection to the heart is engaging a passion with the audience that they can be aspirational about.
- Connection with the senses as inputs to knowing. The senses are engaged by the physical, spatial and tactile representation of the narrative.

Gerontologist H. Whitmore (2001) emphasizes the linkage of material possessions to one's identity. She observes that objects can represent achievements, social relationships, and embodiments of personal goals and feelings. They can be links to lost parts of one's identity. These insights are important supporting arguments for having participants create artifacts and experiences

### **The Three Principles for Experiential Scenarios**

Participants co-designed prototypes as part of the experience during the interview cycle. After the experience a designer creates a personalized high-fidelity prototype guided by these three principles (Candy, 2010).

**Principle 1. Don't break the universe:** The artifact or experience is generated by the scenario. It appears to emerge fully formed from the future. It is of that diegetic world of the scenario, of the same sight, sound, aesthetic without doubts.

In Making the Futures Present each final high-fidelity artifact or experience was made as if real, to fit the the participant's futures. The description of the universe was provided by the

images of the future from the participant. The universe was their own construct; the ideas, values, expressions, real life examples and mental images.

**Principle 2. The tip of the iceberg:** The artifact or experience is a trigger of the imagination; not revealing the whole of the world, but a fragment gesturing towards the rest of the scene, somewhere behind a curtain.

In Making the Futures Present both the low-fidelity prototype made in the session with the participant and the high-fidelity prototype made by the designer are gestures of a bigger environment. This is significant because the futures environments that the participant has created in their mind imbue the prototypes with meaning. The raw materials that they use in the low-fidelity prototype made in the lab (pipe cleaners, rocks, pompoms, ripped paper) are transformed. Documentarian of the film Objectified Gary Hustwit says that every object speaks to who made it (Hustwit, 2009). These objects are now representations of people, human relationships, lifestyles, workplaces and so on and are significant to the participant as the creator of the low-fidelity prototype, or inspiration for the high-fidelity prototype.

**Principle 3. The art of the double take:** "Here the point is that what 'at first appears' soon gives way to a deeper understanding. What seemed ridiculous is later revealed, or rather perceived, as genuinely viable" (Candy, 2010, p. 202)

Participants were surprised by the high-fidelity prototypes. What at first might seem 'icky' as a concept soon became plausible. Three examples are described in Appendix B: Pole Vault Canada, the Democracy iWatch and Curb Appeal. These are high-fidelity prototypes that elicited strong reactions by the participant, but also waves of understanding.

## 4.03 A Human-centred Approach

Over the past six decades, design has changed from an expert-led aesthetic practice to a human-centred approach (Sanders, 2008). Sanders notes that when designers use a process of gathering people together to inform, ideate, and conceptualize activities in the early design phases it is called co-design. She has demonstrated with countless examples across her career that concepts become more clear when they are co-designed with the use of objects (or manipulatives) (Sanders, 2012). If a role of a futurist is to create, anticipate and manage change in how human systems operate, then by contemporary standards, there should be an opportunity to create and use methods with a more human-centred approach.

The use of generative design tools lets one look forward into the possible futures of the people who will be living, working and playing there. The onus is on designers to explore the potential of generative tools, and to bring the languages of co-designing into their practice. Designers will be integral to the creation and exploration of new tools and methods for generative design thinking. Designers in the future will make the tools for non-designers to use to express themselves creatively. (Sanders, 2008 p.12).

The design of this personal experiential futures technique aims to rise to that challenge and employs a prototyping process to involve a participant in the discovery and solution of problems, rather than solely inviting them to document them. The act of prototyping is to quickly learn something that you don't already know. Science fiction writer Bruce Sterling says that prototyping can be a useful tool in the development of a new idea:

Rapid prototyping is a form of brainstorming with materials. It's not simply a faster way to plunge through older methods of production, but a novel way to manage design and production. By previous standards, it looks as if it is profligate, that it "throws a lot away"—but with better data retention, "mistakes" become a source of wealth. Rapid prototyping seen in depth is an "exhaustion of the phase space of the problem"—it isn't reasonable, thrifty or rational, but it has the brutal potency of a chess-playing computer. (Sterling, 2005, p.48).



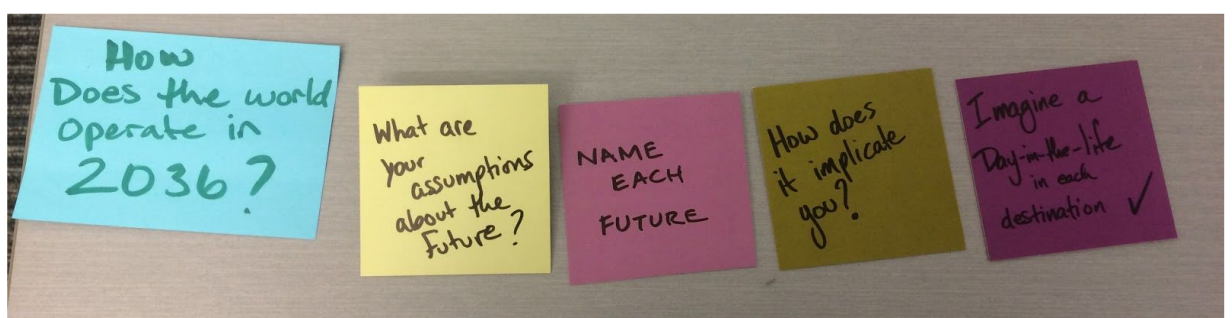
Prototyping is used here for playing with a functional example of something participants can touch, feel and interact within their possible futures.

## 4.04 Characteristics of Making the Futures Present

### 1 Interactive Interviews

The format of Making the Futures Present is a highly interactive experience — in a classic meaning of the word interactive — acting one upon or with the other. The highly engaging semi-structured interview format has to be adaptive to the participant to accommodate their personality, values and learning style. These variables necessitate having multiple conversation prompts ready to use. These imagination tools enable the participants to express themselves creatively with drawing, writing and with three-dimensional materials. Providing a variety of things to think with generates more ideas and thereby more futures images.

Image 5. The agenda for the first and second interview



### 2 Deep Listening

Human-centred design approaches use deep listening skills. Deep listening skills means you listen and reflect back. The term comes from telling autobiographical stories to an engaged listener. Studies by psychologist Monisha Pasupathi and colleagues show that

listeners influence storytelling and by extension autobiographical reasoning (Pasupathi, 2007). A participant must have the time and comfort level to speak freely.

### **3 Language**

Working with participants in the language that they know is more important than trying to teach them new a foresight language. For example, Participants Hana and Tom both did not understand the word 'visceral' when they were asked to prototype a visceral image from the futures that they had just described. It appeared better to ask for another way of describing images that could be turned into a prototype; for example "Please describe a poignant, strong or vibrant image". Follow-up questions were always used to encourage expansion of ideas, especially when they needed encouragement to think about alternative futures to the one that they expect to happen.

### **4 Systems Thinking**

Making the Futures Present prioritizes an environmental scan of 'outer worldview' before looking at 'inner worldview.' An environmental scan is practice that comes from strategic planning; to systematically survey the landscape for external trends and issues (Aguilar, 1967). Looking at 'outer' worldviews before inner domains generates more variables in the expected, optimistic, pessimistic, and unexpected images. It is rare to take the opportunity to explore the impacts of external forces at the systems level on our own future.

Looking forward one may be able to predict with low, medium or high probability, that external forces may impact them. You can make assumptions but you will not know with any certainty when a systems level change will take effect or how it will implicate you. For example:

- The price you pay for rent or homeownership will be affected in accordance with municipal bylaws or the housing market

- As you age your longevity will be affected by changes in the healthcare system supporting the doctors and nurses who treat you
- The type and quality of food that you eat is connected to price of energy, supply chains and tariffs
- The type of work that you do is continually affected by technologies in your industry
- The purity of the air that you breathe is affected by your neighbours' rights, be it the legalization of marijuana cigarettes, a new diesel train track nearby, or a coal fire plant across the border

It is interesting to note that in Wheelwright's *Personal Futures Workbook* he makes a conscious choice to isolate personal futures from other contexts; "only futures that involve that individual" (Wheelwright, 2006). He creates a firm line about not using the influence of external factors that are beyond our control. Taking a systems view, Making the Futures Present is markedly different from his approach. This proposed technique deliberately resembles the kind of engagement with wider systems that is characteristic of most (non-personal) futures research, while aiming to bring the potential consequences and implications of those big-picture alternatives into a relatable, personal register.

## 5 Prototypes

The prototyping process is important to this personal experiential futures technique and is used in both prospection activities and final outputs. These prospection activities are part of a constructive process consisting of the outer view and inner view explorations. The creative processes for the low-fidelity and high-fidelity prototypes are different from each other, whereas the artifacts and experiences created are differently valued. The usage of materials in low-fidelity prototyping operate at the level of symbols. People have trouble imagining any change in their values, so it was very helpful to create different low-fidelity artifacts and experiences with the participant to represent different futures so that they could see themselves in them with a bit more clarity. Each object moved in space is a stand-in for something more significant. The final output of a high-fidelity prototype speak to the

participants in the language of mythology. When the object is presented to the participant it conjures up a future that should be considered.

### **Prototypes Created in the Prospection Activities**

The low-fidelity prototyping process, in collaboration with the facilitator, provides input for the participant's comprehension of multiple futures. As they co-design one low-fidelity prototype after another they make comparisons between their participants in each future. The merit of this activity is the opportunity to reflect, analyze and clarify distant futures images for themselves. The creation of the low-fidelity prototypes provide a unique opportunity for the participant to explore their inner worldview with a lot of depth.

### **Prototypes in the Final Output**

The presentation of the high-fidelity prototype to the participant is meant to crystalize one particular facet of one of the multiple futures. The very existence of this artifact must be considered. This quote from film director Carl Dreyer sums up what the high-fidelity prototype is supposed to do for the participant.

Imagine that we are sitting in a very ordinary room. Suddenly we are told that there is a corpse behind the door. Instantly, the room we are sitting in is completely altered. Everything in it has taken on another look. The light, the atmosphere have changed, though they are physically the same. This is because we have changed and the objects are as we conceive them. This is the effect I wanted to produce in *Vampyr*. (Dreyer, 1932).

The final high-fidelity prototype would surprise the participants. It is significant to note that participant's reactions were often strong, from favourable to distaste. It is possible to believe that the personalization, presentations and investment that they put into the process informed their reactions.

These five characteristics together — interviews, deep listening, language, systems and prototyping — make Making the Present Futures a different technique to the personal futures projects presented in this paper.

#### 4.05 Envisioning a Preferred Future in Other Disciplines

In an effort to orient this personal futures technique in a larger context it is worth comparing other domains that take the long view for personal planning. There is a significant difference in the creation of *planning for oneself* vs. *envisioning alternative futures* for oneself, within a complex system on a distant horizon to assist planning. Looking at disciplines, such as personal finance, life coaching, preventative health care, insurance, they are creating a foundation for one's preferred future using models and goal-setting to evaluate decisions of high futurity. The purpose of this grouping is to put all of them one side of a spectrum of problem solving, and to locate personal experiential futures on the other side for the purpose of problem framing. Characteristics of this group are such that the tools, instruments, theories, methods, techniques, products, etc. are, by and large, singularly supportive of the creation of a plan for an individual's preferred future outcome (singular). These disciplines are separated from futures by the origin of approach, in the achievement of a clear stated goal, and not the more abstract visioning exercise of futures techniques.

#### 4.06 Conclusion

Making the Futures Present is a technique that is built on the interview structure of ethnographic research. It can be classified as experiential futures because of the three principles described here. This technique uses a human-centered design approach. The unique characteristics of this technique include interviews, deep listening, language,

systems thinking and prototyping. It is these foundations and these characteristics that set the technique apart from established disciplines. The next section deals with reasons why personal futures practices, including this technique, are important now.

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## 5.0 The Importance of Making the Futures Present

People now live in a context of global uncertainty. This situation impacts us all and will continue to challenge individuals in many ways that are yet to be seen. The uncertain future impacts us as individuals and at the social level now and in the future. The first half of this section describes the importance of a personal experiential futures technique for individuals. While the technique in this formation is not going to appeal or be accessible to everybody, looking into the future with some structure is a useful exercise. (See Section 8.05 for a discussion of for whom this technique would be a challenge.) The second half of this section describes the importance to society for individuals developing their preferred futures. Futurist Robert Jungk designed his future workshops in a democratic style because in his words he believed that, "The future belongs to everybody" (Jungk and Müllert, 1987). and complex issues need leaders now.

## 5.01 The Importance of Personal Futures for Individuals

This personal futures technique was designed to help people envision their preferred futures whether they are young, middle aged or seniors. Specifically, Making the Futures Present could help some young people who want to know their purpose in life. This technique might also help people who are in their midlife consider who want to fulfill their dreams and plan for a more satisfying retirement. This technique may help older people to envision how they will participate in society in their later years. People may wonder if they are on the right path at any age.

People of any age who are questioning their happiness may turn to those who are larger than life for guidance; spiritual leaders, contemporary mythologists or popular heroes of our time. One of the world's most famous spiritual teachers Eckhart Tolle, author of *The Power of Now: A Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment* says, "realize deeply that the present moment is all you have. Make the NOW the primary focus of your life" (Tolle, 1999). People may turn to the writings of Joseph Campbell, American mythologist, writer and lecturer. Best known for his work in comparative mythology and comparative religion says, "We must let go of the life we have planned, so as to accept the one that is waiting for us" (Campbell, 1949).

Entrepreneur and founder of Apple, Steve Jobs says:

You can't connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backwards. So you have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future. You have to trust in something - your gut, destiny, life, karma, whatever. This approach has never let me down, and it has made all the difference in my life (Jobs, 2005).

Is the Tolle approach "take your time, live in the moment" mindset a prudent approach? Is the Campbell "just wait and your calling in life will come to you" philosophy more advantageous? I don't believe that these fatalistic life-planning philosophies are our best strategies at this time; they may be seen as shortsighted and individualistic.



There is a pleading from the futurist community to reevaluate life strategies. Slaughter challenges us "the future' is not merely an 'empty space' toward which one can remain passive" (Slaughter, 2004, p. 209). In other words, one cannot sit back and let the future happen. One must lean in and take care of one's future self. It appears that future self needs protection from the current self, and this paper proposes a proactive approach to taking care of one's future self.

Slaughter says that 'short-term thinking is endemic' (Slaughter, 1996, p.83). It's our natural backup. We have two options, either we go into the future blindly or we proactively and creatively think about the future. Philosopher Derek Parfit says that we might be neglecting our future selves because of some 'failure of belief or imagination' (Parfit, 1984). Slaughter offers another reason:

It is not just that we don't want to know about the future, it is that thinking about it is a challenge in and of itself. At one level people don't want to know about tomorrow; today is quite hard enough (Slaughter, 1996, p.83).

Busy people cannot afford to think deeply about every choice they have to make. Yet we can employ a process in which we have 'the capacity to think ahead, to consider alternatives, to model different options and to choose between them' (Slaughter, 1994). People use foresight naturally for mental and physical survival, but we can benefit from a structured re-approach to enhance our foresight capacity for the long-view.

## 5.02 Three Myths and One Truism

Why is it that we seem to find it so challenging to look to the long-term future? Hayward says that a concerted look into the future will not guarantee happiness (Hayward, 2005). People do not want to be uncomfortable even for a moment.

It should not surprise anyone that individuals do not consciously seek doubt and discomfort, however temporary. There can be no guarantees that the individual will be 'happier' for having undertaken the journey, as life itself can offer no guarantees. (Hayward, 2005, p.292)

For the most part, the long-view future looks menacing in the way it is portrayed in pop culture, and the news (Slaughter, 2004). As humans, we are also not naturally equipped to do it. Looking at the future is also psychologically hard to do as expressed in the lab research for this paper. Even though we all have a foresight capacity we are not prepared to look at the long-view. Too few people are properly thinking about how to overcome that challenge (Slaughter, 1996). This paper proposes three myths and one truism about the future that should be regarded.

### **One Truism: The Present is Easy**

Textor points out that as humans, we hold a tempocentric point of view. Textor uses the term tempocentric to describe the human desire for a continuation of the familiar and preference for the constraints of the present, no matter how irrational (Textor, 2003). What we think we know in the present is more important than the past or the future. Futurist Riel Miller says that we inappropriately live in the wrong timeframe, the short term; days, weeks, months (Miller, 2007). "We secure psychological comfort by assuming, however irrationally, that the familiar context, the accustomed parameters, of the present will continue as they have been or now are." (Textor, 2003, p.524). Slaughter would call this action a 'discounting of the future', as if the future is too remote to be worth anything and therefore can be ignored. (Slaughter, 1998, p.189)

### **Myth 1: The Future is Menacing**

There is an abundance of pessimistic dystopian stories about the future in pop culture and commercial pursuits (Slaughter, 1996). In the individual realm we are convinced that we are in personal danger and invest in overprotective measures to preserve ourselves. From cosmetics to healthcare spending, to the protection of property, we are often obsessively and consumingly concerned that we will lose it all. Noticing the experience of other people's life transitions, we can be inspired by their success or feel uncomfortable about their unfortunate circumstances. One's worldview of the future can be terrifying. Psychologist Timothy Wilson says that we tend to make assumptions about how we would feel if a certain life changing event would come to pass (Wilson, 2000). However, his studies show that our outlook on life reverts back in as little as three months after the event. This is not what we would expect of ourselves.

There are too many fiction and nonfiction stories of individual and societal destruction to list in this paper. There are examples in literature, such as Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) and George Orwell's *1984* (1948), the film *Blade Runner* (1982) and television series *Black Mirror* (Brooker, 2011). Outside of the personal realm alarms are going off, too. The destruction of some societies is happening before our eyes in news reports from around the world. As a result, whole populations of young people grow up fearing the future and deny or avoid its existence because they are ill-equipped or disempowered (Slaughter, 1996). The foreboding future seems to be a menace that tends to be ignored (or purposefully disassociated with) because it is too challenging.

### **Myth 2: The Future is Blurry**

Humans can envision their future, but it may be with some considerable difficulty. We have the ability to, but are not wired to, perceive time that is very far away without concepts, methods and applications to augment these capacities. (Slaughter, 1996). Recent

psychology research, suggesting a basis for our need to explore the experiential register in futures work, bears this out (Candy 2010). For example, construal level theory (CLT) is a theory in social psychology that describes the relation between psychological distance and the extent to which people's thinking (e.g., about objects and events) is abstract or concrete.

Construal level theory proposes that temporal distance changes people's responses to future events by changing the way people mentally represent those events. The greater the temporal distance, the more likely are events to be represented in terms of a few abstract features that convey the perceived essence of the events (high-level construals) rather than in terms of more concrete and incidental details of the events (low-level construals) (Trope and Liberman, 2003, p.403).

What Trope and Liberman say, in simpler words, is that the farther into the future the object or event is, the more abstracted or blurry it will be.

### **Myth 3: The future is unknowable**

This lack of knowledge about the future leads to skepticism about how the future may turn out in too many people (Slaughter, 1996, p.83). Professional practices dedicated to personal foresight are an under-supported research area. Slaughter says that overall 'links between values, paradigms, ways of knowing and the future are widely overlooked' (Slaughter, 1998, p.148). People don't often have scenarios to analyze because educational institutions are not teaching futures studies to their students. According to the Accelerating Studies Foundation, there are only about two dozen universities with full-time foresight studies worldwide (2017), whereas the number of higher education institutions with history programs are innumerable.

Image 6: Hana, "I will live by the water, but I'm not sure which body of water"



Despite the description of the future as menacing, blurry and unknowable we must face it. In asking what one's preferred future is, we are facing our values, hopes, dreams and fears. It is easier not to confront these things.

### 5.03 The Importance of Personal Futures in Society

This section of the paper talks about why the attempt to create any personal futures technique is important for society.

#### **Personal Foresight Capacity can Lead to Purpose in Life**

As a society we need good leaders with well developed foresight capacities for our uncertain futures. For example, Canadian environmentalist David Suzuki, CBC's longtime host of the TV show *The Nature of Things* (1979- ongoing), is one such leader. He has worked for decades in the public eye identifying 'canaries in the coal mine'. He leads a team of researchers who help him to shine a spotlight on troubled communities and natural wonders in peril. He has an incredibly well developed foresight capacity and has been sharing his visions of the future as a public figure since he was a young student in university

(Gordon and Suzuki, 1991). An outcome of any personal futures technique could be an enhanced foresight capacity such as his.

### **Personal Foresight Capacity can Protect Others**

Hayward says an enhanced foresight capacity for one person may help all of us for the future. I take the view that any personal futures activity is an imperative learning activity. Too many people believe that they cannot impact the future because they are too insignificant to hurt us at all. Yet, we often see the evidence that we are all connected on large and small scales. For instance, consider the effect that a small kitchen fire in a condo that has in triggering the sprinklers on soaking every home in the building. If one person's activities in their own home ripple out and cause thousands in damages to neighbours that may have never even met, how does that scale up in larger communities? This small scale example is used to illustrate a complex idea as a simple unit of measure. On a grander scale, Canadian historian Olivia Dickason illustrates that one event between the First Nations and Canadian government triggers a chain reaction of events that last generations (Dickason, 2002). When one has a greater foresight capacity they may proactively make decisions that could have a positive outcome or decrease unintended consequences.

### **Operating without Foresight**

The story that one person tells about himself or herself attracts others of like minds. Consider reversing the meaning of Margaret Mead's famous quote, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has" and replace thoughtful with thoughtless, committed with disconnected, and change with damage. "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtless, disconnected citizens can damage the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." The point to emphasize in that quote is the import of the small group of citizens. Just a few people can

have a massive impact on the lives of others and the control we have over our present and future challenges. One does not have to look far for leaders who are climate change deniers or capitalists who are only out for themselves. The complexity of these systemic challenges affect us on that personal level when they begin making choices based on their own perspective that ripple out into society and impact generations down the road.

### **Complex Issues need Leaders**

We do not know what will be happening to the world in the future for certain. As humans we live in the greater context of external uncertainties. The uncertainties that affect humankind include the economic impacts of peak oil, impacts of climate change, and the perils of natural resource depletion. Populations of some countries are in decline and people are living longer, while in other countries populations are exploding and the median age is getting younger. Climate change has been recognized as a global issue and this may have a mass effect on global immigration. As technology and social values shift, countless jobs that did not exist ten years ago are emerging and many other jobs are disappearing just as fast. In some places unemployment is soaring, making a current generation of young people who don't have appropriate education appear and feel depressed and listless.

The premise of this research is the fact that we do not know what will happen to us in the broader context of this uncertain future. As individuals we muster the strength to think we have the capabilities and imagination to do something about it. We perceive that by proactively thinking about the future, we are more likely to be able to anticipate possible futures and have a degree of agency over them.

## 5.04 Conclusion

I argue that personal futures projects could play a significant role in helping people look into the future with some structure. It is an important activity because we need a proactive approach to taking care of one's future self, and others. The paper offers up some ideas as to why 'short-term thinking is endemic': the future is blurry, menacing and unknowable. In addition to that, people are tempocentric thinkers who do not protect their future selves. There are problems with that inherent way of thinking that not only affect individuals, they also affect society as a whole

Creating more personal futures projects are also important to the well being for society. As an example the next section details the research as carried out. It also introduces lessons learned from the original design of the technique and the outcomes of time in a lab setting with multiple participants.



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## 6.0 Making the Futures Present Technique

A first prototype of Making the Futures Present came to life in September, 2016. Here we examine how the interviews went and what was learned. Significant activities are listed below with adjoining insights from the field research or literature review. Significant quotes from participants about the process were recorded during all three phases of the interview cycle. Participants also granted permission for quotes from email exchanges to be included.

### 6.01 The Research Method

This paper describes a proof of concept for this technique that was prototyped in nine iterations over the course of six weeks in the fall of 2016. The purpose of the field research was to design a prototype for this technique. The goal was to see if a simplified version the technique could be designed in such a way as to get some usable data for this first attempt. The findings in this document are not meant to be generalizable for society at large. The

intention of iterating the experience for other groups after this primary iteration of the method may yet still be explored.

## **Recruitment**

A call seeking four to six participants was put out on September 1st, 2016 by email and with posters at the Ontario College of Art and Design University (OCAD U) Strategic Foresight and Innovation program, and Centre for Social Innovation (CSI) groups. There were approximately 30 respondents and nine participants were chosen for the study to get a broader range of participants. There were 26 subsequent interviews within a six week timeframe. As this was the first effort with this new technique the sample size was constrained to fit the scope of a Master's degree research project. In one case a follow up interview was not possible due to lack of availability.

The OCAD U and CSI communities were sought out primary because these groups are known for a mindset of openness and a higher potential for self-selection to experimental ideas. The participants were from a variety of cultural backgrounds and life stages from the ages of 23-63. They all live in Toronto and frequent the downtown area for work. There was no gender identification boundary or particular demographic characteristics required. There was no restriction for people outside of these communities to participate however there was little deviation from the demographic that did participate. As a result of the targeted recruitment effort, all participants could be described as educated, urban, open-minded and had the luxury of time and resources to commit to three interviews. It was necessary that the participants were all self-selected. Participation was entirely voluntary and without pressure. The potential implications of the constrained variety of participants on the outcome of the findings are covered in Section 9. Descriptions of the participants can be found in Appendix C.

Pseudonyms are used in reports arising from the research that help paint the picture of a variety of life stages and occupations that each participant had. There was care in the selection to get a variety of males and females. More interviews might reveal deeper insights about the impact of a 20-year horizon, or other time spans, on different age groups. For the sake of research, the proposed technique was consistent in this time frame. The paper describes a proposed participant journey in the next section.

## 6.011 Lab Research

Using an interpretive research method affects the findings and how they were analyzed. For the purpose of developing a complex technique it was preferable to use this type of research to provide greater detail and depth than a standard survey. Interviews were tailored to the experience with the interviewee and what they said during those interviews. This approach was valuable because little is known about personal futures and how an experience such as this would influence someone's future self. It was difficult to develop testable hypotheses within the scope of this Master Research Project and more information-gathering is required in several areas. I make a few suggestions in Sections 8 and 9.

The primary research question was "How might experiential futures be used to help someone begin to create their own preferred future?" and all research efforts were designed in an attempt to answer this question. Throughout a three part interview cycle participants were asked questions in a semi-structured interview to capture qualitative data in the form of quotes and low-fidelity prototypes. Information was captured in the form of written notes, generated into coherent narratives and shared with the participants for feedback and analysis to aid in the assessment of this technique. In addition to capturing

quotes, participatory action research methods were used in the form of the co-design of prototypes. This activity attempted to answer the sub-research question: "How might the fabrication of prototypes of artifacts and experiences help a participant to envision multiple futures?" More detail on this appears below.

The final stage of the research in the interview cycle was a presentation of a personalized high-fidelity prototype to the participant. Follow up questions about the entire experience were asked in a semi-structured interview:

- What is the value in this experience? What did you take away from it?
- Did you change aspects of your preferred future?
- What thoughts have you had since the interviews?
- Did you have a preferred futures strategy before the interviews?
- What brought you into the interviews? What were your expectations? Were they met?
- Did we talk about the things that are relevant to you?
- Have you seen anything like this technique before?
- Did envisioning multiple futures impact the way that you think about the future?
- What worked for you? What exercise was easy or hard?
- Would you have preferred more or less time with any of the activities?
- What did the prototyping process do for you?
- What did you learn about yourself?
- What was the strongest image that you had in our discussions, and how did it make you react?
- Will you take on any new behaviors as a result?

Significant comments from each of the final interviews that would enhance or change the technique are distilled in Appendix D.

## 6.02 Approval for the Research

This project was approved on August 31, 2016 by the Research Ethics Board (REB). As part of the recruitment process potential participants saw a full description of the interview and workshop process with an explanation of desired outcomes. The two consent forms that were signed by the participants before and after the interviews are available in Appendix E.

### **Ethics Issues and Measures Taken**

It was made clear to the REB that participants were pre-notified that this research asks of them to engage in a zone that stretches their thinking and may incur both optimistic and potentially uncomfortable feelings.

## 6.03 The Participant's Journey

At the outset of the first interview participants were welcomed into the lab and given a quick tour of the space. There were posters on the wall to set the stage. One poster had the rules of the space:

### **1. Talking is low risk**

This rule is in place to encourage participants to explore different ideas as much as possible. The act of talking and imagining the futures is in and of itself a design prototype. The participant can 'kick the tires' so to speak of a potential future, instead of the more risky business of it actually coming to pass.

## 2. You will survive and thrive in each future

This rule enables conversation, instead of disables it. No one wants to think about accidents happening to them that reduce their capacity to live the same life as they have now. Wilson and Gilbert share with us the insight that people overestimate how they will react to negative consequences and how long it will take them to get over them (Wilson and Gilbert, 2005). By keeping the conversation about surviving and thriving in the future, it seems to activate a sense of empowerment. The low-fidelity prototypes are solutions focussed. Claudette, who will be 77 in 2036, created a personal megaphone to use with staff working in the healthcare system.

## 3. There are No Facts about the Future

This philosophy is credited to philosopher and futurist Robert Brumbaugh (1966). The future is full of possibilities, predictions and potential choices. Proclamations made in the present can be evaluated with probabilities but do not need to be weighted in this way during the idea generation phase.

The lab was transformed into a supportive environment to enhance playfulness and imagination. More posters were travel agency themed, each indicated a different future destination. (See images 8-11) An illustration of the Experiential Futures Ladder (explained below) on the wall was used to describe what each activity in the sessions would do.

Image 7. The Situation Lab where all interviews were held



Image 8. Expected Futures poster

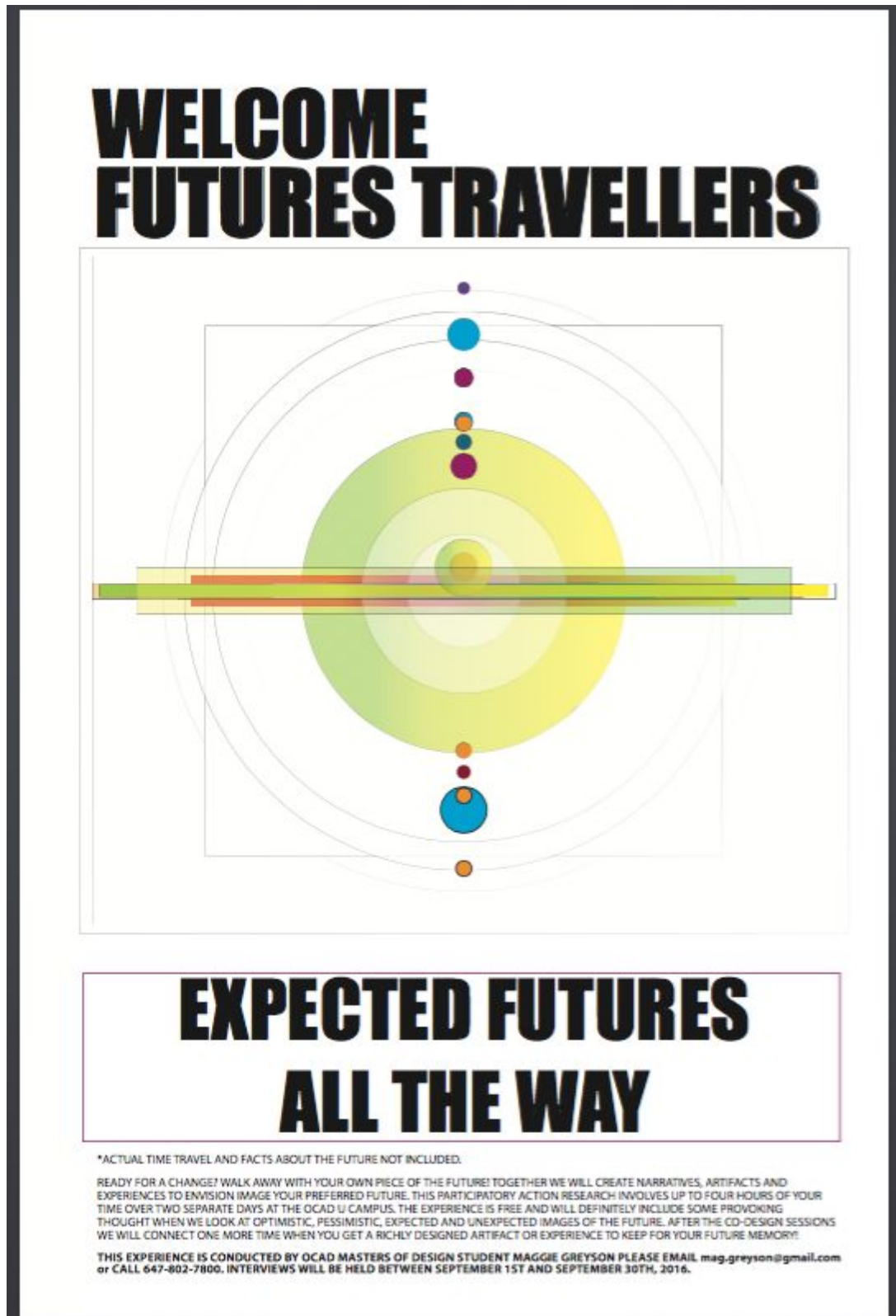


Image 9. Optimistic Futures poster

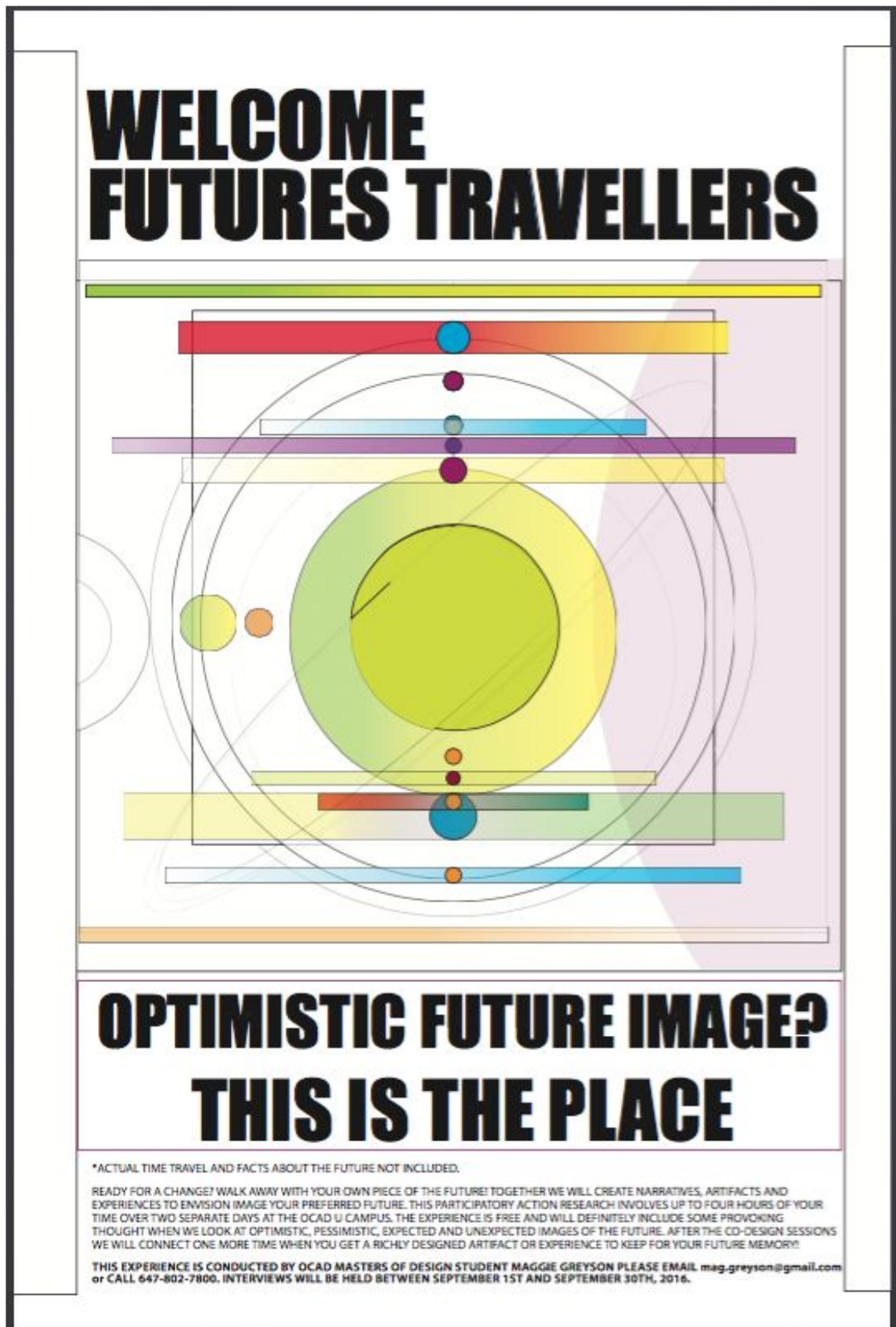




Image 10. Pessimistic Futures poster

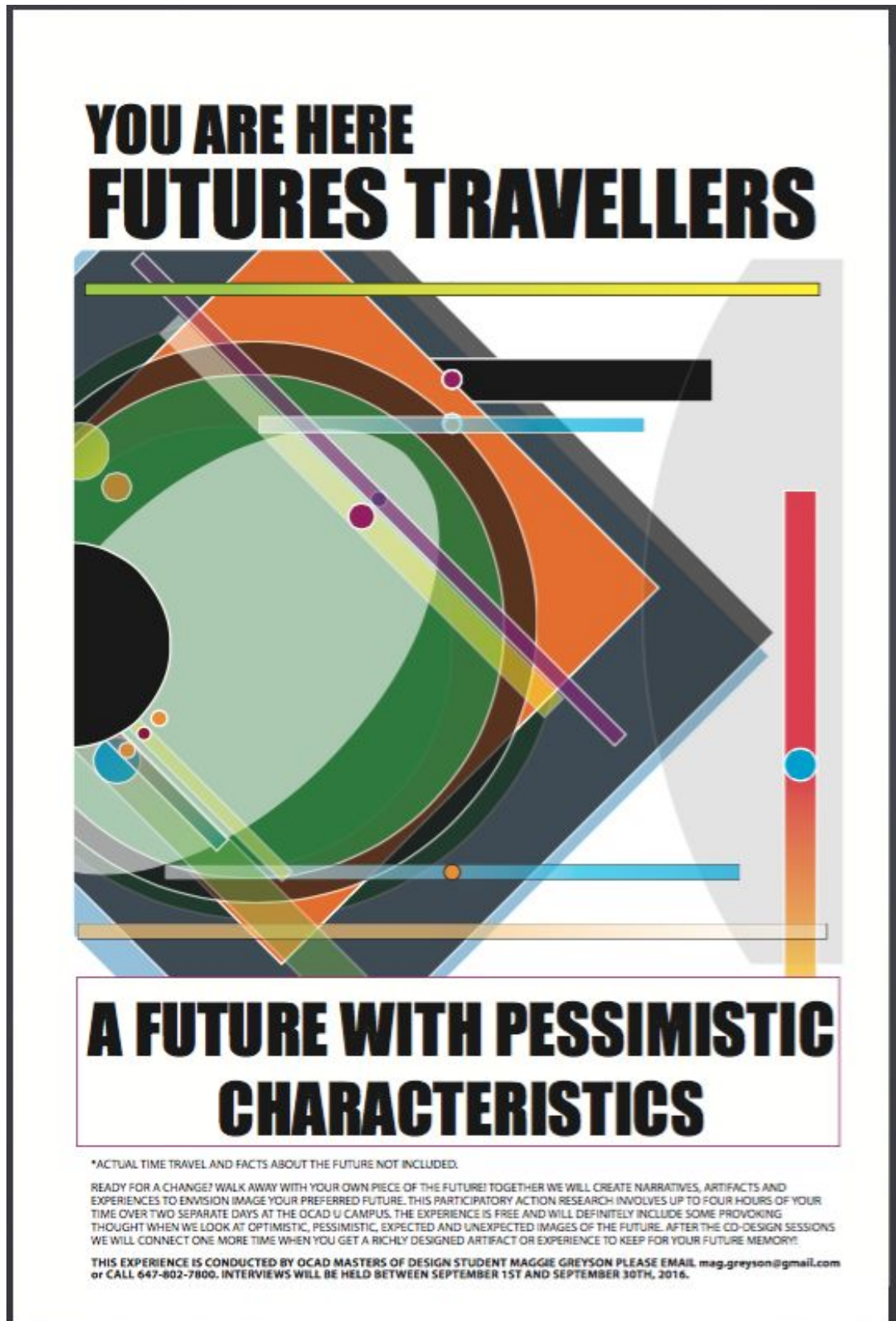
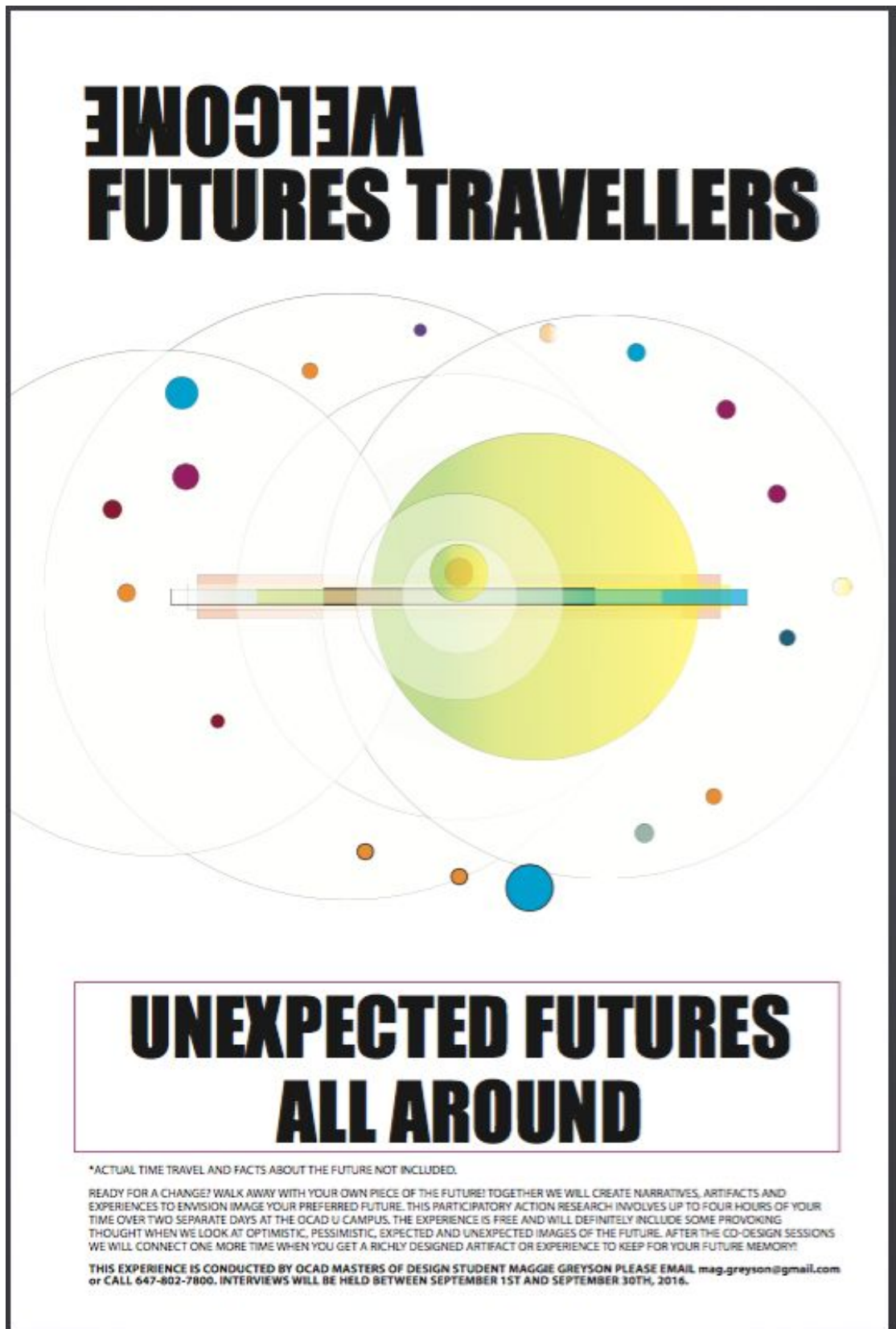
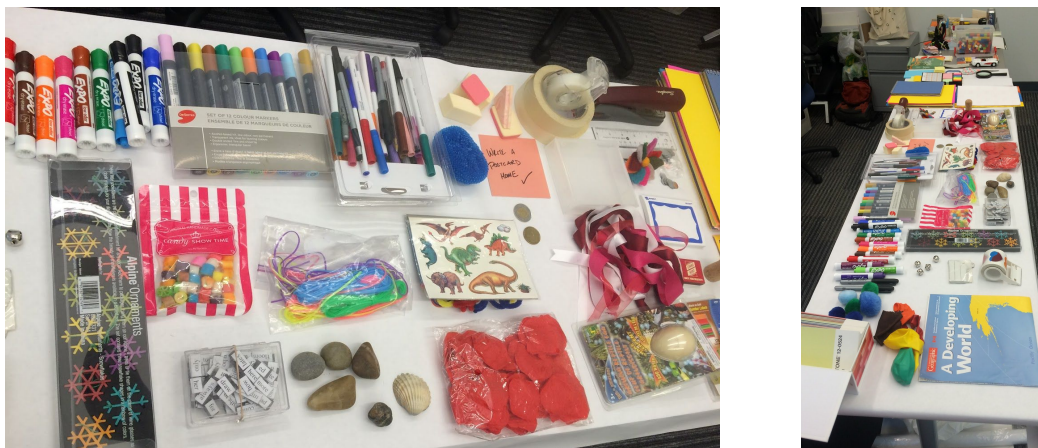


Image 11. Unexpected Futures poster



The discussion started with concepts about futures, why we look at them, and what we hope to achieve in the process. In brief they would be told that "We look at multiple futures to triangulate our preferred future. When we have a clearer image of what that might be, we can start to plan for it and add some insurance to make it happen." The full script of what was said is in Appendix F.

Image 12. The props and materials table for prototyping



Here is the list of the final activities proposed in the interview cycle. All eleven steps are named with a quick description here:

### Phase 1: Generating Scenarios

- 1) **"What brings you in today?"**; this is the recruitment process of the participant.
- 2) **Draw the city of the future**; the first activity of the interview cycle.
- 3) **The blurry futures**; the worldview description of the futures
- 4) **Domains**; a description of how topics were sorted
- 5) **The scenarios**; a description of the way the participant's images were organized

## Phase 2: Generating Rapid Prototypes

- 6) **"How do you survive and thrive?"**; the personal description of the futures based on their scenarios
- 7) **The timeline**; a 20 years into the past or future
- 8) **Daily Details Card** the roles, props, scripts and settings that are informative images of a single day in the future.
- 9) **Rapid prototyping**; a building process for experiential futures

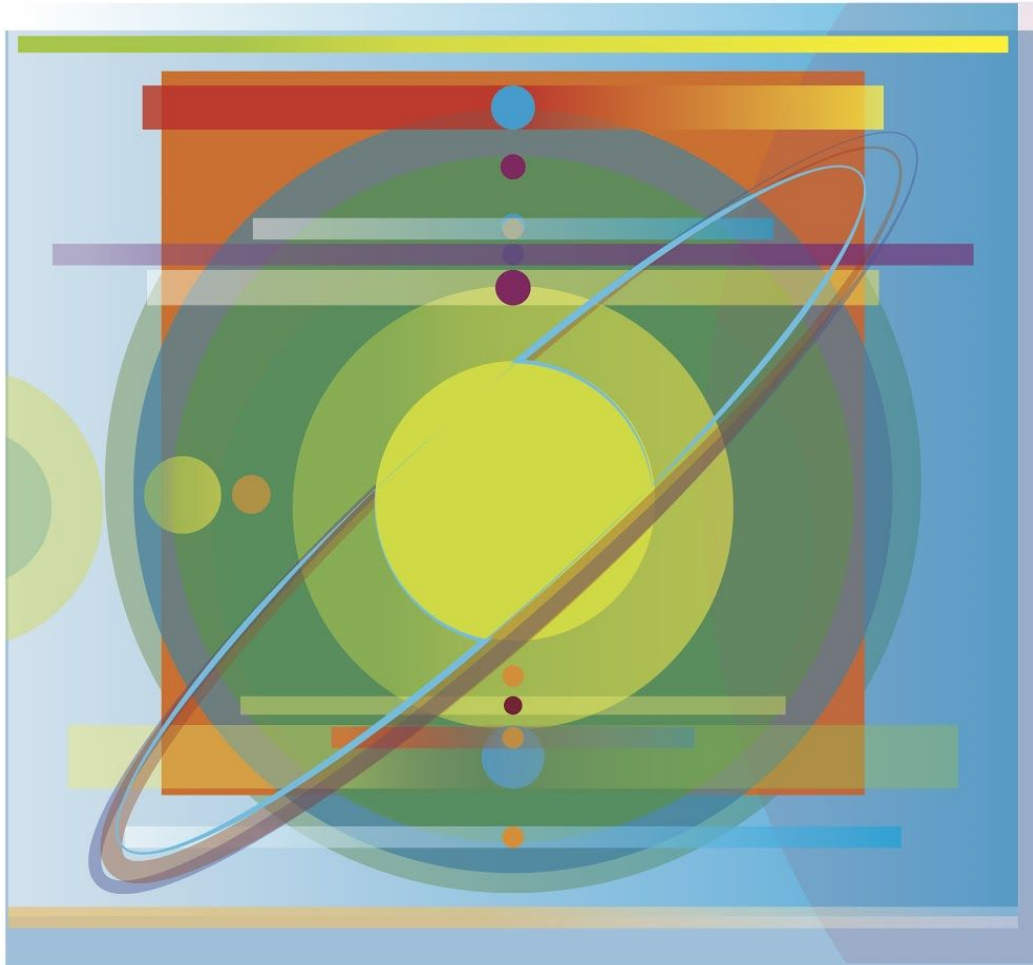
## Phase 3: Generating a High-fidelity Prototype

- 10) **Memories of the futures**; the high-fidelity experiential futures artifact or experience
- 11) **Preferred futures**; the question asked in the final interview

Image 13. Promotional poster used for recruiting

# FUTURES TRAVELLERS

IS WHAT'S OVER THE HORIZON A BIT BLURRY FOR YOU?



STEP INTO IMAGINATION AND WE WILL  
HELP YOU TO ENVISION YOUR PREFERRED FUTURE\*

## NOW BOARDING

\*ACTUAL TIME TRAVEL AND FACTS ABOUT THE FUTURE NOT INCLUDED.

READY FOR A CHANGE? WALK AWAY WITH YOUR OWN PIECE OF THE FUTURE! TOGETHER WE WILL CREATE NARRATIVES, ARTIFACTS AND EXPERIENCES TO ENVISION IMAGE YOUR PREFERRED FUTURE. THIS PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH INVOLVES UP TO FOUR HOURS OF YOUR TIME OVER TWO SEPARATE DAYS AT THE OCAD U CAMPUS. THE EXPERIENCE IS FREE AND WILL DEFINITELY INCLUDE SOME PROVOKING THOUGHT WHEN WE LOOK AT OPTIMISTIC, PESSIMISTIC, EXPECTED AND UNEXPECTED IMAGES OF THE FUTURE. AFTER THE CO-DESIGN SESSIONS WE WILL CONNECT ONE MORE TIME WHEN YOU GET A RICHLY DESIGNED ARTIFACT OR EXPERIENCE TO KEEP FOR YOUR FUTURE MEMORY!

THIS EXPERIENCE IS CONDUCTED BY OCAD MASTERS OF DESIGN STUDENT MAGGIE GREYSON PLEASE EMAIL [mag.greyson@gmail.com](mailto:mag.greyson@gmail.com) or CALL 647-802-7800. INTERVIEWS WILL BE HELD BETWEEN SEPTEMBER 1ST AND SEPTEMBER 30TH, 2016.

## Phase 1: Generating Scenarios

### 1. "What brings you in today?"

An email and poster were sent out in early September to the Strategic Foresight and Innovation program and Centre for Social Innovation communities in Toronto. The poster requested "Futures Travelers" participate in a research study at the Ontario College of Art and Design University. The provocative question on the poster and in the email was "Is what's over the horizon a bit blurry for you?" The high level description of the experience states "Step into imagination and we will help you to envision your preferred future." Other details on the poster and email indicated that people would be developing the four futures and walking away with a high-fidelity prototype.

**Lessons learned:** The initial poster and email stated the value proposition, but did not describe the experience in detail. The follow up email with the consent form and request for personal information contained an abundance of details. Between the description in the email and the consent form there was approximately 1000 words of specific information about the experience. However, in the follow-up interview, all stated that they still had no idea what to expect from the experience, nor had they expectations before the interviews started. A good question to start the interview with is "What brings you in today?" Making this question part of the protocol would have been a gentle way to get them to talk about themselves. In talking about his or her expectations the conversation could transition into the purpose of this research. It may have been helpful for them to have an overview of what was expected of them.

Tom said that he always writes a letter to his future self each year and is very vague about what he wants to accomplish. He thought that this might be a way to get more clear.

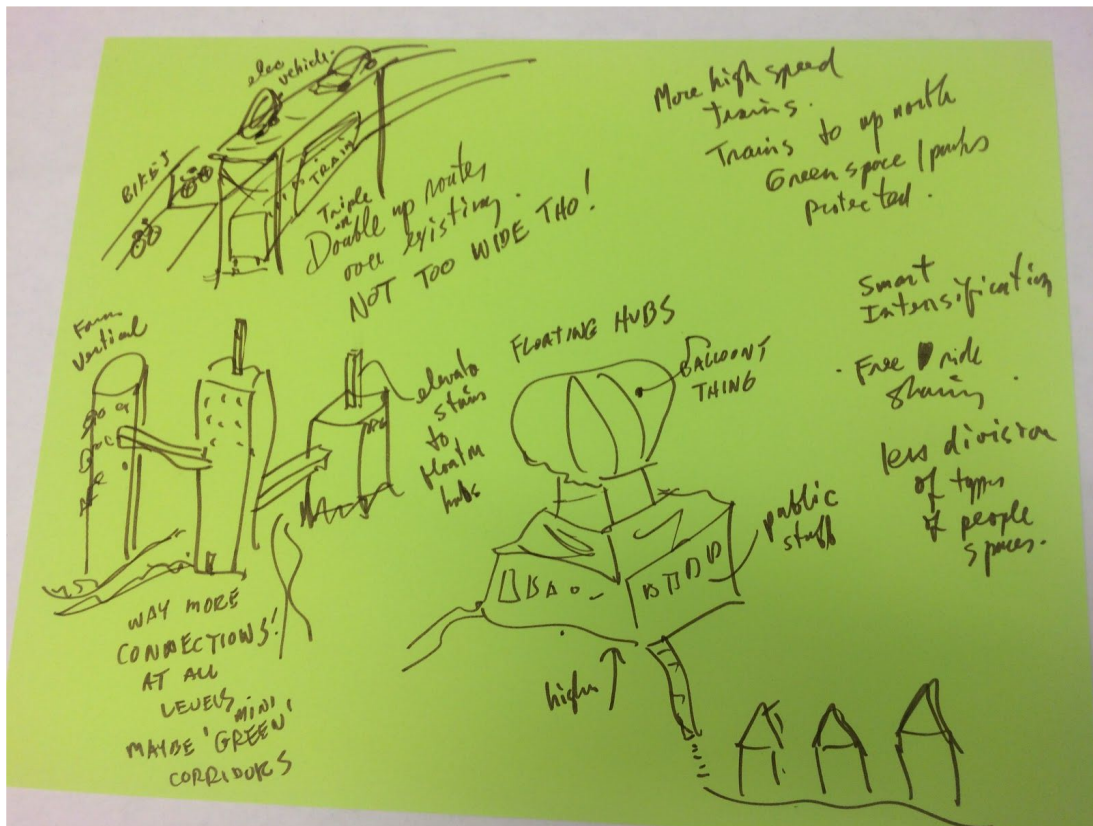
Participants, Shona, Daniel and Claudette appeared to be professionally curious and all were fully invested in every minute of the process. Robin said that she was curious about her future and had the time to invest in something that seemed interesting.



## 2. Draw the City of the Future

About half way through the month of interviews I started to include a 'warm up' creative exercise at the start of the first interview to get them more comfortable with the the unfolding activities. A task that seemed appropriate for the urbanite participants was "draw a city of the future."

Image 14. Vera's city of the future



**Lessons learned:** The creative exercise at the start of the interview was helpful in making the participants relax. Drawing a city was something that they knew well (all living in a large city), and provided some fun at the outset. It became an important practice when getting them to settle into a space that they didn't know, with a researcher they had never met, in a process that they were unsure about.

There is a story of two participants' experience with this activity in Appendix G.

### 3. The blurry futures

The goal of this session of the interview is to have the participant envision multiple images. They chose what is important to talk about in the interview. It is important to clarify and build out images that are across optimistic, pessimistic, expected and unexpected futures. They are prompted to refer to present day occurrences to add sharpness to 'blurry' visions. The horizon for these futures scenarios is 20 years after the present day, far enough to be imaginative, yet near enough that they can relate to that passage of time.

**The interview:** The participants were asked about what they *expect* the world to be like in 20 years. It was not necessarily for a participant to attempt to postulate an image for the whole globe, simply for their personal area concern. They described it from their perspective at the family level, community level, national level or global level. After these statements, the participant was asked if they have an *optimistic* and *pessimistic* image of what they just described. Finally, they were asked if there was something about what they just said that they *did not expect* to happen at all.

**Lessons learned:** Participants described very conceptual and abstract images of the futures at the worldview level. They were then prompted for real life examples to ground the description. For example if they said that the future would bring "despair and chaos" they were then asked for a current example of "despair and chaos" It was the collection of real life stories that brought in a textural overlay to the conversation. The mention of these examples from real life helped both the facilitator and the participant to have a shared understanding of the image. It is very important that the participant saw a present day example in richer detail.

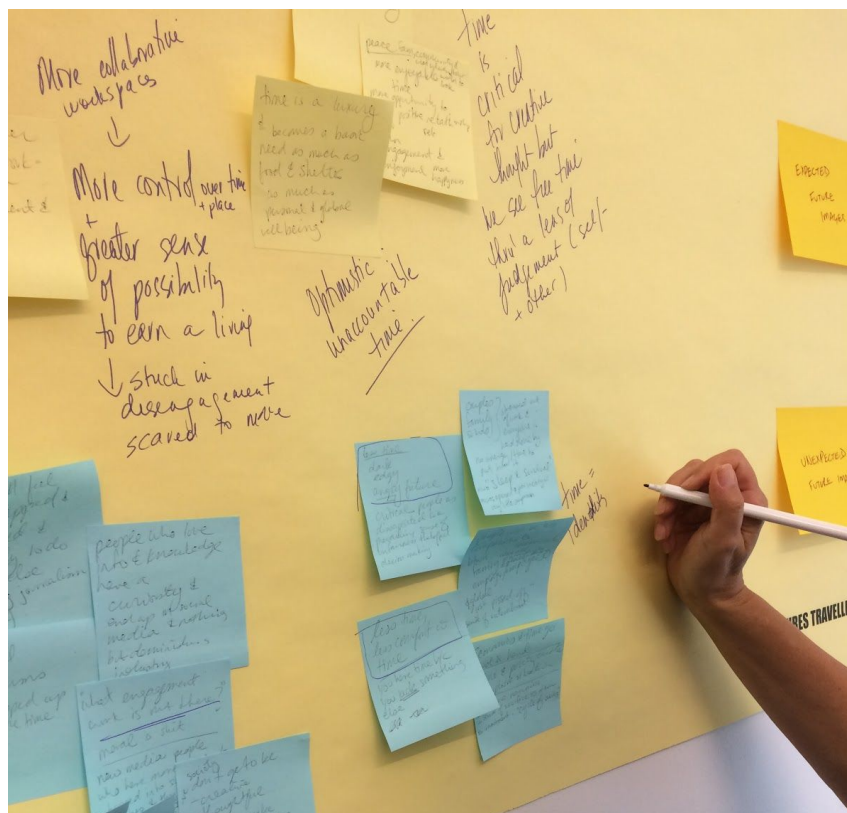
The task of envisioning a worldview in optimistic, pessimistic, expected and unexpected futures could be accomplished with varying degrees of richness. There was no pressure to respond 'correctly'. (Pointing out that "There are no facts about the future" was one of the rules of the space helped them to generate ideas.) It is interesting to note that they were generally dissociated from the future images that they were describing. As predicted in



construal level theory their images were somewhat dissociated from them because of the 20 year distance. An example of the dissociation, Robin thought everyone would be riding in self driving cars. However, she would still be driving her current blue car in 20 years. This continuity of an element from her existing life (the car she has now) in futures where everyone else's car has changed is interesting and perhaps is an area of further research.

Participants were not being rewarded or incentivized to make expert-driven scenarios. It would be interesting, in a future iteration of the technique, to provide the participants with examples of real life events at some point in the interview cycle to see if it would change the outcome. These real life events could be examples of current events given to the participant in news clippings. They could be provided with trends and their historical background. There are many ways to inject reality into the conversation.

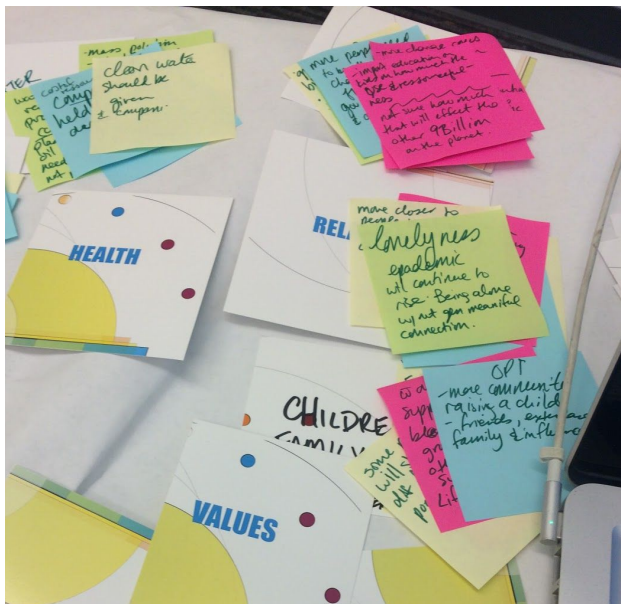
Image 15. Claudette making sense of her futures



#### 4. Domains

It was important to the design of Making the Futures Present to come to a conclusion about guiding the conversation using different domains or topics. Over the course of a few iterations, several groupings were tried. Organizations often use the STEEP+V framework in environmental scanning to group research into society, technology, environment, economy, politics and values buckets (Aguilar, 1967). Wheelwright's personal futures process, by contrast, uses the six domains of Activities, Finances, Health, Housing, Transportation, Social (Wheelwright, 2006). The addition of other topics closely related to the personal realm were also tried.

Image 16. Domain cards



#### Lessons learned:

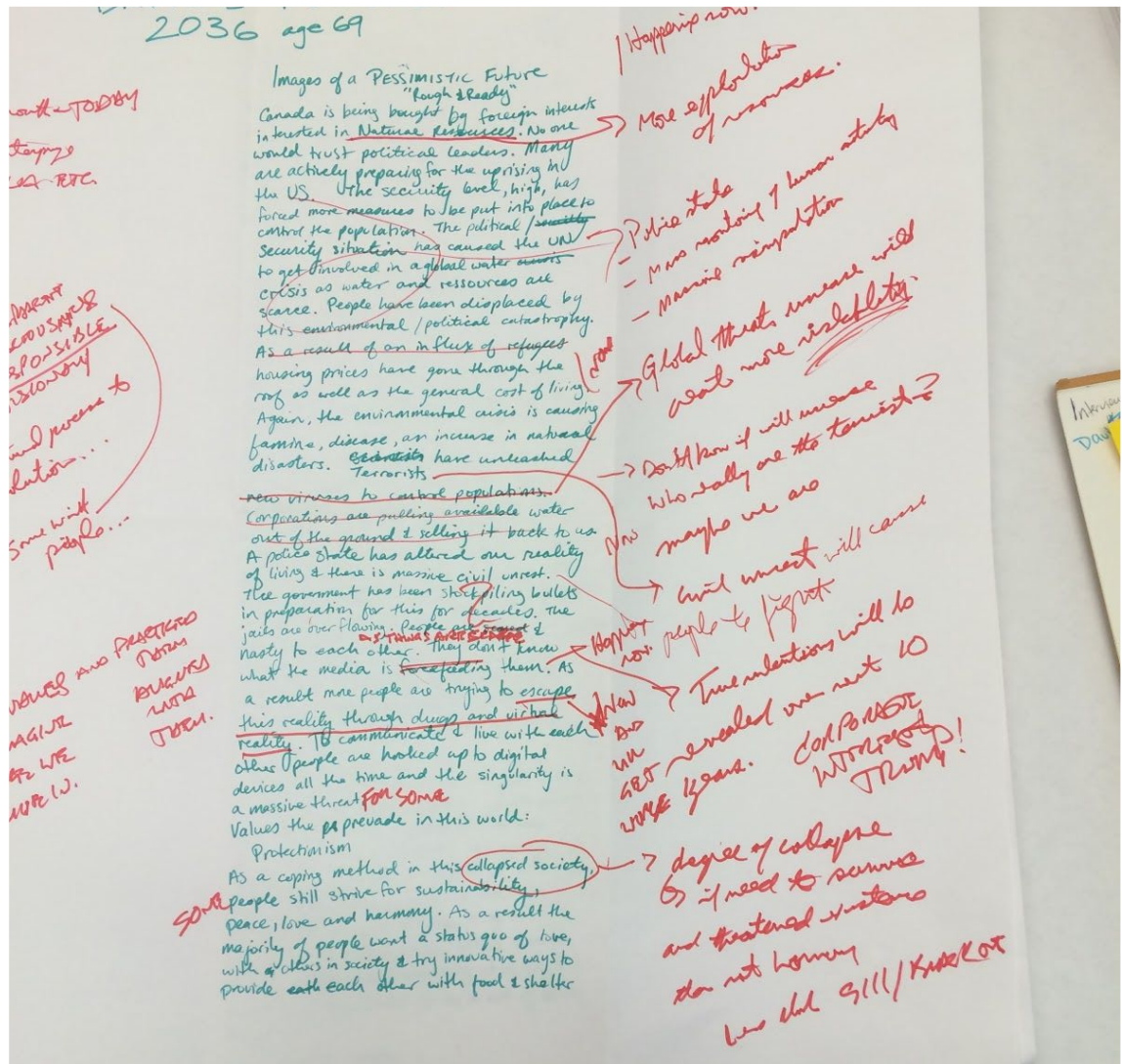
Participants reported that it was easier to have a guided conversation about futures images when they had domains or topics presented to them. As a facilitator I would ask, "What do you expect healthcare to look like in the future?" However, in unstructured conversations without domains, they picked topics

themselves and developed more interesting images. More articulated images generated more robust scenarios, although often fewer of them. When a participant is encouraged to explore any topic that they wish, the outcome appears to be more successful in providing details that later infuse the final high-fidelity prototype with more relevant personal detail.

#### 5. The scenarios

Each scenario was written on paper and presented to the participant at the start of the next session.

Image 17. Daniel's scenarios



### Lessons learned:

Gathering the notes from the first session into a narrative format seemed to be helpful to participants. They could review their words and invest in a scenario written out that way.

Participants could take more time in reimagining what they had said prior. They were asked to edit the scenario to provide more detail and more real life examples. It was difficult to capture everything that a participant said, but the short time to discuss worldview futures is

insufficient to create rich scenarios with many participants. Perhaps instead of attempting four scenarios in two hours, one could try three scenarios in three hours. The hypothesis is that if there were more sessions the participant could imagine more images across more topics and potentially generate more robust scenarios.

The scenarios created in this technique would be improved by demanding more imaginative insights. If "scenarios work best when there is something game changing to explore" (Schwartz, 2008, p.15) what can be tweaked to create more of a sense of urgency? For example:

- Is the unexpected future palpable enough? By and large these Torontonians seemed to feel insulated from the global climate crisis. When they voluntarily brought the subject up, they mentioned that they were concerned by it and many mentioned that they expect climate refugees to move around the globe, but they didn't express any visceral images as to how that would impact their own life.
- Is a milestone like a career change, retirement, living in old age, getting married an easier event to imagine than the average day?
- People have difficulty imagining a day in their life in the future even when guided. We will look at one way to answer the question "What prompts might be useful to people in helping them describe their day?" below.

## Phase 2: Generating Rapid Prototypes

### **6. "How do you survive and thrive?"**

This next step was a little more intense for some. Participants were asked to render further details. They were asked series of questions about how they would survive and thrive in

each alternative future. It is in this recounting that visceral images become the raw imaginative resources for the physical prototypes.

**Lessons learned:** Asking participants to envision themselves surviving and thriving in each future really grounded them in the scenarios of their own making. They had to process an abstract notion of the futures into envisioning themselves taking action. Having the participants describe how they would live in each of the futures stirred up their assertions about skills and assets they have or want. It was a highly personal exercise and as a result of the exploration all participants expressed their values, hopes, dreams and fears in what they said. In the follow-up interview, Melany shared that looking at her personal pessimistic future images were very uncomfortable, but worthwhile. She said that it helped to catalyze a more clarified preferred future. She said that the experience had spurred her on in the pursuit of launching a non-profit organization. It is interesting to hear this, as during the interview she stated in her preferred future that she had gone back for school.

## **7. The timeline**

Drawing a line horizontally across a big piece of paper, participants were asked to create a 20 year timeline of their significant (past) experiences. They were given 15 minutes to plot out as many key moments as they could. They were then asked to plot their personal high and low points on the same page and put a great amount of detail on this timeline. When they were finished it was important to emphasize the lesson behind the activity. This detailed timeline serves to reinforce that the passage of time is not just a concept. In the past a variety of formative events happen, personal learning occurs and one has had agency to make choice. This tool brings the scale of 20 years into the future to life as they recognize that they will have opportunities to learn and develop, make new social connections and make new choices.

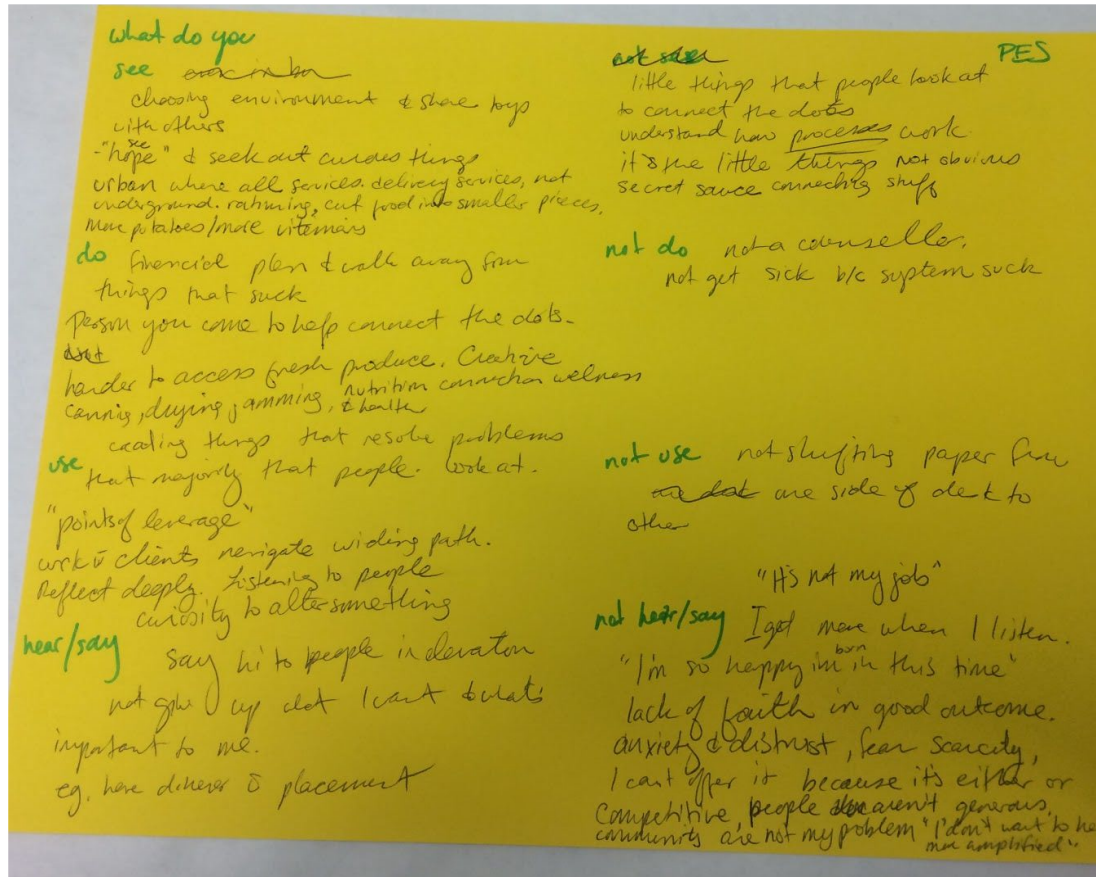
A hand-drawn map of Cuba, oriented vertically. The map is drawn on a white sheet of paper. A hand is holding a blue marker over the map. The map includes the following labels and markings:

- Top:** "1617 high school" (red), "Tupac to Cuba" (blue), "CUBA." (blue).
- Along the coast:** "1617 high school" (red), "Tupac to Cuba" (blue), "1617 high school" (red), "Tupac to Cuba" (blue), "1617 high school" (red), "Tupac to Cuba" (blue).
- Central:** "1617 high school" (red), "Tupac to Cuba" (blue), "1617 high school" (red), "Tupac to Cuba" (blue).
- Bottom:** "1617 high school" (red), "Tupac to Cuba" (blue), "1617 high school" (red), "Tupac to Cuba" (blue).



Participants were asked to write out a 100-word day-in-the-life story that takes on this day, but 20 years into the future. Writing was a silent contemplation task yet it was difficult to get them to expand on their ideas once they were committed to paper. A new prompt was made to keep them in an idea generation state, which turned out to be very useful. This prompt will be referred to as the Daily Details Card. .

Image 20. Shona's Daily Details Card



By having a conversation with them, instead of the writing exercise, the participants were free to spend more time generating ideas. For the purpose of generating a "tangible" quality to a situation the following questions were used. Questions below are inspired by those found on an Empathy Map (Gray, 2010)

- What roles do you play? What things do you not do?
- What do you see? What do you not see?
- What do you hear/say? What do you not hear/ say?
- What do you use? What do you not use?

#### Lessons learned:

This guided conversation was more useful in providing a more robust day-in-the-life in each scenario than giving them a blank piece of paper and asking for 100 words. The content that



they generated in answering questions for the Daily Details Card was used directly in the building of the rapid-prototypes. Not all questions got asked for each future because it became a repetitive task. It is up to the facilitator to decide how to manage the opposing goals of keeping them engaged in describing the details of a day 20 years into the future, while generating enough detail for the manifestation of each future. It was interesting to note that some people were very conceptual and could not easily articulate mental images of the future. Hanna, who is a visual artist only said that she could "see hope" in answer to the question "what do you see?" The expectation was that all participants would be able to see something more concrete, e.g. a warehouse studio in Toronto. This type of statement is difficult to materialize and it would take some experience to identify a counter question to get the participant to envision something more concrete.

## **9. Rapid prototyping**

This is the last portion of the workshop where the facilitator and the participant co-designed the low-fidelity prototype together. The second session ended in the rapid prototyping of one or several visceral images described in the futures scenarios. In most cases participants would excitedly head towards the craft materials table and select items that could represent an artifact or an experience in their futures. Participant engagement ranged from very enthusiastic, to somewhat resistant to very resistant to the prototyping activity. Participants Claudette, Mark and Melany said that they wished that the activity lasted longer because they really enjoyed it. Daniel was somewhat uncomfortable and needed much prompting. Tom refused to make anything and began to play with other materials not for the purpose of prototyping for the last few minutes of discussion.

As a result of Participant Shona's rich details described on her Daily Details Card she was able to quickly develop a prototype of an experience on that day. This is an image of her "stepping over garbage out of her door" near Broadview and Danforth .

Image 21. Shona's rapid-prototypes

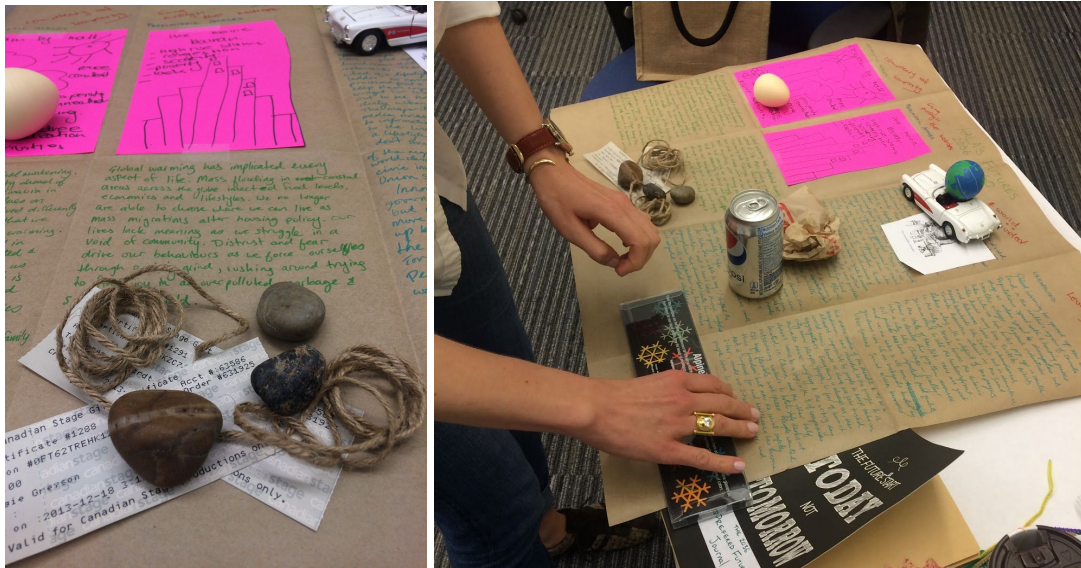


Image 22. Daniel's Intentional Community in Bali



### Lessons learned:

What people create in their prototypes may not seem particularly unique but they are significant and rich in the details of their own mind. They are responses to what they need to survive and thrive in each future. Melany said that the prototyping process gave her some hope for the achievement of her stated goals and more clarity about what success would feel like. (More about reactions in Appendix H.)

Design professor Donald Norman has written about the crucial role of imagination in a way that sheds light on the core of the task undertaken in Making the Futures Present:

When a person considers how to climb a tree, imagination serves as a laboratory for virtual experiments in physics, biomechanics, and physiology. In matters of justice, art, or philosophy, imagination is the laboratory of the spirit (Norman in Laurel, 2013)

It is in this mental laboratory that the participant and facilitator can have a discussion of futures that are plausible, possible or probable.

A preliminary 'sketch' goes along way to indicating what may be included or excluded from the future design. In this case, our source material for this sketch comes from a Daily Details Cards. The next iteration is a physical manifestation of an artifact or experience influenced by that discovery. The intention of analysing the stories from written and recorded format to create an artifact or experience makes a participant reflect and refine their impression of the future. This should enable them to be more reflexive about the imaginative preferred world that they will make up outside of this method.

Continuing the personal narrative generation, the participant and facilitator brainstorm potential artifacts and experiences that could exist in each of the futures. Statements about the futures are used to co-design the participant's most vibrant mental image(s) to rapidly prototype a future memory. In this activity the clarity of the images increases in making these small decisions in the prototyping process, we are folding the future back into the present to get a closer look at what might be in store.

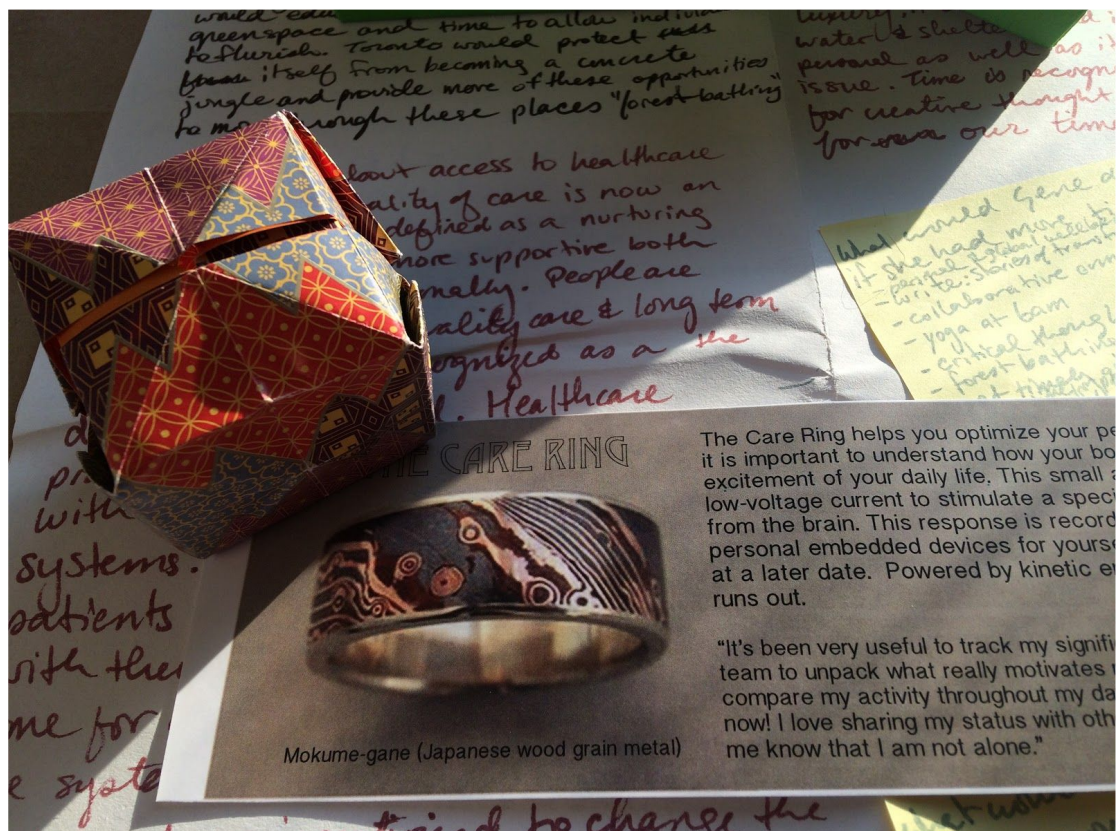
## Phase 3: Generating a High-fidelity Prototype

### 10. Memories of the futures

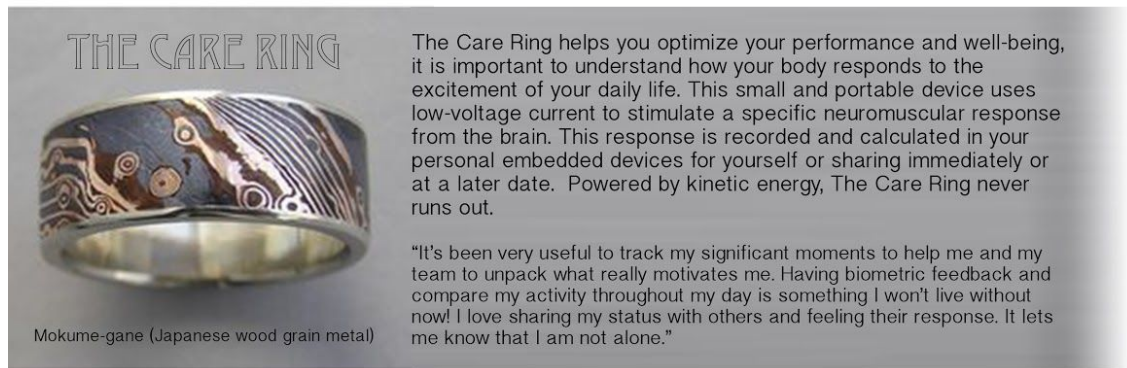
In the last phase of the interview cycle all of the comments and low-fidelity prototypes harvested from the interviews inform the making of a new personal high-fidelity artifact or experience prototype. The participants are given an experiential futures memory as a tangible reminder of the concept of multiple futures. The interpretation of what was said could be wide open but is meant to be guided by the process detailed in the next section.

#### Daniel's Care Ring

Image 23. Daniel's Care Ring biometric communicator







The Care Ring was given to Daniel at the last interview as a prototype for use in his expected future. It was inspired by comments that he made about creating an intentional community. As a ring, it is something that could be a signifier of membership. As a personal coach he could enhance the service that he provides for his clients if he understood more about what gets them excited, anxious or relaxed when they are not in meetings together. As described:

The Care Ring helps you optimize your performance and well-being, it is important to understand how your body responds to the excitement of daily life. This small and portable device uses low-voltage current to stimulate a specific response from the brain. This response is recorded and calculated in your personal embedded device for yourself or sharing immediately or at a later date. Powered by kinetic energy, The Care Ring never runs out.

It was suggested that he give this ring to his clients to connect them together as coach and coachee. The ring itself was not fabricated, but the Japanese paper packaging and marketing material was. An object that had the weight of a ring was inside the paper box.

Daniel was interviewed early on in the research period, before the order of questioning from outer world view to inner view was figured out. His expected and optimistic futures were quite similar to his preferred future. As this technique is designed to help someone envision their preferred future and this was something that he articulated in the process, I might assume that this artifact could be a helpful reminder of Making the Futures Present. As you will read later, I suggest edits to the technique that may help determine if these artifacts and

experiences facilitate the envisioning of a preferred future. Two variables that need to be considered in the evaluation of each high-fidelity prototype:

1. Was there a vision of a preferred future before engaging with Making the Futures Present?
2. How did this change as a result?

### Melany's Kids and Climate Change Game

Image 24. Melany's Game "Kids and Climate Change" made on seed paper



Melany who is 23 years old and the founder of a not-for-profit program for youth. She manages a team of volunteers and describes herself as "young and fancy free." The experience that she had in the rapid-prototype session made her somewhat emotional. As an example, she was able to conjure up a day where she couldn't get out of bed due to mental health issues, working in an unfulfilling job. Her rapid prototype was a sketch of an empty box of Triscuits that she turned to for comfort food in times of distress.

She shared that the honesty of the experience had spurred her on in her commitment in launching a non-profit organization already in the works. This not for profit provides a safe space for youth to play games as a shelter in a low income neighbourhood in Toronto. It is a small storefront now but she had visions of expanding in the future. This high-fidelity prototype is a new game in both Japanese and English to represent the global reach the organization will have as a games company in the future. The game is for kids who are climate refugees.

Melany was the first person to be interviewed and the format of the original questions led the conversation away from futures images that she could relate to. This high-fidelity prototype was created in response to her optimistic future which had the most personal details.

## Claudette's Body Clock

Image 25. Claudette's Body Clock personal time regulator



Paint on your body clock. When you see green you are in a relaxed mode. When you see red you are in a state of arousal.



**Einstein's Dreams**  
3rd edition

In this world, there are two times. There is mechanical time and there is body time. Listen to your heartbeat. Feel the rhythms of your moods and desires.

This prototype is enhanced nail polish with personal sensors. The nail polish is meant to help the wearer express their own biological time instead of using mechanical time. Mechanical time dictates life patterns in many cultures and she expressed discomfort at not being able



to own her own time. "Paint on your body clock. When you see green you are in a relaxed mode. When you see red you are in a state of arousal."

Interviews with Claudette were particularly successful. She is a writer of fiction and nonfiction content and as such had a tremendous capacity to imagine on sources from real life in a quick and detailed way. It was very difficult to organize the rich harvest of images and low-fidelity prototypes until some patterns emerged. For her I decided to design something that was going to signify the theme that she spoke of with the most fear throughout all of her futures. Claudette was so excited by the Body Clock nailpolish that she started to put some on, hoping that it would work right away. By comments that she made, it seemed as if this prototyped concept was more freeing to her than anything that had been co-created as a low-fidelity prototype. Some of the things that she said in her follow up interview reassert that she was leaving the experience with a new question for herself. As someone who freelances and is looking ahead 20 years down the road and assuming that she will still be working at 77, she considers time a lot. "You made me reconsider my relationship to 'time,'" who defines the time that I have?" This quote exemplifies the type of impact that Making the Futures Present hopes to elicit.

## Robin's Nestle Waters Concession Stand

Image 26. Robin's Nestle Waters Concession Stand



In another example, Robin received a mini 3D Nestle Water Concession Stand. Her stated goal in her optimistic future was to create and run an organization similar to the Centre of Social Innovation in Toronto. This is an inclusive and flexible workspace for special interest groups and services that support those communities. Robin had indicated that she was fearful that advertising was becoming more invasive. She noted that corporations were owning more resources and that that may continue. She also feared that clean water may become even more scarce 20 years from now. All of these comments culminated in a high-fidelity prototype built for a response to her fears in a pessimistic future. In this pessimistic future scenario Nestle had taken control of the water supply. In order for her to provide

amenities to her clients in her shared workspace she had to concede to giving Nestle an advertising and value generating opportunity. The image shows that tenants can have free water, in exchange for some personal identification. On the side of the concession stand it says "give your thumbprint to Nestle in exchange for two free glasses of water per day."

It is interesting to note The Globe and Mail reported a story that emerged a few days after this prototype was made. A small town not far from Toronto was trying to buy the rights to their ground water. Nestle outbid them. To end an unfortunate story, they now sell the water back to the town and consumers in the local environs for \$1/litre. (Leslie, 2016).

## **Lessons Learned**

As the designer for the high-fidelity prototypes, working in a studio without the feedback of the participant was a bit of a risk, in that the participant may not identify with the end result. Upon reflection I notice that I was making choices of what to build for the participant, in some cases outside of my original design for the technique. As it was originally designed, the high-fidelity prototype would be derived from descriptions of one of the futures. It became more important to understand driving motivations, values, hopes and dreams now for what each participant would want when they are 20 years older. In all cases these revealed important themes to address that lived across all of the futures. The final choice about which future to design for became a function of critical judgement about how addressing one scenario over another would be received by each participant. Over time the intention behind the final prototype evolved from not just being a provocative item that would represent one future, to something that might remind them of the importance of considering multiple futures.

As the final prototypes were developed I decided that criteria for success must address a larger social context. As a result, Vera had a reaction to her personal experiential futures artifact that made her question her relationship with strangers. Her response to the design was somewhat expected. It would be valuable to follow up with her six months to a year later to see how she was thinking about her relationship to sharing and community connections. It would also be valuable in the refinement of the technique to explore at a later date if anyone has created or sustained a more articulated vision of his or her *preferred*

future (not one that was created in Making the Futures Present. It would be valuable for the research to understand overall if one's approach to issues with great futurity had changed.

## **11. Preferred futures**

Research of coaching and therapy methods indicate that it takes lots of purposeful reflection to generate a preferred future that could be sustained if alternate futures come to pass. This assertion is made based on a general description of coaching and therapeutic techniques that tend to be structured for goal setting. The International Federation of Coaches says that for certain types of coaching a relationship may last three to six months depending on the goal (International Federation of Coaches, 2017). This prototype of Making the Futures Present is designed to test if the *envisioning* of multiple personal futures can be facilitated. Making the Futures Present is designed for the generation of optimistic, pessimistic, expected and unexpected futures. The parameters for the research are if a personal experiential futures technique can even be created before knowing if it will help them to envision a preferred future. The study does not test whether a participant can design and commit to a preferred future within the period of two sessions together.

## **Lessons learned**

There was not enough scope in the research design to follow up on statements made about a preferred future. In a follow up study new research questions could explore the *effectiveness* of Making the Futures Present on one's preferred future. A new study could seek to confirm that a participant had created a new or changed preferred future.

Investigating a change in a participant's preferred future over time would be a rich area for further research. Subsequently, the research suggests that integrating this method with professional practices of coaching, therapy and other life design activities is necessary.

Some participants were asked about their preferred future at the last interview. Shona reported that she was surprised at how much she was thinking about living outside of the city. She also said that the conversations reminded her of her plan to adopt a child. The subject had not been a topic of concern for her recently and the interview caused her to ask herself, "What am I doing about this today?"

## 6.04 The Process for Designing the Final High-fidelity Prototype

The creative process behind the final prototype comes from theatre design script analysis, and design thinking training that I have had. As an former theatre designer, I have a creative process that I could rely on for designing and manifesting artifacts that captures the essence of a narrative. I also have graphic design skills that I used in the creation of most of the final high-fidelity prototypes. I believe that these skills heighten the realism of the future artifact or experience. Sterling says that the more real the design fiction is, the easier it is for the participant to suspend their disbelief (Sterling, 2013).

The process that I used to create something is well founded in research both inside and outside of the a script. In a theatre script analysis the creative team will deconstruct the text before setting out to address technical requirements. The creative team is looking for clues and themes that would lead to a strong design concept. In *Making the Futures Present*, this is the process that I used to create a provocative high-fidelity prototype for the participant, but it does not have to be the process another designer would use. Each task will be described below.

1. Read the narrative and corrections

2. Look for unique verbal cues or comments about of personal values, hopes, dreams and fears
3. Review what they had said in their application email, including a review of their social media (if supplied)
4. What are some common themes throughout the futures?
5. How does the participant cope with these themes?
6. What would help the participant to cope in this future?
7. What assets does she want or have?
8. Double check the list of ideas against the measure of success - in this case, does the preferred solution resonate within a larger social context.

All of these are merely recipe steps and it is not possible to really explain the moment the muse strikes as well as social psychologist Ap Dijksterhuis can:

One could say that unconscious thought is more "liberal" than conscious thought and leads to the generation of items or ideas that are less obvious, less accessible and more creative. Upon being confronted with a task that requires a certain degree of creativity, it pays off to delegate the labor of thinking to the unconscious mind(Dijksterhuis, 2006 p.145).

The paper will use the high-fidelity prototype made for Vera an architect/ project manager, age 63 to describe the process in more depth in Appendix B.

## **Conclusion**

The reveal of the personally designed experiential futures artifact or experience to the participant is an important moment in this technique. I would give them the artifact and let them ponder it without describing it to them. The participants showed delight or shock in receiving the high-fidelity prototype. Their feedback verified if the capture and analysis of their values, hopes, dreams and fears was in some way accurate . The benefit of using

comments that they made, from scenarios that they made seems to make a strong emotional connection to the experience. See the Appendix D for a summary table of the participants experience, and encouraging feedback and critiques that they gave.

What people create in their low-fidelity prototypes may not seem particularly unique at first sight but they are indicative of their values, hopes, dreams and fears. These low-fidelity prototypes are rich in detail of their own mind. The custom products and experiences are responses to what is believed they need to survive and thrive in each future. Futurist Noah Raford says it the command of these details that 'immerse the audience in a direct narrative relationship with the material .This can produce profound insight into the kinds of products, services and stakeholders who may inhabit this scenario.' (Raford, 2012). The intention is that the concretized concepts of the high-fidelity prototypes that give them more clarity about the envisioned future.

## 6.05 The Follow-up Interview

The third and final interview was for following-up with each participant. They were asked to meet for half an hour. They were first presented their futures memory and asked to describe what they understood it to be. As an example, Shona remarked that she could see exactly where the source of inspiration came from in the production of the Pole Vault Canada project (see Appendix B for details).

Tom neither participated in the low-fidelity prototyping process, nor wanted a high-fidelity prototype made. He expressed that he didn't enjoy working with physical objects to express himself. He also didn't feel it was useful to have a final-prototype to complete the experience. It was difficult to elicit more feedback about this reaction, other than it indicated that not all participants were the same in how they wanted to participate in the experience

and perhaps some modifications need to be considered for others who are not comfortable in working with their hands. The low-fidelity prototype experience could be employ different methods of creation for those who prefer to learn and explore with writing, role-play or other forms of expression. Setting up a final interview with him was easier than expected and he was very supportive and curious about the project.

The interview was beneficial for the purpose of researching the immediate impact of the technique. It was an opportunity to ask the participants a few questions about their experience. They were asked if they had any new thoughts since the futures scenario and rapid-prototyping sessions. In particular it was a good opportunity to discuss any changes to their planning strategy. Participant Mark indicated that it was a really good conversation and that he wouldn't be able to envision his preferred future yet without some deep reflection and in-depth conversation with some friends. Three other participants indicated that big life changes had happened in the interim: Daniel was moving to another city, Robin got a new job and Melany had decided not to go back to school. The first two indicated that thinking in the long-view is not something that they could invest in heavily at the moment. It was more difficult to draw out their reflections on the prototype. Melany, Claudette, Shona, Vera and Mark gave encouraging feedback about how the prototype made them reflect on their values. All displayed some level of realization of what the technological or social enablers would have to exist in the future for this to become a reality.

With the help of their feedback the format, dialogue, environment, pacing and materials evolved during in the research window making the technique more precise.



## 6.06 The Evolution of the Interview Protocol

This section describes the change in the protocol of the interviews. Having the opportunity to iterate the procedure was critical in this final proposal. The structure and activities of the interview changed. The quality of the input into making the final high-fidelity prototype increased significantly.

### **“My optimistic, preferred and expected futures are all the same”**

Verne Wheelwright starts his activities in his Personal Futures Workbook with a survey of oneself. Section 1 is called “Look at Your Life and Where You Are Now”. His format informed the first draft of this personal experiential futures interview protocol (Wheelwright, 2006). Making the Futures Present was designed to follow the same path as Wheelwright's, asking the interviewee about their current life. The assumption was that starting the conversation with a description of oneself would be a much easier entry point to a conversation about envisioning a preferred future. I thought that it would be easier for them to proceed from that talk about something that they didn't know very well, the outer worldview futures. The assumption was that participants needed time to be comfortable with the topic of futures and facilitator. This approach turned out to make envisioning a preferred personal future harder because there was less contrast between the described futures. Less contrast between the futures meant a less robust scenario to work with in the generation of a prototype. As evidence, Participant Mark said, “My optimistic futures, my expected futures and preferred futures are pretty much all the same. The optimistic future is the reason I get out of bed everyday.”

A significant change to the protocol was necessary to create more contrast in the futures scenarios. It was decided that the Experiential Futures Ladder would be the best format to follow in the reshape the interview process.

## 6.07 The Experiential Futures Ladder

The order of questioning came into focus through trial and error. To address the challenge of adding more contrast to the futures scenarios the line of questioning was switched around. Having a participant list observations of the opportunities or threats to humanity is a much easier way to start a conversation with a stranger than to ask, "what do you expect your own personal future to be like?" Instead of asking participants about their visions of themselves in 20 years, the activity is to ask them about the worldview in 20 years. "What do you expect the future to be like? How will you survive and thrive in it?" This iteration successfully addressed the issue of diverging scenarios. The final iteration resolved that setting the stage with the outer worldview first generates a much more robust, distinct and productive set of scenarios.

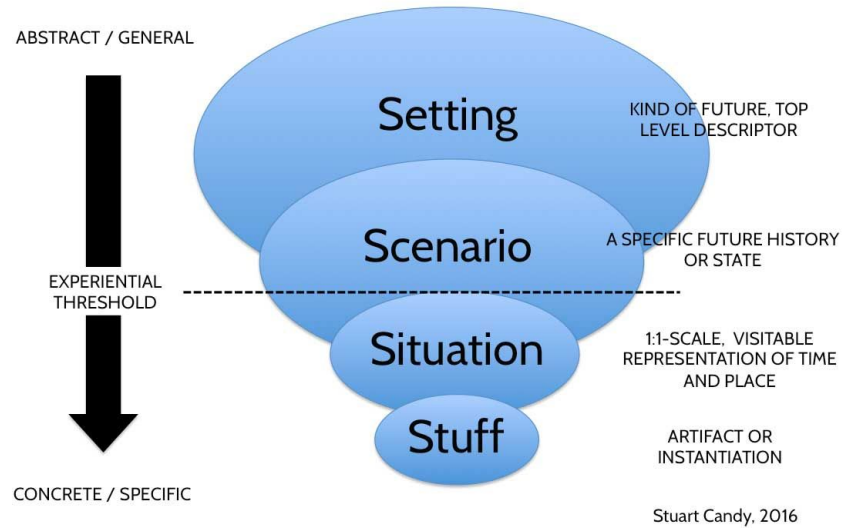
The Experiential Futures Ladder is a good model for the order of activities in the interview cycle. It is described as follows:

As we move down the ladder and an abstract future notion is made concrete, thinkable and feelable, we lose contact with alternative possible instantiations, at least for the time being. The future that can be experienced is not the true future – but we must create these artificially concrete contexts for thought and feeling in order to bridge the experiential gulf between the physical present and abstract spaces of possibility (Candy and Dunagan, 2016, p.14).

The descending rungs of the ladder:

1. SETTING: The theme or kind of future (e.g. generic image of the future).
2. SCENARIO: Specific narrative proposition and sequence of events.
3. SITUATION: The circumstances of encounter; particular events given physical form at 1:1 scale in various media
4. STUFF: Artifact or experience.

## The Experiential Futures Ladder



The rungs of the ladder translate into the shape of the Making the Futures Present technique as follows:

1. **The Setting** is the general theme of each scenario: optimistic, pessimistic, expected or unexpected futures. Four types of scenario, chosen by the researcher, although not all were explored in every interview based on the amount of time available or flow of the conversation.
2. **The Scenario** is the collection of images generated by participants in Phase 1. This may be a deep dive into a few topics or touch on several interests in the conversation. There are some images created by the participant, in some cases as few as three, and in others as many as ten.
3. **The Situation** is the Daily Details Card, which is a more concrete description of images in which they see themselves 20 years into the future. These situations were generated from the scenarios and could vary greatly based on the participant's interest.

4. **The Stuff** is what they make in the rapid prototype (artifacts or experiences) of which there are an effectively infinite number of options in each situation.

There is a separation line between the Setting + Scenario and Situation + Stuff. This separation represents the experiential threshold. Above the horizontal line are the conceptual systematic identifiers and below are the more concretized things of everyday life (roles, scripts, props and locations).

## 6.08 Conclusion

The futures are shaped by the stories we tell about ourselves. Every activity in the interview cycle appeared to be another opportunity for participants to declare values, hopes, dreams and fears. It is in the act of describing these things that one considers what they want in their preferred futures (Sanders, 2008; Morgan, 2002 ; Pasupathi, 2007; Savickas, 2012). The culmination of nine interview cycles resulted in a proposal for this three phase technique. The activities that were described here were chosen and structured in such as way as to enhance clarity of imagination, create feeling, and grow foresight capacity. Each activity is included because of their contribution towards helping a participant imagine a preferred future.

While the overall protocol of the interviews is coming into shape the individual activities selected in the final proposal of this technique still need to be considered in more depth. The Appendix B describes three case studies in detail what happened when content created from these activities is put forth in the making of the high-fidelity prototype.

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## 7.0 Research Reflections

### **Reciprocal Change**

Many small adjustments were made incrementally and as a result the changes refined the technique a little bit more each time. Using feedback from participants as a guide, overall it was noticed that the first two sessions of the interview cycle seemed to help people to do two things. The first, to help people to build their foresight capacity by envisioning themselves in multiple futures. The second, to consider that their futures exist within a more complex world and that they have skills and abilities to survive and thrive within them.

### **Emerging Clarity**

At first, images of the future were inarticulate, foggy and without much shape. Descriptions were vague and unimaginable until participants were pressed to answer specific questions about things that they would see, feel, touch, do and not do in each future. Principles are

more easy to apply to the distant future, but as the situation gets closer in time, morals and ideologies seem to lose their relevance (Wakslak, 2006). As an example, looking 20 years ahead, people were idealistic about how people would relate to one another, "helpful, sharing, genuine" or "mean, selfish." Looking a few months ahead, participants could envision more detail about places, people and things that they would interact with.

### **Self-construction**

The participants created new stories for themselves in each of the futures described.

Savickas says, "As one speaks one's story, so one makes oneself, and this self-constructing is a life project," (Savickas, 2012). What is significant about this statement is that a technique such as Making the Futures Present may help someone to envision a future, but that the preferred future may take a lifetime to construct. The final interview, where they were given their personalized high-fidelity prototype was intended to enhance the goal of making people 'feel the future, not fear the future'.

Having some discomfort can be a useful learning tool towards lasting change. Experiential learning theory (ELT) states that we learn when we are in our stretch zone (Davis-Berman & Berman, 2002). Participants shared that these scenarios came from their tacit knowledge about what they expected the futures to be like. They were authoring future visions that they did not know they had.

In essence, time in the lab seemed to demonstrate that participants were able to see the future as less blurry, less menacing and less unknowable. You will see some outcomes of three additional prototypes, with comments about what people learned from the experience and hear their reactions about their experience as a whole in the Appendix B.

## 7.01 Giving Participants the Fabricated Futures Present

Each of the final prototypes were designed by analysing notes and artifacts made in the interviews, and other online content that they were willing to share.. It was a design challenge to distill all that they shared, and connect the dots with their values, hopes and dreams to a larger their context. It needed a methodical process, described in Section 6, in the hopes that it can be replicated by other facilitators and designers. These prototypes had to live in one of the diegetic futures that the participant created in the context of working together. The prototypes were not meant to be more advanced versions of what the participant and facilitator co-designed in the lab, they had a different standard to uphold. As research probes they were designed to provoke new areas of inquiry for the participant to evaluate or reevaluate their relationship to something they assumed to be true. They were designed as a tool to help them add more layers to their vision of a preferred future.

The high-fidelity prototype was intended to add some context to a participant's day-in-the-life in September 2036, for how they would survive and thrive in one of their futures. Each prototype was designed to provoke a reaction from them the participant's worldview and sense of purpose in it.

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## 8.0 Evaluating Making the Futures Present

We have examined the information that was obtained from follow up interviews, but how do we know if this methodology works?

In these early stages of designing a new technique there are macro level questions about its usefulness in the world. For example, how does the act of engaging in the co-design session affect their clarity of images of the futures? Does the rapid-prototyping exercise of fabricating multiple prototypes affect their understanding of foresight?

There are also more micro level questions about the effectiveness of particular activities during the interviews. As an example; how does the format of the capture of a participant's stories affect what could "truths" can be analysed and reflected back to them? Or, could there be a significant value to the participant in co-creating the high-fidelity prototype with the designer? The following section uses theory and examples to probe some of these



bigger questions. The paper suggests some further indicators that could help to determine if the technique is making an impact on the participants after their experience.

## 8.01 Might Making the Futures Present help someone to create a new personal future narrative?

To help someone create a new narrative, we must first understand the narrative that they are coming from. Firstly, this technique was prototyped for the North American context. That existing socio-economic system is shaping their values, opportunities and lifestyle.

### **The old personal narrative**

This paper presents the argument that survival of humans and nonhumans is intrinsically linked to understanding our 'inner worlds.' Those inner worlds must exist in the context of complex dynamic systems at every human level (personal, social, organizational, governmental and global). Earlier I offered an opinion that we can't focus on an infinite growth situation to seek personal happiness, that in preparation for a complex world we will have to live smaller so that we can all fit on this planet. Our desire to keep things 'the way they are' is leading to dystopia. And, there is still hope that we can change.

'The way things are' is a lot more shallow (both capitalistic; and thin in details) than we are ready to face (Slaughter, 2004). Slaughter identified this gap between an existing paradigm of success and what things should be like in the future. He poses this central question, "How can we gain sufficient clarity about the construction of our inner worlds to be able to intervene in the coding of 'the way things are' in a worldview, in deeply held values, in presuppositions and obscured social interests?" (Slaughter, 1998 p.92). Therefore the challenge is set. We are to change our understanding of 'the way things are' in a quick and efficient manner. I believe that a response is to create new personal stories about our

preferred futures that deal with the larger systemic forces at play. In order to create a new personal futures narrative, the design of technique is to provide multiple scenarios within which to use strategically to create a preferred future.

### **To Create the New Personal Futures Narrative**

A person's worldview changes when they must reframe and accommodate expectations with outcome of new experiences. Among many others, futurist Peter Bishop says it is imperative that we consider our survival as human beings on this planet now. To survive and thrive as humans, individuals must be proactive about life planning in these uncertain times. The way forward depends on thinking 'deeply and creatively about the future, or else we run the risk of being surprised and unprepared.' (Bishop 2007, p.5) Slaughter says that most futurists believe that 'individuals, organizations and cultures that attempt to move into the future blindly are taking unnecessary risks. So they would agree that we need to understand and apply foresight in our private, public and professional lives.' (p. 35) We can insight those feelings by engaging the imagination.

### **Experiential Learning Theory**

A one-to-one interview in a confidential environment provides a safe space for engagement. The role of the facilitator is to hold the space for provocative conversations. ("Talking is low risk" was one of the rules of the space.) Asking the participants to describe pessimistic and unexpected worldviews for the futures seemed to cause some discomfort as they committed to thinking deeply about it.

After participants were coached to describe the futures the were asked "how do you survive and thrive in them?" The very nature of the question implies that there is a positive outcome in the world. Each participant described tools, assets or skills of survival. In contemplating a

pessimistic future Melany said that she would adapt to actions that would restrict her freedoms such as the number of children she could have. Mark also mentioned restrictions placed on him because of his religion didn't really concern him right now. Although it is not evident if this technique may make someone change their personal futures narrative, in a meaningful and lasting way that I assume narrative therapy can, but Dan Gilbert's theories on happiness (2009) state that we can and do change our values and personality over time. Therefore, with the tactics outlined above: communicate the personal futures current narrative, create strategies for new personal futures narrative, and use appropriate experiences, a person may design their own their futures narrative.

## 8.02 An Optimal Outcome

An optimal outcome of this personal experiential futures technique would create an urgent sense of purpose in a person. An individual would demonstrate sustained commitment to affecting positive change. They would more nimbly adapt to external forces because they have an enhanced foresight capacity. Linking these statements back to the proposal of a new technique, we would judge personal experiential futures by what they do for the individual. An abundance is needed here to serve different learning styles and different comfort zones. We know from experiential learning theory that people learn, not when they are out of their comfort zone and under stress, but in the stretch zone (Brown, 2008). Finally, because not everyone is able to generate images of the future with the same level of clarity, as evidenced in this research, there would be several creative solutions to helping people envision more images. (Some ideas will be discussed later.) A new personal experiential futures technique should do all that.

## 8.03 Indicators of Success

The technique could benefit from being prototyped at a much smaller scale, to test much smaller hypotheses. Smaller research units could explore this attempt at a grand intervention with short investigative sprints. A list of assumptions can be made for each step in the interview process, and the research could be redesigned to address those. It is a problem of the chicken and the egg. How do we test small increments of the technique if we don't know what the big picture question is? A smaller area to test within the existing technique could be as simple as a phone call a week ahead to describe the process and what will be expected from them. The design for this technique was made through the process of combining in prototyping, futures and ethnography. The ideas were supported by literary research and selected because of a desire to enable other designers and futurists replicate it or change it.

Now that we have a big picture, we can go back and look at some critical places to intervene in the existing design to make this prototype more successful based on questions such as the following:

1. How might this technique capture an existing personal narrative?
2. How might this technique measure a change between the existing personal narrative and the new one?
3. How might this technique record a change in behaviour? Who would be able to indicate that? What is the new behaviour we are looking for?
4. How might this technique measure a sustained change in behaviour? Over what time frame?

An indicator of success might be measured through actions by the participant:

1. The participant thought about the narratives they co-created and made a comment to someone about it.

2. The participant started to research something that they said would help them to survive and thrive in one or all of the futures.
3. The participant took an action towards helping others to survive and thrive in one or all of the futures.

Another indicator of success might be measured by the impact on others:

1. Is there a measured change in state to people outside of the participant's brief window of experience with the facilitation?

The indicators of success are dependent on the discipline with which the technique is measured.

## 8.04 Opportunities and Challenges for the Technique

As a novel process that is a derivation of ethnographic futures research, and experiential futures, how will it be discovered and judged as a usable framework? Here we discuss some challenges and opportunities for further development about replicability, accountability and the scale of contribution that it may or may not make for a participant.

### 1. Group Interviews

There were some very high reaching aspirations said in the interviews (Daniel, Tim and Melany). There seemed to be no evidence as to whether they were said on a whim or with authenticity. If this technique was tried in pairs or in a group setting, what impact would that have on accountability? Does there need to be? Robin gets the credit for raising that question in her follow up interview, about bringing her partner into the sessions to see if her

responses would change. Raising doubt in the participant's mind is the goal of this exercise. They will make many statements about the futures and the way that they foresee living in it. The important factor is the multiplicity of mental images that aid in deeming this technique a success.

For the first time experimenting with the technique the less structured interviews seemed the most appropriate because they allow interviewees to focus on what they think is most relevant to the question, providing the broadest set of perspectives.

## **2. Replicability of the Interview Cycle**

Is there a desire from individuals for this approach? I hope that after reading this document, which includes case studies and a theory supported process, that someone who is somewhat familiar with futures research and or co-design will be able to replicate or iterate on the technique. There is a need for someone with design skills to provide support in the co-design process, and in the content analysis for the creation of the high-fidelity prototype.

## **3. A Strategy or Action Plan**

Much work can be done to address a need for the strategy for the participant. Such targeted implementation approaches are beyond the intended scope, however, it is very important to close that loop and that would require working with an expert who develops personal goal-oriented plans.

#### **4. What's Next?**

Coaching sessions offering strategies around the re-authored narratives could add to the technique. I could look to narrative therapists, career coaches and such for assisting the participant with a plan.

A dramatic change in one's life purpose is not expected to take place in a short period time. Without asking first what their preferred future was, it is difficult to know if the proposed technique is having an impact. With the time constraints of this research it is difficult to know if the participant's will continue to grow their enhanced foresight capacity.

#### **5. Quantitative research**

Although the interview cycle employs several ideation tools, it could benefit from some existing foresight analysis tool.s. Some of these could be a trend analysis, futures wheel, and causal-layer analysis see more in many articles such as *The current state of scenario development: an overview of techniques* (Bishop, Hines, & Collins 2007). In order to be adopted widely it may be that some quantitative method of evaluation would be required - however this remains several steps further down the path which we have merely begun to map in the current project.

#### **6. Demographics**

This technique will be more helpful for some and less helpful for others. The research found that people who are at the start of a life transition, who have the supportive resources to think about their preferred future, and a time to make those plans were well positioned to gain from participating in the technique, for example; Participants Shona, Mark, Melany and Vera. Participants who were in the moment of a large life change, lacking financial stability and a missing a close and diverse community, were least likely to gain new insights from

participation, for example, Robin. As stated before the participants who were self-selected for this research study were of a similar demographic. Future research studies could be designed to explore variations for different groups such as people who share the same socio-economic backgrounds, cultures, ages and employment types.

## **7. Changes to the horizon**

Any proposed changes must view the design as a holistic approach. Most of the participants were able to contemplate a 20 year span both into the past and forwards into the future. Some of them were more able to connect with this distance by parcelling out lifestages ahead, rather than jumping to an exact date, e.g. September 27, 2036. However, in the follow up interviews, when participants described the experience as fun and not difficult, no one referred back to that moment, therefore, a change to this part of the design may not be needed. This may not be the case with all populations.

Older individuals, the sick or infirm, those who are cognitively impaired or otherwise challenged by their life circumstances may not be able to envision themselves 20 years into the future. It may be too painful or unrealistic to explore a future with any distant horizon at all. Here the intent or deployment of the experience must be reconsidered. Shortening the horizon to days, weeks or months maybe a way to still engage people in this conversation.

## **8.05 Conclusion**

The paper discusses the necessity of new methods in personal futures. This proposed technique, Making the Futures Present, is in the early days of development and as such needs to be judged on the potential of its merits. In my opinion, given the potential of these ideas, the existence of a transformative technique warrants serious consideration. The



intention of the research is to investigate whether a new narrative can be made through participation. As it is designed, each participant imagines new futures during the interviews, new narratives or surviving and thriving in multiple futures are created through participation. Whether participation in the technique achieves the outcome of moving someone from apathy to action needs a critical evaluation.

If these narratives help to inform the creation of a preferred future it needs more exploration. The creation of an expert-led strategy plan, which is missing in the proposed technique, would help in the creation of new behaviours. At this time it is not possible to measure if a participant's preferred future now has a level of social awareness, incorporates a comprehension of system impacts, and a concern for the future of other humans and nonhumans. The proposed technique did not index a benchmark with the participant's preferred future at the outset of the interview cycle. Whether the envisioning of multiple futures creates foresight capacity remains to be seen. More time with the participant, hours in the workshop or multiple weekly sessions would be needed to assess whether someone is moving from apathy to action because of an enhanced foresight capacity.

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## 9.0 From Apathy to Action

As stated previously, Making the Futures Present intends to help someone focus at the start of their personal journey towards finding a purpose in life that is much greater than themselves. Where the technique could be ameliorated is in closing that loop, from apathy to action. To enable someone to realize personal goals in recognition of a worldview beyond the self. The implementation plan, next steps and a limitation of the proposed technique are discussed here.

### 9.01 Implementation Plan

Applying the framework of a business plan would help evolve Making the Futures Present into a well defined product or service.

## **1. Technique refinement or redevelopment.**

Making the Futures Present is merely the prototype for a personal experiential futures technique. The technique was not built using personas or studying a targeted user group. A better approach would be to start by observing people who self-identify that they want to redefine their preferred future. In observing their actions and expressed values there may be other insights that lead to an intervention with an entirely different solution. Without going right back to the beginning, there are many ways to adjust this prototype as created. Some of these ways are to modulate the technique, as discussed in the Section 9.

## **2. Market research in different fields.**

This technique is potentially a marketable service. It was designed with theory from experiential futures and ethnographic futures research methods, before doing research with a user group. The working assumption was that people want an experience that would help them to imagine their preferred futures in the context of an uncertain future. Using business innovation models such as the Business Model Canvas would be helpful to refine potential value propositions, customer groups and pricing structures. Financials could be put around these value propositions and tested in rapid iteration with real customers until a value for service is clear.

The type of customer, or end user that this technique might appeal to most is yet to be determined. Going directly to different user groups to test this further could be time well spent. Each demographic may already have its own set of trusted advisors who help guide people to their preferred future. These players could be cultural, religious, professional or familial. As a point of differentiation, these advisors may or may not be contextualizing that future from a systems view or using prototypes to facilitate the conversation. As an example guidance counsellors and personal coaches may be using assessments such as personality and skills tests that focus on the inner potential before surveying the landscape for what

careers match what a persona can offer the world. These advisors may take into consideration the values, hopes, fears and dreams of an individual, but may not pair them with the agenda to take proactive actions for the world.

### **3.        Suggestions of particular demographics**

The amount of resources allocated for contemplating one's future may depend on what importance one places on that task. A young person coming up to graduation would be thinking more about their future than perhaps someone in the early days of a new job. For example, if a young person is graduating from high school and looking for work, college or university they may wonder how they can ensure the best path forward. The best path forward may be influenced by multiple factors, for example, income, social groups, or personal values. It is at this point that perhaps a facilitated experience such as this one could be useful.

Other groups that may be interested in this experience could be adults approaching retirement age. As people are living healthier longer, retirement age may come at a time when they are not ready to take a full step away from work, but still want a commitment that engages them. If their prospects are looking secure, and responsibilities such as children are less demanding, they may be interested in looking farther afield for ways to share their skills and experience. What they may get out of a facilitated conversation could be very practical.

### **4.        Launch the technique with different partners in those fields.**

The technique could be launched within professional networks such as; developing programming for conferences, running local workshops, or publishing a book or website.

These alternative outreach methods could give the technique a much stronger opportunity at succeeding.

Partners could trial and develop this process with diverse constituencies; for example, those who have a defined client base might include guidance counsellors, narrative therapists, personal and life coaches, newcomer settlement agencies, or university career development departments. These partners would have existing practices and guidelines for communications that would help refine the experience for the participants. Lessons learned from each could be used to inform the development of major changes to the technique.

#### **5. Process refinement with feedback from the participants.**

The prototype process is about refining and adjusting a product or service in a focussed way. A prototype is built to address a design challenge, often multiple prototypes are created in iterations searching for a solution. At this phase Making the Futures Present is only a prototype. It would be a missed opportunity not to incorporate this feedback and update approach to the technique.

## **9.02 Next steps**

### **Foresight Work**

In the near term I can continue to contribute to the growing literature about personal futures, and share what I have learned (as described in Sections 6, 7, and 8). I can compare and contrast this technique with other similar foresight and ethnographic research methods through literature reviews and expert interviews. I can contribute to the foresight process as

a facilitator who helps participants to envision multiple futures helping them to feel the future and not fear a menacing, unknowable, blurry future.

### **Refinements of the existing technique**

As a designer, design thinker and futurist I can refine the existing technique before launching a new version of it to a wider audience. There may be many ways to arrive more efficiently at the required robust and plausible scenarios for the participants. Participants could receive well rounded, well researched futures scenarios as part of their first session, instead of having to create them from scratch. As indicated earlier, participants tend to either cover a small number of topics in depth or multiple topics more shallowly. Alternatively, participants could be given homework before the first session to research emerging trends of their own interest.

In the early stages of evaluation, some small changes to the proposed process could yield results that tighten up the goal of moving participants from apathy to action. There are many options for each of the three phases in the technique. A few of these are explored below.

1. **"What brings you in today?";** this is the recruitment process of the participant.

As participants were recruited from a narrow demographic, there are many opportunities to expand this to new groups with variations on life stage, cultural background, socioeconomic status, geographic location, arena of political stability, and organizational affiliation, to name a few. As a research project, this could generate some rich insights into the zeitgeist of the time.

2. **Draw the city of the future;** the first activity of the interview cycle.

The first task is a creative warm-up.. The creative exercise should help them to free their mind to be open for generative frame of mind. Asking them to express something that they are very familiar with could take many forms other than drawing. Finding different ways to have fun are necessary for different ages and demographics.

3. **The blurry futures;** the worldview description of the futures

An alternative to having participants create their own world view is to have them receive a robust scenario generated by a futurist. The futurist could write out multiple plausible scenarios and see how the participants respond to the information grounded in expert-led research. Creating expert scenarios for the participant may have a two-fold effect. The first effect that it might have on the participant is to give them a broader story in which to contemplate more situations. Secondly, it may take the pressure off of them having to come up with ideas about the future on the spot.

4. **Domains;** this is a description of how topics were sorted

The approaches to several different domains were explored during the interviews. These included collections of domains from Wheelwright (2006), to STEEP+V, and leaving it open for the participants to define their own. There are possibly of approaching the conversation with other domains, such as Chilean economist Manfred Max-Neef's Human Needs (Max-Neef, 1991). His list of fundamental human needs are as follows: subsistence, protection, affection, understanding, participation, leisure, creation, identity and freedom. One way to approach these as domains might be to ask "How would you address these needs in each future?" -- this is an area for further exploration..

5. **The scenarios:** this is a description of the way images were organized

In the existing prototype of the technique. Participants' images of the future were sorted into optimistic, pessimistic, expected and unexpected futures. based on ethnographic futures research (Textor, 1998)

6. **"How do you survive and thrive?";** the personal description of the futures

The personal description of the futures is through a lens of the question "how do you survive and thrive?" An alternative potential question might be, "how do you help others to survive and thrive?" This change in the frame of the question may call people to action, more than just considering their own preferred futures in that diametrically opposed silo of personal and social.

7. **The timeline;** a significant activity

The timeline was used to ask people to think about their past. They described significant events in depth. This future facing exercise definitely needs more time dedicated to it in the sessions. It may, in fact, be a critical activity to keep if other steps are shed away.

8. **The Daily Details Card:** This step gets people to think about details that would exist in their futures

The participants were asked questions about their concrete daily context and activities in the future. They were asked to be as specific as possible, engaging their senses and share what they saw, heard and said. They were asked to describe their surroundings, where they would go or not go -- in short, they were here were asked to generate that whole world for themselves. There are many alternative ways to facilitate a discussion about a 'day in the



life'. An untested way could use persona cards; images of people with a brief quote from them about what they see or say in the futures. Presenting these prompts to the participants could give them something to act or react to a more constrained set of prompts would intentionally limit the conversation, but it could also help the process move faster.

9. **Rapid prototyping;** a building process for low-fidelity prototypes of experiential futures

The rapid prototypes were co-designed by the participant and facilitator. Participants had a full table of materials to choose from and paper to draw on. Instead of rapid prototyping something in the second interview, they could have been asked to role play it with the facilitator. They would still have an immersive experience stimulating new ideas but use their bodies instead of their hands to convey them. To do this it might take some warm up exercises to get people on their feet.

10. **Memories of the futures;** the high-fidelity experiential futures artifact or experience

Instead of the presentation of one final prototype, the designer could work with the participant to create something of high resolution together. This could turn into a collaborative project that extends over one workshop. The evolution of the technique could, in this way, become an art therapy approach.

11. **Preferred futures;** this is the question asked in the final interview

In a final interview some of the participants were asked about their preferred futures. The answer to this question could be sought in more than one modality. Instead of being asked in an interview, a survey could go out with very specific and constant questions over an

extended period of time. The participant and facilitator could refer back to previous surveys and look for patterns and changes to the description in the participant's preferred future.

### 9.03 A Limitation of the Proposed Approach

This personal futures technique requires uptake from three audiences to make this an impactful solution. These three audiences are futurists, facilitators and participants. The most important group is of course participants who are looking for a preferred future with a purpose and who want to be part of the solution. It would be of great benefit to have futurists' involvement to critique the idea and tighten up the concepts. Experts who lead groups in becoming comfortable with uncertainty could help to dial up that conversation by evolving activities, based on tried and true foresight methods. Futurists Wheelwright (2006), West and Draudt (2016) redeveloped existing techniques into personal futures activities that are perhaps more widely used than ethnographic futures research. The third group that would be needed to support this personal futures technique would be facilitators, therapists and other leaders. The hope is that there would be an emergence of facilitators who would agree with the need to make people feel the future instead of fear it. They would be the leaders in a movement towards helping people to consider their preferred futures in the context of a complex world.

#### **Facilitation**

This technique was built to be facilitated. It would necessitate a futurist and a designer to fulfill the basic technique in the form that it is now. The futurist would explain the way that the technique is designed. A facilitator (either the futurist or the designer) would guide the

semi-structured interview keeping the participant on the task of describing multiple possible futures and describing the difference between them.

With evidence from narrative therapy techniques, saying these stories out loud has a proven power to affect change (White and Epston, 1990). A facilitator uses the language of the participant to ask them reflexive questions and thereby influences the success of this experience. It is the action of give and take, echo and response, that sets a facilitated conversation apart from lectures, videos, books and websites. The act of sitting with someone in conversation is a both low risk and a highly useful way to bring about understanding in a dedicated period of time. The verbal and nonverbal expressions from the facilitator support people in reframing their narrative as people use their bodies in response to the other person's behaviour. "Listener behavior changes how elaborative the story is in the moment of telling, with effects that are evident on subsequent remembering occasions," (Pasupathi, 2007).

The technique in the way that it is designed now does not scale as well as it would if it were available to multiple people at once. If it were a book, a website, a video, a conference workshop, a social network or a blog more people could participate at a faster rate. Perhaps it could be designed for more people to work with each other without the need for a futurist and designer. Design firm IDEO and the online leadership educator +Acumen have created a self-guided workshop process teaching people how to do human-centred design.

### **Teaching the Technique to Other Facilitators**

The technique, in its current iteration could be shared through some coaching to other facilitators, presumably teams of futurists and designers. The two roles go hand in hand in a tight collaboration. Coaching would focus on the ethnographic language used to encourage a participant to articulate what they envision the futures to be like, and to create a narrative from that. It would also focus on the rapid-prototyping techniques used in the co-design of

different low-fidelity artifacts and experiences. There would be some considerations placed on coaching a designer to lead the analysis of comments from the interviews. Since the final step is to synthesize the data into an essential concept and manifest an artifact or experience in response both would be critical partners in sharing their understanding of what would be most effective in moving the participant to action.

### **Learning styles**

As mentioned before, not all participants were comfortable with the prototyping activities. As this is an opportunity for participants to learn about themselves there is a strong need for further exploration into how a facilitator can identify and respond to people's different learning styles, kinesthetic, visual or auditory by starting with the writings of David and Kolb and Alice Kolb.

## **9.04 Conclusion**

This section described many ways in which this prototype of a technique could be taken to the next level. Five points of an implementation plan were considered for the evolution of a sustainable business around this technique. I looked at what the next steps might be to help shine a light on this research itself. It is early days for this technique and there is much room for further exploration to refine and enhance its value with multiple partnerships. The concepts can be improved perhaps using some of the suggestions above and the integration with professional associations, it would be advantageous to consider mechanisms for reaching a larger audience. This brings us to our final conclusion about this research.

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## 10.0 Conclusion

In this research we move from theory to practice. This is a proposal of a new technique applying foresight methods, ethnographic futures research techniques, and design practices. This technique is in the early stages of development, and there may be much to work on, but depending on what lens you use to evaluate this first prototype of a personal experiential futures technique. Feedback from the participants indicate some early successes.

To recap the outcomes of this research activity:

- A literature review of relevant futures, design, ethnography, generative research methods, psychology, and fusions of those disciplines that inform the design of this technique
- An illustrated description of the design for Making the Futures Present
- Thoughts on the prototype of a personal experiential futures technique
- The design process for creating the high-fidelity prototypes with three case studies
- A harvest of insights about this version of the technique

- Preliminary next steps for developing a business, finding partners and iterating on this technique
- Comments from nine participants who report that they have a new way to think about the future

This paper may be of interest to futurists who are curious about personal futures, social scientists or personal coaches who are curious about futures methods. An expanded list of disciplines might include designers, personal coaches or teachers. "Most social science and human disciplines have recently turned to narrative analysis for the human involvement in reporting and evaluating experience" (Cortazzi, 1993; Polkinghorne, 1988; Riessman, 1993). Applications could be related to multi-age rehabilitation and care institutions, or equally entrepreneurial think tanks.

## 10.01 In Response to the Research Question

### **How might experiential futures be used to help someone begin to create their own preferred future?**

Personal experiential futures, including the proposed technique of Making the Futures Present, can help someone begin to create their preferred futures for four reasons.

Firstly, the narratives generated by participants make a good source for the manifestation of provocative artifacts and experiences. Some participants state that this personalized artifact or experience catalyzes an evaluation of currently held beliefs. Claudette, who received the Body Clock prototype said, "You made me reconsider my relationship to 'time.'"

Second, the participant created and animated personally relevant images in optimistic, pessimistic, expected and unexpected futures. The creative process of using alternative

futures to discover this 'inner view' is low risk. Experiential learning theorist Michael Brown postulated that when people are under duress, they are not able to learn as much, or the intended message, as if they have some level of comfort and are stretched instead of prodded (Brown, 2008). In the discussion of each future, participants would develop scenarios about what they will do in their preferred futures. Shona, who will be 60 in twenty years, said that she would adopt a child because there are enough children on this planet. She asked herself, "What am I doing now towards this goal?"

Third, the structure of the experiential futures creation process is supportive to the activity of envisioning a preferred future. The sequencing of questions from 'outer view' to 'inner view' appears to help the participant to activate images of the futures. The experience of talking about how they would survive and thrive in them in detail makes the futures more desirable. The Experiential Futures Ladder 'from system, to scenario, to situation, to stuff' sets up a context for someone to feel the future in a tangible way, not fear it as blurry, menacing and unknowable. Claudette was so moved by the experience that she said in the second interview, "You want to make me an activist don't you!"

Fourth, participants are forced to make sense of their values, hopes, dreams and fears in this personalized experience. Declarations about what is really important to them transcend all futures. Describing how they would protect their values, hopes, and dreams becomes a learning opportunity. They express what they want in the future as a fundamental human need and not in terms of material wealth. Tom and Vera both mentioned that the fall of the capitalistic system would potentially happen in the near future.

## 10.02 In Response to the Sub-questions

### **How might the fabrication of prototypes of artifacts and experiences help a participant to envision multiple futures?**

The creation of futures scenarios are, in a sense, prototypes of alternative futures. Future images, snapshots, are the smaller granules of these scenarios. If we take this concept

one step further, the roles, props, scripts and settings are even smaller granules in those images. In trying to understand the whole of these 'outer worlds' participants prototyped the diegetic artifacts and experiences. The prototyping process is just one more granular level down the chain. The incremental decisions a participant makes about the look and feel of an artifact or an experience are based on their own perspective. When this process is repeated for each of the futures a participant envisions the manifestation of each future differently. They can 'see' the differences between them.

Bill Moggridge, co-founder of IDEO, says "it's easier to recognize a solution than it is to explain it" (Moggridge, 2007). Symbols, objects and representations can be a lot more efficient way to communicate than language can be. Hence the truism, a picture is worth a thousand words. Prototypes help to shape and define these images in the futures. Construal level theory says that images are low-level construals of the near-future, they have more detail and substance. Words are high-level construals of the distant future, they transform the essence of an event. Therefore, to concretize distal futures we can prototype something that we can see or touch and make it more clear. We are literally making it feel more real.

The fabrication of an artifact or experience helps to fold back the future into the present at a level of clarity that goes beyond unaided imagination. The prototyping process helped ideas seem more real because they embodied their ideas about themselves in the context of higher order worldview. The more decisions that the participants made about the look and feel of an artifact or experience for each futures situation the more they came to 'own' that future. This is why this technique is called Making the Futures Present. Participants reported that the fabrication of the prototypes challenged them to think in new ways. Participants reported more clarity about their envisioned futures as we heard before from Melany, Tom and Mark. They had a takeaway to focus on after the experience.

### **The Artifact or Experience**



Each participant received a personal experiential futures artifact or experience at the end of the interview cycle. They expressed a range of emotions and new thoughts looking at these things. This brings us to the other research sub-question; **What conclusions can be made from iterating a semi-structured interview process in developing a new technique?**

Image 28: Daniel's comments sorted into STEEP-V categories



Insights from ethnographic futures research, experiential futures and the prototyping process informed the design of the technique. Not until the nine participants came into the lab and started the interview cycles... did things change greatly. Preconceived notions about the order of events, the props for having conversations and method for recording conversation shifted as time with the technique increased. That's the value of experience and reprocessing.

Some interviews were better executed than others. A successful interview cycle would have a combination of carefully worded questions in the right order, the creation of a private and creative space that enables a participant, to the best of their ability, to create visions on a 20 year horizon from now, and a well led co-design session.

### 10.03 A Final Summary

This paper argues that it is imperative that each individual create new stories about himself or herself living in the future. A story of infinite growth as perpetrated by the ideologies of prior generations is revealing itself to be a myth. As humans we have a tempocentric mindset that does not protect our future selves and nonhumans enough if the world continues with many existing trends. Multiple immeasurable factors are creating a future that is more complex than it has ever been. More of what we expect to happen in the future is even more uncertain, yet we apply little effort to considering how we will all live in it. Prevailing approaches are single minded, nearsighted and strongly favour expected outcomes. Although the future is difficult to think about there are ways to make it less blurry, less menacing and less unknowable. One can begin to protect one's future self with enhanced foresight capacity. Instead of expecting more of the same, the new stories must be created in the context of a world of multiplicity. Creating a life plan with speculations about which one of multiple futures comes to pass leads to an entirely different strategy than creating a goal setting plan based on expectations as discussed in Section 4.05.

In this paper it has been argued that everyone's purpose in life is shaped by their preferred future. To begin to create a sustainable preferred future we must not fail to consider the dynamic complex systems at play. These systems make it impossible to create an expected future in the long view, for the world or for ourselves in it. We cannot know all of the variables that will make an impact on an individual's life. We can make an attempt at planning for uncertainty using foresight techniques. To enhance one's foresight capacity is to acknowledge those future facing images with an unlimited imagination. One way we began to do this was by creating multiple futures scenarios.

Foresight techniques are embracing creative approaches to research and the expression of futures scenarios. The Integral theory has informed a new approach to futures. Personal futures is an emerging area of study, and this is where personal experiential futures fits into the lineage. The approach proposed in this paper is a personal futures technique combining ethnographic futures research, experiential futures and a human-centred approach to design. We know from research that values, hopes, dreams and fears shape the stories that we tell about the future but that they change over time.

This proposal for a new technique is called Making the Futures Present. This technique is unique because it gathers interactive interviews, deep listening, systems thinking and prototyping together. The impact of the proposed technique is demonstrated through follow up interviews. This report is of a first test of the technique, with a group of like-minded forward thinking people who live in the progressive urban environment of Toronto, Canada. In the lab research with nine participants, each one consistently referred to skills and assets that they either currently have or would like have in the future to protect themselves against instability.

At its best, the technique tries to make people feel the impact of climate change in 20 years on the same visceral level as having to pay their heating bill today. There are many more questions than conclusions at this stage of the game. Just some of the doubts about this version of the technique are accountability of participants statements, replicability and the requirement to connect it with a goal setting activity.

In conclusion, the findings of this research paper are that a personal futures technique to help someone envision a preferred future that starts at the worldview and uses prototypes does help fold back time for a participant. In the low risk activity of the workshop setting they can begin to envision clearer images of the future. The steps along the journey in this technique are structured so that they learn to engage their personal foresight and challenge their own assumptions about how the future would play out. In that rigorous imagining thoughts of a preferred future within a wider worldview can come into clarity.



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# Appendix A: Formal Steps of the Proposed Technique

## Description of Day 1 - step by step

**Materials:** Prepare a small notebook for a Preferred Futures Journal dated 20 years out. Lots of multi-coloured post-it notes.

Explain the process and expected outcomes. Encourage them to fill in that journal as you go in the sessions or on their own time as ideas develop in the future. Developing a preferred future takes lots of reflection time and you are there only to help them to approach this thought process in a new way.

**Run sheet:** Start with a fun and relevant creative task relevant to the participant. For example, this urban social innovators for 10 minutes.

Ask the participant the following questions and write their responses on colour-coded post-it notes according to themes that you hear. Capturing these images with accuracy forms the basis of their scenarios for each of the futures.

- Ask the participant "what are the current expected future images?"
- Ask the participant "what is an optimistic outcome?"
- Ask the participant "what is a pessimistic outcome?"
- Ask the participant "what do you not expect to happen?"
- Get the participant to sort your recordings into the four futures.

## Description of Day 2 - step by step

**Materials:** Lots of multi-coloured post-it notes, markers, large paper, at least one bag of raw materials and miscellaneous objects. Things like ribbon, rocks, tape, coloured paper, pompoms, small toys, scissors, maps, magazines with lots of pictures, pipe cleaners, etc.

Before the start of the workshop collect and write out their images on paper to make a scenario that they can recognize as their own.

Draw a line horizontally across a big piece of paper. Start with asking them to create a 20 year timeline of their significant experiences for 15 minutes. After they have filled this out, ask them to plot the high and low points on the same page. When they are finished reiterate that this has the same amount of detail in which the next twenty years will unfold.

Now, display their scenarios from Part 1 in a way that they can compare and contrast them all. Leave space around your written scenarios and ask them to clarify or add to them. 20-40 minutes. Get them to name each scenario.

Ask the participant "how do you thrive and survive in each future?" Capture this information on paper and sort it into the following categories for each futures scenario.

"What do you see/ not see?"

"What do you hear/ not hear?"

"What do you say/ not say?"

"What do you do/ not do?"



Ask the participant "what are the most visceral images in each of the futures?"

Prompt them to use materials that you have brought with you to create and describe these images in 3D or on drawn on paper. These are the basis for more informed unique memories of the futures that you will create for them in Part 3.

### The high-fidelity prototype - step by step

The final stage is to give the participant a higher fidelity prototype of a future memory inspired by their assumptions. This touchstone piece serves to remind the participant what they learned about themselves while they were in the middle of the interview cycle. It's not just the prototype that is important, it is the process of prototyping, too. It is my assumption that the participant will come to recognize something of that newly created memory of the future "design is represented of the future (Sanders)" Again, the participant must be willing to envision. In application, these creations may be challenging to encourage.

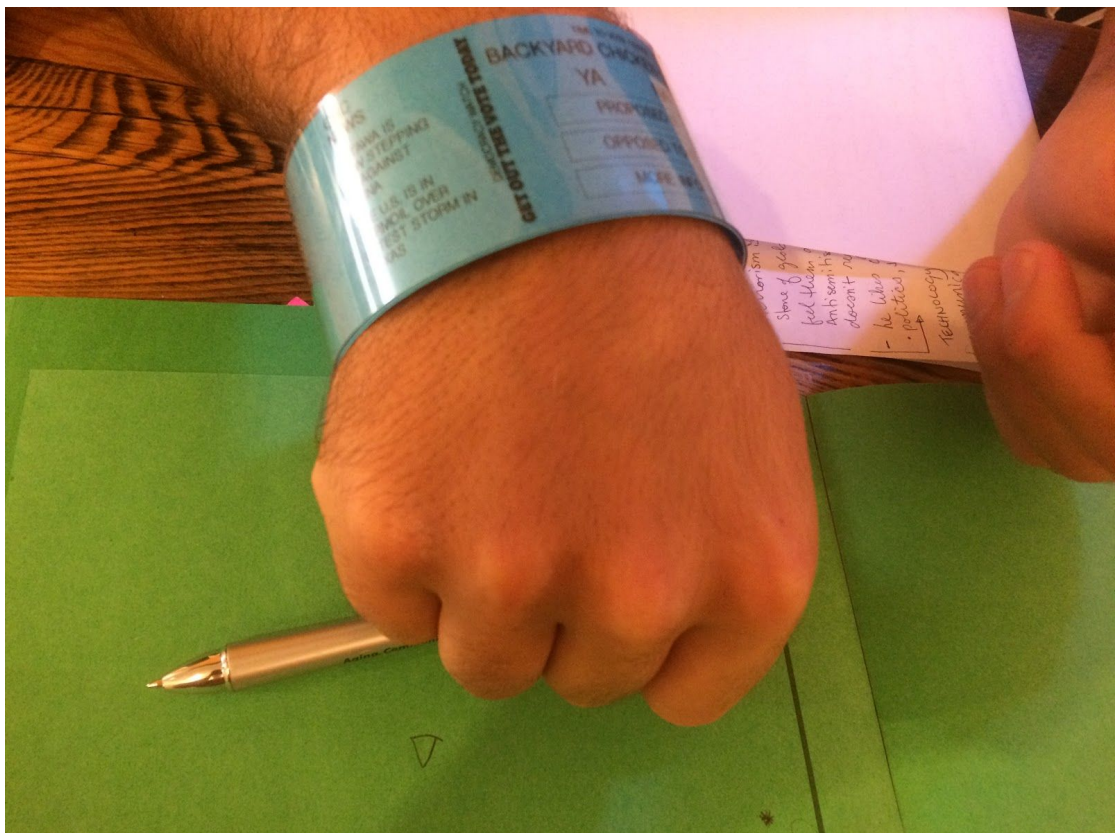
The participant is meant to analyze those new ideas for their preferred futures on their own time. In order to have a tight focus on generating multiple futures the participant is given a "Preferred Futures Journal" and suggested to follow up with their needs, values and personality change over time. Foresight studies recognize that personal experience, bias and values are inputs into this process. Output of a foresight process are both intangible and tangible. Intangible is personal growth and clearer worldview from the process, a tangible output to foresight process are storytelling formats. Scenarios are a good way to practice before you live it. I.e. what are the consequences of not looking at alternative futures?

## Appendix B: Three Case Studies

### Case study 1: Mark - Male age 27

Mark described that he wanted a stronger connection to city voting. He wanted to know about more the municipal issues being discussed at city hall and to be alerted frequently. His values of connectedness, democracy and love of technology together inspired this futures artifact.

Image 29. Mark's Democracy iWatch



**Democracy iWatch:** This is a "smartwatch" designed with a flexible screen that streams the issues of city council to its wearer. It is created as a pricey gadget that enables a privileged and engaged citizen to vote on all civic matters as they come up daily. In this future, citizens were all able to contribute to the daily series of municipal issues, see who supported the issue and who was against it. At first, Participant Mark was really scared of the conceptual

object. It was the physical manifestation of one's voting rights that seemed to give him pause. "What are the implications of your identity on a bracelet and what if it gets lost or stolen?" was his gut reaction. Unpredictably he was shocked when he saw it. His reaction was unexpected. He recoiled at the concept of having his personal identity on his wrist. His immediate reaction was one of fear. What if someone had his watch with all of his identity on it? It was interesting to note that he reacted to the form factor before looking at the details. This insight serves to reaffirm the power of the physical over a verbal expression of an idea.

## Case study 2: Shona - Female age 40

Shona has values of equality for all ages, backgrounds and sex. She also spends a lot of time helping more vulnerable populations. She expects immigration to continue in Canada in all futures. This futures artifact contained a letter from Pole Vault Canada with two tickets to give to two non-registered voters. Pole Vault is a fictional not for profit organization that exists to serve democracy and finding a way to give more agency to those who have no voice. The letter explained that her contribution to the Pole Vault organization would mean that she has purchased two voter registrations. These registrations can be given to the unregistered voters of her choice. She is directed to be their guardian in assisting them to the polling station and informing them of the election issues.

**Pole Vault Canada:** In looking for clues as to what this prototype should be I noticed that Shona repeated a comment twice. In talking about the pessimistic future she remarked that "the Canadian government already requires you to have \$35,000 to participate in an election". She was talking about the minimum entry that someone had to have to run at any level of government. That level of observation and detail about an occurrence in the present is very helpful. The comment and the way that she said it demonstrated passion for a cause, and a wish to make things better. The combination of personal values and choice of topic become an entry point into making a significant artifact in that future scenario.

Image 30. Shona's Pole Vault Canada letter



Shona thought that the concept was very well developed. It gave her pause to consider what kind of contribution she was making now. "It's the little things like recycling and conserving water that are important." Perhaps she was thinking that helping someone to vote is a little gesture that in reality means a lot in the future of our country. These specific comments are useful in the creation of a significant futures memory. I would judge a significant futures memory to be one that makes the participant question their relationship to a value in a way that they had not considered it before.

## Case study 3: Vera - female age 63

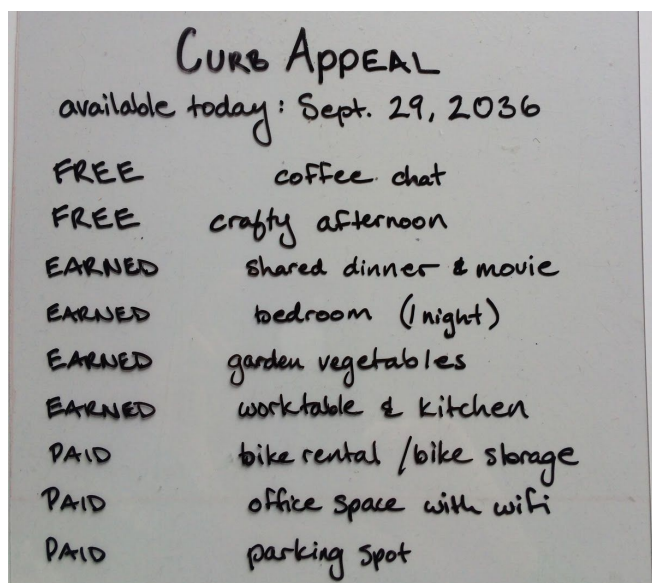
**Step 1. Review the material:** In reviewing her recounting of the futures it was observed that 'sharing' was a big theme for Vera. At times she mentioned that she would share with people and at other times she would not. She mentioned that she would always like to be learning new things. She also mentioned that she imagined that good food would always be available from boutique vendors, she would share wine and meals with others and maybe someone else that she wasn't acquainted with. She mentioned that she is partaking in a neighbourhood wide dinner sharing event where 200 people open up their doors to strangers and share food with them. During the session in the lab she created a rapid prototype of her expected future she described each person, what they were eating and the shape of the table with quite a lot of clarity. She was asked to take the same situation of people sitting around her dinner table and to modify it for each alternative future; optimistic, pessimistic and unexpected. In each iteration she would add people to the table in pessimistic futures, change the conversation in optimistic futures, and change the location for her unexpected future.

**2. Identify key themes:** This is a condensed ethnography of what emerged through the analysis of the conversations. She mentioned 'smart intensification' in the description of her city. She had previously crafted a very interesting but not conclusive description of her plan to cope as a senior. Her and her friends would invest in a large home that could she rent would out in the present until they were ready to move into it. She might manage room rentals for students. She drove a car and really was attached to it.

She had a discrepancy in her comments about not wanting to share more. Focussing on an inconsistency was instrumental in the development of a personal experiential futures high-fidelity prototype that she may respond to.

**3. Sensemaking:** An important part of sensemaking included evaluating the geographic space of where she lives. This also included her likes/ dislikes and what she knows of the city dynamics right now. She talked a lot about playing a contributing role, as a useful and productive senior. She mentioned solutions for seniors communities in the EU that inspired her living plan. She talked about students renting rooms from seniors and living in seniors housing. She talked about the idea of "consuming a foreign culture" as opposed to immersing one's self in it. The essence of this dialogue reflected her appreciation for a multi-generational haves and have-nots situation. The home that she owns now might be something that she leverages in the future as she expects to become more involved in her community.

Image 31. Vera's Curb Appeal



CURB APPEAL	
available today: Sept. 29, 2036	
FREE	coffee chat
FREE	crafty afternoon
EARNED	shared dinner & movie
EARNED	bedroom (1 night)
EARNED	garden vegetables
EARNED	worktable & kitchen
PAID	bike rental / bike storage
PAID	office space with wifi
PAID	parking spot

**4. Final product:** The end result of this analysis a social networking platform that has a business model at the intersection of other sharing economy platforms such as; Bunz, Uber, BikeShare, AirBnB, Not Far from the Tree and Car2Go. The intention of this social network is to help Vera share and interact with new people who are in need of

small favours. In return she keeps busy, runs a small social business and can have some housework assistance when she is 83. The Curb Appeal is both a physical and digital platform lets people advertise assets that they have and what they would like to exchange them for. Examples of sharing are: bike rental or storage, parking space, using a desk or kitchen, crafting time, having a coffee or watching a movie together. The Curb Appeal host can choose whether they want the people to pay for, earn with help around the house or just enjoy the offering for free. This message is conveyed on a webpage and digitally on her

window. The prototype was a small scale "menu of the day" that she would display in her window.

**Participant reaction:** Vera was very complimentary about the "Curb Appeal" social networking opportunity that was created for her in mind. She enjoyed the social aspects of it, and showed concern for having strangers come into her house. She said that she was going to hang the prototype in her window.

**Lessons Learned:** The typical design process for this and the other prototypes was applied in the making of this business model. All of the activities in the interview cycle informed her understanding of futures scenarios. During the timeline exercise she reflected on the ups and downs of the previous 20 years of her life with great detail and comprehended that the futures would also have as much activity in it. She said that many of the thoughts that she expressed are ones that she had not often explored. She said that no part of the interview cycle was emotionally uncomfortable, and that the experience was fun.

## Appendix C: Participants

Table 1. Participants

pseudonym	age/ sex	occupations	lifestage
Mark	27/M	Entrepreneur	"I'm a young adult working my way in the world"
Melany	23/F	I manage a team of volunteers to work towards the goal of providing a space for youth to access counsellors and board games.	young and fancy free"
Claudette	57/F	<p>Senior communications advisor and coach for professionals</p> <p>What does this really mean? I help companies and individuals identify and communicate their unique "story" --with all of its ups and downs and twists and turns -- in a way that resonates with their target market's needs, wants, and interests.</p> <p>Again ---say what? Well, to use a metaphor -- I help clients go outside and look in through a window at themselves. In looking in, they can see first-hand why who they are, and what they do, actually matters to others standing out there looking in at them.</p> <p>I am also a writer, and providing angles and content is a very big part of my everyday work. As well, I'm a published author, but as I am struggling so much with my second book and have yet to gain traction, I find it a bit embarrassing to even go there. I</p>	"It looks like I'll never retire from here."



		appreciate that you'll understand my hesitancy.	
Vera	63/F	description:architect now working as a project manager on contracts mostly for social service groups	"It looks like I'll never retire from here" and "I'm good and/but ready for a big life change"
Tom	35/M	I am an investigative researcher. I have a deep passion for investigative journalism, and I apply the skills of investigative reporting as a researcher-for-hire; tracking down information and insights for a wide range of clients such as documentary film makers, lawyers, and first nations.	"I've been at this game a while now"
Robin	31/F	ESL Teacher and Writer. Currently in a transition stage as in Toronto for six months to support my partner's business enterprise. Wanting to move into working in social enterprise development/ community organizing and engagement.	"I've been at this game a while now"  "I'm good and/but ready for a big life change"
Daniel	49/M	I call myself a life and business strategist. I work with mainly founders of startups / small business who are stuck and stressed out. I help them regain their confidence and take their game to a new heights.  I also work with people who feel trapped by their careers. I help them break free to do the work they really love.	I've been at this game a while now
Hanna	34/F	artist, researcher, consultant. i make installations, interactions and interventions. i follow my curiosities and try to bring people with me or else follow them as part of the curiosity. i am	"I'm in the middle of life change. I've been working for a while, retirement is a long ways off, I'd like to invite more adventure and stillness into my life."if I had to pick one I'd say the last - ready for a big life change - except i

		interested in art in society, not apart. art in the 9 to 5, not just 5 to 9.	feel i've already started, maybe. or maybe not. maybe it's meant to get bigger, more different. exciting!
Shona	40/F	I would call myself a grad researcher/entrepreneur. Certified leadership and transformation coach looking at exploring opportunities for work that allow me to work on interesting projects in an atmosphere where there is no race to the lowest common denominator.	I have Invested time, effort and energy to have the freedom to choose what I get to work on and as such my personal and professional paths. A time great opportunity and uncertainty. I have followed the map, but where does it actually lead and will I actually enjoy like what is at the other end. "I'm young and fancy free" Established, savvy, eternally optimistic and SUPER curious about EVERYTHING.

## Appendix D: Participant Feedback

Referring to the table below, here is a summation of the participants experience and feedback:

The **Participant** column is the pseudonym, age, gender of the participant and if they were explicit a short description of their personal philosophy.

The **Prompts Used** column is the list of prompts used in conversation. The significance of including this column is only to demonstrate that there was a significant evolution in the activities included in the technique. In summation, the activities described in the Making the Futures Present technique proposal became more refined in testing the theory with nine interviewees.

The **Encouraging Feedback** and **Critique** columns are notes from the follow up interviews. Comments selected here follow the format of the organic and varying style of response from the participants, sometimes excerpting and some verbatim.

Table 2: Activities and Participant Responses

Participant	Prompts Used	Encouraging Feedback	Critique
Melany -23F "I was planning on going back to school but this experience made me commit to a more passion driven life"	Direct questions from STEEPV domains Domain cards Personal 20 year timeline Social circle Build prototypes	"Overall a great experience" could be condensed into a workshop. "It really moved me" "I always used to plan so idealistically, but I was missing the other aspects of the planning." "I'd like to do this every couple of months for myself and do this for my business"	My boyfriend would would do this but he would be more reluctant to describe the pessimistic future.
Mark - 27M "The optimistic"	Personal 20 year timeline Social circle	This broadened the scope of his thinking. "I'd like to re-read what I said in the future." The	"It was really hard to separate the optimistic from the expected. It's

future is what motivates you to get out of bed every day"	Build prototypes	impact is deeply qualitative, "like a good conversation" "Looking at the past is really helpful to a human" "Preempt the story that you will tell" "Consequences of massive change haven't affected us. We really need to feel it viscerally" "I really enjoyed talking non-stop about myself for an hour"	really hard to think of a compromise or what you are going to fail at."
Claudette - age 57F  "Who owns my time?"	Created her own domains  Day-in-the-life 100 words  Personal 20 year timeline  Social circle  Daily Details Card  Build prototypes	"You made me reconsider my relationship to 'time'"  "You helped me to discover what I don't know"  "You are trying to make me an activist aren't you?!"	Her suggestion is that  1) the tools need to be simplified.  2) Add a follow-up question at the end "What is one step that you are going to take towards that future?"
Daniel - age 49M  "I don't have a five year plan for myself"	STEEPV domains  Day-in-the-life 100 words  Personal 20 year timeline  Mini-homework: Created a mood board  Daily Details Card  Build prototypes	"You had me looking at the future, not just trends and evidence. It was more my role in the middle of a bigger puzzle. I've always been an observer. What the exercise did, as a result of my download was marry the futures with myself. It's really important for participants to marry the two."	"I wasn't sure about where we were going. I could have used more context on what we were doing and why."
Robin - age 31F  "Living in limbo - looking at the long term was stressful"	Domain cards used in both sessions  Personal 20 year timeline  Social circle	"Good food for thought. Makes you think how every decision influences your future outcome. You don't exist in a vacuum, so many influences, you don't often incorporate those factors."	She used the domain cards to prompt conversation and her feedback was: "It was helpful to have a specific topic, otherwise things got to general."

	Build prototypes		
<p>Tom - age 34M</p> <p>"Every year I write myself a letter, but I don't set specific goals for the future"</p>	<p>Draw the city of the future</p> <p>Daily Details Card</p> <p>Personal timeline 20 years into the future</p>	<p>He was plotting 20 years on a timeline into the future, ideas that he was percolating already. The experience gave him "perspective", to think about the future with a different set of eyes. He was not challenged to draw the past or to draw the city of the future.</p>	<p>"It was scary just walking in the door"</p>
<p>Shona - 40F</p> <p>"What am I doing about this now?"</p>	<p>Draw the city of the future</p> <p>Daily Details Card</p> <p>Build prototypes</p>	<p>Looking at multiple futures "created a sense of urgency in what do I need to do to get where I need to go. "Am I doing my part, am I doing small things along the way?"</p> <p>"Seeing 4 futures on a page gives you so much power. You see reality and the implications of what is happening, not in an abstract way. Telling something to someone makes it almost real."</p>	<p>"As the participant, I was not able to gauge your facial expressions as the facilitator. Staying neutral helped"</p>
<p>Vera - age 63F</p> <p>"I already had the idea of my preferred future"</p>	<p>Draw the city of the future</p> <p>Daily Details Card</p> <p>Build prototypes</p>	<p>"An examined life, either at the personal level, or the global level is important." The process clarified thoughts that she already had. Thinking about multiple futures "probably" affected how she looks at the preferred future</p>	<p>Had some performance anxiety. Being handed blank paper and asked to draw the city of the future was a little bit daunting.</p>

# Appendix E: Consent forms

## Invitation / Consent Form Part 1

Date: August 15, 2016  
Project Title: Personal Experiential Futures

Principal Investigator:  
Amy Helen Margaret Greyson (Maggie),  
student at OCAD University

Faculty Supervisor:  
Dr. Stuart Candy, Assistant Professor  
Faculty of Design  
OCAD University  
(416) 977-6000

### **INVITATION**

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this research is to develop a design thinking technique for those interested in an interactive conversation about their personal futures.

### **WHAT'S INVOLVED**

As a participant, you will be asked to attend two 2-hour sessions at the Ontario College of Art and Design University. A few days after the second session you will be contacted for a brief follow up phone call or in-person meeting. Participation is confidential, physical artifacts and images created during the research can be confidential, and you can withdraw from the study at any time.

The primary session is a one-to-one, semi-structured interview. The second session is a co-design session where we build rapid prototypes, using craft supplies, from the narratives generated in the first session. Within a few days of our second meeting, the researcher/facilitator, Maggie Greyson, will provide you with a high-fidelity prototype of an artifact or experience mocked up in our co-design session.

### **Further details of these activities**

Part 1: The Interview "Creating the Futures Images"

The first session of 90-120 minutes is a sit-down interview held in a private space at OCAD University. You are invited to investigate your personal futures using the STEEP+V domains (social, individual, economic, environmental, technological, political and personal values) to create optimistic, pessimistic, expected and unexpected images of your futures scenarios. Simple pencil-and-paper tasks may be used, writing a 100 word day-in-the-life essay, or drawing timelines. The researcher/facilitator will share the notes and interview summary to provide you with an opportunity to clarify, iterate and amplify your statements. At the end of the first session, you and the researcher/facilitator will brainstorm potential artifacts and experiences that could exist in each future. You will be invited to bring objects or elements for inspiration to the next session, the prototyping workshop.

Part 2: The Workshop "Prototyping Artifacts and Experiences in Your Futures"

The second session is a 90-120 minute workshop to be held in a private space at OCAD University. The researcher/facilitator will provide office and art supplies to co-design and rapidly prototype meaningful artifact(s) or experiences(s) from your four envisioned futures. The researcher/facilitator will share the notes and workshop summary to provide you with

an opportunity to clarify, iterate and amplify your statements. The outcome of this session could be multiple works potentially across a range of media, which could include audio, writing, physical artifacts, digital content, or image-based media.

### Part 3: The Follow-up "Presenting the High-Fidelity Prototype to You"

Finally, the researcher/ facilitator will create two versions of your personalized artifact or experience as a high fidelity prototype from one of the envisioned futures. One of these will be kept by the researcher for future research presentation purposes, the other will be for you to keep.

### **POTENTIAL BENEFITS AND RISKS**

Possible benefits of participation include:

1. The intended direct benefits for you include the opportunity to consider your alternative futures and possibilities. The activities may lead you to contemplate your own preferred future.
2. An indirect benefit to society may occur when more people develop foresight thinking skills.
3. There is a potential methodological benefit to futures practice in the development of this form of personal, experience-based investigation.
4. You can take your low-fidelity futures oriented artifact(s) or experience(s) co-designed during the workshop away with you as a memory of the experience.
5. You will receive a high-fidelity prototype to keep as a memory of the experience.

There also may be risks associated with participation:

1. The range of futures considered (optimistic, pessimistic, expected and unexpected) is intentionally wide, because the future is unwritten. You may experience a spectrum of feelings, from the optimistic to the potentially uncomfortable, as some future possibilities may be upsetting. However, the purpose of the research is to engage with a range of possible systems-level futures (global, national, city, neighbourhood level) and to tie consideration of those to your potential personal experience against those backdrops. Overall the activities are intended to empower you to imagine, and therefore navigate, possible futures in which you might find yourself. There will be time given for them to reflect on your answers. The researcher will not put pressure on you to answer questions that are uncomfortable.
2. You will not be identified in reports, professional and scholarly journals, students theses, and/or presentations to conferences and colloquia unless you agree to sharing any of the additional personal identifiers.

In the event that you would need support, several resources are open to you:

1. Contact a nurse at Telehealth Ontario by dialing 1-866-797-0000
2. ConnexOntario offers province-wide information and referral 24/7: ConnexOntario Mental Health Helpline, 1-866-531-2600
3. <http://www.camh.ca/> Centre for Addictions and Mental Health (416) 535-8501
4. OCAD U health services: 416-977-6000 Ext. 260
5. <http://toronto.cmha.ca/mental-health/find-help/> Canadian Mental Health Association 416-789-7957
6. Distress Centre: 416-408-HELP (4357) offers access to emotional support from the safety and security of the closest telephone. Callers can express their thoughts and feelings in confidence. The Distress Centre offers emotional support, crisis intervention, suicide prevention and linkage to emergency help when necessary.

### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

By default, all information you provide is considered confidential during the study. Your name will not be included or in any other way associated with the data collected without your explicit permission. You will not be identified individually in written reports of this research. Artifacts and experiences will be photographed or transcribed for research documentation, and digital files will be made available to you. For the purposes of documenting and narrating the project it is anticipated that some or all of the following information may be used in the research report, in anonymised form:

- age and life stage
- occupation
- location (city of residence)
- gender
- images of work in progress and the final work
- general background or biographical information (you may notify the researcher of anything specific discussed that you do not wish to be shared)
- written contributions and direct (non-identifying) quotations/statements made during the research process

At the end of the study, during The Follow-up, you will be given the opportunity to select what of your participation will be shared, and to opt out of any of the above elements.

At your discretion, you may also choose to allow the researcher use of additional personal information:

- direct quotes from email correspondence if applicable
- images or other media where you can be identified
- your name

Email correspondence between you and the researcher/ facilitator is confidential, and sent via encrypted email. Digital data collected during this study will be stored on a password-protected computer to maintain your confidentiality. Digital data will be kept for up to twelve months after the study has concluded, approximately December 2017, after which time files will be wiped from the hard drive. Access to this data will be restricted to the researcher/ facilitator Amy Helen Margaret Greyson (Maggie) and Dr. Stuart Candy. You will have the opportunity to keep any physical objects made during the research, except for the one copy of a final high-fidelity prototype that will be retained by the researcher for research presentation purposes.

### **VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION**

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may decline to answer any questions or to participate in any component of the study. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time, or to request withdrawal of your data (prior to data analysis one week after your final meeting with the researcher/facilitator), and you may do so without any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled.

### **Attributing quotes**

The researcher/ facilitator would like to attribute anonymous statements/quotations please indicate agreement here.

☐ Yes, I wish to be attributed for my contribution to this research study. You may use my name alongside statements and/or quotations that you have collected from me.

### **PUBLICATION OF RESULTS**

Results of this study may be published in reports, professional and scholarly journals, students theses, and/or presentations to conferences and colloquia. In any publication, data will be presented in aggregate forms. Quotations from interviews or surveys will not be attributed to you without your permission.



Feedback about this study will be available from the researcher/ facilitator via email after December 31st, 2016.

☐ I would like to hear more about the study. You may reach me by (provide contact information):

Email:

Post:

Phone:

### **CONTACT INFORMATION AND ETHICS CLEARANCE**

If you have any questions about this study or require further information, please contact the Principal Investigator (Amy Helen Margaret Greyson, (Maggie) using the contact information provided above. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Research Ethics Board at OCAD University file #100786. If you have any comments or concerns, please contact the Research Ethics Office through cpineda@ocadu.ca.

### **CONSENT FORM**

I agree to participate in this study described above. I have made this decision based on the information I have read in the Information-Consent Letter. I have had the opportunity to receive any additional details I wanted about the study and understand that I may ask questions in the future. I understand that I may withdraw this consent at any time.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for your assistance in this project. Please keep a copy of this form for your records.

## Final Consent Form

Date: August 15, 2016

Project Title: Personal Experiential Futures

Principal Investigator:

Amy Helen Margaret Greyson (Maggie),  
student at OCAD University

Faculty Supervisor:

Dr. Stuart Candy, Assistant Professor  
Faculty of Design  
OCAD University  
(416) 977-6000

Thank you for your participation!

At the end of the study, during The Follow-up, you will be given the opportunity to select what of your participation will be shared. YOU WILL NOT BE PERSONALLY IDENTIFIED WITHOUT YOUR EXPLICIT PERMISSION. However the following information elements may be used as part of the research study, in anonymised form, unless you specifically wish to opt out:

- age and life stage
- occupation
- location (city of residence)
- gender
- images of work in progress and the final work
- general background or biographical information (you may notify the researcher of anything specific discussed that you do not wish to be shared)
- written contributions and direct (non-identifying) quotations/statements made during the research process

Use of such details is important to concluding and narrating the project. If you are unsure about any of this material being used in anonymised form, please clarify with the researcher and any exceptions will be noted before you sign.

For the purpose of this research, you may also wish to allow use of additional information as follows. Please place an "X" next to any element that you DO wish to allow this project to include.

\_\_\_\_\_ direct quotes from email correspondence if applicable

\_\_\_\_\_ images or other media where you can be identified

\_\_\_\_\_ your name

### **CONSENT FORM**

I have had the opportunity to receive any additional details I wanted about the study and understand that I may ask questions in the future. I understand that I may withdraw this consent at any time up to one week after the final session, and that my information will be removed from the raw data as requested.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for your assistance in this project. Please keep a copy of this form for your records.

## Appendix F: Introductory Script at the Start of the First Interview

This is the basis for the conversation at the outset of the first interview. It was important to give them a roadmap of the interviews so that they were not confused about what would be happening in the sessions together. Being a supportive facilitator meant extra touches, like pausing to see if they wanted a break and finishing on time. Being professional meant that they could focus on their 'job'. Being professional made it more likely that they would be open to attending the second and third sessions.

*Today we will be working together on a prototype of a design fiction process called Personal Experiential Futures. What are personal experiential futures? It is personal (personal to the participant) experiential (because it is interactive and immersive co-design) and futures (because multiple future scenarios help you to prepare for what may come to pass). Today, I [in the role of facilitator] will use methods that are similar to a method called Ethnographic Futures, so that together we will co-design the optimistic, pessimistic, expected and unexpected scenarios for you [the participant]. By the end of our time together today, we will have co-designed four visions of your personal futures. Recognizing that any of these may not be your preferred future, we will generate something to simply "act to or react to" to help you achieve a sense of that more preferred future on your own.*

*Next week, we will co-design four low-fidelity prototypes of artifacts or experiences, based on these scenarios, that will help you to envision your potential futures. Finally, before we say goodbye, I will be creating two high-fidelity prototype of one of your futures. One version is for you to keep, and the other will not have any personal signifiers and may be part of a presentation at some later date. I will have a few questions for you about your experience at every stage.*

*My hope is that you have come to enjoy a reflective conversation. But you may also leave with some gained confidence about your decision-making power and inherit the ability to make incremental plans for the future from the experience of putting a flag stick into the ground towards recognizing your own preferred future.*

## Appendix G: The Creative Warm-up Activity

Upon entering the interview for the first time, participants were unsure of what to expect, even though they had been sent the research consent form. A fun drawing activity was introduced for the purpose of easing their hesitation and get them comfortable with idea generation exercises. They were asked to draw the city of the future.

This task was something that these urban Torontonians delighted in doing. Each took a very different approach in visualizing and rendering their city. They all exceeded the allotted 10 minutes, adding a lot of detail and apparently taking pleasure in describing it.

### **Vera's and Tom's City of the Future**

Vera, a 63 year old architect/ project manager, drew vignettes of buildings with greenery on the outside; and multilevel roads and bike lanes integrated with rail transit. She admitted to feeling very self conscious about this activity and that being handed a blank piece of paper was a bit daunting. Having lived in Toronto for decades and remembers when there were many open lots downtown just a couple of decades before. It would seem that she would have a stronger gauge on a 20 year timeline looking backwards although her images of the city in 20-years from now seemed very fanciful. It is assumed that someone in her practice would know the trends and be able to envision the timeline of development for new builds. It may be inferred that she was drawing an optimistic science fiction infused future farther than 20-years out and not relying on her professional knowledge of planning and construction timelines for new buildings. Suffice to say that this apparent disconnect between professional expertise and visioning capability is interesting and could be explored in further studies.

Tom drew the city of Toronto map and provided a very detailed description of how he hoped transit would be in his city in 20 years. The city of Toronto is something that he happens to think a lot about. He articulated a lot of systemic relationships very quickly; infrastructure, social relationships, economic impacts, political sluggishness, the physical environment of the condos and how they would change, ownership of units in City Place and how that would devolve when the building is governed by small time slumlords. It was a very rich source of imagination for him. It is interesting to note however when he was asked "how do you survive and thrive in each future?" his answer was very binary and extreme. His construct of society was very utopian or dystopian and not affected by his nuanced understanding of the system that he just described. See the description on page 17.

In comparing the two stories, Vera indicated radical evolutions would change the infrastructure for a better city. Tom indicated multiple systemic changes that would make the city harder to live in. Both of them invested a lot of imagination into describing something outside of themselves that they know well. In conjuring up a lot of detail, it is interesting to note that it is easier to find deep discrepancies in how that level of clarity is lost in discussing other parts of the scenarios. On the one hand, they can articulate the future with a high level of detail, and then further in the conversation, they are at a loss to describe a day-in-the-life for themselves.

## Appendix H: General Observations

These participants declared what they want in their future. The sentiments seem to be the same across all of the participants in a few important themes. These participants talked about what they value in terms of basic human needs. It is important to note, however, that the general statements made by this group of participants could vary significantly if the demographic changes. A future study could compare and contrast across differences in cultures, socioeconomic, linguistic, geographic and employment factors, among others. These statements are:

### **1) The participants value supportive friends and good conversations.**

So what? Genuine social connections are being eroded by digital culture, so perhaps a return to real in-depth conversation is a proof to come out of the process.

### **2) The participants said that green space and nature were paramount.**

So what? If the natural environment is such a priority across the board, then why aren't more people environmentalists? That term should no longer be marginalized. How do people reconcile living in a consumerist culture? Is that not at odds with ecological preservation? The outcomes are frustrating but could be seen as progressive, at least having the conversation may have a value.

### **3) The participants want more time. Time is a luxury.**

So what? If time is a factor of identity, will this person change how they spend their time to better reflect who they want to be? This is the crux of the activity. What do people really choose to change, knowing themselves better, and able to envision a different future for themselves?

### **Further observations**

1. What participants value tends to be expressed in all of their futures visions.
2. The average time that it took for every participant to mention climate change could be measured in seconds. It was always mentioned in response to the first worldview question "What do you expect to see in the future?"
3. In unexpected futures, dystopian movie titles often came up in conversations.
4. Most thought that we would be insulated from climate change disasters living in Toronto.
5. There will be a growing population of immigrants in Toronto.
6. Everyone places an importance on access to lots of fresh produce.
7. All talked about their contribution to society and that it would increase in the futures. Younger participants would become teachers or mentors, and older participants would share more of their time in exchange for authentic conversation.
8. Many participants spoke about a change that may come to capitalism, that it will change, it will fail, break and other descriptors. Economic freedom was mentioned a few times.
9. When later asked about the ease of describing the worldview people found either the pessimistic, optimistic or expected images much easier to describe than the unexpected. The ease in which people would describe a world view was not a consistent answer across all participants and presumably speaks to personality, general outlook on life and what they are telling themselves about the future.

#### **Things that I expected to hear in the interviews but didn't**

1. Participants didn't mention their partners by name when they were talking about the future. In most cases their names were said, but not within the context of answering the question "How will *you* survive and thrive in the futures?" It is unclear if this was a silo effect (between himself or herself and the world), or just that they were

unfamiliar with the researcher and had no reason to talk about their partners by first name.

2. Participants talked about who they would like to be surrounded by, but not who they wouldn't like to be surrounded by.
3. Climate change was used frequently, but terms like acid rain, global warming, Amazon rainforest depletion and pollution were not mentioned.
4. Participants did not talk about animals, animal rights, meat or abstaining from meat, or changing their dietary protein sources.
5. Participants talked about driving "their own car" but not driverless cars.



