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Conversations That Matter: New Retail Realities

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Welcome



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NEW RETAIL

REALITIES

Speculative Design
for the Future of Retail



“The only thing we can be sure of about the future is that it will be absolutely fantastic.

So, if what I say now seems to you to be very reasonable, then I have failed completely.

Only if what I tell you appears to be absolutely unbelievable, have we any chance of visualizing the future as it really will happen.”

The background of the slide is a dark blue gradient, overlaid with numerous semi-transparent, light blue virus particles. These particles are spherical with a textured surface and feature several small, protruding spikes or receptors. They are scattered across the frame, with some appearing larger and more prominent than others, creating a sense of depth and movement.

Why look to the future now?

**Don't we have
enough to worry about
in the present?**



31,778,331+

**confirmed COVID-19
cases, globally**



-5.7%

**Global retail sales fell
5.7%, versus 2019**



25,000

**Predicted number of store
closures in the US, due to
COVID-19**



37%

**of Chinese retailers say their
number of customers have
been cut in half**



209%

**Global ecommerce sales are
up 209% versus last year**

[\(https://theseeker.ca/2020/08/global-ecommerce-sales-surge-in-2020/\)](https://theseeker.ca/2020/08/global-ecommerce-sales-surge-in-2020/)



10.2%

**Canadian unemployment
rate, as of August 2020**

<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/200904/dq200904a-eng.htm>



6.8%

**Global consumer confidence
remains 6.8% lower than it was
pre-pandemic**



5%

People who believe their families will be better off dropped 5% globally

**Yesterday is not ours to recover,
but tomorrow is ours to win or to lose.**

Lyndon B. Johnson, November 29, 1963



To begin to look forward, we will borrow from the practice of Speculative Design.

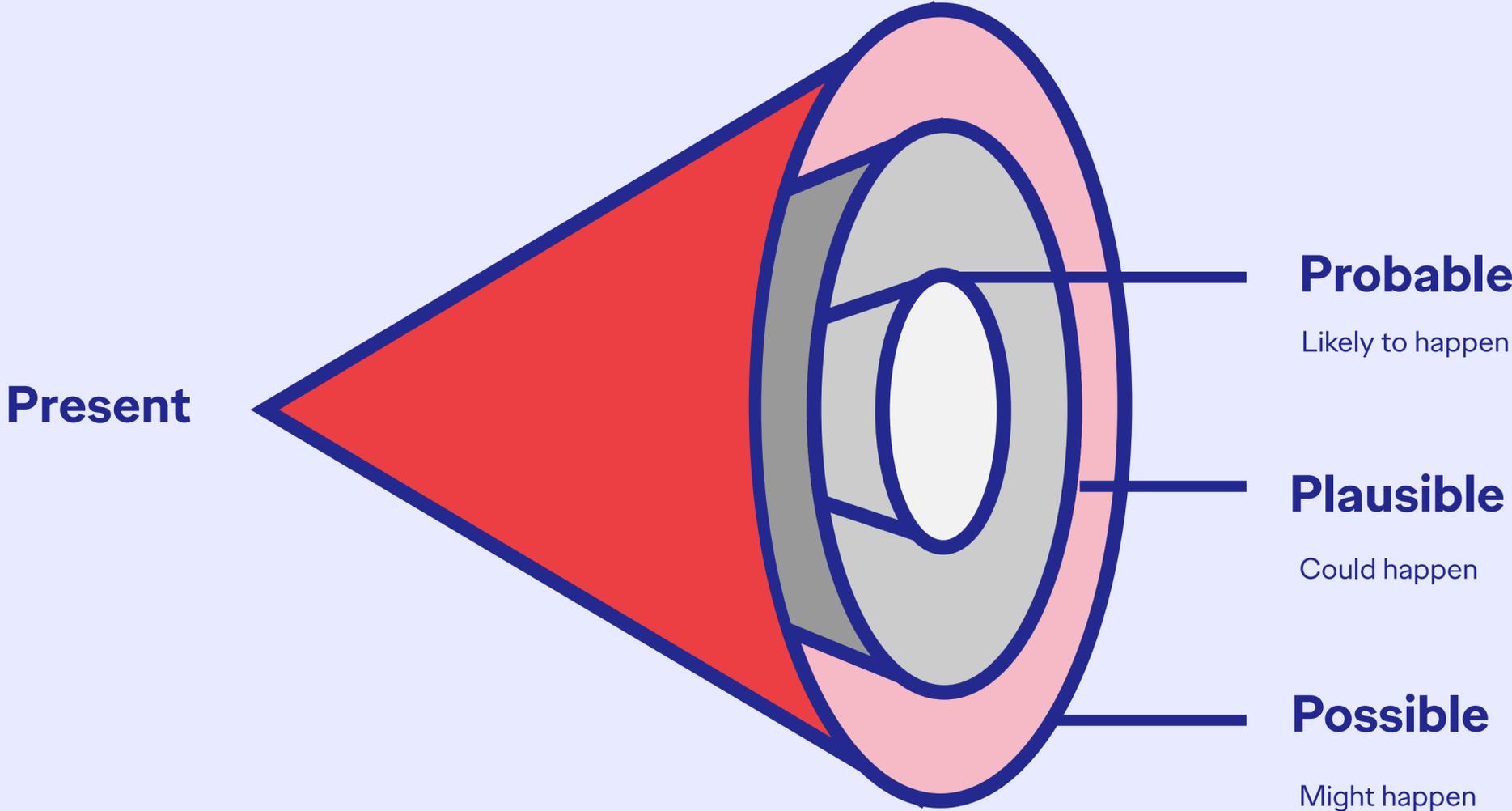
Speculative Design “questions the cultural, social and ethical implications of emerging technologies. A form of design that can help us to define the most desirable futures, and avoid the least desirable.” The term was first coined by Anthony Dunne in the 1990s, and he, alongside Fiona Raby, gave birth to the field in the Design Interactions program at the Royal College of Art, in London.

Probably the most famous example of speculative design in popular culture is Black Mirror.

If you've never seen Black Mirror, its storylines are built around the exploration on the impact of the advancement of a specific technology, like this episode, "Lacey," which explored the potential outcomes of social ratings.

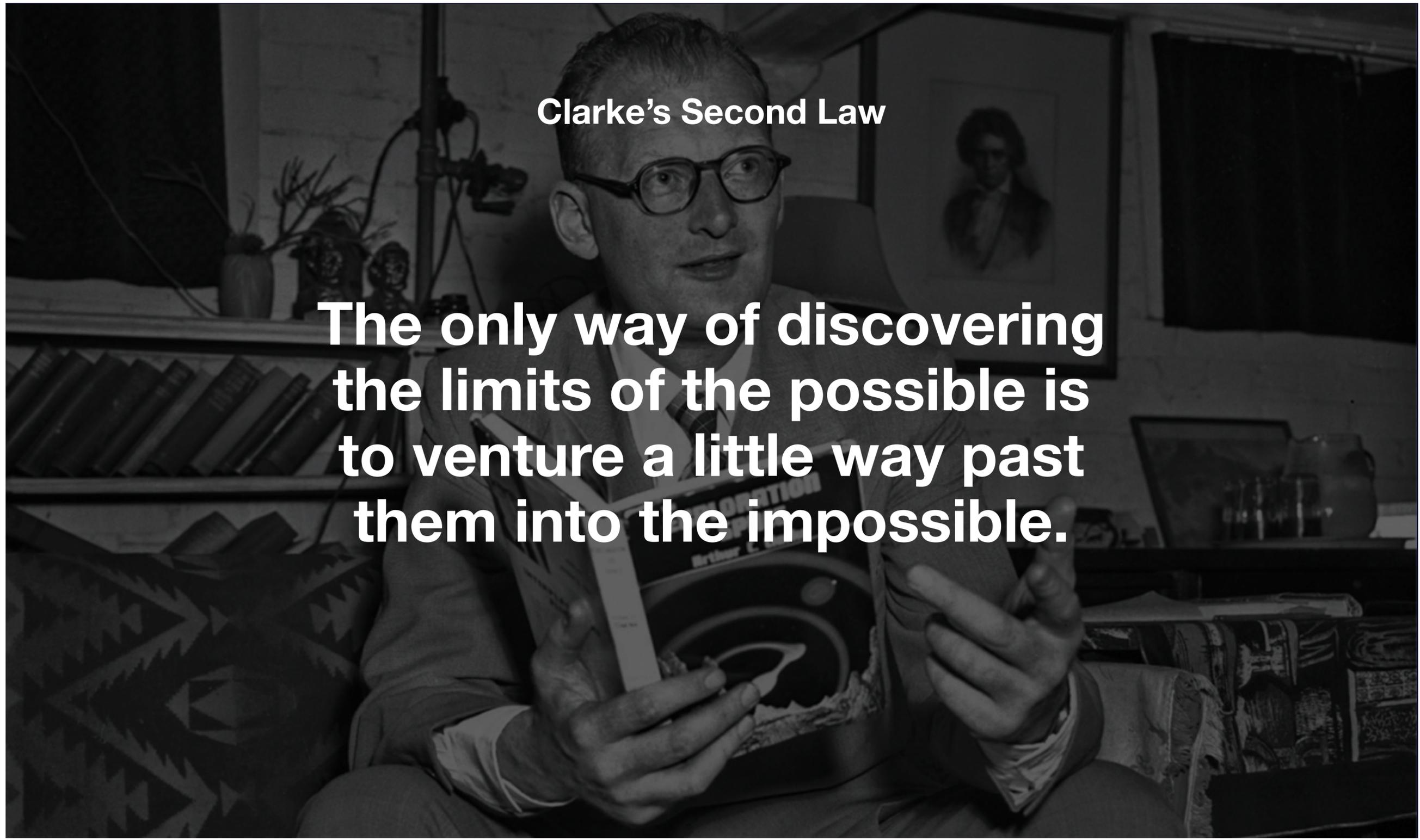


Taxonomy of Futures



The practice is built upon the Taxonomy of Futures, which attempts to map potential outcomes of existing behaviours or technologies.

There are three levels of these outcomes: *Probable* (what is likely to happen), *Plausible* (what could happen), and *Possible* (what might happen). There is typically a *Preferable* state (what we want to happen), which falls somewhere between *Probable* and *Plausible*, but, as with most things, this is largely out of our control.



Clarke's Second Law

The only way of discovering the limits of the possible is to venture a little way past them into the impossible.

1. Hands-off

Exploring a world of shopping where people can look, but don't want to touch.

2. Away from the Crowd

Exploring a world where people are actively looking to avoid crowded, public spaces.

3. Window Shopping

Exploring a world where endless browsing and window shopping is no longer an option.



HANDS OFF

Post-COVID Reality

In a post-COVID world, we will be acutely aware of every single button we've pressed, handle we've touched and door we've opened.

Impact

If customers don't want to touch, retailers will need to rethink the most basic of interactions their shoppers have in their stores.

Present

Motion-Activated Doors

For years, stores entrances have been motion activated to provide easy accessibility, but also to limit physical contact.

Probable

Cashierless Retail

Already piloted in Amazon Go stores, the “Just Walk Out” model uses a mix of computer vision, sensors and other technology to detect what products shoppers take from shelves and keep track of them in a virtual cart. To remove contact, the system could be updated to not display actual items but allow shoppers to scan virtual items that would then be ready for pickup at designated location. Amazon says the system can be installed in stores in “as little as a few weeks,” and it’s already being considered by many of their major competitors.

Plausible

Voice-Activated Retail

While e-comm will continue to boom, the store visit is not going to disappear anytime soon. So, one way to make it a hygienic experience in our new collective reality would be to replace touch with voice. Rather than rummaging around on dirty shelves for a product, you’d simply “ask” the shelf. If it wasn’t in stock, the shelf could notify an employee to check the inventory. Voice could also be used as a wayfinding device to limit person-to-person interactions. Ask the shelf where a product is located, and floor lighting could direct you to the exact location.

Possible

Haptic VR Shopping

To many of us, touch is an indispensable part of the shopping experience. The ripeness of fruits and vegetables, the weight of a tool or utensil, the feel of a fabric. How can we ever be expected to shop without the use of this important sense? The answer may lie in technology that is currently being developed by Disney. A combination of a haptic suit (filled with sensors and tiny airbags that are able to replicate specific sensations) and a VR headset that could allow theme park visitors to experience the Force, could also be employed to let shoppers interact with a virtual world and be able to actually feel and touch products, without actually feeling or touching them.

2

Always From The Crowd

Post-COVID Reality

In a post-COVID world, we will be increasingly wary of time spent in public spaces, specifically retail spaces, where the fear of contact with infected objects and people will remain high.

Impact

When visiting a crowded store is a major concern, retailers will need to reimagine how, when and even if shoppers still come to them?

Present

Click & Collect

A relatively recent value-add service in retail, Click & Collect went from nice-to-have to must-have during the pandemic.

Probable

Virtual Private Shoppers

Of course, if going to a physical location at all is out of the question, retailers will need to find ways to bring the store to the shopper. While many grocers now offer a personal shopper experience as part of their click & collect or delivery options, there are limited “virtual” features, and the service has yet to truly take hold in other retail sectors. There have been experiments in fashion, through apps like Boon + Gable, but what about the home improvement store? Who wouldn’t appreciate a construction expert doing their Home Depot run for them and offering tips and tricks, while they followed along virtually through a video feed?

Plausible

3-Minute Air Mail

At this point, e-commerce and delivery feel decidedly 20th century, but with online shopping increasing around the world, new companies and services are popping up with inventive new solutions to getting people their purchases as easily – and quickly – as possible. One such company is Manna Aero, a drone maker from Ireland that has piloted drone-delivery of medicines during the pandemic and has a stated goal of making “three-minute delivery a reality.

Possible

Self-Renewing Home

One way that online retailers have begun to limit the need for store visits – or shopping altogether – is through a subscription model. And while Amazon Prime is great for essentials, in a world where shopping in-store for anything is out of the question, what to do about all the other products we use every day? What if everything we bought, used, or brought into our homes has a pre-determined, or self-selected shelf-life? – Your pillow knew to replace itself after 6-months, your sheets after 2-years, and your mattress after eight. Not only do you not ever have to shop in-store, now you never technically have to shop at all, as your whole home is instead predicting your every need.

3

ଆମଦେଶର SHOPPING

Post-COVID Reality

In a post-COVID world, we will begin to question many of the simple activities that we used to take for granted, like window shopping.

Impact

With lineups to enter, strictly enforced time limits, and rigorous safety measures, one of a retailers most cherished shoppers, the shop-as-a-hobbyist, may go the way of the dodo bird. Retailers will need to find new ways to engage this prized audience.

Present

Dynamic Displays

The savviest retailers pay careful attention to their window and in-store displays, regularly changing them to keep the store feeling fresh and providing new inspiration for regular shoppers.

Probable

Shoppable Out-of-Home

Who says store windows and displays need to live in an actual store? With new technology like Google Lens, the world has become searchable and shoppable. Employing this type of image recognition software, retailers could create storefronts on billboards, transit ads and other OOH placements to allow shoppers to browse and buy their latest and greatest from wherever they are.

Plausible

Site As Store

Great stores are designed to tell a unique story and take the shopper on a journey of discovery. Think Apple Store, or – and this will be contentious – IKEA. Great webstores, on the other hand, are designed to streamline purchases. If a retailer's website becomes the only place people can truly shop, the entire structure (and KPIs) of that site may need to be reimaged. Websites that we designed to be browsed, with customized displays in every section of the site, built with machine learning to provide a unique experience for each and every visit.

Possible

VR Store

What if you could walk the aisles of your favourite store for hours – seeing the displays, flipping through the racks, interacting with the staff – without ever leaving the comfort of your own home? Taking the notion of the webstore to a new level, VR could be employed to create a virtual, shoppable experience to allow those who love to shop the opportunity to visit their top shops like they did before in an entirely new (and safe) way.

THANK YOU