

Children's books from the future

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a research in the everyday life design field on using children's books of the future as a method for creating awareness about possible futures, understanding what is starting to happen now and will accelerate in the future. Building on theories about parent-child relationships, the research uses the emotional connection with a future child, to increase the urge and care for the future. This concept resulted in a children's book called The Little Twin, touching up on the complexity of the metaverse and digital twins. The book was presented during an exhibition, where the visitors received a package from their future child including a letter and the book. Afterwards, the impact was measured using two matrices on the understandability, relatability, emotional connection and care. It can be concluded that children's books of the future allow to consciously reflect and think about growing into the future full of technological developments in our daily activities.

Author Keywords

Storytelling; Speculative design; Future; Children's books; cyberworld

INTRODUCTION

The Ministry of Time Traveling from the Netherlands has asked us researchers to travel from the year 02038 back to 02023 to address an issue we have in 02038 and to create awareness for this issue among citizens of 02023. Among many issues that should have been addressed earlier, the role of data in our society has excelled beyond what you could have imagined back in the days. Especially for children growing up in 02038 it would have been beneficial if their parents were earlier aware of the role of data in 02023. One issue related to this is, how could we let future parents care about the child they do not even know yet?

We are, of course, not time traveling researchers, but we used time traveling as a thought experiment in design. In this research time traveling was used to speculate about future societal challenges and how those can be brought to the present. Figure 1 shows the framework used in this research. To be able to travel in time to the future it is necessary to look at trends in the present and speculate on how they develop in the set time frame, which was in our case 15 years. This research speculated on the role of data in 2038.

The next step in time traveling is to go from the future back to the present and communicate what has been found. How to communicate the findings differ per goal. Examples of different goals are provoking, alarming, comforting,

providing hope, motivate action. In this research, the goal was to create awareness around the role of data in the future. From our speculations on trends, data could play a large role in society and by creating awareness of this in the present could help people prepare for this. The communication format was chosen to be a children's book. A book has the ability to comfort people, give hope, and explain difficult topics [2]. Besides, the children's books might also help future parents imagine reading books for their future children.

In order to study the potential of children's books from the future, the following research questions have been explored: *"What impact has reading a children's book from the future on adults? Does it enable them to relate to the future? Does it lead them to learn something about the present? Do they feel an emotional connection to their future child?"*.

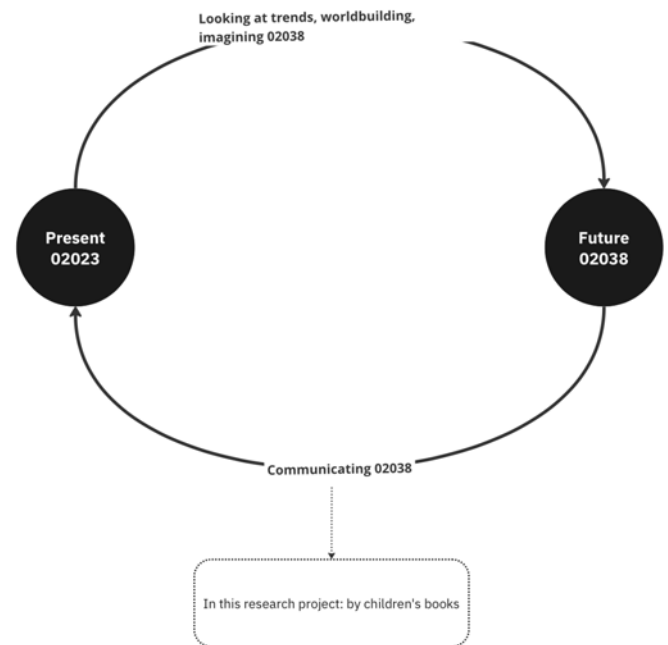


Figure 1: Framework of time traveling

BACKGROUND AND RELATED WORK

Time traveling and speculative design

Time traveling is known from many science-fiction stories. However, it can also be used by designers. Time traveling for designers as a method has been explored before in product design. A product manager travels into the future and returns

to the team explaining how the product looks in the future to guide the team's work towards the future product [8].

The time traveling approach for designers can also be applied to open a discussion about possible societal changes. Designers can travel to a year in the future, e.g., fifteen years from now, evaluate current societal trends and speculate how these could be evolved in that future. Instead of returning with a vision of a future product, designers can create an artifact that communicates this possible future. These artifacts can be related to everyday life to illustrate how the day-to-day life might change in the future. Ethnographic Experiential Futures is an example of a specific method used to bring futures to life [6].

An overarching field in future studies that time traveling could relate to is speculative design. Speculative design is a field that involves creating fictional, radical and social ideas used to facilitate reflections and debates on possible futures [7, 12]. Speculative design can be a bridge between the present and the future. The future is often seen as an empty space. However, our actions today already shape the future [11].

Child – parent relationship

Likewise, parents shape the future of their children's lives. Parents are responsible for making their children good citizens in the future, one way of doing this is by educating themselves [14]. The actions in the present are related to the imagination of the future influencing the parent-child relationship [15]. Additionally, children have the tendency to mirror their parent, as can be seen in how children across different cultures adopt storytelling styles from their parent [17].

Children's books

Stories have the ability to humanize complex issues and can enable children to discover their emotions and thoughts related to such issues even if a child is not experiencing a similar in real life [22]. An example is a story for children that teaches on a deeper level about how to deal with losing a loved one [4]. Besides discovering emotions, stories can create empathy for the experiences of other people which is the start of building a bridge between different worlds [1]. Books can show people the world outside of themselves [1].

Additional to the fact that children's books are beneficial for children, they also have benefits for parents. Children's books can shine new perspectives on topics for adults [21]. Besides, the children's books of today can reassure and comfort adults equally as they can do to children [2]. With large societal problems people often worry a lot about the world and the world's future. Children's books deal with difficult situations of everyday life and even if the situations do not have a happy ending, the books often provide a sense of hope [2]. Therefore, children's books can provide adults with the comfort of empathizing with a changing world or even a possible future.

Worldbuilding

Science fiction stories use worldbuilding processes to design new visions of futures [25]. It affects an important reflective attitude that explores our place within a future world or different societal structures. Sometimes hauntology plays a role, where people would like to explore traces from the past of other possibilities than the present we are living in today [10]. Since there is an infinite set of possibilities available that can be actualized by a slightly different combination of present aspects [5], there will always be enough futures to explore and to potentially encourage changing course. In this case, worldbuilding processes provide inspiration. Even more so, worldbuilding has the transformative potential for societal change, because by making something feel real it can become real (following the principle of prefigurative politics [20]).

In the field of worldbuilding, design can contribute by creating possibilities and enabling discoveries. These possibilities can emerge on an individual and a collective level which can be actualized by agents in the environment as well as recombination of existing elements [5]. As aforementioned, experiential futures focus on making futures visible, tangible, interactive, and otherwise explorable [6]. Hence, a methodological approach circling possibilities which are thinkable, feasible and discussable to enable discoveries.

Digital data-driven future

This research focuses on the topic of a digital data-driven future because there are many trends in the present indicating that we are headed towards the datafication of everyday life [24]. The worldwide data creation is growing at an exponential rate, it doubles every two years [16]. As a consequence, Artificial Intelligence (AI) is upcoming, bringing along good and bad consequences. For example, AI could support new possibilities in public services like energy and waste management, public transport and education [3]. Simultaneously, poorly regulated use of AI could lead to discrimination, inequality and loss of control over dangerous weapons [3]. Data in itself involves crime, such as identity thefts, DDOS attacks, viruses, credit card frauds, doxxing and malware. The values discussed are protection, responsibility, and independence. In 02023, people do not seem highly aware of the consequences of these values or how the digital world is manifesting in everyday life currently. An example is the ignorance of digital twins. Most people consent to their data being used, not knowing that a digital twin is constructed out of it [18].

There are various examples of how this kind of future has been explored using different approaches. For the purpose of showing the diversity of methods, two extremes are highlighted in this section. Firstly, the book Prototyping 2040 [23] envisions four different futures which are mapped based on the polarities individuality-collectivity and shortage-abundance. The second example is a comic named

Contra Chrome [9], which is about how Google's Browser became a threat to privacy and democracy.

In this research opportunities were identified based on this theoretical background, highlighting the connection between present and future and designing from varying perspectives. Being futures literate relates to being aware of how the future is already being constructed in the present [19]. As we are researchers who traveled from the future back in time, the research takes a constructivist view of the year 02038.

PROCESS

From present to future

To be able to bring the future to the present, the future should be imagined. In a brainstorm session, three topics for exploration were discussed, (i) more than human design and nature-based futures, (ii) the role of money and possible economic changes, and (iii) the development of the digital world. The topics nature (i) and data (iii) were researched to find trends in the 02023 society. Data was chosen as the main topic for the continuation of the project.

Following, a brainstorming to inquire analysis, synthesis and conclusions about the current issues of data influencing a future, was conducted. Data is a becoming issue and has now come to encompass notions such as confidentiality and privacy. Hence, its importance is only growing with time, a high necessity to educate the future and restore trust in a data-driven world [13].

A worldbuilding exercise was done to create the data future of 02038. In this exercise several questions were discussed such as, (i) Are people aware that their data is collected, (ii) do they consciously give it, (iii) are there any regulations, and (iv) what are the things that can go wrong with data?

From future to present

The method of bringing the future to the present was chosen to be done by bringing children's books from 02038 to 02023. As mentioned previously, children's books have the ability to show new perspectives on situations [21]. Besides, children allow parents to imagine their future [15]. Therefore, children's books have the ability to support imagination about a data-driven world while also affecting potential parents on how close this future feels.

Potential parents are faced with what challenges within data would be faced by their future children. Hence, to design for future parents focusing on forming a personal connection with their future children, physical aspects such as children's storybooks are used to realize and experience a possible future. Children's books have been written to help children discover thoughts around complexity, as well as help adults realize the challenges in layman words. A hope to lead to provocative reflection that sparks optimism.

Research questions

Both from considering the present to future and future to present resulted in an important research question: *"What impact has reading a children's book from the future on*

adults? Does it enable them to relate to the future? Does it lead them to learn something about the present? Do they feel an emotional connection to their future child?"

DESIGN

A metaphorical approach was taken, inspired by existing fairytales that engage readers of all ages in complex matters and simultaneously teach moral lessons. Several storylines were created, each with a moral lesson regarding data usage and privacy. These stories highlighted topics such as self-authenticity, self-ownership, protection of digital and personal data. The underlying moral which stood out is to be your authentic self on platforms, overcoming becoming predictable.

A specific storyline was worked out in an illustrated, hard cover children's book titled 'The Little Twin' (see figure 2, 3 and Appendix A), with the hope that a future with physical books exists. The goal of this book was to make adult readers in 02023 reflect on their current understandability of data complexity and the emotional connection to not only one's future, but also to their future generations.



Figure 2. Children's book The Little Twin



Figure 3. A spread from the book

The book encompasses the story of a girl named Ariel, whose identity is foreshadowed in a digital metaverse world by

digital twin Ariel. This story has the implicit message to be aware that digital twins are not similar to who you are in real life. Even though digital twins are constructed based on data gathered on you, it does not include the whole of your identity. This story was based on the fairytale the Little Mermaid. Like any other fairytale, there is a happy ending with a moral lesson: even though the digital world brings wonderful opportunities, never forget to be proud of your unique self in the real world. While reading the book, the readers see this upcoming world through the eyes of ‘their’ future children, with the intention to make them think about the impact of cyber-complexity in a future digital world.

METHODS

Study setup

The design was presented in an exhibition setup (figure 4), where multiple time travelers were presenting the results of their research. A cozy corner with a couch and chair was used to invite visitors to read *The Little Twin*. They received a box with a personal letter, which was sent by the visitor's future (grand)child (see figure 5). The child tells the visitor that he or she already needs to read the books they will also read together in the future, to become more aware of what is coming and start preparing already to make together a beautiful and safe life. The reader could settle down on the couch and take a moment to read the children's book.



Figure 4. Exhibition setup



Figure 5. Box with a personal letter

When finished, the participants were asked about their feelings and opinions on receiving such a package from their future child and reading a book from the future. To research this more in-depth, they were asked to answer some questions by placing their opinion onto a matrix. The first matrix was about how the book helped towards the understandability of current data complexity, and to what extent it was relatable to their current everyday life. The second matrix was used to reflect on the emotional connection with the future child and the related increase in care for the future after receiving this package of the future.

To show that there are also other potential issues related to cyber-complexity in the upcoming years, three other front page covers of similar books were created with their synopsis highlighting issues such as relationships with AI, malware and cyber bullying (see figure 6). These also follow an existing fairytale, so users can already make a connection, relate and be thoughtful about it.

Other books



Figure 6. Other stories

Analysis

During the study the participants were observed by notetaking. The visitors were also interviewed about their thoughts, feelings and experiences reading the book, and they were asked to fill in the matrices using children's stickers to stay in theme. This all resulted in a set of qualitative data. The data was interpreted with the research question at the core of the analysis. What impact has reading a children's book from the future on adults? Does it enable them to relate to the future? Does it lead them to learn something about the present? Do they feel an emotional connection to their future child?

RESULTS

Exhibition experience

Visitors were invited to read the personal letter and then The Little Twin book. It turned out to be an emotional experience for some visitors: "Holding the book in my hands made it real, that my son would have children and it might even be twins. I realised I would be a grandparent, which made me emotional." Others laughed while reading, thinking it would never happen or on the contrary that these weird anecdotes can become reality.

The children's book

People recognised some developments currently taking place that could resemble the book in the future. In today's families, a child may already be left behind because they are the only one in the family without a phone, missing out on fun and updates in family group chats. The digital metaverse world in the story could metaphorize social media, where there is also another version of your real-life self. People discovered some important details in the stories, such as that the witch could be an ethical hacker and that the digital twin cannot be controlled in this story, while you still can in the present. They began to wonder what this means for dealing with these developments in today's daily life. The speculative story prompted reflection, questions such as: why would the future look like this, what will happen in the next few years?

Some participants also found the story a letdown in certain areas. They wondered why the characters were white skinned and why a prince is still expected to find a princess. But also, why is it still called the metaverse? In recent years, we have also gone from sending an SMS to sending a WhatsApp text. These details can make it extra futuristic and a conceivable future, showing how important the speculation in the book is.

Research matrices

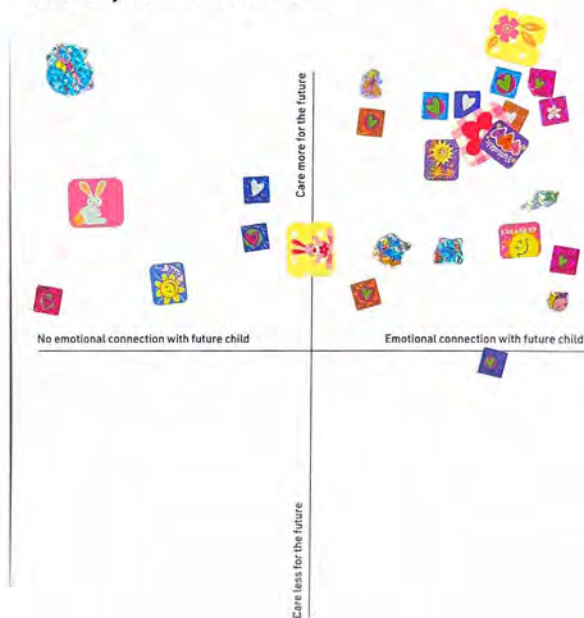
After reading the book, visitors were asked to fill in two matrices (see results in figure 7). The first matrix asked how much they understand the future digital world of the story, and to what extent these developments are relatable to their current daily lives after reading the book. The results show a majority in the 'Understandable / Relatable' quadrant. It touches on basic needs we have in every generation, such as love. It unravels the complexity not only for the child, but also for the parent reading the book. Some readers also appreciated the ethical conflicts explained, which are sometimes difficult to discover on their own. Those on the 'Not understandable' side felt that the book only raised more questions than answers. Those on the 'not related' side had less knowledge about how digital technologies like the one in the book already play a major role in their daily lives. They struggled to think about and imagine these scenarios.

The second matrix asked whether the visitors felt an emotional connection with their future child and whether they care more about the future after reading the book. On the latter, all visitors had agreed. Some visitors even left the exhibition experience with a strong desire to prevent and prepare for this future for their child. The people who did not feel an emotional connection were mostly people who were not yet thinking of having a child, hence the set-up felt fictional. They expressed they were not emotionally connected by the box. Some visitors thought more of themselves in the future, looking at their own generation instead of their children's generation. Still, most people felt an emotional connection because children's books make the connection tangible in a way. The book touches on morals and values that are important in a parent-child relationship,

Do you understand the complexity of the role of digital world in the future? Can you relate these developments to your everyday life?



Do you feel an emotional connection with your future child? Do you care more for the future?



DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to investigate whether presenting children's books from your future child helps to unravel the complexity of developments in everyday life and whether the parent-child relationship increases the amount of care for the future. The results showed that the majority of visitors understood it better and cared more about the future, answering our research question positively. We can conclude that children's books make it possible to address complex topics in an inviting and accessible way because of the metaphors and moral lessons. The extent to which it makes it understandable still depends on the amount of knowledge the reader already has, which may require more books for different levels. The simplicity of a children's book makes room for discussion of larger reflective questions, such as what we should do in the coming years. It creates a moment to slow down and think critically.

It was also clear that readers cared more about the future after reading the books, but it varied from person to person whether this was because of the emotional connection with the future child or because they understood the topic of the digital world better. This differed greatly from one individual to another, as everyone had different views on having children. We believe the relationship aspect of this method is very powerful, but there are varying relationships people value the most, such as an aunt-cousin relationship. The relationship allows us to critically reflect and think about the fact that what we do in our current daily lives will affect future daily lives for loved ones.

Looking at the story itself, it could have been more critical. We mainly focused on the method during this research, with this story being an example of what such a book could look like. But of course, with people focusing on the content first, a more careful thought about its content, the speculations and what the characters look like, should have been made. For example, we did not choose a considerable version of a coloured Ariel like in the latest movie of *The Little Mermaid*. What could have helped was looking at the different versions of *The Little Mermaid* made over time, and what historical impact has influenced the story.

The main contribution of this research is the proposed method. It is based on the concept of time travel, where time travelers bring artifacts from their future to introduce to people in the present. Children's books of the future became a method of creating awareness about possible futures, understanding what is starting to happen already now and will accelerate in the future. Understanding can lead to futuring; imagining and preparing for your personal everyday future life. Reading these books provokes a moment to consciously reflect and think about growing into these futures. As digital developments move so fast that it is difficult for many people to get to grips on what they mean for their lives, and because it can be difficult to step outside

the closed view of the now, there is a need for an inviting and accessible trigger like reading a children's book.

Explanations often consist of technological facts, while these people would benefit more from scenarios they can identify with. By explaining a development in a book, within the context of an everyday scenario, readers can reflect and see opportunities and challenges of their current and future everyday life. In general, children's books are a good medium to be repeatedly reminded of the message while reading the book. For in-depth reflection, it can be argued that the books should be presented in a context that supports them in this, such as an exhibition, as in this study.

Other applications

The context of this design research is future everyday life and how to support people in the present to imagine possible futures, specifically focusing on emerging data-driven digital technologies. Just as there are always children's books on any topic relevant to that generation, this method could be used to unravel any element of plural possible futures. Either existing stories could be adapted to these topics, bringing some recognition, or whole new stories could be written to address the topic effectively. Personal relationships make it possible to feel more kinship, which can be used in any relationship, also besides parent-child relationships. Imagine being a teacher and hearing something from your future students about educational needs in the coming years. In any context, it can be good to step out of routine for a moment and look beyond the now. Depending on the context and the target audience, the recipient, living in the now, may need more or less support. Some will need an artifact like the book to unravel the complexity, others may need a personal letter and others just need a story told to feel the urge. Therefore, it is always important to consciously consider the context and subject of the research to determine the exact details of the method.

Future study

This study had a relatively short research period. Although the results were very positive, a more extensive study would lead to stronger conclusions. The study consisted of an exhibition where adults read a children's book from the future and were asked some questions during a reflective moment. The results showed that it helped them to understand the problems of the future, but there was no baseline to show the extent to which this understanding had really increased because of the books. Some people may already have more knowledge than others. Therefore, it might be valuable to add an extra step where existing knowledge is measured before reading the books. Now the reflection moment was the only moment used to measure impact, but ideally there would be another measurement moment after a while to see if the impact remains for a longer period. To draw stronger conclusions, we would add these two extra research steps to the study.

CONCLUSION

This paper presents the research of a team of time travelers coming from 02038, that were asked by the Ministry of Time Traveling from the Netherlands to make people in the 02023 more aware about the future. Children's books were chosen as a communication medium, researching what impact reading a children's book from the future has on adults. A package was delivered to the parents of the children of 02038, allowing them to see books that they will read together in the future. We can conclude that children's books of the future have become a method to create understandability of the future's complexity and increase the relatability to feel urgency and care for the future. The book the Little Twin introduces a possible future of data and digital developments, but it can be used around any topic that needs to be unraveled for people in the present. This is a contribution to the everyday life design field where it becomes more important to consciously reflect and think about growing into the future full of technological developments in our daily activities.

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APPENDIX A: THE LITTLE TWIN

Explore the story of a curious girl named Ariel. Her digital twin meets a prince in the metaverse, but is her digital self the same as her inner beauty? Read the story and find out...

The little twin



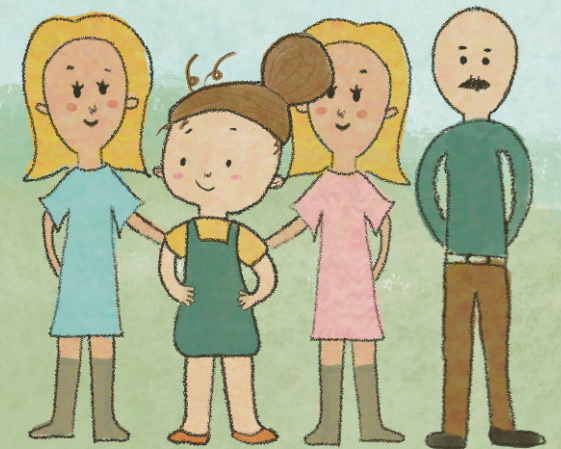
Written by Elke van Dael and Hanna van Rixtel
Illustrated by Anusha Ravishankar and Vere Vreeswijk

Published on 01/06/2038

Ariel is a young girl living in a small town far away from the big cities. She lives there with her widowed father and five older sisters.

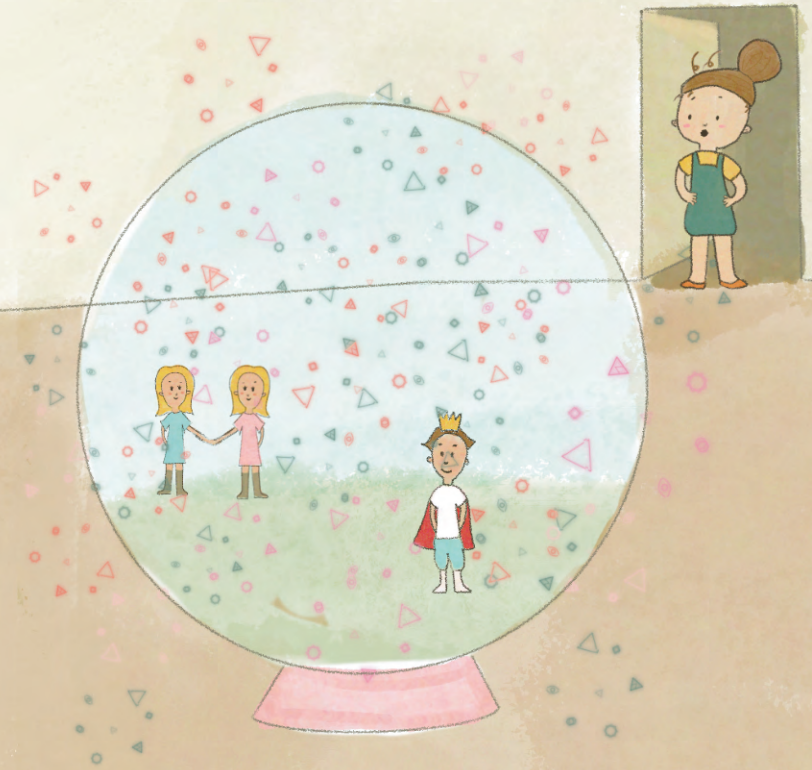
Every sister received access to the metaverse on their 6th birthday to explore the world and make connections.

Ariel is still waiting for this, as she is only five years old. Her sisters are spending entire days in the digital world, so she cannot wait to join.



Every day Ariel sneaks into her sisters' rooms and peeks at the metaverse globes longingly. She always sees her sisters enjoy such fun and cool experiences.

One day, Ariel notices a handsome prince in one of the globes. She starts looking at him every day. Ariel desperately wants to get to know the prince. She even slowly is starting to like him. It makes Ariel sad that she cannot talk with the prince.



Ariel decides to visit the witch to ask her if she can help Ariel get access to the metaverse. The witch tells her that she can make a digital twin of Ariel, who can go into the digital world to meet the prince. However, the spell comes with a warning: Ariel cannot control the digital twin, she can only watch. When Ariel loses her connection with the prince, she will be banned from the metaverse.

Ariel decides to do it. The digital twin is created based on all data gathered about Ariel's life, so it is really detailed and similar to Ariel in real life.



When Ariel returns home again and looks into one of the globes, she sees her digital twin appearing. Luckily, the digital twin quickly finds the prince and they have a small chat. The prince asks digital Ariel to join him for a walk through the park with his dogs.

Ariel watches them every day. To her delight she sees the prince and her digital twin getting a stronger connection. It makes her happy and Ariel starts to fall in love with the prince.



One day, there is a ball in the metaverse organised by the mother of the prince. He needs to choose a princess to spend his life with. A lot of beautiful girls enter the space. Ariel feels nervous, but she has trust in the strong connection she has with the prince.



After a wonderful evening with music, dancing and food, the time has come for the prince to choose his princess.

Unexpectedly the prince tells digital Ariel that he will not choose her. He likes her, but he noticed that Ariel does not like dogs. Since his dogs are really important to him, it is a good reason to choose another girl as his princess.



Ariel is really upset. The prince's reasoning is unfair because it is not true. Ariel loves dogs, as a matter of fact she likes all animals.

Her digital twin must have shown this incorrectly. The twin was created based on collected data about Ariel's life. There must have been a wrong fact in there.



The witch had warned Ariel that if she loses her connection with the prince, she will be banned from the metaverse world.

And indeed, when the prince leaves the ball with his chosen princess, digital Ariel is slowly disappearing out of the metaverse globe. It is too late to change anything.



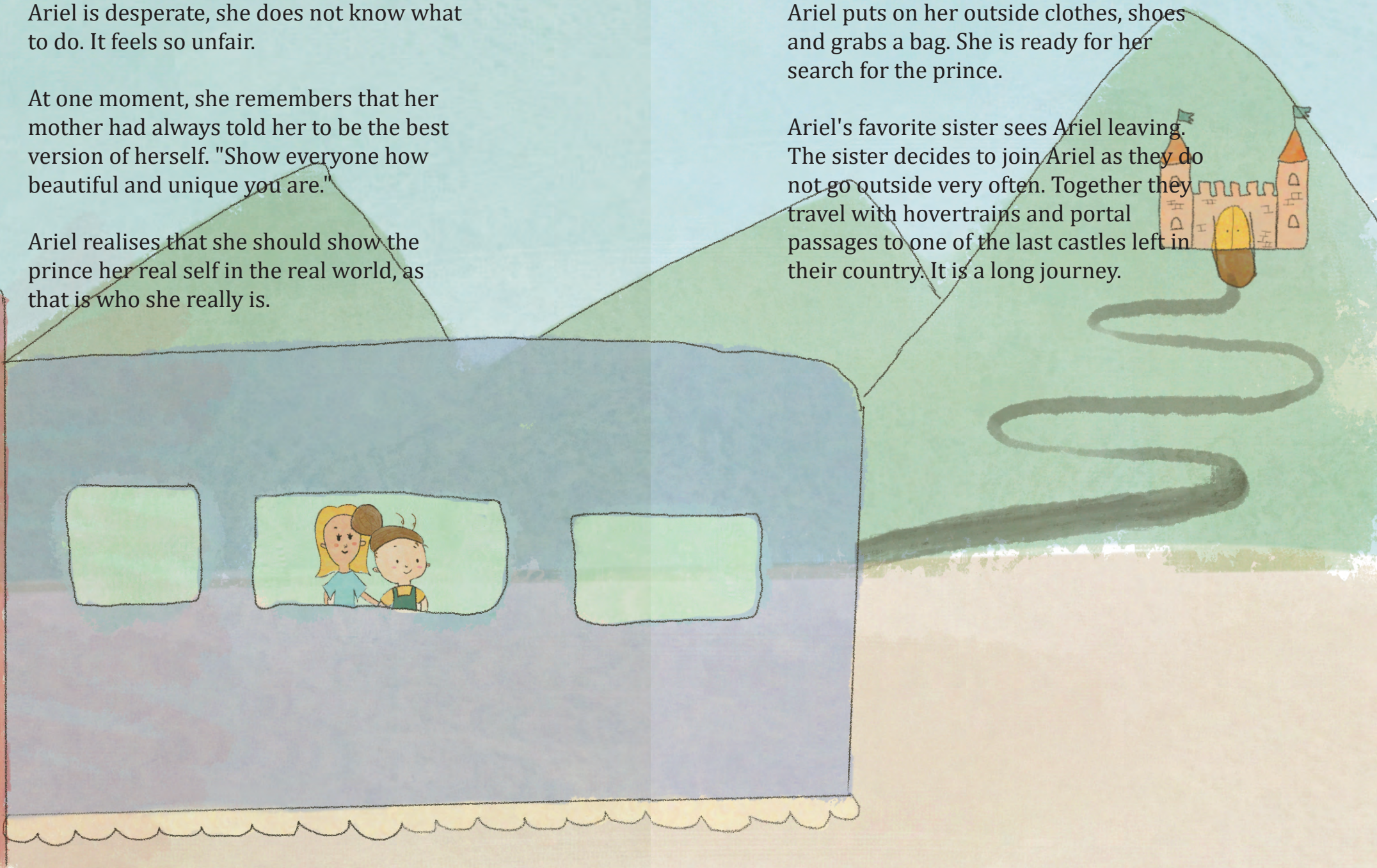
Ariel is desperate, she does not know what to do. It feels so unfair.

At one moment, she remembers that her mother had always told her to be the best version of herself. "Show everyone how beautiful and unique you are."

Ariel realises that she should show the prince her real self in the real world, as that is who she really is.

Ariel puts on her outside clothes, shoes and grabs a bag. She is ready for her search for the prince.

Ariel's favorite sister sees Ariel leaving. The sister decides to join Ariel as they do not go outside very often. Together they travel with hovertrains and portal passages to one of the last castles left in their country. It is a long journey.



Ariel honestly tells the prince everything that happened, from the moment she first saw him in the metaverse globe, to the moment she was banned. The prince believes her.

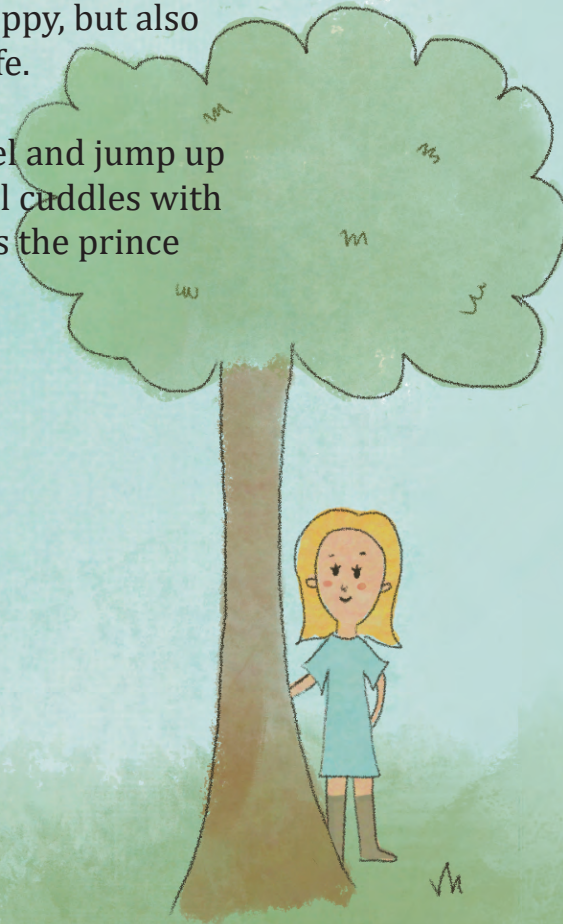
The prince is very happy that Ariel found him in the real world, showing her sincere inner beauty.

Together with the dogs, Ariel and the prince take a walk together towards a happy, never ending future.



When Ariel and her sister arrive at the castle, Ariel sees the prince alone in the garden. She is nervous to go to him. When the prince sees Ariel he is happy, but also confused to see her in real life.

The prince's dogs run to Ariel and jump up to her enthusiastically. Ariel cuddles with the dogs fondly, which shows the prince that Ariel does like dogs.





Background information for parents

This illustrated children's book is meant to be read as a bedside story for children from 4 to 10 years old. Wrapped in an engaging, child-friendly story, it teaches moral lessons like to appreciate your unique self. Besides morality that never is out of date, the story also addresses emerging, contemporary topics that are part of everyday life: dealing with the metaverse and the fact that digital twins are not exact copies of yourself as they are only made up of data.

We as publishers wholeheartedly believe that children should be introduced to these topics from an early age, as they will have to deal with it in real life soon enough.

We hope your child and you will enjoy this book as much we loved making it.

TU/e Imagination
& Climate Futures
/Studio

**Researching The
Future Everyday**



Time Travelling Children's Books From the Future

Have you heard from time travelling designers? Neither did I. Designers are often

thinking about the future and the impact they can have on it. However, it can be hard to think of the future for people who do not regularly engage with the future. Time travel always sounds like a science fiction story, but let's try bringing it closer to the here and now. How can time travelling help designers to enable non-designers to imagine their future?

How to travel in time?

Let's start with a small thought experiment. Ask yourself the following questions: How old will I be in 2038? Where would I live? What happened with the development of AI? What role is technology playing in our everyday life?

Diving deeper into the thought experiment, what if the answers to the last two questions were not ideal or slightly concerning? What concerns should we be aware of currently, and how can these insights help us to steer our path towards a different future? For designers speculating on the future development of trends and concerns is a common practice, as there are many methods, such as speculative design, design fiction, experiential futures and many more. Our ideation shapes the future and lives through our images, often shaping our actions in the present (Candy & Kornet, 2019). However, by doing the thought exercise of time travelling, you are challenged to think from the perspective of coming from the future to the present, reflect on how society has developed in the years in between, and reflect on how this makes you feel.

Time travelling with children

Time travelling as a design method can help to imagine the future we are now heading into, also called the projected future. Time travelling could help designers to design for a different direction for the future. However, one of the difficulties of time travelling is that the concept of time is often hard to grasp. The metaphor of children makes time more concrete when thinking of time travelling and the future because everyone can imagine the timespan of having a child or even a grandchild. If you think about 2038 from the age of 25-ish, you can see yourself having a child within 15 years. Or if your child is currently going to primary school, in 15 years, they may have moved out of your house. If you think of the age of 50-ish, you might already have a grandchild in 15 years. So everyone can relate to the timespan of childhood.

Another way of looking at time and our current influence on the future related to children is inspired by the song from the Manic Street Preachers released in 1998, 'If you tolerate this, your children will be next'. The actions we perform now influence our and our children's future.

How to communicate futures

Looking at the projected future, society will have different challenges than we currently have. Concerns of today about future technology, data, or AI, might become a reality in 15 years. What might the challenges be for future children, parents and grandparents, and how can we communicate these challenging futures? People might relate to or understand the proposed future better by showing the future in everyday objects from the now.

To continue with the child metaphor, children's books are very good at addressing and explaining complicated topics to children (PDST, 2020). Therefore, communicating a future about possible societal challenges in a children's book can help people understand and reflect on the projected future. At the same time, the format of the children's book can help future (grand)parents imagine this is something they will read to their children.

So, to conclude, I hope your takeaway is that time-travelling does not need to be highly futuristic and scientific and I hope that you will think of which stories you might tell your (grand)children in 15 years and try to see how your everyday actions are tied to this.

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The header image was created with the assistance of DALL-E 2 with the description: "A hand drawn rocket in space where a parent is reading a bedtime story to his child"

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Reflection

Vere Vreeswijk

Researching the Future Everyday

28/06/2023

This reflection is written for the course Researching the Future Everyday. In this reflection, I will elaborate on my development as a designer and how this course inspired my future development.

Future literacy

I have worked on speculative design projects before this course. However, during these projects, I have always needed more clarity in design methods. Future studies are a broad field existing out of many smaller fields such as speculative design, design fiction, visioning, experiential futures and many more. One of the reasons for following this course was to gain a better overview of what researching the future means and the learning methods supporting this. In hindsight, no course can give an overview of future studies as I discovered this field is very large and complex. However, this course provided me with insights about navigating this field, a basic understanding of multiple theories and their differences, and some practical examples of how these theories are used in the present for social change. To highlight, the lecture of Femke Coops about transition design was most inspiring as she addressed the importance of researching the future and moving from the present towards the future. As a designer, I am often focused on showing people the projected or possible futures. However, now I want to shift towards creating a bridge from the present towards the future and supporting people in this transition. In my future projects, I want to focus on supporting people in imagining the possible future and guiding them towards a behaviour needed for this future.

Course project

Empathy

In our research project, we completed the cycle of bridging from the present to the future by trend research and worldbuilding and bridging the future to the present by thinking of communication formats for the speculated future. Overall, this method has helped me to think of the future systematically and how to communicate futures. In particular, our method was inspirational as it was not focused on 'people of the age of 18 to 25', for example, but on a specific relation people would have in this future (child-parent relationship). Framing the target group not on a demographic but on a

possible relationship can maybe create more empathy for the future that is communicated, as empathy can support the imagination and possible emotions related to this imagination. Diving deeper into this relationship and altering the communication probe to this allowed me also to design with more empathy for the target group. As a designer who wants to enable people to change their behaviour to alleviate the negative effects of climate change, empathizing with the user can be extremely valuable throughout the process and can result in better-fitting outcomes. This insight will help me to frame projects around interesting relationships (human or non-human) and design with more empathy.

Positivity

The project also focused on translating a complex topic (data in the future society) into a children's story. In my M1.2, I also have been focused on translating the effects of climate change into a story. One of the differences between these projects is that my M1.2 story was perceived as very dystopic, while the story of this project was not perceived as dystopic. This could be due to the topic of the story or by the format of the story. People generally replied positively towards this story but were still able to understand the seriousness of the complex topic. As a designer, I aim to address complex topics positively. I was unsuccessful in this during my M1.2 project, which made me think that complex topics cannot be addressed positively. However, this course project has shown me that it is possible and as powerful as I thought. Overall, this experience showed me that I could explore positive framing of complex topics further as it is possible to do this. This takeaway greatly influences my vision as a designer and my design process in future projects.

Design Research Processes

As a designer, I aim to know many different methods rather than being an expert in one method because this allows me to select the best method per challenge. In this course, I have explored how to be a time-traveling designer. Using time traveling as a method to explore possible futures and relate them back to the future as a thought exercise can help me think of the future of my designs. I focused on bringing

something from the future to the present in this course. However, it can be beneficial as designers to use time traveling to evaluate how your design could impact the future. Imagine designing something for the present and adding as a thought experiment how this could impact society over time. This can make designers more cautious about their impact on society, which is necessary as society currently faces many problems, and there is no need any more for designs that are not beneficial but are only for the joy of humans. This insight enables me to be more critical of my designs and to ensure I contribute to the world.

Conclusion

I have learned a lot about future studies, developed my knowledge in this field, put it into practice and know how to use it in future projects. The course allowed me to explore how time traveling could be used as a thought experiment for designers and how it can address complex societal issues. I have developed my future-thinking-muscle and became more critical towards the effect of future thinking, how to work with it, and how to improve on my projects. Overall, I am delighted I followed this course and my development as a designer facilitated by this course.