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## We are all old: Decentralising visions

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# WE ARE ALL OLD - DECENTRALISING VISIONS

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## ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to understand how a mixed methodology of speculation, design practices, and artistic practices can help design researchers understand how people of different ages and backgrounds may distribute their visions about being old. Our overall motivation for the research is that countries in the world are struggling to shape good societies while the pace of population aging is accelerating faster than in the past. The world's problems are often perceived as complex, leading some to lose faith in their ability to effect change. Every person is a piece of the larger puzzle, and we argue that when individuals build relationships with their future selves, they are empowered to make changes in the present to shape a desirable future. By prototyping a meal setting as a vehicle for speculation, we have learnt about the challenges of our approach.

## INTRODUCTION

The work described in this paper seeks to understand how a mixed methodology of design speculation, design practices, and artistic practices can help people to relate to their own future selves. And by doing so, become empowered to act for an alternative present.

Currently most countries in the world are struggling to shape good societies. The struggles revolve around topics such as climate change and ageing populations. While Sweden has embraced technological solutions in elderly care to slow down pressures on caregiving, there are suggestions that technology also brings the risk of

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dehumanizing care and exacerbating inequalities. The world's problems are often perceived as complex, leading some to lose faith in their ability to effect change. But every person is a piece of the larger puzzle, and we argue that when individuals build relationships with their future selves, they are empowered to make changes in the present to shape a desirable future. This investment transforms the inquiry into something of value, contributing to broader processes of change and the development of alternatives.

Prototyping for speculation can include both speculations on the future and on the alternative present. By employing and developing a mixed methodology, our research aims to create generative insights that challenge existing norms and practices and how knowledge about the lives and relationships of elderly may feed into design iterations and literature for older people (Lindley et al., 2008). In our case, we have created a performative setting where our participants are guided to create a relation to their elderly future selves. They are also guided to critically reflect on what actions the realization of those speculations would require in an alternative present. In this paper we elaborate on how we can navigate a mix of methods in order to make our audience, the prototype participants, distribute their visions about what becoming old entails. By distributing visions, we intend to open up the question beyond the assumptions and status quo of being elderly. By empowering people of different ages and backgrounds, and bringing together artistic practice, design research and practice, we explore how speculation can decentralise to become more inclusive and culturally sensitive.

By using the meal as a vehicle for the exploration, we have investigated how people may engage in the meaning of a good life for elderly. Our design prototype helps the participants create a relationship with their future elderly selves. In this process, they also gain the power and inspiration to, together with the other participants, critically reflect and propose change for current practices and policy making in societal systems. The outcomes of our research teach us how the



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proposed methodology may be used to democratize speculation and empower people to relate to and impact their own futures through an alternative present. It also teaches us how a tangible embodied prototype may help people of different ages and with various backgrounds connect in a concrete manner to a complex system. In this paper, we will start by describing the background of aging populations and societal challenges. We will then move on to describing speculative design and criticism that scholars have expressed about it. We will describe our method, the process and the learnings from setting up and testing our prototype. Finally, we end the paper with a discussion and perspectives on learnings from employing our methodology.

## BACKGROUND

Demographic aging is one of the most pressing global challenges of our time, and the pace of population aging is accelerating faster than in the past. By 2025, the forecast number of people over the age of 60 years will reach 2.1 billion, while those over the age of 80 years will reach 426 million. While aging populations started initially in high-income countries like Japan, where 30% of the population is over 60 years old, it is now experienced in low-and-middle-income countries, where by 2050 they will be home to two-thirds of the world's population of people over 60 years. (World Health Organization, 2023). Elderly care is becoming an increasingly complex issue given the aging population around the world, increased cultural diversity, and the pressures on caregiving (Langeveld, 2019; World Health Organization, 2023). There are discussions ongoing about how to sustain and improve elderly care in the future, and it is important that the public is involved in this conversation to shape this future. Many countries have embraced technological solutions in elderly care and with that brings the risk of dehumanizing care and exacerbating inequalities (Oviatt, 2021; Eubanks, 2018).

A big challenge is to build something that is flexible enough to still be relevant, not just six months from now, but in 5-10 years when technology is almost unpredictable. Efforts are being made to build attractions that last a very long time, and to build platforms that are flexible enough to match the velocity of technology (Causer C, 2019). Ageism, fuelled in part by the idealisation of youth in the media and changes in family structures, has shaped the perceptions and interactions with older generations. This can reinforce misunderstandings, stereotypes and social distance between generations, leading to negative connotations about ageing (Bazalgette et al., 2011). With people seeking to distance themselves from old age, they become disconnected with themselves as part of this ageing future.

The context of demographic aging provides design research a unique lens to imagine decentralised futures that are shaped by participants and that recognises the diversity of aging experiences. An effort to address ageism is found in (Lee et al., 2013; Lee et al., 2012) where the researchers argue that design should enable a more solution-focused approach to elderly people, using the ingenuity of ageing. Strengers et al., (2022) points to how human-computer interaction (HCI) research typically focus on improving technology skills, mobility and health outcomes. The research contributes to the understanding of the importance of curiosity, play and experimentation in supporting positive wellbeing outcomes for older adults living with smart home devices. Other studies highlight the importance of older adults as active contributors in a digital society (Reuter et al., 2021), and a research review of literature from the fields of gerontology, HCI, and human factors that focus on the nature of family and peer relationships in old age, unfolds the multiple ways that age can be defined (Lindely et al., 2008).

It is a privilege to reach old age and there is no common ideal for what this desirable future should be. People come from different cultures with different experiences, bodies, places and opportunities. Everyone's future looks different. Finding ways to engage the public, including youth, into conversations about elderly care and good life can create long-term visions to help the development of an inclusive and relevant future for all.

The speculative design approach has been used to unfold alternative views on elderly in the global north and the use of technology (see for example "Uninvited Guests" by Superflux (Ardern et al., 2015). Speculative design is a method that broadly described investigates alternative pasts, presents and potential futures. The term has been interpreted in several manners (Auger, 2013) and a core value is the potential to democratize the making of the future by involving a public audience beyond experts and academia. But speculative design has been criticized for several reasons (for an overview see Kinnee et al., 2023). There are issues of race, class and gender privilege within Speculative and Critical Design projects and publications. In their "Cheat Sheet for a Non- (or Less-) Colonialist Speculative Design," Luisa Prado and Pedro Oliveira (2014) prompt designers to, among other things ask themselves such as "does my dystopia happen already in other 'invisible' (sic) places of the World?" (de Oliveira et al., 2014). Another critic of speculative critical design, (Tonkinwise, 2014) argues that Dunne and Raaby (2024) always have "technoscience at their center, rather than altered social relations" (Tonkinwise, 2014 p.183). He emphasizes that Dunne and Raby's argument for speculative design universe is motivated by an underlying warrant of capitalistic "future shopping" logics: "...agency to determine futures lies only in the hands of those with discretionary budgets to spend." Tonkinwise encourages designers and design

researchers to future in ways that go beyond the logics and aesthetics of “the market” and technoscience. Speculative designs are to enable the audience to think about the future and to critique current practice. While speculative design often manages the speculation, of what informs the use of technology, aesthetics, behaviour, interaction, and function of a designed artefact, our method is directed towards the altered social relations that the aesthetics, behaviour, interaction, and function of our designed artefact brings forward. We aim for a more inclusive and culturally sensitive approach to speculative design.

## METHOD

Our explorations use a mixed methodology of design speculation, design practices, and artistic practices to let the future emerge in the embodied interaction between the participants and our prototype. While doing this, it engages them in critical reflection on current policies and practice. We will describe the intersecting lines of our methodology to situate this work within other modes of research.

As design researchers we prioritize the exploration of alternatives, visions, and solutions over approaches that seek detailed understanding of the situation (Gaver et al., 2022). Our aim is to extract new reflections and discussions by extending people’s relationships with timeframes, altering how they conceptualise being and becoming elderly. This we argue will enable people to engage in their future elderly selves in new ways and enable them to support systemic change (e.g. structural, political, cultural). Our approach involves speculative design as a tool to democratize the process of envisioning futures. We are convinced, in line with Lindley & Green, (2022), Pierce et al, (2015) that speculative design and research through design (RtD) offers a means to challenge society’s dominant models of understanding and producing knowledge which often prioritizes quantitative and measurable data as the basis for decision making. A central aspect of our research is prototyping, which is a method that is in various forms widely used in design (Coughlan P et al., 2007). Crucially, we strive to create details of tangible expressions of ideas that allow participants’ thinking to develop through embodied engagements. In our case, prototyping is a means to apply a feminist, intersectional, and situated framework (Niemenen, 2023; Buchmüller, 2012) to help us shape the prototype through values and perspectives that include narratives often overlooked in dominant future visions. This approach generates openings for decentralised visions where diversity and lived experiences are embedded. Since there is no singular, ideal future, our methodology embraces a performative worldview, where the felt

relationship between people and objects are continuously evolving. We relate this to a collaborative perspective on design futuring that draws upon hybrid design futures including creative and artistic methods (Aranda et al., 2025). Our methodology blends our own practice of design research and speculative design with artistic practice involving so called “connoisseurs” (Schiphorst, 2011; Kosmack Vaara & Akner Koler, 2021). Through the guidance of our invited artistic practitioners within music, film and theatre, we are able to gain access to their expertise and internalized knowledge of what and how things can be done with the material at hand in order to create aesthetically expressive experiences. Our prototype is a designed setting and situation where designers, artistic practitioners and participants collaboratively perform the prototype. The design prototype, a meal setting, serves as a tangible and experiential method for participants to explore and reflect on their future selves and societal systems. It engages participants in the performance through the aesthetics of the embodied experience, i.e. they explore and experience through their haptic abilities, movements and senses, and through interactions with each other, the materials, and the hosts. We have strived to enhance the speculation by making the familiar strange (Sheets Johnstone, 1999; Loke & Robertson, 2013) by disrupting habitual perceptions to support the imagination and re-imagination of different elderly futures. By being active as waiters in the prototype, the researchers strive to move through the experience collaboratively, while recognising the challenge of how our own values and background may influence our judgements.

## COLLECTING AND ANALYSING DATA

We collaborated with a film maker in planning, filming and editing the material produced from the prototype. The material consisted of recorded sessions, videos, photos and notes. The film maker contributed to sorting the material and reflections from the observer perspective. The participants varied in age (between 21-63 years old), gender (2 men, 3 women) and competence (communication strategist, nutritionist, developer, two students). By being involved ourselves as the waiters and experiencing the prototype close to the participants, we were sensitised to the questions, and we could also follow the exploration process that we had designed. This was a great help when we used the collected data to investigate how the participants engaged with the prototype and the ways that it helped them imagine and speculate about their future selves. In several phases of the analysis, we re-visited the material to articulate how the research method could be a viable path for imagining and prototyping visions for our elderly selves.

## DESIGN PROCESS

The process started by forming core values for the prototype. The system of elderly care is complex, and we wanted to focus on aspects that represent parts of human desires that have a big impact on quality of life regardless of age. The three core values that we chose to work with are fundamental for quality of life, and at the same time abstract enough for participants to fill with their own vision and imaginations. These three core values were autonomy, senses, social. As we move towards our elderly future, we all experience aging, lack of autonomy, the continued need for sensory experiences, and the evolving nature of our social connections. The core values were then transferred into a several course meal setting. The table setting and the food was used as explorative tools for emotional and aesthetic engagements. The foundation for our speculative dinner concept was the creation of a shared cultural experience revolving around the shared meal. This gathering became the focal point of our design process. To build the experience, we first explored the core values that would shape it, identifying key factors that could influence a speculative future. These factors became the foundation for the dinner's design. Next, we translated these values into the dishes themselves, ensuring each one reflected the future needs that we had identified (see Table 1). Critical aspects of the prototype were considered such as composing the dramatic setting and orchestrated performance —familiar, relatable, and believable, yet distinctly imaginary. This is why we paid close attention to the aesthetics of the visual, sensory, auditory, tactile, and choreographic elements of the design, creating a fully immersive experience.

Autonomy	Food Preparation (Mini-aubergine), Choosing Ingredients (Chilli), Food Knowledge (Satsumas), Tempo of Eating (Persimmon), To Be Cared For (Grapes), Change from Routine (Okra)
Senses	Change Preferences (Mint), Tailored Meals (Thyme), Food Cooking Support (Pumpkin seeds), Food Shopping Support (Olives)
Social	Multi-generational Meals (Flour), Contribution (Soil), Social Possibilities (Tea leaves), Social Combinations (Oil), Special Occasions (Coffee beans)

Table 1. Listing the lenses in course two and the speculative components in course three.

## PROCESS AND FINDINGS

Our prototype consisted of an event in a pop-up setting within an existing exhibition at Universeum Museum in Gothenburg, Sweden. The experience was designed as a participatory performance where participants enter an enclosed area in the museum which was staged for the event. Graphic elements and colours, sounds and light, as well as performers, gave the prototype its character. The prototype was designed as a dinner setting around a large round table covered with a soft and thick textile tablecloth. It followed the rhythm of a several course dinner experience in four parts:

- Course one: Starter consisting of props that manipulated the senses (see Figure 4)
- Course two: Appetisers with three themes or “lenses” (see Figure 9)
- Course three: Main course consisting of tapas representing speculative components related to the lenses (see Figure 10)
- Course four: The dessert consisting of a postcard (see Figure 16)

Each part of the dinner had its own character and pacing that was communicated through the design of the physical setting, actors and sounds. The guests were guided through each part of the "dinner" by a multi-lingual performance artist as the host, and two waiters who served the "courses". The host mixed 3 languages, and all menus were in 3 languages, to suggest a multi-cultural future and to subtly disorient the participants (see Figure 1). A coherent graphic and interior identity was implemented to create a believable setting. Dramatic lighting and curated soundtrack served to create an intense atmosphere for the participants to focus on the pop-up scene.



Figure 1. The main menu for course three. Menus served as instructions for the participants, and the texts were in English, Swedish, and Arabic texts to suggest a multi-cultural future. (Photo: Patrik Eriksson)

The participants were invited to enter our prototype through a curtain (see Figure 2). To encourage the group to leave their status behind, participants leave outside their signed GDPR forms, job titles, jackets, and bags.

They just enter with themselves. In this way our speculative prototype brought our participants to a spot where they could leave their respective roles and hierarchies behind.



Figure 2. The entrance curtains are sewn textiles hanging from the ceiling. Participants pass through the middle of the words into the prototype as if they were stepping onto a stage. (Photo: Patrik Eriksson)

On their own initiative they sat down around the large table (see Figure 3) and started involving with what was presented in front of them (see Figure 4, 5 and 6).



Figure 3. During the first course, the five participants are sitting alone around the same table separated by tall black dividers. They can sense one another but not see each other. (Photo: Patrik Eriksson)



Figure 4. Props for course one manipulates the senses of participants to help them imagine themselves aging. A heavy neck scarf filled with rice, glasses with blurred lenses, and tasteless jelly on a non-descript glass plate. (Photo: Patrik Eriksson)



Figure 5. Participant who has put on the props for course one reads the instructions in the menu as the performance actor who is the host watches on. (Photo: Patrik Eriksson)

#### COURSE ONE; RELATING (TO THE FUTURE)

In the first part of the meal setting, each person was sitting alone around the same table screened off from the other participants in order to provoke a sense of loneliness and tension (see Figure 3, 4 and 5). They picked up the "drinks menu" which guided them through instructions to engage with various props that gave them a taste of what their older selves might experience. The prototype played with several of their senses. The sounds (background music), their sight (blurred glasses), the heaviness of their bodies (weighted scarves), and their taste (the dishes). We could observe their body language and the sounds they made.

P1: *"I kind of sunk into myself".*

This part of the meal lasted for 10 minutes. During this time the participants immersed into the emotional state and imagination of becoming older through the change of their autonomy, social situation, and disruption of their senses. The sinking together, resignation, and tension of not feeling comfortable.



Figure 6. Participant doing the first course trying on the prompts that enhance the feeling of aging. Blurred lenses in the glasses makes it difficult to see and read. (Photo: Patrik Eriksson)

P3 *"...and this time felt so extended, it felt like it was sitting here... I mean all this sadness...".*

At this point most of the guests ate the tasteless agar-agar pieces on their plates (see Figure 7).

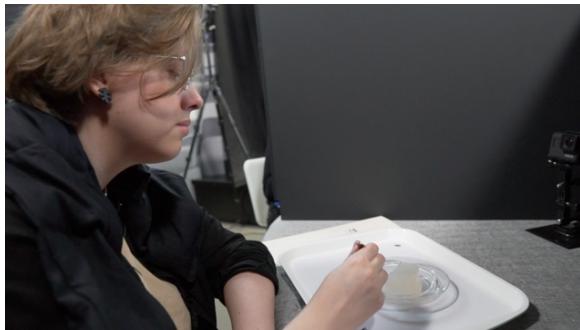


Figure 7. Participant pokes at the agar-agar in course one with the spoon. The tasteless jelly enhances the aesthetics of the loss of social, autonomy and senses. (Photo: Patrik Eriksson)

*P1: "The taste, the sensation in the mouth. Not having any social space, or anything social with you guys just made me kind of sad. And I just went inside of myself. The only hope, the only thing was in the music. I really enjoyed the music. That was kind of the only thing left for me, was the music."*

The aim of the first part of the meal setting was to move participants away from the idea that the elderly are a group of people different to themselves, and that the speculation we imagine for this group of elderly is far in the distant future. Rather, they should understand that this elderly group will be all of them (if they are lucky enough), and that they are already forming their close and far future in the present. They are the elderly and the future.

*P1 "It's very hard to how do you say, it's very hard to grasp that you are thinking about this for yourself in the future, not for someone else. How do you really feel about that in the future? And when sit there and you feel it hit you in the chest, suddenly it's very real".*

The manipulation of people's behaviours and emotions in the meal as a vehicle for the speculative prototype seemed to be very effective based on the spoken reflections during the session. Our participants had little or no power on how the events unfolded and the behaviours and emotions it provoked. We strived to balance between confusion and clarity to result in something productive. At the same time, we had to remain respectful so that participants felt that they could keep their dignity. The speculation balanced the participants' perceptions of their normative meal experience and the fictional element of the concept.

#### COURSE TWO: APPETISERS

The waiters move quickly and quietly around the table to remove the boards dividing the participants. Now the setting transformed into a communal dinner table (see Figure 8). The participants, the host and waiters could feel the tension in the air ease as the music changes. Being able to sit together around the dinner table is

something we often take for granted until that option is taken away.

*P4: "I felt very lonely, and I wanted some sort of connection still. But it was obviously not possible because we were closed off and I didn't like that. So it felt like a relief when the screens were removed and I could finally see you guys. And yeah, that's how I felt".*

Participants were presented with an "appetiser menu" which prompted them to reflect with the rest of the table about how being old made them feel through the lenses of "Social", "Senses", and "Autonomy" (see Figure 9).

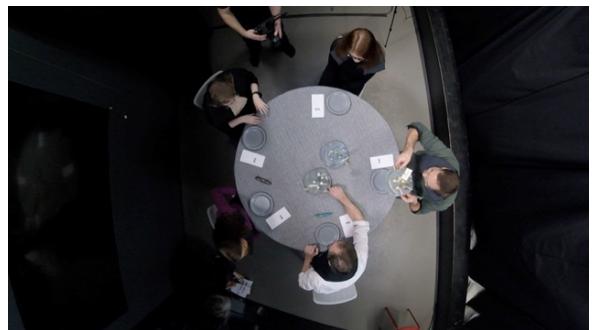


Figure 8. In course two, the atmosphere changes as the boards that divided the five participants are removed to enable them to see and interact with each other. (Photo: Patrik Eriksson)

The prototype presented appetisers to represent each of these lenses, and participants could take onto their plates the appetisers they connected to during the time they sat alone. All participants picked all three lenses.

*P4: "And it was a very powerful scene, to visualise that loneliness. And as someone who has grown up with food as very central to the family, to eat together. It was a very, very stark contrast, to be alone".*

Participants were eager to share their feelings and ate or played with their appetisers as they did so. The physicality of the lenses became something for participants to grasp onto while they reflected on something abstract and enabled them to connect their feelings to the system.

*P5: "...I am **afraid** of the future where other people decide. And it also makes me reflect because I have a background in health care and I am originally a dietitian and we tell people how to eat and you should eat this...giving advice...we do it because we care and it's something we should do, but it really makes me reflect now is this really the way to do it?"*



Figure 9. Appetisers that represent the lenses of social, senses and autonomy are served to the participants. From these the participants can pick the ones they related to. (Photo: Hayley Ho)

#### COURSE THREE: LIBRARY OF CONTRIBUTION

For the "main course" participants pass around tapas plates which metaphorically represented concrete speculative components which could contribute to improving social, senses and autonomy for their future selves (see Figure 10 and 12). They were a way for participants to engage with the system. They could see, touch, and play with elements of the system (see Figure 11).



Figure 10. Tapas dishes in course three were served by the design researchers acting as waiters in the prototype. (Photo: Patrik Eriksson)

Each participant was allowed to select two tapas to combine as their meal on their plate as a combination they want in the future (see Figure 12 and 13). As participants could only take two, they had to acknowledge that it is not possible to get everything you want and the need to prioritise. Since they could also not take the same tapas, everyone ended up with different plate combinations and different future scenarios. Participants had to deal with restrictions in the system.



Figure 11. In course three, participants pass around and choose between tapas that represent speculative components from the groups of lenses -see Table 1, page 4 (Photo: Patrik Eriksson)



Figure 12. Signs attached to the tapas dishes describe to the participants what they represent. (Photo: Patrik Eriksson)



Figure 13. The tapas dish in course three "Change from routine" was represented by the vegetable okra that is not commonly sold in regular supermarkets in Sweden. (Photo: Patrik Eriksson)



Figure 14. Participants read the descriptions of the different components for each tapas dish in course three. (Photo: Patrik Eriksson)

P3: *"I choose "choose ingredients" and "special occasions". Choosing ingredients, I think it's about autonomy, I want to be in charge of what I eat...it's not that important who cooks it, but I want to be in charge of what I eat in some way. And special occasions was actually mostly for to plan and anticipate. And that, that really resonates with me in the sense that ...if I can plan and anticipate things, I can enjoy the meal before it is... long for it. And hopefully long for, for the occasion, hopefully with someone else".*

The staging provided participants with a tapas spread (see Figure 14) that represented elements to construct a future and current scenario to act upon. The tapas and the interactions with the food served as a visual aid for participants to negotiate with themselves and each other as they speculated on their futures (see Figure 15).

P3: *"I have this experience of working in elderly care in homes, and also going into homes, which can be so different from home to home. ...and the importance, the importance of food to people, because much of the day is, you know, as for everyone, it's when do I eat? That's how we structure our days."*

Some of the objects was intentionally unfamiliar, some was not edible, some was not even food. Participants had to find their own way to make sense and connections of what they were presented with (see Figure 15). They were encouraged to arrange, mix, blend, and cut the tapas in a way that represented the combination of their two chosen components. By engaging in this strange way, they played and reconstructed a system for their elderly selves.

P5: *"Because all these things are connected, of course, eventually".*

As the improvised drama of the prototype unfolds, the participants become part of the prototype along with the host, waiters, and filmmakers. Throughout the process we worked to concretize the input from the systems and the world and distil it a way that participants could grasp and interact with it in an embodied way.

However, in our prototype, like in the future, not all the contents of the dishes are familiar or attractive.



Figure 15. After choosing two tapas dishes that represent components that they want in their elderly future, participants manipulated the food from those dishes onto their plates in a way that conveyed how they felt represented their desired future vision. (Photo: Patrik Eriksson)

An imposed limitation also meant they must negotiate their future in relation to the other participants as they pass around the dishes. When the participants combined food together in the Library of Contribution, they negotiated with the system of elderly meal experiences.

#### COURSE FOUR: THE POSTCARD

The dinner concludes with participants filing out postcards for what they hope for in the future and how they can contribute towards that personally and professionally (see Figure 16).



Figure 16. Participant in the last phase of the prototype writing personal thoughts about her elderly future on a postcard. (Photo: Patrik Eriksson)

The purpose of this final activity was to return the participants back to a sitting that was similar to when

they entered the meal setting. Once again, they sit quietly alone, but now together with the other participants.

## DISCUSSION & FUTURE WORK

The fields of design, scenography, performance, and sound have long experimented with creating interactions that are engaging and disorientating (Abrantes, 2021). These industries play with expectations, manipulate senses, and adapt environments to initiate audiences to participate in meaning-making rather than just passive observation (Causer, 2019). They do so by engaging audiences emotionally, intellectually, and sensorially.

We have proposed a mixed methodology that involves meals as a vehicle for future speculation and altering the present. We will now share our considerations for designing prototypes using this methodology.

1. We propose a methodology where the meal as a vehicle for speculation is supported by **artistic and design practices**. The choreography of the performance with the music, actor, lighting, designed details of the dinner setting, and movements around the table all come together to create an immersive and embodied aesthetic experience.
2. Everyone has a different present, even if we are in the same or a similar demographic. This in turn has the potential for a **variety of different future visions**, and thus alternative presents. The goal of our prototype was to create an experience where participants avoided jumping to immediate solutions, for example technological future ideas.
3. The meal setting and the dishes represent parts in **a system** and become tangible objects for the participants to connect themselves to. During the prototype performance they had to negotiate with themselves and their fellow diners within the limitations of the system that we set up.
4. In the flow of the prototype experience, participants had to navigate between the familiar and the strange while supported by their engrained behaviours **triggered by cultural cues around a meal setting**.

In order to explain how we performed the method, we have extracted some perspectives that we found to stand out when we studied our findings.

*Our first perspective for the practice-based method is to consider vulnerability and dignity.*

Our speculative meal setting was designed to be a dignified experience for the participants. Design-practice and artistic-practice have the power to put

people in vulnerable positions, which can easily become absurd and undignified (de Oliveira et al., 2014). That was not our goal with our prototype. This being especially important when working with potentially vulnerable groups such as the elderly. The right to create, engage and contribute to visions can be driven by top-down strategies and powerful organisations. Bringing everyone back to the same vulnerable starting point was the approach to allow for multiple visions to emerge. However, as with any activities that places participants in vulnerable positions, the design must be cautious and consider participants comfort and dignity.

*The second perspective is the aesthetics of dignity, and distributed visions.*

The aesthetics of our speculative meal setting prototype was designed to be a culturally relatable, dignified and embodied experience for the participants. The aesthetic experience of the prototype was designed through considered elements. High quality textiles, a padded tablecloth, attentive host and prompt waiters, professional menus and other surrounding elements all contribute to a comfortable and stylish restaurant identity to the prototype. This comes together to give the participants a sense of being taken care of so that they could safely immerse into the performative experience. We would like to point to the value of aesthetics in design practice and how we as design researchers can emphasize that aesthetic responses are motivated by people's individual real experiences, thoughts, cultural background, and emotions (Koler et al., 2018). The fields of expertise that we involved in our methodology have the sensitivities to work with these elements in a subtle way.

*Thirdly we point to systemic anchors.*

Through the prototype experience, participants encountered the societal system from a range of levels. Starting with the individual level in course one and two, and with negotiating their needs on both a service and policy level in course three and four. These different levels of the system are mentioned as the "incremental level" and the "disruptive level" (Nicholls & Murdock, 2012 in Ehn et al., 2014 p 21). Our designed meal setting is a vehicle to allow speculations to emerge through the interaction between the prototype and the participants. We notice that engaging with unknown complexity is not beyond people's reach, but triggering emotional responses with the system is a challenge. In order to move beyond everyday normative assumptions, the meal setting may be a vehicle that supports distributed visions within our societal systems.

## CONCLUSION

Our initial inquiry was to investigate how we can work with decentralised visions in R&D in order to empower people to make changes in the present that shape a desirable elderly future. Most people around the world are familiar with a table setting. Coming together around a meal takes place in all cultures in one form or another. Food and meals are deeply human experiences, serving as spaces for connection and community. When first encountering our prototype, participants instinctively gather to sit down around the table. They also instinctively react emotionally to the unusual situation of being screened off from their fellow diners seated at the same table. Participants gather around the table as themselves, and navigate between relatability and speculation, comfort and disruption. With the meal as their vehicle, they connect with the core of our concept: You can only imagine the future if you understand that future is you. We are all old.

The prototype was designed to create an immersive experience with a focus on extracting knowledge about how we can create better conditions for older adults in society. As we reflect on the methods we used to create this situation for our participants, we see that the distributed speculation emerged through the embodied interactions between participants and the prototype setup. This gave us access to knowledge that is difficult to describe in interviews, to measure, or to test. It generated emotions, memories and hopes about becoming old. For that, the collaborative performance between artistic practice, speculation, and design research was a beneficial approach. With this research as our starting point, we intend to continue building situated and generative designs to further explore how our methodology of supporting distributed speculation may be used to address other complex themes and contexts guided by the underlying premise: We are all.

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