FUTURIZON

The Future of Valentine's Day

A Futurizon Report for Sparkling Strawberry

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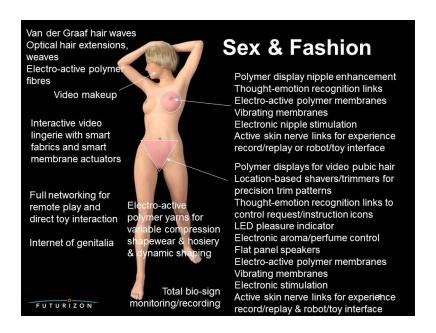
Valentine's Day is traditionally a time when people declare their fondness for someone else, or show an existing partner their undying love and romantic side. It won't go away any time soon, but the way people celebrate it will change dramatically. Gifts of lingerie, jewellery, cards and of course wining and dining a lover are all important parts of the celebration. These might all change rapidly over the next few years as technology increases their scope and capability.

FUTURE GIFTS

We are just beginning to see LEDs and light-emitting fibres being used in clothing, usually in tech demos or glossy music videos so far. Over the next few years, these technologies will hit the mainstream and colour changing, light-emitting or even video clothing will become commonplace. Some clothes will include full video panels, others will have light-emitting fibres or LEDs spread throughout to give a more subtle aura of colour change and sparkle.

Adding touch sensitivity is possible too, offering the scope of lingerie that lights up when touched. Going further and adding some basic life-sign monitoring, measuring pulse and skin conductivity, lingerie could change colour and emit changing patterns, drawing towards a kaleidoscopic climax as a lover's caress increases arousal.

Sex & Fashion

Van der Graaf hair waves
Optical hair extensions, weaves
Electro-active polymer fibres
Video makeup

Interactive video lingerie with smart fabrics and smart membrane actuators

Full networking for remote play and direct toy interaction

Internet of genitalia

Electro-active polymer yarns for variable compression shapewear & hosiery & dynamic shaping

Total bio-sign monitoring/recording

Polymer display nipple enhancement
Thought-emotion recognition links
Electro-active polymer membranes
Vibrating membranes
Electronic nipple stimulation
Active skin nerve links for experience record/replay or robot/toy interface

Polymer displays for video pubic hair
Location-based shavers/trimmers for precision trim patterns
Thought-emotion recognition links to control request/instruction icons
LED pleasure indicator
Electronic aroma/perfume control
Flat panel speakers
Electro-active polymer membranes
Vibrating membranes
Electronic stimulation
Active skin nerve links for experience record/replay & robot/toy interface
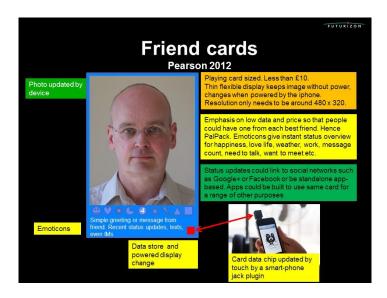
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An obvious extension of today's shrinking IT is emotional jewellery. Even an item as small as an ear-ring or a tongue stud would be large enough to hold considerable electronic capability. If displays rely on augmented or virtual reality visors, then pretty much all of the rest of a smartphone can be condensed down to jewellery size. This will allow lots of electronic functionality to be added to small components of clothing too. Even a sequin could contain a sensor, a display device, a button or an electrical stimulation device. Future lingerie and jewellery will have an even more active part in lovemaking with augmented lingerie that feels more sensual.

As miniaturisation continues through to 2030, even nerve links will become feasible. Skin-cell-sized titanium alloy-coated capsules of electronics could be embedded invisibly in the skin to record and replay sensations. A woman would be able to replay the touch of her lover on Valentine's night.

High technology won't always be so obviously high tech though. As artificial intelligence, robotics and 3D printing continue to evolve, people will find any artistic skills they might have are amplified enormously, so we will see a massive resurgence in arts and crafts. That might mean anything from being able to compose a Shakespeare-quality sonnet through to making Da-Vinci quality paintings or sculptures. It will become easy to express an idea to an AI just by chatting to it, allowing elaborate on-screen designs to be created before 3D printing a figurine in chocolate. Any high-resolution picture of your lover would be enough to make a convincing figurine of them.

Valentine's cards are slowly being replaced by online versions, but with ongoing technology development, greeting cards could catch up by adding more electronic functionality. We're maybe all bored with tinny speakers emitting a crass jingle, but in future, it will be possible to make playing card sized friend cards that are actually a fully networked touch sensitive video display, linked to a Facebook page or blog, so the recipient can have a card dedicated to one person with all their up-to-date photos and posts. That will be possible for under £10 in a couple of years. So, the card displays a romantic message praising your lover on the day, and then becomes a constant reminder of you, possibly even replaying photos or videos from the evening you spent together.
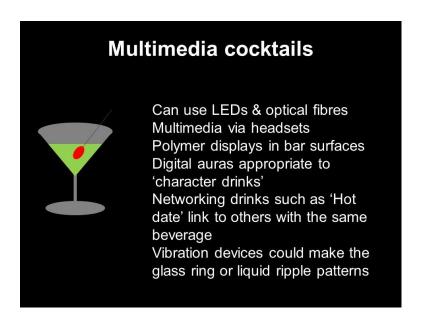

Another fun technology for Valentine's Day is shoulder angels. We've all seen cartoons where a character has a demon on one shoulder and an angel on the other, representing the fun and naughty side of their personality versus the sensible well-behaved side. That could be tiny physical drones that accompany the person and really do live on their shoulders, talking to them with frequent cloud-based wisdom, or virtual characters only visible in augmented reality, again a front end of an AI personality.

Shoulder angels

ACTIVITIES

So much for the various gifts that may be exchanged. What about dates themselves? When going for a future Valentine's dinner, a restaurant might use augmented reality to offer a particularly romantic setting for the evening. With very little extra expense, diners could be serenaded by violinists or watch their celebrity singers or dancers, with each couple seeing different things according to their choices. Winged cupids or fairies could deliver carefully composed love notes.

Gifts can keep flowing the whole evening through. When buying your lover a drink at a bar, multimedia sparkles could be added that they see via their augmented reality, with floating hearts or fireworks emerging from the glass as they drink their cocktail.

Multimedia cocktails

Can use LEDs & optical fibres
Multimedia via headsets
Polymer displays in bar surfaces
Digital auras appropriate to 'character drinks'
Networking drinks such as 'Hot date' link to others with the same beverage
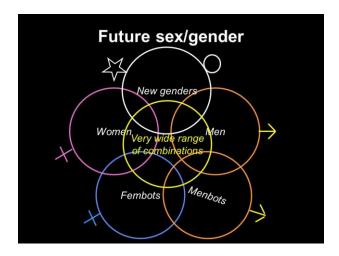Vibration devices could make the glass ring or liquid ripple patterns

VR headsets could make dinners very special, putting the diners seemingly alone on a beautiful beach watching dolphins play, or on another planet with cute aliens walking around. Headsets of course won't interfere with eating, since the meal can be put into context within the VR environment too. The McDonalds meal of the low-budget teen date could of course be rendered as something much more exciting.

VR fantasy doesn't have to be in a restaurant. Even if the lovers are at home and far apart, VR can bring them together in a shared fantasy. It's even possible to preserve anonymity in VR, with the secret lover there and fully interacting, but represented as an avatar that doesn't give their identity away. They might even give romantic gifts that appear at first virtually, and are later delivered from Sparkling Strawberry.

Just as Halloween is for many people now an opportunity to indulge in transgender play, so Valentine's Day offers a similar opportunity. On-line gaming or shared virtual reality environments both offer easy cyber-trans opportunities, where people can present safely and anonymously online as another gender if they wish. VR allows them to see themselves as their chosen gender and future nerve links could make the appropriate sensations too. Of course, they could make it feel more real by physically wearing the appropriate makeup, accessories, clothes or lingerie instead of keeping it all virtual.

Already today there is much talk of future sex with robots. A Valentine's date with a robot might not be very far away. Expense and immature technology ensures it won't be common before 2030 but in the 30s, many people will buy expensive androids for assistance or companionship in the home or office. With advanced AI and even emotions, people are very likely to form strong emotional bonds with their androids, so dating them is very likely. An android could have direct networked links to the owner's nervous system, making sex more fun too. They would have direct access to their sensations, so would know perfectly what is working and what isn't, optimising their lovemaking techniques to deliver maximum pleasure.
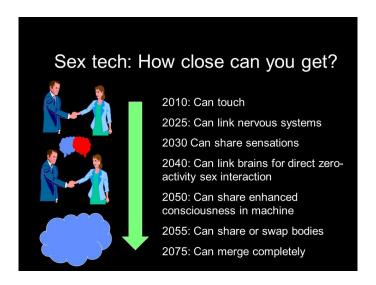
By the 2050s, many people will have the minds fully networked, with most of their mind residing in the cloud. That makes a new possibility. By using an android as their own body, and still inhabiting the original, it will be easy for narcissists to take themselves out on a date. Again, this invited transgender play too, so their male side could date their female side. It's hard to imagine what lovemaking would feel like, being in both bodies at once, but it will certainly be different! What is even harder is to try imagining the future genders that people will be able to choose from, since androids are not confined to male or female, but could have entirely new genders, man-made or AI-made. Once they exist, some humans will want them too, and that will be feasible thanks to cloud extension of mind and our sensory systems.

More mundanely perhaps, such technology obviously facilitates remote sex, using androids as a remote body to have sex with a distant lover. So, future dates could be with an android or as an android. Sometimes, both people might be using androids for remote presence, or maybe androids will have such strong AI that they'll want their own relationships too, so we'll have to compete for reservations with android couples. Importantly, human-like androids will wear clothes, so some will also receive Valentine's gifts of sexy lingerie.

Future technology will go even further than that. If we can network our minds, it might be possible to inhabit not just an android, but another person's body. If they are using an android, their own body could be borrowed by someone else. Body swapping becomes a possibility, with people finding and hiring other people just as they might today rent someone's home while the occupants are away on holiday. People might hire a younger body, or one of another gender. Whether people would allow AIs also to use their bodies is yet another possibility.

This forces us to question just how close people can get. It is a relatively simple timeline from today as totally distinct people interacting conventionally, to a distant tomorrow where they can share bodies and consciousness.

Sex tech: How close can you get?

2010: Can touch

2025: Can link nervous systems

2030 Can share sensations

2040: Can link brains for direct zero-activity sex interaction

2050: Can share enhanced consciousness in machine

2055: Can share or swap bodies

2075: Can merge completely

CLOSING REMARKS

Valentine's Day today offers a wide range of possibility for declaring and showing adoration and love for another person. Tomorrow, that potential will grow enormously in scope, using the full scope of the real world and the virtual world, with the two seamlessly interwoven via augmented and virtual reality and direct links to our nervous systems. Adding androids to the mix gives further potential variety. One constant in all of this is the importance of gift giving, and that will extend even to lingerie for aliens, fantasy creatures, robots and androids.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Ian Pearson is a full-time futurologist, tracking and predicting developments across a wide range of technology, business, society, politics and the environment. He is a Maths and Physics graduate, a Doctor of Science, and has worked in numerous branches of engineering, from aeronautics to cybernetics, sustainable transport to electronic cosmetics. His 1700+ inventions include text messaging and the active contact lens. He was BT's full-time futurologist from 1991 to 2007 and now runs Futurizon, a small futures institute (www.futurizon.com). He writes, lectures and consults globally on all aspects of the technology-driven future. He has written several books and made over 700 TV and radio appearances. He is a Chartered Fellow of the British Computer Society and a Fellow of the World Academy of Art and Science, the Royal Society of Arts and Commerce, and the World Innovation Foundation.

ABOUT SPARKLING STRAWBERRY

Sparkling Strawberry is a leading online lingerie retailer based in Cheshire, UK. (www.sparklingstrawberry.com)