

23red

SXSW

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2017 at SXSW was all about the fear of the rapid rise of AI and anger at the effect it might have on us all. In contrast 2018 felt more grown up and mellowed out. Gone was the fear and anger, replaced with empathy and hope. If 2017 was the year of man vs tech, then 2018 is the year of human-centred tech.

Human-centred tech means tech that feels less technical and isn't just celebrated for its ingenuity; instead it is about working together with machines to deliver something greater than the sum of our parts, built on our best understanding of humans.

5 ways this could manifest itself:

1. Influence. In particular the need for diversity to shape the future of technologies like AI. For example, Dr Fei Fei Li, Director of AI at Stanford, coined the phrase "Diverse people. Diverse thoughts." She calls for bringing together AI with social science and humanities.

2. Amplify. Amplifying human intelligence in ways not possible without the latest developments in tech. For example, amplifying individual intelligence through a 'hive mind' using SwarmAI from Unanimous AI which increases accuracy of predictions from a group of people in real time vs individual responses.

3. Augment. Pushing the boundaries of perception through AR & VR. For example, Microsoft Research have developed out-of-body sensory experiences in VR and uses of AR to 'read' physiological signals from others as the start of a new way to empathise with others.

4. Enhance. Physical, sensory and neuro-enhancements. This could be sensory addition like The Third Thumb Project by Dani Clode which shifts the narrative around prosthetics from disability to extending ability. Or Sensory substitution with things like brain port which translates sight to touch to enable blind people to 'see'. Or advances in neuroscience and consumer electronics mean that we are at the cusp of enhancing the brain, not just healing it.

5. Illuminate. Understanding more about our health, physical movements or even emotional states using wifi and radio waves. Researchers at MIT have developed a device that analyses the wifi signals translates all of their body movements into the stages of sleep: light, deep or REM. Imagine a future in which your WiFi router collects your physical movements, then calculates your health metrics, and automatically adjusts the devices and appliances in your house to help you live a better life.

Rob & Jim delivered their SXSW talk: 'The best is yet to come: digital renaissance'.

We've all heard the dystopian stories of AI destroying the world as we know it, but what if the best is yet to come? They believe there is an equally viable outcome for the future where humans are no longer burdened with menial tasks and are free to live life to the full and get creative, as was exhibited during the Renaissance in the 14th-17th century.

Using this positive outlook as a lens, they provided an analysis of the most important developments in technology over the last year. We're arguably entering the 4th industrial revolution. If energy becomes free to produce, if technology helps us solve the challenges of transport, communication, clean water and food supply and most the hard work is being done by bots and robots there's a real possibility we could live in a world of abundance. This could mean we need to rethink our roles as consumers.

For example, the New Citizenship Project wants to reclaim the idea of 'citizen'. Studies show that when we think of ourselves as just consumers, we're less likely to tackle society's biggest problems, from climate change to international inequality. When we think of ourselves as citizens, we're more likely to participate, volunteer and come together to make our society stronger and more effective. Similarly, the Juvet Agenda brought together a diverse group of people to consider AI from a humanist perspective.

Now is the time to take things into our own hands. Participate in the future, don't just be a recipient of it.