

Insight into technology's role in your life - now and in the future

 By Leigh Andrews

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When a conference programme mentions 'zombie zoology' and 'the nature of dark energy', you know it's going to be a goodie. 'Altered Realities', presented by *Popular Mechanics*, didn't disappoint...

As published in a press release on [Bizcommunity](#), long-term journo Anthony Doman picked up the editorial reins at [Popular Mechanics](#) on 1 October with the retirement of founding editor, Alan Duggan. FutureTech attendees had the pleasure of both Duggan and Doman as event hosts, and enjoyed their jovial interplay.



Duggan kicked off the jam-packed day's content sessions by explaining we're at the cutting edge of electric mobility and therefore making a host of predictions on where technology will lead us in 2020, inviting the audience to email him in 2021 if his predictions prove incorrect.

2020 predictions: drones, robots will replace humans, nuclear energy

Among Duggan's predictions are that we'll have a colony on Mars, in line with the thoughts of Elon Musk, co-founder of [PayPal and more](#), and that by 2030 we may well have discovered intelligent life. He also expects nano-bots to be performing amazing feats and says we can expect the first practical quantum computer offering real encryption. He showed us a clip of the Honda Asimo robot, which is set to at first assist and eventually even replace humans (see below)...

In terms of consumer technology, Duggan feels there'll be backlash for the formidable amount of communication available through every mobile touchpoint, but it won't change a thing. When it comes to energy, he says unfortunately nuclear is our only option. "Yay Chernobyl," shouted a misguided audience member. Added to this, we can look forward to 'digital ants' providing swarming intelligence, as well as drones fitted with video biotelemetry to protect rhinos from poachers, further advancements from software that predicts traffic snafus, and genome sequencing to take remedial action before we're afflicted with genetic disease.

On that note, Duggan ended by stating he is "genuinely looking forward to the day I can merge with a machine and become superhuman."

Augmenting humanity for musical media's benefit

Following on from the 'man merging with machine' theme, next up was Jonathan Crossley, a cyber-guitarist said to be 'in pursuit of ordered noise'. Crossley explained he's reaching for new parameters and effects on the guitar to elicit different emotional and physical reactions from his listeners. Added to this, Crossley says it's often in the unexpected or moments of failure that we grow our intelligence, which is his end-goal in pushing the boundary of where music ends and where noise starts. "My instrument is a traditional jazz guitar... or it was," Crossley said, adding "augmented humanity enables us to reach areas of music we haven't been able access without bionics", leading several tweeters to label him as a #BionicBach. The reason? Crossley winds amplifiers around his arms, so simply moving a wrist results in different resonance.

“ Cyber guitarist Jonathan Crossley. [#PMFutureTech2014 #BionicBach pic.twitter.com/qO3mRYtmO](#)- Deena Ralph Govender (@DeenaRalph) [October 10, 2014](#) ”

Having blown away much of the conservative, checked shirt-wearing audience, Crossley explained three factors come into play with his music, namely the length of the note, creating a more abrasive or softer sound, and the secular noises and phases, "musical things we all know as music". When asked by the audience how he remembers a certain piece of music to play again, Crossley responded, "Why write something down when you can play it differently every day?"

Nazi bombast, *Jurassic Park* rhetoric and naïve journalists

Neoliberal necromancy, anyone? If that had you scrolling for an online dictionary, you have an idea how I felt frantically trying to scribble down some of the genius coming from Stellenbosch University historian Professor Sandra Swart's mouth in her talk on 'Zombie zoology'. Swart was quick to strip us of the notion that this had anything to do with post-apocalyptic characters from [The Walking Dead](#) - rather, her focus is on resurrecting extinct species, which she says hints at a "God-like desire to raise the dead."

While Swart asserted that Creation stories matter to people because they're about power, they also teach us not to cross

societal boundaries to gain knowledge (hello Icarus, flying too close to the sun).

But Swart says Frankenstein Myths point to a more serious problem in terms of naïve journalism, where publishing houses are so quick to jump on the bandwagon and 'be first' with getting an article out there that they merely follow the herd and don't bother to check facts. Swart mentions the 'DNA sequencing results in shaggy mammoth resurrection' stories that did the rounds a few years ago - all [360 or so versions](#), in fact... none of which were true.

That said, Swart makes an interesting point in that "Fossils not only tell us of the past and present, they also guide us on the future," and ends by stating that while the Frankenstein rhetoric is the habitat of the monstrous-like, where we write 'Here Be Monsters' on the map, we are all Prometheus' orphans.

Watch for my 'part two' article tomorrow!

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

Leigh Andrews AKA the #MilkshakeQueen, is former Editor-in-Chief: Marketing & Media at Bizcommunity.com, with a passion for issues of diversity, inclusion and equality, and of course, gourmet food and drinks! She can be reached on Twitter at @Leigh_Andrews.

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