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Title: Conversational Futures (ConFu): Future-centered design as conversations with future humans, cyborgs and artificial agents

How do we understand and design our future worth wanting (Vallor, 2016)? To address this question from philosophical, technological, and design perspectives, we propose a workshop on designing conversations with future beings, things, and systems. The main aim is to imagine how "future voices" can influence our present selves. Whose voices from imagined future(s) could influence our current behavior, e.g., to address the climate crisis or future species' well-being? We hope to discuss provocative viewpoints on what the future can and should be, and how "being human" stands to change. Methodologically, we ask if conversational user interfaces (e.g., smart speaker) can be carriers of future voices as speculative design vehicles.

From Weizenbaum's Eliza to Amazon Alexa, conversational agents that talk are granted human-like social traits and can influence our behavior. Conversational UIs that talk to us with natural language are now embedded in our everyday environments. They can interact with multiple people at the same time in intimate home setting (Porcheron et al., 2018). What is promising is that CUIs as voices (text or speech) are body-independent; a voice can be nested in any body or system, such as human-machine hybrids, robots, or even biological systems. Embedded voices can narrate stories and perspectives from the point of the body that they are in, or one can imagine distributed voices of a single entity, residing in multiple bodies. Building on this, could we better care for future beings (like we would care for ourselves), if their voices are housed in currently existing technologies (Lee et al., 2019)? Temporality hence becomes a critical design space where our present meets our future(s).

Broadly, there are multiple voices, imagined or real, to consider. We strive for multi-vocality and interpretations therein, e.g., children's (Zaga et al., 2017) or other different future being's perspectives on the same phenomenon like the climate crisis. In the workshop, we will thus collaboratively perform future-resilient interactions as dramaturgic experiences. This means that organizers and audience members will play the role of future voices, e.g., future children, new species of human-plant hybrids, or novel viruses, and consider which bodies their voices belong to, e.g., embedded in a flowerpot, books, or a smart speaker. Organizers will introduce the topic, then will lead smaller groups into thinking about voices people want to embody, and then perform speculative *conversations* with volunteers in the audience.

Our guiding questions will be (but are not limited to): *What* simulated conversations could we have with *whose* future perspectives via present day technologies? How can we design verbal and non-verbal elements for a better understanding of future-oriented views? In what ways can we address current societal goals, such as sustainability, to re-direct future developments via speculative conversations? What conversational topics will help us rethink what it means to be a person in the future? Designing for a future worth wanting requires our participation in the present. We take steps towards philosophical, technological, and design refinements on future-centered conversations that bridge the gap between the present and future voices.

## Bibliography

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