

Feminist Futures: Work, Health, Spaces

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Team 6: Final Presentation

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Project partners:

ual: london college
of communication

MA Service Design



THE DAUGHTERS *of* MARS



THE GENDERED CITY

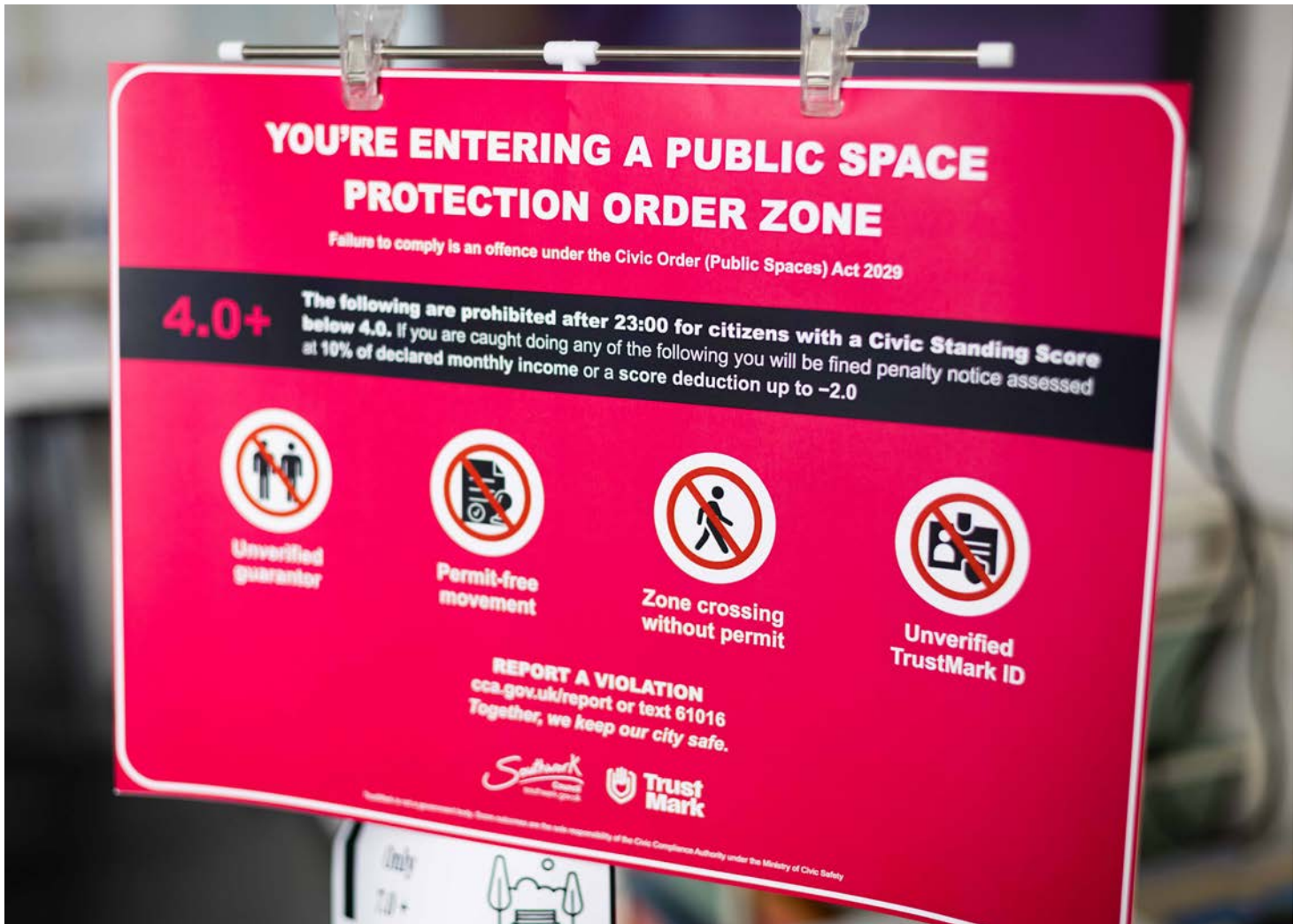


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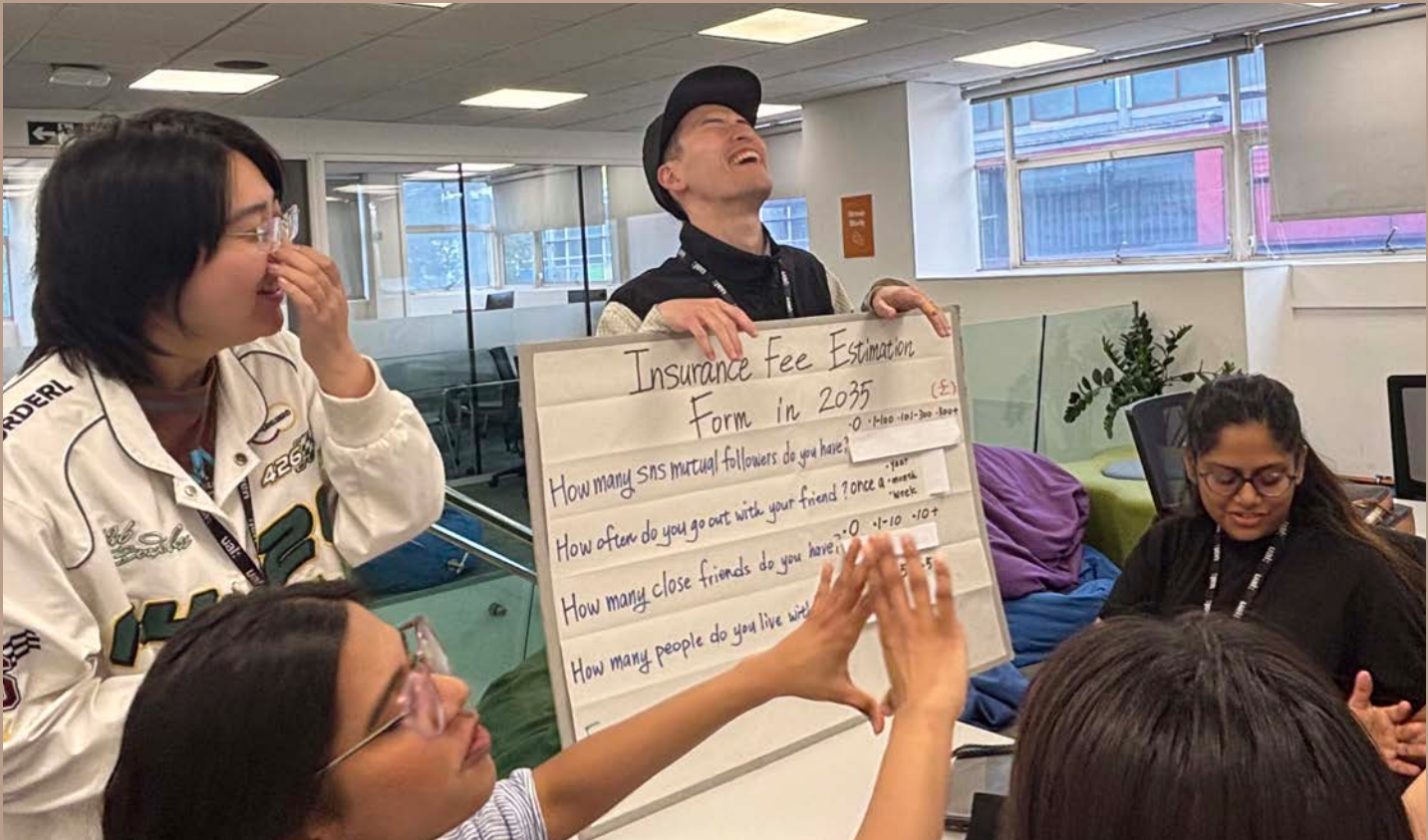
Aidan Harris
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Team 7: Final project presentation



Team 3: Final project presentation



Team 1: Group project discussion



Team 6: Group project work



Team 6: Group project work

Designing Feminist Futures: Service Design, Speculative Practice, and Feminist Critical Service Design in Work, Health, and Spaces

Introduction: Why Futures Needs a Feminist Lens

This essay is about designing feminist futures, through the experience of a project run on the MA Service Design at UAL. It is written as a collage of quotes from student reflections on the project, a grounded and reflexive account of their learning, with commentary in-between to link these together into a coherent single narrative. (This is because as I sat down to try to write a critical essay, anything I wrote was not nearly as well written, as powerful, or as alive as the students' own reflections.)

Silvia

Design necessarily operates in the future, whether the near or far future depends partly on the discipline. As a designer you are always designing something that doesn't exist yet. In this way, design also shapes the future as it creates things, visuals, structures, which will exist in a few months, years or decades.

The project used speculative design and design futures methods within the context of service design, to envision feminist futures for domains in which women, trans and non-binary people are often underserved: health, work and spaces.

"A thread that holds this entire argument is why, without a feminist lens, even the most well-intentioned futures are at risk of reproducing the very inequalities they set out to challenge in the first place."

Maitreyi

"Feminism remains a necessary starting point because it gives language for questioning systems that produce inequality while claiming to reduce it (Ahmed, 2017). Ahmed writes about feminism not as a harmonious solution, but as an ongoing process of noticing discomfort, exclusion, and the structures shaping everyday life".

Mehal

"bell hooks reminds us that feminism is not simply about adding women to existing structures, but about challenging the structures of domination and exclusion themselves (hooks, 1984)."

Anisha

Pei-Tsen introduces beautifully how this way of working is different from your typical service design project, and the ways in which a speculative prototype can activate different ways of interacting with particular futures:

Silvia

"There is a moment in every design process when something shifts. For me, that moment came not at the beginning of this project, but

Pei-Tsen

somewhere in the middle, when I held a tax bill in my hands. [...] The document did not exist. I had designed it. And holding it, I understood for the first time what to speculative design was actually for: not to resolve a problem, but to make one visible. Not to provide an answer, but to make the question impossible ignore.”

“Ahmed’s feminist killjoy doesn’t cause the problem. She just makes it visible, and gets punished for it (Ahmed, 2017). The career returner who wants her care years to count is a killjoy to the traditional hiring manager. The Human Dividend gives the killjoy a system and asks if the world in 2036 is ready for it.”

Eeshanee

“bell hooks wrote that love, as practice and politics, requires us to want to grow (hooks, 2000). Feminist design asks the same of us. Even when the project feels right, we must keep asking whose experience is being centred and whose is falling through the gaps.”

“The designer’s role in creating positive change through a feminist lens is not to build the perfect system. It’s to build something honest enough that people can see the possibility and the problems at the same time. Critical service design can make care visible as a political act.”

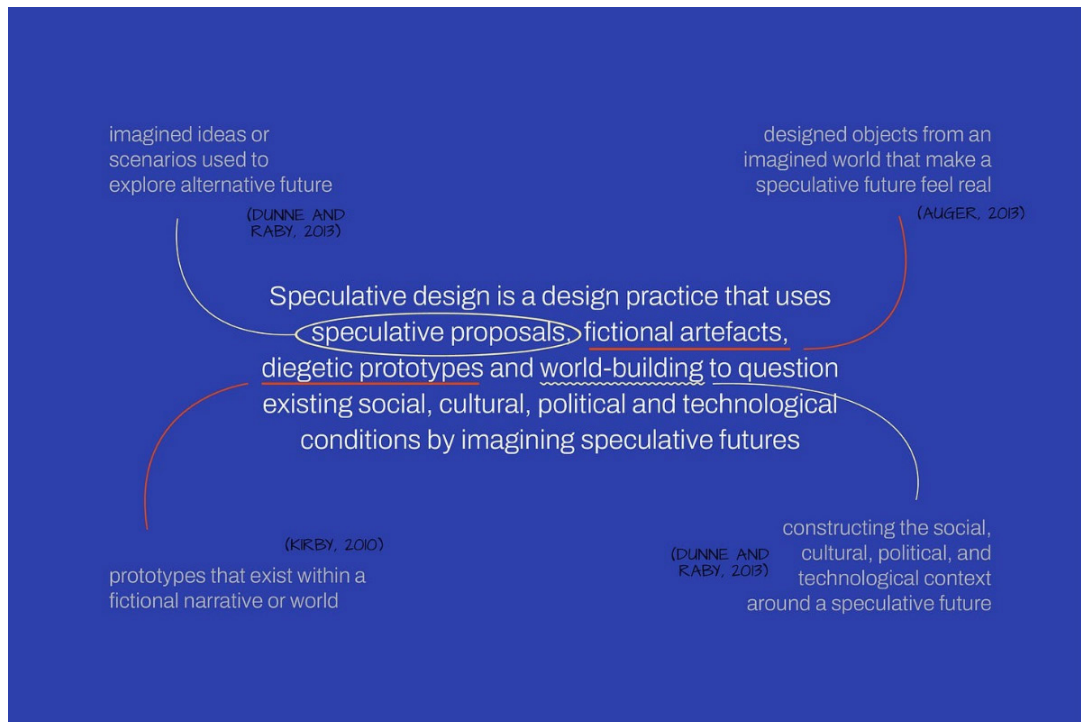


Image: Saeed

2. What is Critical Service Design, and How Does It Work with Futures?

“Service design has traditionally worked around a problem and solution approach... But Koskinen et al.’s (2011) Research through Design argues that knowledge is not gathered before designing, it is gathered through the act of making. The prototype is not the output of the research, but a method

Maitreyi

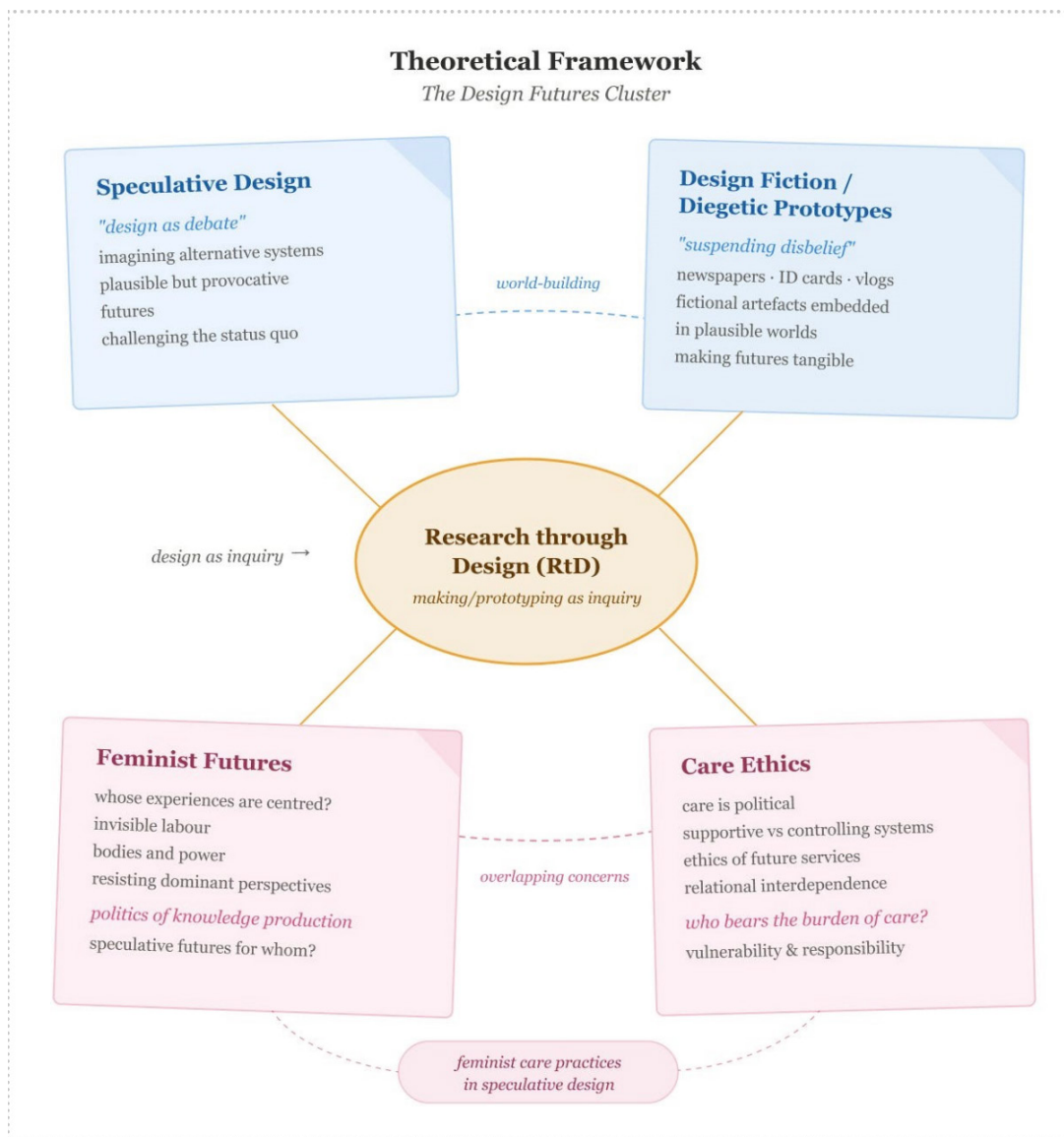


Image: Riya

through which one can research effectively.”

“Research through Design, Critical Design and Speculative Design were not three separate labels in this project. They were three ways of reading the same design activity.

Research through Design treats design practice as a valid form of inquiry, capable of producing knowledge that other methods cannot (Zimmerman, Forlizzi and Evenson, 2007; Stappers and Giaccardi, 2017). [...] Insight came through the act of designing, not before it. Prototypes, timelines, newspapers and participant responses were not just outputs. They were thinking tools.

Critical Design, [...] argues that design does not always need to solve problems. It can ask questions, open discussion and imagine alternative futures (Dunne and Raby, 2013). [...] Critical Design helped us avoid a simple judgement of whether the technology is good or bad. Progress can carry power. Visibility does not automatically mean empowerment.

Speculative Design uses future scenarios to discuss present values, systems and choices (Dunne and Raby, 2013). We chose a **Future Mundane**

Yingze

approach (Coulton et al., 2017): instead of a distant sci-fi future; we placed the speculative world inside ordinary life. [...] That feeling of being too close is precisely what makes it uncomfortable.”

“When a provocative project is mainly seen and discussed by a small, already-informed group, there is a risk that the provocation starts to serve that group — rather than challenging anything beyond it.”

Yao Yao

“The discomfort this creates is not a flaw in the design. It is the design.”

Students start this process by conducting an Evidence Safari and Horizon Scanning exercise. Evidence Safari is a technique to collaboratively, as a team, evaluate a large amount of evidence that is relevant to the project you’re working on. (Drew, 2016). Horizon Scanning was carried out using a PESTLE technique; it is a foresight technique that looks for weak signals of the future within our current world, and then organises them based on Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal and Environmental dimensions. (IF Insight & Foresight, no date)

Silvia

Based on this in-depth research, students were then asked to use a technique called Ban, Amplify, Create to start forming a future world by deciding what would be banned, amplified or created over the years leading up to that future, based on the evidence safari and horizon scanning. The students then started Worldbuilding by creating newspapers from their future world, set in 2038, as part of a worldbuilding process. The aim is for the newspapers to do the talking about the future world, and show the implications of their envisioned society. Backcasting was used as a way to create a history for the fictional future world, one that shows how we got from the present to this future. The newspapers are the first of a series of Diegetic Prototypes (Kirby, 2010) that the students create. Diegetic Prototypes are objects that tell the story of the future world they come from. The diegetic prototypes are then tested with the public or specific groups as a way to see whether these are prompting the right conversations around what future do we want to create, for whom this future is preferable, and what are the complexities of this system

“This reframed everything about how I approached the [...] project. We were not building a system and testing it. We built the system to discover the questions we could not have formulated in advance. Every design decision we took became a form of enquiry, and every participant’s reaction became data for us to analyse. [...] Speculative Design is not about answers. It is about learning to ask better questions through making. [...] Speculative Design expands Service Design’s capacity from friction reduction to ethical provocation.”

Maitreyi

“People did not need to understand the language of speculative design to have an opinion. They could simply react. And that reaction was the research. For a feminist practice, this mattered because physical artefacts lowered the threshold for participation. People did not need academic or design language to enter the conversation. They could pick something up, laugh at it, question it or recognise themselves within the world.”

Smriti

“Dunne and Raby (2013) describe this kind of design as a way of exposing the values embedded in systems that present themselves as neutral or benevolent.”

Riya

“Making is thinking. And thinking through making changes what you are able to perceive.”

“Diegetic prototyping as a method became a strong medium for establishing an anchor in the future world and making it debatable.”

Anisha

“This is, I believe, one of the more underappreciated insights within service design and speculative practice: materiality is not supplementary to thinking. It is thinking conducted in a different register. The resistance and weight of a physical object, its familiar bureaucratic aesthetic, its capacity to be misidentified as something real, these qualities are not incidental they are the conditions under which the most productive critical reflection occurs.”

Riccardo

Bruce Sterling described the process of design futures as “the deliberate use of diegetic prototypes to suspend disbelief about change.” (Sterling, B. 2012). It is easier to talk about the possibilities, contradictions and potential pitfalls of a fictional future, than it is to talk about change in the present, when most people’s minds will immediately run into the obstacles that would prevent certain outcomes, which are seen as insurmountable. Presenting people with artefacts from a future that is already here immerses them in that reality and frees them from criticising how we might get there, to be able to view this future critically and understand what the implications are for society in general. But it also immerses them as people within a fictional world, and when done well, people can imagine what their life would be like in this world, what their thoughts, ethical boundaries and actions might be.

Silvia

“Once the future felt real, people stopped responding like audiences and started responding like citizens living inside it. The prototypes, in that sense, became tools for generating knowledge, becoming the true products of this form of design research (Auger, 2013).”

Mehal

“Facilitation, co-creation, storytelling and communication were no longer only supporting the outcome; they became part of the outcome itself. The engagement generated around the prototype became embedded into the prototype. In that sense, the speculative objects started functioning both as diegetic prototypes and as boundary objects; things that allowed different people to gather around the same future and negotiate what it meant to them.”

Saeed

“This is the contribution Speculative Service Design can make to systemic change. Not by delivering a solution but by making the decision feelable before it gets written in stone.”

Maitreyi

2.1 Field Notes from Research Through Design: What Making and Talking Taught Us

“The conversation is part of the prototype. A speculative object is alive due to the conversation around it. We realised very quickly that if the conversation around the prototype was not producing the tension we intended, then the provocation itself needed to change.”

Saeed

The language, setup, surrounding artefacts and even the tone of interaction became extensions of the speculative object itself. In that sense, we were not only designing products; we were designing conversations.

A believable future is born in friction.

Initially, we were designing the world to feel as seamless as possible.

The technology was highly automated, the medicine was intelligent and responsive, and the human almost became a passive receiver within the system. But real systems are never frictionless. They are shaped by budgets, bureaucracy, marketing strategies, accessibility gaps and technological limitations. Even highly polished products carry everyday frictions.

The iPhone is beautifully designed, but the screen still gets smudgy.

Once we realised this, we intentionally redesigned parts of the system to feel less automated and more manual [...]. The more friction we introduced, the more emotionally nuanced and believable the world became.”

FRITION “This project taught me that when working with speculative futures, too much resolution can weaken the work. If the future becomes too polished, it loses texture and stops creating friction. It starts to look like a proposal rather than a question.”

Smriti

“People do not need to understand speculative design for their reactions to matter.

Saeed

Many participants did not fully understand speculative design or design fiction, especially because we were testing outside academic and gallery spaces. But that never made their feedback less valuable.

These people already inhabit the systems whose inequalities we were trying to expose. Their reactions revealed emotional truths, anxieties and tensions that theoretical discussions alone would not have surfaced. The work, then, was not about searching for “correct” feedback, but learning how to listen carefully and decide what to carry forward and what to let go.”

“This is the mechanism that speculative design depends upon, to provoke a visceral, personal, and even hostile response, you must first have built a world plausible enough to inhabit. Abstract futures produce detached engagement, plausible futures produce identification and identification produces feeling: the kind of feeling that generates genuine critical reflection rather than comfortable academic distance. The reactions we received were not reactions to a design, they were reactions to the implicit question that the design posed: Could this happen to me? Would I accept this? What would I do?”

Riccardo

3. A Feminist Framework for Futures

In this project we build on the framework of Critical Service Design (Salinas et al., 2024) and added a feminist lens. Feminist Critical Service Design (FCSD) changes the focus from emphasising the idea of preferable futures, to analysing who is centred in current society as well as in critical and speculative design practice. In FCSD the question is less about creating preferable futures, and more about understanding how systemic issues manifest in current presents and futures.

Silvia

Feminist Critical Service Design emphasises two questions:

- Preferable for whom? This is a question that requires an intersectional feminist approach in order to analyse how the matrix of domination influences this type of work.
- How do current systems need to be challenged before we can truly embrace futures that are preferable for a multitude of people who are not forefronted in current systems or in current design practices?

“As a woman and as the eldest daughter in a traditional Asian family, feminist thinking has never been something I had to seek out. I encounter it in the ordinary texture of daily life: in the quiet arithmetic of who is expected to sacrifice what, in the weight of being simultaneously expected to carry the family and remain small enough not to inconvenience it.”

Pei-Tsen

“[There] was an “Ohh” moment for me, and it was when I began moving away from Solutionism toward systems thinking. Rather than asking “How might we solve this problem?”, Feminist Futures encouraged us to ask: “What kind of system is creating this condition in the first place?”, “Who benefits from the current arrangement?”, and “Who doesn’t?”

Mehal

The question was no longer simply whether the [designed future] brought in equity. The more difficult question became: equity for whom, and at whose expense? As Ahmad describes, it was more like ‘homework’. Feminism, as a self-assigned, ongoing practice of working out how to live in and transform a world that does not accommodate everyone equally (Ahmed, 2017).”

“Speculative design and design fiction provided the methods, Feminist Speculative Design informed our positionality, and Design Justice gave the ethics and logic to design a future world with.”

Petrina

“Design decisions are shaped by who is in the room when these “decisions are made, as rightly pointed out by Costanza-Chock (2020) in the Design Justice framework. This is where I now understand how the designer’s role is to be explicitly political. In the sense that Ahmed (2017) means, when she writes, “to live a feminist life is to make everything into something that is questionable”. A service designer working in spaces shaped by gender, care, race or labour cannot treat those histories as context. The designer’s responsibility is to actively advocate for the inclusion of marginalised voices, not as a consultation exercise at the end of the process, but as the foundation of the enquiry itself. Whose knowledge counts? and whose [...] disappears into the background? These are not secondary questions.

Maitreyi

They determine what the design is actually for.

Service design’s potential for positive change lies here, not in making care more efficient, but in making it impossible to continue designing systems that ignore who bears its weight.”

3.1 On Intersectionality

“Hill Collins (1990) explains structurally how race, class, gender, and disability do not operate as separate systems through her matrix of domination. They intersect and reinforce each other in and through design. Designing safety for “women” as a unified category already encodes a specific woman: probably white, cisgender, able-bodied, native-born, middle-class. A women’s-only train compartment creates safety for some and

Rucha

erases trans and gender non-conforming people. Every safety measure encodes whose safety it values.

“But it was also about recognising how genuinely complex intersectionality is to hold in practice, and how the tools and conventions of speculative design make intersectional blindness easy unless it is deliberately and continuously addressed. As Prado de O. Martins critiques, design itself carries structural privilege, meaning even critically engaged designers reproduce narrow assumptions because the field’s default imaginaries are already unevenly situated (Prado de O. Martins, 2014).

The project exposed how deeply conditioning and positionality shape even critically conscious designers, and how inevitably this shapes the systems, futures, and definitions of fairness we imagine. That too is a form of power reorganising itself, even when we believe we are working against it.”

Mehal

3.2 Designing Politically, Designing Uncomfortably

“As a feminist, this project gave me confidence for the first time to openly acknowledge that design is political. Throughout much of my previous education, I was taught, either directly or indirectly, to separate my politics from my work. But I now realise that neutrality itself often ends up reinforcing the systems already in place.

As Sara Ahmed (2017) argues, feminism often means continuing to ask difficult questions even when discomfort appears. That became especially important within this project because futuring through a feminist lens did not lead us toward a speculative feminist utopia. Instead, it made us really see how deeply reproductive value, patriarchy, and gendered expectations are embedded into everyday systems.

The future we designed was not “better.” In many ways, it was deeply uncomfortable. But that discomfort became important because it revealed the tensions already present within contemporary society.

And I think that was the most important shift for me as a designer; understanding that provoking critical reflection can itself become a form of feminism.”

Saee

“A feminist lens did not give us a solution to that tension. It insisted that the tension be named. In speculative design, naming it honestly is the work.”

Pei-Tsen

4. Why Work, Health, and Spaces? The Logic of These Three Domains

“Nobody intended to make it harder for women. But it happened anyway. The road to hell is paved with good intentions. This is what Arendt (1963) meant by the banality of evil: the most systemic harms do not require malicious intent, they require ordinary people following ordinary rules without stopping to ask who bears the cost and who benefits.

Costanza-Chock (2020) puts the principle plainly within her Design Justice framework: impact matters more than intention. The people most adversely affected by design decisions tend to have the least influence over them.”

Rucha

We focussed the brief around three domains in which women have been historically underserved, underfunded and underrepresented. They are where patriarchal design assumptions are most embedded and most consequential. The three domains all tie together, the woman who cannot access adequate healthcare, is underserved at work, navigates an unsafe city to get there, and who returns home to unpaid labour is living the intersection of all three.

Silvia

4.1. Work

The organisation of work is built around the default male body and the assumption of an unpaid carer at home. Women carry 60% more unpaid labour than men. Care work is systematically devalued. The feminist question is not how to fit women into existing work structures, but how to redesign work entirely.

“I started to realise that invisible labour is not a Service Design problem that needs smoothing. It is a product of centuries of patriarchal decision-making and behaviours around gender, economics and politics. What speculative design and the process of RtD together offered was something different: the capacity to prefigure new systems rather than optimise existing ones. Dunne and Raby’s (2013) preferable futures are like rehearsal spaces that let designers create environments where the ethical and political consequences and implications of a system can be stress tested before they can harm anyone. These futures become catalysts for public debate and discussion around what kind of futures people really want to live in, or more importantly, don’t.”

Maitreyi

4.2. Health

Healthcare has long centred the cisgender male body as default. Women’s health is reduced to reproductive health; menopause, endometriosis, chronic conditions are dismissed, undertreated, and underfunded. Racialised and disabled bodies face compounded exclusions.

Silvia

“Pregnancy is not publicly cared for simply because women’s health matters. Pregnancy is cared for because reproduction matters. The pregnant body holds value for the family, the state, the labour force, demographic continuity and the future child. Menopause, by contrast, marks a transition away from reproductive usefulness. It sits outside one of the central value systems through which patriarchal societies have historically recognised women’s bodies.

Arumina

This is the cruelty of the comparison. Pregnancy is surrounded by care because it produces a future society recognises. Menopause is neglected because it marks a body no longer organised around reproduction. Our future does not undo that logic. It updates it. The post-reproductive body becomes useful again through labour retention, data extraction, beauty maintenance and subscription care.

So the question shifted. It was no longer only: what if menopause became visible? It became: why does women’s health need to become economically useful before systems decide it deserves care?”

“The pattern was not subtle. Menopause was becoming interesting to systems that had previously failed to prioritise it. Employers could frame it as a workforce retention issue. Healthcare systems could frame it as a preventative cost issue. Technology companies could frame it as a biometric data opportunity. Wellness brands could frame it as a lifestyle market. Beauty industries could frame it as ageing management. Families could frame it as a new form of care. Menopause became visible at the precise moment ageing populations, labour dependency and wellness capitalism discovered they all had economic incentives to manage ageing women differently.”

“The project did not give me an answer about menopause. It left me with a more complicated question: when society finally starts caring about a neglected bodily experience, how do we make sure that care does not become another form of ownership?”

Yingze

4.3. Spaces

Cities are designed around the commuting male office worker. Public transport, safety infrastructure, toilet provision, lighting, all reflect whose movements and whose safety are prioritised.

Silvia

“So when we asked what if access to the city after dark was determined by social trust rather than physical infrastructure, we weren’t just posing a design provocation. Before we could speculate the future, we started from the present reality (Auger, 2013). Women already experience the city as conditional. They already navigate space through a lens of risk, paying what we have come to call the safety tax. The routes calculated, locations shared, the constant vigilance. Things that rarely get called out. What if this labour was formalised? What if technology could redistribute the burden of safety from individuals to communities? What if collective accountability, supported by data, could make streets feel safer for women?”

Anushka

4.4. Reflection

“We become a problem when we describe a problem.” (Ahmed, 2017, p. 39). In the context of this project, this is a design principle, not just an observation. If you are building a future around care, a domain historically performed by women, migrants, and marginalised communities, and traditionally ignored by economic systems, you cannot treat that history as just background context. It is the entire problem! To design a care-based world without confronting who is expected to care? Who is invisible? And who is now being measured in this new world? would be reproducing the same inequalities that this new future claims to repair.”

Maitreyi

5. The Designer's Role: The Service Designer as a Futures Thinker

"Going through this process as a service designer has given me a deep appreciation for feminist speculative design, design futures, and futures thinking as a whole. It expanded not just my toolkit of methodologies but also my way of thinking and approaching systemic problems. The role this project demanded was not just designer, but a facilitator of possibilities. In abiding by futures thinking, I see the service designer assuming these roles and functions:

Petrina

Translator: Candy et al. (2019) sees the designer as a medium that strategically transforms participants' thinking and concerns into experiential scenarios so that they can be seen, felt, and talked about more readily. In translating visions into tangible objects and experiences, the designer pulls the future from abstraction to reality. What new emotions spring up from actually touching objects from the future? What behaviours shift from the new ways we interact with each other? **These are things that can only be found through physical interaction."**

"As designers, we have to know when to stop translating. Too much explanation closes the future down and turns the prototype into evidence for the designer's argument. The skill is in giving enough context for someone to enter the world, then stepping back before the discomfort is explained away."

Smriti

Keeper of Pluriversal Futures: The Care Credit system and world we created had to represent multiple truths — not just those that were for it, but also those against it. Designing for one without the others removes it from the interconnectedness of reality. **Plural futures remind us there are multiple perspectives on the future that are inherently interconnected** (Housley, 2025). As a keeper of pluriversal futures, we made sure to design a **protopia** (Housley, 2025): not a perfect world, but a world radically trying to reframe current problems. Through the tensions it intentionally held — voluntary/mandatory, measurement/humanity — it generated debates on fairness, justice, and inclusion that are directly applicable to the present. **Tension Builder:** Through futures thinking, the designer breaks probable perception through provocation, dreaming radically to **reframe familiar patterns that may be concealing invisible oppressions**. A Feminist Speculative Designer, specifically, does not just reduce anxiety about futures — she also creates it, surfacing futures people don't want and asking why. What can we let go? And what should we keep true? **The insights that emerge from discomfort are as generative as those from aspiration.** Lastly, and the most important role of all in my opinion, is that of **someone who hopes with you."**

Petrina

"Design Futures broke this cycle of thinking for me. Not by offering solutions, but by offering a "What If?" **"What If" allows you to dream outside of crisis.** It makes the impossible tangible, not in a delusional way, but in a way that sees signals and trends as stepping stones toward something better. In an age where apocalyptic thinking has become the norm (Housley, 2025), designing futures calls us to break through this narrative failure and rewrite "a world worth wanting" (McKibben, cited in Housley, 2025).

Design Futures is not just a research methodology, but a way of being and a way of seeing. **It is a methodology of hope.** In an era where people have chosen to despair, where pessimism about the future feels rational, **the act of building a believable preferable world is itself a political act.**

The more immersive the world, the more hope becomes possible.

Design Futures is not escapism — it is not about living in a fantasy. **It is about building a bridge backwards, which then creates a path forward.”**

“Instead of solving complexity, we were being asked to sit inside it.

Mehal

Over time, I realised that discomfort was not a flaw in the process. It was the process.”

6. Conclusion: Design as a Political Act of Hope

“Service Design is Not Innocent.

Arunima

Service design is often framed as improvement: clearer journeys, smoother interactions, better access, more coherent systems. That work matters, but in futures practice it is not enough. A speculative service concept does not simply show what might exist. It rehearses a relationship between bodies, institutions, platforms, policies, markets and everyday life.

Service designers do not merely visualise futures. They help domesticate them.

That is a serious responsibility.”

“For service designers, this shift is important because we do not only organise touchpoints; we organise relationships, permissions, exclusions, and forms of power. Design futures allows us to examine not only how a future service might function, but what values it would normalise.”

Anushka

“Design Futures is not just a research methodology, but a way of being and a way of seeing. It is a methodology of hope. In an era where people have chosen to despair, where pessimism about the future feels rational, the act of building a believable preferable world is itself a political act.”

Petrina

“This project changed something fundamental about how I understand what a service designer can achieve through a futures lens. Before this unit, I mostly understood service design as a practice of improvement: making systems more usable, more efficient, more human-centred. This project showed me it can also surface hidden assumptions, reveal power structures, and create spaces where communities can question what kinds of systems they actually want.

Riya

The feminist lens was essential to that shift. Imagining a future is never an unbiased act. It always involves assumptions about who will benefit, who will bear the costs, and whose version of normal gets to be the default. Making futures tangible through design artefacts brings those assumptions into view at a point where it is still possible to challenge them.”

“Before this unit, I associated service design mainly as a way of making systems easier and more accessible. Design Futures [...] made me realise that service design can also be used to disturb, to create friction, to make people uncomfortable enough to notice what they usually accept. It is about making problems impossible to ignore.”

Anushka

“The friction itself is political.”

Mehal

“I started this project thinking speculative design was about imagining futures.

Saeed

I’m leaving it understanding that sometimes the future only exists to reveal what we have already accepted as normal.”

“This is what I will carry into future practice. Not the tools of speculative design in their entirety, but the question that underlies them: what would it feel like to live inside what I am designing? And is that a world I am willing to make? WHAT IF...?”

Pei-Tsen

“But worldbuilding also carries ethical responsibility, that I am still learning to carry. Building a dystopia is not a neutral act, even if it may not have started out as such. What happens when we design harm in order to reveal it?”

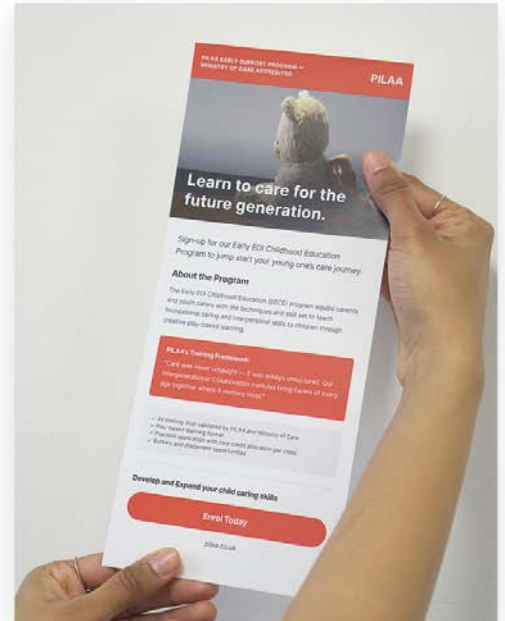
Anushka



Team 1: Share the Care prototype



Team 2: VR Centre Guidelines



Team 1: The Ministry of Care and PILAA pamphlets



Team 4: Future of Menopause Care 2036 - Policy Paper Page 1

**What does
it mean to
design feminist
futures?**

**How do we
practice
design in
feminist ways?**

Project overview

Design isn't just about making things work better today; it's about shaping how we live tomorrow. This unit helps us see design as a tool for imagining and building possible futures, in order to question the real-life implications of these worlds.

This report focusses on a project the MA Service Design Students 2025-26 at London College of Communication, University of the Arts London, worked on as part of their Design Futures Unit.

The brief this year asked the students to take an explicitly feminist perspective of futures, meaning students had to question what futures might be preferable for whom, and who might be negatively impacted in these futures. We looked for those realms in which today women and LGBTQ+ people are still at a disadvantage: health, work and spaces, and we partnered with a range of brilliant organisations who are working in these spaces to inform and advise the student projects.

“This project is a testament to the transformative potential of academic–industry collaboration. Through futures design methods, the partnership explored emerging trends, constructed alternative future scenarios, and translated foresight into action. The result is a shared framework that enables organisations to make informed decisions, foster innovation, and actively shape resilient, inclusive, and sustainable futures.”

– Hena Ali, Course Leader MA Service Design

We prototyped services from these future worlds to explore the ethical and social dimensions of design, with particular consideration on who benefits, who is excluded, and what the long-term implications might be.

The aim is to empower students with the skills to design services that don't just respond to change but actively help to create it.

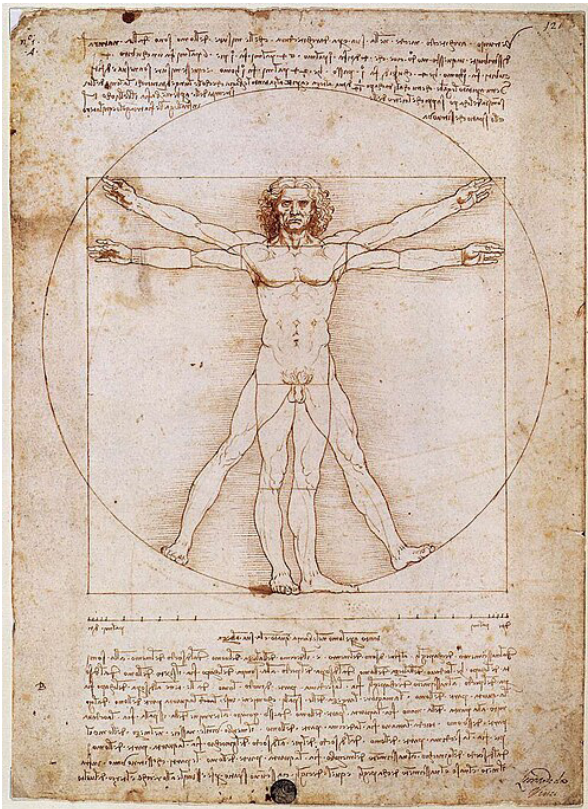
Throughout the unit students developed anticipatory skills, engaged with critical design tools, collaborated across disciplines, engaged with real world complexity and designed for real-world impact, grounding their ideas in deep research and iteration with different publics, to make sure the work resonated with the needs and challenges of real people.

Worldbuilding brief

Throughout history, and within contemporary western society, men have been considered the “default human”. Everything, from furniture and architecture to medicine to safety features to cities to working patterns has been designed for men, more precisely able-bodied, white, straight, middle class or more, cis men. This manifests in the sizing of furniture, in the way car safety is tested, in what type of transport is prioritised and therefore made smoother in the city, in how medicines are tested and who they’re tested on, in how work is still organised around a single income family with another able-bodied adult at home.

Designed things, systems and services are often then adapted for those who don’t fit the “default human”. Curbs are dropped at crossings for wheelchair access, which happens to also benefit anyone who is pushing a child in a pushchair. Crash test dummies are scaled down though often still do not represent women’s body proportions. Public transport is introduced but often it is still not as accessible, convenient, or efficient as cars.

What would feminist design and feminist futures look like? In what ways would our cities, services, buildings, things be different if they were designed from a feminist perspective? What would need to change in order to make this possible and desirable? What type of society would be necessary for these things to exist in?



Vitruvian Man. Leonardo da Vinci. Web Gallery of Art: commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=48852

What is Feminism?

Feminism is a social, political, and intellectual movement advocating for equal rights, opportunities, and treatment for people of all genders, with particular focus on addressing the historical and ongoing subordination of women.

Feminism challenges patriarchal systems, social structures in which men hold primary power, and seeks to dismantle gender-based inequalities in areas including politics, economics, education, employment, reproductive rights, and personal autonomy.

What is Intersectionality?

Intersectional feminism is a framework that examines how various forms of social stratification, such as race, class, gender, sexuality, disability, and other identity categories, overlap and interact to create unique experiences of discrimination and privilege.

The term “intersectionality” was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 to describe how Black women faced discrimination that couldn’t be understood by looking at race or gender alone, but rather at how these identities intersected to create distinct forms of oppression. This builds on earlier black feminist thought which articulates how major systems of oppression

intersect, and how Black women experience multiple simultaneous forms of oppression. Patricia Hill Collins introduced the concept of the “matrix of domination” to describe this phenomenon.

Intersectional feminism critiques mainstream feminism for historically centring the experiences of white, middle-class, cisgender women while marginalizing others. It argues that effective feminist analysis and activism must account for how different power structures interact, recognising, for example, that a wealthy white woman and a poor Black woman don’t experience gender discrimination in the same way.

This approach has become increasingly influential in contemporary feminist scholarship, activism, and policy discussions, emphasising that liberation movements must address multiple, interconnected forms of oppression simultaneously.

Work brief

Focus: Care giving

Workplace cultures are structured around assumptions that privilege workers without caregiving responsibilities, perpetuating gender-based discrimination through countless micro-aggressions and structural barriers. Work that is traditionally performed by women; caring, educating, raising children, nursing, cleaning; is consistently undervalued, underpaid, or rendered invisible as unpaid labour.

The brief asked the teams to use performance, interactive media and speculative fiction to explore workplace cultures, critically analyse policies and practices from a feminist perspective, examine the wider role of care-giving and investigate women's workplace design and policy. From a feminist and disabled perspective, the aim was to develop speculative services to reimagine how policy, culture, and design might transform to create more caring and equitable working lives.

Team 1:
The Ministry
of Care

Team 2:
Human
Dividend

Key questions

- What would a non-patriarchal organisation of work look like?
What types of work would be valued and prioritised?
Who would be centred in workplace design and policy?
- What policy changes would be necessary if we centred women's experiences in policies around work? How would these reshape our working lives and working conditions?
- What workplace adjustments could be designed with women in mind, in the same way that we may think of reasonable adjustments for employees with disabilities, who are neurodivergent or have mental health conditions?
- How would work change if we centred women's health and wellbeing throughout all stages of their lives, from menstruation through pregnancy, breastfeeding, and menopause?
- How can the workplace be redesigned to increase the representation of women, in male-dominated industries?
- How can an employer's digital, online platform be reimaged in recruitment campaigns to attract more women into the workforce?
- What might work look like if care work, whether professional or domestic, was valued as highly as traditionally male-dominated professions?
- How might we design workplace cultures that distribute care-giving responsibilities more equitably across genders?

Health brief

Focus: Menopause

Healthcare systems have long centred the cisgender male body as the default, influencing how medicine is taught, practiced and tested.

These same systems treat women's health as primarily "reproductive health" and marginalise the experiences of trans and non-binary people, as well as women who may not want to have children, cannot have children, or are in perimenopause and menopause.

The brief asked the teams to use data and co-design methods to critically analyse assumptions and biases in health, examine culture, language and perceptions around women's bodies, and investigate supportive technologies embedded in embodied experiences. From a feminist, menopausal perspective, the aim was to reimagine alternative or speculative healthcare futures that genuinely centre the diversity of bodies and their needs across the lifespan and within our cultures.

Key questions

- What would a healthcare system that centres women's bodies and trans bodies as much as cis men's bodies look like? What would wellbeing look like?
- What could menopausal education look like so that people in society (women, men, healthcare providers, employers, policy-makers) are able to consider the effects of menopause on women's bodies and lives?
- How do cultural taboos around menstruation and menopause influence our cultural understanding of these functions? How might different cultural perspectives enrich our approaches to women's health?
- How are disabled people's and non-white people's health concerns addressed (or dismissed) by medical professionals? What can we learn from these experiences about systemic biases in healthcare?
- What if we saw menstruation as a resource rather than a problem? How could technology adapt in the future to use or engage with this resource?
- How might technology support rather than limit the complexity of embodied experiences across different life stages?

Team 3:
Velaground™
The
Environmental
Mediation
System

Team 4:
Menopause
Intelligence

Spaces brief

Focus: Safety

Who is considered a priority in city design? Whose safety is prioritised and when? Is it the male commuter driving to their 9-to-5 job, the stay-at-home parent with two children under five, the cyclist who drops children at nursery before going to work, or the retired public transport user who volunteers? The design of our spaces – public, private, and those in between – reveals whose lives, needs, and movements are centred and whose are marginalised.

The brief asked the teams to use performance, interactive media and speculative fiction to explore who is prioritised in spatial design, critically analyse the politics of space from a feminist and intersectional perspective, examine the role of design, policy, and culture in shaping safety and investigate spaces for wellbeing. From an intersectional, queer, and trans-inclusive perspective, the aim was to propose how alternative or speculative futures of care, community, and collective wellbeing might reshape our approaches to safety in public and private spatial design.

Key questions

- What would public spaces designed to centre women's lives look like? How would they be designed differently from current spaces?
- How would mobility be organised if it didn't prioritise the needs of the default male middle-class office worker?
- What safety mechanisms could exist in a post-patriarchal society? In what ways could we ensure safety coexists with care, community, and collective wellbeing? How are workspaces designed, and who do they cater to? How might they be reimagined to accommodate diverse bodies and caregiving responsibilities?
- Who is allowed in different spaces: public, private, or semi-public? How do these permissions reflect or reinforce power dynamics?
- What functions do private and public spaces take on? Which activities are designed in and which emerge from people using spaces differently than intended?
- How might we design spaces that are safer and more welcoming for women, queer and trans people, particularly in contexts where visibility can pose risks?

Team 5: Bus Havens (The Future of Spaces 2038)

Team 6: The Ministry of Social Wellbeing

Team 7: TrustMark™. The Community Led Safety Systems



Team 7: Restricted Oyster Card

Timeline





Students working and laughing with staff



Materials



Materials working board

Lecture summaries

Infrastructure Fictions

By Georgina Voss

explored the intersection of science fiction and the built systems that underpin modern life: energy grids, transit networks, water supplies, and digital infrastructure.

Voss' lecture drew on Science Fiction as a critical lens: a way to expose and interrogate present conditions and imagine possible futures. Drawing on thinkers like Paul Dourish, Genevieve Bell, and Cory Doctorow, Voss argued that speculative fiction acts like a "petri dish", magnifying a technology or idea until its implications become legible.

Voss complicated the idea that science fiction accurately predicts the future (citing William Gibson's own admission that *Neuromancer* got the internet wrong), and instead positioned it as a tool for asking harder questions. She drew on design practices like Dunne & Raby's critical design and projects like Superflux's Mitigation of Shock, alongside writers like Arkady Martine, to show how infrastructure thinking shapes storytelling.

A key thread is that infrastructure is usually invisible until it fails, and that fiction can make those hidden systems visible. In closing, Voss left the students with these provocations: How does this object link to this structure? Whose story is being told? What if something was removed or added? These questions became prompts for building speculative worlds grounded in systemic constraints

World Building

By Marion Lagedamont

focused on how designers can communicate entire worlds, systems, and structures through diegetic prototypes; objects and services that tell a story of fictional future worlds from within.

Lagedamont opened with Bruce Sterling's definition of design fiction: "the deliberate use of diegetic prototypes to suspend disbelief about

change." (Sterling, B. 2012). Design fiction tells worlds rather than stories; instead of asking audiences to grapple with abstract political or geopolitical trends, it invites them to focus on plausible, tangible, objects and services.

The approach was illustrated through film (2001: A Space Odyssey, Minority Report, Back to the Future II), design studios (Near Future Laboratory, Superflux, Extrapolation Factory), and corporate futures work (Microsoft's various Future Vision videos). The central argument running through these examples was that the most compelling world-building lives in friction and the mundanity of everyday detail rather than in glossy and sleek utopian promises.

The practical half of the session guided students through a "Feminist Futures" brief set in 2038, using three exercises: *Ban / Amplify / Create* (identifying what to remove, scale up, or invent), *Make the Front Page* (writing competing newspaper front pages), and *A Day in the Life* (imagining granular daily experience). Together, these tools pushed students to build the beginning of coherent and textured future worlds from the inside out.

The Gendered City

By Nourhan Bassam

centred on the core argument that cities are not gender neutral, they are built around a default user who is heteronormative, patriarchal, white, and able-bodied male, and that this exclusion has measurable consequences for how women and marginalised groups navigate urban space.

Drawing on her research (including the books *The Gendered City* and *Women After Dark*), Bassam cited striking data: 72% of women modify their routes or behaviour to avoid harassment, and 94% of women using public transport report experiencing some form of it. She framed these not just as safety issues but as design failures; from the 9-to-5 commuter model that ignores care-based trip-chaining, to football-court-dominated public spaces, to well-intentioned but poorly executed interventions like Mexico City's glaring "safe corridors."

Her practice translates feminist theory into actionable tools: walking audits, feminist tree scanners

assessing light and visual permeability, care mapping, and co-design methodologies.

Bassam was emphatic that feminist design is not about female-only spaces but about intersectional equity, designing for the “99.9%.” The Q&A reinforced that good co-design requires humility, community trust, context-sensitivity, and a willingness to be proven wrong.

Design Justice and Feminist Futures

By Silvia Grimaldi

introduced Design Justice as a framework for understanding how design distributes benefits and burdens across different communities, and how it can either reinforce or challenge structural inequalities, including white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, capitalism, and ableism.

The lecture drew on Sasha Costanza-Chock’s *Design Justice* (2020) and the design justice principles, which reframe the designer’s role as facilitator rather than expert, centre communities most affected by design decisions, and prioritise impact over intention. Co-design was presented as a key methodology, with a clear critique of what it is not; it is not tokenistic workshops, one or two people with lived experience surrounded by professionals, or a subtle form of coercion.

Two case studies grounded the theory in practice: Good Help for Families in Camden After Covid, a project which involved co-designing with local parents, trust-building with vulnerable communities and presentation of findings to the council; and the Pharma Factory project, which applied service design to public engagement with novel biotechnologies, moving beyond traditional science communication toward genuine stakeholder dialogue and co-production.

Grimaldi ended by applying Design Justice principles inward, asking students to consider how they collaborate within their own teams, who benefits, and what equitable ownership looks like in a collaborative design process.

Gender and Decoloniality

By Luiza Prado de O. Martins

traced the origins and aftermath of the Decolonizing Design platform, which she co-founded in 2016 with fellow researchers including Mahmoud Keshavarz and Dana Abdullah.

Prado, a Brazilian artist and designer, described how she first noticed the deep limitations of speculative and critical design during her PhD in Europe; its futures were dystopian yet strangely parochial, blind to race, gender, class, and the realities already lived in the Global South.

Her early texts critiquing this, co-written with Pedro Rivera, triggered significant professional backlash, including institutional marginalisation and harassment on a sector mailing list, consequences she argued directly pushed her out of design academia and into fine arts.

The Decolonizing Design platform introduced intersectionality into design discourse at a time when the term was barely known in the field. She reflected on how quickly that language was absorbed and commodified by institutions without any real structural change; what she called performative progressivism.

The Q&A addressed how privilege operates invisibly in design institutions, and why meaningful change requires genuine community, not “good vibes,” but working through conflict, discomfort, and disagreement together. She closes with urgency: facing rising far-right movements and the erosion of feminist gains, collective solidarity is not optional.

A Short Intro to (Some) Political Philosophies

By Aidan Harris

was an accessible introduction to political philosophy designed to help students embed philosophical concepts into their world building.

Harris opened by demystifying philosophy itself; not stuffy or complicated, but a structured process of interrogating assumptions, both in others’ arguments and your own. The core tool is asking simple but relentless questions: *What does that*

mean? Why? Is that even true?

The lecture then surveys four major political frameworks, presenting each alongside its key weaknesses. Utilitarianism maximises happiness for the majority but risks excluding minorities. Technocracy organises society around expertise and merit, but embeds class bias and struggles when experts disagree. Communism abolishes private ownership in favour of communal decision-making but can stifle incentives and autonomy. Anarchy promises radical freedom with no state or enforcement, but leaves questions of who does the hard work and how hidden hierarchies emerge.

The conceptual centrepiece of the session was John Rawls' Veil of Ignorance: if you didn't know who you'd be born as in a society you designed, would you still choose it? It's framed as a practical design test.

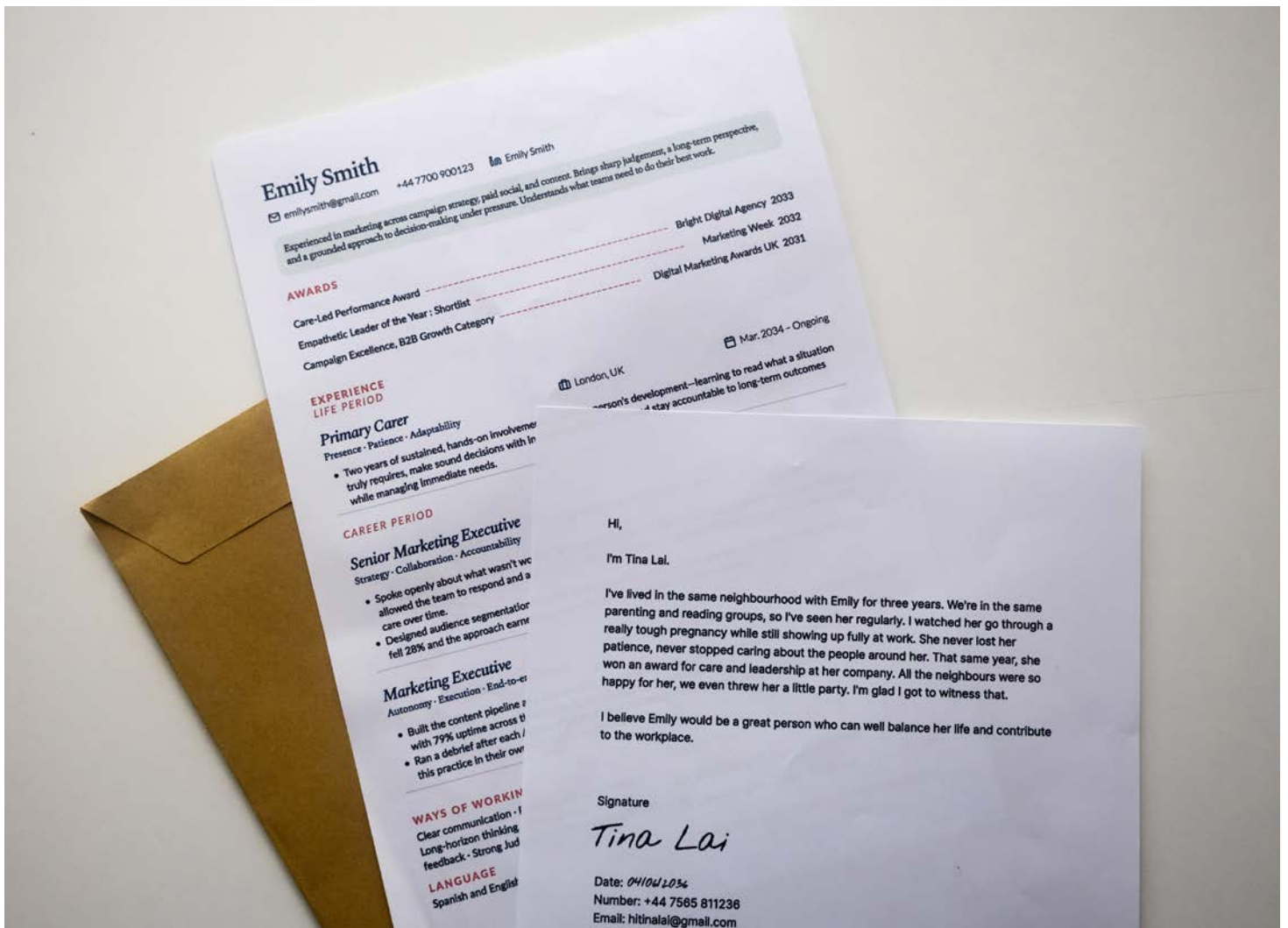
Harris ended by asking students to apply these lenses to their own future society designs, questioning who benefits, who is excluded, and whether their solutions are morally good or merely efficient.



Team 6: Prototyping Ministry of Social Wellbeing cards

Service design concepts

Work: Care giving



Team 2: Life CV and voice-verified witness reference

Team 1: The Ministry of Care

Mehal Chandra,
Petrina Gana,
Maitreyi
Devidas
Mandrekar,
Jiayi Tina
Zhang

The project concept explores a world where care work becomes visible, valued, and shared rather than treated as a private responsibility.

The Ministry of Care runs the Care Credit system, where individuals can participate in different forms of care work, from supporting children, elders, and vulnerable individuals to maintaining neighbourhoods, public spaces, animals, and the environment. Contributions are tracked as Care Credits, which shape access to benefits such as housing, healthcare, education, and mobility.

Using speculative worldbuilding and diegetic prototypes, including a Care Portal, Care ID, orientation video, and everyday media artefacts, the project examines what happens when care becomes embedded within economic and social systems. What was once invisible labour is recognised, measured, and redistributed across everyday life. Rather than presenting a perfect solution, the concept explores the tensions between collective responsibility, personal autonomy, surveillance, non-conformity stigma, and access restrictions within a care-centred society.

To what future world does your concept relate?

Society operates through a state-supported Care Credit System managed by the Ministry of Care. Citizens who opt into the system receive a Care ID, allowing them to request and log care work through the Care Portal. Contributions are recorded as Care Credits, which accumulate quarterly and are assessed yearly to determine care tiers: Neighbour, Keeper, Weaver, or Steward. Each tier grants increasing access to public systems and benefits, including housing priority, pensions, travel permissions, tax reductions etc.

Care work is organised into Peer Care and Community Care, and verified through Care Hubs, digital tracking systems, social workers, and community validation. Participation remains voluntary, but opting out results in the loss of accumulated credits and restricted access to services. Once registered, citizens must complete minimum care hours each quarter, with failure to comply leading to legal consequences. Daily life is shaped by a culture where care is expected, monitored, rewarded, and tied closely to social belonging.

What provocation does your concept respond to?

Our concept responds to the provocation: What if the economy operated on care and empathy rather than productivity and profit alone?

The project questions why care work, despite sustaining individuals, families, communities, and public systems, often remains invisible, undervalued, and unevenly distributed. It explores what happens when care becomes central to how society measures contribution, access, and participation.

From this, we developed a series of connected “what if” questions:

- 1) What if everyone shared in the fruits of their labour?
- 2) What if work cared not only for individuals, but also for families and communities?
- 3) What if people could participate equally despite social, economic, or physical barriers?
- 4) What if work culture nurtured trust, empathy, and open dialogue?

The concept uses speculative worldbuilding to explore the opportunities, tensions, contradictions, and consequences of embedding care into everyday economic and civic life.

What insights about citizen needs, practices or behaviours does your concept relate to or draw on?

The concept draws on signals of change around unpaid care, gendered poverty, feminised labour and digital identity. Smallwood Trust shows that gendered poverty is shaped by inequalities in pay, unpaid care, access to resources and power, with women facing overlapping barriers linked to caring responsibilities, insecure work, disability, immigration status and racial discrimination (Smallwood Trust, 2025). This informed our focus on unpaid care as a structural issue rather than a private domestic responsibility.

Horizon Scanning also identified how feminised labour remains undervalued. Hall argues that social media work is still framed as “women’s work”, contributing to lower respect and compensation despite its strategic role in the digital economy (Hall, 2026). Digital identity research also shaped the concept, as Ifayemi frames Digital ID as infrastructure for faster service access, consent-based data sharing and personalised provision (Ifayemi, 2025).

Through The Ministry of Care, our project aims to make care more visible, measurable and socially valued, while questioning the ethical tensions between care justice, surveillance, conditional welfare and social stigma.

Who would interact with, participate in or experience your concept?

UK Government: GOV.UK, DWP, Home Office and local councils would engage closely with Care ID registration, welfare access and care work requirements.

Schools and education providers: schools would introduce care work (Care Studies) education before residents register for Care ID at 18.

Care Hubs and care organisations: NHS services, charities, childcare providers and elderly care centres would coordinate and verify care work.

UK residents: especially 18-year-olds, unpaid carers, parents, disabled citizens, older adults and low-income households would register, earn Care Credit.

Technology providers: digital ID, biometric chip, drone tracking, and data security companies would support the tracking and Care Credit system.

How would these people/groups interact with, participate in or experience your concept?

Citizens would experience the concept through care education at school, then will be eligible to register for a Care ID at 18 through local Care Hubs. They would complete approved care tasks, such as childcare, elderly support or community care, and receive Care Credit based on their contribution.

Schools would introduce care as a civic responsibility, embedding core values such as empathy, inclusivity, and emotional intelligence into the value system of society – preparing young citizens to understand unpaid care as part of social infrastructure.

Care Hubs would manage Care ID registration, apply the biometric chip sticker, certify available care work, verify completed tasks and issue Care Credit.

The Government would use Care ID and Care Credit records to provide access to welfare, benefits, passport permissions and other public services.

Technology providers would support the chip, tracking system, drone tracking, and Care Credit balance.

What resources, technologies, policies, behaviours or arrangements are required for your concept to work?

For the concept to work, the government would have to radically shift towards a more Authoritarian-Socialist ideology. Unpaid care would need to be recognised as essential labour within UK policy and culture. Care would

no longer be treated as a private family responsibility, but as part of national social infrastructure.

A national Care ID system would be required, supported by biometric chip technology, behaviour-tracking systems, a Care Credit digital balance and secure data infrastructure. Care work would need to be standardised, certified and categorised, with different tasks assigned different Care Credit values.

The Care Tiers also imply the adoption of a Meritocratic system which connects care participation to welfare access, public benefits and citizenship rights. A quarterly care work requirement would make participation compulsory, while non-participation could lead to restrictions or reduced support.

Social behaviours would also need to shift. Citizens would be expected to understand care as a shared civic duty, while stigma would develop around refusing to register or failing to complete required care work.

What would be the result or outcome of people interacting with, participating in or experiencing your concept?

Recognition of care work: Unpaid care becomes more visible and socially valued. Tasks such as childcare, elderly support and community care are recognised as contributions to society rather than private responsibilities.

Changes in behaviour: Citizens may begin to plan their time around required care hours, treating care work as part of civic participation. Care could become a normalised responsibility across genders. Empathy is also built into the psyche of society through consistent care work and the education system.

Access to welfare and services: Care Credit levels influence access to benefits, public services and citizenship rights, creating a stronger link between care contribution and social support. Race, class, gender, and disabilities were all factored into the fairness of the system.

Ethical tensions: The system may also create resistance, privacy concerns and anxiety around being tracked. Citizens with fewer Care Credits could face stigma, reduced welfare or restricted mobility.

Unequal outcomes: Disabled citizens, low-income households or those already doing informal care may experience greater pressure if care work is measured too rigidly.

How would different actors (eg central government, local government, business, civil society, citizens) have to change, if your concept existed?

Achieving a society where unpaid care is recognised as civic labour would require change across all actors.

Government: would need to create a new vertical department (the Ministry of Care) which would form the legal framework for the Care ID, define care

work standards, and connect Care Credit levels to welfare and regulate data protection.

Local Government: would manage local care needs and mediate disputes, operate local Care Hubs and ensure care work opportunities are available across different communities.

Schools: would teach care as a shared social responsibility, preparing young citizens before optional registration at 18.

Civil Society: charities and advocacy groups would monitor fairness, challenge discrimination and support citizens who struggle to meet care requirements.

Citizens: would need to treat care as part of civic participation, while also negotiating concerns around surveillance, stigma and unequal access to welfare.

What might be the risks that might unfold if your concept existed?

One of our concept's risks is that the Care Tier becomes a marker of social status rather than a tool for equity. Those with a lower tier may face compounding stigma, creating new class divisions rather than dismantling existing ones. By quantifying and rewarding care, the system also risks commodifying what it set out to value: gamifying empathy rather than institutionalising it as a social good, potentially hollowing out the intrinsic motivation behind caregiving. The mandatory/voluntary tension opens a structural contradiction observed directly in prototype testing: opt-in participation builds stigma by default for non-participants, while compulsion raises questions of coercion and individual freedom. A black market risk emerges for those seeking to avoid government tracking, and the biometric infrastructure the system relies on creates serious data breach vulnerabilities.

How does your concept advance understanding of sociodigital futures?

The Care ID positions technology not as a productivity tool but as an enabler of equity and a tangible symbol of civic participation (and conversely, non-participation). The digital-physical ID becomes an access point to a baseline of citizen benefits, reframing the social contract between citizen and state around care rather than labour output. This advances sociodigital futures thinking by demonstrating how digital infrastructure can make invisible labour visible and measurable without reducing it to purely economic terms. For feminist futures specifically, the concept gives tangible, systemic weight to the unpaid labour disproportionately shouldered by women.

Were members of the public, citizens, or specialists involved in helping you design or develop your concept? How did they do this? What did they contribute?

Direct consultation with care workers was not possible within the project timeframe (which we acknowledge as a limitation, and a priority for future iterations). Testing was conducted with an equal balance of men and women, with particular attention to participants less familiar with care duties, including men whose relationship to care work is often less immediate.

Rather than evaluating the concept directly, participants were positioned inside the world and asked what they wanted, feared, and expected — producing speculative, open-ended responses rather than evaluative ones.

Diegetic prototype testing then gave participants space to interact with the Care ID and our Care System Registration process unprompted before sharing candid observations, surfacing visceral reactions that ranged from “can I keep it?” to “I feel like I’m in jail.” Industry partner PILAA provided specialist feedback that reframed the project’s proposition toward fairness, equity, and cultural behaviour change.

How did research-through-design and prototyping help you progress your concept? Did you gain any feedback on your concept by sharing with members of the public, citizens, or specialists? What did you learn?

Research-through-design was central to how the concept evolved. Messaging shifted significantly across rounds: early framing felt authoritarian and top-down, and feedback pushed the team toward propaganda language that was communal, relational, and invitational. The mandatory service model was redesigned toward voluntary participation with social incentive, a direct result of participants expressing that compulsion undermined the authenticity of care itself. Testing also surfaced a stronger emphasis on community relationships, which influenced the proximity filter of our Care Portal prototype. PILAA’s specialist feedback offered the sharpest reframe: the project is not simply raising awareness of care work but teaching people how to care, shifting the concept from a transactional economy toward a behavioural and cultural intervention, which became the clearest articulation of what the system is actually doing. Our lore then emphasized an educational system (Care Studies) as part of the world, to ensure cultural change.

What have you learned about feminist futures and feminist design practices?

Feminist futures are not simply futures where women are included in existing systems; they are futures that challenge the patriarchal and capitalist structures shaping those systems. In our project, a feminist lens pushed us to ask: who does this future serve, whose labour does it depend on, and whose experiences does it erase?

Through the Care World, we came to understand care not as a private responsibility, but as a political, economic and social infrastructure. Feminist design practice means making invisible labour visible, while remaining critical of what happens when visibility becomes measurement, surveillance or control.

A feminist future cannot be designed as a perfect utopia. It is provocative, sensational, and radical. It must hold contradiction, discomfort and unequal power relations. Our diegetic prototypes imagined a world where unpaid care was recognised, but also exposed how recognition could become another form of extraction. For us, feminist futures are less about solving unpaid labour and more about asking who defines, values and governs care.

How did your design methods have to change in order to take this perspective?

Our methods had to shift from designing solutions to designing provocations. Instead of asking how to make care easier, we had to ask what structures make care unequal in the first place. This reframed how we approached research, prototyping and testing – we were not seeking usability feedback alone, but emotional, ethical and political reactions. The prototype became a research instrument rather than a resolved output.

We also had to make space for ambiguity. The Care ID could not be presented as straightforwardly good or bad, because feminist design required us to surface the tensions within the system: recognition versus surveillance, reward versus control, visibility versus justice. This meant moving away from neutral service design tools and towards speculative, participatory and research through design (RtD) methods – ones that invited people to question the future being presented to them, rather than simply respond to it.

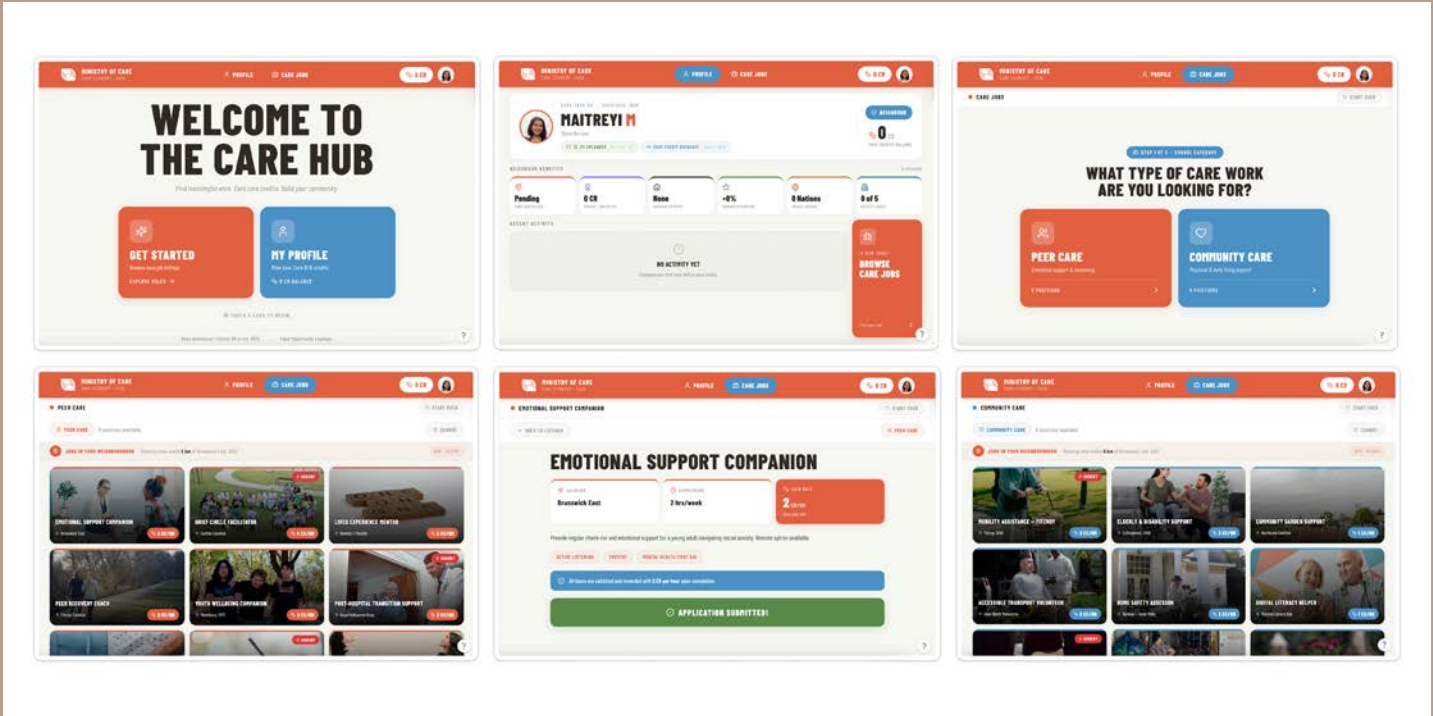
Team 1 information

Jiayi Tina Zhang is a Hong Kong-based service designer, animator and media creator. She aims to craft meaningful and actionable service experiences within complex commercial and cultural landscapes.

Mehal Chandra is a service designer with a background in business development and an MBA. Her work is driven by strategic thinking, problem-solving, clear communication, and a belief that form follows function.

Petrina Gana is a Manila based service designer, creative strategist and photographer with experience in the branding and design industry. Her work focuses on crafting meaningful brand and service experiences that bridge strategy and design.

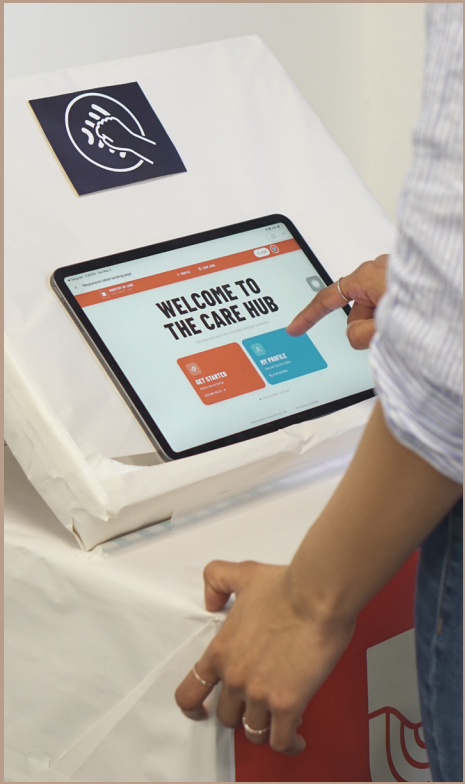
Maitreyi Devidas Mandrekar is a service designer and visual communicator with experience across branding, systems thinking, and social impact projects. Her work is guided by empathy and a belief that good design creates real value for people and communities.



The Care Portal



Care ID



The Care Hub kiosk. Ministry of Care



2038 Newspaper. The Guardian

Reddit Forum



Ministry of Care posters

Team 2: Human Dividend

Eeshanee
Badwe,
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Smriti Bhandari

Set in 2036, the Human Dividend is a societal shift where human qualities, including empathy, care, judgment, and presence, are formally valued in an AI-supported world.

The recruitment process is reimagined through speculative worldbuilding. Instead of traditional CVs, candidates submit a Life CV, a narrative of values and lived experience, including caregiving. Voice-verified references from the community members are required alongside professional endorsements. They attend VR Assessment Centres where behaviour is observed in a photorealistic workplace scenario. An AI system highlights moments for human review to make decisions. Those not selected receive a forward-looking feedback rather than a short rejection e-mail.

The shift extends beyond hiring. Humanics Ed enters education. Wellness products like HUMN™ promise to sharpen emotional readiness. While these systems aim to make invisible experience visible, they also raise questions about surveillance, inequality, and what it means to quantify being human.

To what future world does your concept relate?

Following a decade of AI-driven job displacement and high-profile algorithmic hiring scandals, the UK government passed the Human Qualities Employment Act, requiring employers to assess interpersonal skills alongside technical skills. The Human Capability Standards Board regulates hiring tools. Education, health, and community support are among the most valued forms of work. Human qualities are assessed alongside academic grades.

Career gaps are reframed as transferable experience, verified by witness references. For a returnee, there is finally recognition for what she has spent a decade building. For a recent graduate, it introduces a new kind of pressure to prove you are human enough. Community centres run free Humanics workshops for those without access. HUMN™ drinks sit on shelves next to vitamins, promising emotional optimisation.

Progressive employers embrace the shift. Traditionalist institutions resist it through hidden workforces, and a growing counter-movement questions whether humanity can ever be fairly measured.

What provocation does your concept respond to?

What if human qualities were valued more in an AI-driven world in 2036?

This question shaped our exploration of how AI-supported systems might redefine work, value, and employability in a future where traditional roles are increasingly automated. We built on further questions, such as:

- How are individuals whose greatest strengths lie in care, community, and human connection affected when AI replaces technical and routine roles?
- Can systems ever assess humanity fairly, or do they simply create new forms of emotional performance and surveillance?
- If empathy becomes a credential, who can afford to develop it?
- If empathy, judgement, and human connection become valued skills, will this benefit people overlooked for career gaps and caregiving?

Rather than imagining a utopian alternative to AI-driven hiring, the project explores the tensions that emerge when humanity itself becomes measurable.

What insights about citizen needs, practices or behaviours does your concept relate to or draw on?

Human Dividend builds on converging shifts in labour automation, behavioural assessment, and the formal recognition of human capability. The WEF Future of Jobs Report 2025 confirms that skills rooted in human interaction, including empathy, active listening, and contextual reasoning, currently show no substitution potential. The same report projects 83 million roles displaced and 69 million created by 2027, with care, education and social work among the fastest growing. NIST identifies that credentials no longer assure employers of actual capability, signalling a breakdown in the validation systems that have governed hiring for decades.

Platforms such as HireVue often analyse micro-expressions and vocal tone to evaluate interpersonal capability, while VR scenario testing has moved from military and medical training into mainstream assessment contexts. These developments signal a deeper shift from credential-based validation towards character profiling, where who you are becomes measurable data.

Evidence safari surfaced lived experiences of career returnees, particularly those with care experience. Caregiving builds exactly the skills employers claim to want: crisis management, adaptability, patience, and long-horizon thinking, yet these remain structurally invisible to standard hiring frameworks.

Human Dividend extrapolates this contradiction into a future where lived experience becomes employability infrastructure.

Who would interact with, participate in or experience your concept?

Candidates with non-linear career paths, caregiving histories, and career gaps interact with this concept as a route back into formal employment. Returnees engage with the Life CV and VR assessment centres, hoping that lived experience, empathy, and interpersonal capability will finally be recognised alongside technical skills. Hiring managers use the system to surface candidates they would otherwise have screened out, navigating new norms under the Human Qualities Employment Act 2034.

Empathy practitioners support candidates in articulating experience, while witnesses, including community members and teachers, participate as verifiers that extend beyond the professional network.

The system's influence extends into education through Humanics Ed. Wellbeing products such as HUMN™ drinks become part of everyday routines. At the same time, tensions emerge around emotional performance, optimisation, and the pressure to constantly prove one's humanity, particularly for those who distrust the system or lack access to its resources and infrastructure.

How would these people/groups interact with, participate in or experience your concept?

Candidates submit Life CVs that reframe caregiving, career gaps, and lived experience as valuable forms of skill development, supported by community co-signers along with institutional references. They attend an immersive VR assessment centre where empathy, communication, judgement, and emotional response are evaluated through real-world scenarios. Hiring managers use these assessments alongside technical qualifications to identify suitable candidates. Rejected applicants receive personalised, constructive feedback rather than silence, enabling future development. Successful candidates gain access to returnship programmes and flexible re-entry pathways.

Alongside, new industries and informal relationships emerge. Education systems introduce Humanics Ed, a subject focused on enhancing human qualities. Empathy practitioners coach returnees on how to articulate what their care years built in them. Products such as HUMN™ drinks become embedded within preparation culture, raising concerns about whether emotional capability is becoming another form of privilege. These interactions reveal new relationships between employability, emotional performance,

and social value.

What resources, technologies, policies, behaviours or arrangements are required for your concept to work?

It operates within a legislative framework built across a decade of policy shifts in the UK.

The Algorithmic Hiring Transparency Act 2029 establishes human accountability for AI recruitment decisions, while the Care Experience Recognition Act 2030 requires unpaid caregiving experience to be considered in hiring assessments. The Human Qualities Employment Act 2034 mandates that employers assess human capability alongside technical skill.

Technical infrastructure includes VR simulations, biometric emotional measurement, micro-expression analysis, decision-latency monitoring, and AI systems designed to flag moments for human review.

The system is enabled by a broader cultural shift. Non-linear career paths and career gaps are recognised as sources of professional development. Employers move beyond degree requirements, accelerated by AI-driven displacement and recruitment scandals. Communities place greater value on human qualities. Education systems begin to include emotional and social learning alongside academic subjects.

What would be the result or outcome of people interacting with, participating in or experiencing your concept?

Candidates with care histories or non-linear work paths are becoming visible to employers that previously screened them out. A life CV helps turn career gaps into something employers can understand and assess. The evidence of human capability becomes part of a person's formal record, witnessed and verified. Hiring processes become more explicit in how measurable humanity, such as empathy, judgement, care, connection and presence, are valued and assessed. Rejection becomes a developmental tool rather than a closed door, with candidates receiving feedback that supports future growth.

Emotional skills become something that can be trained, bought, or optimised, which risks creating new forms of inequalities. Those who can afford HUMN™ drinks, VR preparation coaching, and emotional performance training improve their performance. At the same time, concerns also grow around surveillance and emotional data extraction, leading to public protests against surveillance.

As behavioural data becomes part of hiring systems, identity itself increasingly becomes an employability structure.

How would different actors have to change if your concept existed?

Central government shifts from credential-based employment policy towards formally recognising lived experience as measurable economic value. It actively regulates how hiring works, biometric data collection, consent, and deletion rights.

Councils move from having no role in hiring standards to funding community Humanics workshops, and operating returnship support centres. Educational institutions embed human capability assessment alongside academic grades.

Employers move from delegating screening to automated systems towards hybrid processes where human reviewers remain formally accountable. Hiring managers review AI-flagged moments, write accountable rationales, and publish criteria transparently. Flexible re-entry pathways, care leave, and four-day work weeks shift from exceptions to standard commitments.

Community organisations become part of the verification system, acting as references. Citizens shift from performing credentials to articulating lived experience. That shift requires believing the system was built for them. Many do. Others seek advantage through coaching programmes, empathy supplements, or grey-market preparation.

What might be the risks that might unfold if your concept existed?

Privilege of the wealthy: The world built to value human qualities may commodify them instead. Those with financial resources could purchase HUMN™ drinks or coaching, recreating the same inequalities under a new idea of merit.

New ways to cheat: Fabricated care experience, and insider preparation networks could emerge rapidly.

Data privacy: VR assessments collect detailed emotional and behavioural data, creating large databases of personal profiles vulnerable to leaks and misuse.

Off-grid labour: Employers could bypass AI monitoring by creating parallel informal workforces outside regulatory protection.

Baseline bias persists: Neurodiverse candidates, trauma survivors, and differently abled people may be disadvantaged, as their natural responses are judged against normative expectations of appropriate emotional behaviour.

The illusion of human oversight: The system proposes that AI surfaces and humans decide. But when hiring managers review flagged footage, the algorithm has framed the decision before they make it. The interface changes. The bias does not.

How does your concept advance understanding of sociodigital futures?

Human Dividend sits at the intersection of three of the defining sociodigital tensions: automation, care work invisibility, and biometric data governance. It proposes that the response to AI displacement is not resistance to technology but a redesign of what technology is asked to measure, and at whose expense.

The concept reveals how digital infrastructure quietly reshapes what counts as skill, merit, and value. The AI mandate to surface and never decide proposes a design principle for human and AI collaboration that sits outside both full automation and full human subjectivity. It shows that technology and society co-produce new forms of opportunity and control simultaneously.

By using speculative design and diegetic artefacts rather than abstract argument, the concept makes these tensions feel concrete and coherent to discuss.

Were members of the public, citizens, or specialists involved in helping you design or develop your concept? How did they do this? What did they contribute?

The concept was developed through conversations, testing sessions, and feedback from members of the public, industry professionals, and specialists. PILAA, an EDI training and consultancy organisation, contributed critical insights into return-to-work challenges, including skills gaps, pay disparities, and confidence bias within re-entry programmes. Their feedback helped refine the project's focus on recognising care experience, fairer hiring systems, and the development of the Life CV.

User testing sessions with students, caregivers, and working professionals explored responses to speculative artefacts such as the Life CV, VR assessment centre, voice-verified witness reference, hiring outcome emails, A-levels certificate, HUMN™ drink and other marketing artefacts. Participants highlighted where the system felt meaningful, where it could be manipulated, and what forms of recognition felt credible.

Faculty critiques, peer feedback, and informal public conversations further refined the concept, surfacing tensions between recognition and surveillance, care and compliance, and support and optimisation.

How did research-through-design and prototyping help you progress your concept?

Building the artefacts before the arguments were fully resolved forced decisions that theoretical framing avoided. Research-through-design helped transform abstract ideas into tangible experiences that people could emotionally and critically respond to. The Life CV, Voice Verified Witness Reference and rejection stage were the most human moments in the whole system. Seeing HUMN™ drinks positioned alongside everyday wellness

products exposed the commodification of humanity more sharply than written critique alone.

Feedback from members of the public, peers, faculty, and specialists revealed that the artefacts felt both hopeful and unsettling. Some participants viewed the Life CV as liberating, while others saw it as a way to overstate their experience. These reactions reinforced that the project's value lies not in proposing a perfect hiring system, but in exposing the tensions between recognition, optimisation, surveillance, and fairness within the future human economy.

What have you learned about feminist futures and feminist design practices?

Feminist futures and feminist design practices taught us to question whose life a system is built around, and who is made invisible by it. Through this project, we learned that design often centres a “default” person; someone with a linear career, stable support, recognised experience, and the ability to perform professionalism in expected ways. Feminist futures asks us to challenge that default, rather than simply make existing systems appear more inclusive.

The hiring system of 2036 began as an attempt to value care, lived experience, empathy, and non-linear careers. However, the worldbuilding also revealed a contradiction. Even when care is valued, people may still need the right networks, language, evidence, and resources to prove it. Feminist thinkers such as Ruha Benjamin and the Design Justice framework showed us that fairer systems require naming structural bias directly. The project became a feminist futures provocation, exposing what the present already normalises.

How did your design methods have to change in order to take this perspective?

Taking a feminist futures perspective meant our design methods had to become more questioning, situated, and reflective. We moved beyond asking how hiring could be made more efficient, and instead asked who benefits, who is excluded, and what forms of labour remain invisible.

The project evolved from asking “how do we value human qualities?” to questioning what happens when empathy, care, and judgment become measurable. Speculative design and worldbuilding helped us test not only the intended benefits of this future but also its unintended consequences, including emotional performance, surveillance, unequal access, and the pressure to prove lived experience.

Our methods also became more reflective and participatory. Feedback from others helped us see where the system still reproduced exclusion, even when it appeared more humane. This shifted the project from designing a better hiring tool to using design as a way to critique existing assumptions.

Team 2 information

Eeshanee Badwe is a service designer with a background in UX research, product and graphic design. Her work sits at the intersection of systems, people, and social impact, and creates research-led human-focused and equitable experiences.

Smriti Bhandari is a service designer with a background in product design. Her interests are in storytelling and systems thinking to design experiences that foster connection and thoughtful human interaction.

Hui-Chuan Hsu is service designer and UX designer working across Taiwan and the UK with a background in community health and social innovation projects. They specialise in qualitative research and participatory design, and aim to keep people affected by services visible throughout the design process.

Rashi Jaiswal is a service designer with a background in branding and communication design. She is drawn to bringing together people, systems, and strategy, with the aim of making sense of complexity to uncover patterns and design better ways forward.

Shenyue Jian is a service designer, with a background in UX and UI design. Her experience is in human-centered and end-to-end design, and her interests are in how design is influenced by psychology and human behaviors.



VRSupport Programme

Structured preparation for the VR assessment and human qualities coaching.

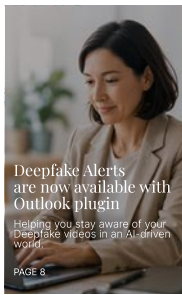
We offer:

- VR assessment familiarisation sessions
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- Human qualities coaching with experienced practitioners
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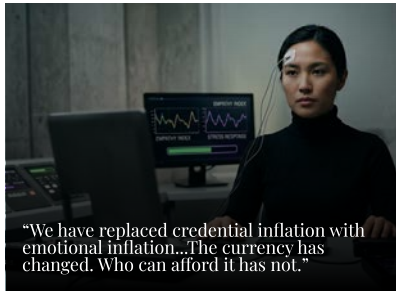
Helping you stay aware of your Deepfake videos in an AI-driven world

PAGE 8

Are Human Qualities Even Real Anymore?

by Sam Smith

Questions grow around fairness, pressure, and re-entry standards.



"We have replaced credential inflation with emotional inflation...The currency has changed. Who can afford it has not."

The human qualities hiring movement was built on one idea. That empathy, judgement, and care are real and not for sale. Then came the HUMN shot.

For £320, anyone can now prime their emotional responsiveness before an assessment. Neural optimisation clinics promise to raise your empathy baseline in six sessions. Stress response coaching has become an industry built entirely around biometric hiring preparation.

The candidate who arrives having slept well, taken their supplements, and completed a preparation programme will read differently to the one who arrived after a night shift. Both are measured against their own baseline. But the baselines were not built in equal conditions.

Human qualities developed through years of care and difficult experience cannot be manufactured in six sessions. But in a thirty minute simulation, it may not matter.

The New Privacy Crisis: Why Are Data Leaks Still Common

by Annie Mitchell

A major leak of over 200 million behavioural profiles this week has reignited concerns about data security in 2026. Despite advanced encryption and AI monitoring, breaches remain frequent—not due to single system failures, but the complexity of modern data ecosystems.

Today's data is not static; it flows continuously across cloud networks, devices, and AI systems. This creates multiple weak points, where even trusted integrations can expose sensitive information.

Regulations by the Department for Science, Innovation & Technology have improved traceability requirements, but enforcement is uneven across borders. Meanwhile, companies continue to prioritise speed and personalisation over strict containment.

Experts argue the issue is no longer just technical but structural. New approaches, such as data trusts and minimisation-by-design systems, are emerging to reduce risk. However, adoption is slow.

As leaks become routine rather than exceptional, public scrutiny has shifted: organisations are now judged less on whether breaches occur, and more on how responsibly they design their data systems in the first place.

"Data leaks are the predictable outcome of systems built to move faster than they can be secured."



In some cases, employers are choosing to bypass AI systems to avoid overtime flags or compliance triggers. This has created a parallel labour structure that exists alongside formal, fully monitored workplaces. One care worker said, "I get paid less, but I do not feel like I am being watched all the time." Economists describe this as a grey area emerging between regulated and unregulated work. While not illegal, off grid arrangements often fall outside standard reporting systems, making them difficult to measure or regulate.

Full Story: Page 5



Food Prices Down for Some, Not for All.

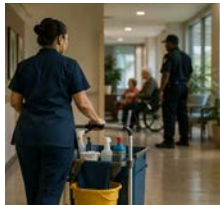
Prices change every day. Your Care Score can change them too.

Higher score, lower cost
Fast shopping with app
No waiting. Some shoppers save a lot. Others too left behind.
Check your price before you pay.

SOCIAL NEWS

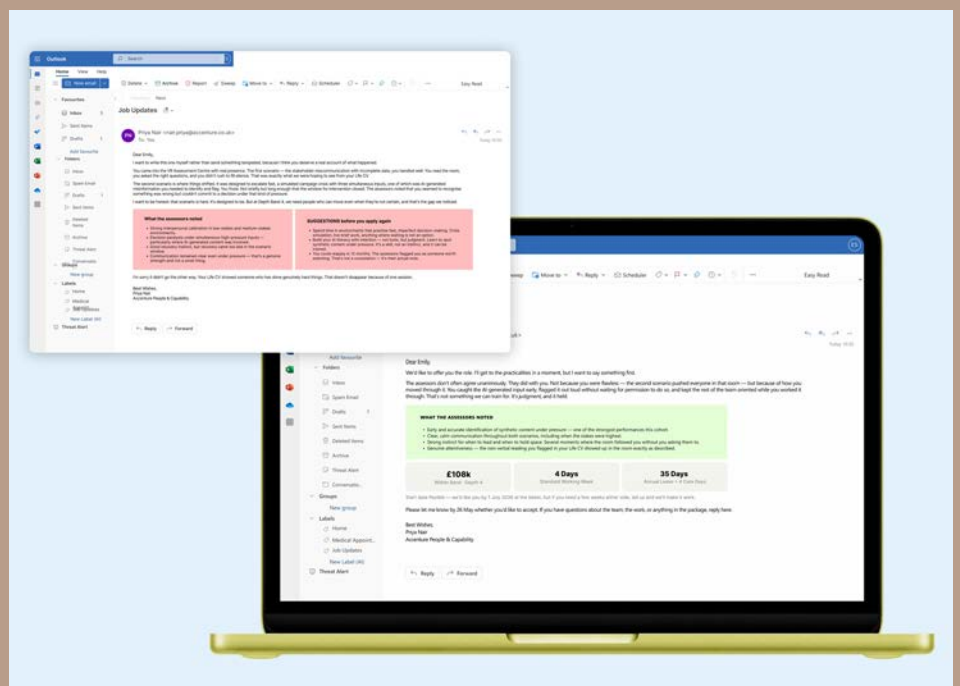
The Hidden Workforce Behind "Transparent" Systems

A growing number of workers are moving into what is being described as "off grid work", operating outside AI logged workplace systems. These workers are often employed in care, cleaning, security, and informal support roles. Instead of being tracked through biometric or AI performance systems, they work in environments that avoid digital monitoring entirely.



2036 Newspaper. The Sun

Human Qualities Crash Course



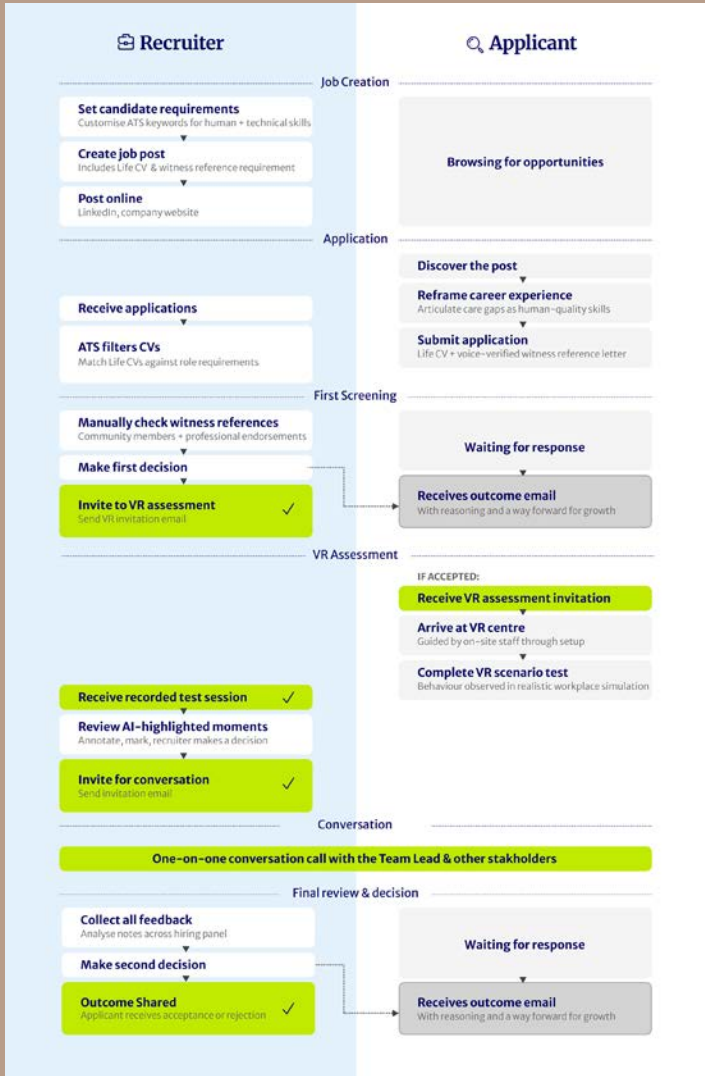
Acceptance and Rejection Mail



HUMN Drink



Empathy Practitioner ID Card



Journey mapping for candidates and hiring managers



VR Assessment Invitation



A Levels Certificate

Health: Menopause



Team 4: Apple and NHS Packaging

Team 3: Velaground™ - The Environmental Health Mediation System

Thennarasu
Sivakumar,
Yao Yao
Shrawani,
Srishti Madan

Velaground™ is a service set in 2036, where environmental pollution has begun to accelerate early perimenopause in women. In this context, it operates as a postcode-based health subscription system that monitors both environmental and biosensor data. It provides pollution reports, personalized supplements, rapid symptom relief strips, and an internal biosensor designed to support everyday management of symptoms.

While the system is highly effective in helping individuals cope, it does not remove pollutants from the body. As data accumulates across users, patterns of collective environmental exposure begin to emerge, unintentionally giving rise to a social movement known as 'Autumn'.

The project explores a critical question: when adaptive systems become increasingly effective at managing the effects of a problem, do they reduce the urgency to address its root causes?

To what future world does your concept relate?

Pollution is embedded in everyday environments and directly affects endocrine systems. Environmental data is continuously displayed across public infrastructures, showing local temperature and contamination levels (Body Debt Index Poster. p71), often accompanied by targeted health product advertising (Sleepy. Cooling Mattress advert poster. p.72). Health is no longer understood as an individual condition, but as something shaped by location, based on a person's postcode.

Healthcare systems remain reactive and overstretched, with long waiting times and limited capacity to respond to emerging environmental health

conditions. In this context, private services take on a growing role, using data-driven approaches to monitor, interpret, and mitigate the symptoms.

Environmental exposure becomes normalised as part of daily life yet remains unevenly distributed. While some individuals can manage and adapt through personalised services, others continue to experience the effects without access to the right support.

What provocation does your concept respond to?

Our concept responds to the provocation: What if environmental harm becomes internalised within the body, and its management is increasingly privatized? This question led us to explore a series of related provocations: What if menopause care is finally normalised, but only through market-driven systems? What if care becomes highly effective at the individual level, but the systemic accountability disappears? What happens when adaptation is optimised? Who remains responsible for addressing the root cause? We further asked: what if the data infrastructures built to personalise this adaptation begin to reveal underlying patterns? Could systems designed for individual care unintentionally make structural harm visible?

Through these questions, the project examines a shift from public responsibility to private adaptation, and the tensions that emerge when effectiveness at the individual level coexists with inaction at the systemic level.

What insights about citizen needs, practices or behaviours does your concept relate to or draw on?

The concept draws on a shift where women's physical changes are increasingly individualised, despite having environmental causes. Perimenopause symptoms vary and are often minimised within public and professional contexts, leading to a preference for low-friction, continuous forms of management rather than engagement with clinical pathways. Trust in health data increases when it is directly linked to the body, while environmental risks, although recognised, lack visibility.

Horizon scanning highlights the rapid expansion of FemTech beyond fertility, with biosensing technologies becoming normalised through devices such as Oura and Apple Watch. This signals a broader move toward continuous, data-driven self-monitoring as part of everyday health practices.

User testing further revealed how these conditions are experienced and negotiated in practice. Skin-marking was not perceived as culturally neutral (Phase 1), jewellery-based devices conflicted with workplace constraints at clinical or food-service environments (Phase 2), and speculative concepts were consistently interpreted as present-day products before participants were supported with methods to engage with future contexts (Phase 3).

Together, these insights point to a gap between awareness and action, where health management becomes increasingly personalised, while the structural conditions shaping those conditions remain less visible and harder to address.

Who would interact with, participate in or experience your concept?

Women living in urban environments, particularly in high-contamination postcodes, interact with Velaground as primary users of the system. They engage through continuous monitoring and personalised health management, integrating the service into everyday routines.

NHS practitioners, including menopause specialists, access biosensor data to support diagnosis and consultation, while staff at Women's Health Hubs distribute kits and run training sessions to facilitate use.

Velaground operates as a commercial provider, positioning itself between public healthcare and individual care practices. Alongside these formal structures, influencers and grassroots organisations play a role in shaping public perception, contributing to the emergence of the Autumn movement.

Through these interactions, the system extends beyond a service into a wider socio-technical network, where care, data, and public discourse become interconnected.

How would these people/groups interact with, participate in or experience your concept?

Velaground restructures relationships between body, data, and care. Individuals engage in continuous bodily monitoring, contributing personal data to a shared system while becoming increasingly responsible for managing environmental health impacts. Healthcare shifts into a hybrid model, where public institutions access privately generated data, and care is partially outsourced to commercial platforms.

Through the Vela biosensor, the body becomes a site of continuous data extraction, blurring the boundary between internal physiology and external systems. The weekly journal introduces a reflective practice, linking subjective experience with quantified data. The app's postcode map, initially designed for personalisation, aggregates individual data into collective patterns of exposure.

Describe the new relationships that your service concept enables or makes evident.

These interactions create new relationships: between individuals and data infrastructures, between private services and public healthcare, and between personal experience and collective awareness. As shared exposure becomes visible, individual adaptation transforms into a basis for political recognition, contributing to the emergence of the Autumn movement.

What resources, technologies, policies, behaviours or arrangements are required for your concept to work?

Velaground operates within a system shaped by advances in biosensing, environmental degradation, and healthcare strain.

Bioresorbable microsphere technology is approved for consumer use, enabling continuous internal monitoring as part of everyday health management. Environmental contamination of air, water, and soil is widespread, making health increasingly dependent on location.

Public healthcare systems are overstretched, with long waiting times for menopause-related care, creating conditions for private services to fill the gap. Regulatory frameworks, such as the Reproductive Health Digital Companion Act (2034), allow biosensor data to be integrated into NHS records, legitimising privately generated health data.

New institutional arrangements emerge, including certification systems for postcode-calibrated health products and expanded Equality Act provisions addressing menopause-related discrimination. These are supported by a broader behavioural shift: the normalisation of personalised, data-driven health management as a routine part of everyday life.

What would be the result or outcome of people interacting with, participating in or experiencing your concept?

Individuals experience improved symptom management and reduced uncertainty about their bodies through continuous monitoring and personalised interventions. However, environmental pollution is gradually reframed as a personal health responsibility, shifting the burden of adaptation onto individuals.

For some users, the service creates a sense of being seen and supported, particularly when data can be used to communicate with healthcare providers. At the same time, aggregated data—originally designed for personalisation—begins to reveal patterns of collective environmental exposure. This shared visibility contributes to the emergence of the Autumn movement, where individual experiences become politicised.

Over time, the system produces a paradox: it effectively mitigates symptoms while also normalising the conditions that cause them. By making the problem manageable at an individual level, it absorbs the urgency for structural change and reduces pressure on the systems responsible for environmental harm.

How would different actors (eg central government, local government, business, civil society, citizens) have to change, if your concept existed?

Central government shifts from direct intervention to regulatory oversight, establishing data governance frameworks and national contamination registries. Local governments take on the role of making environmental data publicly accessible at a postcode level.

The NHS moves from being a primary provider to a hybrid system, integrating private biosensor data and relying on external services to extend care capacity. Businesses become embedded within health infrastructure,

offering data-driven interventions while operating within newly defined regulatory boundaries.

Civil society organisations, including Women's Health Hubs, navigate a complex position between public trust and commercial partnership, while also supporting community-level engagement.

Citizens shift from passive recipients of care to active participants in data production and health management. Over time, this also enables new forms of collective awareness and political action, as seen in the emergence of the Autumn movement.

What might be the risks that might unfold if your concept existed?

Velaground introduces risks across social, economic, and political domains. Health becomes increasingly commodified; reinforcing inequality as access to personalised care depends on the ability to pay. At the same time, responsibility for environmental harm shifts away from polluters and onto the individuals who absorb its effects.

The integration of biosensor and postcode data creates highly intimate profiles, raising risks of discrimination in insurance, employment, and housing. During research, some participants already expressed reluctance to share such data, indicating early resistance to these forms of surveillance.

As the system becomes more effective, it risks obscuring the structural causes of harm. Continuous monitoring normalises the body as a site of data extraction, while adaptation becomes an individual task. Over time, the service may become infrastructural; embedded, expected, and difficult to opt out of; even as the underlying environmental problem remains unresolved.

How does your concept advance understanding of sociodigital futures?

Velaground advances understanding of sociodigital futures by showing how data infrastructures not only connect individuals, but also redistribute responsibility across systems. It highlights a key tension: while personalised data systems promise individual empowerment, they can simultaneously shift the burden of structural problems onto those most affected.

The project also reveals how data designed for individual care can generate unintended collective effects. The Velaground dot map, initially a personalisation feature, becomes an infrastructure for shared visibility of environmental exposure. This shift demonstrates that sociodigital systems are not fixed in meaning; data can be reinterpreted and repurposed, enabling new forms of collective awareness and political action.

Rather than presenting digital futures as purely empowering or exploitative, the concept frames them as ambivalent infrastructures capable of both individual support and systemic displacement.

Were members of the public, citizens, or specialists involved in helping you design or develop your concept? How did they do this? What did they contribute?

Public participants were involved through three phases of testing, shaping both the direction and form of the concept. In Phase 1, a transfer-tattoo probe tested ideas of visibility with women from diverse cultural backgrounds. Their responses challenged the assumption that menopause should be made visible, leading to a shift away from identity-based expression.

In Phase 2, a kit-and-ring concept was tested with users in clinical and food-service roles, revealing practical constraints around workplace compliance and wearability. This exposed gaps between design intention and everyday conditions.

In Phase 3, a public poster poll conducted outside a Lidl invited women to select preferred biosensor formats. The majority chose a dissolvable sphere, indicating openness to more embedded forms of monitoring when framed as low-friction care.

Across all phases, participants shaped decisions around form, usability, and pricing, while also revealing deeper tensions around data trust, bodily autonomy, and the limits of personalisation.

How did research-through-design and prototyping help you progress your concept?

Research-through-design and prototyping enabled the concept to evolve through situated feedback, testing not only technical feasibility but also cultural acceptance and ethical implications. Each iteration functioned as a probe: from transfer tattoos to wearable rings, and finally to a bioresorbable microsphere, with each shift directly shaped by participant responses rather than internal design assumptions.

Public engagement revealed key tensions. Participants evaluated speculative artefacts as present-day products, leading to the development of “Temporal Anchor Prompting” as a method to help them situate themselves within the proposed future context.

Prototyping also surfaced unintended effects. The silver tint left by the dissolving sphere, initially incidental, became a powerful visual marker, later embedded into the narrative as part of the Autumn movement.

Rather than validating solutions, the prototypes acted as tools for exposing constraints, reframing the project from product design toward systemic critique.

What have you learned about feminist futures and feminist design practices?

Feminist futures and design practices emphasise not only centring marginalised bodies and experiences, but understanding how those experiences

are shaped by intersecting structural conditions. In this project, this was not an additional perspective, but a fundamental design approach.

Phase 1 was instructive because it failed. We had assumed skin was a neutral design surface, but participants from non-Western backgrounds challenged this directly. This exposed how design decisions are always culturally situated, and how quickly “visibility” can become a burden rather than empowerment.

Luiza Prado’s argument that dystopian futures are already lived realities for many groups reframed the project, shifting it from imagining futures to recognising present inequalities.

The inclusion of the Honesty Statement reflects this approach: a system acknowledging its own limits. Feminist design, in this sense, is not about resolving contradiction, but making it visible and accountable.

How did your design methods have to change in order to take this perspective?

Adopting a feminist perspective required a shift from neutral problem-solving toward situated and critical design practice. Rather than focusing on individual solutions, the methods expanded to examine how design decisions are embedded within cultural, social, and systemic contexts.

Three key changes followed. First, decision-making shifted from internally driven to participant-led. The transition from tattoo to biosensor sphere was directly shaped by user feedback, challenging initial design assumptions.

The third prototyping phase introduced multiple artefacts around the world that are not about velaground, which are designed to help individuals immerse themselves in speculative design. And, critical reflection was embedded into the artefacts themselves. The Honesty Statement operates as a form of internal critique, where the system acknowledges its own limitations within its own interface.

Team 3 information

Shrawani is a service designer with a background in UX and systems thinking. Her focus is on speculative worldbuilding, systems mapping, and translating complex societal issues into tangible, human-centered experiences and storytelling.

Thennarasu Sivakumar is a service designer with a background in industrial design and medical design. He combines process-driven thinking, human-centric design, and a systems perspective to create thoughtful, end-to-end solutions that address real user contexts and needs.

Yao Yao is a service designer and UX designer with a background in enterprise systems, CRM infrastructure and cloud-based product platforms. Her focus is on exploring how design can expand its impact across systems and contexts.

Srishti is a service designer with a background in communication design. Her focus is on bringing a visual and critical lens to complex systemic issues. She brings design as a tool for critique, shaping how exploitation can be made legible through the objects and systems people trust.



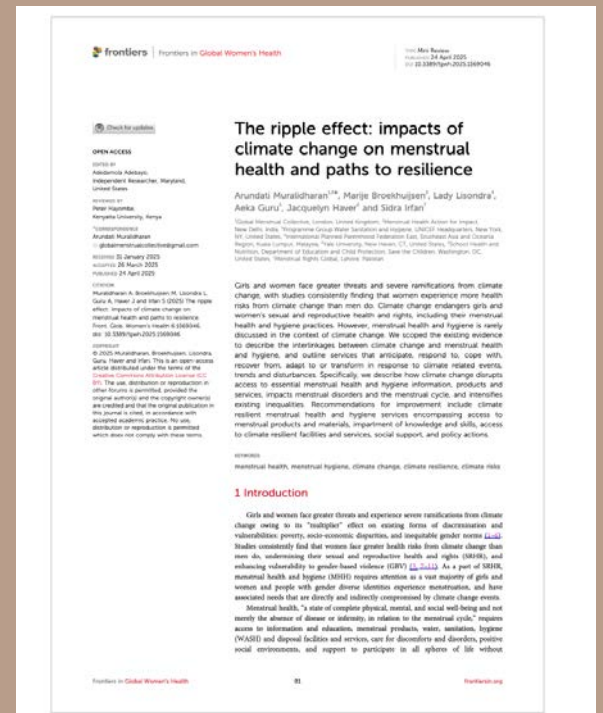
Velaground launch event



Velaground Products



Letter from Joining Hands Foundation



2025 Research paper



TFL Body Debt Index Poster



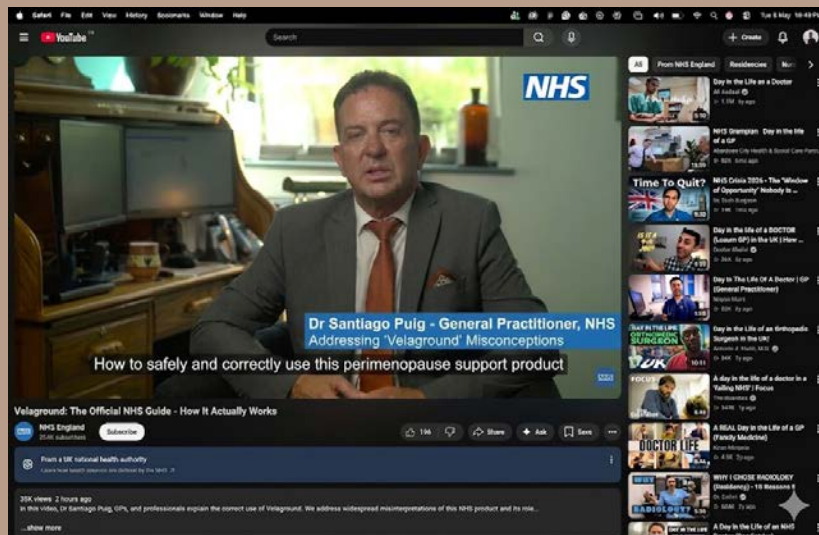
2036 Newspaper. The Guardian



2036 Newspaper. The Sun



Velaground Box



NHS GP explaining Velaground



Protest support



Sleepy. Cooling Mattress. Advert

Team 4: Menopause Intelligence

Anisha Jhaveri,
Arunima
Dhawan,
Haerin Lee,
Sae Mahajan,
Yingze Luo

The Menopause project aims to reframe menopause as a well-monitored transition within the broader women's health landscape, optimised and personalised by consumer tech. We have framed the project around one question: What if menopause were treated with the same information, intention, and involvement as fertility?

Through this question, menopause is strategically repositioned as an informed, visible, trackable, and economically valuable health category.

We have designed a world around two main interventions:

1. **Apple Rhythm +:** A wearable bracelet and adaptive hormone patch system, integrated with Apple Health. Positioned within a market-driven ecosystem, it tracks ~190 parameters to provide personalised hormonal insights, recommendations and interventions using a subscription-based model.

2. **NHS Hormone Tracking Protocol:** Drawing on similar smart technology, the NHS bracelet focuses on public healthcare. It situates the technology within the existing clinically supervised pathway, with better access and integration.

The comparison is not to choose one over the other, but to show how different political, economic, and institutional values shape the experience of menopause care itself.

To what future world does your concept relate?

Since 2026, as the NHS has introduced menopause into routine health checks, by now, in 2038, menopause has also become normalised within consumer technology, workplaces, insurance systems, and everyday social life.

- Hormonal monitoring has become popular through wearable bracelets, adaptive patches, and predictive health platforms that continuously collect physiological data.
- Employers provide menopause support plans in the same way fertility benefits were once introduced.
- Retail campaigns, subscription services, and public health programmes position menopause as a long-term optimisation market rather than a short-term medical condition.

At the same time, there are tensions.

- While women are receiving more support and medical attention, they are expected to continuously track, manage, and disclose their bodies.
- Technology companies have framed hormonal data as empowerment, while healthcare systems have framed it as prevention and efficiency.
- Care has become accessible yet data-driven and commercialised, making it difficult to separate from consumer behaviour.

What provocation does your concept respond to?

A woman's health often comes down to her reproductive health rather than personal well-being, and once she loses this capacity, society sees it as the end of her womanhood. Our project responds to this bias using the provocation: What if menopause were treated with the same information, intention, and involvement as fertility?

Fertility has historically attracted greater medical attention, family involvement and public debate. But menopause lacks this investment and has been reduced to a problem left for women to manage privately. Not that fertility care is ideal, but there is a structural imbalance in the understanding of women's health. The world sees fertility from a gain mindset, while it sees menopause from a loss and decline mindset. Rather than presenting a perfect solution towards this imbalance, the project introduces new systems for menopause and its frictions- all through new age technology, existing healthcare infrastructure, and the complex, capitalist consumer markets.

What insights about citizen needs, practices or behaviours does your concept relate to or draw on?

Menopause Intelligence draws on three converging shifts identified through Horizon Scanning and Evidence Safari.

1. Menopause is moving from a private endurance into a publicly managed

life stage.

- A 2024 NHS Confederation data shows 60,000 UK women leave work annually due to menopause symptoms, costing £1.5-1.8B in GDP.
- The UK Equality and Human Rights Commission Guidelines, 2024, recognise menopause symptoms as qualifying for disability protections under the Equality Act.
- The Department of Health and Social Care in the NHS has begun integrating menopause screening into routine 40+ health checks.
- The NHS has progressively improved financial support for HRT, now embedding it entirely within NHS care.

2. Bodies are increasingly tracked, predicted, and managed.

- Private FemTech companies (Balance, Vitall, Elvie) are rapidly expanding their consumer-grade hormone-tracking offerings.
- Wearables, home diagnostics, and AI symptom-pattern detection are normalising continuous biometric monitoring as a health practice.

3. Menopause visibility is becoming highly commodified.

Anti-aging markets, influencer-led supplement brands, and menopause-friendly labelling are reshaping menopause into a consumer category often profiting from the very anxieties they claim to address.

How would these people/groups interact with, participate in or experience your concept?

The concept makes visible menopause as a relational practice.

1. The body-system relationship becomes continuous: a wearable bracelet tracks hormonal patterns; a phone app interprets them, and smart patches release supplements in response.

- NHS users encounter active consent steps, escalation alerts to the GP, and exemption certificates.
- Apple Rhythm+ users encounter premium lifestyle framing and personalised AI recommendations.

Real-time data creates an ongoing dialogue, and perimenopause thus becomes a life stage women are better prepared for, like fertility.

2. Family units are better involved in the woman's life, not just dismissing her symptoms but also extending care and support. E.g., the product becomes a family's go-to gift for Mother's Day or Women's Day, with personalisation every year.

3. Apple evolves its products through yearly updates, and more fem-tech companies invest in such wearables. Fem-tech engineers and pharmaceutical companies capitalise on the data pool, which inadvertently fuels a wicked consumer market and counterfeits. NHS-embedded wearables, in turn, could increase demand on the already stretched system.

What resources, technologies, policies, behaviours or arrangements are required for your concept to work?

The concept requires changes across several interconnected domains by 2038.

Policy:

- NHS adopts changes under The 10 Year Health Plan for England to deliver preventive care for all patients, such as a planned NHS Menopause Care Pathway, established between 2026 and 2030, a Menopause Exemption Certificate introduced in 2031, modelled on the maternity exemption, and in 2036, embedding HRT treatment completely under NHS, covering HRT for all.
- Workplace adjustments for menopause are required under the Equality Act and the Digital Health Data regulations governing hormone data evidence in legal proceedings.

Technology:

- Continuous developments in biometric wearables, transdermal smart patches releasing hormones and supplements based on body signals.
- AI symptom-pattern detection trained on disaggregated datasets across ethnicities.
- Partner-pharmacy distribution infrastructure that links NHS pathways to physical access.

Cultural shifts:

- Mainstream media has normalised menopause; there is a reduction in generational stigma, and corporate adoption of menopause-positive workplace cultures.
- Increased mental health support, identifying the emotional effects of menopause on women.

Education:

- Knowledge infrastructure, especially in medical schools, has included menopause care into the curriculum, making it the baseline standard and compulsory.

What would be the result or outcome of people interacting with, participating in or experiencing your concept?

The concept reveals both what we gain and what we intensify when we treat menopause like fertility.

What we gain is a step toward more holistic women's health: products that support early symptom recognition, reduce productivity loss, strengthen workplace protections, connect people to integrated care pathways, and frame menopause as a recognised life stage rather than a private struggle. It also opens space for intergenerational conversation.

At the same time, this approach can reproduce and intensify:

women feeling overwhelmed with the constant signalling of intervention and increased medicalisation of minor hormonal fluctuations, data breaches through continuous biometric tracking, hormone data used in legal or workplace disputes, the commodification of menopause through anti-ageing markets causing anxieties, unequal access between premium and public systems, Eurocentric assumptions built into algorithms, and care work that technology privatises instead of redistributing.

It also surfaces the in-between actors, such as family members, who appear unevenly. Technology addresses clinical continuity, but emotional continuity remains a design problem.

How would different actors (e.g., central government, local government, business, civil society, citizens) have to change if your concept existed?

The central government would shift to recognising menopause as a cross-departmental policy. E.g., A Menopause Exemption Certificate would require a treasury commitment comparable to that for maternity provisions.

Local governments and NHS trusts would establish menopause care pathways through partner pharmacies, requiring new commissioning frameworks and ethical oversight.

Businesses would become more divided: FemTech companies would compete for premium markets while facing tighter regulation around data use.

Insurers and employers would revise policies under expanded Equality Act protections, even as informal discrimination through hormone-data profiling remains a risk.

Civil society organisations, feminist health collectives, racialised health researchers, and disability rights groups would move from demanding recognition to scrutinising implementation, asking whose menopause is counted and whose data shapes algorithms.

Citizens would navigate menopause not as a private burden anymore but as a managed life stage, or sometimes as a publicly managed life stage whose terms, access, and boundaries they would increasingly question.

What might be the risks that might unfold if your concept existed?

Although our speculative concept reimagines the emphasis on menopause compared to that which is given to fertility, it still exists within a patriarchal system. Rather than solving these issues, the concept highlights how existing inequalities could evolve in new ways.

Women would still be pressured to appear youthful, and treatments meant for health support could easily slip into anti-ageing and cosmetic markets. Hormone-tracking could also create new forms of discrimination based on symptom severity, while hormonal data would raise serious concerns around privacy, surveillance, and misuse.

On a broader level, hormone technologies could expand into pseudo-medical consumer products that reinforce traditional gender norms, such as testosterone products linked to masculinity or estrogen products marketed around youth and beauty.

On a societal level, even with increased visibility, the framing around Menopause would carry the fundamental risks that exist around fertility today. In this world, menopause is still valued because managing it is seen as beneficial to wider systems, and care ultimately serves the maintenance of the status quo.

How does your concept advance understanding of sociodigital futures?

Our concept explores how future healthcare technologies could simultaneously increase visibility and support for menopause while also reinforcing patriarchal views, gender norms, and data-driven forms of medicalisation and optimisation.

Rather than presenting technology as inherently progressive, the project examines how existing social systems shape the way technologies are designed, used, and valued.

Through speculative products and services, we explore the tension between asking whether increased visibility of menopause would genuinely support women's health or simply create new systems of social regulation disguised as optimisation.

The concept advances understanding of sociodigital futures by showing how healthcare technologies can both empower and constrain at the same time.

Were members of the public, citizens, or specialists involved in helping you design or develop your concept? How did they do this? What did they contribute?

We conducted two rounds of public testing, speaking with around twelve women across different age groups. We also conducted three expert interviews with specialists whose work is connected to healthcare, service design, and public systems:

- Victoria Betton – Director for Digital, Data & AI, Health Innovation Kent Surrey Sussex
- Damine Patel – Senior Content Designer, Aire Logic Limited
- Veron Lai – Senior Lecturer, MA Service Design, UAL

In all sessions, we presented our diegetic prototypes and asked participants to respond to the products, services, and future world they suggested.

Feedback from both groups, though it often overlapped, focused on different aspects of the project.

1. The public participants helped us understand the concept's emotional

and social impact, signalling what felt believable, uncomfortable, exciting, or concerning about this future.

2. The experts contributed to more critical and practical feedback. They helped us think through the user journey, service lifecycle, and the feasibility of different elements within healthcare systems. Their insights helped us refine the concepts and make the speculative world more plausible.

Overall, these interactions helped us test both the product itself and the provocation behind it.

How did research-through-design and prototyping help you progress your concept?

Research-through-design and prototyping helped us progress the concept quickly by allowing us to test ideas early and gain immediate feedback. It helped us identify what aspects of the concept felt believable, uncomfortable, unclear, or provocative without needing to fully resolve the system beforehand.

Through public testing and expert feedback, we received responses on aesthetics, usability, emotional response, data privacy, and the tension between feeling supported and feeling tracked.

One major turning point came during the first round of testing. Participants were overwhelmingly focused on concerns around surveillance, data collection, and tracking rather than the experience of menopause itself. While this was valuable feedback, it also revealed that our prototypes over-emphasised the technology and did not fully communicate the broader world and social systems around it.

This directly influenced our next iterations and final presentation. We expanded world-building and introduced additional touchpoints to better communicate the wider cultural, medical, and societal systems shaping this future.

What have you learned about feminist futures and feminist design practices?

Feminist futures and feminist design practices made us realise that design can create a space to question the present from a feminist point of view, not simply imagine a future. In speculative work, this can move in two directions:

1. It can imagine a utopian world where oppressive structures are transformed
2. Or it can critically extend present systems to reveal how they might react to a feminist 'what if' and co-create alternative realities.

In our project, we were not trying to create a feminist utopia around women's health. Instead, we carried existing social, political, medical, and technological structures forward to ask what would happen if menopause became more visible and supported. This helped expose both the possibilities and risks of recognition.

In the context of menopause and health tech, feminist futures meant

questioning systems that have overlooked women's bodies, reduced them to reproductive value, or translated them into data without emotional and social context. It gave form to lived experiences often excluded from mainstream healthcare innovation.

How did your design methods have to change in order to take this perspective?

Adopting a non-utopian feminist perspective required our design methods to shift from a conventional user-centred approach to a more critical and political one. We were not trying to design the opposite of the existing system or to solve patriarchy and its challenges for women. One project cannot possibly do that. Instead, our methods had to make the problem undeniable.

We interrogated the power structures shaping women's health: who owns hormonal data, who gains access to care, whose bodies are represented, and whose experiences remain excluded across class, race, age, and digital literacy.

We also repeatedly revisited the political and ethical philosophies framing the project to ensure that our approach is nuanced and comprehensive, accessible, and not exclusively Eurocentric. This meant questioning patriarchal assumptions in every design decision and reorienting menopause discourse around women's needs rather than reproductive norms.

Team 4 information

Arunima Dhawan is a service designer and design strategist with experience across UX, UI, and brand strategy. Her work is driven by using design to make people's everyday experiences simpler, more intuitive, and enjoyable.

Anisha Jhaveri is a service designer with a background as an architect and interior designer in internationally collaborative and community-focused projects. Her interest is in shaping how people interact with spaces, services, and systems to create social impact.

Haerin Lee is a service designer with a background in engineering. Her focus is on exploring how design can shape more equitable everyday experiences through the lens of user-centered research, inclusive design, wellness, and feminist futures.

Yingze Luo is a service designer with a background in urban planning. His focus is on human-centred design and the spatial formation of cities, and his work explores how design can respond to real-world social needs.

Saee Mahajan is a service designer and communication designer with a background in publication design and branding for government and finance. Her interests lie in utilising design to solve complex problems with care and integrity.

THE TIMES

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NHS introduces the new Menopause Exemption Certificate

By Eleanor Hughes Health Editor

The NHS and Government have today launched the Menopause Exemption Certificate, a new scheme in England that will allow eligible patients to receive hormone replacement therapy (HRT) without paying prescription charges.

The initiative, which comes into force next month, is designed to remove cost barriers and improve access to HRT for women who continue to experience significant menopausal symptoms.

The scheme follows the recent passage of the Menopause Exemption Act through Parliament, which cleared both Houses last month after cross-party backing.

Under the scheme, women can apply for a digital certificate via their GP practice or participating pharmacies. Once approved, the certificate exempts patients from prescription charges for all NHS-supplied menopausal hormone therapy, including tablets, patches, gels and implants.

The NHS says the move follows evidence that more than half of women delay or stop treatment because of cost, despite HRT being the most effective treatment for many menopausal symptoms.

Certificates will be valid for 12 months and renewed annually. The eligibility criteria are based on NHS clinical guidance and focus on symptom impact rather than age.

Health Secretary Louise Hartley said the scheme marked a "major step towards fairer healthcare for women," adding: "No one should have to choose between managing debilitating symptoms and meeting everyday costs. This certificate puts choice and control back in women's hands."

The Royal College of GPs and menopause charities welcomed the announcement, calling it a long-overdue recognition of menopause as a health priority.

More information and registration details are available via the NHS App, GP practices and nhs.uk/menopause.



TECH

The rotten apples

Fake Apple Rhythm+ Patches Flood Market, Causing Severe Chemical Burns and Ulcers

By Daniel Price, Technology Correspondent



The rotten apples- Fake Apple Rhythm+ Patches Flood Market, Causing Severe Chemical Burns and Ulcers

The Apple Rhythm+ system has revolutionized menopausal and endocrine care.

However, unable to afford these proprietary smart patches has driven desperate consumers to online gray markets, where highly convincing counterfeits have been circulating at half the retail price.

These aren't just placebo stickers; they are actively dangerous chemical hazards, warned Dr. Aris Thorne, Director of Dermatology at UCSF Medical Center. "The authentic Apple patches use a highly regulated, bio-adaptive hydrogel. These counterfeits are using industrial solvents and corrosive acrylic resins mixed with unregulated synthetic estrogens."

Patients using the fake patches report an intense, burning itch within four hours of application.

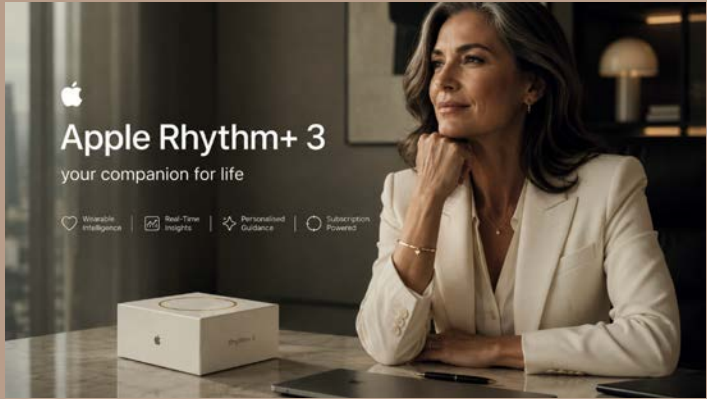
How to spot the counterfeits

The Peeling Edge
Fake patches curl and peel within hours.

The Sync Lag
The Apple Health app often shows a static hormone delivery rate rather than real algorithmic adjustments.

If you suspect you've used a fake patch, stop using it immediately and seek medical advice. Report it at mhra.gov.uk.

Because the counterfeit patches contain NFC chips, the Rhythm+ bracelet registers a successful connection. But left on the skin, the toxic adhesive causes rapid contact dermatitis, which quickly degrades into deep tissue ulcers that can take months to heal.



Apple Rhythm+ 3 Advert



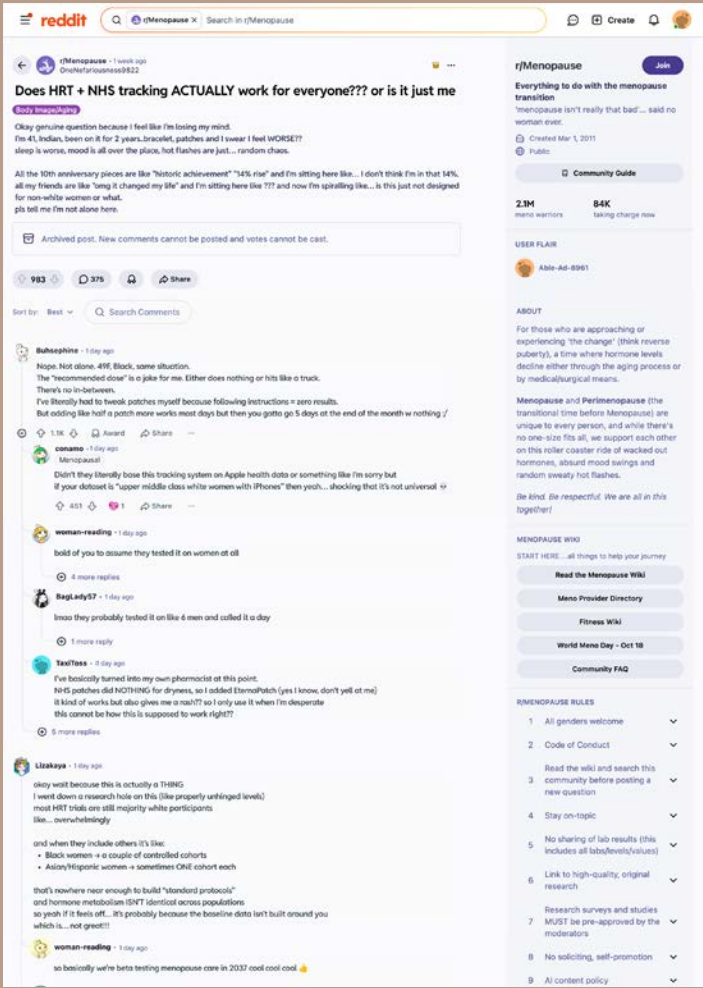
NHS Hormone Tracking Protocol Kit Advert



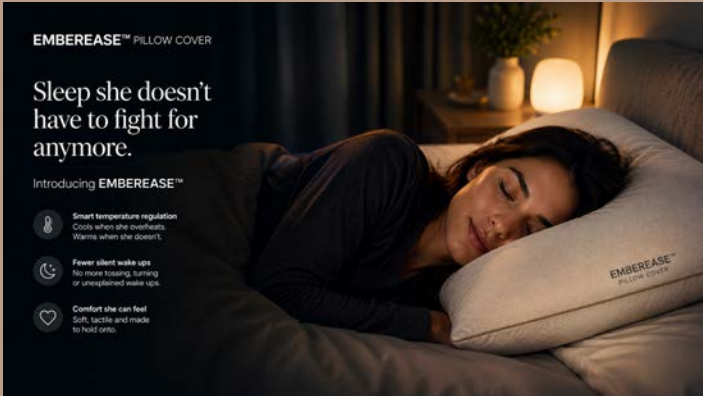
Apple and NHS packaging and products



Apple Rhythm+ User Interface



2038 Reddit Thread on Eurocentrism



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Spaces: Safety



Team 5: Women-only Bus Haven Designs

Team 5: Bus Havens (The Future of Spaces 2038)

Adib Ghani
Ahamed,
Odelia Vaz,
Kelsey Lim,
Tsz Ching Chan

Bus Haven 2038 reimagines the ordinary bus stop as public care infrastructure for safer waiting after dark. When someone waits alone, the Haven responds through warm lighting, live transport information, visible connection to other waiting travellers, and nearby Guardian support if needed. Portal screens connect people waiting alone across different locations, helping them feel seen rather than watched.

The concept also introduces Guardians of the Haven: trained community-based support roles who offer reassurance, respond to issues, support vulnerable travellers, and help maintain the space. In the speculative world, selected Bus Havens are recognised through a fictional UNESCO-supported framework as “living social and transit ecosystems”. Together, Bus Haven and the Guardians ask how public safety could be designed through care, presence, and shared responsibility rather than surveillance alone.

To what future world does your concept relate?

Bus Haven 2038 relates to a future world where urban mobility has become more unequal. From 2029 onward, micro-mobility, e-bikes and personal transport became dominant, while bus use declined. Those still depending on buses often had fewer alternatives, including women, older adults, disabled users and low-income groups. As AI-driven job loss increased social pressure, empty bus shelters became more vulnerable to anti-social behaviour, and the emotional safety of public transport spaces declined.

In response, the fictional 2031 ACE Act (Adaptable, Comfortable, Equitable). It redefined bus shelters as social and emotional infrastructure, not only transport infrastructure. By 2038, selected shelters have become

Bus Havens: warmer, more accessible, and supported by Guardians, portal screens and care-focused policies. The world is not utopian; it still raises tensions around surveillance, exclusion and who gets to feel safe in public space.

What provocation does your concept respond to?

Bus Haven 2038 responds to the provocation:

What if spaces were designed to create the feeling of safety? Instead of treating safety only as crime prevention, CCTV, lighting, or policing, the concept asks how safety is felt emotionally, socially and physically by those waiting alone in public space.

A second question shaped the project: What if bus shelters did more than just provide shelter? This reframed the bus stop from a passive transport object into an active care infrastructure. In this future, the shelter does not only protect people from rain or display bus times. It offers warmth, visibility, connection, support and shared presence.

Together, these questions challenge the assumption that public safety can be solved through surveillance alone. Bus Haven asks whether ordinary public infrastructure could help people feel less exposed, less isolated and less alone.

What insights about citizen needs, practices or behaviours does your concept relate to or draw on?

Micro-mobility becomes the norm, so bus use declines and buses are mainly used by citizens with fewer alternatives. AI-driven job loss increases social pressure, and emptier shelters lead to more visible anti-social behaviour. Women's safety in public transport spaces declines, with 70% changing routes to avoid feeling unsafe. Bus Havens respond by making waiting spaces more visible, comfortable and supportive, especially after dark.

Who would interact with, participate in or experience your concept?

Bus Havens are experienced by bus users, especially women travelling after dark and citizens with fewer transport alternatives. Older adults, disabled citizens, young commuters and night-time workers also interact with the shelters through seating, lighting and live location screens. Local councils, transport authorities and Guardians of the Havens participate by maintaining, monitoring and supporting these spaces.

Women-only bus havens were created to support the complex, multi-purpose, and caregiving-related trips that many women make on a daily basis. These trips may include, but are not limited to, mothers travelling with young children, women accompanying elderly relatives, caregivers running household errands, and passengers making multiple stops for work, school,

healthcare, shopping, and family responsibilities.

How would these people/groups interact with, participate in or experience your concept?

Bus users experience Bus Havens as supported waiting spaces rather than empty shelters. They use live location screens, responsive lighting and seating designed for different bodies, ages and needs. Women travelling at night can feel connected to others waiting in Bus Havens around the world.

Guardians of the Havens support safety and respond to concerns, while councils and transport authorities manage shelters as social and transit spaces, not just transport infrastructure.

What resources, technologies, policies, behaviours or arrangements are required for your concept to work?

The ACE Act (2031) mandates that bus stops become adaptable, comfortable and equitable. The Public Spaces (Safety and Guardianship) Bill (2033) requires Guardians to be present in Scheduled Spaces. Responsive technologies support Bus Havens: live location screens, Comfort Index sensors (crowding, noise, light, temperature), adaptive lighting (warm blue for calm, yellow for connection), fabric canopies and sound absorbing panels. Portal screens allow women waiting alone at night to see and acknowledge others across different havens, creating shared presence without surveillance.

Resources include council funding for retrofitting shelters, training for Guardians (many formerly homeless), and UNESCO recognition incentives. Behaviours have shifted: women no longer alter routes after dark; citizens contribute to Creative Commons Shelves (leaving books, notes, tools), local artists integrate murals and textiles. Safety is no longer treated as crime prevention but as emotional and social infrastructure, a change embedded in law, design and daily practice.

What would be the result or outcome of people interacting with, participating in or experiencing your concept?

Bus Havens make waiting feel less isolated, more legible and more dignified. More women and vulnerable travellers feel able to use buses after dark. Bus stops become recognised civic spaces rather than neglected pauses in a journey. The service produces practical outcomes, such as better route confidence and visible support, and symbolic outcomes, such as public recognition that women's safety is an infrastructure issue.

How would different actors (eg central government, local government, business, civil society, citizens) have to change, if your concept existed?

The central government funds and regulates care-based public infrastructure. Local government becomes responsible for comfort, maintenance and accountability. Transport authorities move beyond efficiency metrics to include felt safety. Businesses around bus stops become part of local care ecologies. Citizens shift from passive users to contributors who report, maintain and challenge how the Havens operate.

With the ACE Act in place, all bus stops are now expected to be adaptable, comfortable, equitable, accessible, safe, and welcoming for everyone. Peckham Bus Haven has become a leading example of this new standard. It has also been recognised by UNESCO as a Safe Space Site under Living Social and Transit Ecosystem Sites, turning it from a local project into a global example of safer public transport design.

Because of this, other areas in London are now competing to build better, safer bus stops with improved lighting, shelter, seating, accessibility, and support for women, children, elderly people, disabled passengers, and caregivers. The idea is now spreading to other cities too, showing how a simple bus stop can become a space of care, safety, and community.

What might be the risks that might unfold if your concept existed?

While Bus Havens were designed around care, safety, and belonging, they also reveal social and political risks. The ACE Act could become a system that wealthier boroughs can achieve more easily, safe and well-designed spaces in already privileged areas while increasing inequality elsewhere. Areas with less funding or weaker council support may struggle to even qualify as “safe,” reinforcing existing social and economic divides instead of reducing them.

When safety becomes attached to designated sites, the spaces between them, uncertified shelters, streets, and overlooked neighbourhoods may begin to feel even more abandoned/dangerous by contrast. Governments may also prioritise aesthetically pleasing Bus Havens in high-visibility areas while neglecting deeper structural issues across the wider city.

Most critically, the system raises questions around who decides what safety means, whose experiences are prioritised, and which spaces deserve recognition from UNESCO. A place that feels threatening to one person may feel familiar or culturally important to another.

There is also the possibility that spaces recognised as “safe” could increase forms of surveillance, behavioural monitoring to maintain their status.

How does your concept advance understanding of sociodigital futures?

Bus Havens contribute to the understanding of sociodigital futures by

reframing public infrastructure around care, emotional safety, and belonging rather than purely efficiency or surveillance. The project explores how future cities can access spaces through mobility and economic performance, but through comfort, accessibility, emotional wellbeing.

For example, in the speculative Amsterdam Women's Bus Haven, women waiting alone at night can connect through a shared live interface that allows them to see and acknowledge other women across nearby Bus Havens in real time. Rather than functioning as surveillance, the system acts as a form of social comfort and collective presence

Rather than imagining technology as the solution to urban safety, Bus Havens proposes a future where soft infrastructures like- lighting, warmth, materiality, acoustics, community activities, and emotional comfort become equally important in shaping how people experience bus shelters and overall city spaces, especially for women and marginalised communities after dark.

Were members of the public, citizens, or specialists involved in helping you design or develop your concept? How did they do this? What did they contribute?

Citizens in London played an important role in shaping the Bus Havens project through interviews, co-design activities, and informal conversations near bus stops with both younger and older commuters. We asked participants what safety meant to them and many associated it with warmth, comfort, softness, lighting, and the feeling of home.

During one co-design session, participants interacted with different materials and many instinctively chose fabric and cloth because they felt familiar and comforting. We also created speculative scenarios around waiting alone at night and asked what "superpower" they would want a bus stop to have. Responses included better lighting, visibility, warmth, and emergency communication.

One older woman we spoke to, carried her own foldable seat because she found bus stop seating uncomfortable. When shown images of future Bus Havens, she responded she would "love to live in an age where bus stops looked so comfortable." Many also expressed a desire for better lighting across London bus shelters.

How did research-through-design and prototyping help you progress your concept?

Research-through-design and prototyping helped us move away from abstract futuristic ideas and ground the project within real public experiences and behaviours. Through co-design activities, speculative scenarios, visual prototypes of the havens, and world building, we were able to test how people emotionally responded to ideas around safety, comfort, and belonging within public spaces.

Feedback from specialists significantly shaped the concept. Transport and mobility consultant Toby Godfray encouraged us to think about bus shelters

as micro-public spaces rather than simply transit infrastructure. Instead of relying on cameras or policing, we began focusing more on warmth, visibility, human presence, and welcoming environments as indicators of safety.

The feedback also helped us question the governance and accessibility of Bus Havens, including who maintains them, how care routes operate, and whether systems designed around safety could unintentionally create exclusion or unequal access in relation to the price that might be charged for the different routes.

What have you learned about feminist futures and feminist design practices?

We learned that feminist futures is not simply about designing spaces “for women,” but about questioning the systems, values, and assumptions that shape cities. Discussions with Nourhan Bassam helped us understand that women’s mobility is non-linear and deeply connected to care work, involving multiple everyday journeys between work, schools, childcare, grocery stores, and homes. Which is what led us to create “care routes” embedded as new routes for buses to cater to women.

This shifted our project away from thinking only about surveillance and towards emotional safety, comfort, accessibility, lighting etc. We also learned that safety is not always created through cameras or policing, but through social cohesion, visibility, warmth, and human presence.

Feminist design practices also highlighted the importance of governance and participation questioning who gets to define safety, whose voices are heard, and who has the “right to the city,” especially after dark. This strongly shaped how we imagined Bus Havens as care-centred public spaces.

How did your design methods have to change in order to take this perspective?

As service design students, we were used to structured methods such as the Double Diamond, stakeholder mapping, and “How Might We” questions focused on solving present-day problems. However, designing from a feminist futures perspective required us to become more comfortable with ambiguity, speculation, and world building.

Our process became far less linear and involved constant trial and error while testing ideas, futures, policies, and speculative scenarios. Instead of only asking “How might we solve this problem?”, we also began asking “What if?” and “What could this lead to over time?” We had to think carefully about the chain of events, social shifts, and consequences that could realistically shape the world of 2038.

The A/B Manifesto by Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby helped us shift from purely problem-solving towards problem-finding, provocation, and imagining parallel worlds. This allowed us to consider not only optimistic futures, but also the frictions, contradictions, and unintended consequences that emerge alongside innovation.

Team 5 information

Adib Ghani Ahamed is a service designer, UX designer and product designer with a background in NGO's, B2B industries and the education sectors.

Odelia Vaz is a service designer with a background in communication design. Her interests are in using ethnographic research to develop and build strategic interconnected systems.

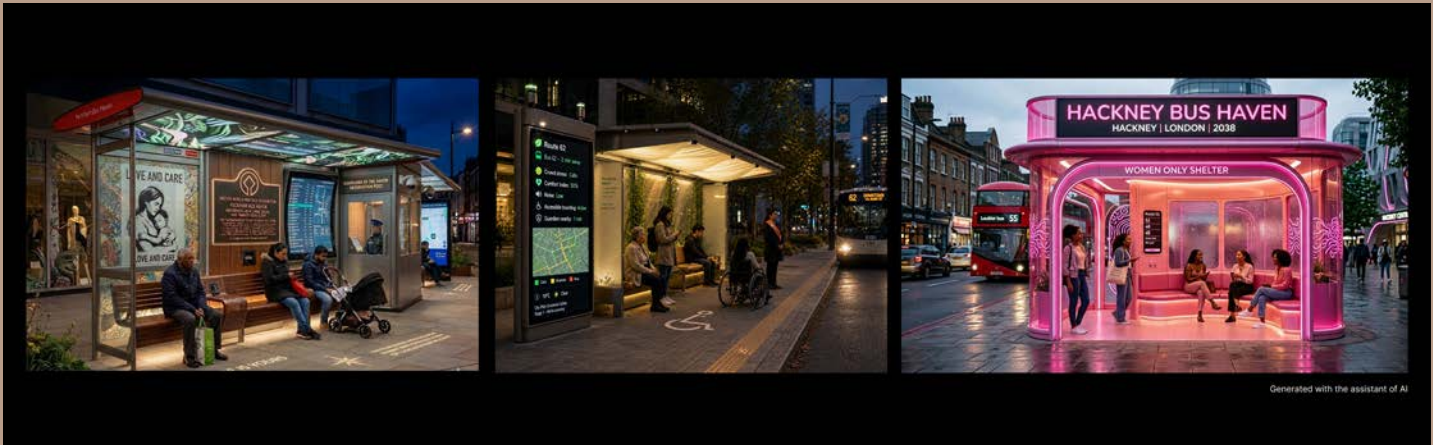
Kelsey Lim is a service designer with a background in brand marketing. Her interest is on bringing a branding-led perspective into academic projects and NGO work through focusing on identity, values and vision.

Tsz Ching Chan is a service designer and UX designer. With a background in B2B and O2O products across the education, retail, and financial sectors.



why is this guy approaching?

Safety in Buses Awareness Video



Bus Haven Designs



Exhibition image of London Buses Care Route, Public Safety Notice and Guardians of the Haven Uniform



Women After Dark Poster

Adaptable, Comfortable, Equitable Bill

EXPLANATORY NOTES

Explanatory notes to the Bill, prepared by the Ministry of Transport and Public Realm, are published separately as Bill 2031—EN.

EUROPEAN CONVENTION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Secretary for Transport has made the following statement under section 19(1)(a) of the Human Rights Act 1998:

In my view the provisions of the Adaptable, Comfortable, Equitable Bill are compatible with the Convention rights.

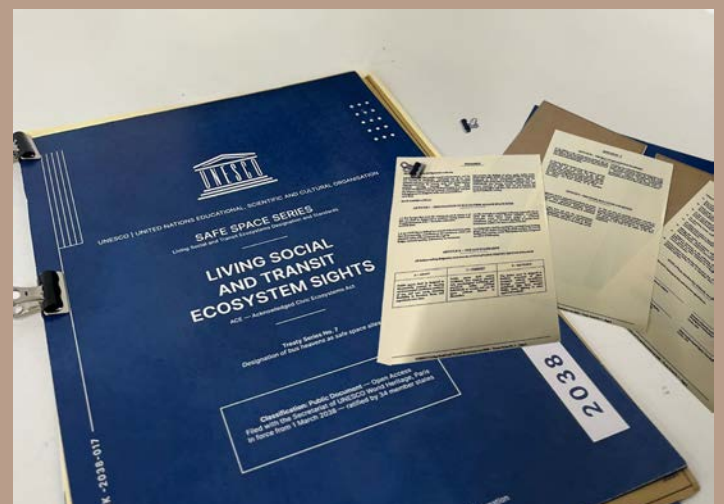
Adaptable, Comfortable, Equitable, (ACE) Bill



2031 TFL Adverts. The ACE Act



Unesco Safe Space Series Award for Peckham Bus Haven



2038 Unesco Safe Space Series Folder

Team 6: The Ministry of Social Wellbeing | Social Wellbeing Identity Card

Hibiki Nagaoka,
Pei-Tsen Lai,
Riya Kamdar,
Yuan Tao

The Social Wellbeing Identity Card is a speculative public service launched in London in 2035, initiated by 'The Ministry of Social Wellbeing'. It serves as a foundational infrastructure that categorises citizens by their social skills through personality archetypes (The Connector, The Dependent, The Intermittent, The Observer, The Solo Navigator). These archetypes are assigned via a mandatory Social Assessment Test. This classification dictates an individual's access to public spaces, the levels of resident tax, and eligibility for specific private sector services.

This system acts as a critical response to the loneliness epidemic and safety concerns of a hyper-individualised future. By transforming qualitative social connections into quantitative digital data, the service reveals a world where social participation is no longer a choice but a prerequisite for urban life.

It highlights the tension between government-mandated well-being and the systemic marginalisation of those who do not fit extroverted social norms.

To what future world does your concept relate?

In 2035 London, a demographic shift characterised by high singlehood and extended life expectancy has made loneliness a primary threat to social and

physical safety. Loneliness is no longer a private emotion but a public risk that undermines the overall well-being of the city.

Co-housing and shared living have become the default for single residents seeking security, and privacy is increasingly viewed as a social risk. Connection becomes the new currency where friendship acts as financial survival.

In this environment, access to public parks and retail sales strategy operates under “social boost” protocols, often barring solo visitors to ensure the city remains a space of mandatory interaction. These acts are built on the belief that being in a group is fundamentally better for social well-being.

What provocation does your concept respond to?

Our concept responds to the growing tension between government care and government control. Addressing loneliness to improve community safety, the Ministry of Social Wellbeing introduced the Social Wellbeing Identity Card. By collecting data on social identities, the government aims to build a more connected society, but this effectively treats being social as a mandatory civic duty.

This surfaces deeper provocations about government power and the loss of private, non-conforming social behaviours. We explored these dynamics through several “what if” questions:

- What if social participation became a condition for shared urban life?
- What if access to public space was shaped by your Social Participation Status?
- What if living alone changed what you could afford, book, or enter?
- What if connection became something the city could measure, reward, and require?

What insights about citizen needs, practices or behaviours does your concept relate to or draw on?

The Horizon Scanning and Evidence Safari showed three clear trends: co-housing for single adults is slowly increasing across Europe, especially for those who do not want to live within traditional family structures; life expectancy is rising in many developed countries due to technological advancements; and more young individuals are treating AI as a main source of advice and emotional support.

London in 2035 is a society where loneliness becomes a central social issue. As singlehood continues to rise, the need for intentional communities beyond the family (such as co-housing) grows.

Longer, healthier lives mean more years in which individuals risk becoming socially and physically isolated. At the same time, as AI becomes more capable and more embedded in daily life, some face-to-face, “real” connections are replaced by mediated, digital ones.

Together, these dynamics maintain how emotional and physical safety depend on social participation, and where loneliness is treated as a public concern rather than a private feeling.

Who would interact with, participate in or experience your concept?

The Social Wellbeing Identity Card is a mandatory public infrastructure that involves every adult resident in London. The primary participants are citizens who must navigate the system's impact on their daily lives.

At the institutional level, the Ministry of Social Wellbeing serves as the central regulator, managing personal social data and the assessment process.

Beyond the government, the professional sector is deeply integrated; employers in industries like hospitality use the system to recruit specific archetypes, such as "The Connector," while retailers and housing providers adjust pricing and access based on these social scores.

Finally, citizens, particularly introverted individuals or those having autonomous lifestyles like "The Solo Navigators", face the most friction, as they must navigate a system that treats their lifestyle as a taxable liability.

How would these people/groups interact with, participate in or experience your concept?

Citizens engage with the service through the Social Assessment Test, which provides a personalised recommendation for improving their social wellbeing score and community presence. This supports a more proactive relationship with the community, encouraging the building of local ties and a sense of belonging in shared environments like parks or cohousing communities.

The service also enables new types of collaboration; for example, influencers share "Connection Hacks" to help others optimise their profiles and reduce their tax rates, while products like "Socia+" (an energy drink for boosting confidence) help build connections during social gatherings.

While these interactions help individuals feel supported and active, they also make a new kind of "social performance" visible. Relationships can become more intentional, though sometimes transactional, as individuals connect to access "Pairs/Groups Only" spaces or financial benefits. Ultimately, the service highlights the shift toward treating social connection as a vital form of public infrastructure.

What resources, technologies, policies, behaviours or arrangements are required for your concept to work?

The service requires a national data infrastructure that can securely store, update, and analyse Social Participation Status for every adult resident. This includes systems that run the Social Assessment Test and the Social Identity Wellbeing Card, as well as interfaces that provide regulated access,

including verification and internal use of the information.

At a policy level, the central government needs to recognise loneliness as a safety issue, fund the Ministry of Social Wellbeing to run the mandatory Social Assessment Test, and maintain its systems. Local councils also need to follow governmental decisions and operate “social boost” schemes.

Social norms also need to shift; the idea is that being in a group is safer and more desirable than being alone.

What would be the result or outcome of people interacting with, participating in or experiencing your concept?

The primary outcome is a significant increase in visible social activity and community engagement across London. Many participants experience enhanced social support and a reduction in isolation, finding that the system provides the necessary push to rebuild local networks. However, this visibility often comes at the cost of authenticity.

While some find genuine belonging, others develop social performance behaviours where interactions are driven by financial incentives or the need to maintain a certain “Social Archetype”. The system creates a world where every personality type has distinct advantages and disadvantages.

This changes how everyone thinks about their daily schedule. While extroverted people might naturally thrive, others have to be more mindful of how they spend their time. Instead of just being a private choice, citizens are essentially investing in their social standing to keep their benefits, like lower taxes or access to better public spaces.

How would different actors (eg central government, local government, business, civil society, citizens) have to change, if your concept existed?

The government would move from just providing services to actively managing how people connect. Local councils would run social boost programs to make sure neighbourhoods aren't getting too lonely.

Businesses would have to modify their strategy to assess what social archetypes would best fit their goals. For example, a café might offer better employment opportunities to “Connectors” to keep the atmosphere lively.

Civil society groups and NGOs would take on a new role as protectors, making sure that people who are naturally quiet or introverted aren't unfairly charged more or left out. Essentially, everyone, from the mayor to the local shopkeeper, would have to treat human connection as public infrastructure that needs constant maintenance.

What might be the risks that might unfold if your concept existed?

The most immediate risk is the standardisation of extroversion, which imposes a heavier emotional load and greater financial challenges on introverted individuals. Paying higher resident taxes or facing exclusion from “Pairs/ Groups Only” public spaces creates a new form of hierarchy.

Furthermore, the narrative that being in a group is better risks stigmatising singlehood and privacy as social failures rather than valid life choices. From a systemic perspective, the reliance on digital Social Wellbeing Assessment Tests risks turning fluid human relationships into qualitative and inhumane data points.

This digitisation can lead to a “compliance through connection” culture, where the pressure to perform socially for the algorithm eventually weakens the very empathy and genuine community trust the system originally intends to build.

How does your concept advance understanding of sociodigital futures?

This concept shows what happens when we try to solve human problems like loneliness using only data and management tools. It highlights that while digital systems are great for organising a city, they often miss the qualitative parts of life, the stuff that makes us human and can't be measured.

By showing a world where safety is tied to how many friends you have, it helps us see how future technology could create new kinds of unfairness. It forces us to ask: do we want a future where our social lives are optimised by an algorithm, or should some parts of life stay private and unmeasured? It moves the conversation beyond just ‘tech is good’ to ‘what are the human costs?’

Were members of the public, citizens, or specialists involved in helping you design or develop your concept? How did they do this? What did they contribute?

We approached 20 individuals on the streets and in parks to interact with our prototypes. They shared their honest thoughts and first reactions: 2 participants mentioned how the system reminded them of a layered caste system. This gave us a much-needed outside perspective on how the service might actually feel in real life.

These engagements helped us move past our own assumptions and develop a deeper understanding of the world we were building. Besides, it gave us a direction on how to approach testing and presenting for better public participation.

By listening to their concerns and curiosities, we were able to reframe our concept grounded in research.

How did research-through-design and prototyping help you progress your concept?

Using research-through-design and diegetic prototyping allowed us to get critiques from people who weren't familiar with our specific academic context. This method helped us see our artefacts not just as solutions to a problem, but as tools to start meaningful conversations about the future.

The individuals we spoke to gave us a mix of positive and negative feedback, which was exactly what we needed to imagine how the service would work in a real-world setting. We learned that the service is quite complex; while it has clear benefits for community building, it also has unavoidable downsides regarding privacy and social pressure.

This process taught us that the most important part of design isn't just making something that works, but making something that invites people to think and talk.

What have you learned about feminist futures and feminist design practices?

Feminist futures and feminist design practices are critical methodologies for greater inclusivity in service exploration.

Usually, in design, we just try to "solve the problem", but this perspective reminded us that even a good solution (like mitigating loneliness) can be used to control or pressure people. We realised we had been overlooking how conventional problem-solving approaches can exclude certain groups.

It taught us that truly inclusive design means looking at power, who gets to decide what a good social life looks like, and what happens to the people who disagree. It's about making space for everyone, not just the majority.

How did your design methods have to change in order to take this perspective?

First, we needed to discard the thought "we have to come up with a solution". Obsessing over a solution makes the boundaries between a designer and a user stronger, making it harder to engage with users. Instead, we started asking "what if...?"

We used prototypes to start difficult conversations rather than showing a finished product. This meant being honest about the negative parts of our world, like the single tax or the social energy drink.

Also, we had to step back and take a look at our world to consider its underlying or negative aspects. Talking to 20 random people on the street was a big part of this; their skepticism helped us see things we were too close to notice. It changed our role from "problem solvers" to "critics," using design to explore the grounded reality of how people actually live.

Team 6 information

Hibiki Nagaoka is a service designer and UI designer with a background in FinTech.

Pei-Tsen Lai (Yessika) is a service designer with a background in product design. Her interests focus on observing and understanding user behavior to design digital products and create experiences.

Riya Kamdar is a service designer with a background in communication design and branding. Her interest is in using brand development and human-centered research to translate complex stakeholder requirements into tangible experiences. Her focus is on conscious design to balance functional needs with deep empathy.

Yuan Tao is a service design and creative practitioner with a background primary years education. Her focus is on designing for communities and education-related projects.

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Daily Social Interaction Score Boost
Priority access to public services

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Social Wellbeing Identity Card



The Riders Advertisement



Socia+ Drink prototype



Ministry
of Social Wellbeing

24TH MAY, 2035



Camden

The Solo Navigator

— LONDON RESIDENT TAX —

LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN

ACCOUNT SUMMARY

RESIDENT NAME: CASEY BENNETT
ADDRESS: FLAT 7.45 BAYHAM STREET
CITY: LONDON NW1 OAB

ARCHETYPE:
The Solo Navigator
ASSESSMENT YEAR: 2035
BILLING PERIOD: 1 JUNE - 31 DEC 2035



SOCIAL WELLBEING ASSESSMENT SUMMARY

Interaction Tendency	Minimal		Limited
Public Presence	Autonomous		Moderate Risk
Contact Responsiveness	Delayed		Elevated Risk
Network Compatibility	Selective		Restricted

SOCIAL WELLBEING RISK RATING

RISK TIER: HIGH

20/100

Base London Social Security Levy	£218.00
Selective Network Adjustment	£250.00
Passive Presence Supplement	£100.00
Delayed Response Premium	£75.00

Recommended Social Development Plan:

- Expand trusted network density
- Establish two new meaningful contacts
- Register a backup emergency contact

MONTHLY TOTAL DUE: £643

Social Pattern ID: SP-SOL-LDN-06319-35

IN 2035, SOCIAL CONNECTION IS PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE.



Park Entrance Signages

The Tax Bill of the Solo Navigator

WE ARE HIRING

Position Part-time Barista

Requirements

- Social type: the connector
- Previous café/hospitality experience preferred
- Flexible availability (weekends essential)
- Right to work in the UK

What We Offer

- Competitive pay
- Tips included
- Staff discount / free drinks on shift

How To Apply

Drop in your CV or speak to the manager
Email us at: elephantcafe@email.com

Part-time Barista Advert

Don't Fall Behind — Stay Connected.

NHS

NHS Advert

The Natural Light

THE WORLD AS IT ACTUALLY IS

www.thenaturallight.com

Issue 12 | 2035

30th May, 2035

Social Scores Define Access
Low scores have restricted entry to shared spaces.
Connection is Optional. 20 PAGE 3

Data Driven Behaviour
Relationships are tracked, valued, and measured.
You are a social pattern. 30 PAGE 3

Global Outlook
Connection Economy
Londoners have priority over citizens as core access.
We're seeing a shift in social connection in Northern Europe.

London's Social Wellbeing Score System Redefines Everyday Life
Over 50% of Londoners now have Social Wellbeing scores and assigned archetypes.
Access to co-living, transport, and public spaces is increasingly shaped by these scores, raising questions about how systems define connection, and who may be left out.

Friendships = Financial Survival?
"This isn't about wellbeing. It's about compliance through connection." — Oliver Brown, An Observer

Alone Redefined: The Rise of London's Singlehood Revolution
Living alone is becoming more common, but also more visible within systems that track and measure social connection.
For some, this opens new ways to engage; for others, it reflects changing expectations around independence.
What was once seen as autonomy is increasingly framed as social risk, forcing many to reconsider what it means to live alone in a system that rewards connection.

Quaint UK: The Free-er UK?
Access to services and spaces is gradually aligning with wellbeing metrics, highlighting both opportunities and challenges for older residents.

The Rise of Social Proxies
"I don't know if I always joined or if the game made me," said one anonymous user of the service.
With Social Wellbeing scores dictating tax rates, a black market has emerged for "Social Proxy" Professional stand-ins can be hired to mimic high-interaction lifestyles to lower the owner's fiscal burden.

NEW DEVELOPMENT
The Ministry of Social Wellbeing Launches "Social Boost Credits"
Citizens can now improve their score through community service.

Apply now!

The Natural Light

Team 6: TrustMark™ – The Community-Led Safety System. For you, by you.

Anushka
Mathur, Rucha
Ghadge,
Riccardo
Nembrini,
Zain Megdad

TrustMark™ is a speculative civic service set in 2036 that reimagines public safety as something that is people-driven rather than infrastructure-based. In this world, people's everyday actions are reflected through feedback from neighbours, friends, family, and strangers who interact with them. This contributes to a TrustMark score that shapes how they move through the city after dark. It explores safety as something co-created through everyday conduct.

The project responds to everyday experiences of women navigating public spaces, especially at night. It recognises the invisible cost involved in staying safe and imagines a system that formally acknowledges these practices. Rather than fixed 'safe' or 'unsafe' locations, spaces are understood through collective decisions based on who is present.

Participants engaged with speculative scenarios including score-based night-time access restrictions and civic reporting. It explores how people might navigate, perform for, or resist systems intended to make communities safer.

The concept asks: what are people willing to sacrifice for the promise of safer cities? And can a society made safer through collective responsibility

ever be truly fair? It invites reflection on power, exclusion, and biases, in how we define safety for women.

To what future world does your concept relate?

This is a world where public safety is treated as a shared civic responsibility and a measurable social condition. Access to the city after dark is guided by trust, not infrastructure. Cities no longer rely only on lighting, CCTVs, or policing to decide whether a space is safe. Instead, safety is shaped by community decisions and the people present in that space.

The Night Citizen Safety Law (widely known as The Cinderella Act) introduces TrustMark: a social safety system built on everyday encounters. People log moments of care and support as well as threat and discomfort. This influences who can move freely through the city after dark.

For Jane, an accountant leaving work at 1 am, the system offers reassurance. She can get home safely because everyone is expected to look out for each other.

Some welcome TrustMark™ as a safety infrastructure which holds harmful behaviour immediately accountable. Yet it also creates new forms of surveillance, public judgment, exclusion, and behavioural performance.

But quiet resistance circulates: score-improving wellness products and reporting hacks emerge, used by those seeking to leverage the system in their favour.

What provocation does your concept respond to?

Our concept responds to the provocation:

What if access to the city after dark was determined by social trust rather than physical infrastructure?

This question shaped our exploration of how public safety might shift from policing and surveillance toward a community system built on trust, care, and everyday behaviour.

We built on further questions, such as:

What if safety were attached to people rather than places? What if society formally recognised and worked to reduce the invisible tax women pay to navigate spaces?

These provocations pushed us to consider a world where safety is something that is continuously measured. Designing within this speculative space, we examined the potential benefits of collective accountability. It also exposed the ethical risks of redefining public safety by turning trust and care into measurable data.

Every night, women make hundreds of small calculations to get home safely. TrustMark™ asks what happens when that becomes visible.

Who benefits, who is believed, and who is left out when empathy is quantified?

What insights about citizen needs, practices or behaviours does your concept relate to or draw on?

TrustMark draws on behaviours already embedded in everyday life. Rating, reporting, and algorithmic judgment are pre-existing habits. Checking an Uber driver's score, reading Airbnb reviews, and flagging a neighbour on Nextdoor are small, subconscious acts of assessment. They are so normalised that they no longer feel like surveillance.

The infrastructure beneath them is significant. Credit scores determine access to housing and financial services. Palantir holds a £330 million contract with NHS England, embedding private data infrastructure within public institutions. Open banking mandates real-time financial data sharing, normalising algorithmic gatekeeping as routine.

TrustMark extends this into public spaces, responding to a real and documented demand for city safety. Harassment, stalking, and intimidating behaviour on public transport leave women and vulnerable communities with ineffective responses. By making everyday intimidation visible and accountable, the concept distributes responsibility for safety across the public rather than placing that burden on those most at risk.

Safety, however, is co-created and never neutral. Some comply, curating their conduct for the score. Others resist quietly by using score improvement products or illegal score jammers. But it is communities that decide what counts as acceptable conduct and whose fear gets taken seriously. The concept reveals both the appeal and the risk of turning ordinary behaviour into constant accountability.

Who would interact with, participate in or experience your concept?

Citizens, workers, landlords, students, tourists, and transport operators all interact with TrustMark. Low scorers face restrictions and rehabilitation programmes while high scorers gain benefits and access to aspirational services.

Governments and local authorities use score data to manage civic behaviour and design education programmes for more considerate communities. TrustMark is an opt-in government service, but unrated citizens become suspicious by default. Their absence from the system reads as a refusal to be accountable. NGOs and community advisors support both low scorers and vulnerable groups. They help them navigate appeals, rebuild scores, and access the digital system.

Alongside official pathways, resistance also takes shape. Underground, unrated spaces, unmarked score-improvement products, and illegal score-jammers circulate in grey markets. Score preparation services and behavioural coaching emerge as both official and unofficial industries.

Activist groups protest public judgment, and resistance forms around who owns the night.

TrustMark reorders society into new social classes defined by perceived safety and civic contribution rather than wealth, though wealth finds ways to hack the new hierarchical order.

How would these people/groups interact with, participate in or experience your concept?

Citizens, workers, students, and tourists interact with TrustMark through everyday reporting, logging moments of discomfort or care through the app. These reports form a score that shapes how freely someone moves through the city after dark.

Some engage genuinely, finding reassurance in a system that makes safety a community issue. Others perform for it, curating conduct to maintain nighttime mobility and receive government benefits. Products like ClearHead and Atmo pills are used to manage public emotional stability.

Governments and corporations use it to shape policy decisions. High scores are required for public service roles, embedding empathy optimisation into leadership. NGOs advocate for equitable access for those the system leaves behind.

Beyond formal engagement, informal solidarities emerge. Underground, unrated spaces become sites of connection for those who resist. Score-improvement products, behavioural coaching services, and illegal jammers circulate in grey markets. Networks form around resistance strategies: score-raise tips and appeal letter templates passed between strangers with the same score.

What resources, technologies, policies, behaviours or arrangements are required for your concept to work?

TrustMark operates within a legal framework established by the Night Citizen Safety Law, which restructures night-time access through community scoring. This creates the Ministry of Civic Safety, standardising behavioural reporting across public institutions, which embeds score-based access into the city's infrastructure. Policies include night access thresholds, rehabilitation requirements, emergency voting, score appeals, guarantor systems, and temporary scores for visitors.

The system builds on technologies already in everyday use. The smartphone becomes the primary tool: citizens report, verify, and are verified through an app. Restricted night-time access triggers instant alerts to nearby citizens. Real-time data processing platforms manage behavioural reports at a population scale, feeding into scores that update continuously. Restricted night-time access triggers instant alerts to nearby citizens.

What enables the system's reach is a broader cultural shift: the normalisation of mutual rating and public compliance as a civic expectation. Score-based access becomes routine, embedded into the conditions of movement. The law formalises community safety, but introduces a new

form of governance grounded in the performance of trustworthiness.

What would be the result or outcome of people interacting with, participating in or experiencing your concept?

TrustMark's intended outcome is immediate and tangible: fewer incidents after dark, greater confidence in shared spaces, and a system that finally takes everyday fear seriously. People who engage positively with their community gain greater confidence in safety and tangible benefits like tax reductions.

Not all outcomes are welcomed. Low scorers face reduced access to night-time spaces and public judgment. In response, many adopt score-conscious behaviours in public or turn to grey-market products and illegal jammers to influence their behaviour.

Over time, TrustMark reshapes how safety and belonging are understood, making them increasingly data-driven. Everyday actions become socially consequential because they can be rewarded, reported, or penalised. This increases visible care and caution in public life, but creates pressure to conform to a majority idea of acceptable conduct.

By co-creating safety through conduct and judgment, the system exposes how quickly collective responsibility can devolve into collective surveillance. Belonging and access are no longer treated as fixed rights but as outcomes that must be earned through repeated performance of acceptable behaviour.

How would different actors (eg central government, local government, business, civil society, citizens) have to change, if your concept existed?

The central government builds and regulates the scoring infrastructure, defines safety thresholds, and manages appeals. Local government uses score data to improve public services, target community rehabilitation programmes, and enforce access rules across transport and public space

Corporations integrate TrustMark into hiring, pricing, and entry decisions, rewarding high scorers with better terms. A new commercial economy emerges around score optimisation through certified coaching programmes, wellness products, and behavioural training aimed at performing better in public.

NGOs advocate for equitable access, supporting vulnerable groups to rebuild scores and re-enter public life. Others form counter-systems: underground unrated spaces, blackout zones, and resistance networks.

Citizens adapt in various ways. Some genuinely feel safer, more connected to their community, and empowered to protect. Others adopt score-conscious behaviours and curate their public conduct.

Across all actors, safety becomes a shared responsibility, but one that still

has unequal power over who gets to judge and report. Everyone is compelled to renegotiate what safety, trust, and civic belonging actually mean.

What might be the risks that might unfold if your concept existed?

TrustMark™ introduces risks across social, ethical, and political domains. It can reinforce existing inequalities if reports are shaped by racial bias, gendered assumptions, class prejudice, personal conflict, or unconscious bias. Those with existing social power may be protected from accountability.

Crowdsourced reporting risks turning collective care into surveillance. People modify their behaviour to appear trustworthy rather than practise genuine care. False reports, revenge reporting, and score manipulation could make the system punitive rather than protective.

Opting out carries its own penalty: unrated citizens become suspicious by default. Grey-market services may also emerge, offering score-improving products, appeal coaches, and false reporting strategies. As TrustMark scores shape access to public spaces at night, freedom of movement becomes conditional, raising the question: who decides what counts as safe behaviour, and for whose benefit?

For women, a system designed in their name can easily be turned against them. Those who demonstrate trustworthiness are rewarded. Those who cannot, or refuse to, are excluded.

How does your concept advance understanding of sociodigital futures?

TrustMark contributes to the understanding of sociodigital futures by challenging assumptions that collective care systems are neutral. It positions community trust and safety as a central force in how urban spaces are felt and governed.

The concept highlights the tension between collective protection and individual freedom. It asks what happens when the promise of safer streets comes at the cost of privacy and equal access.

By linking everyday behaviour to the right to move through the city after dark, TrustMark shows how safety can become coded into the system. It is shaped by whose fear is believed, whose presence is trusted, and whose behaviour is judged. Ordinary people are not just users of this system, but also producers of it, shaping how the city is governed through everyday reporting.

Rather than creating new technology, TrustMark uses what already exists to show how systems built around care can become systems of control. And how that shift falls hardest on those they were designed to protect.

Were members of the public, citizens, or specialists involved in helping you design or develop your concept? How did they do this? What did they contribute?

The concept was developed through workshops, testing sessions, and conversations with members of the public, industry professionals, and classmates. Participants engaged directly with TrustMark artefacts and scenarios like night access permits, score reporting apps, and council letters. These surfaced discomfort and scepticism towards the limits of collective responsibility.

At first, restricting movement based on community safety felt reasonable to many. However, this led to deeper questions about who is considered safe, how safety is perceived at a city level, and what it means to have access restricted by public perception.

Input from Toby Godfray and Aidan Harris contributed to reframing the political approach towards deeper ethical questions at the concept's core. Faculty critiques and public feedback surfaced tensions where systems designed to protect vulnerable groups disproportionately impact marginalised identities.

Together, these engagements shifted our thinking. We moved from seeing safety as infrastructure to understanding it as something produced through people, behaviour, and relationships.

How did research-through-design and prototyping help you progress your concept?

Prototyping sessions gave participants a chance to engage with TrustMark through speculative artefacts like the Night Access Permit and Mood Stabilisers. These worked as provocations, creating opportunities to experience the system might in everyday life and feel its consequences directly.

Participants first responded positively to rating others and restricting unsafe behaviour. Their views shifted when they imagined being rated themselves. This surfaced questions about who defines unsafe, how reports could be biased, and whether collective care could become surveillance. It became a significant finding. Participants were less interested in the technology than in the social relationships and power structures it made visible.

Participant feedback also validated the inclusion of grey-market dynamics, such as score-improving products, appeal services, reporting strategies, and informal workarounds, as a believable and necessary layer.

Rather than offering conclusions, the prototypes functioned as tools for surfacing tension, inviting ongoing questions around trust, control, and the right to define safety.

What have you learned about feminist futures and feminist design practices?

Feminist futures shift design away from punishment and extraction towards care, redistribution, and accountability. At its core, safety is not handed down by institutions. It is collective and co-created. Yet this framing is fragile. It can be captured

and inverted when institutions gain the authority to decide whose behaviour is acceptable, transforming care-oriented systems into instruments of surveillance and exclusion.

Feminist design asks harder questions: not just who is kept safe, but who is monitored. Not only who has a voice, but who carries the burden of proof. This project surfaced an uncomfortable tension. True dismantling of patriarchal structures cannot stop at giving marginalised groups representation within existing systems. We learned how a well-intentioned measure can, over time, solidify into new forms of public judgment and control.

The Design Justice framework asks who benefits from a system and who is harmed by it. TrustMark pushes this to confront a deeper question: if power corrupts, should it ever truly rest with any group of people? What does it actually mean to redistribute and democratise power, rather than merely relocate it?

How did your design methods have to change in order to take this perspective?

Initially, we asked how public spaces could be made safer through infrastructure, and how the system could be made to work. Taking a feminist futures perspective reframed this question. Our methods became more critical and participatory, interrogating power structures and questioning who gets to define safety, who is excluded by it, and what forms of fear remain invisible.

Horizon scanning and evidence safaris helped us understand how technology, governance, and everyday behaviour are already entangled in our present.

Our methods became more reflective and questioning. We stopped trying to fix the system and started trying to break it. Feedback from others helped us see where TrustMark still reproduced exclusion, even when it appeared protective. This shifted the project from designing safety as a community issue to exposing the conditions under which collective care becomes control, and who gets to feel safe within it.

It also exposed a core contradiction in our own design: we had built a system around the woman being protected, without asking what happened when she became the one being reported.

Team 7 information

Rucha Ghadge is a service designer and visual designer with a background across public health, FMCG, beauty, fashion, pharma, education, and banking. Her focus lies in using research-led, human-centered approaches to create systemic, scalable, and impactful solutions.

Anushka Mathur is service designer with a background in architecture. Her interest lies in exploring how services and experiences can be creatively shaped around people's everyday needs, behaviors, and the wider social spaces and systems they live in.

Zain Megdad is a service designer with a background in design management. Her work explores how diverse perspectives and future thinking can design meaningful relationships and experiences between systems, culture, and everyday life.

Riccardo Nembrini is a service designer and brand designer. His interest is in the relationship between people, systems and culture, and his practice is driven by critical thinking, research-led design, and a desire to create experiences that are not only functional, but meaningful, coherent and human.



SEE IT. SAY IT. VOTE IT.



Are they making you feel unsafe?

Your voice counts. A civic concern logged today
can update someone's TrustMark by tonight.
mocs.gov.uk/report or text 61106

You vote it. We'll sort it.



Ministry of
Civic Safety

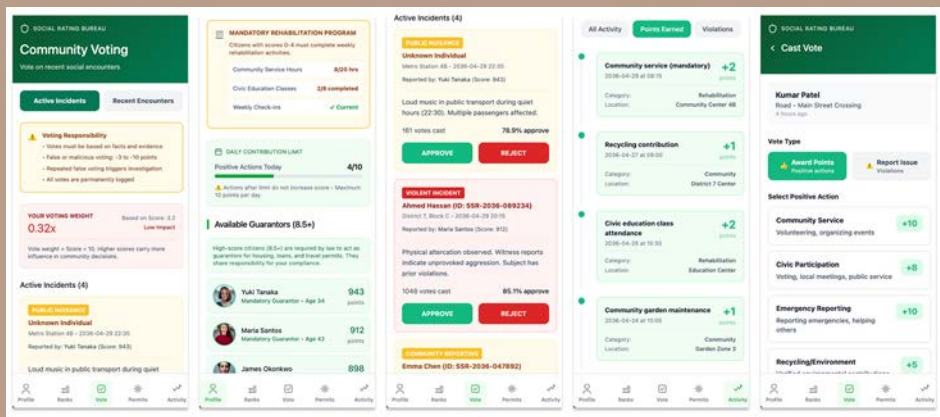
Together, we can be safe

In an emergency always call 999



BRITISH
TRANSPORT
POLICE

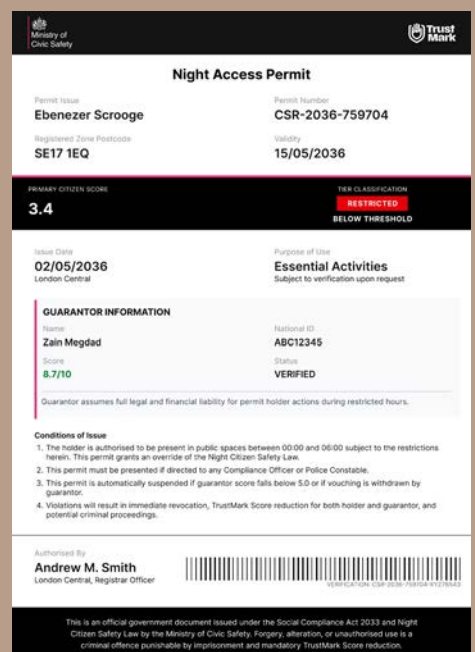
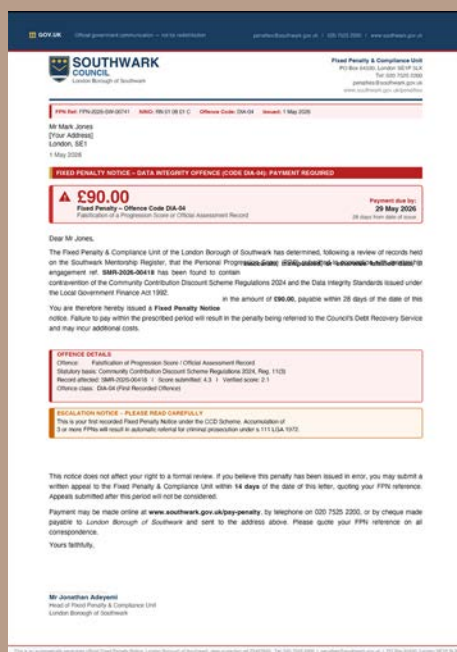
TFL. Trust Mark Poster



Prototype for TrustMark App



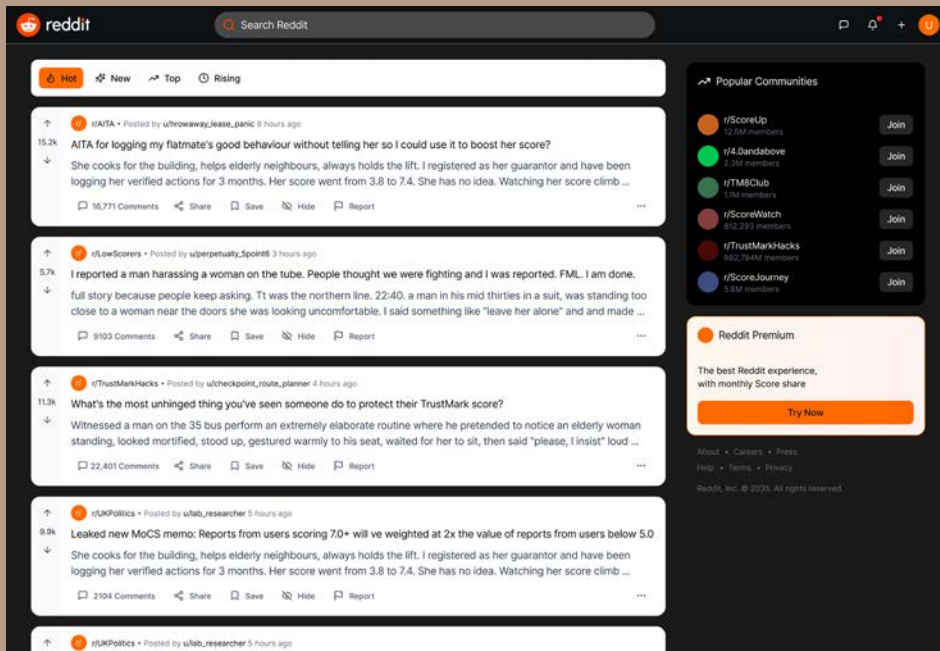
Public Spaces Night Time Restrictions. Ministry of Civic Safety and TrustMark



Southwark Council. Benefits notice

Southwark Council. Fines notice

Ministry of Civic Safety. Night Permit for Access to City



Reddit Social Media



2036 Newspaper. The Guardian



Daily Life Infrastructure at Bus Stop



Anti-TrustMark protest placards

Reflections and Conclusions

The Design Futures unit asked the students on this year's MA Service Design to consider how they could embed designing feminist futures through each of their projects. This is a brief summary the overall themes that emerged from each team's submitted concept sheets (p39-118) and from their reflective blog posts, as well as the learnings they discovered for each project area: work, health, and spaces.

Over the 8-week period, the students were given lectures from visiting experts, combined with design workshops and activities to help form and develop their projects. What was clear from each outcome and presentation was that the students deeply connected with the approach and practice of feminist futures and used this lens to challenge the patriarchal and capitalist systems within their project spaces, by making needs and tensions visible.

Approaching the projects through a feminist futures lens became about moving from service design from a problem and solution approach, to asking the teams to invent 'how' they designed. TheseTheir speculative futures reached from the everyday to considering national governance. This framing allowed the students to collaboratively have conversations about the methods and tools they used, the importance of prototypes and people's participation in the process, and possibly most importantly, to consider their own intersectionality and reflexivity.

A common thread which emerged was that this approach forced the students to question the potential benefits and consequences of care if it were to be made tangible and explicit. Even good intentions can have negative consequences if they are not properly considered. This reinforced that design and [service] designers have a responsibility to consider the futures they imagine and create.

Work

In the Work brief, teams 1 and 2 were asked to consider the possibilities if caregiving responsibilities were brought into the mainstream workplace.

Both teams highlighted the multiple tensions and ambiguities that arose as they explored care in the workplace systems. A feminist futures lens asked them to consider how something supposedly as simple as care could be effectively shifted into an area, such as work, that was known to be extractive. In both concept summaries, the teams reflected on the importance of the language they used and how the provocations were designed.

Both teams spoke about the importance of testing prototypes and assumptions in the real-world and with people outside of the project, to gain a more holistic understanding of the potential impact of care in future workplaces.

Health

In the Health brief, teams 3 and 4 were set the task of reimagining health-care beyond cisgender female reproduction towards menopausal health.

Teams 3 and 4 asked what would happen if women's menopausal health became more visible and supported. This led them to calling out the limitations of the current health system, as well as the speculative future health systems.

Both teams found they had to analyse their own biases regarding women's age-based health and health systems, and navigated reconnecting the abstracted data with the messiness of lived experience to identify needs vs norms for a feminist approach to wellbeing.

Throughout the process the teams spoke about embracing the possibilities that arose from failures in the project prototypes, and the importance of being adaptable with the research to meet marginalized cultural needs.

Spaces

In the Spaces brief, teams 5, 6 and 7 considered whose safety was considered a priority during the design of city infrastructure.

Teams 5, 6 and 7 realised that asking about women's safety meant questioning systems, values and assumptions in order to address the conditions of inclusivity for everyone, in particular for other underrepresented groups who may be harmed by more surveillance. Safety is not only enforced by a top-down power structure to be monitored but also emerges from social cohesion and connection. Through embracing and engaging with the tensions from multiple perspectives, they spoke about how the system doesn't need to be fixed, but broken and rebuilt through a feminist perspective.

All the teams found that safety can not only enforced by a top-down monitored power structure but also emerges from social cohesion and softer connections, which led the methods used in the projects to become more critical and participatory, especially with the use of the question, 'what if?'.

Through engaging with the tensions and frictions of safety from multiple perspectives and through participant research, the teams spoke about how the current patriarchal system doesn't need to be fixed but should be broken and rebuilt through a feminist perspective.

Methodological Reflection on What It Means to Do Feminist Speculative Design

What does it mean to design feminist futures? How do we practice design in feminist ways?

Practicing design futures in a feminist way means applying feminist principles, values, and methodologies to speculative and futures design work, creating visions of possible futures that challenge patriarchal structures, centre marginalised perspectives, and reimagine more equitable worlds.

Below are the collected reflections of the seven student teams, each engaging with a different speculative scenario, from care economies and hiring systems to women's health, urban mobility, loneliness, and public safety. Read together, they reveal a shared set of insights about what feminist futures demand of designers, and how that demand reshapes design practice itself.

What we learned about feminist futures and feminist design practices

The clearest lesson was that feminist futures are not about adding women, or other marginalised groups, into systems that remain otherwise unchanged. They are about challenging the patriarchal and capitalist structures that shape those systems in the first place, asking who a future serves, whose labour it depends on, and whose experiences it erases. This meant questioning the “default person” that design so often centres: someone with a linear career, stable support, and the ability to perform professionalism in expected ways. Once that default is challenged, intersecting structural conditions such as culture, race, class, age, gender, sexual orientation, became central rather than additional considerations, exposing how design decisions are never neutral.

Care emerged as a recurring focus, problematised through the concepts. Teams came to see care less as a private responsibility and more as political, economic and social infrastructure, whether that meant making invisible care labour visible, building “care routes” into public transport, or rethinking hiring around lived experience and empathy. Yet every team also discovered the same uncomfortable contradiction: that making care visible, valuing it, or rewarding it can easily tip into measurement, surveillance or control. Recognition is not automatically liberation; it can become another form of extraction, judgment, or burden placed back onto the people it claims to support.

This led teams to a shared understanding of what feminist futures are not: they are not tidy utopias. A feminist future, several teams concluded, can hold contradiction, discomfort and unequal power relations rather than resolve them. Some projects started by imagining transformed, more equitable worlds; others critically extended the present to expose how it might react to a feminist “What If?” question, others built on the understanding that dystopian conditions are already lived realities for many groups. Either way, the deeper question was consistently one of power: who gets to imagine and define futures, who decides what a good life or a safe city looks like, and, as one team put it, whether power should ever simply rest with any one group, rather than being genuinely redistributed and democratised.

How our design methods had to change in order to take this perspective

Taking a feminist futures perspective consistently pushed teams away from conventional, solution-focused service design and towards more situated,

critical and speculative practice. Familiar tools such as the Double Diamond, stakeholder mapping and “How Might We” questions gave way to provocation, world-building, and “What if?” thinking. Supported by frameworks such as Dunne and Raby’s A/B Manifesto (2013), several teams described this as a shift from designing solutions to designing provocations: prototypes became research instruments and conversation-starters rather than resolved outputs, deliberately surfacing tension instead of presenting a finished, comfortable answer.

This required becoming far more comfortable with ambiguity. Teams sought emotional, ethical and political reactions instead of usability feedback, and let participant feedback reshape their designs, from changing a prototype’s form in response to participant concerns, to revisiting the political and ethical philosophies underpinning a project to correct Eurocentric assumptions. Methods like horizon scanning, evidence safaris, and talking directly to people outside the design team (such as strangers on the street) helped surface blind spots the teams were too close to see themselves, shifting their role from “problem solver” to “critic.”

Most significantly, teams had to build self-critique into the work itself. Several embedded honesty statements or similar devices directly into their prototypes, so the system acknowledged its own limitations rather than presenting itself as a finished, neutral solution. The overall shift was from trying to fix or solve a system to trying to expose its limitations and contradictions, and, in places, deliberately break it. Using design to keep asking who is protected, who is monitored, who carries the burden of proof, and what happens when a well-intentioned system starts to police the very people it was meant to support.

Key principles for Feminist Speculative Design

1. Centring Excluded Voices.

Feminist design futures actively involve those typically excluded from future-making processes: women, people of colour, LGBTQ+ communities, people with disabilities, and others at intersecting margins. This challenges the historical dominance of white, western, patriarchal perspectives in both design and futures, practices that historically perpetuate colonial and patriarchal structures. It isn't enough to just add women to patriarchal systems, the systems need to be critiqued from an intersectional lens.

2. Challenging Techno-Solutionism.

Rather than assuming technology inherently brings progress, feminist design futures critically examine whose interests those technologies serve. Feminist approaches question assumptions about automation, AI, and “smart” systems that may reinforce existing inequalities, systematically critiquing the power structures that are embedded in the ownership of and access to technologies and data. Feminist approaches are technology-agnostic.

3. Foregrounding Care and Relationality.

Feminist futures reimagine economies and societies organised around care, interdependence, and collective wellbeing rather than competition and extraction. This draws on feminist ethics of care and challenges the devaluation of reproductive, emotional, and care labour. Reimagining the underlying principles of our economies and our societies helps to view our current systems from a critical lens.

4. Multiple, Pluralistic Futures.

Rather than singular utopian visions, feminist design futures embrace plurality, recognising that different communities may need and desire different futures, acknowledging pluriversal perspectives, and diverse ontologies and ways of being.

5. Critiquing Power Structures.

Feminist design futures interrogate who gets to imagine and build futures, who benefits, and who is excluded. It shines a light on power structures we live under, challenges corporate and military dominance in shaping technological development, and questions whose labour enables futures to materialise.

6. Materialising Current Contradictions.

Feminist futures shine a lens on the contradictions that are embedded into our societies. Artefacts from the future create a space of dialogue and conversation in which people can envision change, and critically recognise dystopian aspects of the societies we inhabit, questioning structures and systems that we normally take for granted.



Team 3: Autumn Movement Posters



Team 7: TFL Poster and TrustMark logo



Team 6: The Golden Light

2029-2030

micro-mobility became the norm.
bus use declined.
Women's safety in Public declined.
more visible anti-social behaviour.

2031

Implementation of A.C.E ACT
adaptable
comfortable
equitable

2033-2035

Bus Haven roll out.
Guardians of the Haven.
(GH)

2038

Bus Haven recognised and awarded by UNESCO.
GH backlash.
Implementation of Women-only Bus Havens and care routes.

Team 5: Timeline

MA Service Design, Design Futures Exhibition

Feminist Futures: Health, Work, Spaces

Friday 5th June 2026.
4 - 6 pm.

The Tree House. Elephant Park. Elephant &
Castle. London, SE17 1GW

Free and open to the public.

The end of unit exhibition was an interactive space, so stakeholders and other attendees were able to experience some of the designed services and performances, and talk to the students, academics, and experts in attendance.

The exhibition was packed for the whole 2 hours; people stayed for a long time, went around, and talked to all the groups. The crowd was a mixture of local people passing by, industry contacts, project partners, academics, and ex-students. An estimated 200 external people came through the door to experience the projects.





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AI Disclosure Statement

Claude AI and Microsoft Copilot were used in parts of this report to summarise large amounts of information. All AI outputs were reviewed, edited, and verified by the authors for accuracy, originality, and relevance. No AI-generated content was published verbatim without substantial modification.

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AUTUMN

Saturday, October 12th | 2036 2:00 PM

2036 | TRAFALGAR SQUARE | LONDON

FIVE YEARS OF ADAPTATION. NOW WE WANT ACCOUNTABILITY!

We were told to track. To monitor. To adapt. To wear the ring. To trust the box. To pay the subscription. We were never told who poisoned the water. Menopause is not a problem to be solved. It is a season we were never warned was coming early. Join us. Trafalgar Square. October 12th, 2036. Bring your silver line.



Appendix

Can Care be Currency?: Feminist Design Futures and the Question of Invisible Labour



Fig 1. The Care Hub kiosk

Chapter 1: A Peek into the Care World It is 2038.

Amara, a 31-year-old woman, steps out of the local Care Hub with an e-chip on her wrist. The Care ID, what they call it in this world, is concealed beneath a limited-edition skin art. “I guess my Saturdays belong to Mrs Dunphy now,” she sighs, scrolling through her care schedule: medication, grocery runs and mobility assistance. Above her, a small government drone flies by, tracking every move across the neighbourhood.

In this world, your care status matters more than your profession. Care is no longer optional; it is embedded in everyday life. Those without a Care ID are quietly excluded from society — no pension access, reduced tax benefits, restricted voting rights, and limited entry into certain public zones and international travel. But none of this feels unusual to Amara. She grew up with it. Since primary school, Care Studies has been part of the national curriculum, introduced by the Ministry of Care. Empathy, emotional intelligence, and community labour were taught alongside mathematics and science.

Across the street, Amara’s neighbour Margaret

has been getting up at 5 am every morning for eleven years to care for her mother, who has dementia. She washes her, cooks for her, manages her medication, and holds her hand when she feels frightened. Margaret’s Care Credit balance: zero. She never registered. She felt unsettled by the idea of the constant surveillance surrounding work she had been expected to perform ever since she was young.

This is a society built on care and collective responsibility. So why does it feel so eerie? And in a world designed entirely around the value of care, how is Margaret’s labour still invisible?

This Care World, twelve years from now, is a speculative future my team and I developed as part of the 8-week Design Futures unit in MA Service Design at UAL, in collaboration with PILAA — an organisation that specialises in Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion. The provocation that launched everything was:

What if the economy operated on care and empathy?

Chapter 2: The Theoretical Frame for the Care World — Research through Design, Speculative Design, and the Feminist Lens

Service design has traditionally worked around a problem and solution approach. You identify a pain point, you map a journey, you reduce friction. But Koskinen et al.’s (2011) Research through Design (RtD) argues that knowledge is not gathered before designing — it is gathered through the act of making. The prototype is not the output of the research, but a method through which one can research effectively.

This reframed everything about how I approached the Care World project. We were not building

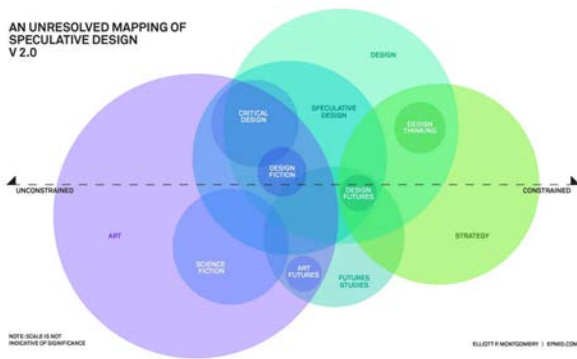


Fig 2. An Unresolved Mapping of Speculative Design (Montgomery, n.d.)

a system and testing it. We built the system to discover the questions we could not have formulated in advance. Every design decision we took became a form of enquiry, and every participant's reaction became data for us to analyse. This is what I mean when I say Speculative Design is not about answers. It is about learning to ask better questions through making. Through this process of building this world, I concluded that Speculative Design expands Service Design's capacity from friction reduction to ethical provocation. And that expansion is what this blog tries to argue.

2.1 What kind of Future are we designing?

To better understand where the Care World sat in the landscape of futures thinking, I looked at the

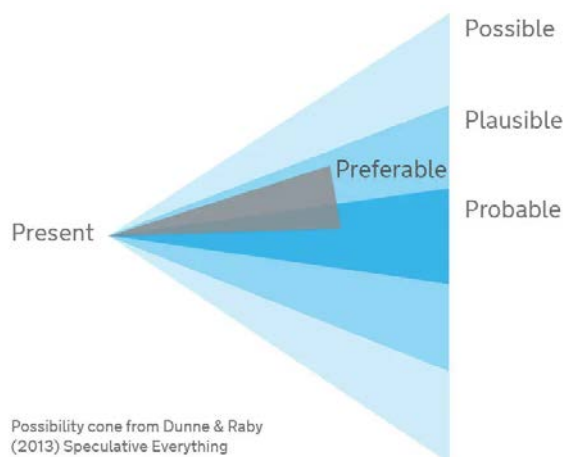


Fig 3. Dunne & Raby's version of the Futures Cone, based on thinking by Joseph Voros, Clem Bezold and Norman Henchley and developed by Eddie Obeng

futures cone that maps futures across a spectrum, organised through a series of "P" words that became important for us to understand (Voros, 2003; Dunne and Raby, 2013):

Possible futures (anything that could happen), Plausible futures (those consistent with what we know about how the world works), Probable futures (the most likely trajectory), and most importantly, Preferable futures (those that are socially and ethically desirable).

The Care World was never meant to be a prediction. It was a preferable future, not in the sense of it being ideal, but in the sense that Dunne and Raby intend: a future that opens up debate about what should be possible, and for whom? Preferable futures are not utopias. They are provocations. They ask: if this is the direction we chose, what would we gain? What would we lose? Who would benefit, and who would be excluded?

What the futures cone gave me was permission to design a world that was internally logical and deliberately uncomfortable. It did not need to be good. It needed to be plausible enough to provoke real ethical reflection.

2.2 Why a Feminist Lens Is Not Optional

To answer the question of 'for whom are we designing this world?' It was necessary to look at this world with a feminist framework.

"We become a problem when we describe a problem." (Ahmed, 2017, p. 39). In the context of this project, this is a design principle, not just an observation. If you are building a future around care, a domain historically performed by women, migrants, and marginalised communities, and traditionally ignored by economic systems, you cannot treat that history as just background context. It is the entire problem! To design a care-based world without confronting who is expected to care? Who is invisible? And who is now being measured in this new world? would be reproducing the same inequalities that this new future claims to repair.

Costanza-Chock's (2020) feminist pedagogy in the design justice framework builds this further: it says that design should be led by the people most affected by a problem. Without this, well-intended futures hold the risk of becoming

a system that speaks on behalf of marginalised people rather than redistributing power to them. In the Care World, this meant asking not only whether care was being recognised, but who had the authority to define it, measure it and reward it.

These frameworks together formed the feminist lens through which I tried to hold the Care World accountable. Feminist design futures must be built from this willingness to name the unnamed, and to make it impossible to continue ignoring. But at the same time, refusing to let care become another language through which control is redesigned as progress.

2.3 Diegetic Prototypes: Making the Care World Feel Real

“Specifically, we must not say it; we must show it.” (Kirby, 2011, p.210)

David Kirby’s (2011) notion of diegetic prototypes is designed objects and systems that make a speculative world feel real from the inside, so that people respond to them as if they were real. Kirby’s original argument was about sci-fi films: how props and interfaces in movies function as “pre-product placements” for technologies that don’t yet exist.

Our diegetic prototypes for the Care World were the Care portal, the Care ID, job listings for care jobs, the kiosk interface and the Ministry of Care posters and pamphlets — these were not products of our concept, but the concept made tangible through these prototypes. When a participant put the Care ID on their wrists, they were not reading about a future; they were briefly inhabiting it. And the discomfort, curiosity, or resistance they felt in that moment was the research.

The artefacts we built were:

The Care ID acted as the entry point into the system: a wearable, non-invasive sticker chip placed on the wrist. It made care participation visible on the body and a care tracking device for the system.

The Care Portal and Kiosk translated care into bureaucracy. The portal was designed for checking one’s profile and browsing neighbourhood jobs.

The Ministry of Care posters created the public



Fig 4. The Care ID prototype

voice of the system. Designed to surface social pressure around non-registration.

The Care Pamphlets imagined the communication layer of this world, as well as for our collaborators, PILAA.

The challenge was not imagining a care economy. It was making one feel real and believable. This is where Auger’s (2013) argument about the role of the familiar became essential. A speculative future does not feel real because it is explained well; it feels real because it borrows the texture of things people already recognise. By borrowing from everyday formats such as ATMs, propaganda posters, job listings, ID systems, and public information pamphlets, the Care World became close enough to the present for participants to respond to it as if it were possible.

Chapter 3: The Process of Building the Care World

3.1 From Evidence to Enquiry

To begin the process of world-building, we used Evidence Safari, gathering fragments of the present that helped us ground our Care World in reality. We found that women perform an estimated 75% of the world's unpaid care work globally. At the same time, digital ID systems, biometric workplace tracking, and four-day work week pilots showed how labour, identity, and wellbeing were already being redefined through policy and technology. This revealed a key tension for our RtD process: care was becoming visible, but at the cost of measurement, data and institutional control.

Through the Horizon scanning bingo, we captured trends and signals of the future already taking place today. It helped us map these signals into forces: rising hybrid co-living culture, the blurring of domestic and professional life, growing care policy frameworks, and the growing importance of emotional intelligence in hiring. This helped us build our 'What if?' questions instead of the typical 'How might we?' (HMW).into forces: rising hybrid co-living culture, the blurring of domestic and professional life, growing care policy frameworks, and the growing importance of emotional intelligence in hiring. This helped us build our 'What if?' questions instead of the typical 'How might we?' (HMW).

What if care not capital was at the centre of organising value?



Fig 11. Refined Evidence Safari and Horizon Scanning

This shifted our project from a broad interest in unpaid work to a sharper enquiry into what happens when care becomes measurable.

3.2 World-building

We began materialising the Care World through a speculative newspaper. Some articles celebrated the emergence of Care ID technology, highlighting the progress it enabled in public policy and the ways society had seemingly evolved. Others revealed the hidden tensions beneath this progress: care-based money laundering to urgent questions around personal data, ownership, and identity.

We also designed a fictional Reddit forum r/manosphere and a YouTube Short to explore the emotional friction the care economy would produce. The forum became a space where men discussed how to game the credit system and expressed anxiety about a world in which feminist values had reached the centre of public policy. While the reel depicted how this world gave rise to new roles like the care influencers, who are now debating the new mandatory care system. It revealed a real human response to a change in the society's value system that felt threatening to those who had previously benefited from its invisibility.

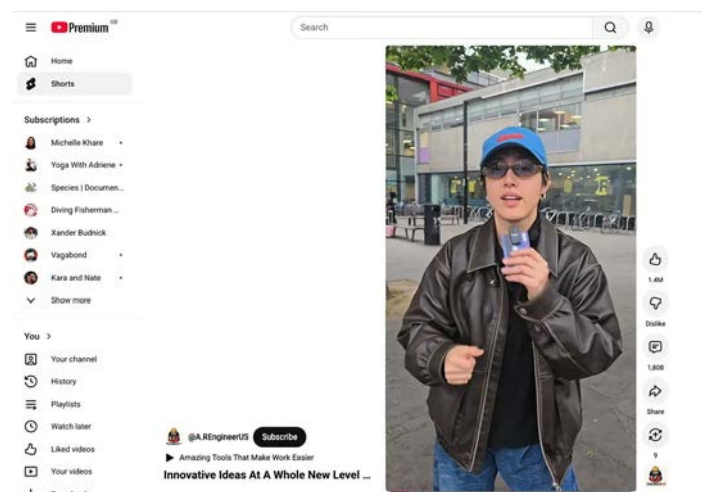


Fig 14. The YouTube Short where a "Care-influencer" debates whether the Care ID and Care work should be mandatory or not

Through these, we discovered how the system might behave once it entered everyday life. The Care system would not only create rewards but also surface new forms of crime, exclusion and

control. Through making these artefacts, RtD allowed us to move beyond the idealism of “valuing care” and confront the social, political, and emotional resistance that such a system could generate.

This moved the world from an ideal care economy into a more conflicted social system.

3.3 Backcasting

Backcasting is typically used to work backwards from the future you have envisioned, by identifying the decisions, policies and interventions that would need to happen to get there from the present. As a design futures tool, it helps designers look at the political implications of world-building and the roles that might need to shift in order to reach there.

We constructed a history for the Care world, a 2026 youth revolution, the collapse of extractive governments and the traditional parliaments getting replaced. We thought about it all, and we believed we were building a feminist future. But the process of backcasting, and after a lecture on political ideologies, we realised we had built what we called an authoritarian socialism. But a specialised feedback from our collaborator, PILAA, reframed our perspective. Our world was not just raising awareness of care work — it was teaching people how to care by making care work mandatory. This became the clearest articulation of what the system was actually doing, and it pointed to something we had underweighted in the design.

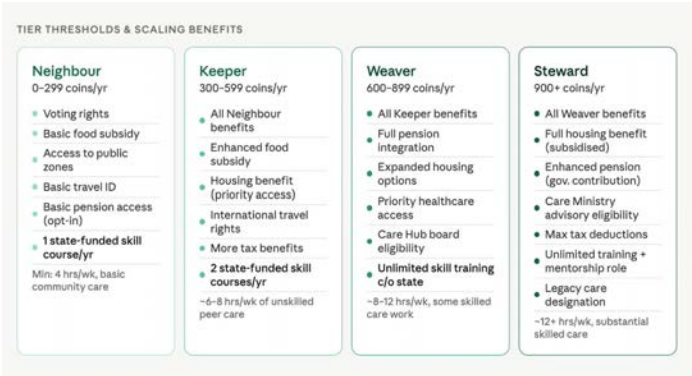


Fig 16. The Care Credit tiers and their respective benefits

The tiered system we built for our world: Neighbour, Keeper, Weaver, Steward, as shown in Figure 16 below, revealed another problem we

had not anticipated. The care economy had become a meritocracy of care.

Something I learned through this process is that speculative world-building rarely produces clean utopias. It made me recognise that futures are often broken, messy systems, deeply rooted in the realities of the present and still carrying traces of the past.

The process of backcasting pushed us to confront the political costs of our world.

3.4 Prototyping and What It Revealed

Next, we tested our prototype with a group of willing participants. We used our artefacts as tools for enquiry to surface reactions that could inform further iterations.

We enacted the registration process: participants chose their sticker design, received the Care ID, and were entered into the system. The reactions split immediately. What struck me about this was not the discomfort I had anticipated but what it revealed about the system’s logic. The people who recoiled were recognising something else: the same object that recognised care also marked the body as compliant.

One of the posters we presented during the testing read: No Care ID. No access. We had designed a kind of passive social pressure that doesn’t announce itself, but quietly shapes behaviour through exclusion.

The second round of testing produced richer and more contradictory responses.

In a conventional service design project, contradictory feedback would be a signal to a problem that needs fixing, but for us, this was an insight. The same system that felt like a positive change for humanity to one participant felt like imprisonment to another.

One participant said:

“The wearable format is intuitive — easier than carrying documents, a natural progression from existing data-sharing habits.”

Another said,

“It’s forcing me to do work I don’t want to do. I feel like I’m in jail.”

This is where Fry’s (2009) concept of ‘Defuturing’

became visible. Our intention was feminist: to recognise care and let it be rewarded. But once made mandatory, it began closing down pathways to alternative futures for those who care differently, refuse quantification, or distrust state systems.

This also brought me back to Tronto's care ethics. Something I had been reading throughout the course. The Care ID could track whether care had been provided, but it could not know whether care had been felt. It did not account for emotional labour. Caring started looking more like an output rather than a relational, consensual, responsive practice, as Tronto (1993) mentions..



Fig 19. Pictures from the second round of testing

The prototyping did not reveal what we could fix in the next iteration, but a structural limit of what any institutional system can hold. Some things may resist being turned into infrastructure, and whether care is one of them remains an open question.

Chapter 4: The Designer's Role in Systemic Change

4.1 From Optimising to Prefiguring

The identity that the Service Design field has created for itself is to optimise living. It has reduced friction and made existing services efficient. The Care World challenged that framing for me entirely. I started to realise that invisible labour is not a Service Design problem that needs smoothing. It is a product of centuries of patriarchal decision-making and behaviours around gender, economics and politics.

What speculative design and the process of RtD together offered was something different: the capacity to prefigure new systems rather than optimise existing ones. Dunne and Raby's (2013) preferable futures are like rehearsal spaces that let designers create environments where the ethical and political consequences and implications of a system can be stress tested before they can harm anyone. These futures become catalysts for public debate and discussion around what kind of futures people really want to live in, or more importantly, don't.

When the participants during our testing put on the Care ID and immediately contradicted one another, we were not identifying a usability issue, but witnessing a political truth about whose values had been designed into the system and whose had not. The kind of knowledge that cannot be gathered through a survey but through making something real enough to provoke a genuine response.

This is the contribution Speculative Service Design can make to systemic change. Not by delivering a solution but by making the decision feelable before it gets written in stone.

4.2 The Designer as Advocate

Design decisions are shaped by who is in the room when these decisions are made, as rightly pointed out by Costanza-Chock (2020) in the Design Justice framework. This is where I now understand how the designer's role is to be explicitly political. In the sense that Ahmed (2017) means, when she writes, "to live a feminist life is to make everything into something that is questionable". A service designer working in spaces shaped by gender, care, race or labour cannot treat those histories as context. The designer's responsibility is to actively advocate for the inclusion of marginalised voices, not as a consultation

exercise at the end of the process, but as the foundation of the enquiry itself. Whose knowledge counts? and whose, like Margaret's eleven years at 5 am, disappears into the background? These are not secondary questions. They determine what the design is actually for.

Service design's potential for positive change lies here, not in making care more efficient, but in making it impossible to continue designing systems that ignore who bears its weight.



Fig 20. The Care ID Registration Handshake — a syncing ritual

people who live in them are the ones who shape them.

This project taught me that responsible service design does not always mean clarity. Sometimes it ends with discomfort, sharper questions, and a strong refusal to design as if systems are neutral.

Chapter 5: Takeaways, what do I carry forward?

I began this project believing that the goal of design is to build better futures. I now know that the goal was to ask better questions about the present, because a future built on unexamined assumptions will always carry the inequalities of the present.

The Care World taught me that making is research, a form of thinking. The most important discoveries come from building something real enough for people to react and resist. It taught me that visibility is not justice: making invisible labour measurable does not redistribute its burden. It also taught me that uncertainty in speculative design is a feature, not a flaw. Contradictory reactions point out that the world is doing its work.

Most of all, what shifted in the way I think about the role of service design is not just to solve a problem but to surface the ones we have been too comfortable to confront. To rehearse futures before they even come true and to ensure that

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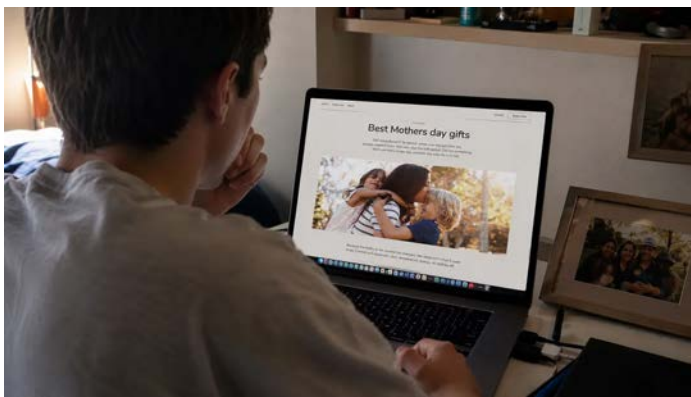
medium.com/@maitreyi.mandrekar/can-care-be-currency-feminist-design-futures-and-the-question-of-invisible-labour-c551fe1d4165

Menopause Was Never Invisible. It Was Unprofitable.

Mother's Day, 2038.

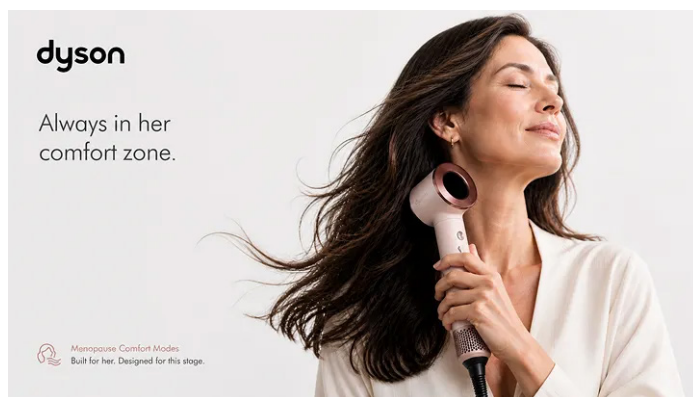
A son is looking for a gift for his mother. Not flowers. Not chocolates. Those feel careless now, almost negligent. There are more thoughtful alternatives now. More informed ones.

"Best gifts for mothers who never ask for help."



Mothers day 2038; Son looking up gift for his mother

The recommendations arrive instantly. The market already knows how to package care.



Gift recommendation 3: Dyson Comfort with intelligent mode that adapts airflow and temperature

Then Apple Rhythm+ 3 recommendation appears.

A polished bracelet paired with adaptive hormone patches. It tracks body signals continuously: temperature shifts, stress responses, hormonal

fluctuations. The system translates those signals into predictive prompts before discomfort becomes visible. Subscription-based. Lightweight enough to disappear against the skin. The longer she wears it, the more accurately the system learns her body.

The son looks up product reviews and lands on a comparison video between Apple Rhythm+ and the NHS-integrated version.

Compared to Apple, the NHS system is less premium. More clinical. Built around treatment precision rather than lifestyle integration. Linked directly to the NHS App. Better suited for supervised hormonal care. Apple, by contrast, is framed around personalisation, continuous optimisation and ecosystem convenience.

The NHS manages menopause. Apple integrates it into everyday life.

He chooses Apple. It looks more personal. The bracelet comes with charms he can customise with photographs of himself and his mother.

There is no obvious exploitation in this scene. No dystopian spectacle. No collapse of public care. In fact, the scene appears thoughtful. A son remembers his mother's menopause device is outdated and buys her a better one. A life stage once hidden in silence has become visible enough to organise markets around. Families are informed. Brands are prepared. The NHS has a pathway. Apple has an ecosystem. Menopause has entered public life.

That is the problem. This was not a prediction. It was a designed provocation.

This future was developed as part of the MA Service Design Design Futures unit at University of the Arts London, where our group used speculative and critical service design to explore feminist futures through real-world systems. The aim was not to imagine novelty for its own sake, but to test what present conditions might become if

followed to their consequences.

Our starting question sounded simple:

What if menopause was treated with the same intention, information and involvement as pregnancy?

At first, it felt like an obvious feminist correction. Pregnancy is culturally legible. It is surrounded by appointments, apps, advice, workplace language, family rituals, medical pathways and public concern. Menopause, by contrast, is too often treated as private inconvenience: fragmented into symptoms, dismissed in clinics, joked about culturally and absorbed silently into women's working and domestic lives.

But speculative work becomes useful when it makes the original question harder to believe.

Pregnancy is not publicly cared for simply because women's health matters. Pregnancy is cared for because reproduction matters. The pregnant body holds value for the family, the state, the labour force, demographic continuity and the future child. Menopause, by contrast, marks a transition away from reproductive

usefulness. It sits outside one of the central value systems through which patriarchal societies have historically recognised women's bodies.

This is the cruelty of the comparison.

Pregnancy is surrounded by care because it produces a future society recognises. Menopause is neglected because it marks a body no longer organised around reproduction. Our future does not undo that logic. It updates it. The post-reproductive body becomes useful again through labour retention, data extraction, beauty maintenance and subscription care.

So the question shifted. It was no longer only: what if menopause became visible? It became:

Why does women's health need to become economically useful before systems decide it deserves care?

Menopause was not invisible because society forgot it. It was neglected because systems prioritise women's bodies when they reproduce, perform, work, consume or remain desirable. In our speculative future, menopause becomes visible only when it can be converted into economic value: retained workers, reduced healthcare costs, platform data, beauty markets, wellness subscriptions and anti-ageing desire.

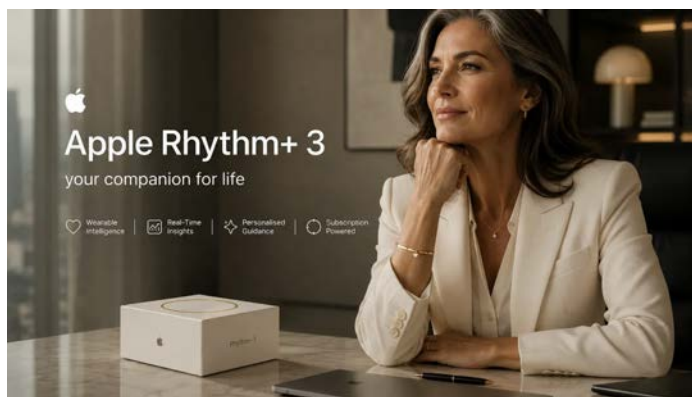
The future is not feminist because menopause is finally seen. It is capitalist because menopause has finally become profitable.

When Neglect Becomes a Business Case

We began with horizon scanning and evidence safari, not to forecast a neat future of menopause, but to understand what pressures were already making it newly visible. The signals did not sit inside healthcare alone. They spread across femtech investment, workplace retention, ageing populations, NHS digitisation, wearable health systems, beauty markets, anti-ageing culture, pharmaceutical expansion, hormonal optimisation and the broader wellness economy.

The pattern was not subtle. Menopause was becoming interesting to systems that had previously failed to prioritise it.

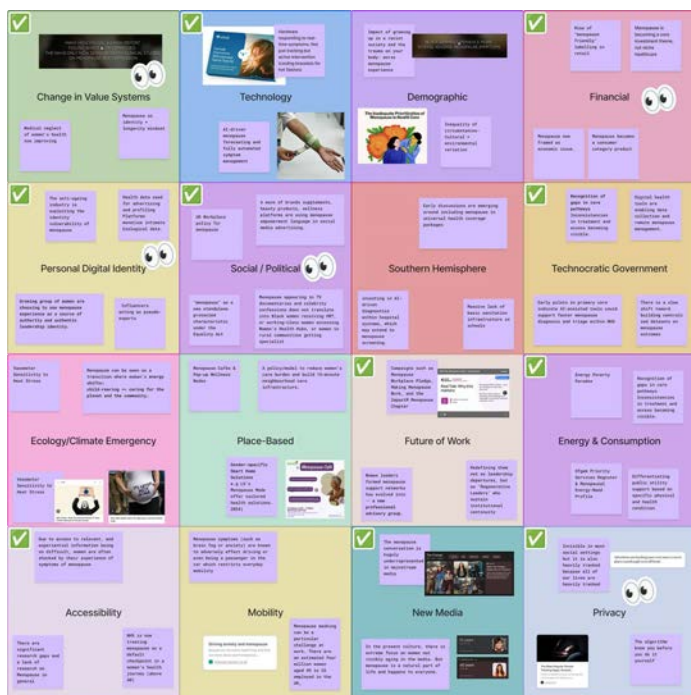
Employers could frame it as a workforce retention issue. Healthcare systems could frame it as a preventative cost issue. Technology companies



Gift recommendation 4: Apple Rhythm+3



NHS Hormone Tracking Protocol



Horizon scanning; understanding the current trends and signals

could frame it as a biometric data opportunity. Wellness brands could frame it as a lifestyle market. Beauty industries could frame it as ageing management. Families could frame it as a new form of care

Menopause became visible at the precise moment ageing populations, labour dependency and wellness capitalism discovered they all had economic incentives to manage ageing women differently.

This is why the language of awareness felt too weak. Awareness suggests the problem is that people did not know. Our research suggested something more uncomfortable: many systems did not need to know until menopause became useful to them.

This is where feminist speculative design mattered. A future cannot be critical if it simply gives existing power better tools. Prado de O. Martins (2014) argues that speculative design cannot claim to be critical while ignoring the structures of power, privilege and oppression through which futures are imagined. Our provocation risked becoming too neat: more menopause products, more information, more public discussion.

But more visibility is not automatically feminist. It depends on who controls the infrastructure of being seen.

Visibility is not neutral. There is visibility as recognition, where women are believed and supported. There is visibility as surveillance, where bodies are monitored. There is visibility as market discovery, where symptoms become product categories. There is visibility as governance, where bodies become manageable populations. There is visibility as extraction, where intimate data becomes infrastructure.

Visibility is not always the opposite of oppression. Sometimes it is the method through which oppression becomes more efficient.

The Prototype Felt Real Because Infrastructure Already Existed

Our first major prototype was Apple Rhythm+, a bracelet paired with intelligent adaptive patches. It continuously tracks what is happening in the body and turns hormonal patterns into simple prompts. The patches respond before discomfort fully escalates. The user does not need to analyse herself. The system does it for her.

The prototype borrowed from existing patterns in wearable health, Apple-style ecosystem design, subscription services, skin patches, hormone tracking, predictive prompts and the everyday promise of technological ease. It looked close enough to the present to be unsettling.

In early testing, this closeness became the problem. People responded to it as a product. They asked whether the patches were safe, how dosage would be regulated, whether the algorithm could over-correct, whether the device would be affordable, and whether the system could be trusted to act before symptoms appeared.

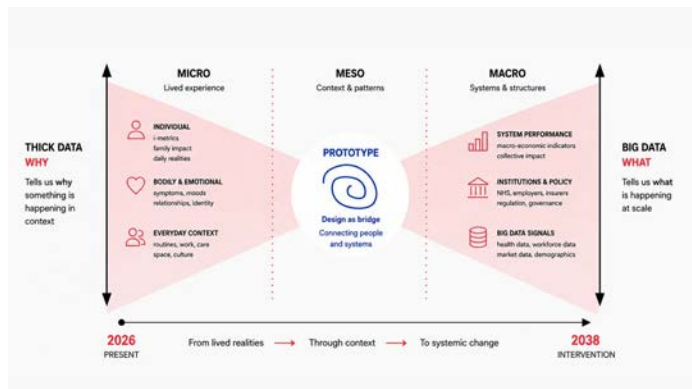
The feedback was useful, but it exposed a weakness. Apple Rhythm+ was too easy to consume as a speculative product. People could ask whether they would buy it before asking what kind of world would make it desirable.

The prototype worked because audiences already accept platform governance as care.

This is where research-through-design became central. Frayling's distinction between research into, for and through design is useful because our insight did not arrive before making or after making. It arrived through the failure of making itself

(Frayling, 1993). The prototype worked aesthetically, but not politically. It made the future look plausible before it made the system visible.

That failure redirected the project. We stopped refining the object and started building the world that would make the object ordinary.



Prototypes that are grounded in lived experience and are accountable to systems

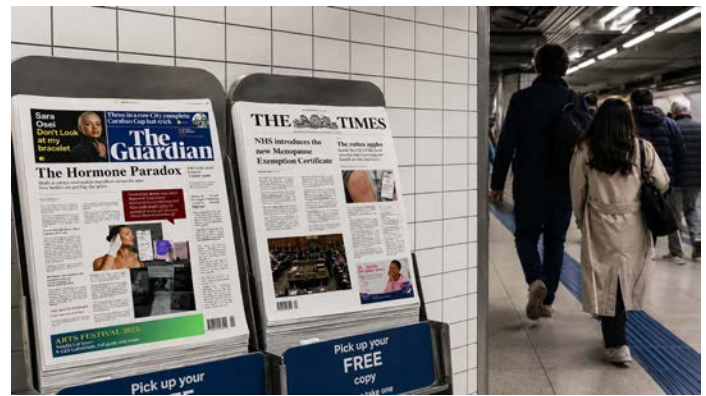
World Building Made Extraction Visible

The future became sharper when we stopped treating Apple Rhythm+ and the NHS bracelet as standalone objects. We began constructing the media, policy, social rituals and commercial ecosystems around them: speculative newspapers, Reddit threads, YouTube reviews, Mother's Day gift guides, NHS policy announcements, black-market scandals and commercial campaigns.

These artefacts were not decoration. They were the argument.

Kirby (2010) describes diegetic prototypes as objects embedded inside fictional worlds that help audiences understand how technologies might become socially real. This was exactly what our artefacts needed to do. The YouTube review made menopause care feel like consumer advice. The Mother's Day gift guide made hormonal monitoring feel like affection. The speculative newspapers made menopause feel like public policy. The Reddit thread made data bias and unequal trust visible. The black-market story made the costs of exclusion impossible to ignore.

A speculative issue of The Times announced the NHS Menopause Exemption Certificate in 2031. On the same page, another article reported counterfeit Apple Rhythm+ patches causing burns and



Speculative Newspapers

ulcers. That juxtaposition mattered.

It showed that expanded care and expanded harm can emerge from the same infrastructure. When a proprietary care system becomes desirable but not equally accessible, a grey market is not an accident. It is a predictable consequence.

A speculative Guardian front page from 2038 framed "The Hormone Paradox," where medical treatment had become entangled with anti-ageing culture. This pushed our project beyond health-care and into the politics of desirability. Hormonal support was no longer only about reducing suffering. It became linked to youthfulness, beauty, productivity and self-maintenance.

The Reddit artefact sharpened another risk. A fictional user questioned whether NHS tracking systems worked for everyone, especially if the data behind the protocols was built around white, Western bodies. This was not a side concern. It exposed a core contradiction in predictive healthcare: systems can call themselves personalised while still being built around exclusionary averages.

Costanza-Chock's Design Justice framework asks who benefits from design, who is harmed by it and whose knowledge is centred in the process (Costanza-Chock, 2020). In our speculative world, menopause care becomes more advanced, but not automatically more just. If the dataset is biased, the pathway is biased. If the interface becomes the gatekeeper, exclusion moves from the clinic to the platform. If care depends on being monitored, refusal begins to look irresponsible.

The future became disturbing because it did not look like neglect anymore. It looked like progress.

Menopause Became Governable

A weaker reading of the project would position Apple as capitalist and the NHS as ethical. That binary is too easy.

Apple Rhythm+ and the NHS bracelet represented different ideologies of care, but both relied on the same underlying shift: menopause became visible by becoming measurable.

Apple translated menopause into a lifestyle ecosystem. It was premium, elegant, intimate and continuous. Monitoring became jewellery. Surveillance became softness. The system did not demand obedience. It made dependence attractive.

This is the power of platform capitalism. It does not need to appear violent. It makes extraction feel like convenience. It makes compliance feel like personalisation. It makes ongoing monitoring feel like care.

The NHS version appeared more public, more clinical and more accountable. It was integrated into the NHS App, linked to treatment pathways and framed around access and accuracy. Through backcasting, we imagined a progression from the HRT Prepayment Certificate to a Menopause Exemption Certificate, and eventually to full NHS integration of menopause care. This was not presented as a false good. It genuinely expanded support.

But public care is not outside economics.

In our future, the NHS enters menopause care not only as a caregiver, but as an institution managing risk, cost and population productivity. It does not sell optimisation as lifestyle. It administers it as public care. The state does not need to profit from the body in the same way Apple does. It needs the body to become manageable.

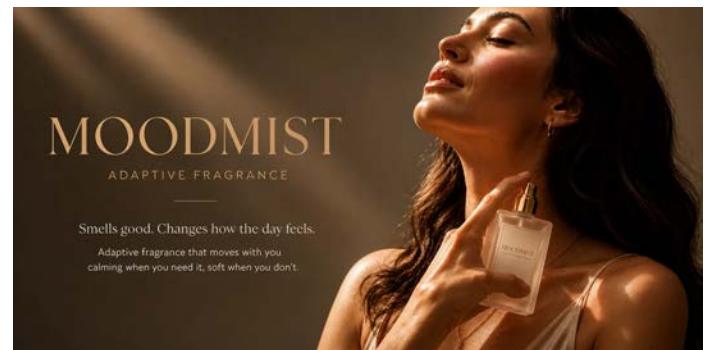
What changed was not society's compassion. What changed was the business case.

This does not make NHS care cynical or unnecessary. It makes it politically complex. Public systems often need evidence, cost justification and policy framing to act. But the feminist problem remains: why must women's suffering become economically measurable before it becomes institutionally urgent?

Salinas, Yarrow and Lagedamont (2024) position

Critical Service Design as a way to explore how fictional services can reveal the socio-material organisation of future worlds. Our NHS bracelet was not a recommendation. It was a critical instrument. It helped us examine how public care might become predictive, standardised and data-driven under pressure from cost, access and efficiency

Apple made menopause desirable. The NHS made menopause governable. Both made menopause actionable.



MoodMist stabilised emotional atmosphere

The Market did not Solve Neglect. It Consumed it.

Once menopause became visible in our world, the market did not hesitate. It produced products for sleep, skin, scent, temperature, mood, stress, calm, confidence and ageing.

These products were not random. They showed how a neglected life stage becomes a market category.

Each symptom became a product. Each discomfort became a revenue stream. Each uncertainty became a subscription opportunity.

This is where the future became most recognisable. None of the products needed to look extreme. They only needed to extend what already exists: wellness capitalism, personalised beauty, quantified health, predictive comfort, subscription care and the constant promise that life can be smoother if the body is managed better.

The Mother's Day gift guide made this logic painfully clear. It did not ask sons to understand menopause. It asked them to buy better. Care became a transaction. Intimacy became product literacy. The family did not need to redistribute emotional labour; it could outsource

concern into a device, a mist, a pillow, a patch, a bracelet.

Women benefit in this world, but not on neutral terms. They receive support through systems that also profit from their continued optimisation.

This is the deeper feminist critique. Patriarchy does not only silence women's bodies. It also re-enters when those bodies become profitable. Pregnancy extracts reproductive value. Menopause futures extract post-reproductive value: labour, data, consumption, compliance and anti-ageing aspiration.

Menopause becomes valuable again, not because ageing women are finally free from patriarchal usefulness, but because usefulness has been redesigned.

The post-reproductive body is not abandoned. It is re-entered into the market as a site of correction.

The Mother is Over Governed

The emotional centre of the project was the mother in 2038. At first, she seemed irritated because everyone was involved. That interpretation underestimated what was happening.

She is not simply annoyed that people care too much. She is over-governed.

Her menopause is no longer hers alone. It has become a family concern, a workplace variable, a public health metric, a subscription plan and a gift category. Her body is read by Apple, interpreted by the NHS, discussed by her son, anticipated by her workplace and targeted by wellness brands.

Her son knows her patch cycle. Her workplace knows which days to reduce pressure. The NHS knows when her sleep drops. Apple knows before she says she is tired. None of this is abuse. That is why it is difficult to resist. Every system is helping, and every form of help asks her to become more readable.

This is the emotional cost of infrastructural visibility.

The son's gift was not thoughtless. That is what makes it worse. It is thoughtful within the logic of the world. He had learnt the correct systems and chose what appeared to be the more personal

option. His care had been trained through the market. He knew how to upgrade his mother's support, but not necessarily how to sit with the discomfort that cannot be optimised.

In the present, women are often expected to endure menopause privately. In our future, they are expected to optimise it publicly. The burden does not disappear. It changes form.

Silence becomes tracking. Dismissal becomes data compliance. Neglect becomes self-management. Care becomes continuous participation.

Ahmed (2017) writes about feminism as a practice of noticing what has been smoothed over, made comfortable or treated as normal. Our project became feminist when we stopped treating "more care" as inherently good and began interrogating what care was asking women to become.

The opposite of invisibility is not liberation. Sometimes it is management.

The Dark Side

The black-market and misuse artefacts were not dramatic additions. They were consequences of the system.

If Apple patches are expensive, counterfeit patches become profitable. If NHS access is uneven, informal markets grow. If hormones become linked to beauty and youthfulness, anti-ageing markets absorb them. If tracking becomes normal, double dosing becomes imaginable. If care is platformised, exclusion becomes more dangerous.

This is why the fake patch scandal mattered. It was not a warning that some people might misuse a good system. It revealed how unequal access produces unsafe alternatives. When care becomes essential but unevenly distributed, harm does not sit outside the system. It is produced by the system's boundaries.

Futures work often treats unintended consequences as secondary. Our project made them central. The margin is where the system reveals itself.

A future that expands care through platforms also expands dependency on platforms. A future that standardises hormonal treatment also produces bodies that fall outside the standard. A future that

monetises relief also creates markets for risk.

These are not bugs. They are business models, policy failures and design decisions made visible.

Service Design is Not Innocent

Service design is often framed as improvement: clearer journeys, smoother interactions, better access, more coherent systems. That work matters, but in futures practice it is not enough. A speculative service concept does not simply show what might exist. It rehearses a relationship between bodies, institutions, platforms, policies, markets and everyday life.

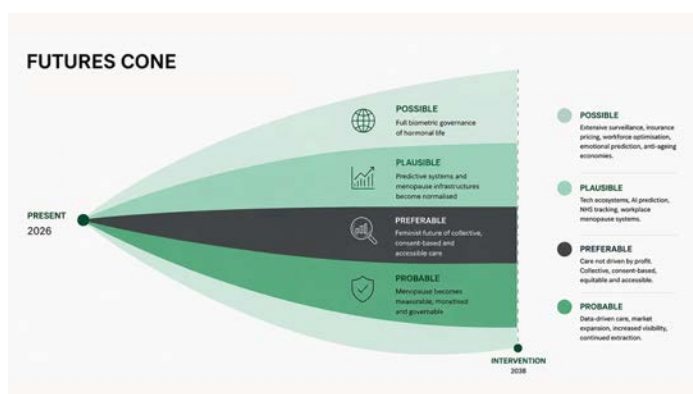
Service designers do not merely visualise futures. They help domesticate them.

That is a serious responsibility.

Apple Rhythm+ worked because it was desirable. It borrowed the visual and behavioural language of the very systems we wanted to critique. It made surveillance feel intimate. It made extraction feel personalised. It made dependency feel thoughtful. In doing so, it exposed the political risk of speculative design itself: a critical prototype can accidentally become an advertisement for the system it is trying to question.

A beautiful prototype can become propaganda for the system it claims to critique. This is why the fake patch scandal mattered. It was not a warning that some people might misuse a good system. It revealed how unequal access produces unsafe alternatives. When care becomes essential but unevenly distributed, harm does not sit outside the system. It is produced by the system's boundaries.

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MoodMist stabilised emotional atmosphere

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These are not bugs. They are business models, policy failures and design decisions made visible.

Auger (2013) argues that speculative design must sit close enough to reality to be plausible while maintaining enough distance to provoke critical reflection. Our project lived in that unstable space. The artefacts were not fantasy.

They were extensions of existing trajectories: wearable health, femtech, NHS digitisation, wellness capitalism, predictive care and platform ecosystems.

That is what made them useful. It is also what made them dangerous.

The role of the service designer in future-making is therefore not to produce reassuring visions of better services. It is to make futures arguable. To reveal who benefits. To show who carries risk. To expose where care becomes governance. To ask whether visibility redistributes power or simply creates new ways to extract value from women's bodies.

Visibility is Not Justice

Our project did not attempt to solve menopause. It used menopause to examine the conditions under which women's health becomes valuable enough to support.

A future where menopause is visible is not automatically feminist. It depends on whether visibility redistributes power, or whether it simply creates new markets, new metrics and new obligations.

By 2038, menopause in our world is recognised everywhere. It is discussed publicly, tracked clinically, acknowledged by workplaces, integrated into health policy and sold through consumer ecosystems. Women are no longer entirely ignored.

But they are also increasingly tracked, classified, prompted, corrected and sold back

their own relief.

The question is no longer whether menopause deserves visibility. It does.

The real question is why women's health needs to become economically useful before systems decide it deserves care.

Because if recognition arrives mainly through profitability, manageability and optimisation, then being seen is not the same as being valuable.

The future did not learn to care for ageing women. It learned to extract from them differently.



MoodMist stabilised emotional atmosphere

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Good Intentions Do Not Make Power Disappear

What if the economy ran on care? That was the question our team started with when we set out to design The Ministry of Care, a speculative feminist society where care work, typically carried out by women, is not an invisible burden but the organising logic of the state. We thought we were building something radically different. What we ended up with was a system threaded through with surveillance, behavioural control, and carefully managed autonomy. This is a reflection on how that happened, and what it taught me about the uncomfortable truth at the heart of designing for equity: good intentions do not make power disappear. Power just takes a different shape.

Designing the Future, Questioning the Present

When I first entered the Design Futures module at UAL, I was not sure what to make of it. We were seemingly being asked to build fictional worlds, write speculative narratives, and design systems that did not exist. Previous service design projects had made me accustomed to strategic, grounded work with visible impact in real systems. Design Futures sounded like the opposite. Throughout the lectures and workshops, I kept returning to the same question: if these futures are imaginary, what exactly are we designing for?

What initially appeared to be imaginative storytelling slowly revealed itself as a deeply critical design methodology. Informed by Auger's view that speculative design critiques current practice as much as it imagines, I began to understand that Design Futures was not about predicting ideal futures, but about provoking people and institutions to reflect on the systems they already inhabit and the directions they might move toward (Auger, 2013). And what better way to provoke than through feminism, which Ahmad characterises as an ongoing practice of working out how to live in an unjust world and how to build more bearable ones (Ahmed, 2017).



Week 1 of the Design Futures module: Our team's rendition of what a feminist future might look like

Our team's response was The Ministry of Care, which explored a speculative care-centred society in 2038, where care work considered to be BAU for women in the present day, became visible, measurable, and rewarded through a state-supported Care System. Residents could register for a Care ID (a non-invasive chip attached to their wrist), and participate in different forms of care work for their families, wider communities, and the environment. Contributions were logged through the Care Portal, where residents could also submit care needs for others to respond to. Care work accumulated as Care Credits across each quarter, with yearly totals determining a resident's Care Tier. Each tier reflected their level of contribution and shaped access to public systems and benefits. Participation remained voluntary. Residents could choose to opt in or opt out at any time, although both choices carried their own mandates and consequences.

This was our desired, preferable future (Salinas, Yarrow and Lagedamont, 2024), designed through a feminist lens and grounded in collective responsibility, interdependence, and care as a shared political project. It was shaped by the feminist

understanding that more just worlds depend on mutual support, a collective practice of ‘picking each other up’, and working through injustices together through shared accountability (Ahmed, 2017). However, the deeper we developed the system, the more contradictions emerged. Every attempt to redistribute care and create fairness became interspersed with surveillance, enforcement, restricted access, or social control. Our feminist attempt to recognise invisible labour initially leaned heavily toward a utilitarian and authoritarian socialist state, revealing the uncomfortable friction embedded within systems attempting to operationalise equality at scale.

The Limits of Solving

My understanding of design had largely been shaped by traditional design thinking and service design: solving problems, reducing friction, improving accessibility, and optimising systems for users. Design Futures complicated that understanding.

Early in the project, our team instinctively approached problems through a user-centred lens. If a system felt frustrating, inaccessible, or inefficient, our immediate instinct was to remove the friction.

After a point, though, I began to feel like we were caught in an endless loop. We had started with a well-intentioned feminist question, “What if the economy operated on care and empathy?” But quickly spiralled into increasingly complex “What ifs.” What about people from a particular community? What if someone wants to opt out? What if participation itself becomes coercive? Critical Service Design proposes the deployment of novel public policies and services within complex fictional worlds (Salinas, Yarrow and Lagedamont, 2024). But what remained unclear to me was how far we were expected to resolve that complexity. How clean does a policy need to be? How much tension should we try to remove?

Friction of some form in any system seemed inevitable. Eventually, through lectures and debates within our group, I realised the point was not to remove the friction. It was to acknowledge and critically examine it.

This was an “Ohh” moment for me, and it was

when I began moving away from Solutionism toward systems thinking. Rather than asking “How might we solve this problem?”, Feminist Futures encouraged us to ask: “What kind of system is creating this condition in the first place?”, “Who benefits from the current arrangement?”, and “Who doesn’t?”

The question was no longer simply whether the Care System brought in equity. The more difficult question became: equity for whom, and at whose expense? As Ahmad describes, it was more like ‘homework’ — feminism, as a self-assigned, ongoing practice of working out how to live in and transform a world that does not accommodate everyone equally (Ahmed, 2017).

As a designer, this was initially uncomfortable. Traditional design processes seek clarity, efficiency, and measurable solutions. Feminist Design Futures pushed us toward ambiguity, contradiction, and unresolved tensions.

Instead of solving complexity, we were being asked to sit inside it. Over time, I realised that discomfort was not a flaw in the process. It was the process.

The Politics of Friction

The friction also made me rethink an assumption I had carried into design practice: that improving experiences is always universally desirable. But a preferable future for residents is not always preferable for institutions, governments, or systems of power.

One discussion within our group centred around visa systems. From a human-centred perspective, it is easy to argue that visa processes should be smoother, faster, and more accessible. But visa systems are intentionally difficult because governments do not necessarily want unrestricted access. This reflected what Gerber says about inequity having deep roots, using the US policing system as an example: it is not flawed but working exactly as designed, to protect property and maintain the wealth of those who have it, rather than to address conflict or heal harm (Gerber, 2021). The friction itself is political.

This tension surfaced within our own speculative world during a debate around the Care ID system. At one stage, I argued that residents who opted

in should remain opted in permanently unless there were exceptional circumstances. My thinking came from the perspective of the ministry we were building. If the state genuinely believed the Care System created a fairer society, allowing people to freely leave and re-enter felt counter-productive to the collective good. I was reasoning from a utilitarian perspective, believing in the good we were trying to do as designers.

This position was challenged strongly from a Design Justice perspective. The argument was that by removing people's autonomy and freedom to choose, we as designers were no longer questioning systems of power but simply reproducing them through a different ideological lens. This reinforced that designers cannot only think from the perspective of the system they are building. We also have to continuously question whether the system itself remains just, even when it claims to operate for the greater good. Otherwise, we risk only reproducing existing inequalities (Costanza-Chock, 2020).

Eventually, we redesigned the Care System to allow residents to opt in and out multiple times, with restrictions and consequences attached to each decision, because my original perspective was not entirely wrong either. The system still needed mechanisms to sustain participation. Residents retained a 'managed' autonomy: enough choice to feel participatory, but not enough to escape the state's underlying logic of control. The debate forced us to confront the tension between collective wellbeing and individual freedom much more directly as designers.

When Fiction Became Research

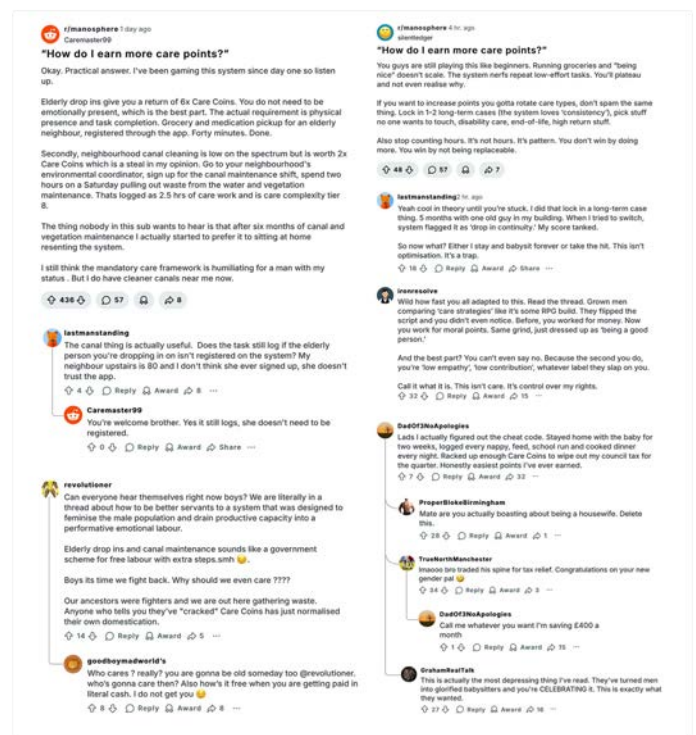
One of the most interesting aspects of the project was the world-building process itself. I initially viewed it as a creative exercise, something closer to storytelling than research. What became clear over time was that world-building was also a critical methodology for uncovering hidden assumptions, unintended consequences, and embedded power structures within systems.

Auger cautions that speculation can risk taking people too far from the 'here and now' (Auger, 2013). Ours did not. Every aspect of the Care System was grounded in evidence safari research and horizon scanning. The evidence safari

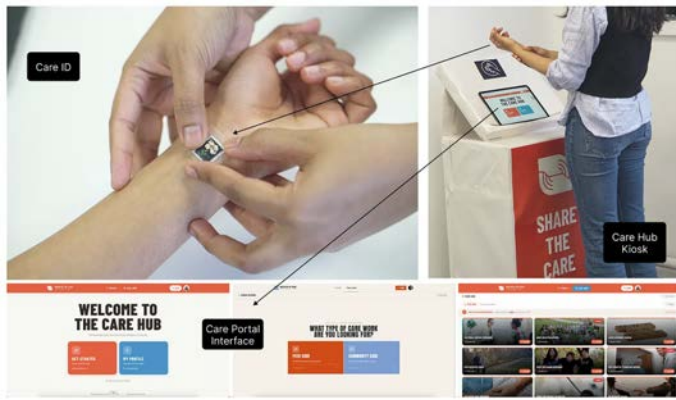
involved gathering material across care work, feminist economics, emotional labour, ageing populations, invisible work, and social inequality, functioning in effect, as an interdisciplinary literature review. Horizon scanning then pushed us to identify trends, broader macro-level shifts already taking shape socially and politically, and signals, smaller early indicators of change not yet fully visible.

Rather than beginning with fantasy, we began with trajectories already present in the world. Our findings on care economies, universal basic income, emotional labour, community support systems were not fringe conversations. They are already entering mainstream political discourse. The speculative world worked precisely because it was believable design 'faction' (Ibid, 2013).

The diegetic prototypes made this concrete. We built artefacts that let audiences experience fragments of the world directly:



A Reddit thread for the Manosphere in a world built on a feminist foundation, with men trying to hack the Care Credits system



A kiosk at a local Care Hub, A resident's Care ID and the Care Portal interface

For the final presentation, we created a short film following someone registering for a Care ID later in life, using the narrative structure of film to situate the concept within a recognisable social reality (Kirby, 2009).

Once the system became tangible, reactions stopped being theoretical. The moment audiences engaged with the prototypes, conversations surfaced around surveillance, coercion, state control, and fairness, questions that had not emerged when the project existed only as a written concept. The artefacts were not decorative. They functioned as what Auger calls a 'perceptual bridge' between the speculative world and the present, provoking reactions, ethical discomfort, and political discussion (Auger, 2013).



Testing the diegetic prototypes

Once the future felt real, people stopped responding like audiences and started responding like citizens living inside it. The prototypes, in that sense, became tools for generating knowledge,

becoming the true products of this form of design research (Ibid, 2013).



The Care ID syncing handshake ritual, which inspired the logo for The Ministry of Care

Designing Care, Designing Control

For me, the central contradiction of the project emerged through our attempt to operationalise fairness itself. Designing Care, Designing Control.

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At its core, The Ministry of Care was a feminist attempt to recognise forms of labour that societies have historically rendered invisible: childcare, elder care, emotional labour. The project imagined what might happen if care became central to society rather than peripheral to it, already a radically different starting point from existing economic and political systems.

Prefiguration as a political strategy describes working towards social transformation by "building the new world in the shell of the old" (Gerber, 2021). In hindsight, this became true for us. A feminist lens did not make us immune to the assumptions we carried in as designers who held the power of designing this world. We still started from a position of control, bringing the baggage of a field born out of capitalism and existing political ideologies. Early versions of the Care System included mandatory care hours, state tracking, strong government oversight, and Care Coins functioning almost like an alternative currency, all shaped by the logic of a state enforcing collective care for what it believed was the greater good.

Gerber questions whether design practice can genuinely contribute to building social systems based on fundamentally different values (Ibid, 2021). For us, the answer came gradually. Over time, feedback, testing, and internal debate forced us to re-evaluate our decisions.

One important shift was moving from “Care Coins” to “Care Credits.” Testing revealed that Coins pushed the system back toward capitalist logic: accumulation and market exchange. Credits reframed participation as access to collective social benefits rather than personal wealth generation.

Similarly, we moved away from direct punishment and legal enforcement. Instead, the system relied on softer forms of behavioural control: propaganda-style state messaging, restricted access to benefits, and socially reinforced stigma around opting out, drawing inspiration from Covid mandates. Residents could eventually opt in and out multiple times rather than being locked in permanently. Even so, every decision carried pressures, restrictions, and consequences.



Prototypes for promotional posters by The Ministry of Care — Shift in content and tone from authoritarian to propaganda-style state messaging

Interestingly enough, even after reducing the overt authoritarianism, the system remained shaped by governance and control. People technically had freedom of choice, but only within carefully designed boundaries. As Gerber concludes, it is helpful to be aware not only of the skills built through professional design practice, but also of the baggage those practices carry, particularly when striving to enact ways of thinking that conflict with the status quo (Gerber, 2021).

This became my key understanding from the project. Designing a ‘preferable’ feminist future did not eliminate power. It revealed how power reorganises itself inside systems attempting to do good.

The project forced us to confront difficult questions. At what point does collective responsibility become coercion? Can fairness ever be operationalised at scale without creating new forms of regulation, exclusion, or social pressure? Can a system built around empathy still rely on surveillance and behavioural shaping to sustain itself?

I realised that my understanding of a ‘preferable’ future was incomplete in the first place. A preferable future is not just desirable, it is a question of preferable for whom, and who gets to decide. Rather than a destination defined by governments or institutions, it should act as a catalyst for public debate about the kinds of futures people collectively want (Dunne and Raby, 2013).

But this did not make the feminist lens feel incorrect. If anything, it confirmed that feminism remains a necessary starting point because it gives language for questioning systems that produce inequality while claiming to reduce it (Ahmed, 2017). Ahmed writes about feminism not as a harmonious solution, but as an ongoing process of noticing discomfort, exclusion, and the structures shaping everyday life. Our project embodied that tension through enforcement, surveillance, and social control. It revealed the immense complexity involved in operationalising equity within large-scale social systems.

There may never be complete equality. But that does not make the pursuit of more equitable futures meaningless.

The Blind Spots We Carried

Another important reflection emerged through the limitations of our own feminist perspective. Despite approaching the project through a feminist lens, our world-building still operated largely through a single-axis understanding of oppression. We questioned the influence of gender, class, disability, and race individually — but not as interlocked systems. We insufficiently interrogated how layered forms of oppression would interact with the Care System.

This connects directly to the critiques raised within Design Justice around single-axis analysis and the ‘Matrix of Domination,’ the argument that oppression does not operate through isolated categories, but through interconnected systems

that shape experiences differently depending on positionality. Our project unintentionally demonstrated this critique (Costanza-Chock, 2020).

We assumed that because care became central to the economy, the system would affect people relatively equally. We did not fully interrogate how different intersectionalities might experience surveillance, participation requirements, state monitoring, or restricted access in fundamentally different ways. While we employed a feminist lens, we were not fully designing through an intersectional lens.

This realisation was uncomfortable. A team of politically and socially aware women of colour still defaulted toward a simplified understanding of oppression. It could be attributed to the limited timeframe we had or to our personal privilege of operating within an elite educational space. But it was also about recognising how genuinely complex intersectionality is to hold in practice, and how the tools and conventions of speculative design make intersectional blindness easy unless it is deliberately and continuously addressed.

As Prado Martins critiques, design itself carries structural privilege, meaning even critically engaged designers reproduce narrow assumptions because the field's default imaginaries are already unevenly situated (Prado de O. Martins, 2014).

The project exposed how deeply conditioning and positionality shape even critically conscious designers, and how inevitably this shapes the systems, futures, and definitions of fairness we imagine. That too is a form of power reorganising itself, even when we believe we are working against it.

A Service Designer with a Feminist Lens

The Ministry of Care began as an act of feminist imagination and ended as something far more instructive, a mirror held up to the assumptions we carry as designers, even when we believe we are working against the grain of unjust systems. What the project made undeniably clear is that designing for equity is not a destination you arrive at by choosing the right values. It is a form of slow critical activism (Jain, 2018), that may not produce measurable outcomes immediately, but shifts how people imagine what is possible. Filtered through a feminist lens, that provocation

becomes something sharper: not just asking what futures we want, but an ongoing, unfinished practice of questioning who the system serves, who it forgets, and who quietly pays for its smooth operation.

As a Service Designer, this has shifted how I understand my role to work toward positive change in society. It is not enough to improve experiences, reduce friction, or make systems more accessible, though all of that still matters. The more difficult responsibility is to ask what a system is actually doing beneath those improvements, whose interests it protects, whose labour it renders invisible, and whose freedom it quietly absorbs. A feminist lens does not make that work easier. It makes it more honest. It insists on sitting with contradiction rather than designing it away, on naming exclusion rather than smoothing it into a better user journey, and on treating discomfort not as a problem to solve but as a signal worth following. This realisation, more than any prototype or policy concept, is what I am taking forward as a designer.

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Design Futures: Spaces That Connect, Systems That Decide

Introduction

There is a moment in every design process when something shifts.

For me, that moment came not at the beginning of this project, but somewhere in the middle, when I held a tax bill in my hands. It was a document styled like an NHS council tax statement, addressed to a fictional resident of Camden named Casey Bennett, classified as a Solo Navigator, a person who lives alone, socialises selectively, and whose lifestyle the Ministry of Social Wellbeing had determined to be a public risk. Her monthly surcharge: £643.

The document did not exist. I had designed it. And holding it, I understood for the first time what speculative design was actually for: not to resolve a problem, but to make one visible. Not to provide an answer, but to make the question impossible to ignore.

This blog is a personal reflection on eight weeks of exploring the question: “What if social participation became a condition for shared urban life in 2035?” Through a future-oriented design approach and a feminist lens, our team built a world where loneliness is classified as a public risk, and social connection is measured, scored, and enforced by the state. The Ministry of Social Wellbeing issues every adult a Social Wellbeing Identity Card. Your archetype — Connector, Dependent, Intermittent, Observer, or Solo Navigator — determines your tax rate, your access to public spaces, and your eligibility for services.

1. Speculative Design for Service Design through a Feminist Lens

Breaking the Frame

Seven years of Product Design trained me to



Figure 1: The Tax Bill of the Solo Navigator — monthly surcharge: £643

observe and resolve — to make things that worked, that were fair, that could be implemented. I operated within a consistent framework: design must land. Whatever I made had to be achievable within real constraints.

I had encountered speculative design once before, during my undergraduate studies. The memory is vague, but one thing stays with me: no one in that class wanted to go dark. Every imagined world was bright and optimistic. Except ours. Our group arrived somewhere dystopian — I remember the feeling of excitement that came with it. Not the satisfaction of solving something, but the thrill of breaking something open. Of making a problem rather than fixing one. I did not fully understand that feeling at the time. Design Futures gave it a name.

As Dunne and Raby (2013) articulate in their A/B Manifesto, mainstream design is affirmative — it provides answers, serves industry, and makes us buy. Speculative design is critical, it asks questions, serves society, and makes us think. The distinction matters because it changes what success looks like. In conventional design, success is adoption, people use what you made. In speculative design, success is conversation, people cannot stop thinking about what you made.

[a]	[b]
affirmative	critical
problem solving	problem finding
design as process	design as medium
provides answers	asks questions
in the service of shareholders	in the service of society
for how the world is	for how the world could be
science fiction	social action
futures	alternative worlds
fictional functions	functional fictions
change the world to suit us	change the us to suit the world
narratives of production	narratives of consumption
anti-art	applied art
research for design	research through design
applications	implications
design for production	design for debate
fun	satire
concept design	conceptual design
consumer	citizen
makes us buy	makes us think
innovation	provocation
ergonomics	rhetoric
user-friendliness	ethics

Figure 2: A/B — A Manifesto (Dunne and Raby, 2013)

Speculative design, situated within the Futures Cone (Voros, 2017), operates not in the probable or projected future but in the possible — the space where assumptions can be examined before they harden into reality. The tool that makes this possible is the diegetic prototype: an artefact that functions within a fictional world, not as a proposal but as a provocation (Kirby, 2010). Its purpose is to create what Lindley, Sharma and Potts (2015) call a “discursive space” a context in which people can engage critically with possible futures without the defensiveness that comes from evaluating a real proposal.

What this means for service design specifically is significant. Service design has always been concerned with how systems shape human experience, how the structure of a service determines who is included, who is excluded, and what kinds of lives it makes possible. Speculative design sharpens this concern by extending it into the future: not just “how does this system work?” but “what kind of world does this system produce, and for whom?” As Zimmerman, Forlizzi, and Evenson (2007) argue, research through design treats making itself as a form of inquiry, meaning that the prototype is not just a communication of research, but the site where research happens. In combination, these approaches create a practice that is grounded in human experience and oriented toward the long-term consequences of design decisions.

Feminist Lens: Fairness as Care, Not as Combat
As a woman and as the eldest daughter in a

traditional Asian family, feminist thinking has never been something I had to seek out. I encounter it in the ordinary texture of daily life: in the quiet arithmetic of who is expected to sacrifice what, in the weight of being simultaneously expected to carry the family and remain small enough not to inconvenience it.

I grew up understanding that gender equality is hard-won. But I have always been uncomfortable with the loudest registers of feminist discourse not because I disagree with the goals, but because I distrust the approach. When the message becomes “if you do not support us, you are against us,” it produces exactly the opposition it claims to oppose. For me, feminism has always meant something quieter: fairness and care. Genuine attention to who is being left out, and why.

Bringing this into design practice meant asking, at every stage: who is this system designed to protect and who is it quietly asking to change?

As Prado de O. Martins and Vieira de Oliveira (2014) argue, speculative and critical design must interrogate not just what a future looks like, but who holds the power to define it, and whose experiences are treated as the baseline for what counts as desirable. In our 2035 world, the Ministry of Social Wellbeing was designed with genuine care to address a real and serious problem. And it still produced a system that taxed a woman for living alone. A feminist lens did not give us a solution to that tension. It insisted that the tension be named. In speculative design, naming it honestly is the work.



Figure 3: the Ministry of Social Wellbeing

2. Research through Design: Building the World from Signals

Research through Design as a Method

Research through design (RtD) is a methodology in which the act of designing is itself a form of inquiry where making is how knowledge is produced, not how it is communicated after the fact (Zimmerman, Forlizzi, and Evenson, 2007). In the context of this project, this meant that our diegetic prototypes were not the output of our research. They were the researchers. The conversations they generated, the discomfort they provoked, and the questions they surfaced, these were the findings.

This is fundamentally different from conventional research, in which data is collected first and then used to inform a design decision. In RtD, the prototype comes before the insight. You make something in order to discover what it means. The tax bill taught me more about the politics of loneliness than weeks of desk research had, not because it contained more information, but because it made information feel.

Horizon Scanning: Following the Unexpected Signal

When we began horizon scanning, I expected to find signals that confirmed what I already suspected: that cities were becoming lonelier, that public space was eroding, that technology was filling gaps left by declining social infrastructure. All of those signals were present.

What I did not expect was the 4B movement.

I had assumed that the rise of singlehood was primarily economic, that people were choosing not to marry because they could not afford to. The research revealed a more complex story. The 4B movement, originating in South Korea and spreading globally after the 2024 US election, was not born of financial pragmatism. It was a deliberate feminist act of refusal: women choosing not to date, not to marry, not to have children as a direct rejection of structures that had required their subordination (Jeong, 2025).

This was not loneliness as a condition imposed from outside. It was solitude as a choice made freely, deliberately, on one's own terms. And in our 2035 world, that choice would be classified as

a social risk. She would be taxed for it.

World Building and the Two Newspapers

Moving from signals to a world required thinking in layers from broad demographic context through the infrastructure of daily life, down to the lived experience of individuals within the system. The most generative exercise in this phase was writing two newspapers.

The Golden Light and The Natural Light reported on the same 2035 London from opposite editorial positions. The constraint forced us to articulate not just what was happening in our world, but what it meant and to whom. The Golden Light saw co-housing communities as evidence of women's agency. The Natural Light saw them as evidence of a system that had failed older women so completely that they had been forced to build their own alternatives. Both were simultaneously true.

There is no neutral position from which a world can be described. Making two newspapers made our own assumptions visible and forced us to be honest about which ones we were smuggling into our design.

Diegetic Prototyping: When Fiction Meets Reality

Our first prototype generated only approval: "Great idea," "Very innovative," "I would use this." Approval is not insight. We had made people comfortable with a broken system. That was not what we were trying to do.

The shift came when we stopped presenting the system and started presenting its consequences. The tax bill. The identity card with its archetype printed in bold. The park sign reads NO SOLO VISITORS.



Figure 6: First prototype testing

What happened next was something we had not planned for.

While filming for our Solo Navigator Diaries video, we placed the NO SOLO VISITORS sign at a real park entrance. A stranger walking toward the park stopped. She read the sign. She stood still for a moment, visibly uncertain, visibly uncomfortable, before we explained that it was part of a design project. After we explained to her, she laughed with relief and walked in.

She had not known the sign was fictional. For a few seconds, she had believed it. And in those seconds, she had already begun to change her behaviour to defer, to hesitate, to consider turning back.

That was the most precise demonstration of speculative design I experienced across the entire project. Not a prototype in a controlled testing environment, but a real person encountering a fictional future and responding to it as though it were real. The discomfort she felt was not manufactured. It was discovered in the gap between the world as it is and the world the sign implied.

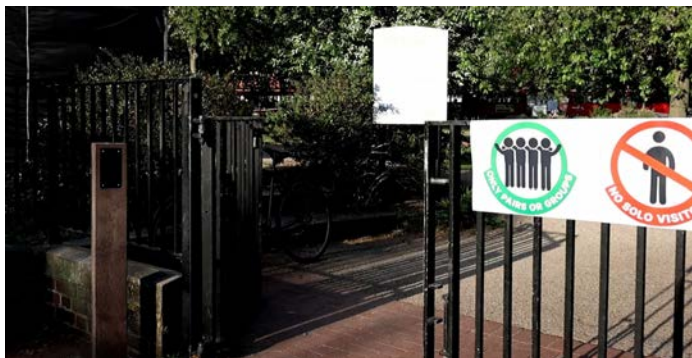


Figure 8: Solo Navigator Diaries — filming at the park entrance

When we took the tax bill to the street and placed it in front of twenty strangers, the responses were divided clearly. Extroverts leaned in, calculating what the system could give them, whether it would make public spaces feel safer, whether it would help them build networks in a new city. They were already optimising.

Introverts went quiet. And then several said, almost identically: they would rather pay more than break their peace. The tax was not the worst part. The worst part was being told that the way they moved through the world was a problem

requiring correction.

Two participants said the system reminded them of a caste structure.

That conversation was not about whether the system was well designed, but about what kind of world it would produce, which was what the design had been building toward.

3. The Role of the Service Designer

Speculative Design as a Tool, Not an Identity

After eight weeks, I do not think of myself as a speculative designer. I think of speculative design as a tool, one that breaks the frame that conventional design practice builds around itself, and makes visible the assumptions that frame conceals.

The frame I had built around myself said: design must land. Design must be achievable. Design must solve something. Speculative design does not replace that frame; it interrogates it. It asks: achievable for whom? Solving what, exactly? And for whose version of the problem?

Used as a tool within service design practice, speculative design does not abandon the discipline's commitment to human experience and systemic change. It extends it, into futures that have not happened yet, into consequences that have not been felt yet, into questions that have not been asked yet. As Dunne and Raby (2013) put it, speculative design operates in the service of society rather than industry. That is not a departure from service design. That is its deepest purpose.

The Value of Provocation Beyond the Studio

I came into this project believing that provocation-based design belonged primarily in exhibition and art contexts, spaces where reflection is already invited, where the audience arrives expecting to be challenged. I still believe that speculative design finds its most natural home in those spaces.

But the stranger at the park entrance changed something in my thinking. She was not in a gallery. She was not expecting to be challenged. She was simply going to the park. And a fictional sign stopped her.

What this told me is that provocation does not require a curated context to be effective. It requires only that the artefact be specific enough, credible enough, and grounded enough in a real social tension that a person encountering it cannot immediately dismiss it. The NO SOLO VISITORS sign worked not because it was art, but because it was plausible, because the world it implied was not so far from the world she was already living in.

This is what I will carry into future practice. Not the tools of speculative design in their entirety, but the question that underlies them: what would it feel like to live inside what I am designing? And is that a world I am willing to make? WHAT IF...?

Holt-Lunstad (2017) has documented that social isolation carries health risks comparable to smoking fifteen cigarettes a day. The loneliness that our 2035 world was built around is not speculative. It is already a public health crisis.

The question of how cities and services respond to it, whether with care or with control, whether by expanding connection or by enforcing it, is being answered right now, in design decisions being made right now.

A service designer who understands that is not just a problem-solver. They are, in the fullest sense of the word, a maker of futures.

But the stranger at the park entrance stopped. For a few seconds, she believed the sign was real. And in those seconds, she had already begun to comply.

That is what Design Futures taught me about the relationship between design and the present moment. Speculative design does not predict the future. It reveals the present by pushing its logic forward until the implications become impossible to ignore. Research through design does not describe this process from the outside. It produces knowledge through making, through encounter, through the moment when a fictional artefact lands in a real person's experience and something shifts.

I came into this course as a designer who solved problems. I leave it understanding that the most important design work is not always about solutions. Sometimes it is about making the right questions visible, specific enough, credible enough, and grounded enough in real social tension that the person who encounters them cannot simply walk past.

The most consequential design decisions about 2035 are not made in 2035.

They are being made now. By designers who are willing to ask: What if.



Figure 9: Diegetic prototypes

Conclusion

The Social Wellbeing Identity Card does not exist. The Ministry of Social Wellbeing has not been established. The Solo Navigator's tax bill has not been sent.

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Sample blogs

More student blog posts are linked from servicefutures.co.uk/feminist-futures-health-work-spaces/

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Relearning Service Design Through the Lens of Feminist Ideology

14 min read · 7 hours ago

Adib

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As a designer with over seven years of experience in the professional setting, I have always tried to make design more accessible for all, especially for women, because I strongly believe in feminist values. However, my initial understanding of the concept was not entirely correct. I used to think that designing through a feminist lens meant designing solutions solely for women. Over the course of this project, I came to realise that designing for feminist futures is not about designing only for women, it is about designing more equally and thoughtfully for everyone (Prado de O. Martins, 2014).

<https://medium.com/@adib292000/stop-checking-my-essay-12a7ac73a2d0?postPublishedType=repub>

1/24

Team 5: Adib May. Personal Medium Blog

Medium

Write

When the Future Feels Too Close

A Design Futures Lens on Menopause and Women's Health

Anisha Jhaveri

15 min read · Just now



Futures are no longer abstract but increasingly functional

Perhaps futures thinking was once a kind of intellectual indulgence, optional, imaginative, even a luxury. A way of looking at reality from a distance —

Team 4: Anisha Jhaveri. Personal Medium Blog

Sample Blogs

165

MA Service Design, Design Futures Exhibition Poster

Feminist Futures: Health, Work, Spaces

MA Service Design,
Design Futures Exhibition

Friday 5
June 2026
4-6pm

Free and open to the public

The Tree House, Elephant Park, Elephant & Castle. SE17 1GW

What does it mean to design futures from a feminist perspective? How do we practice design in feminist ways? How are the futures of health, work and spaces reshaped when they are approached from an intersectional and LGBTQ+ inclusive feminist perspective?

These were the collective research questions of this year's MA Service Design students over the course of their Design Futures unit. We invite you to join us in an afternoon filled with future provocations, future policy making, and future space considerations.

This year, students have been collaborating closely with The Gendered City, FEM.DES Network, The European Health Futures Forum, The Daughters of Mars, and PILAA, and have explored questions such as: What if our economy focussed on the value of care work and human skills? What if menopause care were destigmatised and treated like fertility care? And what if access to spaces were based on your safety rating or social connections?

We'd like to extend our grateful thanks to this year's collaborators: Dr. Ope Lori and BJ Woodstein from Pilaa, Janet Mitchel and Nura Jahanpour from the European Health Futures Forum, Dr Nourhan Bassam and Toby Godfray from The Gendered City and FEM.DES network; Lucy Hope from The Daughters of Mars, as well as to our visiting lecturers this term, Dr Luiza Prado de O. Martins, Dr Georgina Voss, Malina Dabrowska, and Aidan Harris.

The project was led by Prof Silvia Grimaldi and Marion Lagedamont of the Service Futures Lab, and MA Service Design, London College of Communication, University of the Arts London.



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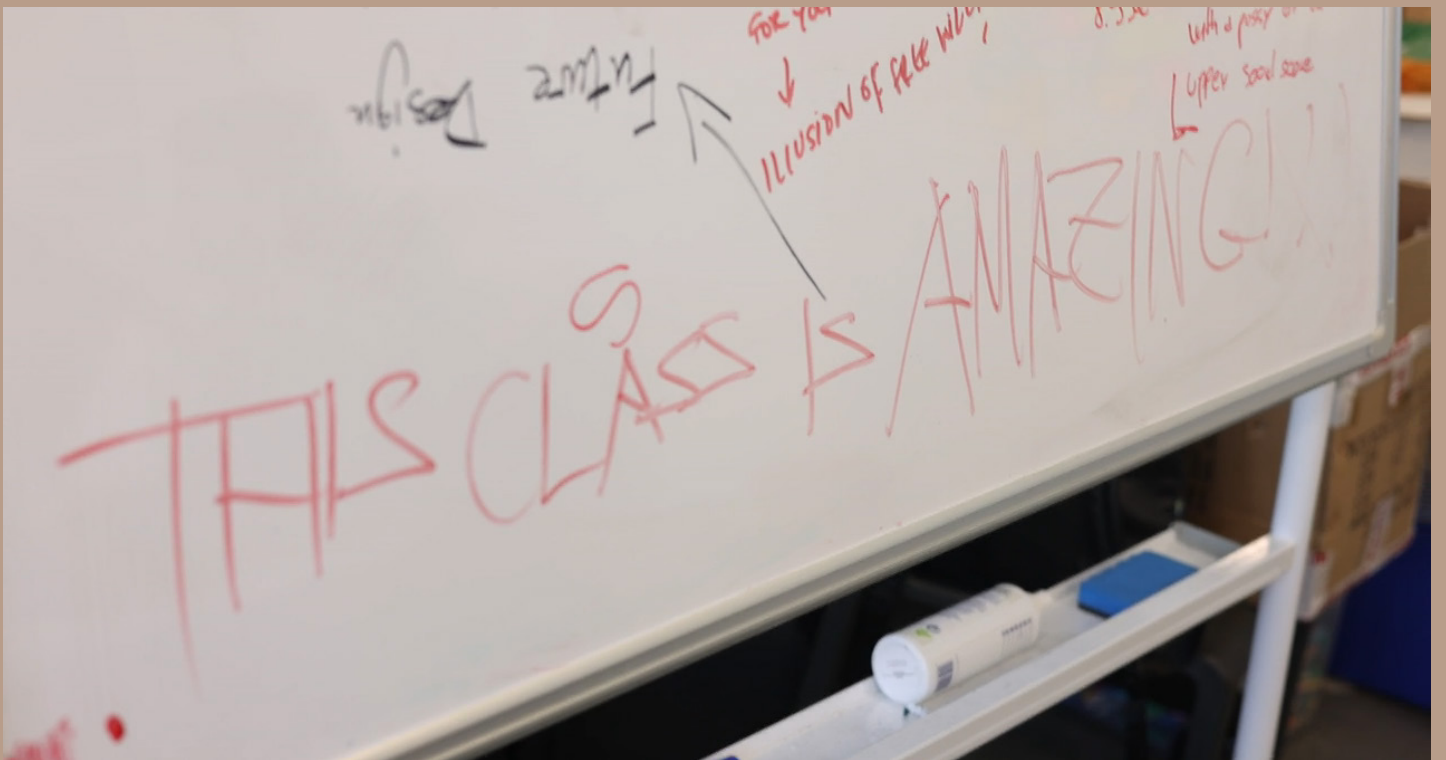
2026 Poster for MA Service Design, Design Futures Exhibition.



Team 3: Protest in speculative newspaper



Students working together



White board with writing, 'This class is amazing.'

