

Futurology Through Semiotics 2.0

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28 October 2014

Introduction: Welcome to The Future 2.0

This paper is the second in a series that began in 2009. Futurology is the most exciting of all the many applications of semiotics and this update is going to reveal some brand new trends as well as investigate what happened to the trends we identified last time.

Recap: The Story So Far

In the original *Futurology Through Semiotics*, hereafter referred to as *Futurology 1.0*, we:

- discussed why business needs futurology (so you can keep up with social change, manage risk and help to create the future instead of just letting it happen to you);
- explored semiotic method in detail, with an emphasis on the fact that semiotics is not merely a case of picking apart advertising and packaging but is in fact a branch of anthropology, which studies human societies and cultures around the world;
- identified the difference between synchronic analysis (looking at a given phenomenon in different categories or different parts of the world at the same point in time) and diachronic analysis (examining change over time: past, present, future);
- listed some of the sources where new and emerging trends are regularly found;
- detailed the twig-to-branch formula which gives futurological predictions their validity by tapping into global structures of formal and informal knowledge – without this, you are just guessing;
- examined at some length social change and future-facing trends in two specific and very important areas of consumer life – sex and gender followed by the future of leisure;
- compiled a short and handy list of macro-trends, these being very large trends that have an influence on specific phenomena such as sex and leisure;
- and finally made some recommendations for business.

Futurology 1.0 was a well-received paper, nominated for Best Paper by the MRS Conference judging panel in the year of its publication. That being the case, and given the amount of detail in which *Futurology 1.0* discusses semiotic method, we need not repeat ourselves. Instead, let's cut to the chase. The remainder of this paper is in five parts, as follows:

1. Trends & Predictions from 2009: Did they come true?

- The decline of TV and the rise of gaming.
- The collapse of sex, gender and sexual orientation.

2. Macro Trends: Further developments.

- The Return of the Real and the young, Western jihadi bride.
- Visual & Accelerated Culture and the death of Facebook.

3. The New News: Emerging trends.

Post-Humanism: Technology is changing you, not just the way you use your time.

- Who are you?
- Where are you?

4. Do This Next: Recommendations for Business

Trends & Predictions from 2009: Did they come true?

The decline of television

In 2009, in Futurology 1, I observed that, while people still want to consume TV *content*, or at least some of it, they decreasingly want to watch TV in the traditional sense, meaning parking oneself in front of a television set and watching what broadcasters have decided is going to be 'on'. Let's see what changes have occurred since then.

The BBC is haemorrhaging money in cancelled licence fees. On 5 April 2013, the Daily Mail reported¹ that the BBC was refusing to reveal how many households have cancelled their licence. Amusingly and in its typical style, the Mail regarded this as 'licence fee evasion' but in fact, as you can learn from popular consumer advocacy sites such as Money Supermarket, you are under absolutely no obligation to pay for a TV licence if you don't watch TV content as it is being broadcast². John Whittingdale, Chairman of the Commons Culture, Media and Sport Committee said "*The licence fee was created when television was in a different world, when there was very little choice and everybody watched the BBC. Today people have access to hundreds of channels as well as downloads, catch-up services and on demand. As more and more choice is available, the arguments for having a licence fee no longer hold.*" It is, perhaps, understandable if the BBC doesn't want to reveal how many households it has lost in total. However, we are not completely in the dark. The Mail further claimed: "*The BBC estimates that £196 million of revenue was lost in 2009/10*". That's 1.3m households. In one year. Five years ago. A five-year period in which seismic changes have occurred in how people consume – and talk about consuming – TV content.

¹ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2304280/BBC-silence-licence-loophole-Corporation-refuses-say-households-need-catch-online.html>

² <http://www.moneysavingexpert.com/utilities/tv-licence>

Three million British households subscribe to Netflix. On 11 August 2014, the *Telegraph* reported that Netflix had succeeded in signing up more than one in 10 British households³, fully explaining where all those lost TV licence fees are going. This is especially impressive as Netflix was not only in competition with conventional broadcast TV but also with equivalent streaming services such as Lovefilm and Amazon. That is, as not all users of streaming services are Netflix customers, we can anticipate that the actual number of British households who are now consuming some or all of their TV content in streaming, on-demand format is actually much higher than 1 in 10. Netflix's UK subscriber base was described as having doubled in the one single year leading up this remarkable achievement.

This isn't just about bottom lines and business success: consumer psychology is changing. We know this because totally new linguistic forms are entering the English language. A great example is "binge-watching" (a Google search of this term will bring up 9.2 million results if you force Google to include the hyphen and an additional 4.4m results if you remove the hyphen and truncate the phrase into a single word). Binge-watching, meaning to consume entire TV series, or even multiple TV series, such as sitting down to watch all five series of *Breaking Bad* back-to-back, is a behaviour that was formerly the province of a tiny minority of superfans who relied on DVD box-sets, months or years after the live broadcast, and now, in 2014, is in the Oxford English Dictionary and is being described (by Slate⁴, and the Wall Street Journal, for example⁵) as an addiction and a pandemic, thanks in part to Netflix premiering TV series such as *Orange Is The New Black* in bulk for exactly that purpose.

Let us return to the natural language of consumers. From a semiotic and discursive point of view (for a crucial part of semiotics is the study of discourse), an even more interesting development than the sudden explosion of the term 'binge-watching' is the linguistic separation of 'watching Netflix' from 'watching TV', where these things are not merely different but contrasted against each other, with 'watching TV' being linguistically marked as the less desirable, less-preferred case. Consider this spontaneous verbal description by a user of Reddit who is not able to find a job, despite his degree.

*"But now the summer has died down and here I am without a job still. Biology is a tough major to find jobs for, alas I do nothing all day. I watch Netflix, read books, watch stupid tv, check to see new job postings, repeat."*⁶

It is very clear what the order of preferred activities is. Watching Netflix is the default activity for an unemployed young man. Reading books, though we can take it that he does not lack intelligence, is relegated to second place. Watching TV is, by definition, watching 'stupid' TV, meaning TV that you wouldn't have chosen, and, as activities go, is superior only to searching for jobs that don't exist.

We do not have to search very hard, or very far, for the reasons why consumers like Netflix. They like control. They like being able to fully immerse themselves in their favourite shows. They like being able to watch what they want, when they want it. They value being able to skip TV advertising, this is especially the case for US consumers who have no BBC and will be bombarded with advertising every 10-15

³<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/newsbysector/mediatechnologyandtelecoms/media/11021782/Netflix-signs-up-more-than-one-in-10-British-households.html>

⁴ http://www.slate.com/blogs/browbeat/2012/07/09/binge_watching_tv_why_you_need_to_stop_.html

⁵ <http://online.wsj.com/articles/how-to-overcome-a-binge-watching-addiction-1411748602>

⁶http://www.reddit.com/r/leaves/comments/2g2zg7/almost_9_months_clean_and_still_feeling_the_urge

minutes on all channels. Most of all, and considering that VCRs were introduced in the 1980s, they like being able to watch, in these highly controlled circumstances, what is **new**. Video and DVD releases could not compete with TV because viewers had to wait for them to be released: usually a considerable amount of time. Finally, with the introduction of streaming services and new TV series that are made for those services, consumers can enjoy up-to-the minute entertainment in the precise way that suits them. Examples of consumers citing these reasons for choosing Netflix are abundantly available and we do not need to repeat them here. That being the case, let me conclude this section with one more linguistic and cultural reference to the dying art of 'watching TV'. It is from popular website BuzzFeed, which publishes humorous features in the form of lists. In this case, the list we are considering is 'Secrets That Lazy People Won't Tell You', and item 19 perfectly summarises the newly-discovered, yet fundamental, problem with TV that we've all been overlooking since its introduction in 1956: things are only on when they are on.

"19. Ninety-nine percent of your decision to watch a show is based on whether or not it's playing when you turn on the TV."⁷

The rise and rise of gaming.

2009 was a boom year for desktop gaming, a year in which Blizzard's *World of Warcraft*, which we discussed last time, peaked with 12 million subscribers. It was a significant moment in desktop gaming history that was immediately prior to a massive, global explosion of mobile and tablet gaming. Apple introduced the iPhone in 2007 and the iPad in 2010. In 2013, Apple sold 150 million iPhones and 71 million iPads⁸. While *World of Warcraft* did unprecedentedly well, by the standards of the day, it was only the beginning for gaming and the tip of an unimaginably large iceberg. In 2014, a staggering **93 million people play Candy Crush every day**⁹. Of course, the shift from desktop to mobile has not just launched gaming into the stratosphere, it is also symptomatic of our increasingly visual and accelerating culture, which we will come to in a moment. But first ... let's remind ourselves of the 2009 predictions about sex.

The changing shape of sex, gender and sexual orientation.

In *Futurology 1.0* I talked about the history and future of sex and gender. I traced a story which began with the American Psychological Association's 1973 declassification as a mental disorder of what was once known as 'homosexuality' and ended in 2009, at the time of publication, with the fragmentation and disintegration of sex, gender and sexual orientation categories, such that the public, no longer found it necessary to distinguish between a physical state (e.g., male, female) and a preference (e.g., gay), this being particularly well exemplified in the word 'queer', which is a description of a person's politics and not their biology or their psychology. I also predicted last time that while they were at that time a very small proportion of the total population, the number of people who

⁷ <http://www.buzzfeed.com/ariannarebolini/secrets-that-lazy-people-wont-tell-you#orroi3>

⁸ <http://www.cnet.com/uk/news/apples-2013-by-the-numbers-150m-iphones-71m-ipads/>

⁹ <http://www.theguardian.com/science/blog/2014/apr/01/candy-crush-saga-app-brain>

regarded themselves as intersexual and transsexual was going to increase. So where are we now, five years later? Have these kinds of trends that we identified in 2009 held true?

- GIRES is a British organisation, the full name of which is the Gender Identity Research and Education Society. In 2011, it published a report entitled *The Number of Gender Variant People in the UK: Update 2011*. Here is what it says:

*“Incidence, in 2007, was estimated to be 3.0 per 100,000 people aged over 15 in the UK, that is, 1,500 people presenting for treatment of gender dysphoria. Data provided to GIRES by HM Revenue and Customs for 2010 confirm the upward trend. The number who had by then presented for treatment can be estimated to be 12,500. That represents a **growth trend from 1998 of 11% per annum**. At that rate, the number who have presented is **doubling every 6.5 years**.”¹⁰*

- If you are wondering what gender dysphoria is, that in itself is a sign of social change. Remember the actions of the APA in 1973 when it finally declassified ‘homosexuality’ as a mental disorder? What we see here is the equivalent declassification and normalisation of being unhappy with your status as a man or a woman. That is, in 1980, the American Psychiatric Association, in what was undoubtedly a liberal and progressive move for its time, introduced Gender Identity Disorder to DSM-III¹¹. Thirty-five years of social change later, in an even more progressive move, Gender Identity Disorder is about to be taken off the books. It will be replaced with the new diagnosis of Gender Dysphoria¹². This is not just about a small change of language: what you see happening here is an acknowledgement that regarding oneself as gendered in a way that happens to mismatch the description that other people would give of your physical characteristics is not, by definition, a problem. If you feel like a woman and other people feel that you resemble a man, that might be their problem, not yours. That’s the upshot. In contrast, the new problem of Gender Dysphoria cannot be located with anyone but you. It refers to your feelings of unhappiness with your inward or outward gender and thereby leaves open the possibility that you might be perfectly fine with whatever ambiguously gendered status you appear to display.

Although there is far more that could be said, here ends the part of this paper where we find out what happened with respect to the two very specific predictions I made last time, one concerning entertainment and leisure, the other concerning sex and gender.

If you recall, in *Futurology 1.0*, those specific topics were described as twigs that sprout from a large, tree-like structure of social trends. The larger, sturdier trends which are closer to the trunk of consumer culture are called macro-trends and we are going to explore two, very contemporary, examples of them right now.

¹⁰ <http://www.gires.org.uk/assets/Research-Assets/Prevalence2011.pdf>

¹¹ DSM-III was the third edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, which is the U.S. equivalent of the International Classification of Diseases used by the World Health Organisation.

¹² <http://www.apa.org/monitor/2013/04/transgender.aspx>

Macro Trends: Further Developments

Return of the Real, and the young, Western jihadi bride.

Futurology 1.0 explored a macro-trend known as Return of the Real. It is a very interesting phenomenon wherein consumers who have had an overdose of relativism console and reassure themselves with things that seem unambiguously reliable and concrete. It explains the interest of affluent, over-indulged consumers in the simple and the rustic. It explains why they want to pay premium prices for floral Cath Kidston wellingtons and rough-looking pieces of cheese that are wrapped in brown paper and string. It also explains why, in 2014, British schoolgirls are boarding planes without their parents and going to Syria to marry strangers who are armed and fighting for the Islamic State.

On 6 September 2014, the *Guardian* published comments from Sasha Havlicek, CEO of the Institute of Strategic Dialogue, a think-tank that exists to develop multi-country responses to security and socio-economic problems, and also from Sara Khan, director of Inspire, a human rights organisation that focuses on British Muslim women¹³. Their fascinating analysis of the appeal of ISIS to young British women could not be a more stark or a more gripping example of the Return of the Real taken to its most dramatic conclusions. For the parents of girls such as 15-year-old Yusra Hussien, who went to Heathrow Airport one Wednesday instead of going to school, the actions of their daughters are not only desperately upsetting but baffling. However, Havlicek and Khan shrewdly point out that these girls flee to ISIS not despite its brutality and fundamentalism but precisely because of those factors. Though neither of these women is a semiologist, it is the semiotics of ISIS and the semiotic predicament of these young British women to which they refer.

Khan refers to “a lack of a sense of belonging” on the one hand, and on the other, “authenticity”, two ideas which are instantly recognisable as the insecurity of the over-relativised Western consumer, and the medicine that treats that condition. That is, girls feel the need to belong to something, to stand for something, and the variable, culturally-received version of Islam that they get from their Anglicised parents is not meeting their needs, so they find authenticity and reliability in an ultra-conservative, ultra-hard-line version of Islam that ISIS is offering. Havlicek remarks upon the success of ISIS’s online communications strategy; a success that is totally surprising unless you look at it from a semiotic point of view. The point is that ISIS has been extremely uncompromising in its verbal and visual communications. There is a pornographic amount of brutality. There are beheadings. There are kittens playing on Kalashnikovs. With these semiotic gestures, ISIS goes to lengths that Al-Quaida shied away from, for fear of alienating supporters – and wins support. A Kalashnikov is a very solid object with a very real and material purpose, it couldn’t be any more real. Similarly, a beheading is about as real and material as an action or a gesture can get. The uncompromising, brutal reality of ISIS’s communications is perfectly and exactly attuned to the hunger for authenticity that makes the cause of the Islamic State interesting to begin with. Now that we have perhaps reached the limits and the local conclusion of The Real as an idea, it will be interesting to see what happens next.

¹³ <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/06/british-women-married-to-jihad-isis-syria>

Visual & Accelerating Culture, and the death of Facebook.

Visual & Accelerating Culture is a second macro-trend that was highlighted in *Futurology 1.0*. It is really a pair of trends that happen to occur together. The 'accelerating' part refers to the constantly increasing pace at which consumers generate, process and dispose of information. The 'visual' part refers to consumers' preference for things that they can take in by looking at them as opposed, for example, to listening or being physically involved, doing. These tendencies are mutually supportive, that is, it is much faster to take in information or an idea by glancing at a picture than by almost any other method. In 2009, when I first identified this trend in *Futurology 1.0*, people were still documenting their lives via long, verbose blogs hosted on Blogger and Wordpress. It was also the year in which LiveJournal, which had operated since 1999 with similar painstaking verbosity finally downsized its staff and moved to Russia. In the years between 2009 and 2014, blogging has changed. People are still very keen to share the minute – and very personal – details of their daily lives but they are no longer so inclined to write long passages of prose. It is a dated medium. Instead, we have micro-blogging, also known as short-form blogging, where people upload static images, gifs and very short video clips instead of laboriously writing words. Instagram really took off in 2011 and gained 30m users in the 18 months prior to its acquisition by Facebook. Tumblr was sold to Yahoo! in 2013 for \$1.1 billion. According to Snapchat in May 2014, the app's users were sending 700 million photos and videos per day,

It is this tendency that is eventually going to take down the mighty Facebook, its purchasing power and interest in buying out the competition notwithstanding. Facebook is losing customers in the Western world (it continues to enjoy take-up in developing countries). Epidemiological modelling by researchers at Princeton University predicts that Facebook will lose 80% of its peak user base between 2015 and 2017¹⁴. On 29 April 2013, the Guardian reported that in the immediately preceding month, it had lost 4% of its US visitors (that's 6m Americans) and an equivalent 4.5% of UK visitors (1.4m people)¹⁵. Additionally, when people do visit Facebook, the length of time they spend on site is diminishing. Facebook itself acknowledges this tendency and its cause: people are switching from desktop computers to smartphones and tablets.

On 11 June 2012, online tech magazine PostDesk interviewed Eric Jackson, an industry analyst who just a week earlier had predicted that Facebook would be "not bankrupt gone, but MySpace gone" in five to eight years¹⁶, an estimation that more or less agrees with the January 2014 Princeton study. What matters is not so much the exact date of Facebook's demise, as if it were possible to pinpoint the moment when something is "MySpace gone" but the reasons why this is going to happen, that is, a massive shift from the traditional website, accessed from a desktop machine, to the mobile app.

To paraphrase Jackson's arguments, very simply, his view is that:

¹⁴ Epidemiological modeling of online social network dynamics John Cannarella¹, Joshua A. Spechler^{1,*} ¹ Department of Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ, USA <http://arxiv.org/pdf/1401.4208v1.pdf>

¹⁵ <http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2013/apr/28/facebook-loses-users-biggest-markets>

¹⁶ <https://www.postdesk.com/facebook-disappear-die-5-years-competitor>

- Facebooks thinks in terms of websites and desktop hardware, which means that the app versions of its services deliver a lesser and secondary experience. Companies don't change their DNA and in Jackson's opinion, Facebook will still be a web company no matter how many mobile apps it buys up and bolts on. Mobile developers at Facebook will become frustrated and leave, for their own start-ups or for a more mobile-focused employer.
- Consumers are going to be less willing to tolerate substandard web-like experiences over time, because they are migrating away from web/desktop and towards app/mobile. That is, Web 3.0 isn't going to be on the web at all.
- Companies that are best-equipped to respond to consumers' needs are those which are not concerned primarily, or even at all, with websites but are wholly focused on developing apps. They are not held back by the legacy of web-based thinking. The best apps, says Jackson, are those which are designed for that purpose and do not regard themselves as just another way to show a website.

On that note, let's proceed to the final part of this paper, in which I'm going to make some predictions about the future of humanity that represent the real cutting edge of consumer culture and which we can test when I publish *Futurology Through Semiotics 3.0*, in three to five years' time.

The New News: Emerging Trends

The New You: Technology is changing you, not just the way you use your time.

In *Futurology 1.0* I hinted at the newest of new trends, post-humanism. I mentioned it in the context of predicting what will follow the rampant individualism of the Western world in which every consumer thinks that they are uniquely and profoundly special and that their opinion on virtually any subject is as good as that of an expert. Post-humanism is a term that has a few different meanings so let me specify that the one I intend here is cultural post-humanism. That is, I am not so much referring to biological post-humanism in which we all eventually turn into cyborgs (although that is coming too, thanks to advances in bio-technology) but to cultural post-humanism in which 18th-20th century ideas of 'human nature' and contained, embodied 'human psychology' give way and adapt to new versions of the human condition, a new experience of being human, shaped by technology and science.

This is a huge subject and it would be easy (and is very tempting) to write an outdatedly long book about it, but in the interests of compliance with 21st-century need for speed, let me focus on just two examples here. They are examples of the ways in which digital culture has changed not just what you do with your time, but where you are, and who you are.

Who are you?

In her landmark book *The Breakup 2.0* (2010), cultural anthropologist Ilana Gershon published her extensive research findings concerning the way that people manage their relationships, and specifically how they end their relationships, using digital media. As a semiologist and a social psychologist, what interests me specifically about the situation Gershon describes is the

part where her interviewees report that they – not just their relationships, but they themselves, as people – were altered by the technology they were using. Indeed, so powerful was this effect that some of them stopped using the technology in an effort to get a sense of their ‘real’ selves back. I quote it at some length because I think the linguistic detail as well as the content of Gershon’s commentary is fascinating. Gershon writes:

[people] “remarked how the structure of Facebook encouraged them to be anxious selves or to have relationships filled with jealous monitoring. Many of these new media technologies let a level of monitoring be easy and accessible that in the past used to require considerable effort and imagination. Several women told me that the ease of monitoring their boyfriend on Facebook changed them. Facebook made them into that kind of girlfriend, the one who is ever-suspicious and constantly asking her boyfriend to prove he only thinks of her.”

Further to this, Gershon quotes an interviewee, an undergraduate called Olivia, who deleted her Facebook account because she wanted her real personality back, as we can see:

“People always ask me, “Why did you delete Facebook?” And I want to say that it kind of led to the demise of my last relationship, as crazy as that sounds [...] I had this boyfriend who I knew was a very outgoing guy. This is how we got to talking, because I can be pretty shy sometimes. He has a lot of girlfriends. The first time I met him, we walked into the restaurant where he worked, and these girls just flocked to him, they are hugging him and all these things. And at first, I am a very trust[ing] person, I trust my family and my friends, and I don’t have any issues with that. So I was just blindly going, “Well, I don’t blame them. He’s a great guy [...]” And then as we get more serious, I start to see the pictures come up. [...] And every other picture was of his face mashed up against another girl’s face. And they are hugging him, and these girls, you know you can write your caption, and every girl writes, “Oh, I love Brian so much, isn’t Brian so cute, isn’t he awesome? You’re my lover Brian!” And remember, for a long time, I was like, well you know, I have flirted with guys in this way and meant nothing by it. It is possible to have girl friends, and not to have infidelity involved. Eventually my good friends were saying, “Hey, have you looked at Brian’s Facebook lately?” My friend wasn’t trying to start anything, it was just as a concerned friend. How do you look at these things and be normal with that? And when it got so bad that my friends were trying to tell me – are you sure he is an okay guy? I started to really wonder. That’s how it begins. At first it just became this obsession with checking his Facebook, and wondering, “Who did you go out with?” And that’s how these text-message fights begin. I am at home in my apartment alone, and I ask him who he is with, and he says a girl’s name. I find her on Facebook, and oh look, a string of pictures with her. And then you start looking at these girls – Is she skinnier than me? Is she prettier than me? I would ask him what did you do this weekend? And I can go on Facebook and see what his weekend looked like.”

Gershon comments:

*“Facebook allowed Olivia to compare her boyfriend’s answers with the ‘evidence’ on Facebook. She was also very aware that he did not have his own cell phone camera. Because the pictures of him were pictures that other people put up of him, these photos served as more accidental (and thus more reliable) evidence of what he was doing. It seemed that **he wasn’t managing his Facebook profile, that his Facebook profile was being created for him by the traces of how friendly he was at***

*parties. So Olivia asked, and checked, and asked and checked. She describes how she found herself **becoming paranoid, discovering a side of herself that she did not want** to have. Finally Olivia got so disgusted with the cycle that she quit Facebook. A few months later, she broke up with him."*

Olivia is not the only person this happened to. Gershon goes on to quote numerous interviewees who found that Facebook was inculcating suspicion, paranoia and detective-like activities in their own personalities and behaviour, in a way that they did not like. As much as I would like to discuss this in more detail, in the interests of brevity, I recommend *The Breakup 2.0* to you for further reading and propose that we move to the second example of the post-human condition that I want to consider here, this being the question of not who, but where, you are.

Where are you?

The Fappening¹⁷ was an event – in fact, a series of events, the first being the largest and most consequential – which began on the 13th of August 2014. Hundreds of intimate photos and short videos of about 100 actresses, singers and other entertainers, mostly women, mostly American, were released into the wild via 4chan¹⁸, that well-known bastion of public morality and the original home of Anonymous¹⁹. The photos had apparently been copied from these celebrities' iClouds, which were hacked into, apparently over several months until the just-published massive collection was built up. The photos attracted a great deal of attention because they were nearly all nudes and some of them featured explicit sex acts. They also attracted a lot of attention because they were self-generated. That is, most of the photos were self-portraits, or "selfies", in the popular vernacular, and those that were not were taken by husbands, boyfriends and other intimate friends of the person being portrayed in what appeared to be fully consensual and private situations.

In the ensuing debates, some shocked, some prurient, that followed The Fappening, the questions of who took these photos and why they were uploaded to clouds in the first place became of paramount importance. Some parties to the discussion, for example, many Daily Mail readers, took the attitude that these women were at least partly to blame for what happened – they shouldn't have been stupid enough to take naked selfies in the first place²⁰. It should be noted that Daily Mail readers are not noted for being at the cutting edge of technology-related social trends and on 26th October 2014, the Mail found it necessary to explain to its readers what a cloud is²¹. It hardly needs saying, then, that inasmuch as DM readers enjoyed commenting on the Fappening, the overwhelming majority of them had not seen any of the pictures and were working solely from their own imaginations with regard to the reasons why the pictures were taken and how they became available to the public. This led to a huge amount of righteous moralising along the following lines:

¹⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2014_celebrity_photo_leaks

¹⁸ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/4chan>

¹⁹ [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anonymous_\(group\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anonymous_(group))

²⁰ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2740387/New-wave-leaks-plague-celebrities-authorities-prove-unable-stop-spread-suggest-naked-photos-passed-users-online-CLUB-months.html>

²¹ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-2808867/Everything-want-know-SMARTPHONES-afraid-ask-best-model-clever-keyboard-shortcuts-stop-battery-going-flat-more.html>

- a) The photos were all 'naked selfies'. That is, they were self-portraits and they were totally unclothed. All naked selfies are taken for reasons of vanity and exhibitionism and for no other reason.
- b) There is no good reason for letting another person take pictures of you while you are naked.
- c) None of the photos which were taken by another person included the photographer themselves in the picture.
- d) The celebrities in question were utterly stupid for allowing those photos, once taken, to be uploaded to the cloud - even though most Daily Mail commenters aren't sure what a cloud is.

This was a very interesting set of assumptions and explained why the reaction of Middle England to The Fappingen differed so dramatically from its reaction to, for example, photographs of a naked Kate Middleton which were taken with a super-long-range camera while she holidayed with her royal husband on a private estate. That is, in the minds of Middle England, the Duchess of Cambridge was doing something normal (sunbathing with her husband in a private setting) and was aggressively intruded upon by paparazzi, while in contrast the actresses at the centre of The Fappingen were doing something abnormal (recording images of themselves without clothes for reasons of vanity) and then publicised the photographs themselves by uploading them to a public space.

I bring the Fappingen to attention here because the reaction of Daily Mail readers, along with many other members of the public, on both sides of the Atlantic, evidences a social trend that they are now on the wrong side of. They have been left behind by history. They continue to occupy a rather 20th-century, material world in which the default state for human beings is *not* being in a digital, and therefore public, space, with or without one's clothes. But the world has moved on. The new normal is that the default location for human beings *is* a digital and public space, while *not* being in that space, being private, being invisible is now the unusual state of affairs and the one that requires an unusual degree of effort. Recall Gershon's remarks about Brian's appearances on Facebook. Very unusually, Brian's cell phone was so primitive that it didn't even have a camera. What's interesting is that this did not save him from Facebook. In fact, there was photographic documentation of his entire social life on Facebook because Facebook, with the help of all Brian's friends and acquaintances, created it for him. He would have had an extremely difficult time staying off Facebook, all the more so now, in 2014. In that light, then, let me offer a more accurate view of The Fappingen, contra the list above.

- a) The photos were not all portraits and they were not all unclothed. As an example, photographs by and of the 42-year-old singer Jill Scott were not portraits, they were documentation: she was trying to lose weight and was documenting her progress, for her own reasons (and didn't look very happy with what she'd achieved). This isn't portraiture. Moreover, she had at least some clothing on. These pictures are not 'nude selfies' in the way that the Daily Mail uses that phrase.
- b) Some of the photos of popular actresses were taken by their husbands and life partners in situations of marital intimacy, for their private enjoyment.
- c) Some of those photos included the photographer in shot: imagine a husband and wife posing together in front of the bathroom mirror, for their own mutual pleasure, with no thought of a third party ever viewing the pictures.
- d) Actors and pop singers are not actually smarter than the general population when it comes to things like understanding how their mobile devices work and choosing

hard-to-break passwords. They are, therefore, just as publicly exposed and digitally located as the rest of us, which is a lot.

It is all very well, then, for Middle England to moralise that people should not take naked self-portraits for vanity reasons and upload them for public view. But this will not alter the fact that in 2014, *not* having intimate images and recordings of oneself in a publicly-accessible space is becoming an unrealistic expectation, in the sense that it's not realistic to think that Brian should have kept himself off Facebook if he wanted his relationship with Olivia to last. Technology not only changed *who* Olivia was, it changed *where* Brian was, and Olivia and Brian are all of us.

Do This Next: Implications for Business

Let's conclude this paper while it is still 2014 and make some recommendations for business, as we did at the end of *Futurology 1.0*.

- The perfect form of entertainment is that which is both happening now and is controllable. This is why Netflix is robbing the BBC even though VCRs were introduced decades ago. Consumers want to be at the cutting edge, they want to be right up to date with all the newest crazes and popular dramas, comedies, music, games and so on. If it's fashionable now and everybody else has it now, your consumer cannot wait, they must have it now as well. At the same time, that doesn't mean they are going to sit down at a time that suits you and let you spoon-feed it to them. They want it at the precise moment that works for them and they will consume everything you have to offer in one massive binge of consumption if you make that facility available, which you should. **If you were thinking about making what used to be called a "TV series", then, you should think twice before broadcasting it on actual TV.**
- There is no longer any such thing as 'casual gaming'. This is because, in a world in which 93 million people play *Candy Crush*, gaming is casual by definition. In 2009, and many people still imagine this to be the case, 'gamers' were people who were 'hardcore' and played many consecutive hours of games while sitting in front of a high-end desktop PC. In 2009, then, the idea of 'casual gaming' was a useful one and made some kind of sense. In 2014, it is a redundant idea. The whole world is gaming. 'Casual' is the wrong word for the dominant form of any activity. Playing five minute bursts of *Candy Crush* is not casual gaming, it is normal gaming. The hardcore PC gamers are now the anomaly, despite their still-strong numbers and the lush forest of expensive, resource-hungry products that are constantly released to meet their needs. **If you can make a smartphone or tablet game for your brand that is visually pleasing, easy to learn, more reliant on luck than is immediately apparent, delivers speedy rewards and is designed to be played in short bursts of a few minutes at a time, you probably should.** The game does not need to draw on actual player skill in any meaningful way (see *Cookie Clicker*). It should require zero instructions to play, being completely intuitive – tap the largest object on the screen and take it from there. People don't have time for instructions. A social networking element is good. If it looks attractive, that's a bonus.

- Consumers are more self-defined and resistant to other people's categorisations of them than ever before. This is great news for **beauty and personal care brands, which are in the business of wish fulfilment and personal transformation**, as we discussed last time. While beauty is, in so many ways, a deeply conventional thing, what is new and more variable than ever is consumers' faith in themselves and willingness to believe that they can achieve beauty (and therefore social value) no matter what their budget or raw materials – see Josie Cunningham²², Frank Maloney²³. Moreover, this belief in the supremacy and triumph of self-perception over other people's perceptions or what used to be the constraints of material reality translates into other sectors, such as **private education** and people's **plans for their retirement**. By this, I mean to highlight British and generally Western phenomena where, for example, people who would once have accepted that becoming a doctor at 55 or 60 and lacking any relevant qualifications or even any formal education whatsoever was a totally impossible dream are now willingly spending their money on private training in **homeopathy**, believing, rightly or wrongly, that it is (a) as good as the real thing where health outcomes are concerned and (b) they will be able to make a living out of treating patients who are even more faithful and self-regarding than themselves, in what is becoming a health pyramid scheme. An incredibly revealing quote on the front page of homeopathyschool.com that illustrates the essence of this trend is as follows: *"We often get asked, 'What's it like to learn homeopathy?' One of our students once said, 'Learning homeopathy is a little like going to a university all about you'."* Clearly, this is what conventional universities and medical schools have been missing all this time. They could have made themselves a lot more appealing and therefore profitable if they had concentrated less on imparting knowledge about medicine and more on encouraging students to reflect upon themselves. Moreover, while medical schools cause the student to suffer the inconvenience of having to show up at an actual bricks-and-mortar building, to which, in any case, most consumers don't qualify for admission, a "university all about you" can be wholly experienced online and from the comfort of Starbucks or the toilet or wherever you happen to be playing Candy Crush at the same time. **There are insights here for every category and brand that causes consumers to think about themselves as individuals and how they could be different.**
- Are you in the business of making **advertising and marketing communications**? Don't be afraid to be brutal. Now is the time in which the macro trend known as the Return of the Real is finding its logical conclusions. The secret to making the most of this trend is going to be **identifying consumer groups who are particularly ungrounded and over-relativised**. That is, we can see the previously-described trend for self-definition as an example of extreme individualisation and relativisation. Everything is up for grabs. Everything is about you. The real world has become nearly eclipsed. Consumers who have experienced very large doses of this sometimes become insecure, find themselves craving authenticity and therefore vulnerable to extreme versions of the Return of the Real, as seen in the Islamic State's Kalashnikov-loving kittens. It is not just young, disenfranchised, second- and third-generation European Muslims who have little knowledge of the struggles of their (grand)parents who are

²² <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/video/tvshowbiz/video-1130723/Archive-TV-interview-Josie-Cunningham-NHS-breast-op.html>

²³ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-2808449/Kellie-Maloney-3-000-worth-semi-permanent-make-tattooed-face-create-feminine-features-final-sex-change-operation.html>

prone to this. Lots of people value truth, belonging and authenticity. Who is disenfranchised? Who has been let down by being over-individualised and over-relativised? One suggestion could be **new parents**. Parenting ideologies change very frequently, leading to uncertainty. At the moment, in particular, Western parents of babies and pre-schoolers are caught in an impossible bind – in semiotic terms, they are caught in the prongs of a set of ideological dilemmas. On the one hand, mothers are supposed to be ‘yummy mummies’, not old and frumpy. They are supposed to be slim, beautiful, desirable to their husbands, fashionable, appear not to have given birth. On the other hand, if they succeed too well in this ambition then they are to blame for over-sexualising their children and making them into juvenile delinquents. On the one hand, they are informed that their child is ‘a little explorer’ who learns through discovery, which they are supposed to facilitate, by taking him or her to expensive baby gyms, encouraging physical play and activity, not keeping him confined in a baby bouncer in front of the television, and so on. On the other hand, they are supposed to anti-bacterialise everything within a five-mile radius, otherwise it is their fault if the child dies from Ebola-infected crayons and what’s more they should regard every approaching adult as a potential paedophile and supervise every journey to and from school until their offspring reach adulthood, for fear of road traffic accidents, the prevalence of both paedophiles and road traffic accidents being vastly overestimated. It is an impossible situation. This is a demographic that ought to be absolutely ripe for some Return of the Real brutal naturalism and common sense. **It is a massive business opportunity and a consumer trend waiting to happen.**

- Visual and Accelerating Culture affects everyone, and every sector, in the sense that there is no limit to how fast consumers want the things they want. However, the example we’ve discussed here in *Futurology 2.0* concerned Facebook and its tendency to fall behind the times, because of the shift in consumer culture not only from desktop to mobile but also from prose to pictures, from verbosity to micro-blogging, from permanence to **planned destruction and disposability**. This last element is particularly interesting because it overlaps with consumer concerns about how Facebook cares (or otherwise) for their **privacy**. People do still want to announce themselves and the minute details of their lives, they do still want their social networks, but they also want to be able to place tougher restrictions on who is allowed to know what kind of information about them, they want not to be stalked, they want to resist and avoid being **doxed**²⁴ and they want the right to be forgotten^{25,26}. **Brands in the digital space** which can find a way to satisfy these twin desires to reveal and share very personal information about oneself, including to complete strangers, while preserving potentially total, black-out level anonymity will have a product or service that people are willing to invest themselves in.
- Finally, let’s talk about the business implications of cultural post-humanism. As you’ll remember, the essence of this trend is that digital culture is substantially and qualitatively changing the human condition. It changes where you are, it changes who you are and ultimately it changes what you are. It challenges and changes the

²⁴ <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=doxed>

²⁵ Delete: The Virtue of Forgetting in the Digital Age, Mayer-Schönberger, V., (2011), Princeton University Press.

²⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Right_to_be_forgotten

very nature of humanity. So many of the things that we could once rely on, like fundamental aspects of our personalities (are you trusting or jealous? shy or sociable?) and the places where our minds and bodies reside and who controls them (that is, those things aren't located within the terminal boundaries of your skin any more, and that decision is being made for you by other people, many of whom you call your friends), are radically different now from the version of humanity that was developed in the time of Rousseau's 17th-century *Confessions*, gave birth to the science of human psychology and held strong until the end of the 20th century. **This is why we now have semiotics and digital anthropology.** These are the conceptual and theoretical tools we need in an age when the individual is distributed and not a singular, embodied entity. Because this is the newest of the new trends and nearly all consumers are unaware of it until they are actively prompted to think about it by clever anthropologists like Ilana Gershon, it is the most difficult to make recommendations for, but also the most stimulating.

- o The obvious place to start is with **psychotherapy**. This rather lucrative industry used to concentrate on tweaking the contents of people's heads, said contents being firmly located within the skull. Restructuring their habitual thought patterns. Fixing faulty perceptions. Helping them to achieve more integrated, whole personalities. Making them feel happier by improving their relationship with the world, where the individual and the world are two separate things. Helping them overcome past wounds and trauma. Helping them make sense of their lives by giving those lives a completely individual and unique story that is coherent and makes sense. People do still want to be happy, that hasn't changed. But they are perhaps ready to hear something new, something more contemporary. Tai Chi and yoga are popular in the West because they offer a *slight* improvement on individual psychology by viewing the body not so much as a vessel that contains things, but more as a channel through which things flow. My sense, though, is that this is not really radical enough to meet all the potentially lucrative consumer needs of the coming years. What we need is to offer consumers a form of happiness that is achieved through a thoroughly distributed self. Not just an open-channel self but a self that is properly multiple and distributed in space, time and ownership. Maybe **the evidence for happiness needs to change**. How do you know you are happy? Because you feel it? No, because you saw it. Where did you see it? Somewhere outside your body. In a photo, maybe. A bit of digitally encoded text. Who put it there? Someone who wasn't you – or were they? Maybe a different version of you. Where was this operator? Not in your skin? When did it happen? When the embodied version of you that we are speaking to now wasn't there. I think **Apple or Microsoft** should lead the way with a huge, radical **Happiness Project** and thus monopolise and monetise Western happiness. If you want some help, guys, give Lawes Gadsby Semiotics a call.

Until next time, readers. *Futurology Through Semiotics 3.0* will be published no later than 2019.

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