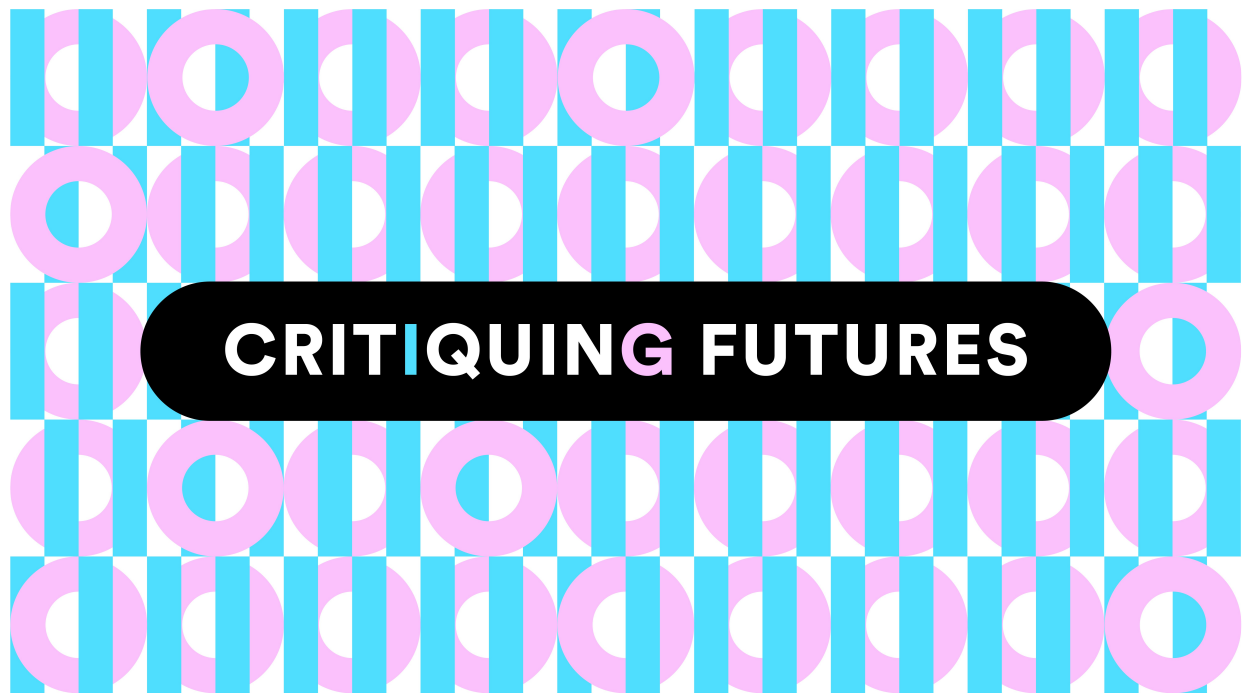# SUPERRR Methods

An approach to reflect on biases in futures scenarios and ideas

"Upon her arrival at the Robotic Center, Hilde is warmly greeted by a silvery, welcoming voice. It informs her of her eligibility for a humanoid care robot due to her dementia and as a resident of Togedera. Guided through the grand metal gates into a courtyard, she encounters Angela, a sleek humanoid robot. Adorned with emerald blue eyes and subtle pink lips, Angela gracefully introduces herself and, with a gentle demeanor, explains how the Center will customize a personal assistant, tailored specifically to Hilde's care needs. It will be capable of offering thoughtful care and making considered decisions on her behalf, all while being connected to the vast expanse of the cloud..."

This is a short excerpt from one of the future scenarios we used during our workshop at re:publica 23 last year. Depicting a seamless and glossy future, it seems like something to strive for and reminds us of the public images of robots and convenience technology so often painted by dominant actors in the field. And it sounds nice, right?

We can probably say that most developing such scenarios or paving the paths towards them seek to prepare the ground for more equitable futures. Be it that patients diagnosed with dementia can live in a self-determined way, not having to be locked up in a care home as described in the above scenario. Or that clever robots support us in our daily tasks, supposedly freeing up time for us to do more things we actually like doing. But even with the best intentions, it can be very challenging to create those equitable futures without reproducing the same discriminatory patterns that we actually want to change.

In the above example, questions arise like "Who is this town made for, and who might be excluded from it?". Receiving a free humanoid care robot seems to presuppose quite a number of privileges. Another question one could ask is, "Do dementia patients actually have a say in

the development of these futures? Would they want to be cared for by a robot rather than a human being? Who has the power to decide?"

We are often so caught up in the status quo that we hardly notice how it seeps into our future scenarios and ideas. Moreover, each of us brings along our own (unconscious) biases, which are even more challenging to tackle. We encounter these issues regularly during our work at [SUPERRR Lab](#). Trying to incorporate intersectional feminist and decolonial perspectives into it, Feven Keleta and Quincey Stumptner asked themselves: how can such perspectives be built into futures thinking to dismantle our biases and challenge the status quo?

Answering this question is definitely a work in progress. It is a process of constant iteration and learning. So far, Feven's and Quincey's approach has revolved a lot around creating space for reflection and critical questioning. It builds on the fantastic work of many activists, intellectuals, researchers and others who have pioneered intersectional and decolonial perspectives, like the Combahee River Collective or Frantz Fanon (for more, see the appendix at the bottom). It is an attempt to apply these perspectives to futures practices to create room for critical reflection.

Critical Futures Interrogation

The following questions mean to help practitioners and others dealing with futures to interrogate futures ideas, scenarios and thoughts from intersectional and decolonial perspectives. By critically questioning our futures, we can start to reflect on how different kinds of discrimination might be present in such scenarios or ideas. The goal is to start a reflection process about how status quo thinking and embedded, e.g. personal biases, might shape our visions of futures. Ideally, the interrogation produces a setting where these can be addressed and challenged, leading to a better understanding of the complex and interconnected factors that shape our present perspectives and visions of futures.

It is important to note that the questions do not represent the complete body of intersectional and decolonial theory. Moreover, they are not meant to be used as a token or relieve users of the responsibility to generate a better understanding of both concepts. Instead, we encourage everyone using the questions to regard them as a starting point to dig deeper, to further their understanding of both concepts and to change their perspectives on inequalities in our societies and how to approach them (for further reading, see the appendix).

We are always looking for feedback on our methods and work. If you have feedback or questions, please do get in touch with quincey@superrr.net

Questions

Status Quo

- How is your future scenario different from today's status quo?

- What types of societal patterns does your future reproduce that might discriminate against different types of groups/entities/beings?

- Is your future scenario already a reality for some? (Especially relevant when building dystopian scenarios.)

o   If yes, how does this change your perspective on privilege? And what does a futures scenario look like where this existing reality is changed (to the better)?

Power

- Who holds power in your future, and how is it exercised?

- How does the distribution of power affect groups of minorities?

  o   Can you make out any adverse effects it might have on specific groups/entities/beings? If yes, what are these?

- How do people affected by your scenario shape this common future?

  o   Do they have a voice and the ability to shape this future? If not, what is the reason?

- How do you dismantle or reproduce (historical) power imbalances in your scenario that elevate some over others (e.g. one nation over the other or one gender over another)?

  o   Is this what you intended?

- How does your scenario deal with exploitative approaches to nature, knowledge, culture or human beings?

  o   If it is built on such models of economy or politics, think about if this is what you explicitly chose to reproduce or if you intended to change this model in your scenario.

- Does your future scenario serve a specific interest? If yes, name it and make it explicit.

- How does your scenario dismantle or reproduce (neo-)colonial continuities?

Exclusion

- For whom is your future scenario built (e.g. geography, language, ability, origin, education, class, gender, race, age, sexual orientation, religion), and for whom is it not built? Is that what you intended?

- How does this scenario affect different groups/entities/beings in society?

  o   Can you identify adverse effects it might have on specific groups/entities/beings, and what are these?

- How does your future leave room for other, diverging or alternative futures?

- Does your scenario describe a future that is supposed to be "universal" or "global" in scope?

  o   If yes, does this include neglecting the existence of other cultures, approaches, and lifestyles, and how can you justify its universal claim?

- How do you ensure that everyone affected by your scenario also has a say in creating this future?

<u>Values</u>

- What assumptions and values underpin your future scenario?

    o Are these the assumptions and values you intended to use?

- What past and present-day narratives influence your image(s) of the future(s)?

    o Do you want these influences to be part of your future?

- Are you using any language(s), images, metaphors or assumptions in your scenario that claim to be "neutral" or "realistic"?

    o If yes, which are these? Where do they come from, and might they imply a specific worldview beneath their "neutrality"?

- What type of language(s) are you using to describe your future?

    o Does this language hinder you from describing something new? Does this language keep you locked in the present?

    o If yes, what would be a different way/different words to describe your future?

Appendix

Decoloniality

- "The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options"; Walter D. Mignolo 2011.

- "Decolonizing Futures: Exploring Storytelling as a Tool for Inclusion in Foresight"; Pupul Bisht 2017, p. 5.

- "Decoloniality", Wikipedia overview.

- "The Wretched of the Earth"; Frantz Fanon 1963, p. 36.

- "Frantz Fanon", Tracey Nicholls 2024.

- "Decolonizing Methodologies in Qualitative Research: Creating Spaces for Transformative Praxis"; Thambinathan, Kinsella 2021, p. 2-3.

- "Cheat Sheet for a Non- (or Less-) Colonialist Speculative Design", Luiza Prado, Pedro Oliveira 2014.

- "Process of Decolonization"; Poka Laenui 2006.

Intersectionality

- "The Combahee River Collective Statement," The Combahee River Collective 1977.

- "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics"; Kimberle Crenshaw 1989.

- "She Coined the Term Intersectionality 30 years Ago. Here's what it means to her today."; Katy Steinmetz 2020.

- "Feminism is for everybody"; bell hooks 2000.

- "Intersectionality, Key Concepts"; Patricia Hill Collins, Sirma Bilge 2020.