

# Experiential futures: Show and tell

**Article** *in* Economist (London, England: 1843) · November 2015

---

CITATIONS

2

**1 author:**



**Stuart Candy**

Carnegie Mellon University

**28** PUBLICATIONS **96** CITATIONS

[SEE PROFILE](#)

## Experiential futures

# Show and tell

Stuart Candy *TORONTO*

### Fly me to tomorrow

**W**ithin a generation, those unable to afford time outside Toronto's dense urban environment will resort to Nature Deficit Disorder Clinics, where they will get essential dietary supplements along with simulated rainforests and birdsong.

In Singapore, a popular museum exhibition will chart the startling social transformations over the previous few decades in romance, sex and marriage, including the introduction of state-subsidised love robots to maintain well-being across the population.

Mexico City will be subject to severe flooding, and a peer-to-peer emergency service called Operación Axolotl will emerge as citizens help meet each other's basic needs.

By 2044, young people in North Carolina will face a critical choice at the age of 18: whether to let life's slings and arrows take their natural course, or to accept the wonders of modern medical technology and become, in effect, immortal.

How can anyone possibly claim to predict all this,

## We can design situations that help us better understand possible futures by visiting them

you may ask? Actually I'm not predicting that these things will happen—even though I witnessed them all first-hand.

As an experiential futurist my job is to create, and to help others create, transmedia situations where such possibilities can be thought, felt and used to make better decisions. In this practice, all media are fair game for bringing futures to life, from interactive performances to physical artifacts, from video to food: whatever enlivens a future scenario as a potential reality-in-waiting.

If Andy Clark, a cognitive scientist at the Univer-



sity of Edinburgh, is right, thought isn't confined to the boundaries of our skulls. We think with our environments. The map or smartphone in your pocket is a deliberate extension of your thought processes.

We can design situations that help us understand possible futures by visiting them. How much more powerful this is than the white papers and slideshows that are the typical focus of future-gazing in boardrooms and at UN summits.

Driven by the irrepressible human urge to bring our inner worlds to life, the culture of public imagination is set to make a leap: in coming years we can expect to see more and more companies, governments, advocacy organisations and communities creating and sharing experiential futures. The sooner we learn to use and democratise collective imagination to dramatise our alternatives, the more powerful will be our capacity to shape change towards just and worthwhile ends. ■

**Stuart Candy:** director of the Situation Lab and assistant professor of strategic foresight and innovation at OCAD University in Toronto, and fellow of the Long Now Foundation