

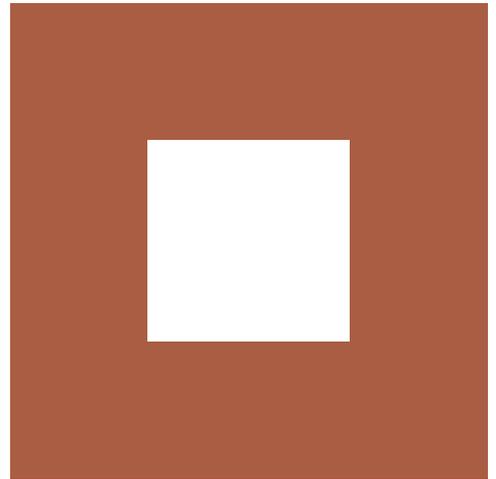
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Variable future
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Alexandra Daisy Ginsberg
& Sascha Pohflepp
Félix Luque
Àlex Nogué
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BÒLIT-LARAMBLA, DAESPAT
AND BÒLIT-SANTNICOLAU
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Where is the future before it is ensnared by the present?

ROSA PERA

Throughout history people have striven to imagine what the future would be like and have created a wealth of visions in the fields of [architecture](#), film and literature that reveal different ways of seeing and living: from Piranesi and Bouleé's 18th-century utopian ideals and Méliès' *Le Voyage dans la Lune* (1902) to stories like Philip K Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968) and Arthur C Clarke's *The Sentinel* (1948) and their film adaptations [1], [Archigram's Plug-in City](#) (1964) and [Buckminster Fuller's Tetrahedral City](#) (1965), we can clearly see the icons of the future dreamt of at the time. It certainly wouldn't be easy to piece them all together, and working out where there's friction or overlap would surely be just as fascinating as letting yourself be carried away by each and every one of the stories that make up the world of science fiction. To do so means undertaking a journey to some of the inveterate obsessions of the human condition, such as fear of the unknown and, therefore, its very paradigm: the future.

Journeys to the future, forays into the past, interstellar strolls or flights of fancy – one of the features that fantastical visions of the future all have in common is the experience of time. Perhaps analysing how this experience has evolved and noting the changes in its cadence might give us the key to facing a near future, a future that has been sketched out time and time again to the point that these outlines start to look disturbingly more and more like reality. In fact the slightest confirmation can be more shocking than all the tales of the future of the past put together.

Recent years have seen several premonitions of the future based mainly on the evolution of technology and catastrophes, such as the Wachowski brothers' *Matrix* series (1999-2003) and other films such as Winterbottom's *Code 46* (2003) and Alfonso Cuarón's dystopian *Children of Men* (2006), which explore age-old existential concerns about survival. Here more than ever, these visions stress their connection to philosophy, and make repeated allusions to myths (Oedipus in *Code 46* and Prometheus in *Blade Runner*) or to philosophical works linked to these tales, as argued by William Irwin [2], to use the same examples. This trend reaches its peak in *Lost*, the internationally successful television series designed and [subsequently extensively analysed under the spotlight of philosophy and myths](#) [3].

In the present, we sometimes hear reflections that echo futurities of the recent past. On the one hand, nostalgic tales that recall fantasy utopias that, who knows, might still be within reach. On the other hand, in the realm of dystopia,

proof of the failed futurist models of the past, those that foresaw societies founded and organised by an alternative power, either from politics or mysticism, but seldom from a free, emancipated society.

But time seems to be running out. This calm fascination is being replaced by pressing needs. If in the past the construction of futurist hypotheses was linked to the nonchalant temptation of the yearned-for future, today it is a question of survival. Thinking about the future means rethinking the present. And if we do so from a scientific perspective, we might well reach conclusions previously only foreshadowed by the fantasy of science fiction. According to astrophysicist [Martin Rees](#), there is a 50:50 chance that this could be humanity's last century. If the universe is pictured as a snake eating its own tail, in an infinite cycle between the biggest and the smallest, in which human beings are a complex turning point, Rees gives two possible outcomes: on the one hand, the destruction of the planet by fatal use of technology, either through misuse of the means (energy or natural raw materials) or a massive terrorist attack; on the other hand, the colonisation of other planets. Following his argument, humans have always started from the belief that we belong to a sole universe, when it could well be – as Rees firmly believes is the case – that our universe is merely an island in an archipelago of infinite universes [4].

These conclusions cannot help but bring to mind [Douglas Adams' The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy](#), in which a hapless man is evicted from his house one Thursday and forced to travel through space with an old friend, who turns out to be an alien who was just passing by the Earth following the recommendations of "The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy". Science's vision of reality comes pretty close to science fiction's: according to Rees, Adams' *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* could be read as a key manual to be taken somewhat less lightly. This guide was described in 1979 by its author as "a device that looks rather like a largish electronic calculator. It has about a hundred tiny flat press buttons and a screen about four inches square on which any one of a million 'pages' could be summoned at a moment's notice. [...] If it were printed in normal book form, an interstellar hitchhiker would require several inconveniently large buildings to carry it around in" [5]. A smartphone *avant la lettre*.

In addition to Rees, many anxious scientists and intellectuals are calling for attention to be focused on a future that is looking less and less uncertain and far off than it used to. They argue that we urgently need to slow down and work intelligently towards more sustainable attitudes if we want to keep alive the idea of the future as something distant and unreachable. Otherwise, they warn, the present could be devoured by the future in a definitive attack. It is time for survival, time to design a world that can accommodate the future. And it is in the fields of thought, design and creation

where we need to work hardest to right our course towards the coordinates where this is possible.

Now, when the liquid 21st century has thinned out many past limits, science fiction is no longer a separate fantasy world, philosophy no longer a hermetic field for speculation, and design no longer a practice centred solely on materials, the artists presenting their work in “Variable Future” aren’t concerned with imagining possible or impossible futures. Their pieces simply hint, and subtly focus attention on prolonged reflection on the future condition, with oblique references to science fiction, philosophy or synthetic biology and artificial intelligence. [Alexandra Daisy Ginsberg and Sascha Pohflepp](#) (Cologne, 1978), [Félix Luque](#) (Oviedo, Spain, 1976) and [Alex Nogué](#) (Hostalets d'en Bas, Spain, 1953) are creators with different backgrounds from different generations who work with sometimes diametrically opposed languages: minimal technology (lead pencils and water), sophisticated computer programs that lead to complex interactive systems, nineteenth-century illustration and cutting-edge design. All in all, thought-provoking pieces on uncertainty and immutability.

Alexandra Daisy Ginsberg & Sascha Pohflepp, *Growth Assembly* (2009)



Félix Luque, *Chapter I: The Discovery* (2009)
Alex Nogué, *Codi de subsistència* (2010)



In line with some of the most innovative ideas on how to rethink the present, such as those espoused by researchers like architect [William McDonough](#) and chemist [Michael Braungart](#), Ginsberg and Pohflepp are championing sustainable environmental design. Although they use evocative symbolic representations, they call for urgent thought on survival strategies based on our relationship with nature using design, science and creation. And it is no surprise that we can find many points in common with ideas such as the “industrial re-evolution” set out in the superb essay *Cradle to Cradle*: “Natural systems take from their environment, but they also give something back. The cherry tree drops its blossoms and leaves while it cycles water and makes oxygen; the ant community redistributes the nutrients throughout the soil. We can follow their cue to create a more inspiring engagement – a partnership – with nature. We can build factories whose products and by-products nourish the ecosystem with biodegradable material and recirculate technical materials instead of dumping, burning, or burying them. We can design systems that regulate themselves. Instead of using nature as a mere tool for human purposes, we can strive to become tools of nature who serve its agenda too. We can celebrate the fecundity in the world, instead of perpetuating a way of thinking and making that eliminates it” [9].

The self-regulating modified plants, in symbiosis with industrial machinery in *Growth Assembly*, are another voice in favour of sustainably. However, in Ginsberg and Pohflepp’s evocative piece, the first reaction (as in Félix Luque’s work) is a strange feeling. It is likewise a both attractive and repellent piece that seems approachable since it is expressed in known languages – nineteenth-century illustration and scientific reports – but reveals strange, unfamiliar methodologies. Closer to myth than scientific rigour, Ginsberg and Pohflepp craft a strange atmosphere that stirs a certain unease towards nature and its systems.

Treating drawing as a methodology, graphite and water are the only materials used by artist [Àlex Nogué](#) in his specially created work *Codi de subsistència* (2010). Made up of a large drawing reflected in the surface of a liquid, this piece aims to pose a question in visual language by exploring codes to overcome contingency, to survive uncertainty, to survive life itself. In the body of a tree, the symbol of life – and therefore also of death – it gives a realist, immutable representation and a symmetrical, virtual, shaky, changing reading. In some way, what Nogué presents with stunning simplicity is a confrontation with the real-life ouroboros hinted at by Rees, the need for something “[to unify the biggest with the smallest](#)”. Nogué, though, makes a philosophical, existential plea. In silence. Because, if we accept the head-on confrontation on offer, we are invited to witness and take part in the death of the icon of nature in real time on a real-life scale, in an unstoppable process. Art as a transcendental practice, as Nogué reflects in his writing:

“We’re slowly realising that we’ve turned a way of being in the world into a profession. Harried by ridiculous challenges for which we have no outlet, we’ve turned questions into an answer, a desire to understand into a perversion, and art and life into an unsolvable equation. [...] Faced with the most spectacular scientific advances, faced with computerised communication, faced with medical research and practice that relieves so much suffering, faced with the opportunity to see for the first time the tiniest spaces of matter and hear the sounds of the first explosions and see the veils fall from certain mysteries, I draw a lime-tree branch. They did so too” [10].

We’re left in suspense, with the closing sequence from *2001: A Space Odyssey* in mind, recalling [Alan Kay’s](#) famous quip: “the best way to predict the future is to invent it”.

The underlined words in the text refer to Internet links giving further information on the subjects discussed, accessible via the online text at www.bolit.cat

1. Ridley Scott’s *Blade Runner* (1982) and Stanley Kubrick’s *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), respectively.
2. William Irwin, *The Matrix and Philosophy: Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, Peru, Open Court Publishing Company, 2002; William Irwin, *More Matrix and Philosophy: Revolutions and Reloaded Decoded*, Peru, Open Court Publishing Company, 2005.
3. Anthropologist Manuel Delgado has produced fascinating, in-depth work on the high-order mythological connections interiorised in the series.
4. Martin Rees, *Our Final Century: Will the Human Race Survive the Twenty-first Century?*, UK, Heinemann, 2003.

5. Douglas Adams, *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*, UK, Pan Books, 1979.
6. Sterling’s own statements on its wiki www.viridiandesign.com
7. Bruce Sterling, op.cit.
8. Bruce Sterling, op.cit.
9. William McDonough & Michael Braungart, *Cradle to Cradle. Remaking the Way We Make Things*, New York, North Point Press, 2002, p. 154.
10. Àlex Nogué, *Algunes reflexions sobre ‘Codi de subsistència’*, 2010.



Integrated activities

Concert

***Pendulum Music* by Steve Reich**

Laboratori d'Art Sonor at the University of Barcelona

7 July 2011 / 8 pm

Capella de Santa Llúcia

(Jardins de John Lennon, Porta de la Muralla s/n, Girona)

Free admission

The [Laboratori d'Art Sonor](#) at the UB presents *Pendulum Music*, an experimental piece by [Steve Reich](#) that resists pigeonholing. It can be seen as a work of art, an installation or a concert – or all three at once.

The performers simply let the sound take place, in keeping with work by Reich and other [minimalists](#). Based on repetitions and variations, synchronies and asynchronies, rhythm and tone progressions, this composition also opens the door to sound installations and pure sound sculpture.

This piece was first performed by [Bruce Nauman](#), [Richard Serra](#), [Michael Snow](#) and [James Tenney](#) at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1969.

Drawing *Masterclass*

Given by Àlex Nogué, artist and professor at the University of Barcelona

14 July 2011/ 5-7 pm

Pati del Museu d'Història de la Ciutat, antigues Hortes del Convent

(Carrer de la Força 27, Girona)

Free registration. Limited places

Drawing is an ideal tool for understanding and experimenting with artistic processes and can also act as a powerful resource for sparking creativity.

The drawing *masterclass* is aimed at people working in any field of artistic creation (architects, actors, painters, sculptors, photographers, designers, etc.) and adults in general without any specific visual training who are keen to explore their creative side.

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Alexandra Daisy Ginsberg

London, 1982. *Lives and works in London*

She's an artist, designer and writer, using the medium of design to interrogate emerging technologies and science.

Through intensive research into synthetic biology, Daisy is exploring the role of design in a Biotech Revolution. As Design Fellow on *Synthetic Aesthetics*, an NSF/EPSRC-funded project at Stanford University and the University of Edinburgh, she is curating an international programme researching the shared and shifting territory between synthetic biology, art and design.

Recent projects include *The Synthetic Kingdom*, a proposal for a new branch of the Tree of Life; *E.chromi*, a collaboration with James King and Cambridge University's grandprize-winning team at the 2009 International Genetically Engineered Machine competition (iGEM), nominated for the Brit Insurance Designs of the Year 2011; and a science fiction short - *The Well-Oiled Machine* - for Icon magazine, UK, authored with Oron Catts.

She has participated in exhibitions such as "Talk to me" (MoMA, 2011), "Hyperlinks: Architecture & Design" (The Art Institute of Chicago, 2010-2011) and "Museum of the future" (Ars Electronica Center, Linz, 2010-2011).

She studied Architecture at Cambridge University, design at Harvard University, and Design Interactions at the Royal College of Art. She exhibits, lectures and publishes internationally.

www.daisyginsberg.com

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Sascha Pohflepp

Cologne, 1978. *Lives and works between London and Berlin*

He's interested in past and future technologies, notions of art, business and idealism, what they mean to us as historical beings and how they inform which worlds come true and which worlds are discarded. He aims to create social objects in which we can see ourselves differently.

Most recently, his work has been shown at the The Art Institute of Chicago, The Wellcome Trust, Ars Electronica Festival, The V&A Museum and will be part of the upcoming "Talk To Me" exhibition at MoMA New York. He received a special mention at the 2010 VIDA award for art and artificial life.

In 2010 he was a researcher-in-residence at the Art Center College of Design, Pasadena and throughout 2011 he has been a resident in *Synthetic Aesthetics*, an NSF/EPSRC-funded research project focussing on synthetic biology. He occasionally contributes to Webby-winning art and technology blog *We-Make-Money-Not-Art.com*.

He holds a degree from The Berlin University of the Arts and an MA in Design Interactions from the Royal College of Art London.

www.pohflepp.com

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Àlex Nogué

Hostalets d'en Bas, 1953. *Lives and works in Hostalets d'en Bas*

Àlex Nogué is a doctor in fine art and professor in painting at the University of Barcelona. He has been a lecturer at the Internationale Akademie für Kunst und Gestaltung at the Fachhochschule in Hamburg since 1992 and a member of the Teaching Board at the École Nationale d'Arts Décoratifs in Limoges since 1996.

His exhibition projects combine two complementary media (drawing, photography, video, painting or sculpture) to communicate his intentions. His recent exhibitions include "Les illes no existeixen" (with Ester Baulida), Fundació Valvi, Girona (2011); "42ª nord. 2ª est", Esther Montoriol Gallery, Barcelona (2010); "Registres i posicions", Horizon Galery, Colera, Girona (2009); "Lighting for John Baldessari's plant", HIAP-Kaapeli, Helsinki (2008); "Antworten auf 23 Fragen" (with Ester Baulida), Artothek, Munic and "Espai recíproc" (projecte de net-art), www.igac.org, both in 2007.

He also publishes his thoughts and research on art in specialist media. His recent books include *Art i ciència. Converses*, in collaboration with Enric Canadell (2010); *Trementina, una metàfora de la pintura*, with Joan Descarga, (2007); *Límits del dibuix. Tretze exercicis de dibuix, 'mème'*, also with Joan Descarga (2004) o *23 preguntes amb resposta*, with Ester Baulida (2004).

www.alexnogue.com

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Félix Luque Sánchez

Oviedo, 1976. *Lives and works in Brussels*

He works in the field of new media art. His works and installations have been presented in art institutions such as Transmediale (Berlin), Ars Electronica (Linz), iMAL (Brussels) LABoral (Gijón).

His work has been nominated for major international new media awards: transmediale 2010 (Berlin-Germany). The Multimedia Award from the Liedts-Meesen Fondation (Gent-Belgium). Ars Electronica 2010 (Linz-Austria), for which he received an Honorary Mention.

He has received a number of scholarships, including a Phonos grant for audiovisual and musical production for young artists (2002-2004), the Digital Art scholarship of the Belgian's French Community of Belgium (2008-2009), the "oficina de proyectos" grant from LABoral (2008) and a production grant from VIDA 13.0 "Fundación Telefónica" (2010).

From 2001 to 2007, he was a faculty member at IUA, the Audiovisual Institute at the Pompeu Fabra University (UPF) in Barcelona, carrying out didactic and technical functions at the university's Digital Arts Master and Postgraduate Programme of Musical Composition with New Technologies.

He is also engaged with sound design and the development of customized technologies, electronics and software, for artists and art institutions.

www.othersounds.net

BÒLIT CENTRE D'ART CONTEMPORANI GIRONA



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and the Catalan Ministry of Culture*
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Producer: *Farners Cabra*
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Exhibition spaces

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Rambla de la Llibertat 1, 17004 Girona

Bòlit-SantNicolau
Plaça de Sta. Llúcia 1, 17007 Girona

Timetable

Monday closed
Tuesday 6 pm to 9 pm
Wednesday to Sunday and public holidays midday to 2 pm
and 6 pm to 9 pm

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Further information and registration at

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