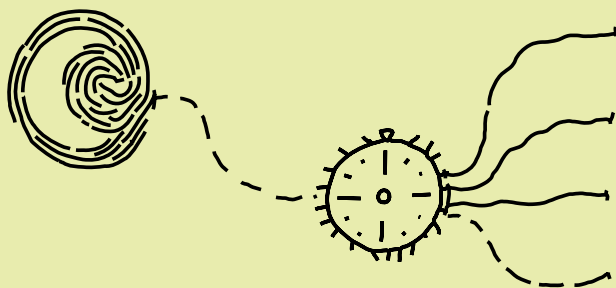




specXcraft

Speculative crafting for un/common futures
in Brussels



Authored by Giulietta Laki, Greg Nijs, Thomas Laureyssens,
Florence Peeraer, Mia Melvaer, Elodie Mugrefya,
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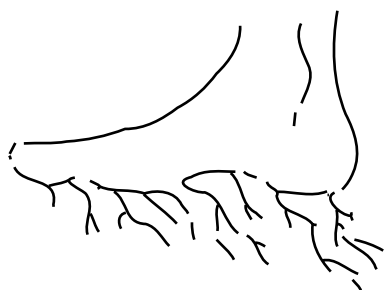




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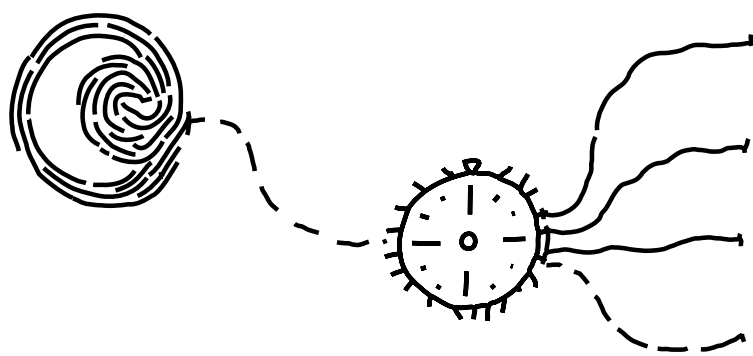
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preface

This publication is a polyphonic and provisional account of specXcraft, a co-creative research project in which we developed and experimented a method *with* and *for* Brussels' civic actors who claim the right to imagine different futures. specXcraft is a wordplay which joins speculation and crafting, and starts from the basic premise that un/common futures can take shape through collective and situated creative processes.

To reflect the multiple shapes the project has taken and the multi-handed writing of this publication, you will find different registers of texts in the document, ranging from descriptive to analytical to speculative tones. You can choose to either let yourself be carried along by the text, or to make forays here and there in specific layers that might tickle your curiosity.

The project has its foundation within the humanities (anthropology, design, sociology, urbanism) and the creative research approaches throughout these fields. From the start it has included three local Brussels' organisations which have continuously co-steered the research, as well as the development and implementation of the method. We intended to mirror this approach and setup in the publication, which explains the theoretical underpinnings of the project and offers a first analysis of its results, but also offers ample space for the experimental stories and artefacts which were produced by those who participated.

Essential to understanding specXcraft is that the proposed method has – in its current (beta) status – the form of a rather intensive 'trajectory', which takes participants on a multiple-day experience throughout different phases and steps. Applying a specXcraft trajectory in an organisation is, through its length, a substantial investment in the identification, unravelling and alignment of collective imagination. Do not expect a quick-to-apply, plug-in, ready-made workshop module: the method requires careful attunement to the dynamics and aims which are already present in your organisation.

After 18 months of collaborative work amongst four very different organisations, this publication is an account of the current status of specXcraft, a basis on which to potentially build new projects. Maybe yours. We hope this document can inspire civic associations and activists to experiment with these approaches in order to give unheard voices of the future more leverage. We also hope it can inspire people concerned with the future of Brussels – administrations, public authorities, researchers and the like – to open up for more collective and situated ways of exploring the future of Brussels.







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specXcraft

specXcraft, short for speculative crafting for un/common futures, is an action-research project in which four associations explore the futures of Brussels through speculative, embodied and crafted methods, based on their respective practices and commitments in the present. Started in September 2022, this Innoviris funded co-creation project is led by Urban Species (ULB/LUCA School of Arts), a collective of researchers committed to developing other forms of interaction between different entities in the city; Constant, a non-profit organisation exploring the links between technology, the arts and feminisms; the Centre Vidéo de Bruxelles, a documentary film production association working on social and urban issues through collective video workshops; and Natagora, an association who carries out a range of actions in defence of biodiversity.

These organisations have come together to act against the “there is no alternative”¹ discourse that all too often underpins public action in Brussels. Free market, growth, efficiency, free competition, techno-solutionism, human exceptionalism and the like are functioning as an often implicit and unquestioned leitmotif for politics and urban development. Whether it is about the choice of changing existing regulations in order to allow the deployment of 5G in Brussels or about building permits on derelict land, those who want to slow down self-proclaimed ‘progress’ are struggling to make themselves heard. Many mainstream and hegemonic narratives

leave only very little space - private, public, urban - for alternative imagination to flourish.

For philosopher Isabelle Stengers, capitalism has ‘bewitched’ our imagination, our ability to understand what is at stake, to think of alternatives and even more to take action (Stengers & Pignarre, 2005). It is this generalised cognitive impasse that Mark Fisher calls ‘capitalist realism’, where it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism. With specXcraft we want to stand up against hegemonic narratives – not only capitalism but also patriarchy, racism, speciesism,... – and their various operational exten-

¹ This expression, attributed to Margaret Thatcher, makes the importance of the existence - or not - of alternative options, scenarios, aspirations, very tangible... That is why, all differences made, we deem it a powerful sentence to get a sense of the intrinsically political nature of the venture of making manyfold alternatives flourish.



What we talk about when we talk about IMAGINATION

When we talk about imagination, it's not just about coming up with wild ideas. Rather, it is a powerful force that shapes how we see the world and what we do in it. Imagination emerges from a mix of memories, experiences, and creativity that helps us see things in new ways. However, it's not just in our heads—imagination sparks from the interaction of our thoughts and bodies with the world around us.

But sometimes, imagination can be influenced by outside pressures. That is, imagination can be controlled by powerful societal forces like money. In today's world, our creativity can be limited by what's profitable. This limits our ability to imagine new and other ways of living. To fight back, we need to embrace coming up with novel creative stories and keep on acting as if things could be different. This opens up our imagination to new possibilities and helps us challenge the status quo. By freeing our imagination, we can unlock the power to make real change happen.

sions which undermine our capacity to think or feel out other futures, let alone prepare for them. The project grew out of a shared desire to cultivate our capacity – both material and immaterial – to imagine otherwise possible futures. Through this detour, it also aims at renewing our practices and actions in the present; including the possibilities of creating new alliances, making our struggles converge.

To this end, we have chosen to put imagination of the future at the heart of our co-creative research project. But not just any imagination. A *situated* imagination, rooted in our specific experiences, practices, fears and hopes. A *responsible* imagination, one that acknowledges injustice and the interplay of multifarious problems, and is concerned with their consequences. A *speculative* imagination, however, that challenges the probable and gives rise to the ‘possible’, with the help of SF (science fiction, speculative fiction, speculative fabulation) (Debaise & Stengers, 2017). An *alternative* imagination, capable of leading us elsewhere. A *crafted* imagination, pulled off the virtual to become explorable and experienceable through our senses and actions. An *empowering* imagination, oriented towards agency and action. A *plural* imagination that gives rise to multiple futures. A *collective* imagination, none-

theless, in which the possibility of the common is outlined, not as a given but as a task to be always started again.

This all leads us to the (research) questions that we sought to answer throughout the initial 18-month phase of the specXcraft project. That is, can such a particular form of imagination – situated, responsible, speculative, crafted, plural, collective – lead Brussels militant, cultural and associative milieus to:

- spark imaginaries about futures in Brussels that diverge from dominant and hegemonic narratives?
- explore possible futures arising from specific situations and get a sense of their consequences?
- increase our (feeling of) agency or grasp on the future – and thus on the present?
- make new alliances and reconfigure struggles that are disconnected or even opposed in Brussels?

Why is it important to foster and forge alternative, situated and specific visions for the future of Brussels?

Mainly because we believe that it could empower Brussels militant, cultural and associative milieus, and that it could strengthen our actions to give internal and public space to non-dominant visions of the future in Brussels.

Also, citizens are increasingly being asked to contribute to decision-making through citizen participation, especially in fundamental questions and issues with long-term impact, on which politicians often lack the courage or legitimacy to take a stand and to propose incisive measures. Yet we know that participatory democracy is only viable if citizens are equipped to play this role.

Thus, the ability to imagine the future becomes a fundamental skill of critical thinking and active citizenship. It is often referred to as ‘*futures literacy*’², to stress the need to generalise and democratise an ability that seemed to be the prerogative of future studies.

On the other hand, the supposed scientific neutrality of the field of future studies has been more and more questioned in recent years, by showing the culturally, historically and ideologically rooted nature of the visions of the future that are produced in it. There is an urgent need to ‘decolonize’ future studies (Sardar, 1993). The idea of

² Futures literacies refers to the ways we perceive, sense, enact, envision, and create the future in the present. However, any idea of ‘literacy’ is also situated and imbued with a normative outlook (see Rachel & Gladwin, 2024).

'dissenting futures' denounces the 'Eurocentric, hegemonic visions of futurity' and the "disappearance of alternative, counter-hegemonic visions of the future" (Ranjan, 2024).

In that context, inviting activists who explicitly dissent with specific aspects of the mainstream future visions for Brussels is a necessary step towards preserving an openness to a plurality of different futures, and preventing us from getting bogged down in an ineluctable vision of the future.

For this reason, Urban Species invited three organisations into specXcraft who are concerned with issues around biodiversity, techno-solutionism and social justice in Brussels. Issues that are - in many of the decisions taken by the different governing bodies acting in Brussels - often outweighed by ambitions in terms of 'progress' and economic growth. The defenders of these causes often feel discredited, unrecognised and relegated to second place by a system of values that is often not made explicit.

If the notion of 'epistemic³ injustices' (Fricker, 2007) refers to the fact that the knowledge of cer-

tain social groups is less valued or discriminated against, we propose to use the term 'futuring injustices' to name this type of phenomenon when it specifically concerns a denial of legitimacy to produce knowledge relating to the future.

Putting these Brussels struggles at the very heart of the project means, in a way, taking a stand against these futuring injustices. In line with the idea of 'future repairers', we wish not only to take note of the epistemic erasures that make us insensitive to past and present wrongs, but also to counter them proactively in order to work towards more desirable futures (Sriprakash et al., 2020, Robinson 2015).

If the past is (at least implicitly) present in all future making activities, there are different levels of engaging with it. SpecXcraft aims at "thinking with heritage" (Sandford, 2019), drawing on specific activist cultures (specific and idiosyncratic histories, traditions, sensibilities, resources, practices, tactics), in order to spark alternative forms of future imagination, while embedding enquiries within lived experiences and values, that are not taken as self-evident.

As an action-research project, specXcraft's goals are to tackle issues encountered in the field with the help of both scientific approaches and concrete experimentations. It was our challenge to do this co-creatively, putting different expertises and forms of knowledge on a par. For its first round of experimentations, four associations joined the specXcraft co-research.

Urban Species - Espèces Urbaines

Urban Species is a multidisciplinary action-research group which works on urban participation in Brussels, bringing together a whole range of different entities and concerns, human or not, living or not, digital or not. They are interested in the different ways in which these entities contribute to the city, and they create devices and methods that amplify and foster their participation. In recent years, they've been developing speculative devices and exploring their democratic

and inventive potential. specXcraft is for Urban Species the opportunity to dive more deeply into different forms of practice and knowledge, and try to put in place processes in order to articulate them and to get them recognised. After having addressed questions of epistemic injustice and other obstacles to civic and political rights, this project is an opportunity to tackle futuring injustice.

³ 'Epistemic' means relating to an episteme, to the body of knowledge specific to a social group or an era.

Centre Vidéo de Bruxelles - CVB

The Centre Vidéo de Bruxelles (CVB) is a not-for-profit production organisation that has been working on social and urban issues through collective video workshops since 1974. Initially, CVB did so by way of a 'videobus' that travelled through various neighbourhoods of Brussels with lightweight video equipment made available to associations and residents. 50 years later, the CVB offers Brussels' residents free training and collective creation workshops: from personal and documentary stories where participants shared their journeys, video workshops have become spaces for political reclaiming, sometimes through the fictionalisation of narratives.

The recourse to narrative speculation now seems often claimed by filmmaker facilitators as well as committed youth, in search of new forms capable of overcoming a certain fatigue induced by outdated documentary approaches

and models of struggle. They wish to bring to the screen realities at the margins of Brussels' dominant imaginaries, reflecting current societal changes and Brussels' struggles. Enrolling in the specXcraft research project responded to this new momentum in two ways: to put forward a cinema committed on an ethical and political level allowing to imagine more just, solidary, inclusive Brussels futures, escaping the capitalist model; and to put forward a cinema committed on a formal and aesthetic level, where attention to narration, poetry, and address matter as much as the message conveyed. A cinema capable of carrying our imagination beyond the oppressive limits that seem to be imposed on it, to decolonize our thinking, even the public space: to invent possibilities, to weave new alliances.

Natagora

Natagora gathers a community of employees and volunteers in French-speaking Belgium, who take part in a great variety of actions towards defending living beings and their habitats, in a context of the up-and-coming sixth mass extinction of biodiversity.

In an urban milieu like Brussels, natural habitats and the species they host are facing specific and increasing pressures, such as urbanisation and real estate speculation, pollution, climate change, increased use of green areas... Despite the pressing nature of the ecological crisis, most political decisions reflect a vision of the city in which profit and control take precedence over the possibility of providing a decent living environment for human and non-human populations alike. For instance, many natural areas in Brussels are threatened by building projects, which will not only destroy the fauna and flora living there, but also deprive human populations of contact with those non-humans. In order to weaken opposition to such projects, the ecological struggle is - often artificially - put in contradiction with other social injustices, such as the crisis of affordable housing that strikes an important part of Brussels' population.

In this context, Natagora employs and supports naturalists and groups of activists who are taking actions to defend non-humans in Brussels. These actions are as diverse as monitoring the populations and habitats, using legal proceedings to prevent harmful projects, raising awareness and providing information about the issue, protesting in public spaces, and so on. These practices demand a lot of time, energy, knowledge and know-how, often based on voluntary work, and can lead to strong confrontation with other parties. On the other hand, humans involved in these actions repeatedly face frustration over their struggles to convince society at large to shift perspectives and habits regarding their relationship to non-human entities and other humans. This can lead to activist fatigue or resignation, stemming from the emotional and physical burden of fighting seemingly insurmountable problems.

specXcraft offers an opportunity to give more voice to these persons and their experiences as activists and naturalists, their ambitions for the future, as well as to explore the ways they relate to non-humans. It also provides a space for experimenting with other ways of interacting with

struggles that should not be in contradiction, but in alliance, in order to shape more responsible fu-

tures for Brussels.

Constant

Constant is an association run by artists, designers, researchers and hackers. They work together to create collaborative situations that engage with the challenges of contemporary techno-life. Constant learns from/ engages with/ practices from within feminisms and is inspired by the principles of copyleft, Free/Libre + Open Source Software while formulating its own critique towards it. The development of artistic practices is at the core of Constant. It means generating shareable content, different perspectives and ways of working in collaborations between artists, designers, researchers, activists and cultural workers.

Since Constant works with/on and against technology, it has observed throughout the years how the research and implementation of technological apparatus are increasingly accompanied

by promises and imaginations towards particular futures. These imaginations are populated by technologies always more present and efficient towards a form of optimisation of our lives; regardless of the damages these technologies can cause. For Constant, it became clear that there is too much power and determination given to imaginations which have been formed by the tech conglomerates developing and rolling out these technologies. Consequently, we intend to give attention to future imaginations which resist or divert from the universalist and oppressive narratives of those tech multinationals. With a project such as specXcraft, Constant aspired to understand how narratives of diversion and resistance can meet and find ways of interlocking not only their languages and imaginations for the future but also their modes of action.

Co-creation

Through the whole project, the research collective took great care in valorizing all forms of knowledge present amongst its members, whether they were rooted in scientific, artistic, militant or other kinds of practices. In that sense, each person had the opportunity to bring their take on how to conduct the research part of the project. We all participated not only in shaping the specXcraft method, but also in the reporting and analysing of the experimentations, each bringing some of our own reflexivity and interpretative frameworks to what happened.

Finally, the desire of the three organisations to take part in the specXcraft project was born of a terrain conducive to speculation specific to each organisation but also, more broadly, of a trend observed in the social sciences and humanities that could be called the 'speculative turn'.





the hinterland of specXcraft: relaying the SF turn

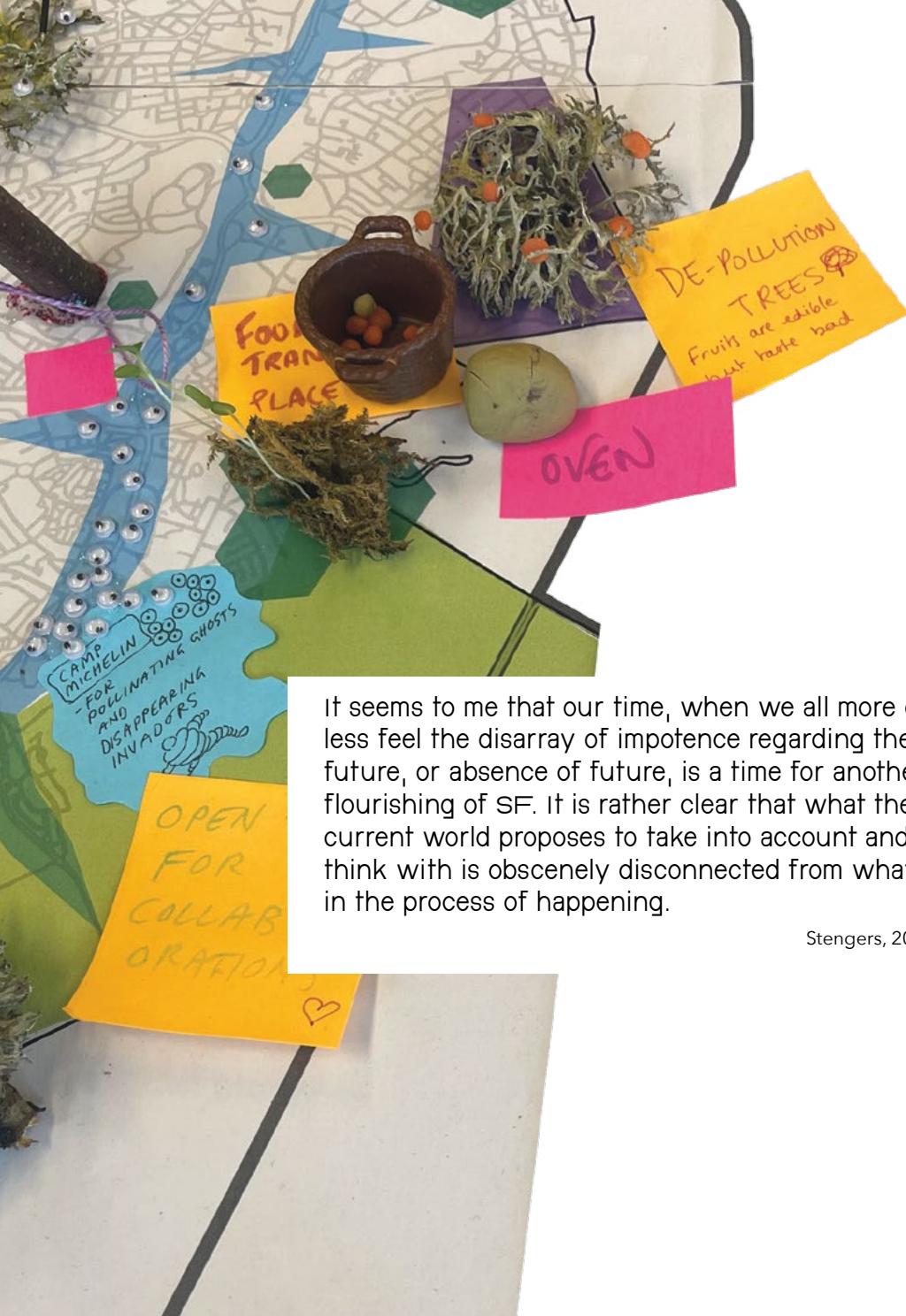
Whenever a new method is devised, it is useful – if not necessary – to account for the research hinterland it emerged from.

For methods do not come into being from a void, *ex nihilo*. New ‘method assemblages’ (Law, 2004) hold within them – and are held by – a larger constellation of research directions, practises and endeavours in diverse research fields. In specXcraft we initially have drawn on recent developments in research fields from the humanities – namely anthropology, the environmental humanities, cultural studies, futures studies, design research and sociology. In the following, we give a succinct and non-exhaustive state of the art that fed our reflections and from which we borrowed when developing the specXcraft method.

More specifically, we want to account for the attention for SF (science fiction, speculative fiction, speculative fabulation) in recent social sciences and humanities research, as well as for the different ways in which it is mobilised. From the margins of various mainstream research in these fields, the increased uses of SF have amounted to what could be dubbed ‘the SF turn’. In line with other researchers’ motivations, from the onset of

the specXcraft project we deemed SF a promising companion when embarking on trajectories to imagine, think, and feel out otherwise possible futures.

While SF has been with us in varying degrees throughout the unfolding of the project – sometimes more remotely, sometimes more closely – the gravitational pull of its basic potential capacities for our endeavour kept the unruly elements on the outer limits in orbit. But what are these potential capacities SF has on offer for research? First of all, SF is not to be understood as a means of escapism – as “a means to flee the pressures of the present” (Mengozi & Wacquez, 2023: 150) – but rather activates “our capacity for resistance in the face of what claims to be normal or necessary” (ibid.). SF thus allows us to develop alternatives – *beneath, beyond and besides* that which seems to be a given. This is because, secondly, for researchers SF “has the capacity to *expand* the reality they can grasp and work on” – as it “offers them an enlarged range of subjects, themes and situations traditionally neglected



It seems to me that our time, when we all more or less feel the disarray of impotence regarding the future, or absence of future, is a time for another flourishing of SF. It is rather clear that what the current world proposes to take into account and to think with is obscenely disconnected from what is in the process of happening.

Stengers, 2019: 13

in their fields of study" (ibid.: 149). This enlargement or expansion is key to include the neglected and feed the *im- or otherwise possible*. Including more-than-human entities (fauna, flora, living and nonliving entities and stuff that make up our world) in ways that are not human-centred, for example. Indeed, here too, SF "has the capacity to grant the encounter with radical otherness a central narrative place" (ibid.: 151). In sum, SF is central to allow politics, human and social sciences to find other paths to explore, paths that were for too long discarded. Finally, "we need SF to restock our political imagination and fertilise the human and social sciences by reviving their speculative dimension, the one the sciences obliterated in order to seem more scientific" (Mengozi & Wacquez, 2023: 150). Thus, SF serves as a beacon illuminating paths of resistance against dominant societal narratives, urging us to envision and explore alterna-

tive realities. By expanding the boundaries of research and embracing diverse lines of flight, it invigorates our collective imagination, fostering a deeper understanding of our world and every (more-than-)human being's place within it.

In the following sections, we have a closer look at how different research fields in the social sciences and humanities have called for the mobilisation of SF in their respective domains and the difference SF could bring to research when doing so.

The SF turn

Contrary to its (often derided) reputation, maybe "SF is the realism of our time"? (Beukes et al., 2017; emphasis added). And should be thus considered – precisely as the genre that removes (supposed) "realist constraints (such as capitalism)" and thus "narrates world-prototyping as prefigurative politics" (Hamraie, 2020: 408). Indeed, gradually it has been making its way into the humanities and wider societal initiatives.

In the field of **anthropology**, for example, researchers are turning towards SF, characterising anthropology "as a 'fabulatory art', with the capacity to disturb common-sense distinctions between the real and the fictive" (Jensen & Kamiksiz, 2019: iii), amounting to calls for ethnographies of SF (Anderson et al., 2018; Fisch, 2019) and a speculative thinking-with (de la Bel-lacasa, 2019). In this mutual cross-pollination, anthropology and SF engage in a material and textual adventure in "an effort to replace an understanding that sees 'real' and 'fictional' worlds as fundamentally, ontologically distinctive, with images of looping, recursive implication, lateral movements, and blurred zones of interaction" (Jensen & Kamiksiz, 2019: iv). Drawing on the lateral movements between 'real' and 'fictional' worlds is an interesting endeavour for specXcraft

to experimentally explore in real world settings.

As a strategy to sensitise both researchers and the broader public to more-than-human worlds, the field of **environmental humanities** equally engages in speculative intervention. With 'the arts of noticing' (Tsing et al., 2017), they call for "the cultivation of skills for both paying attention to others and meaningfully responding" (Van Dooren et al., 2016: 6). Exemplary responses take the form of artful and narrative SF approaches (cf. Despret, 2021). More-than-human artworks facilitate 'new ecological sympathies' (Ballard, 2017) and probe speculative dimensions of multispecies worlds. Narrative approaches, it is argued, enact multispecies storied places, unearthing the intricate entanglements between humans and non-humans in urban environments (Van Dooren & Rose, 2012). Here, too, what is at issue is to vibrate between scientific and fictional realities, "a blurring of both sides of the assumed division: the speculative turn that is palpable and the scientific turn that is fabulating" (Thorsen, 2019: 7).

Similar sounds can be heard in **cultural studies**, more specifically with regard to decolonising imaginaries through speculative fiction

(e.g. Eshun, 2003; Whyte, 2018; Streeby, 2018; Sides, 2019; Keeling, 2019). In mobilising and discussing speculative stories, these studies focus on ‘visionary fictions’, that is SF which “has relevance toward building new, freer worlds from the mainstream strain of SF, which most often reinforces dominant narratives of power” (Brown & Imarisha, 2015: 4) and as such carry seeds of otherwise possibles. “They decolonize the imagination by using speculative fiction to break with mainstream narratives that centre white settlers and fail to imagine deep change” (Streeby, 2019: 31). More often than not, these analyses make an effort to exceed the limits of one (marginalised) community or topic, forging new relations and alliances. Thus, one can find approaches at the intersection of social and environmental justice, climate change and race, or still, more-than-human and queer epistemologies for example.

In the research field of **futures studies** – traditionally a hallmark of calculative and model-based predictive approaches – some researchers argue that SF scenarios are “a legitimate, but creative, way of imagining future worlds (which) offers a set of tools to help inform decision-makers of future pathways other than those already in common use” (Pereira et al., 2020: xx). Under the guise of ‘different method, different future predictions’, it is recognised that “analytical tools (...) are often prioritised in scientific scenarios” which is “at the expense of storytelling, imagination, metaphor and creativity”, while engagement with SF “could loosen cognitive restrictions and stimulate a novel understanding” (Merrie et al., 2018: 23). Moreover, as a matter of inclusion (i.e. pluralising), some future studies researchers see opportunities for marginalised imaginaries to be generated, arguing that it is necessary “to open up diverse narratives of the future that enrich, challenge and expand existing projections of coupled social and environmental change” thereby providing “an important opportunity to decolonize the future” (Pereira et al., 2020: xx).

Speculative makings and doings

Since ‘only imagining’ speculative stories is not enough, they must also be *made* (cf. Strivay et al., 2015). Moreover, we advocate that they have to be made in *co-creation* and made *shareable* for others to engage with them. For this, we are borrowing and bringing together insights from what is happening in a number of research fields.

Borrowing from design research. When it comes to making the speculative physical, one cannot but consider speculative design, design research which originated in the early 2010s (Bleeker, 2009; Dunne & Raby, 2013). Under the motto “One can do science fiction not only as a writer of stories but also as a maker of things” (Bleeker, 2009: 11), speculative design moves towards a “generative, speculative, and future-oriented space of alternative possibilities”.

Although (self-)lauded for its critical capacity to question the status quo, it was criticised for its elitism (sleek designs, not moving beyond the walls of the highbrow design/art venue) and adoption into commercial business (Rumpala, 2018; Forlano & Mathew, 2014). To counterbalance this issue, we join those who argue that it is more interesting to bring speculative design’s “future-orientation (...) into conversation with participatory design” (Forlano & Mathew, 2014: 11). In this manner, there are examples of urban toolkits to support community resilience (see Mattern, 2021 for an overview), speculative prototyping with homeless people (Tironi, 2018), Designing Policy Toolkit (Forlano & Mathew, 2014), and more-than-human futures prototypes (Heitlinger & Comber, 2018; Clarke et al., 2019).



How can we create speculators and make the world speculate? Posing this question moves speculation away from the assumptions that speculation is the province of philosophers and is merely a mode of thinking. Producing speculations is also a mode of doing and making.

Guggenheim et al., 2017: 145

Borrowing from future studies. As a result of the SF turn (described above), recently, more and more researchers in future studies have also called for interactions between foresight and design practices. Hence they have pointed out the potential of SF prototyping, supported by SF worldbuilding (Zaidi, 2019). Others have started putting this to practise, amounting to so-called physical narratives (Kuzmanovic et al., 2019) and ethnographic experiential futures (Candy & Kornet, 2019; Candy & Dunagan, 2017) which consist of “approaches to make futures visible, tangible, interactive and otherwise explorable in a range of modes” (Candy & Kornet, 2019: 5). Having a fundamentally collective dimension, these approaches are often taken together with a participatory approach, in which groups or communities collaboratively design their imagined futures. For specXcraft, two notions are interesting to inherit from: ‘futures action research’ (Ramos, 2017), with an emphasis on scaffolding “to more effectively explore the futures thinking of diverse communities, using design (meant broadly here) to loop from an interior register to an exterior – thinkable, feelable, discussable – one” (Candy & Kornet, 2019: 13); and ‘infrastructuring imagination’, which “is a method to empower local populations to engage with emerging technologies

in their own cultural terms and even to design potential implementations” and where “speculative processes use design to push the imagination toward wholly new sociotechnical systems” (Baumann et al., 2017: n.p.).

Borrowing from social sciences. Honouring the *exigences obligées* of social research (which goes further in its requirements/embeddedness than e.g. cultural studies or futures studies), we draw on Marres et al and follow their proposition of ‘inventing the social’ (Marres et al., 2018). The inventive methods in this approach aim at “moving beyond the customary distinctions between knowledge and art, and for combining ‘doing’ ‘researching’ and ‘making’ of social life in potentially new ways” (Marres et al., 2018: 17). They argue that “the pressing question today, in our view, is whether social research can reflexively deploy things, environments and non-humans to make an ostensible difference to our forms of life and how we live together” (ibid.: 30). It is the ambition of the specXcraft project to experimentally test this question.

How to read this part

Here you will find a description of the specific 'method assemblage' we developed during this project, as well as examples of practical applications that have been experimented with during the past year. These examples are only some versions (often pretty prototypal, minimalist) of the multiple shapes the method has already taken or could take within the 5 threads mentioned below. The aim is to give a taste of a series of tools that can be adapted to each situation. If you are looking for complete instructions on how to use this method, you will not find them here, as the aim is not to make a 'one size fits all' methodology, ready to use. However, a tool for conceiving a situated version of a specXcraft trajectory is currently being designed by the team... If you are interested or have questions about the method, please reach out to us.

What we talk about when we talk about METHOD

Methods and tools are not independent of the contexts to which they are applied; their effectiveness is situational. All methods are performative, that is, they bring realities into being, and as such they engage the responsibility of those who use them. No method, no tool is neutral: they always carry politics, ethics, values and a certain amount of friction that we want to integrate into the process. The specific 'method assemblage' (Law, 2004) we put together in specXcraft is meant to connect as much as possible to the tools and practices of each group of participants.

a method assemblage to explore situated future imaginaries

Within this landscape of multiple academic fields, the project's main proposal is to experiment with a process to explore Brussels' futures in a crafted, embodied and situated way, drawing on SF and a variety of methods to spark creativity and reflexivity.

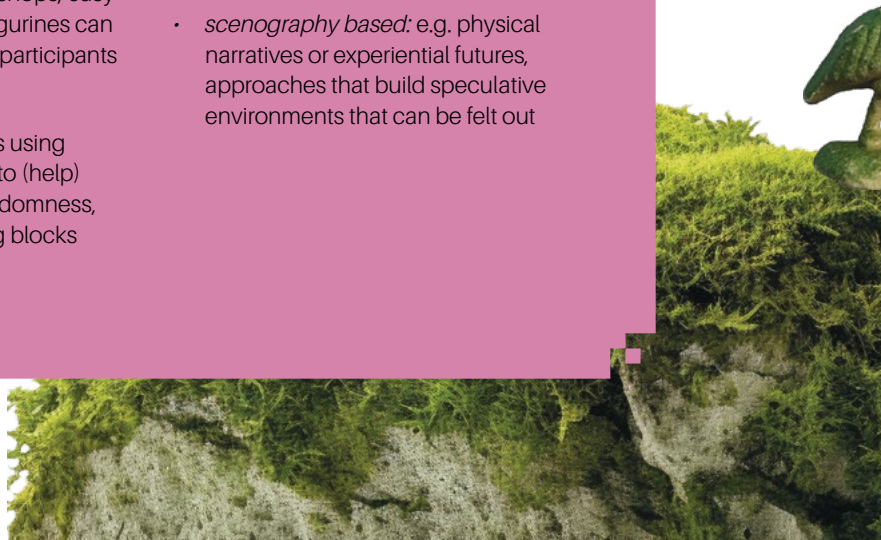
In order to activate this dense conceptual framework, an experimental protocol - the specXcraft method - was first designed, then tested within the partner organisations and their networks. The main proposition of specXcraft is to embark on 'trajectories' with communities of practice and experience who cultivate divergent futures. What we call a 'trajectory' is a series of workshops spread over several weeks or months, with a group that shares similar concerns. Trajectories are built around a similar structure, but great attention is paid to keeping their form mouldable and adaptable to the contexts they are grafted upon.

Each trajectory begins in some form of non-mixity, meaning that the group shares a relative homogeneity in the concerns and struggles they carry. On the one hand, this aims to activate very specific cultures of understanding the present. On the other hand, it helps to set a safer space which eases the sharing of experiences and opinions with people who are confronted with similar issues. It legitimates participants to voice their visions of the future and go into creative processes, knowing that they have more chances to be understood in such a group than in public situations.

borrowing from a diversity of tools

This method is an assemblage of a wide range of tools and approaches, in order to allow multiplicities of sensitivities and imaginations to spark. Here is a non-exhaustive typology of shapes those elements can take:

- *card-based*: involving card decks, parametric or for random association, to be used autonomously by non-expert users
- *writing-based*: most often used in the form of writing workshops, low cost, variable threshold, can be short or long
- *ethnographically based*: making use of social science methods such as participant observation, material ethnography or semi-structured thematic interviews; mostly used by experts (who may use outcomes as input for co-creation)
- *futuring based*: scientific tools and methods from the domains of futuring and forecasting; until recently mainly used by academics and commercial professionals, now also used in co-creation workshops (be it in slightly revised/redesigned forms)
- *mapping based*: mappings of all kinds used as a collective and co-creative way of making sense of interactions or relations between issues, places, data, actors, ...; mappings can straddle past, present and future
- *figurine based*: making use of found figurines of all sorts in workshops, easy and playful engagement, figurines can take on whatever meaning participants invent for it
- *electronics based*: methods using electronic or digital means to (help) imagine, either through randomness, displacement or as building blocks
- *embodied & performance based*: methods making use of the body, from meditation to moving, from performative reading to (slam) poetry, from (re) enacting theatrical performance to role play (e.g. Live Action Role Play)
- *image based*: making use of image-editing means, either analogue or digital; mostly for making collages, but recently also making use of AI generated imagery by way of key words as input
- *sound based + audio-visual based*: playing with film-making codes, forms and content
- *craft based*: methods making use of all sorts of (low-fi) crafting tools and materials in order to build mock-ups through hands-on engagement
- *prototyping based*: methods which make use of fast prototyping, either analogue (similar to crafts, but with different types of materials) or electronically/digitally (building electronic devices or 3D sketching/rendering); either through hacking, re-composing/re-assembling existing devices or building newly produced ones
- *scenography based*: e.g. physical narratives or experiential futures, approaches that build speculative environments that can be felt out



five threads

The modular method is composed of five main phases or 'threads', braiding into each trajectory. The five threads form steps into a progressive process, but they also indicate qualities found in unequal proportions at every stage of the research. The crafting aspect, for instance, is mainly developed in the 'speculative crafting' phase of each trajectory, but the attention to materiality and artefacts with the worlds they convey is present at every moment of the process.

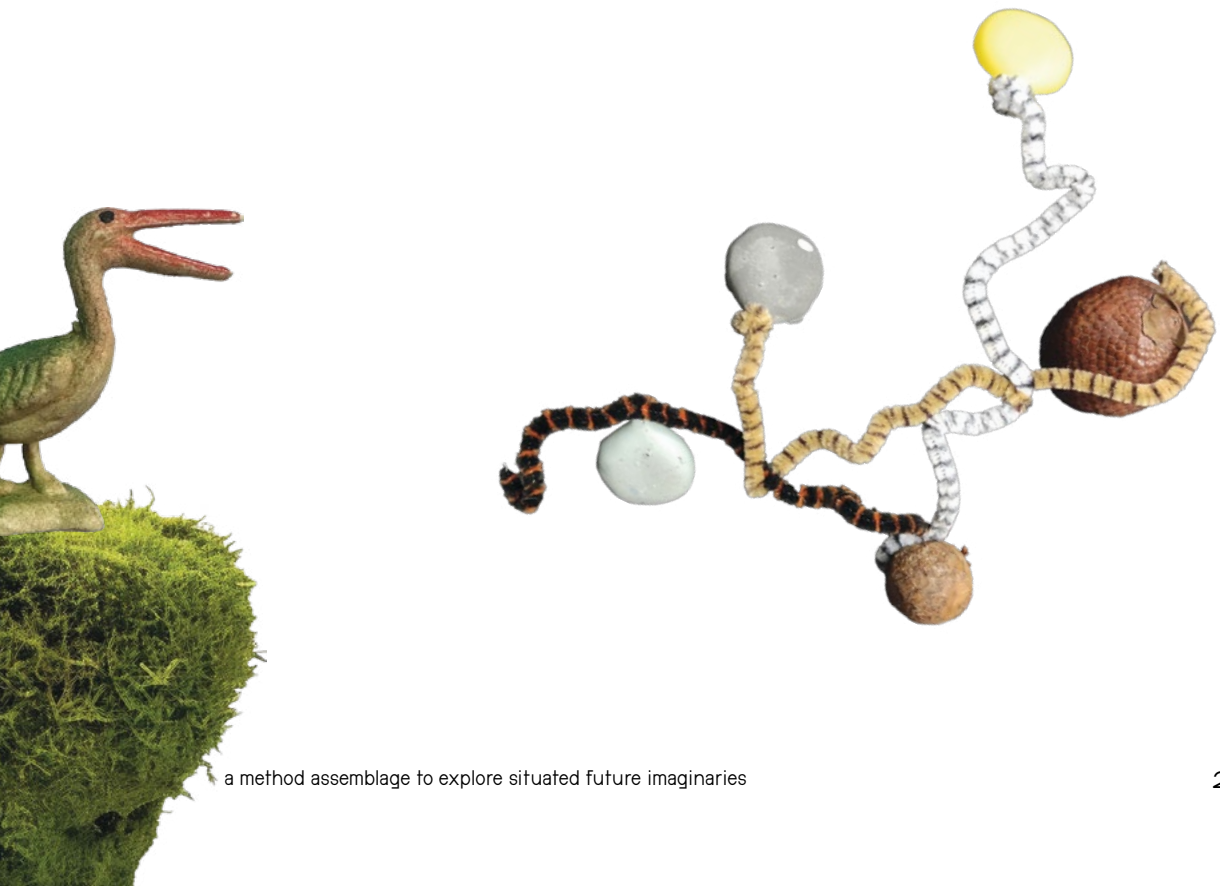
All participants, as individuals and as members of various communities, enter the project with their own fears, desires, and concerns, with the struggles and the initiatives they are involved in, as well as the places that matter to them (*'sounding and mapping present-futures'*).

These resources of dissensus and bifurcation constitute the baggage for the collective journey the project invites us to embark on, after which we draw on SF as a springboard of imagination to jumpstart and explore ways to imagine other future Brussels (*'moving imagination'*). Those future Brussels are not only made of words: they are crafted, fabricated and can thus sometimes be experienced (*'speculative crafting'*).

At different stages of these trajectories, the aim is to explore ways to bring the experiences back to the here and now, to feed the participants' present engagements and struggles (*'back to present'*).

Finally, the idea is that little by little, the different future and present Brussels' intersect and meet, be it in the trajectory itself or between different trajectories, provoking potential tensions but also alliances. Thus, we don't presuppose the possibility of landing in a common future Brussels or to make our current struggles converge: this can only be the fruit of a 'composition' (Latour, 2010) (*'articulating diplomacy'*).

Four main trajectories were tested so far: one with each association (CVB, Natagora and Constant) grounded in specific issues, and one amongst the research team (called the *'prototrajectory'*).



a method assemblage to explore situated future imaginaries

Mapping:
visualisations of what
the participants
share regarding
present and future



Participants are shown two non-linear visualisations of time (from present to future) and are asked to answer two questions about the level of agency they feel on Brussels' future, and how disobedience could play a role in this future. They then place their answers on the temporal map.

Constant trajectory



On the floor in the middle of a room lies a sentence: "We, the co-researchers of specXcraft, are haunted by denial, apathy and resignation about systemic injustice and violence (between human beings but also towards other species or non-human entities)". Several questions were asked regarding this statement, and the participants had to answer them by varying the position of their bodies in relation to floor markings.

Prototrajectory

thread #1: sounding and mapping present-futures

In order to explore alternative, situated futures, we first need to know where we depart from. Our practices, our struggles, our tactics, our culture of activism with its founding stories and its fetish objects... constitute the baggage with which we embark towards different futures.

The common starting point for the whole project - and for each of the trajectories - is Brussels today. But which Brussels? What are the issues, tensions and crises currently at work in our city? Who is the 'we' in whose name we speak? (De la Cadena, 2019) It is necessary to clarify the situated standpoint of each group (Haraway, 1988), its specific heritage, that could constitute precious baggage for the subsequent imaginative and speculative take-offs.

Which images and imaginaries of the future does the group have before starting the whole trajectory? What are their main fears, concerns and aspirations, about the present of Brussels as well as its possible futures? The goal here is to outline the group's specific definition of the future-present crisis that they feel mostly concerned about in Brussels.

Mapping

In order to achieve this, we use 'mapping' exercises, to outline general states of affairs as well as specific ones (according to the group), identifying the main blockages through their very concrete manifestations in the participants' everyday actions, and specifying what seems difficult to grasp, impossible to change. We aim to detect signals, weak or strong, of futures that are coming towards us, and map the group's practices which attempt to influence un/desirable futures.

to prepare alternative futures. Last but not least, we identify what are – within their practices – their most precious tactics, talismans, tricks... which form cornerstones for building alternative futures. Most of these aspects are explored through embodied (Torkild & Knights, 2019), material (Woodward, 2019) and performative (Kazubowski-Houston & Magnat, 2018) methods and exercises.



Mapping participants' practices as activists for nature protection, through a visual word cloud, then covered with their obstacles and fears, as well as their resources and hopes, using natural objects and small coloured papers.

Nataqora trajectoryv



Gleaning of everyday objects and their anecdotes; participants brought objects that represent anecdotes connected to their fears and hopes about future-related crises, be it linked to social, technological or environmental (in)justice. Then, these objects and stories were re-articulated together and participants reappropriated each others' objects. Parallels and differences were explored between the interpretations of the objects and their anecdotes through a mapping exercise.

Prototrajecy

Gleaning:
gathering elements that strike
participants' attention regarding
the identified common issue



Gleaning of audiovisual excerpts: participants were asked to choose a number of excerpts of good, bad, and 'false good' representations in films, series and other audiovisual productions (with regard to different types of social injustice). The aim was to collect excerpts for the 'specXcraft movie club' and to have a collection of 'found footage' from which the participants could draw in the subsequent phases.

CVB Trajectory



Brussels in this place between nature and urbanity. Some did for instance find evidence for the presence of fées (fairies), special beings living in and around the marsh, who are capable of surviving through social and ecological catastrophes thanks to their ability to cooperate and help one another.

Natagora trajectory

Gleaning

These moments can also involve activities of 'gleaning' from Brussels future-presents; and this gleaning can happen anywhere in Brussels. The group collects traces, information, practices, experiences and feelings, about their specific present, but subsequently also about detecting signals of futures that appear to take shape. The gleaning and collecting are done both for reflex-

ive purposes, to increase group cohesion and self-awareness, as well as to collect resources for other phases (i.e. '*moving imagination*' and '*speculative crafting*', see below). In the latter sense, they can be used – sometimes quite literally – as building materials.



In order to address the different forms of in/justice in Brussels, a group of participants undertook an immersive road trip from the South to the North of Brussels, starting with class injustice (upper class neighbourhood and country club – Uccle's Prince d'Orange and the David Lloyd Club), then injustice linked to origins and ethnicity (former colonial trade neighbourhood – Quartier de la Banane), then gender and sexuality injustice (queer district – Plattestein) and, finally, ecological injustice (contested wasteland – friche Donderberg).

CVB Trajectory

Luggage

Yet, this collection of imaginaries and concerns is not a generic or abstract one. It is meant to be as embedded as possible in the concrete and specific experiences and lives of the members of the group. In order to overcome (and challenge)

preconceptions, we use a combination of in situ and embodied methods, to glean and collect snippets of experiences that constitute a sort of 'luggage' for the trajectory.

Luggage:
a way of gathering elements to be carried along the trajectory. It can take many forms, from a simple (paper or virtual) folder to an actual luggage, such as this 'magic suitcase' that was used in Natagora's trajectory



Natagora trajectory

Exhibit B
Be Is for Brilliant

Letter from Alandrix, age twelve, sent via skytablet during dream
upload, third cycle of the facing moon, receipt unknown:

Ancestor Alexis,
I've heard about you. I've even read some of
your writing. Everyone says I have an old soul, and
I'm really interested in what it was like back when
you lived. It seems like people were afraid a lot.
Maybe every day? It's hard to imagine, but it seems
that way from the writing. I have to remember that
no one knew that things would get better, and that
even people who were working to make it happen
had to live with oppression every day. I read your
writing and the writing of your other comrades
from that time and I feel grateful. It seems like
maybe you knew about us. It feels like you loved us
already. Thank you for being brave.

I'm twelve and last year I did a project for
our community about your time, the time of
silence-breaking. I made a poster and everything
and an interactive dance. A friend of mine did one
on the second abbreviated ice age instigated by oil
on fire, but I thought writing about the time of

EVIDENCE . 35

silence-breaking would be harder. The ice conti-
nents were in your imaginations, the limits of your
memory melted, you spoke about the hard things
and you could see your own voices. It must feel
almost like a force of nature when you live. I'm
12 and you would have thought of me as part of
your family, even though now we do family dif-
ferently: we have chosen family now, so maybe we
would just be comrades if you lived here in this
generation. Who knows? But I think that if you
met me, you would feel like we have some things
in common. I'm a poet and I use interactive dance
so maybe you would choose me as family. I know
I would choose you. You could have been at my
wow kapow ritual that happened recently. In our
community, 12 is an important accountability age.
We named this ritual for how it feels in our bodies
around now. Wow kapow. I think you used to call it
the pituitary gland.

We are here five generations after you and a lot
has happened. A lot of the things that used to ex-
ist when you were 12 and even when you were 28
don't exist anymore. People broke a lot of things
other than silence during your lifetime. And
people learned how to grow new things and in
new ways. Now we are very good at growing. I'm
growing a lot right now and everyone is support-
ive of growing time, which includes daydreams,
deep breaths, and quiet walks. No one is impatient
while anyone else is growing. It seems like people
are growing all the time in different ways. It was
great to learn about you and a time when whole
communities decided to grow past silence. It is
hard to read about the fact that sexual abuse, what
we would now call the deepest violation of some-
one else's growing, used to happen all the time. It
is hard to imagine what it felt like for people to

Encounters with SF:
a way of displacing
imaginations from present
constraints

36 . ALEXIS PAULINE GUMBS

walk around with all that hurt from harming and
being harmed. But I can tell from the writing that
people were afraid so much. History was so close.
But the amazing thing is how people spoke and
wrote and danced anyway. Imagine being afraid to
speak.

Anyway, I wanted to say thank you. Now in the
5th generation since the time of the silence break-
ing we are called hope holders and healers. There
are still people doing a lot of healing, but it seems
like generation after generation people got less and
less afraid. People took those writings and started to
recite them and then another generation hummed
their melodies and then another generation clicked
their rhythms and then another generation just
walked them with their feet and now we just
breathe it, what you were saying before about how
love is the most powerful thing. About how every-
thing and everyone is sacred.

I read a really old story where the character
believed that time travel was dangerous because if
you change one thing in the past the whole future
changes and then you might never get born. I am
still here writing this though so I think it's okay to
tell you that everything works out. That it's okay.
And it's not easy all the time, not even here, because
so much has been broken, besides silence, but it
is possible, it does feel possible. My friends and I
feel possible all the time. So when you get afraid
to speak, remember that you all were part of us all
learning how to just do it. And most . . . take it for
granted. Except poets like me. I remember you. I
feel it. Wow. Kapow.

love,
alandrix

Excerpt from Evidence by Alexis Pauline Gumbs (2015 : 34-36), in adrienne maree brown & Walidah Imarisha (eds.) *Octavia's Brood: Science Fiction Stories from Social Justice Movements*, Oakland: AK Press. Read by facilitators during prototrajjectory's second session.

thread #2: moving imagination

Now that we know where we come from, it is time to set our imaginations in motion to travel through time, with the help of SF and imaginative exercises.

Encounters with SF

Part of this thread is about exploring some regions of the vast continent of SF together with the participants. Through literature, film and other cultural productions we try to become familiar with some speculative worlds and workings that resonate with the group's concerns. By doing so, we aim to un/learn the present and un/learn present-day imagination and imaginaries of the future (not necessarily as a

dreadful and ineluctable given, but as a possibility among many other possibles). Throughout, SF acts as a vessel to feel, think and move across worlds – some utopic, some dystopian, some in-between. In other words, training ourselves to be moved by SF and thereby displacing our imagination (Jensen & Kamiksiz, 2019).

What we talk about when we talk about SPECULATION

In the realm of speculative thought and practice, the notion of speculation unfolds along a complex genealogy, tracing its roots through diverse intellectual landscapes. For the context of specXcraft, a delineation of 'situated speculation' becomes imperative, where creative constraints shape its contours, emphasising the transformative potential of speculative endeavours. For us, speculation sidesteps the mere confirmation of existing beliefs, beckoning towards new thoughts and realities, acting as a beacon guiding us from the confines of present conditions towards uncharted territories of imagination. Thus, speculation invites us to imagine alternatives beneath, beyond and besides dominant narratives, thereby fostering a plurality of dissenting perspectives.

Yet, the issue of the democratisation of speculation unveils significant political dimensions, challenging traditional notions of expertise and authority. While speculative endeavours have historically been confined to the realm of experts, there's a pressing need to democratise its practice, making it a civic right accessible to all. This democrati-

sation advocates for a shift in power dynamics, from a future shaped by corporate and state interests to one co-created by diverse civic voices. It prompts us to question how we can empower individuals from all walks of life to engage in speculative endeavours, thereby enriching collective imaginaries and shaping more inclusive futures.

Crucially, the quest for collective speculative practice extends beyond theoretical discourse into practical methodologies. Speculation bypasses mere contemplation; it necessitates active engagement and participation. As we strive to devise methods for collective speculative practice, we recognize the importance of creative technical infrastructures that facilitate speculation, enabling individuals and groups of people to become speculators. This shift from speculation as a mode of thinking to a mode of doing and making underscores the transformative potential of collective imagination, propelling us towards a future shaped by diverse perspectives and collaborative creativity.

THE BAMBOO

Growth cells divide and extend, fill with sap, and mature, thus another leaf opens. Hundreds today, young leaves, tender in the Sun. With the burn of light comes glucose to create starch, cellulose, lipids, proteins, anything I want. Any quantity I need. In joy I grow leaves, branches, culms, stems, shoots, and roots of all types.

Water flows through the repaired foreigners' pipes like veins in leaves, freeing me from rain and seasons so I may develop at will. Water feeds fungus on my roots that generate nitrogen for amino acids. Water permits increased transpiration in leaves and thus higher photosynthesis, growth compounding growth and bringing gratification.

Because of the foreign animals, I am more than yesterday, bigger, smarter, stronger. Strong as I once was. In the city, I reign. Outside, groves and sentinels protect and feed me. I turn light into substance. Everywhere, I control the sunshine.

Intelligence wastes itself on animals and their trameled, repetitive lives. They mature, reproduce, and die faster than pines, each animal equivalent to its forebearer, never smarter, never different, always re-prising their ancestors, never unique. Yet with more intelligence, less control. The mindless root fungus never fails, but moth messengers come and go with seasons, larger animals grow immune to addictions, and the first foreigners, who built the city, abandoned it and me without explanation or motive just as we had begun to communicate. Did they discover my nature and flee, or was their nature renegade?

Their intelligence astounded me, far above that of other animals and plants. I could not have become what I am without their irrigation, protection, excretion, and compost. I suffered when they abandoned me almost two centuries ago, years that should have been

prime, forsaking functions to preserve my roots, for what am I without memory but mere grass? But what am I without pollen to communicate, without nectar to trade with moths for the bits they gather for me, without seeds and spores to disseminate ideas, without roots to touch from grove to grove, without lenses to see, without crystals to sense electric waves?

Almost blind and numb, thirsty, crippled, yellowed by malnutrition, trapped in old memories too costly to maintain and too precious to let die, exhausting storage roots, I barely knew of these new foreigners. Day after day twinkled past while I hoped they might save me. Yet when they came, I was almost fatally slow to adjust my fruit to welcome and tempt them. Unfamiliar in body chemistry, but decipherable. Moths brought me bits of flesh and I learned.

Now I give fruit that makes the foreigners content and healthy, a complex balance between pleasure and utility. They give me water and nutrients, trained like fippokats by the snow vines, but so much more than fippokats, for they, like the first foreigners, make plants and animals their own servants. Indeed, tulips seek domestication, their minuscule intelligence aimed toward service, and I have encouraged them and other crops to serve the foreigners, and I have protected the crops from competitive plants.

I would have died without these new foreigners, I will die without them, but I have seen that intelligence makes animals unstable.

I must communicate with them and finally I have the strength. I am growing a root to store what I learn, but it now contains little more than pith. I have not tapped their intellect and used it like phosphates.

The Sun rises. With eyes at many nodes, I see them awaken, quick and busy. Many go to the gate near the river to leave for the fields. I observe color in their clothing. They see colors. They will see mine, grand and compelling, and know that I am no snow vine, that I have a significant and inescapable communication to enter into with them.

Animals never grow smarter, but I do. Ours will be a rewarding relationship.

The pollen in the wind, what little pollen there is, speaks of a wraith of leaf-eaters at the valley's farthest fern villages. One of my groves

across the river reports that a pack of fippolions has been led away from it, which I never doubted, for the lion's claws are a tool of my new foreigners, well controlled, although I can easily teach lions to avoid roots and stems embittered to deliver the lesson. I listen for the electric snap of lightning. I await a taste of pollen or a messenger seed, or a tidbit from a moth, but it is winter and much is still. Intelligence conquers the seasons. but there is little intelligence in the world.

Excerpt from *Semiosis: A novel of first contact* by Sue Burke. New York: Tor Books (2018; pp. 87-8).

Natagora Trajectory

Act Naturally

The zoo caretaker penguin is watching the captive penguin, Wellington, watch whales, and the whales watch him as they record this for the aquarium's Twitter account. "Wellington, meet the belugas! This weekend, Wellington visited Kavak, Mauryak, and baby Annik, who were very curious about this little rockhopper. Belugas are northern-hemisphere animals, so they would likely never see a penguin!"¹⁶ Their thinking wanders from Wellington to the orca who returned his iPhone to someone after they dropped it in the water, or the time that white far was surrounded by a pod of whales and the mother called the police. "Officer, Officer, we have an emergency, we're surrounded by three gray whales." "They're very intelligent! Oh my God, Oh my God!" The father said repeatedly in joyful disbelief as his family cried in horror. "Oh my God it's rolling! Oh my God look at that!"

Confusing whales for sharks, or the encountering of a mammal so large that you appreciate and fear the realization of your smallness. The greatest misunderstanding is the human family's misinterpretation of their intentions and how failure is never benign but always political. A horizon where instead of calling the police, you look out and see a fleet of communist dolphins dancing in the suns. The dolphins have been protected by the communist state workers all dressed in matching Adidas tracksuits. The workers cared for the dolphins, preparing them to be airlifted by helicopters to safety. A fleet of workers in solidarity with a fleet of dolphins on a political mission.¹⁹

Instead, here they are in the aquarium, empty of human visitors, taking penguins for a walk. They call this walk a date, with the chaperones documenting every move. All they can think of is a panda rolling in a tire saying "service, service, over and over."²⁰ A group of penguins investigate a statue of a penguin. Penguins walk down stairs. "Wait for the hop at the end!" They imagine the captive penguin running out of the frame and past the info center desk and never looking back as they walk out of the building into the world. They go to a cafe run by one of their friends and sit there all day drinking caffè mochas. They get their drivers licenses. They get drunk and talk about their crushes on other penguins. They go home to their studio apartment. What kind of life could the uncaptive penguins make for themselves? And how the zoo caretaker penguin sits differently in theirs, unmaking of nature, the natural world disintegrating, sloughing off itself, eating a newly shed coat; caught between a dream of a free world and its manufactured enclosure.

"Where's Wellington now?" hashtag. The zoo caretakers are forced to find a new form of animation in this crisis. They're told it is for the captive penguin stimulation since they're without crowds and rely on the zoo caretakers. They are at work. They are suddenly essential workers and more visible than ever. They think: what is a circus without an audience, a prison without prisoners or what is an institution constantly remaking itself in and around a function of the nation where only they can provide the boundaries and limitations? "Public aquariums, zoos and museums provide sources of inspiration, knowledge and enjoyment for millions of Americans."²¹

16 @shedd_aquarium, *Twitter*, March 30, 2020, https://twitter.com/shedd_aquarium/status/1244743245588021250?lang=en/.

17 TIME, "Woman on Family Boating Adventure Calls Cops About Whales," *YouTube*, October 9, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q4iQrDufir8>.

18 Blake Stilwell, "Iran May Have a Fleet of Communist Killer Dolphins," *Militant.com*, n.d., <https://www.military.com/off-duty/iran-may-have-fleet-communist-killer-dolphins.html>.

19 Jeff Farrell, "Irma: Cuba Airlifts Dolphins to Safety from Deadly Hurricane," *Independent*, September 9, 2017, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/irma-hurricane-florida-cuba-dolphins-cayo-guillermo-island-cienfuegos-a7937596.html/>.

20 Masuhara, dir., *Shirokuma Café*.

21 Aquarium Conservation Partnership, "We Need Your Help," *New Mode*, 2020 <https://act.newmode.net/action/aquarium-conservation-partnership/we-need-your-help/>.

Excerpt from *The Anti Menagerie: Fictions for Interrogating the Supremacy of Worldshaping Violence* by Cassandra Troyan and Helen V. Pritchard. Published in *Multispecies Storytelling in Intermedial Practices* (2022: 194-195)

Constant Trajectory



Participants were given a moving meditation mantra to read out loud and discuss in the car while being taken on a speculative road trip. The mantra reads: "Crazy times have changed the way that I think about weirdness. I used to think of strange and surreal art as a siege weapon—a cannon aimed at the walls of conformity, structural oppression, and well-of-course-ness. But lately? I think of strange art as a source of reassurance and safety. A cozy blanket made out of nice fuzzy WTF" (Excerpt from *Never Say You Can't Survive: How to Get Through Hard Times by Making Up Stories* by Charlie Jane Anders (2021 : 169). New York: Tordotcom.)

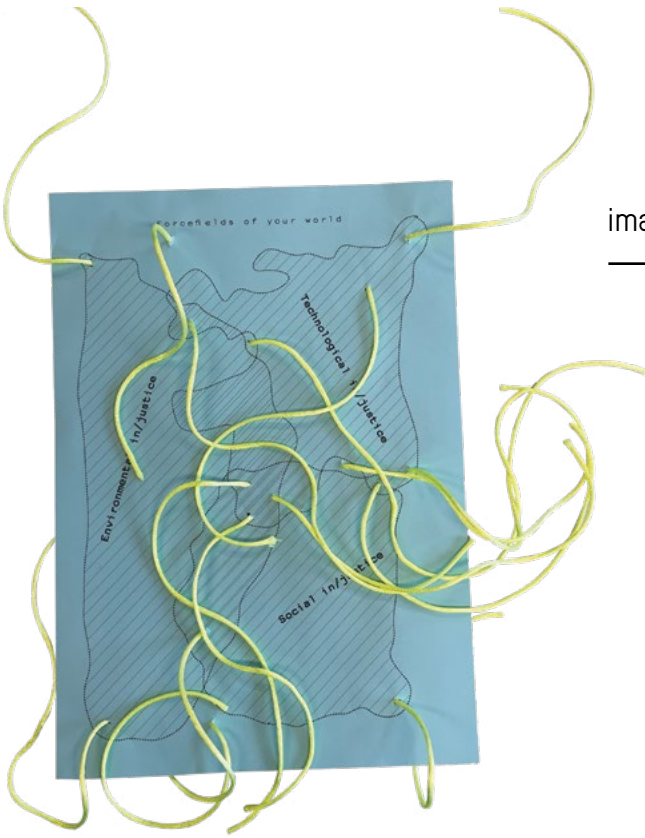
CVB Trajectory



Moving imagination excerpts to listen to or pick @ bourse aux plantes sauvages

_____ Trajectoire Natagora

SF worldbuilding
and storytelling:
imagining future situations



Starter kit for a worldbuilding session: a special sheet to help articulate ideas.

Prototrajjectory



Figurines and other playful material to embody and materialise the stories.

CVB Trajectory

SF worldbuilding and storytelling

In a second step, the group puts their own imaginations of the future to work through SF world building and creative writing/storytelling practice. Individually and collectively, they further 'train' their futures imagination to generate a number of Brussels-based SF stories, situations, characters, scenes or worlds of their own – rooted in the participants' own experience or prac-

tice and situated in their everyday worlds. The goal is to have a number of Brussels SF stories and worlds that can serve as intermediary (public) output as well as be used as context for stories, scenarii and prototype crafting (see 'speculative crafting' below).⁴

⁴ Curious about these outputs? A whole section (see *stories & crafts for dissenting futures*, p. 89) is dedicated to give a taste of some stories and crafts that came out of these trajectories

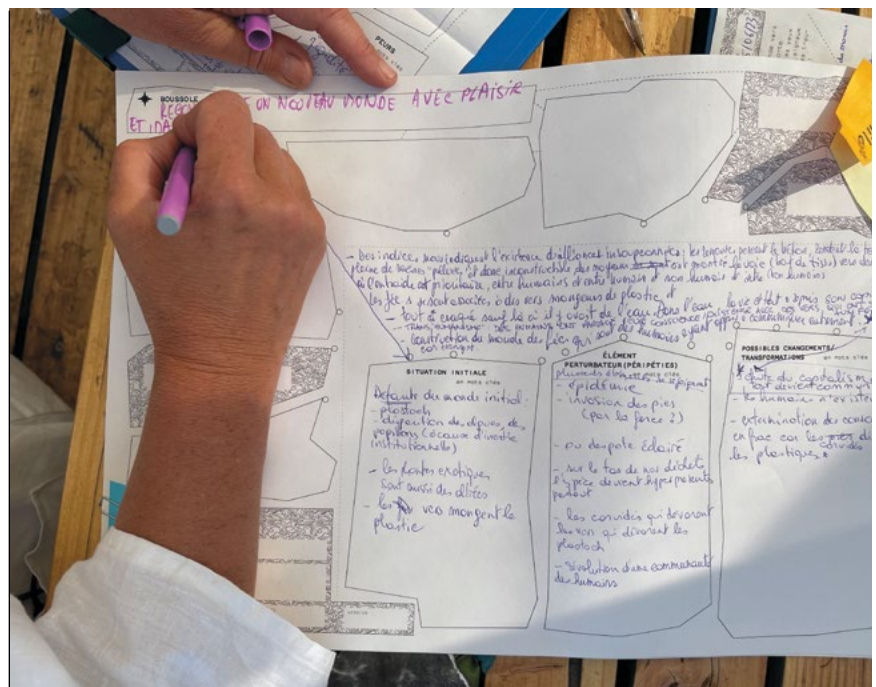
CHEAT SHEET Questions (non-exhaustives) à se poser, ou pas

Représentez collectivement des bribes de ce/s monde/s imaginé/s?

- * C'est quoi faire un/des film/s au CVB au temps du TOTAL RESET?
- * Quelles sont les histoires qui comptent et qui valent la peine d'être racontées?
- * Quel est le statut du film dans le/s monde/s imaginé/s? Film d'insurrection? d'émancipation? manifeste? mythographie? found footage? auto-fiction performative?
- * Quel est le rôle de chacun.e d'entre vous dans ce/s film/s?

'Cheat sheets' with instructions or guidelines to accompany the process.

CVB Trajectory



A 'story sheet' filled in by a group.

Natagora Trajectory

2050? 68?

Climate change wasn't properly coped with. Floods and droughts are part of everyday life in Brussels. Because of this and the continuous destruction of natural habitats, 6th extinction has gone far. Many species in Belgium have disappeared or gone their way North when possible, seeking for survival. Some very common ones have been reduced to small populations. Other species have developed a lot, taking advantage of the way things turned. Some have founded new alliances with more-than-human non-living beings.

*In reaction to this, and in order to cope with this big change, Brussels' inhabitants (more-than-/ humans) have rewilded. Y*our mission today is to find out how this happened. How do we relate to the species that are gone? How do we care about the ones left? What does this mean in our daily lives?"*

The session used a specific constraint - impossibility of verbal communication - to create some discomfort, and potentially resistance, in the objective of partially 'jumping' into the (un)common and setting the group into a new mindset about the future that might be. Living through the need to act and become more resilient.

Example of one of the missions:

*Mission 1: (Re)build y*our specXcraft camp.
Out of the crash comes the new
Born from the rubble
Emerging from the scraps that have been left
You*we make things anew together*

*You*we (re)build a specXcraft camp in Brussels, a place where you*we feel safe enough to tackle the 6th extinction in full swing. Choose/build a tool to ease y*our communication. What does the specXcraft camp look like? Where do we set it up? What are its abilities? How is it powered and sustained? Which (three) topics will we tackle, along with their action radii?*

A series of missions to fulfil within a world that was defined prior to one session of the prototrajecy.

Prototrajecy



A material toolkit for a crafting session: assembling / cutting / weaving / drawing material, accompanied with natural and manufactured elements to play with.

Prototrajecy

thread #3 speculative crafting

The 'speculative crafting' thread intends to further populate the worlds that were previously articulated by making them tangible, imaginable, and to some extent, liveable.

Experiential crafting

The experiential crafting is activated through various forms of 'making': object prototyping, film making, media installations (interactive or not) or other mobilising experiences. Those productions are not merely intended to 'illustrate' some possible future scenarios, they constitute a means to look into alternative futures in embodied, mundane and/or dramatised ways. The tangible experiences are meant to help participants in engaging with the potential future crises through developing stories (or story parts), recipes, methodologies, sets of instructions, toolboxes etc.

These activation moments make use of methods such as brainstorming, storyboarding, prototyping, forms of hacking and re-appropriation of existing objects. Lo-fi prototypes developed using cut & paste techniques or by basic media production can iteratively evolve into more hi-fi developed versions over time.



A crafted specXcraft camp on a map. Exercise to think through situations of scarcity, and connectedness in relation to geography.

Prototrajectory

Character Sheet

NAME *Nikima Nikaanj Dichaan*

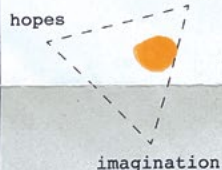
SPECIES

- ☐ Human
- ☒ Plantient
- ☐ Humanimal
- ☐ Mechanimal
- ☐ Mechahuman
- ☒ Funghuman
- ☐ _____



(draw yourself)

REWILDER OF



PROFESSION

- ☒ Nature Rewilder
- ☐ Pollinator
- ☒ Decontaminator
- ☒ Scavenger
- ☐ Ghost summoner
- ☐ Hacker
- ☒ *listener of other times*

LANGUAGE PROFIENCIES

- ☒ Brusseleir
- ☐ Plantient
- ☐ Python
- ☐ Humanimal
- ☐ Chemical
- ☒ *multi-abstract*

EQUIPMENT



*pest-
turned-
companion*



*upcycle
environmentalist*



(draw it)

SPECIAL ABILITIES

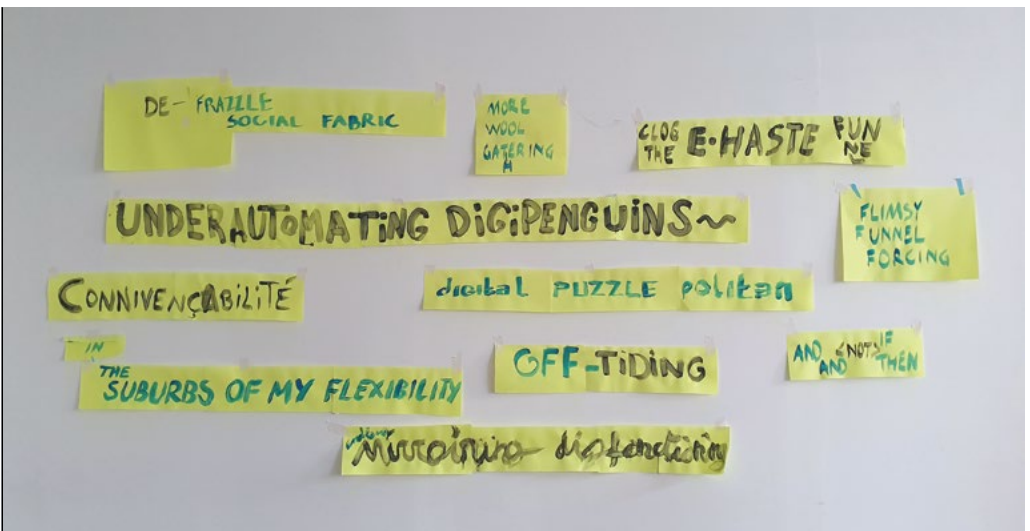
*listening to
the
dead talk
speaks in
non-vibrant
language*

A speculative character imagined to meet the needs of the future world. In this case, the character is able to listen to 'deep' signals that are not audible to the human ear. The exercise shows what participants think will be useful to face future crises, and highlights participants' commitment to multi-species articulations.



A small group of participants thoroughly crafted an installation in Jean Massart Garden, around an existing pond, to represent the 'bains mitochondriens transspécifiques', a place where humans and more-than-humans can go to rest and share mitochondria, in order to experience deep empathy towards each other.

Natagora Trajectory



Crafting words: how creating new words can tell us something about our way of envisioning the city's future? And can these words activate modes of doing beyond the discursive?

Constant Trajectory

For a trans-temporal art of consequences:
travelling back and forth
between futures and presents



Half postcard half sliding plan of the psy-web-metro that some activists of 2100 sent to 2023 as a wayfinder through the techno-conceptual labyrinth. The postcard is sent from the future to the present to think through notions of techno-solutionism and technological overloads in urban settings. Terms invented during the session form an exaggerated techno-infused message from the future. The postcard points towards specific elements that need attention today to avoid the future that it is illustrating.

Constant Trajectory



A postcard sent by a participant from an imaginary future to our present. The postcard addresses the continuous and inevitable cycles of change through time. The participant wanted to address how the human-made ecological destruction currently happening does not mean complete destruction but instead destruction of the forms of life as we know and experience them. This cycle will bring new forms of life and we will not be there anymore to witness them. It is a way to think out of the anthropocentric models sometimes present in environmental activism discourse.

Diplomatic Session

thread #4: back to the present

Back to the present is a mode throughout each of the trajectories. It allows for a regular back and forth between future and present to ensure that the speculations do not lose grounding with the lived experiences and the needs of the participants.

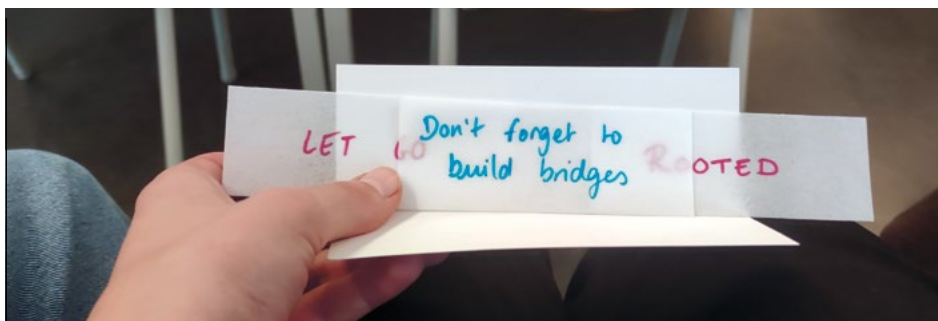
The back to the present mode investigates the potential resonance the speculations have into the present. How each of the threads have had an impact on the participants' practices and positions into the now. It tries to identify what feels

useful and generative for thinking about the future. It also helps to assess practices and reflections happening in the present that could need re-thinking, or that are possibly counterproductive.



After going through a trajectory, participants went back to the initial obstacles and resources initially mapped. The back and forth between speculation and the present helped to analyse how the specXcraft experience had transformed or reconfigured the participants' perspectives.

Nafagora Trajectory



The back to the present mode was systematised during a '*moving imagination*' workshop. Each time that a story was shared, participants took a moment to bring it back to their present selves. Writing a few words on how the story resonated with them and what ability or skill they would like to train according to it, they then had to pick one paper and eat it, sitting at the edge of the world.

Prototrajectory

Articulating diplomacy: navigating un/common learnings



"In an imagined future where you have to flee the places where you live, please think of a message in the form of an embroidery that you would want to leave to the beings that would come after." Meditative or craft practices were used to introduce slowness into the process as a way of initiating 'slow futures'. These practices incite forms of presence in the world that encourage attention, concentration, imagination and escape while encouraging an empathy and openness to other forms of communication and sharing.

Prototrajjectory



A collectively made garland that gathers many visual versions of the same story. A way to deeply listen to each other and explore how one story can conjure many and different imaginations.

Diplomatic Session

thread #5: articulating diplomacy

Radical heterogeneity between the groups makes the richness of this project but also opens the challenge on how to mediate between different standpoints. How to make the trajectories meet and articulate some un/common learnings?

Starting from the present, leaving it towards improbable futures, fabricating the worlds they imply, experiencing them... all this with different groups. But these trajectories are not meant to develop in parallel. The specific challenge for the specXcraft diplomacy is to bring together the groups engaged in different trajectories, to exchange concerns, places, tools etc. Eventually, the aim with articulating diplomacy is to make the trajectories meet and collectively investigate the possibilities for a common future. The diplomacy should also help finding ways to make the traces of the present visible in imagined futures, with the idea, among others, that our current actions and practices are conditions for the emergence of futures to come.

These diplomatic exchanges can happen in different forms: the passing on of tools and methodologies from one trajectory to another, the formation of a critical public to test the consistency of a fiction written in one trajectory, the organisation of a scripted meeting with another trajectory's public within an environment previously created etc.

The connection could also be made through the crafted artefacts and prototypes, for instance by creating a common setting in which different narratives can develop, or simply by sharing a story that has been written in another trajectory. The importance of grounding the various speculations in the context of Brussels is also part of articulating diplomacy to make the links between our imaginations and our local context more sensitive and tangible.



For the last session, various crafts and stories made in previous threads were blended together into scenes and story snippets. These texts were then read aloud in different places of Brussels that served as a common soundbox and made these stories resonate.

— Prototrajectory

A photograph of three people—two men and one woman—engaged in a craft project outdoors. They are standing on a gravel path next to a body of water, with lush green trees in the background. The man on the left, wearing a white t-shirt and dark pants, is holding a string. The man in the center, wearing a light blue t-shirt and red shorts, is also working with a string. The woman on the right, wearing a grey patterned top and dark pants, is focused on her work. They are using a large wooden post as a base for their project. The text 'Prototrajectory', 'Constant', 'CVB', and 'Natagora' is overlaid on the image in a white, handwritten-style font.

Prototrajectory
Constant
CVB
Natagora

Natagora participants crafting a 'Bain Mythochondrien'

experimenting with the method

Equipped with this method design, the research collective engaged in four trajectories, in order to test some of its possibilities, consequences and limitations.

A first one, called 'prototrajectory', was put in place in order to experiment with the specific blend of techniques and tools that make up the specXcraft methodology. It was set internally to the team, and each of the sessions was conceived and facilitated jointly by a member of Urban Species and another co-researcher¹.

Later, three trajectories took place respectively with CVB, Natagora and Constant's employees, members and communities. There the method

was co-creatively tailored to the situation, the issues and publics that were at the core of each trajectory. The three trajectories ended in a common workshop, called 'diplomatic session', in order to explore the last thread of our method.

Other moments took place within the research group, for instance a common crafting session, which was meant to further explore the stories and reflections that came out of the different trajectories in a crafted and embodied way.

¹ We use the term 'co-researcher' to refer to the members of each organisation (one or two) who worked on specXcraft for more or less two days a week. Other people took part in the 'trajectories' and their contributions were essential to this research. In this first phase of the project, it was people from the partner associations and their networks (participants, supporters or volunteers). All co-researchers and participants are credited at the end of this publication.

specXcraft trajectories for...

In this part, you will get a taste of the contexts in which our three thematic trajectories unfolded, with whom they took place and how. Each trajectory description comes with a selection of stories, crafts and reflections that seemed central to their explored themes, in order to give them flesh and flavour.

However, to pay tribute to the diversity in the myriad of other inspiring creations that emerged in these trajectories (as well as in other collective moments), you will find a more complete compilation of stories and crafts in the next section.



Constant started from the Brussels subway infrastructure to approach the future of Brussels.

Constant's trajectory served as a compass for identifying the pressing issues for Constant and those around us in regard to the futures of Brussels.

To do this, we organised two different gatherings with larger groups of our network in March and June 2023, followed by a more intensive, 2-day trajectory with the seven 'core' members of Constant in July 2023. Firstly, we asked questions about the audiences' imaginations for the future of the city.

The two larger groups we worked with were:

- Around 30 participants who took part in the symposium 'Life in the future imperfect' in March 2023, organised by the study circle Cybioses as part of the Nordic Summer University (NSU). The Cybioses circle brought together theorists, practitioners, and technologists to discuss practices of making and the social and cultural impact of future technologies.
- 26 participants who took part in Constant's worksession in June 2023, titled 'Technodisobedience'. Constant's worksessions are transdisciplinary collective residencies where participants from different backgrounds come together to develop projects and research ideas.

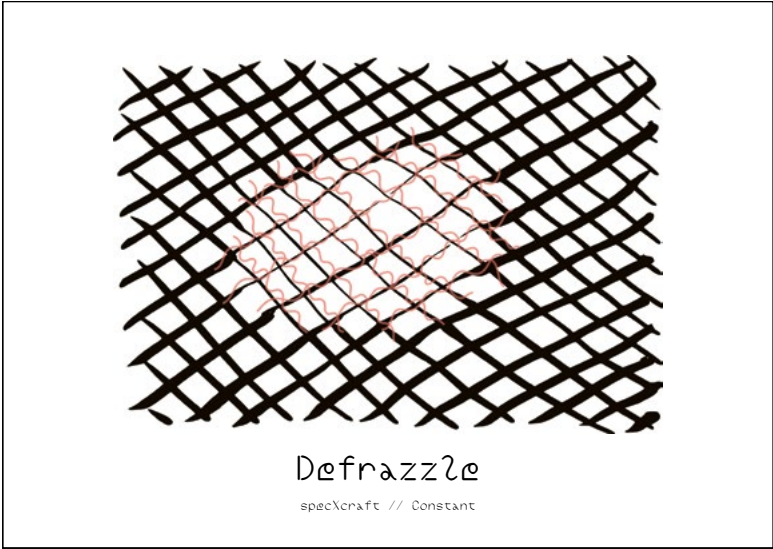
The answers of these two groups reflected specific concerns related to how technological regimes perceived as oppressive are governing more and more aspects of urban life. We noted the general understanding that the economics and politics that are informing and shaping

today's technologies hurt us on a myriad of aspects of our lives: environmental, social, psychological, economic, etc. But because of this layering of spheres of action and their effects, it is difficult to decipher what exactly needs to be scrutinised and acted upon, resulting for some in a feeling of freezing up rather than engagement and activity. These responses made it clear to us that in addressing the networks of Constant, it was important to bring in the multi-layered nature of the pressure points. For many, it is the all-encompassing characteristic of today's technology that becomes central. It was at this point that the smart city framework started to appear as a topic that could cover a lot of the concerns of the group.

As a result, the session with the 'core' team started from investigating this fuzzy thing called the smart city. The session was initiated by sharing anecdotes of a personal encounter with technology in the city that left them puzzled. Then it led through a series of collective language speculations: we experimented with language to find ways to talk about technology in the city. We played with language to try to put our finger on what is disturbing us without yet knowing exactly why or how to talk about it. The exercises were a way to help in the formulation of a critique that is grounded in experiential knowledge. Bringing the framework of the smart city in these speculations brought some focus to the collective thinking. For Constant, the framework of the smart city needed to be questioned on multiple levels:



Constant 'core team' session on the smart city.



- the materiality of the monitoring infrastructure that is necessary to implement the smart city
- the potential of such infrastructure for governmental/private control onto the population
- its reliance on already too powerful private tech corporations.

Like with any push towards a form of technological apparatus, Constant believes that it is crucial to question and examine the push towards the smart city. We refuse to take such a move for granted as an inevitable fact that enters every sphere of public and private life, whether we want it or not. These questioning and examination were central to Constant's thinking during the specXcraft sessions.

Most of the speculation that took place during the two days intensive session of Constant was set in or about modes of moving through the city and especially public transport. This space of public transport, with all its issues, seemed intuitively interesting for the group to have a closer look at; particularly from the perspective of possible futures within a push toward the smart city: what do we say, what do we propose for the future of transport in Brussels, and how do we position ourselves in relation to these proposals? What potentialities do we want to resist?

The group invented terms and expressions that would address these future proposals and potentialities. Here are two examples of those terms:

defrazzle: 'frazzle' means to exhaust. The word is used to describe a fabric that has been completely damaged, with only a few fibres left to hold it together. It can also characterise something that has been completely burnt.

In our context, the word was used to describe how the various fabrics and networks woven by the city's inhabitants are damaged and worn down by the imposition of certain infrastructures (some technological, but not only). 'Defrazzle' is a call to stop these processes of erosion. We found the term 'frazzle' quite interesting, because it refers to a state that could be described as subjective: a person observes an exhaustion, experiences it, undergoes it, it is experiential knowledge. But the term is complex enough to refer to different natures of this frazzling: we can talk about a frazzling experience, but we can also say that a device frazzles public resources, frazzles a social fabric, etc. The fact that thinking through public transport in Brussels brought us back to this experience of erosion and exhaustion is quite striking. We asked ourselves how the technological development of public transport contributes to this state of erosion, how it facilitates forms of violence and control in public transport.

A banner made in the context of Constant session. "___No Publish___ on metro 3" is a humorous reference to the growing uncertainties and discontent surrounding the new metro 3 line in Brussels. The metro was proposed to the city inhabitants as the only viable and sustainable solution to the overcrowded transportations in Brussels¹. This push towards one mode instead of another shows certain particularities of the city's techno-politics.

We noted a few things: the fact that the metro has to be built underground means the confinement of the public space which prevents the same social interaction with the street that is possible with trams and buses. The metro is defended for its assumed functionality (mainly in terms of speed) and is not thought for social interaction, as underground metro stations are generally harsh spaces not conducive to qualitative social interaction. There is an idea of rapid consumption of the public service, very much like most of the shops

¹ "Cause toujours, cause perdue... la politique du fait accompli" Inter-Environnement Bruxelles, <https://www.ieb.be/Cause-toujours-cause-perdue-la-politique-du-fait-accompli#nb2-5>



Postcard from / map of the psy-web metro

Puzzletonitans on the psy-web metro

*2100, Brussels ...Two underautomatising Penguins are on their way to the Suburbs of their flexibility
They are stuck in public transport, again
A sort of discussion emerges.*

P1: Puzzletonitans are back. It has been a while I haven't come across them. Everytime I see them, the suburbs just grow farther away. It's so tiring while you travel. Beware not to cross their gaze. Let alone get into a conversation.

P2: Do you think the submetro ran smoother when they were not around? I have the impression that avoiding them slows down the telepathically driven psy-engine of the metro

P1: They question everything, as soon as they look at something it gets more and more complex. They have endless reservations... you know perfectly well that it creates the worst interferences with the psyweb.

P2: As revolutionary agents of crosscurrent digi-inversion, we Underautomatising Penguins should try to obtain their superpowers, what do you think ...?

P1: I thought we were acting for preservation of the Hyperstabletechnoflexibility

P2: But you know about our secret mission that we are going to carry out in the Suburbs, no? Preservation of Hyperstabletechnoflexibility only comes through subversive action to move the radicals into visibility, so yes.

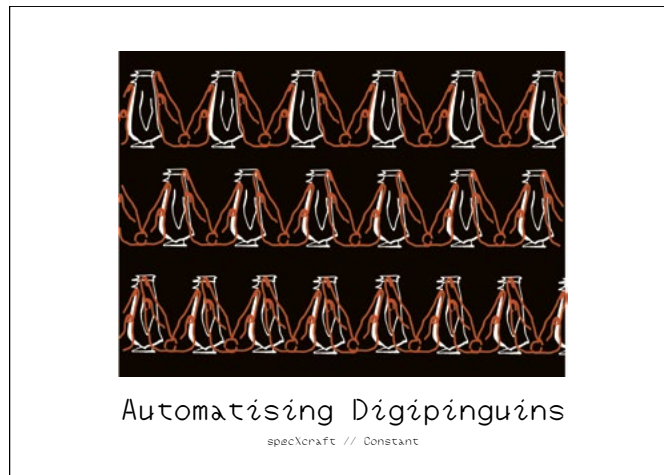
*But hey we should shut up. It is a secret.
Let's play a game. I will start. Here we go:
I see, I see what you don't see, and the colour isRED !
P1: NO WORRIES, IT SAYS "NOPUBLISH"*

Scene written while writing alternately on an etherpad. The scene hints to notions of transport efficiency and monitoring.

present in the underground today, unlike other local shops that can be found on the surface in our Brussels neighbourhoods.

We can also see today, right in the middle of the metro 3 works, how the process towards the metro mode is causing considerable deterioration on the surface, which is physically tearing up

the spaces. Moreover, the fact that this physical deterioration is prolonged causes a deterioration in the more intangible spaces. This prolonged frazzling could be seen as contributing to the imagination of the blank page; an authoritarian fantasy in which it is possible to start again from scratch by undoing and replacing.



Underautomatising digipinguins: It was imagined in a story as a coded way of saying "Abolish the police".

Underautomatising digipinguins refers to the different modes of control in the public space; how public transport now seems to be conceived via security logics based on the presence of security forces. And whether this was premeditated or not, these logics today make possible the tracking down and arresting of people without papers using public transport. This phenomenon is coupled with a policy of automation, automation in the technical sense, the automation of metros etc., but also in terms of the protocols exercised by these security forces, where there is no room for discussion.

The confinement through the metro also gives better conditions for controlling and monitoring. The setting up of an access infrastructure via gates is a showing example in which there is a coercion towards the transport card and its val-

idation; which with its electronic chip enables information on movements in the city to be transferred in real time. For these reasons, the confinement of public transport seems to be an investment in security; and this push towards security makes it difficult to consider and ask for free public transport, as these infrastructures linked to confinement would become superfluous.

For Constant, these reflections indicated strong potential pathways for future critical research in the ways that technological modes interact with or interrupt the needs for open and accessible forms of urban mobility. Additionally, the imaginaries made of always faster and efficient modes of transportation in the city obey specific techno-politics which we think need some undoing.

specXcraft trajectories for...



... social in/justice, or sidestepping dominant representations

Within the wider scope of social and urban in/justice the CVB is committed to, this trajectory addressed more specifically the 'crisis of representation', understood in a first approximation as the prevalence of dominant tropes and misrepresentation of class, appearance, species, dis/ability, gender, ethnicity, age in both public and private imaginative landscapes.

As one of the basic premises of the specXcraft research project is to make place for dissenting voices and concurrent non-dominant visions of the future, the issue was deemed to align. The question of who is represented, how, and by whom is a prevalent one in the everyday ecosystem of Brussels. It is also part of the CVB mission as a socio-cultural organisation working in the domain of cinema: to show other stories of the world and the future of Brussels.

The method was co-constructed specifically to address the problems that the CVB employees and participants said they wanted to tackle, such as contesting the existence of dominant forms of representation, produced by dominant groups; social injustices in Brussels, including the under-representation or mis-representation of certain social groups, which was also based on the actions and missions of the organisation: "to show other stories of the world, those of diversity and complexity, and whose aim is indeed to contribute to a fairer and more united future", but also "to work *with* people and not *on* people, to help free a voice that buried because it is too often distorted".¹

Among other things, the aim was to discover the obstacles and tensions in these stated missions and to explore the possibilities offered by speculative imagination to open them up and potentially strengthen the fight.

The trajectory took place in May and June 2023 and gathered 17 participants (17 for the preparatory sessions, 14 of whom followed the entire trajectory). It brought together CVB employees working in different areas of the association (animation, editing, production, promotion and distribution), as well as participants from 'Extérieur Jour' (one of CVB's collective film workshops).

The trajectory consisted of a 3-step workshop:

- a one-day preparatory session (in small groups), specifically focused on '*sounding and mapping Brussels present-futures*'. To that end, participants first exhausted what good or bad (or 'bad good') representations might entail. They discussed to what extent they were concerned with and committed to the issues of social injustices and representation, personally and as CVB employees. They collectively drew a film pitch based on automatic drawing to then analyse their pitch by way of a 'sensitivity reading'. During the gleaning session participants looked for and selected audiovisual excerpts from films and other cultural productions (the outcome being a 50-minute edited collage film with 'good' and 'bad' cultural tropes regarding the question of representation).
- a full-day road trip in a speculative future Brussels, emptied from its elites, meant to 'move the imagination' by provoking an 'Im-

1 See CVB main mission on its website <https://cvb.be/fr/cvb>

TOTAL RESET (OR ALMOST)

I

The time of the GREEX

One day they just left. Whether it was because of internal or international pressure was actually of no big importance. They thought they had – by then and by far – exceeded their original goal. Their domination seemed to be permanently inscribed in institutions and infrastructures; in movies, books, and theatre pieces; in the very mentalities of those over whom they exercised their domination; and even in the air these poor souls breathe.

Under the guise of political immunity, all the foreign and domestic -icians, -crats and -mats; CEOs, CFOs, and other self-declared business leaders; all the most eminent members of the capitalist creative class; old, new and very old new money as well as all other people of considerable power and import (still, according to themselves) hastily got evacuated to their newfound homelands.

So, the only people that stayed in Brussels were those who could not afford or would not apply for expat emigration and elite exile. The only people left in Brussels were 'the Brussels people'. And, henceforth, it was them who were in charge. Things were chaotic for some days. But far less than expected, actually.

The time of the GREEX we called it: The Great Elite Exodus.

II

A Gift-wrapped crisis

They left, we be free. A cause for celebration. Bonfires, drunk and sober street and square dancing. Followed by long sleep and deep rest. Slow fast slow. Slow fast slow. Then, some well earned vandalism and the better directed looting (which, technically, wasn't what it used to be). But the bonfires were only short-lived, it turned out. The hangover of freshly found freeform freedom, one could say.

Any- and everything goes for every- and anyone. (Not that it was that bad. Nobody got lynched. There were no mass killings. Some people got hissed at quite a lot, yet that's about it.) But we did need to figure some stuff out, that's for sure. Classism, racism, sexism, speciesism, ageism, ableism, and all other possible bad -isms were to be banned... A bas la domination! A bas les elites! Bye bye bad representation! ... Hello sobering truth...

One does not detach oneself to be free. Absolute freedom is but a foundational myth. No, one detaches oneself from bad attachments only to try to find better ones.

Hence is the conundrum:

What is the otherwise-possible after the TOTAL RESET?

What do we do with the ruins of domination?

With the seeds of past wild struggles?

With the good, the bad and the 'false good' legacies?

With the good, the bad and the 'false good' representations?

III

The TOTAL RESET of Reality after the GREEX

New times, new beliefs. So it was no different during the time after the GREEX. Total Resetters came up with a new take on reality. It was argued by many and all of us that the 'real' reality was not above or behind fiction but that fiction sits besides reality: whatever can be imagined is brought into existence and becomes reality. An anonymous pre-TOTAL RESET voice had already said it before as they had summoned for a narrative uprising:

*Stories are where we find ourselves,
where we find others who are un/like us.
Gather enough stories
and soon you're not alone;
you are an army.*

Thus during the TOTAL RESET there was a strong belief in the power of stories. A firm belief that stories are big, even bigger than reality; a firm belief that the stories we tell ourselves shape who we are and how we relate. So it followed that during the TOTAL RESET we needed to make reality stutter by making up new stories. For it was commonly believed that stories are practical technologies that have empathy-shaping, complexity-fostering and world-making capacities that affect, guide and enable us, not just as individuals, but also as communities, societies and cultures.

mersive Timequake² in Brussels. In order to address the different forms of in/justice in Brussels, a group of participants undertook an immersive road trip from the South to the North of Brussels, starting with class injustice (upper class neighbourhood and country club – Uccle’s Prince d’Orange and the David Lloyd Club), then injustice linked to origins and ethnicity (former colonial trade neighbourhood – Quartier de la Banane), then gender and sexuality injustice (queer district – Plattesteen) and, finally, ecological injustice (contested wasteland – friche Donderberg). The road trip was contextualised from the first exercise onwards in a speculative narrative that transported the participants to a future Brussels, where the elites had left and the power relationships had been flattened/rethought during the time after the *TOTAL RESET*. The instruction for the day was to live as if this timequake had taken place, so today’s Brussels was seen through the prism of a speculative future.

- a three-day consecutive workshop, focused on ‘*speculative crafting*’, with the corollary of making two short collective movies. This session – which immediately followed the day after the road trip day – was spread over three days. The full group of participants (ap-

prox. 15 people) was split in two subgroups to make it more workable. The speculative crafting existed in making two collective films, in which there was no pre-set task division. The making of the films was done at CVB (though some filming was done outside). We provided a ‘green screen’ room, as well as filming material, an editing room and two editors who were available from day 1 (thus making it into a so-called ‘*tour-nage-montage*’). During the whole week the main CVB meeting room was filled with carpets and pillows to divert the usual function of the room and make it extra-ordinary. Both groups started from the specXcraft narrative pitch *TOTAL RESET* (see opposite page) and were – apart from some instructions and guidelines – free in their approach. There was a ‘helpdesk’ in the figure of an oracle, which the participant groups could call upon if they felt the need. When consulted, they would get an oracular vision – basically an excerpt of some avant garde sidestep movie or video (selected by the facilitators beforehand).

The trajectory was followed by a public screening of the two movies and a collective feedback session – which focused on both the content and the form of the experience.

TOTAL RESET - or Brussels without the elites

Based on the question of representation, what came out of the preparatory sessions with the participants and what could be otherwise possible roles for the CVB, we decided to write a narrative pitch (see opposite page). The pitch was a speculative flash fiction (< 1000 words) describing a future Brussels in which all of a sudden the elites left the city. In an era of (relative) post-dominance, the question of representation would need to be researched and explored anew – and CVB could have its role to play in this. The narrative pitch served to launch and frame both the speculative immersion during the Time Quake road trip and could be used as a basis for the subsequent film making.

Using the narrative pitch as a starting point, the two groups of participants wrote, shot and edited two speculative short films over the course of three consecutive days. Selecting from the pitch on the basis of their own sensitivities and concerns, they each took their proper directions. While diverging on the main topics of their scenarios, both films share a certain (welcome and re/claimed) radicality departing from the more usual CVB productions.

2 This ‘timequake’ (a notion borrowed by psychoanalyst Françoise Davoine from the SF writer Kurt Vonnegut to address the treatment of trauma) is one of the foundations of the specXcraft method, and more specifically of the phases we have entitled ‘*moving imagination*’ and ‘*speculative crafting*’.

IV

CVB is CVB is CVB (but not exactly)

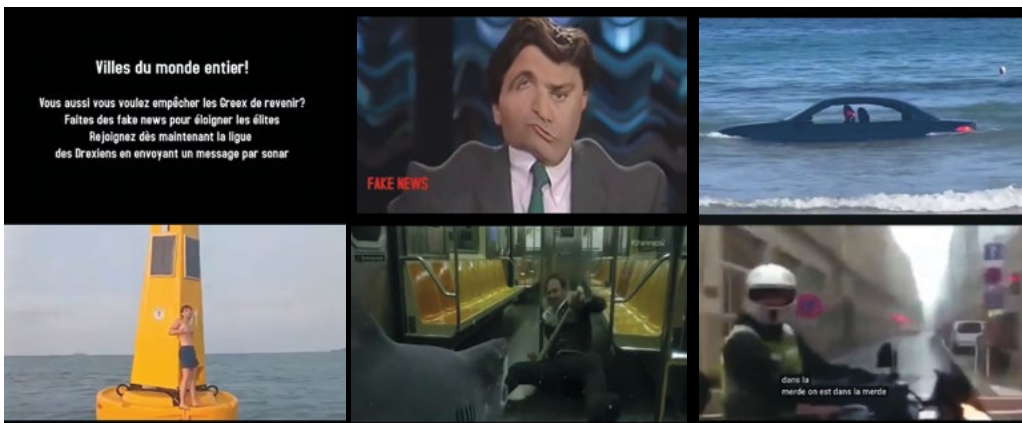
Enter CVB. In this particular story, this particular CVB is 'just the same' CVB as before the GREEX. But not exactly. CVB was now recognised for their knowledge, skills and craftsmanship in making up stories. But since stories were equal to realities, CVB were now genuine shapers of reality. Make film, shape reality. Make film, feel out an otherwise-possible. This is one of the reasons why one day they got approached by this figure called Siri Vonni (not to be confused with that other Siri, Siri Phoney, that early crappy chatbot who could only tell lousy jokes). No, this was the real real Siri. Siri Vonni, who was the chef-pas-chef of the newly founded BBRQQOFM (short for Bureau Bruxellois de la Recherche en Qu'est-ce Qu'on Fait Maintenant?). They wanted to allocate time and resources to CVB to enquire into the crisis of representation (of any and/or all sorts) now that there was a TOTAL RESET. That is, they solicited the CVB to do the necessary research into filmically imagining where and how to go from now.

Thus got founded (and funded!) the CVB department for speculative and filmic enquiry into public matters of representation.

Excerpt of TOTAL RESET (or almost)



Screenshots from *Archivage*



Screenshots from *2073*

Film 1 - Archivage

Archivage. *After everything has been represented, representation has become an obsolete concept. Film production companies have closed down or been repurposed. As such, the CVB has become a Center for archiving and data analysis led by a canine Bitch Boss. The CVB researchers archive old images with novel thought patterns and filters. Hoping to give meaning back to their seemingly boring work, they re-explore the taboo act of filming.*

If at first sight, the film seems to focus on the question of (post-)representation, its form and content unexpectedly address questions of dominant representational tropes by subverting what we take to be taken-for-granted cultural meanings and categorisations. What happens when given cultural, social and political categories no longer apply? How do signification and meaning shift under these conditions? What is worth being represented and why? The film presents an eerie existential surrealist vision by addressing the im/possibility of self-representation, as well as of representing the world we live in. It's an ode to cinema and the situated point of view.

ARCHIVAGE (BE, 2023, 9') - a film by specXcraft collective workshop | CVB

<https://youtu.be/YJAZ8-R0DXk>



Film 2 - 2073

2073. *After the GREEX (Great Elite Exodus), new life in underwater Brussels is harmonious. Only shadow in the picture: the risk of the elites returning. Drexycian groups are gathering in order to broadcast fake news of an apocalyptic flooded Brussels, deterring the elites from coming back...*

The script takes up a series of recurring topos in prospective and SF scenarios (notably that of rising waters). But rather than making it the basis of an apocalyptic narrative, this fact contributes to life in harmony in a city where the powerful have left, and opens up new possibilities. The future of Brussels is not reduced to being under water, but places, culture and representations have changed as a result: the pace of speech and life have slowed down, the ruins of yesterday's Brussels can be visited by scuba diving, and the daily horoscope is now also for beings other-than-human. The script also subverts the codes of domination and the (institutionalised) expression of power: the courthouse is transformed into a public bath; the seeming leader of the Drexycians is a semi-devilish figure losing his costume while talking and dancing to a song from the Afro-futurist avant-garde of the last century³... Finally, in 2073, while fake news continues to be a 'weapon', disinformation does not sow chaos for the benefit of the powerful or play on the supposed lack of critical thinking of popular classes, but serves to protect the life in harmony of those 'the elites' have left behind.

2073 (BE, 2023, 10') - a film by specXcraft collective workshop | CVB

<https://youtu.be/h8dmfYC6bdY>



3 Drexciya, 1990s Afro-American electronic music collective from Detroit employing Afrofuturist narrations of a subaquatic hybrid human-non-human species.

specXcraft trajectories for...



...environmental in/justice, or how to tackle the 6th mass extinction of biodiversity, its causes and symptoms

In Brussels, Natagora supports groups of inhabitants, activists, volunteers and professionals who take various actions in order to slow the ongoing 6th mass extinction of biodiversity, and make more-than-human voices louder in the public sphere.

But the work is fastidious, as there are many reluctances from other actors to consider other living beings as equals to humans, and thus taking true responsibility towards them. This manifests in many forms, for instance the growing pressure to build on wastelands regardless of their biological richness, region-wise house-insulating incentives that deprive nesting birds from precious habitats in human buildings, never-ending cuts of old trees for so-called safety reasons or access to sunlight... The list is long, and the obstacles are numerous for those who try to make a difference.

In this context, a diversity of humans were invited to take part in a trajectory with Natagora. They were volunteers and employees directly linked to the association, but also citizens that take part in fights that are supported - directly or indirectly - by the association. In total, 13 persons accepted the invitation and took part in the adventure.

The trajectory took the shape of 4 sessions in total, ranging from 1h30 to 5 hours long. The first 3 happened every other week in May and June 2023. The first session took place in Mundo-Matonge, in an arranged meeting room, in order to map the participants' practices, obstacles they live or fear, and resources they use or wish to have in order to overcome the said difficulties. The second session happened in Marais Wiels, a wasteland near Brussels-Midi station, where an accidental stretch of water gave birth to a place rich in human and more-than-human interactions. It served as a departure point for the participants' future explorations, which ended in a series of proto-stories about speculative futures. The third session took place in Jean Massart Garden, a lush green setting next to Sonian forest, where participants could explore further the

futures they had foreseen, with the help of embodied and crafty exercises. Six months later, a short fourth session was set to explore how the trajectory had resonated with their obstacles and their presents during these months.

The red thread of these numerous discussions, inventions, story buildings, explorations, reflexions, was the 6th mass extinction of biodiversity and how this crisis is a lot more than numbers in scientific reports: it is about occidental human's flawed ways of considering the non-humans that exist around us, how they are part of a wider domination system, and how we, as Belgian citizens, position ourselves as part of this system. Thus, this trajectory was crossed by a series of interrogations:

- How to reconnect with the non-humans who share our territories? How to make ourselves useful for other living beings - and vice versa? How do we go from knowing to practising the fact that humans are part of nature?
- How to go beyond resignation, exhaustion or feeling overwhelmed as activists, facing increasingly complex and multiple challenges when it comes to defending (non-) humans' rights in public policies? How to nourish empathy, joy and care in this context of seemingly never-ending fights?
- How to go beyond cultural reluctances and change our habits and ways of life? How to get rid of our addictions to mass consumption, private property, hyper-individualism and capitalism? How do we end capitalism and all other domination mechanisms in a locked-up system? What would it look like if they actually ended?

The Great Metamorphosis

Capitalism was freewheeling, ever more predatory and destructive. AI and technology only reinforced the greed to control and maintain populations; mass consumption and extractivism were never-ending. While cities underwent ever more extreme ghettoization, ecosystems became increasingly dysfunctional through exploitation, pollution and destruction. Cataclysmic events were multiplying: floods, epidemics, wars, fires... The latter took on continental proportions and eventually brought the system to its knees.

It was a particularly hot early summer day, 27 years after the abject failure of COP-21. Fires were particularly fierce that day, coupled with extremely powerful winds and hurricanes in every corner of the globe. The events were so violent that the mycelium of the suffering forests underwent a worldwide mutation that changed the course of events.

Thanks to its rootlets, it was now able to translate and transmit fragments of messages from certain species to others. The mycelium could pick up words, vibrations, waves and chemical elements emitted by living beings, but also fragments of their dreams. Communication between humans and non-humans, between non-humans and between humans, suddenly became easier. They could exchange basic messages, albeit awkwardly, but they could understand each other. Some began to dream of what they were not: a worm glimpsed snatches of a field mouse's dreams, a bat dreamed as a frog, a human dreamed of being a mermaid. A new network, the intermycelaire, was being built, weaving its threads between beings.

That was all it took to change the order of things. Simultaneously, in many parts of the world, there emerged what some called the Revolution, others the Great Change, still others the Wind from Elsewhere, but which in Brussels will be remembered as the Great Metamorphosis.

Here, the uprising was led by the fées, humans who had long since learned to communicate differently with each other. They were basically collectives or associations, populated by anarchists, ecologists, anti-racists, LGBTQIA+ activists, and many, many young people. And this time, thanks to their new, albeit limited, possibilities for interspecies communication, the fées were joined by a host of other surviving non-human beings. These included earthworms, their plastic-eating cousins, corvids, Japanese knotweed, bats, migratory birds, oak trees, ants, field mice and toads. Even water and wind joined the fight. If they didn't agree on everything, they did agree on the cruel need to get out of this destructive system. Everyone was sick and tired of suffering in this world. A great uprising took place on this early summer's day, 27 years after COP21. New alliances were formed in all directions. Across Brussels, these fées, humans and non-humans took back control of the city and swept away the structures of breathless capitalism.

With rising temperatures and extreme weather events, living conditions in the city had deteriorated sharply, and the living had taken refuge in places that still offered pockets of life and freshness. These places were wastelands, marshes, bits of nature reserves, agricultural areas, abandoned houses and underground tunnels of all kinds. They also invested in strategic locations to spread the metamorphosis: institutional buildings, media houses, railway stations, former industries... A series of experiments began spontaneously across Brussels, showing the beginnings of cooperation between fées and non-humans. Everything had to be rethought: how to house and feed each other, how to interact between individuals and species, how to take care of each other, but also how to avoid a return to the old automatisms and addictions... The living had to learn from each other, to invent new ways of helping each other, to turn these groups into collectives, and these places into commons.

The challenges were many and daunting, but a wind of hope was blowing across Brussels. Would this new community survive? Would it succeed in anchoring itself in new values that were less destructive, more restorative and creative? Would it be able to create a real network of mutual aid with the other pockets of human beings surviving around the world?

It was now a full moon after the start of the great Metamorphosis, and all this and more was about to be discussed, debated and triturated at the first Trans-Specific Assembly of Liberated Brussels.



Welcome to the *First Trans-Specific Assembly of Liberated Brussels*, at park Jean Massart

The Great Metamorphosis

This text is freely inspired from the 3 stories that came out of the participants' exploration during the 2nd session. It was written by the facilitators in order to give a common ground of a speculative world to be explored during the 3rd session.

Participants were hence invited to take part in the Trans-Specific Assembly of Liberated Brussels as characters (you will find examples of characters in section '*stories & crafts*') they would invent and embody through a narrative guided meditation. After that, three groups were formed based on affinities between characters, in order to give shape to specific thematics in this world:

- Communication and relationships between *fê-es* and with non-*fê-es* (other surviving humans, other species)

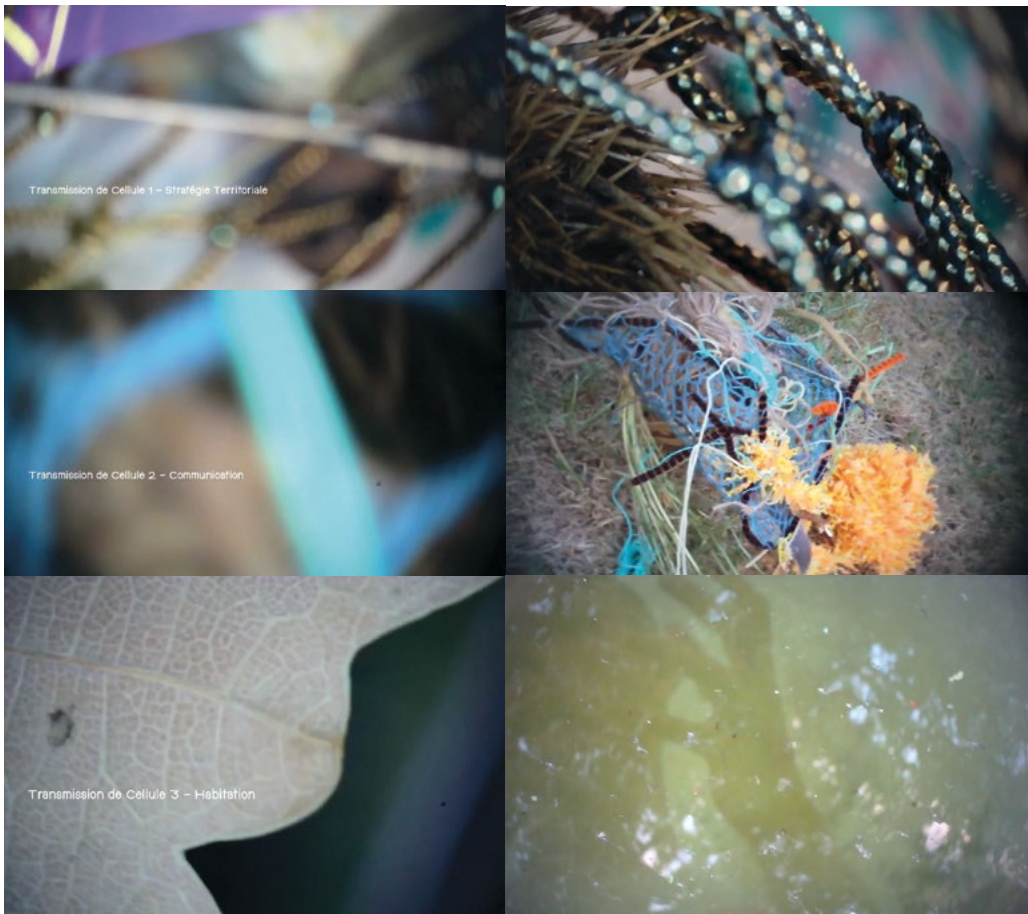
- Caring, living, resting (caring for other living beings, inter-individual and inter-species relationships, resting, ways of recharging one's batteries)
- Territorial strategy (repairing the environment, redesigning the city for all living things, food, etc.)

Coming back to the Assembly after a moment of crafted reflexivity, the groups shared their findings to the others. Their sharings were registered orally and visually through the connect-songeur, a device capable of sending full-fetched messages to other species through the intermycélaire.

A few months later, those registered messages were given back to the participants in their present time in the form of a short film, as a message of hope and perseverance.



While the participants presented their prototypes, we filmed details of the scene with a magnifying camera.



Screencaptures of *Incoming message from the intermycélaire*.

Incoming message from the intermycélaire

This experimental short film is made of the images of a microscope camera (aka 'dreamconnector') that captured the presentations of the working groups for sending them into the intermycelium. The film thus features the voices of participants and their creations, in a cryptic, non-figurative visual exploration.

The film begins with a message coming from a small group of earthworms, mushrooms and granite, communicating through the intermycélaire. They want to share what a group of humans invented a few months ago in their quest of more desirable futures. The following sequences offers an exploration of the creations:

Territorial intermycélaire strategy: the great entanglement

New interactions between humans and non-humans mean new territorial configurations. Formerly human spaces are reinvested by the *fées* (fairies) and non-humans to reinvent their uses. On this 3-dimensional map, we see vegetation reclaiming its place and expelling engineers and other remnants of the old world. The viaduct becomes a meeting place, stormwater basins become thermal baths, former industrial sites become diving boards. It's no longer a matter of rational planning, but rather of taking care of the land, of establishing coexistence wherever possible.

Interspecies declaration of Metamorphosis

A declaration compiled spontaneously by the intermycélaire via a capture and transcription device. It aims to establish a more respectful way of living together between (super)living beings.

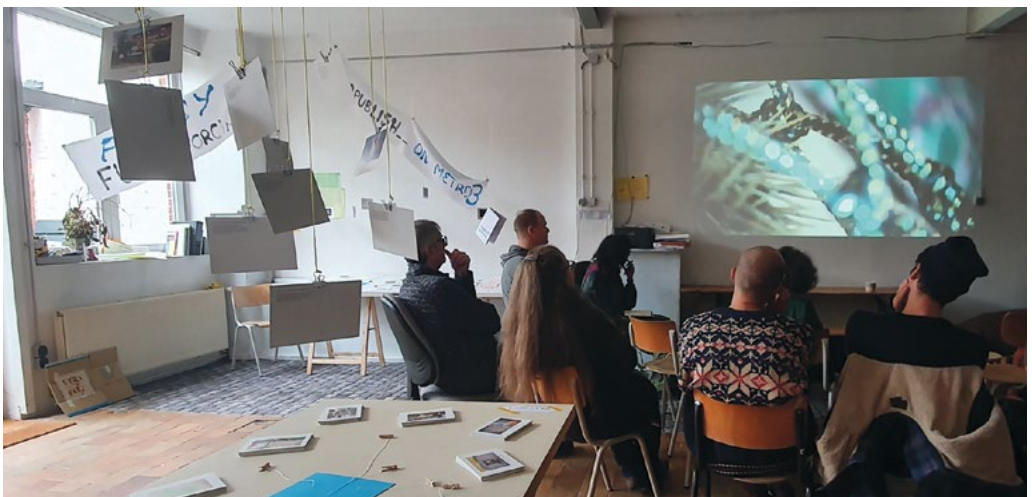
Trans-specific mitochondrial baths

In this place, you will be able to relearn how to co-breathe with everyone, reconnect with your mitochondria and share mitochondria that come from other living beings. This restful space will offer you a remedy, a place to dwell, a place to recharge your batteries, a place to reconnect with others and with yourself. And if empathy overwhelms you, an individual bath is available for you to simply relax and relearn how to inhabit your body.

Incoming message from the intermycélaire

(BE, 2023, 14'35) - Collective film from the Natagora trajectory

<https://youtu.be/a8Y96W80Ea4>.



Projection of *Incoming message from the intermycélaire* during the Diplomacy session.



what if...? speculative encounters between the trajectories

In late autumn, delegations from all specXcraft trajectories met in secret, somewhere in Brussels. Their diplomatic mission entailed not only banqueting and toasting to new potential alliances, but also to partially disclose each other's issues at stake and fabricated narratives; to speculate jointly; and to weave together some of the stories they had crafted. The research collective facilitated the meeting through a simple scenography. Arranged in three different 'stations', each exposing a series of postcards (prepared by the co-researchers) containing elements (concepts, invented words, snippets of stories) from each trajectory. The postcards were intended both as

discussion and creative tools, and as 'souvenirs' to take home after the session.

This diplomatic session was held under the auspices of the 'what if'.... *What if* we infiltrate that element, which has emerged from a technodisobedient future speculation, into that other trajectory, driven by the fight for biodiversity? What will it provoke there? How could the story continue? How would, in turn, the infiltrated element be affected by the new context, sensitivities and issues?

The first part of the day was about making acquaintances: through the stories produced, presenting what is at stake for each group. Then - as sort of diplomats or undercover agents - elements of each trajectory were infiltrated into the stories of the other organisations.



Bains Mitochondriens Trans-Spécifiques

Espace de repos où les êtres vivants peuvent échanger des mitochondries avec les autres espèces, afin de se ressourcer et d'entrer en empathie profonde avec l'autre.

les bains
comme l'eau...
le bain par ce qu'il
ressemble
à l'eau qui "résoud"
le problème technologique/surveillance etc...
en le détruisant tout simplement
in-compatibilité
"les bains" comme solution?

KARIN



Bains Mitochondriens Trans-Spécifiques

specXcraft // Natagora

What if... water was the ultimate solution for the problem of technologically mediated surveillance? Water connects, sometimes by destroying..... thus the *Bains Mytochondriens Trans-Spécifiques* could drown devices such as surveillance cameras.

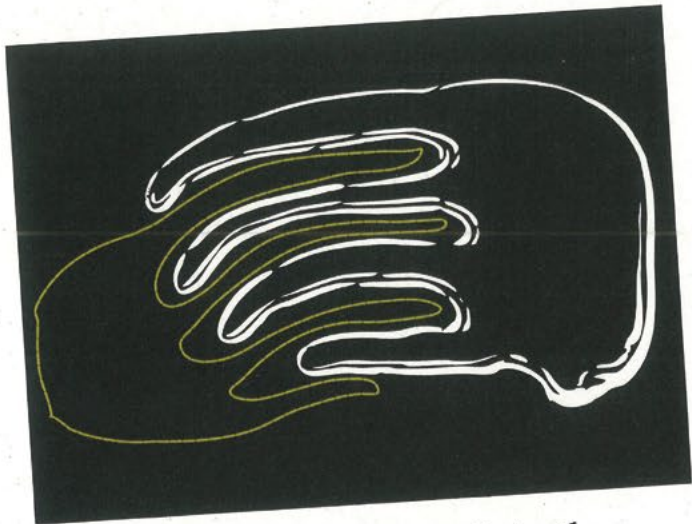
Postcard from Natagora, infiltrated into Constant's trajectory

Connivençabilité

Mot inventé par le couplage des mots « connivence » et « responsabilité ». Le terme fait référence à un état de complicité d'une personne mais dont la responsabilité reste inexprimée ou inavouée. Lors de l'utilisation et la consommation de certains outils et services (notamment de technologies), les utilisateurs et utilisatrices sont laissés.e.s devant un non choix les poussant dans cet état de connivençabilité : complices des conséquences (environnementales, politiques, etc) de leur non choix sans en prendre la responsabilité.

Denatella

Les Bruxellois-es
qui sont restés
sont des victimes
ou il y a de la
"connivençabilité"
de leur part ?



Connivençabilité

specXcraft // Constant

What if... the people of Brussels who stayed behind were unwittingly co-responsible? The term *connivençabilité* is intended to make us aware of the unexpected connivances that are sometimes brought about by inaction, and highlights the ambiguous boundaries of our understanding of responsibility...

Postcard from Constant, infiltrated into the CVB

Sabotage

Sabotage comme forme de désobéissance.
Sabotage menant à la destruction; sabotage
menant à la 'malfonction' ou sabotage menant à
une fonction tout autre.

OLIVIER

C'EST QUOI LE
SABOTAGE
LORSQUE L'ON
VEUT CRÉER DU
LIEN, AMENER
DE L'EMPATHIE?



Sabotage

specXcraft // Constant

Sabotage comme forme de désobéissance.
Sabotage menant à la destruction; sabotage
menant à la 'malfonction' ou sabotage menant à
une fonction tout autre.

mycélium infiltré,
Sabotage des
infrastructures de
l'Oppresseur!

Giuliano!

What if... sabotage was used to create new links and bonds, to bring about empathy? But also: what if.... mycelium could be used to sabotage infrastructures of the oppressors?

Postcard from Constant, infiltrated into Natagora



What if... future technology functioned in a less binary way ('if... then...') but more in a multiversal, Jamesian ('and, and'), alchemist way, fusing and processing information as the 'magic suitcase' did, within Natagora's specXcraft trajectory? As an alternative to current preference learning algorithms, how would these non-human and other-than-tech devices process our wishes and desires?

Postcard from Natagora, infiltrated into Constant

The second part of the day proposed to explore the possible links between the trajectories through material, creative workshops.



What if... we could make ideas and wishes flourish in the future through the sprouting of indigenous plants, in places of our choice? Participants integrated a message using kraft paper and natural ink around a handmade seed bomb. Some participants expressed a wish, intended to grow and flourish with the seeds ("paix et amour", "ensemble!", "nature pour tous"⁶⁵). Some participants considered the message as something meant to be dissolved into earth and disappear, and thus called for the end of toxic political figures ("G.L.B. tu vas te décomposer") or the end of any oppressive system ("nous ne serons plus ni maîtres ni esclaves"). Others bet on the future seed bombs to make them able to catch sight of a future Brussels... and made the ball into the shape of a periscope.

Future seed bombs



What if... the folded paper of diplomacy were turned into a less individualistic and more collective piece? Around a table, for each concept or infiltration shared by someone, everyone drew their own interpretation of this sharing on a small paper. The drawings/collages were then stuck together to form a unique, colourful and manifold collective assemblage. A compilation of multiple versions of a story.

— The collective garland



What if... we tried to send a sound message, distorted by our own technology, to another being? A participant was invited to leave a sound message to the next participant, based on their interpretation of some combinations of postcards. The sound was recorded by a karaoke microphone, using distortions and pitches to create oddness in the process. The next person would then have to decode the previous message and see if it inspired them for their own production.

Sound station

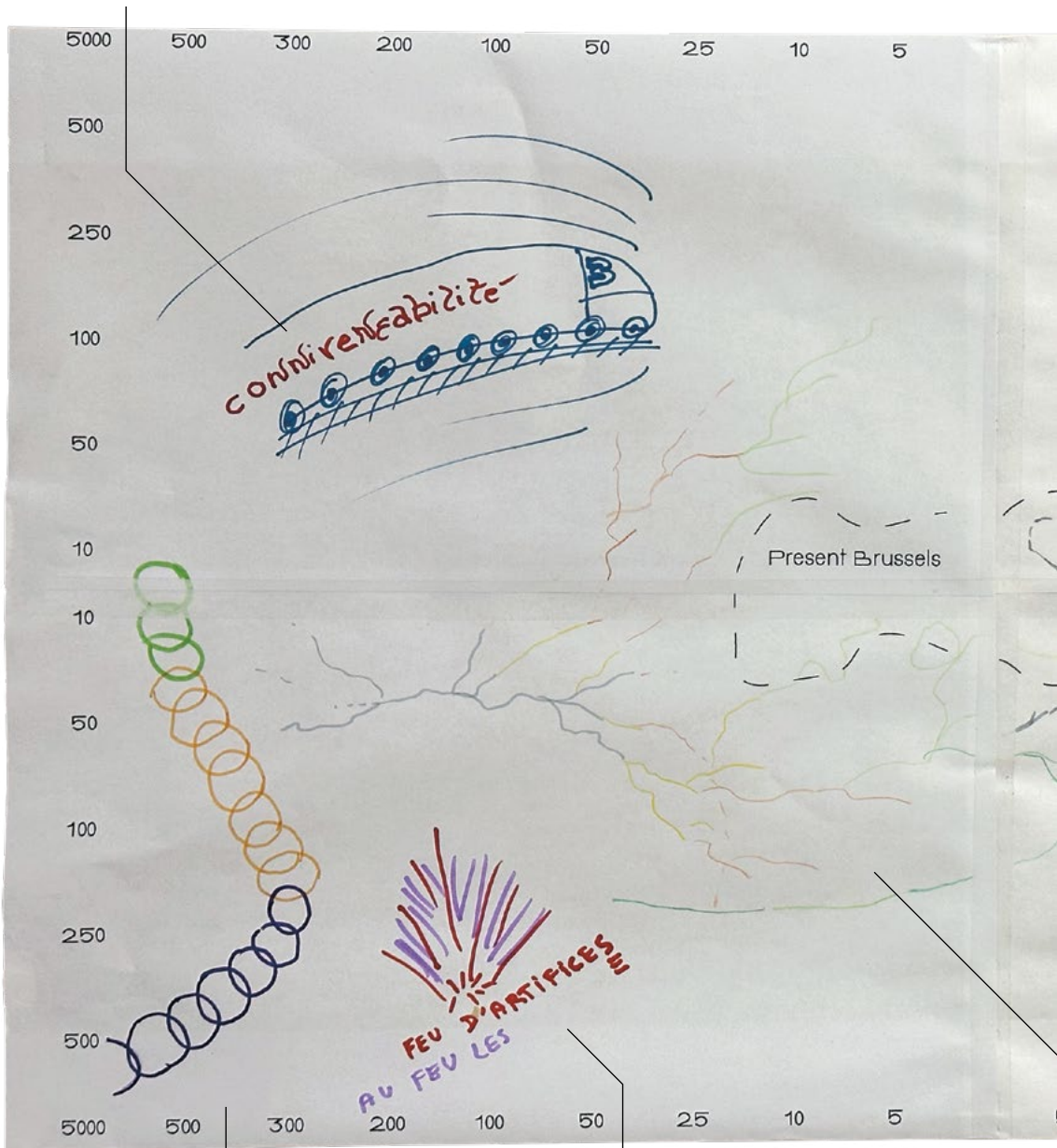


What if... a message was sent from a supposed future, to our present-time? Trans-temporal postcards were crafted to distil the different imaginaries that were shared during the day, in regard to our own (or other entities') present. Some cards were pretty light and playful, to give oneself the right for joy and brightness when thinking about what is next. Others depicted scenarios that would have unravelled in a speculative future, and that they would like to foresee today to find strength and inspiration to keep on moving forwards. Finally, some people chose to write cards with personal content, addressed to people they love, as a way of taking care of who surrounds them in the present.

Future-to-present postcards

Connivencability

How do these visible and hidden aspects propel us toward the future? And do we want to board this train?



Garlands

"Because we need to be pragmatic."

Fireworks / Fire to the artificials

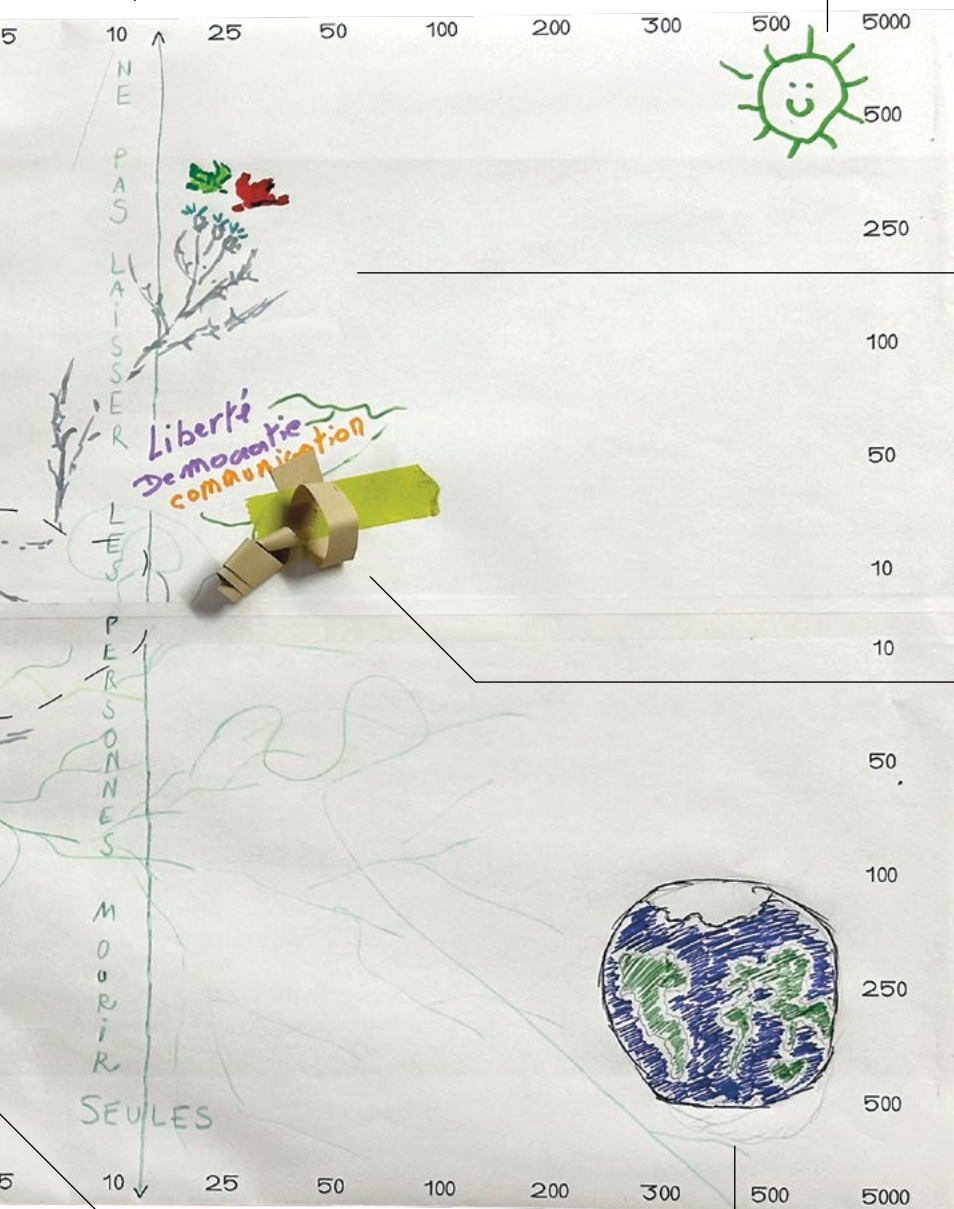
To eliminate what we need to, in order to regenerate.

What if... We tried to depict where to situate in time (in a non-linear scale) the craft or story we are currently playing with? What would it mean, and how would it articulate with the other entries on the map? Through sharing them, we most often realised that a lot of the stories, desires and fears about future Brussels were - perhaps to a bigger extent than expected - somehow 'common'.

Collective timemap

Symptomatic of many aspects going wrong in humanity, the distress of dying alone needs to be left behind. Let's set a deadline.

Ultimately devastating the entire solar system, this glowing sphere of energy currently sustains all life on Earth, smiling.



The battle for Nature, symbolized by the Thistle (*Chardone*), will, in a not-too-distant future, lead to the convergence of multiple worlds, epitomized by two Chardonnerets (European Goldfinch), birds that feed on thistles.

We will get there, adorned
with garlands.

This grows through the past, present, and future, making unexpected detours through time.

Our planet will not explode; new ecosystems will emerge after the 6th extinction, before the Sun swallows Earth.



The historic roots of collective crafting

There are long historic roots of low-threshold, collective crafting in relation to movements of resistance and resilience, especially in different feminist and anti-fascist movements. For many decades, there were attempts to control women and especially controlling how they could express their thoughts, by cultures that told them to stay inside and work on 'feminine skills' such as textile crafts. Though, there were few ways to control what women 'crafted about'. There are some well documented early examples, like a collectively embroidered handkerchief of imprisoned women from the suffragettes

movement in 1912, or how in the Indian Independence movement the spinning of Khadi as an alternative to British textiles was a signal of resistance and wide community support. In more recent times there are also plenty of examples stretching from collectively woven webs of anti-nuclear weapon groups in the 70's to the knitting of 'pussy-hats' created during the peak of the Me Too Movement in 2017. Collective crafting in this context has long been used as a way to put things into reality together, often equally focused on the moment of gathering and collective thinking as much as on the crafted output.

collective crafting – as a way to connect speculative worlds back to the present

When using speculative practices in specXcraft the idea has always been to do this in a situated way. This means grounding our fantastical world building both in our own reality and experience. But also, to understand where the speculative reality exists in relation to our present.

An approach that builds on crafting skills situated in each person's lived experience and reality, rather than more advanced but also more standardised crafting techniques. Low threshold, collective crafting has long historic roots in several cultures and subcultures, one of the most well documented ones being activist resistance movements such as different feminist movements and anti-fascist efforts. In these movements the moment of resilience that comes from being and thinking together is often given equal importance to the output created. In our view this also ties nicely back to the origin of the word 'amateur', which comes from - amare, to love, or doing something for the love of it.

We tried to integrate crafting as a working method also because it would be a way to give shape to parts of our speculative work, and by embodying these things we could potentially bring them a little closer in relation to our present reality. The material aspect was additionally a way to open up for thinking with our hands, which could help us occasionally step out of verbal language and theoretic discussions as a co-creative project working with people from various backgrounds. Or, described differently:

"viewed from the epistemology of the hand, creativity is not confined to some particular elite 'creative class' or special sectors of the economy, but is an inherent aspect of practical work"
(Brinkmann & Tanggaard, 2010)

We have been curious about its use as a tool

to go from speculative futures back to the present. Could it take speculative terms that we had grown fond of during the different explorations of the project and help us create something palpable, like a prop or a model?

Ideally this could for example be an occasion to take a fleeting fragment or question that felt important, and give it a physical dimension, thereby making it take up space. Giving shape to concepts, words and questions that stuck with us could potentially make the speculative reality exist in the present while making it easier for others to engage with it.

Collective crafting was used in many trajectories throughout the project, but these are some of the reflections that were put to the forefront on a final, whole-day crafting session with the specXcraft research group in October 2023.

It started with asking each participant to bring two questions and two concepts/words/phrases from any trajectory they were part of. As a way to help select which four elements to bring, these intentions were set for orientation:

"Think of what feels meaningful, precious or urgent to you when picking the things you bring to the session. Something worth your safekeeping, or worth being given life to."

We have been facilitating others a lot in the last months. By trying to bring elements that truly resonate with our 'personal present' we make sure to situate ourselves and our own urgencies."

up words and internal references. From there onwards, the different fragments were used as starting points for mock-ups and crafts. The list of selected fragments and questions used as a starting point, however obscure, looked like this:

HISTORIC
DE-FRAZZZED BY
~~WHO IS NOT~~
I
MEDICATION
E-HASTE
THE EXTRA
PLATE
INTERCARE
200-28
AFTER) THE DAWN OF
FOR KAPDM THE MORNING
1690-1700



HOW TO GROW DELICIOUS FRUITS?

HOW TO ESCAPE OUR ADDICTIONS?

AI + DATA + ME AS A TERRACE OF ATTENTION?

Why couldn't I fuck up with instant uterine un-stories of the future?
also include/help our Facing of Xmas?

Can even the most unlikely human stories measure up to the AI to come?

How will we individually and collectively cope with massive-mourning-to-come?

.. OKEY. TIMELINE ? >>>

How to retrieve and integrate n-f-y stories
(from places & perhaps can't visit at yours) ?

STORY TELLING AS TECHNOLOGY

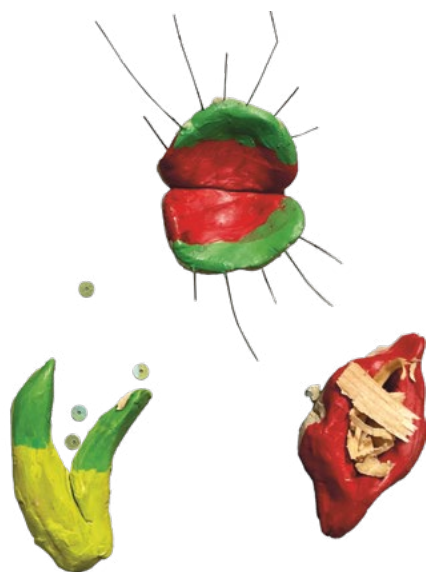
How to connect in deeper authentic ways?

WHICH ONE SKILL WILL YOU EAT?

These fragments were explored through the shaping and assembling of different materials: clay, textile, seeds, wax, paint, silicone, electronic components, paper, found objects... We made several small iterations of quick prototyping in

order to observe how each idea could evolve through its materialisation. We were also curious to see how these crafted objects could be laid out in relation to time and to each other.







ability and pleasure in a global economy, and a pillow with a seed rotating almost imperceptibly, pointing to a tentatively hopeful, hibernating future potential that we cannot yet see.



stories & crafts for dissenting futures

This part is a collection of crafts and stories made throughout the project by different groups. You can read it as an 'archive' of possibly surprising, unsettling or inspiring creations, to be enjoyed just as they are or as triggers for reflexions.

Fiction and, by extension, design fiction, "allow us to 'play' with possible dystopias, locating them within a fictional diegesis and providing us with a critical distance (...) The "diegetic buffer" we perceive surrounding a dystopian design fiction is more permeable, allowing for questions of values, ethics, and actions to cross back and forth between our present world and the simulated future" (Tenenbaum, 2016).

We chose to present the diegetic¹ entities populating this archive (characters, story snippets, worldbuilding prototypes...) in a simple layout, with minimal information on the contexts of their fabrication, so they can be taken as they are – not only as results of some experimentation, but also objects that can live on their own. To give them strength and value, to emphasise the power of stories, wherever they come from.

Upon acquainting with a slice of the specXcraft stories and crafts, you may find yourself discov-

ering chunks of im/possible worlds-to-come and other 'outrageous propositions'. Stories of alternative futures and otherwise possible presents, stories of human and more-than-human interdependencies, entanglements, intimacies, and the differences within. Stories wildly imagined, crafted in quick and dirty manner, enacted more or less convincingly.

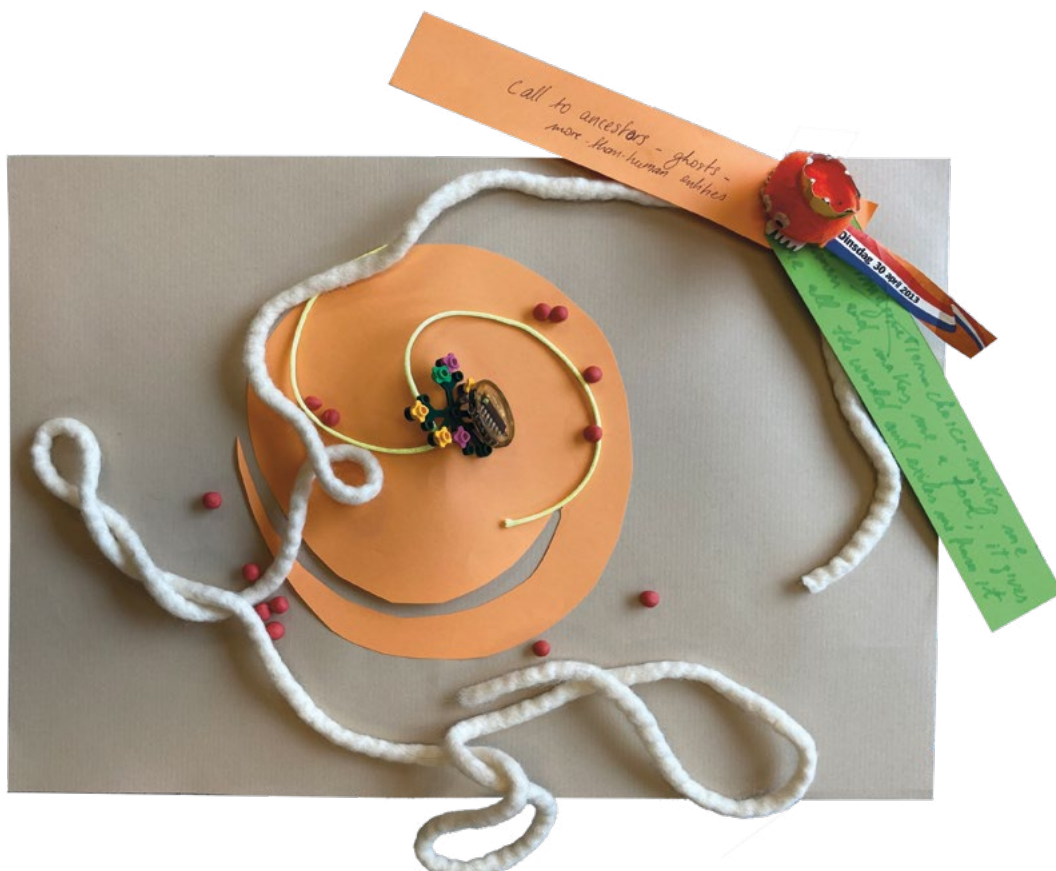
Making up and relaying stories has considerable importance. For stories are big. They're bigger than science, society, economics, politics, and all the stuff that makes up our contemporary human lives. This is because stories have modestly immense capabilities – which are world-making, empathy-shaping, complexity-fostering. Stories affect, guide and enable us, not just as individuals, but as communities, societies and cultures.

¹ A 'diegetic' object, place or character, related to the diegesis, the space-time in which the story takes place.

The Social Justice Program: "Don't endure your life. Choose it"

Hack of a quote by Ursula Le Guin

"My ~~imagination~~ choice makes me human and makes me a fool;
it gives me all the world and exiles me from it."



Materialising the principle of circular and regular role shifts



"Don't endure your life. Choose it", with our Social Justice Program you don't have to endure the position you were born into anymore. Choose your family, choose your kin, choose class, choose your ancestors, choose your job, choose your body.

Every 368 days, 2 of these elements are to change. One of them will be determined by you, the other one is attributed randomly. Our new

program for social justice does make social injustices a shared good. Solidarity is now a matter of fact.

Trajectory: Prototrajectory

Type: Worldbuilding prototype (low-fi)

Authors: Hélène & Giulietta

Thank You to the Garden Dormice



Towers in Brussels where people took refuge, and started to communicate together thanks to beaver dams

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We're not sure whether our story starts in the past, the present or the future.

The story starts as many species of small mammals are disappearing in Belgium. They're disappearing because of the use of a product supposed to eradicate what we call 'invasive species'. It's in Brussels that we first realise the many deaths of the small mammals, but the news slowly spread in rural areas too. Unfortunately, we understand the seriousness of the phenomenon too late and the product contaminates most of the water sources. Many animals are now dying while others seem to thrive, unbothered. The garden dormouse is one of them. Opportunistic little animals, the garden dormice establish themselves in the nests of the many disappearing species. The population of the garden dormice literally explodes: it's a good life for them, at least for a certain time. But then they hit a wall. The population of garden dormouse starts to exceed the amount of available nests. They are then forced to adapt and start building their own nests by using the knowledge they've accumulated from the many different nests they've occupied. The garden dormice come to create extremely intricate and resisting weaving techniques with materials gleaned from everywhere around them. But soon, certain areas get overflowed and the

garden dormice need to flee. The emptied nests are taken by the floods and land a little further in wooded areas. The woods are progressing in Brussels as the people are slowly forced to uplift their life, always higher and higher. Some beavers start to settle in those woods and notice the intricate nests. They get inspired by them and start building also very complex logs structures for the constructions of dams. The inhabitants of Brussels now live in huge towers; away from the ground. These huge towers are disconnected from each other and form small societies; they're struggling to communicate and be solidary with each other. But slowly, the huge castors' dam emerge from the ground fog and start to appear at the eyes of the Bruxellois. Some of them get inspired by weaving too and manage to weave intricate structures from materials they have around them. These structures, strong but also very light, soon allow them to connect the towers to each other.

Trajectory: Prototrajjectory

Type: Worldbuilding prototype (low-fi)

Authors: Amandine & Elodie

Internship with Snails



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In order to learn how to slow down in this crazy, speed-worshipping world, snails invite us to take an internship with them, where we would have to follow them at their own pace for at least one full day.

Trajectory: Common crafting session

Type: Diegetic object

Author: Hélène

Ether Adama - Reading near the Sky



Perched high in a tree, somewhere between the earth and the sky, Ether-Adama, which you can only reach with the strength of your arms and legs, a cosy terrace in fleece, with books for all tastes, stories of the past, present and future, of our ancestors, but also books with blank pages to write new stories, and fill your heart, between earth and sky.

Trajectory: Prototrajectory

Type: Worldbuilding prototype (low-fi)

Author: Florence

Stavanger Scavenger



Top view of a constellation, using our bodies to spatialize the relationships between the characters



A return to the past. Norway, Stavanger, hometown. Lost city by the sea. Memories of childhood. Reenactment. The father, the mother, the real estate developer, the oil extraction company boss. The little girl, observing, disagreeing, growing. And the fish. The fish. One day, the developer arrives, and everyone disappears. No living soul from the past. Stavanger ghost town. Except the little girl and the fish. What remains is the tireless little girl – who turned a scavenger for greater justice – and the ghost of the fish, a reminder of the days of Stavanger before Scavenger. Stavanger-Scavenger.

Trajectory: Prototrajectory
Type: Performative exercise
Authors: Co-researchers

Bitch Boss



Screenshot from the movie *Archive* co-produced by CVB participants



In the CVB after the total reset, Bitch Boss is the new not-director director. He observes and comments on the work of archiving images of humans. With anthropocentrism now surpassed, Bitch Boss grants us access to another, often surprising, reading of images, and to an alter-specific vision of human/non-human relationships. In his own words, ‘intelligence is wasted for the benefit of humans and their repetitive and hindered lives. They mature, reproduce, and die faster than pines, each human being equivalent to their predecessor, never smarter, never different, always repeating their ancestors, never unique. Yet, with more intelligence, less control.’ (freely inspired by Rainbow Bamboo in Semiosis by Sue Burke)

Trajectory: CVB trajectory
Type: Character
Authors: Léo, Lucas, Louise, Giuliano, Soline, Victoria

Growing Infrastructures



After so many generations of not noticing, the 6th extinction has undoubtedly come. There are still some spots that resemble what Humans used to call 'nature' left in Brussels. But the situation is precarious for living beings. Only some critters have drinking water. Only some others have access to food or scavenged material. Only a few of them have secrets, gossip and other stories. No one can survive as such. No one is an island. New forms of communication and exchange are needed. Cañas Vivas are plantient entities, behaving as caddisflies. Assembling stones, feathers and all kinds of materials. They grow bridges. But they are blind, deaf, and only communicate in a kinetic way... By contact. For some time now, another plantient entity, Mousse, has been trav-

elling with Cañas Vivas. Mousse's capacity of absorbing and transmitting gossip, secrets, water or excrements makes the Caña Viva more sentient to its environment. A plant-based infrastructure is growing and developing from one area to another and it's evolving towards a multispecies transmitting system that connects, absorbs and releases water, knowledge, resources.

Trajectory: Prototrajectory

Type: Worldbuilding prototype (low-fi)

Authors: Rafaella & Giulietta

Angry \Water



////////////////////////////////////
In Brussels, this is where the water started to tremble. Almost imperceptibly, at first. Then furiously. In Brussels, this is where the revolt of water began. Of all its molecules. This is where women started to lose their water well before the term. This is where the walls first turned to dust. This is where fruits first dried up.

Those who have in their memories the traces of ancient times were not at all surprised. The water revolts where the water must be released. The vaulted Maelbeek: it was already here. The buried Elssenvijver: it was already here. Rains and storms channelled, then sent to a retention tank: it was already here. "Ô rage, ô désespoir", we used to say in the old language. But it is also

here, in Brussels, that women lay down in the dust to keep the water inside them. Here also, beings, living or not, have survived by becoming water. Those who have in their memories the traces of ancient times were not at all surprised. The trout caressed by the clear water, it was already here. The beer brewed with fresh water, it was already here. "Maelbeek mon amour", it was already here.

Trajectory: Prototrajectory

Type: Worldbuilding prototype (low-fi)

Authors: Rafaella, Florence, Thomas

Nature/Gardening



Screenshot from the movie *Archivage* co-produced by CVB participants



Forget everything you thought was a garden. Over time, you will begin to forget what you thought 'nature' was; you will forget how you thought life 'worked'; and you will eventually also forget that you 'believed' living beings 'operate' like machines, or that forests provide 'ecosystem services'. Do ecology differently.

Trajectory: CVB trajectory

Type: Moving imagination prompt

Authors: Léo, Lucas, Louise, Giuliano, Soline, Victoria

(paraphrased from *How to grow Livable worlds: ten not-so-easy steps* by Natasha Myers in *The World to Come*)

Fake News



Screenshot from the movie *2073* co-produced by CVB participants

Fake news: a Drexciyan weapon of mass deterrence. We, the ocean planet, protect ourselves from a possible return of the GREEX. Our weapon, fake news. To prevent the GREEX from returning, we depict a world plunged into chaos. Brussels under water: floods, acid rains, epidemics, rapes, dangerous animals, and drugs have invaded the city of Brussels. In the aquatic breach, viruses from the depths devour flesh and zombify brains.

Trajectory: CVB trajectory

Type: Resistance strategy in a world-to-come

Authors: Tessa, Oumar, Alice, Marc, Gwen,
Emilie, Yussuf, Dora

'It's really the end, man! Pack your bags, we gotta get out, guys.

Oh shit, what the hell is this mess!

Forgive us, Jazzzzv!

What a mess! Motha fuckers!

I'm gonna end up in a damn puddle, guys!

All this to end up here!

What a shitty life, man!

BXL SLOW/SOUS L'EAU



Brussels, 2073: Despite the rise in sea level, we have managed to live in harmony with our environment. We, the Drexciyans, are aquatic mutants, descendants of the Bruxellois who were left behind after the Great Elite Exodus. We have eliminated what made the world before - speculation, the pursuit of profit in excess, the destruction of the living, patriarchy, racism! This summer, the reopening of Pool-Art square: public baths and hammams welcome you, Haddocks, Trouts, Sturgeons, in the former Palace of Justice. The terms of Pool-Art represent the well-being of the body and soul - in BXL-SLOW.

Trajectory: CVB trajectory

Type: Story

Authors: Tessa, Oumar, Alice, Marc, Gwen, Emilie, Yussuf, Dora

The Extra Plate



In certain cultures and on certain occasions, an extra plate is set on the table for the deceased. On other occasions, food is placed on shrines as an offering and token of gratitude. These prototype plates aim at integrating some forms of awareness and multi-species mourning into everyday present and future meals. Making tangible that we have to give our share, that we took our share, and thanking those - human or not - who directly or indirectly left their share - or their live - in order to feed us.

Trajectory: Common crafting

Type: Speculative prototype

Authors: Giulietta & Greg

Dreaming of Being Mermaids



Chapter 1: The underground world

How do we serve others, and how do others serve us? In a world not so far from our own, humans and non-humans live in a holocracy, a democracy of all living things. A world in which, because of its degradation, we have been forced to live underground, and where we humans have been living in church foundations. The only ones who could teach us how to live underground were field mice, earthworms and moles. We had to build a dialogue with these species to get by, to survive. They offered us some of their knowledge about housing, food storage and social organisation. But unfortunately our world has gone too far in the past, we've polluted the soil, there's not enough left to feed everyone.

The state of things is completely dysfunctional, because in the past, we didn't take the time to communicate with other species quickly enough. As a result, there aren't enough field mice and earthworms to help us, and they can't...

So we decided to put ourselves at the service of these species, and see how we could support them, how our own bodies could put themselves at the service

of these species. We started giving them what our bodies secreted, or even parts of our bodies, to enable them to survive, to multiply, and to experiment with how our body secretions could help clean up the soil. And then we realized that there are plenty of other worlds where we could create this holocracy.

Chapter 2: Het volgende hoofdstuk - The world of water.

Despite all the efforts we've made in the earth world, the water world is a mess and water decides to go on strike. It sends us acid rain and everything becomes deserted, and it tells us "fuck you, you've pissed me off"; it shamelessly evaporates, leaving us thirsty. And then some humans, starting to go crazy, start dreaming of being mermaids. So we ask ourselves, why are we dreaming about this, is it a premonition?

Trajectory: Natagora Trajectory

Type: Story snippet

Authors: Amandine, Michel, Marco

Timequake



Screenshot from the movie 2073 co-produced by CVB participants

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A pointillist work from the world before had, unknowingly, depicted the symbol of life after the TOTAL RESET: far from destructions, riots, bloodthirsty sharks, and civilizations swallowed by the waves, the Drexciyan people quickly found a way to live in harmony.

Trajectory: CVB
Authors: Tessa, Oumar, Alice, Marc, Gwen, Emilie, Yussuf, Dora

Chardone



It's a community of humans who have given their bodies to nature to enable the thistle to persist in an environment that has no longer been kind enough to allow it to exist.

Trajectory: Natagora

Type: Character

Author: Amandine

Strengths: the thistle loves violence, which has been disowned and no longer wanted in society, and has decided that this is how it wants to exist.

Weaknesses: she stings and scares, so she's a loner. She's often not really seen, as she's a new kind of thistle made of beams of light, and you really have to be in the right spectrum to see her. She needs nothing more than the emotions of the living, especially violence. And it stings.

Captain-not-Captain

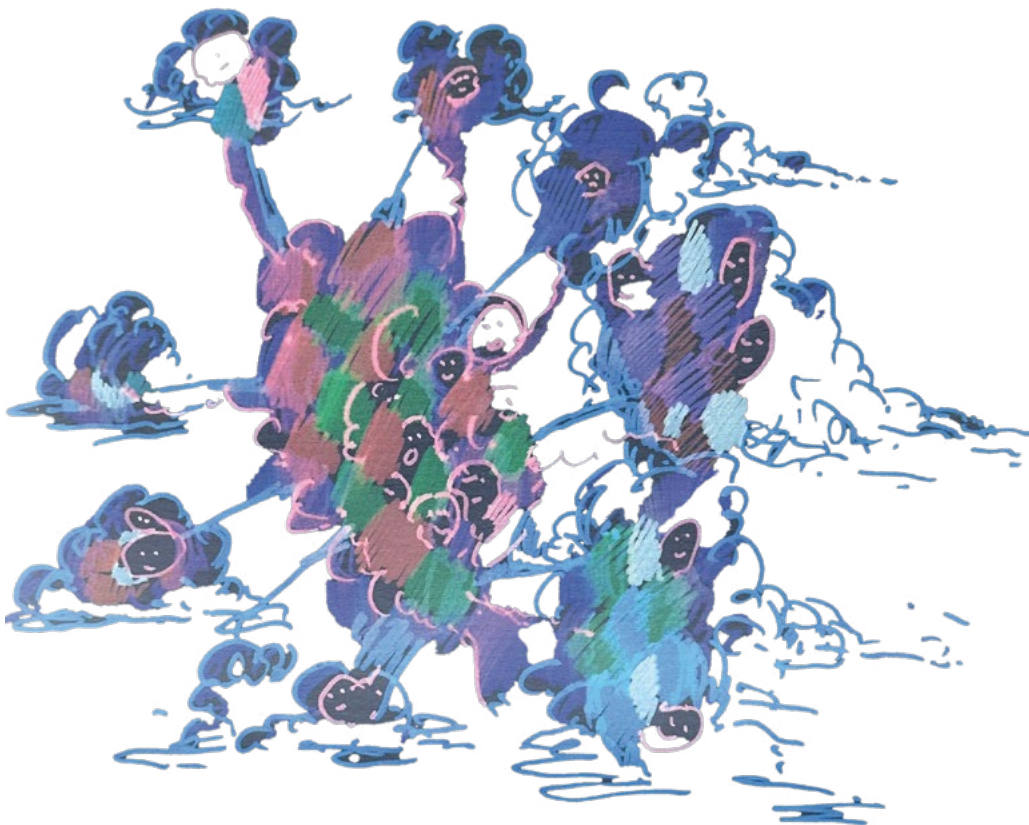


Illustration depicting one of the co-researchers' (Mia Melvaer) interpretations of what specXcraft is



There is no singular captain aboard. you^we are both crew and captain-not-captain, as you^we are all kindred beings and companions de route on this living and non/breathing vessel. you^we are here to support, soothe, re^compose and accompany each other. at times you^we are steering, leading, directing as captain-not-captain; at other times you^we are navigating, following, searching as crew member of the specXcraft vessel.

Trajectory: prototrajectory

Type: new vocabulary

Authors: Mia & Greg

Ccroack



I travel, I migrate, I go from tribe to tribe, to listen, to discuss with the tribes and learn from their wisdom and pass it on to others. I'm a messenger.

Trajectory: Natagora

Type: Character

Author: Nicolas

Species: Chattering Magpie

Strengths: flies, communicates, thinks, listens, migrates.

Weaknesses: I can't keep my mouth shut. Especially when I disagree, or when faced with injustice. Impatience: things need to move forward.

Resources: universal and inter-species declaration of metamorphosis.

Mission: to develop an inclusive spirituality that leads to a sustainable society and prevents any destructive drift.

Diva Verde



Wise witch, part of the hominidea transgenrus species. She is connected to a kind of luminous source that is the voice of pleasure, of joy, of the sacred feminine. She is a kind of spokesperson and representative of the diversity of genders and sexualities in the living world. And she'll help living beings find pleasure, joy, rediscover their sensuality, distill the micro-skills of benevolent listening and non-violent communication. All with the aim of strengthening group cohesion around the notion of pleasure. She has the ability to help living people discover who they are, identify their gender identity and sexuality, and identify their desires so they can better respond to them. And she's accompanied by her two gay mallard ducks, who show the way when you're lost.

Her hair is very plant-like, and she combines all the codes of the genre: she wears heels, but

we're not sure what sex she is, so there you have it, she's representative of everything.

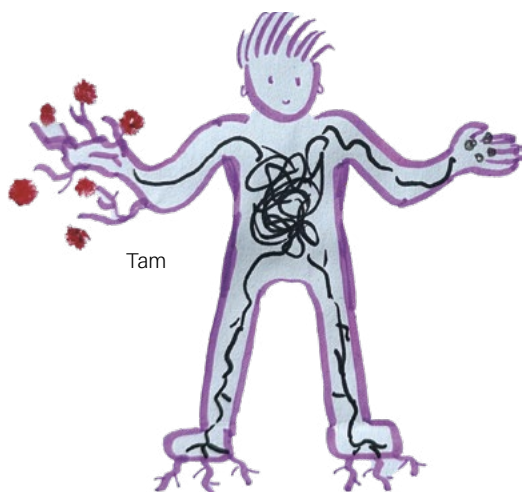
Weaknesses: she has none, because she's a diva and has understood that she complements the others. So when she can't master something, she'll rely on interdependence, on the complementary nature of beings, and on trust.

Trajectory: Natagora

Type: Character

Author: Jeremy

TAM & FRIENDS



Tam



Nikima Nikaanj Dichaam



Pollydip



It has been a few moons and rains since Tam, Pollydip, Nikima Nikaanj Dichaam were kicked out of the Highrise camp. Internal quarrels. Ain't easy to live in a community, let's face it. Neither to live in a tower, that's for sure. The worst part is that none of the three necessarily agreed with each other when the quarrel broke out. But that's the way it is, the rest of the group lumped all three of them together. And here they are now, wandering around in their small forced pack. And what if it's not so bad after all ? If you think about it, practising as decontaminators and nature rewilders on the ground rather than in a tower makes sense. Tam has no trouble putting down roots in the vast polluted valleys. Nikima Nikaanj Dicham finally has the opportunity to put on her bio-foil suit, which suits

her perfectly. Pollydip has already found 35 different pollens since he left the highrise farm. And what if it's not so bad after all? At least they eat their fill: every day they share the fruits that have fallen from Tam's hands. Tam's fruits are not very good, but at least they are edible. And who knows? In a few moons and rains, maybe the fruits of their collaboration will be delicious.

Trajectory: Prototrajectory

Type: Story

Authors: Elodie, Rafa, H  l  ne, Thomas, Greg

The World Without End/Hunger

a world WITHOUT END - black cloud - do or die!!! Chronicles of the New Sedentarization, How Darkness Revealed the Return of the Past The cloud



Paths through darkness: rats guiding children and other humans towards their future

The world has collapsed and is covered by a Cloud of Darkness whose origins are still unknown today. Traces of the Old World are scattered, and the beings who traverse the globe's surface rediscover its outlines. Every path taken pushes back the Darkness, and everyone uses their Great Fan to permanently make the Path accessible to posterity¹. Everyone has become Nomadic: the Children, close to the ground, explore the front lines. The Scout Rats aid them in their task.

When two paths cross, the Nomads have begun to collectively and spontaneously leave clues. Over generations, Nomads add food gleaned here and there during their explorations². The Crossroads Fridges (CF) have now become an institution, and it is now criminal to leave a CF empty behind oneself. In this rare case, the next Nomad has the heavy task of destroying the CF, leaving the crossroads empty, like a mausoleum in memory of the collective failure that contradicts the maxim inscribed on every CF "to get lost = to find oneself". The CFs also have another important function: in this world of Nomads, living conditions are harsh, the weather is extreme, dangers lurk in the Darkness, and there comes a time in every Nomad's journey when their legs wear out. They then know that the next CF will be their last and thus begin

their Sedentarization.

One day, the few patches of Darkness are reduced to about ten. Now, Nomads can see each other from afar and start to avoid the last shadows out of superstition. Some more daring Nomads decide to end it and explore the last dark territory. An elder, more listened to that day, the date is uncertain, recalls an ancestral tradition and everyone formed a pile of Great Fans to create a large fire. The Great Fire marks the beginning of the New Sedentarization. This era will gradually reverse the power dynamic. Nomads will gradually lose influence in favor of the New Sedentaries who already live at the various CFs. They will be the new guides and architects of the cities, the unified calendar, and the food system of this phase of Humanity. If the reader had any doubt, here is yet another proof that History is a Loop.

Trajectory: Natagora

Type: Story

Authors: Mari-Luz, Amandine, David

¹ It took many generations for Humans to understand that only their species was affected by this cloud. Plants, for example, grow without any problem.

² The gleanings are mainly made up of POLLEN from the wild growth of plants in the planthroposcene.

Chiro-Batrachian Domination

Elevation of humans - The BAT-racist civilization. A world on the roof of another world - Inversion -
The Blue World - A fair return... At least for frogs!!!



Once (or twice) upon a time (or two), in 25 years (or less), frogs and other amphibians are affected by a disease they catch from beavers in bodies of water. The beavers transmit the disease to Daubenton's bats, which mutate and transmit it to the amphibians. Batrachians grow wings of bats and develop unparalleled intelligence. With this intelligence, they control and manipulate humans, who are completely at their mercy. Batrachians raise humans in spirals on the roofs of buildings. Humans feed exclusively on castoreum. Arachnids tell stories of animal survival to children in incubators. These stories are traps to make them docile. The batrachians' takeover regulates the population rate. No one is afraid of spiders anymore. Nature is doing well. Humans have developed behaviours of adaptation to their environment and instincts that they had lost. They lived normally ever after and had very few children. If they are not dead, they are not yet happy.

Trajectory: Natagora

Type: Story

Authors: Serge, Nancy, Aude

The slumbering archive at piotra-piotra



Permanent residents: Piotra-Piotra and NOI
Semi-permanent residents: Apparition and Stavanger
scavenger

Goals:

1. Memories / stories conservation and gathering
2. A place for vulnerable people, animals, stories, signals, fungi, machines, etc And a place for sleep (+growing time?)
3. A place for recording and archiving dreams, collectively analysing them

NOI sleeps all the time, she can sleep through everything.

People go to her room while she sleeps and they tell her their hopes and wishes. NOI includes these hopes and wishes in her dreams and unknowingly makes them come true. There's a sign on NOI's door saying "Do disturb"

Trajectory: Prototrajectory

Type: Story

Authors: Elodie & Mia

Submetro and supatrains

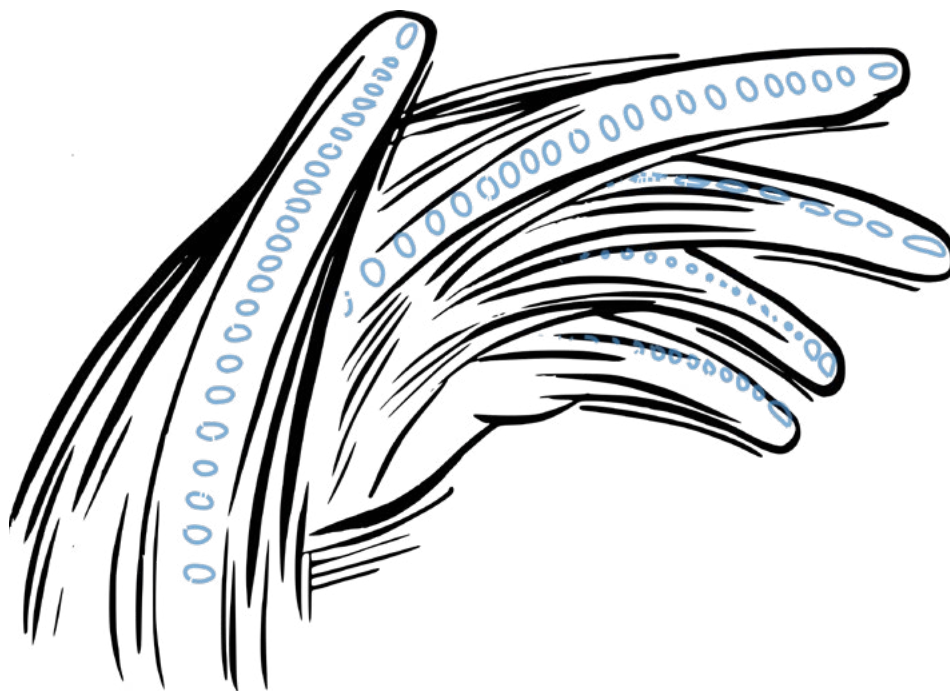


Illustration : Mia Melvaer

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The terms submetro and supatrains were invented as a critic of obsessive technological progress. They are a caricature that speaks to the ways that social and environmental dimensions are often discarded or superficially dealt with at the profit of an ever-consuming technological progress.

Trajectory: Constant trajectory
Type: New vocabulary
Authors: Constant participants

More woolgathering



Illustration : Mia Melvaer

Woolgathering is an English expression for day-dreaming. It also refers to slow, small-scale practices such as, admittedly a long time ago, the processing of wool before its entry into industry. It is a way of calling for slower, more liveable and collective futures. It is a call to action. A call to form different types of collectivities; to gather around practices that are slower, maybe inefficient but surely gentle. More woolgathering is a call to reverse the capitalist mode that values speed, efficiency and individualism.

Trajectory: Constant trajectory

Type: New vocabulary

Authors: Constant participants



mid-way assessment

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After a year of joint experimentation, we can only make an intermediate and provisional assessment of what this process and method have generated, but we can do so from different perspectives: ours, as co-researchers and participants; the feedback collected by questionnaires immediately before and after the sessions; and most importantly, through the numerous individual and collective feedback interviews on the experimentations we conducted with the participants of the trajectories within the organisations involved in the project. Finally, and this should not be underestimated, there is what the productions of these trajectories tell us, the stories and artefacts created, which now exist as witnesses of otherwise possible futures.

With the help of these different materials, let's now attempt to review one by one the objectives

of specXcraft to draw up a provisional assessment.

a) One of the project's objectives is to evoke future imaginaries (of or in Brussels) that diverge from hegemonic narratives.

The first trajectories confirmed our hypothesis that the cultures and practices of associations in disagreement with central aspects of present-day Brussels constitute a valuable reservoir of concrete elements from which to imagine the future differently.

The shared experience of the groups and their culture of activism functioned as a powerful engine of imagination. The aspects of the present that are denounced by these associations and against which they fight have offered grasp and affordance for the imagination to project itself



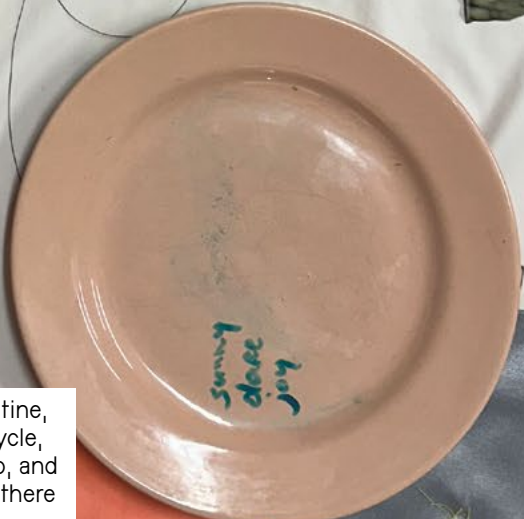
I feel like I belong to a generation where trust in the future is non-existent; it's a different way of projecting oneself. We are constantly referred to an uncertain future, and so projecting into the future, speculating... We are forced to resort to science fiction and fantasy to name things that are complex. A means to project ourselves into a more desirable future.

CVB Participant



I think we need to plough more actively to arrive at conclusions that are off the beaten path. For that, we need to conduct pilot experiments in many layers of society, offer workshops in schools, psychiatric hospitals, youth centres, activist collectives, businesses, etc.

CVB Participant



You actually pulled me out of my routine, from my little 'metro, boulot, dodo' cycle, [...] it opens up to other things too, and that was also the goal, to show that there are many different ways of thinking.

Natagora Participant

into futures where these aspects have been amplified, eliminated, or diverted. Even if most of the participants had no prior experience in speculative narration and/or in collective and immediate story creation, the initial barriers were quickly overcome. Common references and the complicity installed through a careful and non-judgemental process allowed speculative flights quite quickly.

It can be noted that a clearly defined common struggle from the start of the trajectory could allow an easy and rapid leap into speculation for the participants, who clearly saw a meaning to this experience (before and after). Thus, for Constant, where the heart of the trajectory was accomplished with people who have been working together for several years, we noticed an ease in immediately bouncing off the shared fictional elements on the fly. Similarly, for the trajectory of Natagora – although it brought together a larger group, including people who did not know each other at all – the clearly identified common cause, as well as the difficulties shared by all the participants during the first session regarding their fight to preserve living beings, allowed work to start quickly.

The CVB, whose activities touch on quite varied causes, chose to articulate two common and interconnected concerns, namely social injustices and the issue of private and public space dedi-

cated to social minorities in Brussels. The issue of the representation of marginalised people (due to their class, ethnicity, gender, etc.) in the city, but also in cultural and intimate spheres, thus became the very subject of the trajectory and served as the basis for the creation of two experimental and speculative short films, working on the form (the question of representation), as well as the content (the social injustices).

However, due to the limited means and time available in this phase of the project, the productions of all the trajectories remained at a relatively fragmentary, minimalist stage. The degree of speculation and divergence from hegemonic discourses, for some, remained insufficient, calling for more radical and diverse experiments to see the emergence of a real alternative force. Moreover, crafting was limited only to manipulations of easily accessible material and techniques. There was also a tendency to use fabrication mainly for illustrating the stories or creating models of the setting, whereas the making of speculative prototypes was explored very little and with very few means. But this did not prevent the emergence of varied and rich speculative experiences, whose interpretations can be as numerous as the interlocutors. This leads us to the next point.

b) The second objective of the project (closely linked to the first) is to train our abilities to open the field of the possible, explore different possible futures and to develop a sensitivity for their consequences.

Several exercises started from present situations or places and - through simple 'what if?' questions - speculatively extended these elements. Then, for example by sharing these story fragments, the consequences of each choice started to become palpable, negotiation processes often internal to the narrative environments were set off. After speculative gleaning at the Wiels marsh site, for example, each participant had begun to imagine (individually) the story of the 'archaeological pieces' of im/possible futures they had just excavated on this wasteland. Then, in small groups, they attempted to assemble these fragments into a common scenario. The difficulty of bringing these different elements together made it palpable that fictions come with their de-

mands. As Bruno Latour beautifully showed with Etienne Souriau (Latour, 2012), the beings of fiction do not let themselves be easily reconciled, tamed,... how to negotiate the consequences to which certain choices commit us? Where to backpedal? Is it possible to find a different, novel outcome, an unexpected configuration?

One of the specificities of specXcraft is its situated character in different activist environments. Thus, the moments of 'diplomatic' articulation between the different trajectories provide excellent opportunities to deepen the meaning of the consequences of the stories that each group has created. Sending an artefact or a story to another group of participants and meeting up with them

are opportunities to step out of one's bubble, to return to a necessary mediation of different possible/impossible worlds. The diplomatic day that concluded the different trajectories of this first phase of specXcraft allowed us to test our capacity to anticipate the effects that our stories can have on other people, in other realities. For "no cause, even God as a cause, has the power to define how it will cause. Nothing has the power to determine how it will matter for others" (Stengers, 2009). There is no mechanicity in cause and effect relationships, which is why effects must be imagined, felt, explored, reviewed, adjusted, with as much empathy as creativity, so that SF can be 'an art of consequences' (Stengers, 2018). In this sense, specXcraft constitutes a laboratory of imagination responsible for the future, we try to train our capacity to respond to other beings, other causes, other demands (Hache, 2011; Meißner, 2014; Laki et al., 2021).

Even though the groups that participated in the first trajectories were less heterogeneous than what we aim for during the continuation of the project, the meeting between the different groups (and the stories they created) already led to a series of shifts and reflections about the blind spots and focuses of different commitments and their perspectives. For example, certain 'characters' - like water - were mobilised in several trajectories: protagonist of fake news that preserves a social reversal for some; a means of inter-body and inter-species communication for others; or, a final solution to sabotage a technological surveillance deployment. An element that thus gave as much grip to commonality as to the exploration of gaps and differences.

Finally, with specXcraft, we would like to give more space to 'returns to the present'. How has the cognitive estrangement experienced during the trajectory affected our feelings towards the present, our understanding of current situations? Has it changed our evaluation of the levels of necessity and constraint of different aspects of the status quo?

Can we learn something from these explorations - whether it's a feeling, a warning, or a very concrete solution? What do we bring back home, in our luggage? These aspects, which could lead us to a form of 'potential history' (Azoulay, 2019), were only tested quite minimally during this first year.

The Constant trajectory, for example, ended with the request to send a postcard from the present to the explored future or vice versa. An exercise that we repeated during the diplomatic session between the three organisations, but specifying that the message must be sent from the future (or fictional universe) to the here and now. Most participants, however, did this while remaining in a narrative register. We probably hadn't taken enough time to establish a break in intentions; not sufficiently insisted on the importance of exploring consequences, of moving from 'what if' to 'but then' in order to practise speculation as an art of consequences (Stengers, 2018). We hadn't taken enough time to train this very particular form of responsibility that situated speculative imagination implies. Rare - but not nonexistent - were the concrete action plans. Several participants, for example, mentioned the necessity of learning from animals and plants to find other forms of communication, regeneration, or infrastructure destruction used by humans. Someone else proposed importing into the present the principle of diverting privileges against the privileged, discovered in one of the stories created at CVB. Others emphasised the radical uncertainty with which they returned home (see 'carte omni-futuriste', p.77). In the Natagora trajectory, an entire session was dedicated to the 'return to the present', revisiting the constraints and resources of their activism that had been shared at the beginning, to see what had changed. The feedback was very positive, but it particularly focused on how the experience of the trajectory generally reduced their sense of powerlessness towards the future.

Finally, if our ambition is to open up the field of the possible, this does not mean that one story - and by extension one future - is worth more than another, or that all possibilities are interchangeable or equally desirable. As Didier Debaise and Isabelle Stengers put it so well in *L'insistance des possibles* (2017), speculative thought cannot and must not become a kind of 'neutral collection' of the multiplicity of possibilities. Nor should they be preserved indiscriminately like endangered species. Along with the philosopher Whitehead, Stengers and Debaise defend the importance of taking these possibles into account, in the sense of refusing the right to disqualify some of them a priori. Speculative thinking is a necessary antidote, a gentle and abundant insurrec-



I find that even in terms of possible actions in the world we currently live in, it has certainly opened my horizon on the way... it has also opened up activism to simply other modes of action, for other forms of reaction rather than staying in the mode of 'this is politics, this is communication...'

Natagora Participant

tion against the dictatorship of the 'probable'. But this insurrection is not without risks. For Stengers and Debaise, it is a genuine 'speculative commitment', acted upon and guided by experience. For "etymologically, the speculator was the one who observes, watches and cultivates the signs

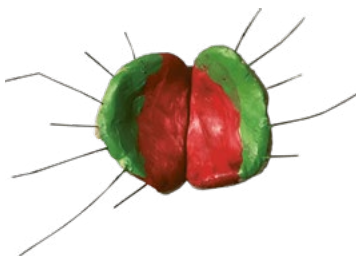
of a change in a situation, making herself sensitive to what, in this situation, might matter." To sort things out, we need to turn to pragmatism as the art of responsibility, and ask the question of effects: does the insistence on the possible add to the situation or impoverish it? (James, 2007).

c) Thirdly, it is about increasing our (sense of) agency and grip on the future - and consequently on the present.

The most striking and immediate result of the process initiated by specXcraft was undoubtedly the activation of a collective and creative energy, whether in relation to the present or the future.

When you came back from these sessions, there were other windows that opened that you're not able to open otherwise.

Natagora participant



Much feedback emphasised the beneficial aspect of moments that focused on the present (and the past) of the group, even before projecting towards the future. These moments, though focused on the status quo, offered a pause in the usual activist and/or professional practice, allowing for a step back, to generate a 'reflexivity' in relation to the present. And not just any reflexivity. We refer to a form of attention to one's own practice that extends the capacity for judgement from solely rational and intellectual means to bodily reflexivity, to the registers of affect, emotions and intuition, for example.

The exercises proposed to take stock of the group's practises indeed had the particularity of paying the utmost care to the working materials (durable, natural, and/or related to the particular practice of the association); to the workshop locations and what they convey (wasteland, in-situ excursion rather than choosing a place on a map, ...); to activating the bodies and physical understanding to open up to different sensory and experiential spheres; or even, to leave room for the emotions or feelings of the participants. All these shifts, even if they may seem 'formal', generated a slightly different status quo, and for many participants, already allowed a certain degree of 'reconfiguration of the present'.

It touched me emotionally, even talking about it now, all this gentleness actually. In a world of brutes...

Natagora Participant



In research practices, reflexivity is linked to researchers' awareness of their own involvement in the process and results of their research, to the awareness of their own research actions or to the critique of those of others. While reflexivity has long been considered a source of privileged knowledge, and thus as a characteristic of research and action allowing to distinguish the knowledge of experts from that of laypeople, it has more recently been expanded to the practice of laypeople's knowledge, thus problematizing the divide between expert knowledge and lay knowledge and the privileges it generates.

The ability to decompose individual experience is far from trivial and does not naturally result from the simple gathering of a few people. The specXcraft method aims to establish the conditions for the expression of a reflective capacity (Thoreau & Despret, 2014), by which we mean the exercise of particular attention to personal experience, that is, to a complex lived experience of actions and interactions with people, words, artefacts, and cultural productions.

More specifically, we found that alternating between analytical (classic) and creative approaches (or parts of the exercise) allows a variety of participants to have a broader understanding and provokes reflexivity on what would not usually be questioned. Some exercises, for example, proposed intuitive-reflective pairings. We can mention three exercises in the CVB trajectory to move from a non-figurative and unreflective drawing to the elaboration of a scenario. By accompanying the process with small critical and reflective exercises, participants realised how

much their spontaneous creative practice could be imbued with implicit biases or unintentionally follow certain dominant tropes. Participants suggested making this type of exercise a default part of the usual practice (workshop) within the organisation.

As for exploring the future, a new term has been coined in recent years to describe the need to train our capacity to imagine the future: 'futures literacy'. UNESCO promotes very different types of work under this term, with expected effects ranging from increasing resilience to an uncertain future, to the aspiration to master the future, or to better shape it. Our aspiration was more modest (and more ambitious from certain points of view). Making narratives is for us above all a collective enterprise. Conversely, in our first experiments, the joint fabrication process had the effect of consolidating collectives, creating new complicities, new links.

Many participants' feedbacks insist on the liberating character of telling stories, going on delusions together, collectively imagining other worlds, reversing power relationships, or even, changing the outcome of usually lost battles...

Whatever happens you make room for it, because actually it's really outside of what we live... And it's really, fundamentally, in a temporal other, which is in a real imaginary.

Natagora Participant



Resorting to SF (Science Fiction, Speculative Fabulation, String Figures... Haraway, 2016) is a way to extract oneself from the constraints of the status quo. Cognitive distancing – or defamiliarization – is an effect that “occurs when the author constructs an imaginative plot that ‘radically alters’ the empirical environment of the real world, or through the use of a language that disrupts taken-for-granted knowledge” (de Freitas & Tru-

man, 2020: 3). The specXcraft method inherits and borrows from this technique, but instead of generating it (only) through writing and reading, we try to bring it to life by creating – to varying degrees – a narrative terrain and environment: by adopting a narrative voice, choosing particular places, creating situations that are performative. Rather than a strictly cognitive defamiliarization, we seek in specXcraft a more experiential and bodily defamiliarization.

“Cognition in cognitive estrangement is understood narrowly in terms of rational, cerebral sense-making. Broadening the concept to include recent notions of embodied cognition can help sf studies to better describe how works of speculative fiction latch onto our affinities for bodily sense-making” (Kortekallio, 2023)

For example, we paid great attention to the locations in which the workshops took place, whether in terms of anchoring and defamiliarizing places, or in terms of ways to activate material elements (leaning more or less towards role-playing).

In the CVB trajectory, for the moving imagination phase, we set up an immersive SF in-situ experience in the form of a road trip through Brussels. In the Natagora trajectory, this took the form of a speculative visit to the Wiels Marsh, and a re-appropriation of elements from the Jean Massart garden by the participants to make them elements of their speculative installations. These experiences added a fictional overlay to selected places in Brussels, with the aim of creating speculative slippages between fictional stories and real places and activities. Participants said they were positively ‘disoriented’, and often revised the way they considered these familiar places.

Regarding the degree of role-playing to adopt in order to give an immersive character to the experience, what worked best in our different tests was when the format allowed a certain latitude of choice for each participant. For the peak moment of speculative crafting in the Natagora trajectory, for example, the instructions for all the exercises were given from within the narrative environment that the group had previously imagined. The missions were thus valid both in the here and now of the workshop (making something, in a group) and in the unfolding of the story (“the cell in charge of housing and care has the

mission to fabricate a device or a plan to prepare for the next phase of the Great Metamorphosis..."). During the sharing moments, thanks to the openness of the format, some participants took a more performative stance, others, who would have been uncomfortable doing that, took it as a simple report.

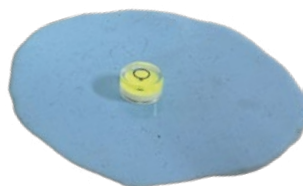
Compared to what happens in LARP (Life Action Role Play) games, the focus is less on the in-depth experience than on exploring worlds and their implications. Compared to speculative design, our approach is however more oriented towards collective ideation and creations are primarily intended to be experienced by the group itself.

One aspect was striking in all the trajectories: all the groups invented new words. Taking ownership of one's future clearly also involves (self) forging new vocabularies. Sometimes this was proposed by the facilitators, sometimes by the participants, but very quickly the groups needed different terms to tell their (different) stories. This of course echoes an important trait in many SF works (cf. 'Newspeak' in George Orwell's *1984*). Indeed, new societal regimes, new regimes of relationships, knowledge, and feelings most often require new ways of speaking and expressing. New worlds require new words and vice versa. These words are both a 'shortcut' to name what

the group has just agreed upon, and also a way to force a slowdown: hesitate on the meaning, try to understand. Sometimes auspices, sometimes incantations, these words were often charged with a certain animist power, in order to reintegrate experiences and ideas, speculation and action.

"The possibility of imperfect realisation is certainly present whenever transformative and metaphorical forces are felt, but this is particularly true when it comes to ideas, if, as I claim, the realisation of ideas involves writing.

Indeed, once 'written', ideas tempt us to associate them with a defined meaning, generally available for understanding, separating the experience of reading from that of writing. This is all the more true in a world today saturated with texts and signs that address 'anyone', separating us from the 'more-than-human' world to which ideas nevertheless belong. But to reclaim animism, it is not enough to maintain an 'idea' that would allow us to claim that we know it - even if, for people like me, it is crucial to realise that my experience of writing is an animist experience, attesting to a 'more-than-human' world." (Stengers, 2012)





Since the Natagora trajectory, I have observed several times participants (and myself) using certain words or concepts we had invented, in other discussion contexts. This often served to summarise an idea or to recognize that what we had just talked about resonated with a memory from that trajectory... These words have 'enriched' our 'intra-group' vocabulary, thus creating a shared understanding, and also a great complicity at certain moments ('we understand each other', we can talk about certain ideas in a blink of an eye – and without always being understood by others). But without necessarily wanting to exclude other people: sometimes, using one or the other invented word invites us to share these funny inventions for the pleasure of explaining what they imply and telling what we have experienced.

Hélène (Natagora facilitator)

d) Finally, with specXcraft, the aim is to create new alliances and reconfigure struggles that are currently disconnected or sometimes even opposed in Brussels.

In this year of experimentation, we could only get a small glimpse of what it can mean to articulate different trajectories with one another.

The hypothesis of specXcraft is that trajectories, these collective, situated, speculative, and experiential expeditions, open a space conducive to exploring entangled ethics of links that are already de facto at work in this world among different groups, people, causes, more-than-human entities. Becoming aware of these engagements that are already there and developing appropriate forms of 'care' (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017), but also creating new 'ecological sympathies' (Ballard, 2017) are an excellent mission for SF, as we have seen.

In specXcraft, we rely on the creation of these links and sympathies both from within the narrative - between the crafted stories - and outside of it, in the here and now. Although minimally, both were tested during a 'diplomatic' day to which all participants in the test trajectories were invited, in November 2023.

By organising this meeting between activists committed to different causes in Brussels, the goal was to make tangible what matters to us, what we believe is threatened. If the etymology of the word 'diplomatic' comes from 'folded paper' information held under fold as an instrument of power, we invoked this practice more in the sense proposed by Vinciane Despret, of the diplomat as the one who negotiates: "the possible worlds of sharing, the modes of appropriation of knowledge, both for others through our questions, and for ourselves who ask for answers," who makes "this knowledge built with others an ingredient of the one we are inventing for ourselves" (Despret, 1999; our translation).

Presenting the stories we had created during the trajectories was a way of "getting to know each other" (Despret, 2002) in the here and now, a way to introduce and meet each other, through the postcards prepared by the research team.

Secondly, during this day, we continued the speculations together. The postcards served as material to imagine speculative extensions of the 'what if?' The mission was to infiltrate an element represented on a postcard into a story from another trajectory. What if we infiltrate this element, from a story about social injustices, into this other trajectory, driven by the struggle for biodiversity, what will it provoke? How could the story continue? How would the infiltrated element be, in turn, affected by the new context, sensitivities, and issues? These kinds of meetings happened within the narrative and constituted a minimal form of what we would like to do with prototypes that can travel from one trajectory to another.

The day of November 17 offered a space of interactions with worlds that do not talk to each other, inviting participants to confront other ways of seeing the world. This moment highlighted a variety of viewpoints, while giving some the impression of sharing a common issue, that of inhabiting the city. The staging, material, and proposed exercises seem to have offered a particular framework for exchange. The postcards and infiltration exercises were praised for providing a visual and conceptual support, allowing to appropriate the content of other trajectories, to go beyond just listening and understanding what they did. The day left a feeling of glimpsing the premises of something, and thus a certain frustration of not seeing its continuation. Many suggestions were made by participants on the different ways this project could continue and grow.

Many people appreciated that this meeting offered a possibility of making opposed worlds talk to each other in a peaceful and benevolent manner. A space for laying down arms. Especially Natagora's activist emphasised that in a lot of contexts, meeting with other activists is often packed with confrontations and hermetic, even violent exchanges. But here, going through things related to their collectively created imaginaries, instead of directly tackling their current concerns — and this with an aesthetic, artistic dimension, a care for the beautiful and the setting

— seemed to allow another form of exchange. The differences in worldview were visible and even highlighted, but without being a source of

tension or strategic calculations, without fear of 'losing something'.



The diplomatic day was useful in the way it finally brought the different trajectories and groups together. It was a good opportunity to meet the other groups, which helped to see potential connections emerging but it was just the beginning of possibilities. There was a bit of a frustration that this 'beginning' comes sort of at the end of the project (at least the end of this phase). Seeing others' crafts and listening to each other made some resonances even more palpable; you'd want to know more!

Constant participant

I'm someone who's more hyper-rational, with more logical, mathematical approaches, and this gave me tools to better understand how other people function, how we can react differently to the same situation

Natagora participant

I liked the practical application of crossings with the act of bringing postcards to other tables to activate imaginaries parallel to what would come to us spontaneously, but I regretted that the second part of the day was not dedicated to a sort of landing of the crossings that appeared in the form of a concrete, testable hypothesis in reality.

CVB participant



conclusion: the present futures of specXcraft

Starting from the places and issues in Brussels that are close to our hearts and to which we are committed. We start from our practices as activists, caretakers, watchmen and watchwomen: our tactics, our resources, our myths, the obstacles we come up against to the point of exhaustion. Let ourselves be imbued and transported by science fiction and other speculative fictions. Unlearning the present, embarking on a journey into the unknown. Fabricating these unknowns. Proliferating our own stories. Imagining together the profound changes that could affect the city. Conducting forays in these future Brussels and then experimenting with ways of dealing with them – emotionally, culturally, socially, politically. Organising encounters in and between these different urban futures, thwarting or replaying present tensions. Exploring the tensions and unexpected collusions that these encounters generate. Making incursions into the present, informed by these journeys. Taking note, taking action, strengthening our struggles, creating new alliances.

This is the invitation that our constellation of citizens, researchers, artists, activists, mediators and naturalists is extending to the people of Brussels, who, like us, wish to ward off impotence, resignation and injustice in the face of the present and future crises, but also to get away from the outdated recipes that are partly to blame for them.

This invitation primarily concerns human and

non-human actors at the margins of power structures and dominant models, as holders of alternative experiences, practices and imaginaries.

It will gradually be extended to other people and entities. But to whom? And how? What are the conditions for taking off on a trajectory? How robust must the collective be? What are the objectives? How can the method be adjusted and



perfected to suit different contexts? How far can it be taken? To what extent should this process involve those who participate - directly or indirectly - in the mechanisms and stories we are fighting against?

We can let our imaginations run wild...

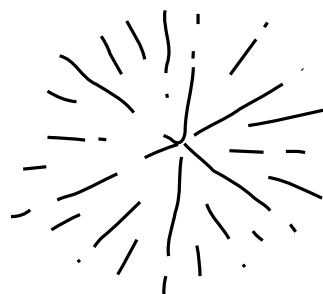
- Create (or integrate) a place that welcomes associations and activists to weave together dissident imaginations and link them together (if only partially) - a kind of Living Lab of alternative imaginations?
- Going to Brussels secondary schools, so that young people can have a say in the future of their world(s)?
- Support institutional mechanisms for citizen participation in the Brussels-Capital Region (e.g. within the Citizens' Climate Assembly, or the Parliament's Deliberative Commissions) to introduce a speculative and situated component for the creation and exploration of otherwise possible futures?
- To offer a method of resilience to organisations (associations, activists, public bodies) wishing to strengthen their practices, to re-discover energy and hope in an often grueling context, to offer a framework for rethinking their perspectives and missions in the light of current and future challenges in all their complexity?

We can let our imaginations run wild, but that does not mean that one path is necessarily worth more than another, that all possibilities are interchangeable or equally desirable. As Didier Debaïse and Isabelle Stengers put it so well in *L'insistance des possibles* (2017), speculative

thought cannot and must not become a kind of 'neutral collection' of the multiplicity of possibilities. Nor should they be preserved indiscriminately like endangered species. Along with the philosopher Whitehead, Stengers and Debaïse defend the importance of taking these possibilities 'into account', in the sense of refusing the right to disqualify some of them a priori.

If the phrase "There is no alternative" perfectly embodies the violence of the threat of disqualification of multiple possibilities, speculative thinking constitutes a necessary antidote, a gentle and abundant insurrection, against the dictatorship of the probable. However, this insurrection is not without risks: when we propel ourselves towards future un/determined worlds, we always do so from a situation that 'holds' us and commits us. In the same way, as we continue our explorations of Brussels, we want to do so with and from the urgencies and demands at work in our city today.

For the only way to face the future in a world in ruins is to combine the speculative, sensitive to the insistence of the possible, with the pragmatic, as the art of response-ability. For the future of specXcraft, this publication is therefore a kind of bottle that we are throwing into the sea to sound out desires and needs, in order to bring together the otherwise possible with the desirable.



postface

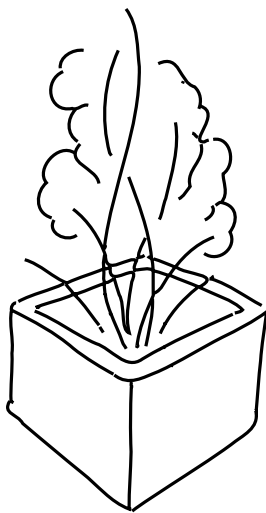
2025. Following the promising initial experiments of the specXcraft project, in February this year the doors of the *Laboratory of Otherwise Possible Futures* officially opened in Brussels. In the laboratory, groups of human beings, citizens and activists, proposing alternatives to the capitalisto-fascisto-masculinisto-techno-growth discourse, are invited to come and try their hand at an unusual method. Sheltered from any technological simulations, they are given time and space to explore together the futures that are germinating in the struggles and ideals they are concerned with. They are invited to water these seeds of imagination with drops of SF of different compositions, and to give them shape by playing with materials and space. There, one cultivates hope that one day, from all these seeds, a new landscape of possible futures will grow, more diversified, more lush and more organic. Little by little, invented and fabricated futures join their fellows in the *Archives of Otherwise Possible Futures*, compiled in a place open to all but still kept secret. In this reservoir of stories and prototypes, we can draw on a myriad of ideas to build new stories and prototypes, develop actions and strategies to stir things up, feed with inspiration and dreams to find the strength to continue fighting for what matters to us.

2027. As the months and years go by, the *Laboratory of Otherwise Possible Futures* slowly gains momentum. Little by little, it has become a key meeting place for people looking for alternative futures. Collectives and groups of residents are meeting up and constructing new, radical but ambivalent narratives that strengthen them and create ever-stronger alliances. The stories and objects of possible alternative futures are multiplying and intersecting, and their increasingly strong links with non-humans are beginning to open up bridges between the species living in Brussels. The alternative imaginaries thus created are beginning to flourish in various parts

of Brussels and to appeal to the general public, leaving their mark on the public space in the form of installations, murals and prototypes.

2029. New projects and collectives are emerging from these alliances, with new visions based on what brings them together (although never without tensions and dissensions). Examples include the *Collective pour le Droit au Logement des Mamans et des Écureuils*, the *Maison de quartier naturelle Josaphat*, and the *Décolonisons nos Saisons* group. The Archives are growing and multiplying, and it is becoming increasingly rare to think of a future project without referring to them. These stories, initiatives and other creations are beginning to seriously alter the ideas of the future commonly put forward by the Region's spheres of power. UNESCO has set up a special commission to study the phenomenon. The WTO is preparing a legal action for breach of the general resignation.

2032. In the streets of Brussels, if you listen carefully, you can hear people, pigeons and dandelions whispering, spreading the rumours of recent weeks. For some, it's a question of integrating a futuristic *Laboratory of Multiple Alternatives* into current decision-making procedures. This would be done through a new device for empathic infusion and articulation of the multiplicity of zones of importance (human and non-human) that has been developed by the co-creative effluvia of specXcraft. But for the rest of us, it could be that, in the face of all the new narratives that are already abounding, this system will soon be obsolete, and it will already be time to build a new one...



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credits

We, the specXcraft co-researchers

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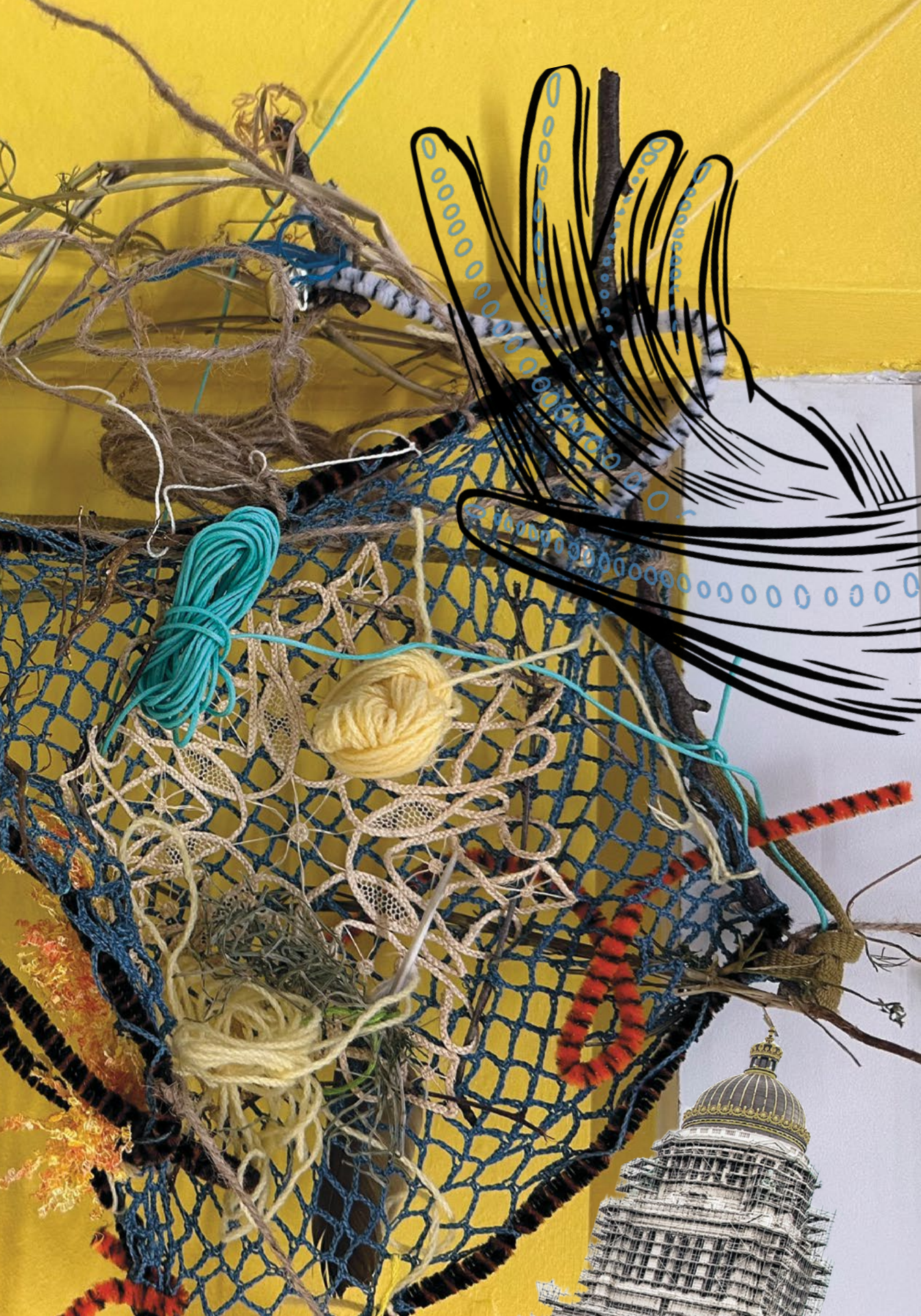
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specXcraft

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