BECOMING A DESIGN & AI RESEARCHER

Personal Development Plan M2.1

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VISION

IDENTITY

I believe we should design a future world, instead of designing merely a future product. A future world in which technology is not added to our society, but in which it creates and cooperates with our society.

Many innovations and technologies advance in such a way that they don't bring real value to our lives or society. They help us in all sorts of practical ways, but no one seems to stand still to truly think about the cultural and societal effects on a bigger scale. Most people either just accept that these technologies are there, losing themselves in the chaos of fast developments, or they become afraid that technology will take over the Earth and become a danger to the human race.

This creates a challenge. The challenge to make technology that enables people and intelligent technology such as artificially intelligent systems to work together on the same level, to empower people in using their qualities such as imagination, to encourage people to live life to the fullest and create their own stories of life.
To achieve this goal, designers with a vision should cooperate across disciplines to be able to match (inter)national policymaking with technological development.

I think. A lot. About the world, society, life, death… And about technology and the role it has to play in the story of the human race.

I often wonder what the world would look like if certain technologies or ways of dealing with life would be different. I wonder what the changes would do to us, the people, what it would do to our feelings and perception of the world. Stories, especially in the genres of Fantasy and Science-Fiction, help in challenging the views we have on the world. They create scenarios of how society might be different when some aspects would change.

Writers and storytellers are designers of worlds, whereas many people are designers of little aspects. I want to design systems that take a vision of a future world into account, by using narratives and stories.

I want to research the interaction between intelligent systems and people, and how they can empower each other. I want to find out how the presence of intelligent systems influences people's perception and experience of the world and how I can support the processes of changing values and cultures.

I am a **design researcher**, but also an **AI researcher**. I like to research **fundamental issues** around the **social system of the world** and how **intelligent and autonomous systems** can play a role in that, while using **creative methods from design**. I focus on **the unique qualities of people** and even though I might conduct more theoretical and technical work, experiments with humans are essential to me. In this, I highly value a **combination of quantitative, qualitative and constructive methods** to get a broad view on a research topic. I thrive in interdisciplinary teams where team members can provide me with different viewpoints. One of the most enjoyable challenges in interdisciplinary research for me is to try to find the common ground between those viewpoints, a direction that makes most out of all expertise present.

INTRODUCTION

LONG TERM

Having just finished a thesis for the AI Master program, it is very important for me to define what I still want to get out of my FMP. Also, graduating from the first program made me think about my future, about the kind of researcher I want to become and the environment that I would like to work in. Over the last 2,5 years I slowly became more of an AI researcher and less of a designer, but my AI thesis project made me realize that part of me is definitely still a designer. Although the topics in AI research highly interest me, I tend to lean towards the topics that are more aimed at interaction with humans. Also, I missed being creative throughout the research process and being able to speculate about future societies, something that has always been a great part of my process here at Industrial Design.

My FMP will therefore be a search for the perfect balance between AI topics of research and viewpoints and methods from design. A general goal is to explore different methods next to each other and to allow myself the freedom to try more 'designerly' and unconventional methods. Hopefully this will enable me to enjoy this final project within university as much as possible, making me a confident researcher who knows her style of research.

Looking across disciplines and envisioning what role (AI) technology might play in a future world is what I would love to do in the future. There are four aspects that I feel I need in a future job:

HIGH-LEVEL HUMAN-AGENT INTERACTION such as human-agent collaboration or teaming

FUTURE SOCIETY ORIENTED taking into account future societal developments and culture changes, which makes the work rather exploratory

MIXED METHODS: ALSO CREATIVE it should be possible to use various methods, and there should be openness to unconventional and creative methods such as Research through Design

MULTI/INTER-DISCIPLINARY TEAM it would be especially great if there are other people working on the same or a similar project, preferably people with different backgrounds

Currently the context in which I would like to have these aspects is that of a PhD project that I can dive into with my heart and soul.

GOALS

BE RELAXED One of the challenges that I faced in my AI thesis project, is being insecure about the amount and quality of work that I was delivering. At the end of the project, I was praised especially for the amount of work that I did, but the quality sometimes suffered from me wanting to do too much. This shows that my work suffered from the insecurity. Therefore, one of the goals for my FMP is to try to always have confidence in what I'm doing while looking at my work and planning in a realistic way. I will try to achieve this by making a clear planning that is realistic and not too ambitious, while keeping my work within office hours as much as possible.

HAVE FUN AND EXPLORE During my previous thesis project, I sometimes felt somewhat demotivated by the activities I was doing. While this might have been a side-effect of the mentioned insecurity, I felt like it was also caused by a lack of flexibility and diversity in research activities. For my FMP, I want to ensure that my motivation stays high by making sure I enjoy the activities I'm doing. I will do this by exploring different kinds of methods and using a mix of prototyping/constructive design research, literature reading as well as qualitative research and user contact.

RESEARCH METHODS Even though I have been studying for a long time, I still feel like I sometimes struggle with choosing the right methods for my research in general, as well as with having an overview of more 'designerly' research methods. By following the elective 'Research Methods' I will hopefully gain a better understanding of these topics. I will apply the knowledge learned in my project by defining my research questions and methods accordingly.

PUBLICATION Since my ambition for the future is to do research, and more specifically to do a PhD after graduating, I want to learn more about the general academic processes such as publishing work. Currently, I am working on two full papers and a work-in-progress paper, and my goal is to submit all three of those to conferences.

REACHING OUT To prepare for my career after graduating, I want to talk to many people who do work related to my interests. I want to find out what the different possible directions are that I could go into, as well as making connections to those people to find possible future opportunities. I have a short list with people whose work I am interested in and I plan to contact all of them in the coming year.

ETHICS AND RESPONSIBILITY Lately I have become more interested in ethics and responsibility, especially in relation to Artificial Intelligence. I will be following the course 'Ethics and the Risk Society' in quartile 4 for that reason. I hope to gain a better overall view on how design and AI research can contribute to the debate on ethics and responsibility.