

<http://somatosphere.net/?p=9223>

Web Roundup: Death and Technology

2014-09-30 11:47:50

By Lily Shapiro

When my parents came to visit a few weeks ago, they brought with them legal documents for my siblings and me to sign relating to their wills and end of life care. Happily, they did not do this because such an event is considered imminent; rather, they recently retired and are simply putting their affairs in order. The ensuing conversations revealed a tiny glimpse into how complicated and surprisingly bureaucratic death in America is. I therefore chose death and technology as the subject for this week's Web Roundup.

[The Atlantic](#) interviewed Caitlin Doughty (of [Ask a Mortician](#)) about death practices in America, the work of a mortician, and how she would like to die. They have another piece on [how deaths are covered by the media](#), that is to say, whose deaths are covered, and in what way, to what end. Researchers looked at the American news media's coverage of deaths outside America and determined that the depth of coverage an event received was directly related to the country's proximity to the US, and to the number of American tourists who visit the country in question per year. By depth of coverage, they mean the degree to which an article or series focused on individuals killed, rather than reporting deaths as a statistic with little humanizing information.

NPR did a story about [how and where Americans die](#). The focus is on New York City, though there is some data on the rest of the country. Due to a combination of medical culture and structural constraints, although most Americans say they would prefer to die at home, a great number spend many, if not all, of their last days in a hospital.

[The Hollywood Reporter](#) did an interesting in-depth piece on the anti-vaccine movement in affluent LA neighborhoods, including an interactive map, based on state vaccination records, of the risk of potential infection in over 3500 preschool, daycare, and kindergarten institutions.

Ezekiel Emanuel wrote an article about how [he hopes to die at 75](#). It's an interesting read, though I wouldn't recommend forwarding it to your parents, as they tend to take it the wrong way.

Changing gears slightly, in [You Should Be Terrified of Superintelligent](#)

[Machines](#), a writer for Slate argues that we have something to fear from the development of technology that is purportedly “more intelligent” than humans, though not, perhaps, for the reasons you might expect.

[Vice](#) interviews Martin Rees (professor of cosmology and astrophysics at the University of Cambridge) about the ways in which humans will have to change to live in space or on other planets, and a post-human future in which beings are capable of manufacturing such changes in themselves.

The magazine, *The Baffler*, hosted a debate between Peter Thiel (the co-founder of PayPal) and David Graeber about the failed promises of and potential futures of technology. You can read a write-up of it on [Inc.com](#) or in the [New York Times](#). Both Graeber and Thiel agree, though for very different reasons, that technology has largely failed to live up to its expectations over the last half-century. [Slate](#) has an article arguing that urban designers and policy makers should read more science fiction. This article is part of the lead-up to an event in New York City on October 2nd on science fiction and public policy, which takes as its starting point the assumption that technology has largely failed to deliver on its promises. Info on the event, which you can stream as a live webcast, is [here](#).

In the wake of GoPro going public (now valued at about USD 3 billion), [the New Yorker](#) did a long piece on the pros and cons of constantly recording everything. It’s a story we’ve all heard, but no less thought provoking for having been told before. “GoPro, like Google Glass, has the insidious effect of making the pervasiveness of cameras seem playful and benign when it may one day be anything but. The *Economist* called the film-everything culture “the people’s panopticon”—the suggestion being that with all these nifty devices we might be unwittingly erecting a vast prison of self-administered surveillance.” They also discuss the idea that having cameras like this pushes athletes to attempt more and more daring feats and that, in the event of an accident or death, the GoPro can become a kind of black box.

To balance all this talk of death with one thing about birth: [The New Yorker](#) has an interesting video on how and why C-sections became so common in the US.

AMA citation

Shapiro L. Web Roundup: Death and Technology. *Somatosphere*. 2014. Available at: <http://somatosphere.net/?p=9223>. Accessed September 30, 2014.

APA citation

Shapiro, Lily. (2014). *Web Roundup: Death and Technology*. Retrieved

September 30, 2014, from Somatosphere Web site:
<http://somatosphere.net/?p=9223>

Chicago citation

Shapiro, Lily. 2014. Web Roundup: Death and Technology.
Somatosphere. <http://somatosphere.net/?p=9223> (accessed September 30, 2014).

Harvard citation

Shapiro, L 2014, *Web Roundup: Death and Technology*, Somatosphere.
Retrieved September 30, 2014, from <<http://somatosphere.net/?p=9223>>

MLA citation

Shapiro, Lily. "Web Roundup: Death and Technology." 30 Sep. 2014.
Somatosphere. Accessed 30 Sep.
2014.<<http://somatosphere.net/?p=9223>>