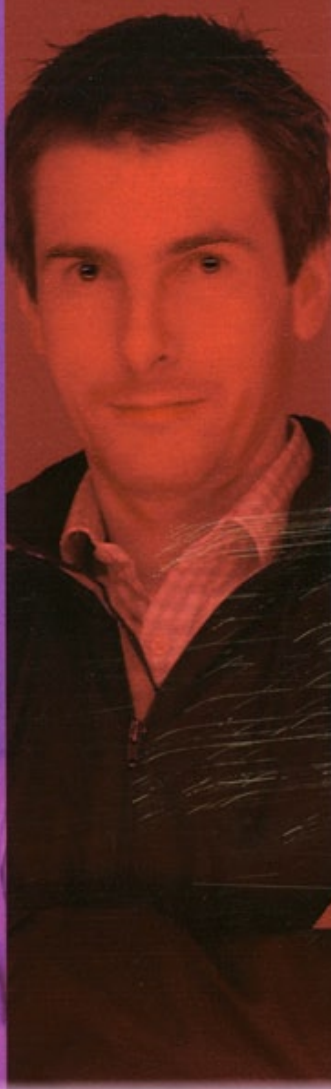


THE  TIMES



27.12.03 **THE PREDICTORS** THE MEN AND WOMEN WHO SEE THE FUTURE

# MAGAZINE

**PLUS** JEANETTE WINTERSON ★ HELMUT NEWTON ★ MONICA ALI ★ GIORGIO ARMANI ★ LIAM FOX



# TOMORROW'S PEOPLE

Meet the men and women who predict the future, from the politics of happiness to fashion's newest twist

REPORT JAMES COLLARD PORTRAITS SPIROS POLITIS

We are disinclined to trust anyone who says they can predict the future, and with good reason. The desire to know what happens next is nothing new, and the kind of people who until recently have set about fulfilling this need – necromancers, gazers into crystal balls, science-fiction fantasists, not to mention town planners – don't inspire much confidence.

Anyone who can remember the mood of Britain in the Sixties will recall that bold Utopian vision with which decaying back-to-backs were replaced by glittering, cloud-topped "streets in the sky" – many of which rapidly turned out to be jerry-built, high-rise, crime-filled slums. More recently, there was much talk of the "paperless office", an idea which – despite the extraordinary (and largely unexpected) way e-mail has transformed our working lives – seems as unlikely for many of us as the notion that airships would dock at the top of the Empire State Building.

Technology, in particular, has a nasty habit of not doing quite what it's expected to do. As Will Davies of The Work Foundation points out, even runaway successes aren't always predictable – especially when consumers begin to experiment, and so "the hub loses control of the margins". The multimillion-pound business that is text messaging is the perfect example. "The telecommunications companies saw texting simply as a way of sending service updates," explains Davies. "But teenagers adapted it – mostly as a way of flirting – and so it took off in a completely unexpected direction." Thus was launched the preferred method of communication among so-called "thumb tribes" all the way from Tokyo to the sixth form.

According to Patrick Harris, formerly a strategist at Orange, now working at the consultancy thoughtengine, we are often slow to predict the impact of technological advances because we tend to "think in terms of single technologies". Individually, technologies might not seem especially exciting. "But when you put broadband and pier-to-pier with storage on PCs, for example – then you have downloaded a whole new music industry."

So successful predictions are rare, failures abound, and our faith in the ability of those whose job it is to divine the future is hardly likely to be

improved by the kind of language they use, which perhaps inevitably, can sound rarefied. Futurologists use expressions such as "dangerworld" (to describe our post-9/11 anxieties) and "sunshine teens" (the "can-do kids changing our world"). They discern signs of the future by looking everywhere from obscure demographic studies undertaken by ambitious young academics to the markets of Brick Lane in London. They read the novels of William Gibson (*Neuromancer*, *Pattern Recognition*) and the often almost pontifical declarations of future gurus such as Peter Schwartz, author of *Inevitable Surprises: Thinking Ahead in a Time of Turbulence*.

As an American venture capitalist, Schwartz offers a reminder of one reason why we want to second-guess the future – because there's money to be made when we get it right, and lost when we get it wrong. No wonder, then, that as the world seems to become ever more unpredictable, the field of futurology expands exponentially.

As it happens, Schwartz headed up the "scenario team" on the Hart-Kudman commission – a body established by President Clinton and Congress to ponder threats to America's security following the end of the Cold War. In its final report, published in 2000, the commission, Cassandra-like, decided that terrorism presented the greatest challenge to the United States; one scenario contemplated was (wait for it) terrorists crashing planes into the World Trade Centre. It seems that it's not enough for us to be told our futures; for the predictions to be anything more than some esoteric game, we also have to believe what we're hearing.

The six people interviewed here all try to predict just where our world is heading in the next few years – whether that is second-guessing what our politicians will be arguing about a decade down the line, or imagining what colours will be found on the swatches of the future; predicting youth trends or looking for "Superbrands"; assessing risk, or envisioning an era of extraordinary scientific advances. Each has a convincing methodology and smart-sounding vocabulary, but for all of them, predicting the future is an act of imagination as much as a science.

Right: Sean Pillot de Chenecy, tracker of global youth trends



### << **SEAN PILLOT DE CHENEY** **TRACKER OF GLOBAL YOUTH TRENDS**

**Position:** Founder of Captain Crikey, a London-based "research, trend analysis and brand development consultancy".

**Background:** London-born Pillot de Cheney, 42, left school at 17 and drove tanks for the Blues and Royals before gravitating – via public relations – into advertising. He worked as a coolchaser ("strictly a job for 20-year-olds") and researcher, before co-founding an advertising agency in Los Angeles. After working for Informer, a consultancy operating out of New York, Miami and London, Sean branched out on his own, launching Captain Crikey in 1999. He now works with clients such as Heineken, GlaxoSmithKline and Saatchi & Saatchi, and has been involved in developing new strategies for youth-orientated anti-tobacco campaigns.

#### **How can you see the future?**

"Essentially, I am a researcher and an observer. I talk to people, I listen. Anyone who lives an extreme life can be especially rewarding to talk to. Looking into the future of sport and of sleep, I spoke to mountaineers and members of the US special forces, as well as neurologists. But a lot of this is stunningly obvious: if you think people here are becoming more health conscious, for example, well then you need to visit a very health-conscious country like Finland, to find out just where that might take us."

### **'PEOPLE ARE BECOMING RESISTANT TO AMERICANISATION – "BRAND AMERICA" IS IN SERIOUS TROUBLE'**

#### **And what do you see?**

"'Stranger-danger' is going to have an ever greater impact, especially on childhood, as we are force-fed the kind of images we are currently getting from the Soham trial. Bali will have an impact on 'experience culture' [the practice of collecting experiences through travel and adventure]. The globalised nature of youth culture, in which you can go into any club anywhere in the world and people are wearing the same clothes and listening to the same music, will cause a kickback. People are becoming resistant to Americanisation – 'Brand America' is in serious trouble."

### **SUNDER KATWALA** **POLICY WONK (BELOW)**

**Position:** General secretary of the Fabian Society, a Labour-affiliated campaigning organisation and the world's oldest think-tank.

**Background:** As the son of a Gujarati doctor and an Irish nurse, Katwala, 29, might almost be said to have been born into the business of forward-thinking; he sees himself as "a product of the NHS, which was functioning like a multicultural society, with mixed-race relationships, long before the rest of Britain". Born in

### **'THERE IS A POLITICS OF HAPPINESS EMERGING. ECONOMIC GROWTH AND PROSPERITY ARE NO LONGER ENOUGH – WE ARE INCREASINGLY CONCERNED ABOUT THE QUALITY OF LIFE'**

Doncaster, Katwala grew up in Cheshire and the South East. After studying PPE (Politics, Philosophy and Economics) at Oxford, he commissioned economics and politics books at Macmillan, before joining the founding team at the Foreign Policy Centre, a think-tank designed to help prepare New Labour for government by "being creative about Europe, globalisation, ethics". He worked for *The Observer* until September of this year, when he took up the top job at the Fabians, which celebrates its 124th birthday next week. He sees the Society,

formed before the Labour Party existed, as having been "ahead of its time" on issues such as feminism and decolonisation.

#### **How can you see the future?**

"Party politics is often just about the next two or three years. We are looking to identify just what the big emerging debates will be beyond that – and to see where the Left should stand on them. We listen to what academics are thinking, we define that and translate it back to the politicians, to the MPs and the members. There is also a kind of virtual community of people working in these fields. We act

as a hub for these networks, we float ideas, we develop arguments."

#### **And what do you see?**

"There is a politics of happiness emerging. Economic growth and prosperity are no longer enough – we are increasingly concerned about the quality of life, about the world in which our children will grow up. So while on the one hand, people are being very individualistic, on the other, they want to make collective choices, and the challenge is to see how politics and political institutions can respond to those contradictions."







**ANNE LISE KJAER**  
**CREATOR OF**  
**INSPIRATIONAL FUTURES (ABOVE)**

**Position:** Founder of Kjaer Global, providing conceptual trend forecasting for global corporations.

**Background:** Fashion graduate Kjaer, 41, worked in product development in Paris, Hamburg and her native Denmark, before moving to London. Having founded her own company, "one thing led to another", and so from working mostly in fashion and related fields such as beauty (where she advised about style directions and colours) Kjaer's work has become increasingly conceptual. She now specialises in taking consumer trends

and translating them into future projects for companies such as Benetton, Dunhill, Ford and Ikea.

**How can you see the future?**

"If you are going to try to imagine what we'll be thinking in ten years' time, you first need to go back ten years. If you look at the past and then the present, then you can begin to use that as a projection of the future. And, of course, when you are thinking about history, you must also consider the history of the client. These big companies have their own histories and their own logic, like a person – you could call what we do trend therapy. And these days you have to use a multidimensional, holistic approach. It's not just a product

any more – you now have to weigh up the scientific, social, emotional value."

**And what do you see?**

"I think two things we'll be thinking about a lot over the next 20 years are energy and ethics. Energy, because if we're going to live a lot longer, we need to think about our capital, which includes our body capital, in terms of what we eat and how we live our lives, as well as our cultural, social, spiritual and financial capital. As for ethics, the well-informed consumer will increasingly be concerned with issues such as fair trade. We have so much; in the future, it's not going to be a question of what to choose, so much as what we want to leave behind."

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**'IN THE FUTURE, THE WELL-INFORMED CONSUMER  
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<< **MARTIN RAYMOND and CHRISTOPHER SANDERSON**  
**EXPLORERS OF FUTURE LIFESTYLES AND TECHNOLOGIES (LEFT)**

**Position:** Co-founders of The Future Laboratory, a futures consultancy based in the East End of London; respectively the editor and the creative director of *Viewpoint*, an award-winning magazine of "trends, brands, futures and ideas".

**Background:** Raised in the Home Counties, Sanderson (right), 34, trained with the National Youth Theatre and studied English and drama at Goldsmiths, working as a director in Spain before taking up fashion journalism and PR, "all of which is about knowing what makes people tick". Irish-born Raymond, 42, is a lecturer, author (of *The Tomorrow People: Future Consumers and How to Read Them Today*), journalist and broadcaster. Set up in 2001, The Future Laboratory provides trend forecasting, consumer profiling and lifestyle analysis to the likes of BMW, the BBC, Marks & Spencer and Unilever.

**How can you see the future?**

"We have set up a network of around 2,000 contacts," Raymond explains.

"That includes people who work in the music industry, academics, people in the club and fashion scenes, journalists. We use them for what we call 'brailing' – a way of reading the shifts that are set to change the culture. We also work with organisations doing the kind of thing we do elsewhere, people like the Ministry of Culture in New York, for example, and four times a year we put all of this together to compile a report about what is emerging."

**And what do you see?**

"We're very excited about something we're calling Science and Magic," declares Sanderson. "The past 50 years has been about silicon technology, but the new

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conductors – which are much faster – are going to be organic. Similarly, in fields such as biochemistry, stem cells and GM, we are on the cusp of extraordinary scientific advances – advances that will provoke even more of the kind of ethical problems consumers now face about the provenance of products."

"With developments in genetics," Raymond chips in, "it is almost as if scientists are returning to the world of alchemy."



**'OUR THINKING ABOUT LIFE-PHASES IS CHANGING DRAMATICALLY. TODAY, WE HAVE THE "MIDDLE-ESCENT", THE FIT, ACTIVE 60-YEAR-OLD, WHILE A 40-YEAR-OLD IS PRACTICALLY A YOUTH'**

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**PREDICTOR OF LIFESTYLE AND CONSUMER TRENDS (ABOVE)**

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**How can you see the future?**

"I don't like the word 'trend', because a trend is something that is already happening. We have to look beyond the

normal hunting grounds for coolchasing. I'm looking for emotions, attitudes, habits, fears, desires. Travel is useful, as is reading, but going to the market on a Saturday can be just as important as knowing what kind of films are in the pipeline. And politics are important – not party politics, so much as ethics. But this business is also about intuition – it's creative as well as scientific. The future isn't a place we go to, but one we create."

**And what do you see?**

"I think there will be more of an idea about sustainability – above and beyond recycling. And I think we'll be thinking a lot more about how to adjust the pace of life. With food, lots of us are looking for food which is fast to prepare, but which isn't 'fast food'. As for shopping, we often think of it as something we do in a hurry, grabbing stuff as quickly as we can, but it's also private time, so we need to think about how we can enjoy it. Our thinking about life-phases is changing dramatically. There's this whole business of the 'middle-escent', for example, the fit, active, lively 60-year-old, and today a 40-year-old is practically a youth." ■



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MAGAZINE 27 DECEMBER 2005



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