HDSA2020
The Underdistanced
In these first months of the pandemic, many have practiced social distancing, but others could not do so. Those without a home, a stable job, legal protections, documents or access to digital technologies have fewer chances to protect themselves against contagion. We call them "underdistanced and undernetworked," as they have more difficulties to isolate themselves physically and to access networks of care. We propose this workshop as we believe that the social and political implications of being underdistanced and undernetworked risk to remain in the background in this time of crisis. Considering the many tech-driven solutions mentioned by the media (smart bracelets, tracing apps, drones…), we wonder what life the "new normal" will offer to those with less access to online/offline care networks. With a speculative making approach, we want to materialize fictional but plausible objects that the underdistanced might self-build to navigate the "1,5 m society" to take care of themselves.

We are concerned that the "new normal" of Covid will push some people even more to the margins. We aim to explore the social, cultural, and political effects on disadvantaged people of the technological solutions proposed to mitigate the pandemic, and we want to do it by creating speculative objects set in July 2021. To do so, we will take a critical look at the current Covid solutionist craze, we will extrapolate which technologies might be deployed in the next year, and we will speculate about which hacks might be necessary for the underdistanced & undernetworked. We will materialize them into speculative artifacts with the objective of understanding better how it would feel to be marginalized in a (probable?) scenario where Covid-19 is dealt with through top-down tech-driven solutions. Finally, we will loop back to the present and reflect on the ethical takeaways of our speculative experiments: what could be designed and implemented now to make the pandemic response more inclusive?

Hackers and Designers Summer Academy

The Underdistanced and the Undernetworked
Workshop script – draft 1

General structure
There is one moment of contact per day between the workshop organizers and the participants, between 10am and 11am Amsterdam time. This will take place through Jitsi and will be video recorded & shared with participants. During that hour, the organizers will:
- 10:00 – 10:30: recap of the previous day, check in about everyone's progress.
- 10:30 – 11:00: explanation of the day's activities.

Participants who cannot work synchronously with us due to different time zones will have access to all the recordings of the explanations and can work individually at their own pace. We will be available via email for further clarifications.

Monday: Exploration and narratives

Topics of the day
- Who are we, what do we want to achieve?
- What are first-person speculative methodologies?
- In the context of Covid-19, who are the Undernetworked & Underdistanced?
- What *top-down solutionist solutions™* have been proposed so far?

Activities

Morning
Kick off *(shared activity)* "HDSA Kick-off: Sustainable Internet Talk" Online seminar / Duration TBD.

10am Amsterdam time: workshop kick-off on Jitsi.

Task 1
Title: Blogging the pandemic
Duration: 2 hours.
Type: individual work, with occasional check-ins with whole team.
Objective: produce a first scan of how Covid has been represented online, with special attention to diary-like texts, such as blogs. With this task, we want to collect a series of texts that, in your opinion, are noteworthy and give a general impression of the "mood" of the pandemic. Who are the actors writing about Covid? How do they talk? What concerns do they raise? Are there "things" (intended broadly, such as artifacts, services, activities...) that seem to appear frequently?
Instructions: working individually, search, read, annotate, and share. The texts, or videos, or pictures that you select don't necessarily need to be "the best," but they should represent a point of view that you find personally interesting. The group self-manages how & when to check-in.

Deliverables: each participant produces a curated selection of links, with annotations and comments. All lists are finally condensed in a document shared with the whole team

Task 2
Title: Things of Covid-19
Duration: 2 hours.
Type: work in small groups or individually. Results are presented to the whole team.
Objective: dive deeper in the media representation of Covid-19, and focus on the things that have been presented (often with lots of emphasis & media fanfare) as 'solutions' to this very complex issue. We are particularly interested in what we may call ironically *top-down solutionist solutions™,* which often are high-tech artifacts that are heavily promoted by their vendor as almost-miraculous. Another effective way to spot *solutionist solutions™* is that they often feel rushed to implementation without much field-testing, and often fail miserably in real-world scenarios. *Solutionist solutions™* tend to paint their users in very broad strokes, often relying of large generalizations. Some examples of *solutionist solutions™* could be https://www.wearable-technologies.com/2020/04/proxxi-launches-halo-wearable-wristband-to-maintain-social-distance-at-work-during-covid-19-pandemic/ or https://www.businessinsider.com/draganfly-pandemic-drone-will-detect-people-infected-with-coronavirus-2020-4
Instructions: search, read, annotate, and share. This task may be completed in small groups, or individually. The texts, or videos, or pictures that you select don't necessarily need to be "the best," but they should represent a point of view that you find personally interesting. The group self-manages how & when to check-in.
Deliverables: each participant (or small group) produces a curated selection of links, with annotations and comments. All lists are finally condensed in a document shared with the whole team

Task 3
Title: Who's missing?
Duration: 1 hour
Type: plenary discussion. The group might want to select a moderator to keep the process on track.
Objective: probably, tasks 1 and 2 have identified certain stakeholders, while other people affected by Covid have remained invisible. Among those who are likely missing, there is a category that we call "the Underdistanced and the Undernetworked". They are those who simply *cannot* observe the social distancing rules for many reasons – perhaps they can't afford it, perhaps they don't know about them, or perhaps... They are also those who lack the resources (monetary, cultural, social, technological...) to isolate effectively.
Instructions: each participant briefly presents the texts that s/he examined during the day.
Deliverables: The team note & discusses which actors are missing – the observations are collected in a synthetized table. The team also elaborates a brief text describing who, in their opinion, are the relevant groups of Underdistanced/Undernetworked that will be considered (and designed for) in the rest of this workshop.

Output
- A collection of notable top-down 'solutions' for Covid that have been featured in the media
- A reflection on the intended users of the above-mentioned 'solutions'
- An open list of social categories that are Undernetworked & Underdistanced

Tuesday: Speculative artifacts

Topic of the day
- Creating a speculative scenario for July 2021, in the third wave of Covid-19
- Examining the social consequences of the *solutionist solutions™* for the Underdistanced

Imagine how a solutionist artifact may be reappropriated, subverted, hacked, reused, tinkered with… by the Underdistanced

Activities

Morning

10am Amsterdam time: group reflections and instructions on Jitsi

Task 4
Title: It's July 2021, and not all is well
Duration: 1 hour, timeboxed (important! Discussions like this tend to get out of hand)
Type: plenary discussion. The group might want to select a moderator to keep the process on track.
Objective: this task has two main objectives. The team outlines a scenario for July 2021 in which Covid has not been cured and is still wreaking havoc. The team also picks 3-5 of the most "interesting" (or most problematic, or more debatable, or plainly most stupid) *solutionist solutions™* that fit the proposed scenario.
Instructions: find someone who will take notes. Set a timer to 5 minutes. Start it. The youngest person in the team starts with a "what if" sentence (for example: "what if all borders remain closed..."). Other participants can add to the sentence with a logical consequence that doesn't contradict the previous sentence (for example: "...then classes for international students will be only online...). The chain continues until the timer rings, or until the team runs out of ideas. When the timer rings, someone else starts a new scenario.
When there are 15 minutes remaining to the end of the task, the team decides on the most promising scenarios, and on which *solutionist solutions™* would fit those scenarios.
Deliverables: a shared document with the scenarios, and a bullet-point list of the technologies that fit in them.

Task 5
Title: Smash ~~capitalism~~ solutionism
Duration: 1 hour
Type: work in small groups of 3-4 people

Objective: for (some of) the scenarios outlined in Task 4, imagine if and how an underdistanced/undernetworked person might make use of the *solutionist solutions™* that you identified. If s/he can't (or doesn't want to, or doesn't understand how to, or can't afford to, or...), imagine how s/he might adapt them to his/her needs.

Instructions: This is like a role-play exercise: put yourselves in the shoes of one of the underdistanced that you identified before and situate yourselves in one of the scenarios that you created. Then, imagine encountering one of the *solutionist solutions™*. How would a clever & resourceful underdistanced person deal with it? Would s/he ignore it? Or adapt it to his/her needs? How? To describe your ideas, you might write short texts, or you could sketch and annotate.

Deliverables: Don't go too much in depth, the objective here is to produce as many rough concepts as you can. In one hour, we would expect at least 20-30 tiny concepts per person. Examples could be: "Anti-drone slingshot. With a good aim and a decent-sized rock, you can take out those pesky observer drones" or "Tinfoil pouch. An insulating pocket that blocks the bluetooth radio signal for contact-tracing".

Afternoon

Task 6
Title: Make it so
Duration: at least 3 hours
Type: divide in small groups, then sub-tasks are divided for every small group
Objective: each small group picks between 1 and 3 concepts developed in Task 5. (It's possible also to pick concepts imagined by somebody else!) Then, the team produces a hi-fi mockup of the selected object. It is fundamental that the object is as realistic and complete as possible.
Instructions: Pick 1-3 concepts. Materialize them as realistically as possible.
Deliverables: Every bit of the object is important. If the label has a barcode and a phone number, I want to know if the phone number is toll-free or not. If the object is dirty and full of graffiti, I want to know what the graffiti says. If the object has a warranty, I want to read it. If it displays a weird error message because it's been tinkered with, I want to read it. Examples: https://www.masterdigitaldesign.com/case/powerpack, http://blog.nearfuturelaboratory.com/2019/10/21/a-map-of-geneva-for-autonomous-vehicles/, http://qsg.nearfuturelaboratory.com/

Output
- A scenario for July 2021
- A collection of speculative solutionist artifacts for 2021
- A collection of ways in which the Underdistanced might tinker with those artifacts to make them relevant for them
- High-fidelity representations of the hacked artifacts

Wednesday: The artifact in context

Topic of the day
- Envision the Underdistanced personal experience through first-person narrative experiments

Gather insights on "how does it feel" to interact with the speculative artifacts

10am Amsterdam time: group reflection and instructions on Jitsi.

Task 7
Title: It was a dark and stormy night...
Duration: 1 hour
Type: Individual work
Objective: This is a writing exercise that we will use as a form of design research. The aim is to use first-person diary-like texts to get insights into the experience of interacting with technology.
Instructions: you must write two texts. The first one is autobiographic and is a precise description of about ten minutes of your life this morning. For example, you can describe the time between waking up and leaving the apartment. Or how you set up your desk and computer before joining this workshop this morning. I don't want only a list of actions, but I am especially interested into "how did things felt like". For example, *"I walked down the stairs to the metro station, the air felt cooler, and as I approached the gateway I fumbled with my wallet. Where is my card? I took out a bunch of cards and it took a moment to recognize the metro card. I felt worried because I feared dropping my bank card on the ground. The man behind me grunted impatiently..."*
Then, I want you to transpose the same bit of narrative in the 2021 scenario that you developed in Tasks 4-5-6. The protagonist isn't you anymore, but you'll write from his/her point of view. If you described taking the metro in the first text, write about the same thing also for 2021 but try to bring to the forefront the differences with our reality. Is your protagonist feeling safe or anxious? Does s/he use something that isn't common today?
You have 1 hour in total, if you see that you have more time available, you can do these optional points:
A) rework the two texts adding even more descriptions of feelings, thoughts, sensations, opinions...
B) write other 2 texts about another daily activity
Deliverables: the narratives are collected in a shared document.

Task 8
Title: The devil is in the details
Duration: 1 hour
Type: work in small groups
Objective: quickly examine the 2021 narratives that have been written by the members of the small group. Either pick one or combine some into one. Then, imagine how could your protagonist interact with the hacked speculative artifacts that you imagined in Task 6, and/or with the users of those artifacts.
Instructions: This is like a role-playing exercise, put yourselves in the shoes of your protagonist, and imagine how s/he would interact with the artifacts you have imagined. What

would s/he think? What would s/he feel? I'm looking for a level of detail in the description of feelings/experience/opinions/thoughts that is like what you achieved in Task 7.

Deliverables: the narratives are collected in a shared document. Optional: it's not compulsory to have written narratives – also sketches, comics, annotated pictures... could be used to tell your story.

Afternoon

This afternoon, you can choose one or two tasks, depending on what you want/can do (also considering the various lockdown restrictions in place in various cities).

Task 9a
Title: What would the neighbors think?!?
Duration: 1 hour
Type: individual work
Objective: Produce additional narratives set in 2021, detailing other perspectives on your protagonist and his/her interaction with the speculative artifact (as described in Task 8)
Instructions: Revisit the text you wrote in Task 8, also referring to the artifacts you imagined in Tasks 4-5-6. Choose a different point of view: a neighbor who sees the protagonist, the policeman piloting a drone looking at the protagonist, the homeless person loitering on the sidewalk... Write a text detailing the same minutes described in Task 8 and focus on the fact that your protagonist is now another person who feels/thinks/experiences things quite differently.
Deliverables: the narratives are collected in a shared document.

Task 9b
Title: The Thing From The Future
Duration: at least 3 hours, but possibly even more
Type: individual or group work, in public spaces (be careful!)
Objective: gather insights from your own experience of interacting with the speculative artifact (Task 6) in public and/or from spontaneous reactions of passersby seeing the artifact.
Instructions: this is an activity inspired by a methodology called "speculative enactment," and it requires that you take the object (Task 6) with you and live with it in public. Notice what you think/feel as you are with the artifact. Notice how people react. Try to initiate conversations about the artifact. **ATTENTION:** of course, there are at least two crucial points to keep in mind – be safe (don't take risks related to Covid, and to your personal safety & surroundings), and don't frighten/alarm people.
Deliverables: a diary-like description of your experience. Pictures/video taken by a second participant would also be very precious.

Output
- A collection of narrative pieces set in 2021, addressing the experience of being Underdistanced/Undernetworked

Thursday: Critical / political consequences

- Explore the 2021 social/political climate
- Explore how would society respond to the speculative artifacts/hacks
    - How would it fit existing infrastructures?
    - How would it fit into rules, regulations, laws?
    - How would it intersect with economic concerns?
    - How would politics respond?
    - How would the media report on this?

Activities

Morning

10am Amsterdam time: group reflections and instructions on Jitsi

Task 10
Title: Imagining the socio-political climate of 2021 and responses to the artifact
Duration: 2 hours
Type: Discussions and speculation done in small groups
Objective: gain a broader understanding of the artifact as it might be situated in the socio-political climate of 2021 and the institutional, political, commercial responses it could generate.
Instructions: Meet in small groups and discuss and take collective notes. Starting from the various points of view sketched in the narrative scenarios, discuss the socio-political climate broadly. What has changed in politics from today and who is in charge? What kind of regulations relating to Covid-19 are in place? Which commercial entities will have gained in influence? What will be the economic reality for people? What kind of resources and infrastructures does your artifact rely on, and how will they have changed? Then imagine how society responds to the speculative artifacts. Zoom in on particular entities that are affected by or have something particular to say about the artifact. Will there be a commercialized version of your artifact offering personalization? Will there be new regulations against your artifact, or a Public Service Announcement warning against the (supposed) dangers of its use? Will some resources become scarce or more expensive, how will their availability change?
Deliverables: An updated version of your July 2021 scenario including the wider socio-political context and responses to your artifact from institutions, politics, and corporations.

Afternoon
Task 11
Title: The headlines and the ads
Duration: 3 hours
Type: Design work in small groups
Objective: By creating a collections of fictional media products discussing the speculative artifact and its users, tease out how society understands them.
Instructions: Select the most interesting responses from your updated scenario. In your group, brainstorm in detail what should be included in these responses and what they should look / sound / feel like. For example, which company is behind a fake ad, how much does the product cost, is there a subscription model, and are there different styles or options? Divide

the work or collectively design / write several of these media products (press reviews, fictional blogs, fictional social media posts, fake ads, etc).
Deliverables: A collection of fictional media products from 2021

Friday: Reflection on the present-day

Topic of the day
- We leave the 2021 scenario and return to the present day
- What are the lessons that we learned through this speculative exercise?
- What recommendations can we offer to designers, activists, concerned people, policymakers?

Ultimately, who are the Underdistanced and the Undernetworked, and how should society relate to them?

Activities

Morning

10am Amsterdam time: group reflections and instructions on Jitsi

Task 12
Title: Sync & reflect
Duration: 2 hours
Type: plenary discussion. The group might want to select a moderator to keep the process on track.
Objective: the first objective of this task is to bring every participant on the same page with respect to the various individual activities. Everyone presents a synthesis of what they did, create, and write in the previous days. The second objective is to reflect on what the fictional scenarios teach us about our present social, cultural and political situation.
Instructions: Select a moderator and a timekeeper (keep at least 45-60 minutes for discussion and reflection, use the rest for sync & updates). Divide the "updates" time fairly among all participants. Everyone briefly tells what they did in the previous days.
Use a virtual post-it app (e.g., Miro, or other mind-mapping software) to identify recurring themes in the various scenarios & narratives. The moderator asks to all participants which "lessons learned" they can derive from the experience so far.
Deliverables: a collective mind-map.

Afternoon
Task 14
Title: Matters of concern
Duration: 1,5 hours
Type: discussion in small groups
Objective: synthesize the general update & mind-map (Task 13) in a list of worries, recommendations, insights for designers, concerns for politically engaged people...
Instructions: With this task, we "exit from" the 2021 scenario and we return to the present day. Looking critically to what we have done so far, which are the most urgent matters of

concern that can we identify? How do we make sure that we (don't) arrive in the situation hypothesized in the 2021 scenario? How to make the Underdistanced & Undernetworked more visible and more central in the way we plan for the pandemic?

Deliverables: a list of agenda points for political action, for protest, for hacktivism, for designing for social good...

Task 15

Title: I've seen the future. Now what?

Duration: 1,5 hours

Type: plenary discussion. The group might want to select a moderator to keep the process on track.

Objective: plan the next steps. Dissemination, further design. In this week we imagined speculative technologies – can we / should we make them real?

Instructions: discuss the main takeaways of this workshop and decide how to make them accessible/understandable/useful for others. Consider publishing the documentation, consider writing a manifesto, or a list of points of concern, or a call for political action, or... Consider writing an instructable to enable people to build whatever your ideated.

Deliverables: a plan for the next steps, including organizing and publishing your documentation.

Output

- A conclusive reflection on the week
- One or more shareable outputs, such as manifestos, lists of concerns, lists of opportunity for design/activism/intervention