The Singularity is Boring: An Open, Collaborative ‘Mock-up’

Justin Pickard, Noah Raford, Wendy Schultz, Jake Dunagan, Scott Smith, & uncounted others

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The Singularity is Boring

"The hypothetical future emergence of greater-than-human intelligence through technological means."

Blah blah blah... What else is there?

Alternatives to the Singularity

A collaborative presentation for grumpy futurists

(This doc is now closed. Thanks to everyone who contributed; we be putting up a "best of" version soon. Here is more about the best stuff in the mean while.)

[check speaker notes for other comments]
The Singularity is Boring

The Crapularity

3D printing + spam + micropayments + habits that you get billed for, as it replicates wildly out of control.

90% of everything is rubbish, and it's all in your spare room— or someone else's spare room, which you're forced to rent through AirBnB.

The Singapolarity

Nanotech, exotic materials, viral screenprinting, soft authoritarianism, and dehumanization gone wild.

Cheerful, well-disciplined, society-diverse pre-teens leading a world wide geocaching binge.

Climate change? Solved.

Civil liberties? Surplus to requirements.

The Zizekularity

With extreme-scale data-mining and weaponized psychanalysis proves Zizek was right. About everything.

"We Slovenians are even better suited than you Scots. You know, the older generation, when we Slovenians were spending too much money, we sold our houses on a boat and he landed in Scotland."

Oh SNMPularity, Szove!

The Duolarity

Miracle Magazine meets Soldier of Fortune. Beautiful people drinking cocktails in walled cities surrounded by knee-slams full of dirty, angry pre-teens. Like Berling's Paralyse Café, but mean.

Elvis and Morlock, or Shoreditch? You be the judge...

The Similarity

Beginning at first as the Interpenetrability, all flavors of singularity begin to resemble all others so closely that he can tell them apart. Eventually, the universe melts into one single delicious, but lonely, pink macaron. That is the final similarity.

*analysts right at the Patisserie at the End of the Universe

The Vowel-ularity

Flickr, Twitter, Dopplr, etc all ignored the First Law of Phonemes: A letter can neither be created or destroyed. The return of the vowels leads to a global language based on screams and howls.

The Governmentality

As the nation-state slides into irrelevance, hollowed out by corporations and transnational classes, the world witnesses a Cambodian explosion in governance, as communities route around the blockades of a feudal elite.

Flags as franchise, virtual politics, seatheads, cascading declarations of independence, and semi-regular birthing result in a world of geopolitical crumb — where the lifespan of a political entity is — in days, rather than years; the Federated Territories of the Vatican Issue trade sanctions against Vermont, OPEC and EVE Online, and nobody knows quite who's responsible for what.

The Myhrvoldularity

In which patent trolls secure the rights to Hepatitis Pharmacology of the 21st century at a cost that every person on the planet must pay $0.00345/s, for every thought they have had and will have to the private company Intellectual Ventures.

People stop thinking and rely on themselves to accessing molecular gastronomy through Microsoft Operating Systems.
The Golgafrinchularity
Outsource all middle management to semi-intelligent software (much like today’s middle management). The emergent AI takes control over critical systems and prevents anything getting done... ever... (much like today’s middle management).

All humans have to fill out forms in triplicate to upload minds only to find singularity is really dull.

The Collabularity
The popularity of “The Singularity is Boring” presentation takes the world by storm. Eventually, in late 2012, every single human being on Earth is reading and contributing simultaneously.

The Detroiltularity
Panoptic self-aware design真相 + 3D printed buildings + rolling debt foreclosures in a constantly reconfigured urban environment governed by non-equilibrium real estate equations.

Minimal techno, random vegetables, and a crowdfunded RoboCop statue.

The Songularity
As “auto-tune” software becomes vanishingly inexpensive and ubiquitous, it won’t just be music that’s digitally manipulated to correct tone and note. All spoken language will go through auto-tune filters to sound more pleasing and/or manipulative to the listener.

The DesignThinkularity
In which we iterate our ideas to storyboard game-changing demographic personas which create breakthrough business models using impactful, user-centered, dhine-chrome experience design service sessions. All life grinds to a halt.

The Apple-arity
As Apple stockpiles more money from product sales than it held by all countries combined, we eventually adopt the boujl-owoded eny as our Great National Symbol: the global world government with only one button.

*Downloadable from the App Store

The Waddlarity
Stumbling forth, we never arrive at sky-car city.

Final step: Buck Rogers space for a new set of Draper Romm designed teeth to match the carbon-fiber reinforced polymer walker.

The government’s environmental geoclonists look on, approvingly.
Grumpy, Happy Collaboration: The Drug of Futurists

On Wednesday, August 3, at 10:20am I got a “mention” ping from Tweetdeck. This is the message I received:

@wendaинфutures Can we present this in Istanbul? :)
3 Aug

Afterwards, and on 4 Aug, Nash Raford, a researcher in collaborative engagement, and Scott Smith, a futurist, both tweeted:

@wendainfutures Have you seen how it’s grown? Definitely poster worthy.

@wendainfutures Evil man: you have single-handedly caused the loss of hundreds of thousands of your(currennycome) of blogish hours today. Good one.
3 Aug

In reply to 1

@wendainfutures @nraford Oh, the Shame-ularity.

And reading through the first few slides, my initial reactions were confirmed. Nash Raford, a researcher in collaborative engagement, and Scott Smith, a futurist, both tweeted:

Going to the people doc, I came across the title slide, “Alternatives to the Singularity: A Collaborative Presentation by/for Grumpy Futurists.” I guess it was a rush of dopamine or some other happy neurotransmitter, because I immediately felt the delicious exuberance of recognizing a shared sensibility, as well as the anticipation of passionate camaraderie with colleagues. The door was open, this was going to be fun.

And reading through the first few slides, my initial reactions were confirmed. Nash Raford, a researcher in collaborative engagement, and Scott Smith, a futurist, both tweeted:

And yet, this felt like I just walked in to my favorite bar, and all these friends shouted my name.

The instructions were simple (paraphrasing): this is an open document to “take the plot” out of the concept of the singularity. The “singularity,” as described on the second slide (“The Singularity is Boring”), is “The hypothetical future emergence of greater-than-human intelligence through technological means.” Following this description was the commentary, “Bah, Blah, Blah… What else is there?” Oh boy, I thought to myself, here we go.

And reading through the first few slides, my initial reactions were confirmed. Nash Raford, a researcher in collaborative engagement, and Scott Smith, a futurist, both tweeted:

If you’ve got the future going long enough, you will be provoked, informed, and annoyed by various shades of techno-disaster.

“Now comes yet another story that gets it wrong.” Yes, there are many post-apocalypse stories as well as apocalyptic futurists, and the Singularity is such a far-off fantasy that it’s a large chunk of them. Raford offered an emotive for futurists to express these frustrations together, and a high-profile, snarky, glib way. Besides being humorously relevant, it offered the chance to “speak out” on futurist inside-jokes, while exposing the tropes and cliches that permeate our world. It was, as Wendy Schultz put it, “Funfuts crowd.”

The first slides were wordy, cutesy, cynical, and wonderful. I was laughing out loud. Tribulationist-pitched world of 7th-century humanist.

“In Russia, the internet surfs you.” My favorite of the early slides.

Zirkularit, told of a world in which Russian political philosopher Slavoj Zizek is right about everything. Crapeauts, Singaporalternity, Abu Dhabiularity, Singaporalyness.

Much of the joy came from the fact that it was an open document, and you didn’t know who or what was coming next. The next wave saw other futurists jumping in, including Scott Smith, James Carville, Zhejiang Li, Chris Arkenberg, and a few others. Seeing the “crack-like” addictive effect of the experience, I posed the Collaborability, and by 2013, every single person on earth is contributing to the document, verting our own emotional gas about the future we are being sold. Futurists live to go “Weehee.”
In short... Daror has suggested that a critical sense for any futures researcher is a sense of humour, a delight in the absurd. This experiment in evolving images of the future through complex interactions of a social network occurred in real-time over 4 days on Google Docs/Present. Its seed was a tweet by @KarlSchroeder, retweeted by @m1k3y, that generated a volley of humorous exchanges between @nraford and @justinpickard, that was stimulating enough that @m1k3y asked that it be archived – and elaborated – on Google Docs.

- Did this only go ‘viral’ because it was a festival of sarcasm – is humor necessary to motivate this level of participation, or could a similar feeding frenzy of participation in futures image generation arise over a more serious topic?
- Is this actually ‘crowd-sourcing’, or in fact ‘peer-sourcing’? While this spread beyond Schroeder, Pickard, and Raford’s initial Twitter networks, it stayed pretty well within the English-speaking futures community.
- Is there an ‘80/20’ rule for quality and usefulness of content generated by such techniques? Initial entries extrapolated actual trends and emerging issues, combining them and then critiquing technological optimism by suggesting possible negative outcomes. As the event wavefront proliferates (one copy of the Doc is still open), does the ‘long tail’ diminish in quality?

What other lessons can we learn from this collective intelligence platform?

>>END CREDITS<<
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https://docs.google.com/present/view?id=0AAbx-8bXc9JDK2Hc9cZbWo6N3MzJzRgc7d4Mq298bX4om_1J3
An acerbic thread trash[ing] the monocural futures view of the Singularity erupted on 3 August 2011, and sucked me into its slipstream. What evolved was a critique; a play on words; a purse-seining of popular culture, academic fads, and political crankiness; a lampooning of all possible media; and a skewering of ‘thin’ as opposed to ‘thick’ (in the best Geertzian sense) futures – and all at high speed and high hilarity. Serious futures? Perhaps not. Futures legerdemain? Futures acrobatics? Futures fluency? Most assuredly.

The thread picked up a core of well-networked followers and contributors very quickly over the first few hours of the workday in Europe. What was fascinating was how the interested reader could track the planet spinning beneath the worldwide futures community’s keyboards: you could see when colleagues in New York woke up, poured a coffee, and sat down at their keyboards – and read, and no doubt sputtered that coffee all over their desks as they laughed, and then added to the accreting mass of imagination, synthesis, collaboration, and critique. The flow of creativity wrapped all the way from Europe to the US East Coast, the Midwest, around to California, and then to Hawai’i and Australia and Asia and back to the Middle East. It was a flash addiction, keep checking back, looking for more, more outrageous, more transgressive, more ridiculous, more diverse.

And it was all possible as a global crowd-sourced exercise in post-linear futures mania because of the immediacy of feedback via Twitter – and the ability to build something lasting and documented, but public and publicly malleable, on Google Docs. The visual record of this event is offered as “The Singularity is Boring”, the panel’s final poster: included as a panel bonus for the simple reason that most of the people on the panel had participated in the sudden dust devil of ideas swirling through Twitter and onto Google Docs as a slide show. It’s still there, and one version is even still open for you to add your own thoughts, graphics, short stories, or characters.