



VISIONS of the FUTURE

WORDS JESSE SHIP



The ancient Greeks believed that the future could be found by examining the livers of sacrificial animals or the flight trajectory of birds. And if a fortune was uncovered, there was little that could be done to alter one's destiny. You could always consult an oracle to understand what lay ahead but ultimately it was up to the gods to control the fate of mankind.

These days, most people believe that our future is not pre-ordained. We are the masters of our own fate. But that doesn't stop some people from looking at what's to come. Futurists pour hours into analyzing the past and assessing the trends of the present — to predict developments yet to appear on the horizon. But who and what exactly are professional "futurists?" Is it truly a job title that can be bestowed like a doctor or professor?

In short, yes. According to the Association of Professional Futurists, "a professional futurist is a person who helps people understand, anticipate, prepare for, and gain advantage from coming changes. But it is not the goal of a futurist to predict what will happen in the future. The futurist uses foresight to describe what could happen in the future and, in some cases, what should happen in the future." In this sense, futurists are part-idealist and part-problem solver; foreshadowing data that weaves a story of a more efficient (and sometimes necessary) way to live.

Vancouver-based Nikolas Badminton is one such futurist who makes predictions based on contemporary empirical evidence. His focus is to look at where we are in the world today and how we are going to be affected down the line by examining a number of different factors and data points. Badminton is the first to admit however, that 50 percent of his predictions won't come true. But before you scoff at that dismissive statistic, consider this: Would you take the odds of a coin flip into the casino and bet your earnings? He envisions you nodding your head. Was he right?

Five years ago, Badminton predicted the rise of mobile payments and... nothing happened, which drove him mad with frustration. Then suddenly the iPhone 6 launches with ApplePay, and "the world's gone crazy for it," he says.

"Just looking at a certain field like augmented reality and wearable technology, you can make very safe predictions. But you also have to look at macroeconomic trends. Education, government and changes in urban environments matter especially in the U.S. and Canada. With these factors taken into consideration, you'll suddenly have a large set of data points where you'll start to see correlations." The increasing reliance on mobile technology housing our daily lives led him to believe mobile payments were an inevitability, long before it became commonplace.

So it may be true that studying data from the past is one pillar in anticipating the future. But part of the fun of being a futurist is also the imagination, anticipation, and

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sometimes, foolishness of it all. It's because all futuristic ideas seem somewhat foolish in the present, until that vision comes to pass of course.

That formula of facts mixed with imagination is a recipe utilized by a different futurist, Afshin Mousavian. Mousavian is a co-founder at TEDxToronto, a conference that bills itself as a catalyst for exceptional ideas and profound changes, and a former managing partner at Shopify, one of the world's leading online shopping platforms.

As “foolish” as it may seem, Mousavian senses that in 10 years the idea of carrying a shopping bag will be archaic. Customers will simply make a purchase, and a drone or a delivery service will bring the product to your door at your convenience. Store lineups will be much shorter, and carrying cash and credit cards will be even more rare, as the world shifts to a heavy dependency on secure technological devices with built-in pay systems.



Mousavian also touts social networks as the new platforms for shopping, which he thinks will reduce the level of buyer's remorse, making shopping more of a community experience than an individual one. “It will help me relate to my friends more because I'll get notifications saying, for example, ‘Matt bought this product.’ It will happen on Facebook, it's already happening on Pinterest and it will start happening across all social networks.”

Sharing ideas and finding like minds is, after all, a driving force for social change. To strengthen their voice and ability to predict future outcomes, many are drawn to conferences to bring futurists-in-the-making together. Nikolas Badminton has organized the forward thinking trans-humanist ‘From Now’ conference, Afshin Mousavian is a partner with the aforementioned TEDxToronto, and Montreal's Richard St. Pierre is president at the wildly creative C2.

C2 stands for commerce and creativity and is a phenomenon that challenges traditional business practices that have oddly become dogma that we never question. “Creating something new is the most difficult thing a business can do,” says St-Pierre. Last year, the Cirque Du Soleil-partnered networking conference featured highlights like brainstorming meetings suspended from chairs 20 feet in the air with safety nets below, tête-a-tête meetings in Ferris wheel cars and lectures from the likes of Richard Branson, Andre Agassi and Chelsea Clinton. The immersive three-day event aims to unite “the cream of the international business crop” to stimulate creative and even visionary thinking to commercial problems.

One of those problems is our never ending thirst for connectivity, and the required on-demand high-speed access needed to sustain it. With the world's increased desire for connectivity and the simplicity of mobile application payment systems, one begins to wonder, where is all this bandwidth coming from?



The skies above us are a part of the future that is somewhat overlooked and forgotten, except by those trained futurists whose job it is to look at the sky, like Natalie Panek. “In the future we will have to necessitate a pro-active plan that will take care of satellites and the end of their life spans,” says Natalie Panek, an aerospace engineer at MacDonald Dettwiler Space and Advanced Robotics (MDA). (Yes, that MDA that built the Canadarm.)

“Going forward, I think there will be huge disruptions by private players in the satellite industry. We have satellites going around the earth without binding laws to determine what happens at the end of their lives. If a part breaks down or it reaches the end of its mission life, it ends up as space junk and possibly moved into a graveyard disposal orbit. In the coming years, we'll be seeing more initiatives trying to repair, repurpose and recycle satellites, possibly using orbital arms as an orbital gas station servicing the satellite industry.”

And while space is approached scientifically by futurists like Panek, imagination and sense are still the primary force in predicting the future, especially for what we would assume most futurists are: psychic mediums.

Evidential psychic medium Brough Perkins deals with a purely intuitive technology of his own mind to make predictions on the future. And he ironically, albeit unknowingly, sees the future in much the same way his evidence-based counterparts do.

“Our curiosity in space is going to open up. In the next five to ten years we'll see a plan to mine asteroids for natural resources by a company that will take action.” Among other predictions, Perkins feels that youth in coming generations will seek more information, and there will be a spark for many young activists. “It will be a new revolution, as in the late '60s,” he quips. It's a thought shared by C2's Richard St. Pierre.

“Social impact businesses that have a social goal as a purpose, as opposed to profit as its primary goal, will be common in the future,” says St. Pierre. “Advancing society without dying the next year, not just financially, will be a priority. Society can make change, like with the Berlin Wall for example. Although no one has a crystal ball, the thought of the next 50 years is the power of the future.”

Until then... 