Design in an exponential world

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The summit meeting of Singularity University took place recently in Puerto Vallarta. For two days, experts from all over the world discussed their advances in exponential technology, talks which for the incredulous sound more like science fiction than reality.

But before talking more about how the world is about to change, let us explain what exponential development is. The idea of exponential development is a term inspired in the law of Gordon Moore, who was one of the founders of the Intel company who realized that approximately every two years the number of transistors in a processor duplicated and that, in this time, the cost of the same transistor was drastically reduced. The fundamental idea is that there are technologies where development is not lineal but exponential.

What is interesting is that the human being has developed and evolved lineally for 150,000 years, and the difference between the two is not small; 30 lineal steps leave us a round 30 meters from where we started; 30 exponential steps are equivalent to 25 times around the Earth.

Within the better-known exponential technologies, we have robotics, artificial intelligence, nanotechnology, neuroscience, virtual reality, 3D printing, among others.

The relevance of these technologies is that, according to the experts, within less time than we can imagine, there will be no industry which is not profoundly affected by one or several of these.

The future will generate countless literally exponential opportunities.

Almost nothing in the world will continue to be as up to now. Illnesses will begin to be cured by means of a reconfiguration of the genetic code of the patient, and not only with medicines; transport will change radically with self-driven cars , and possibly none of our children will have to learn how to drive; obesity will be understood and attacked in a more efficient way through the information of peoples´ genetic code; neuroscience will provide us with information on how to increase the cognitive capacity of children; the possibility of designing ones descendant will exist; we will be able to print organs to make transplants and food can also be printed.

What happened in Mexico with the Singularity University summit can be read in many ways; the first and very positive is that in Mexico we are beginning to take the concept of futurism seriously and every time there are more people interested in trying to understand how the world is about to change.

Another obligatory reading for those of us is what we have made of the design of our lifestyle; another is that practically everything we know is about to change or will at least be radically affected, generating boundless literally exponential opportunities. All these changes are going to require a redesign of the world as we know it; a revolution of design is approaching, a revolution never before seen and of a size difficult to comprehend.

This new revolution is going to call for designers who are not only designers but also futurists; designers who understand that the solution of much that we do not like in the world lies in the design; designers who work with many increasingly diverse disciplines and who understand that the design is a good way of hacking society in the search for a better world.

In the face of this coming revolution I have found two types of principal reactions: the first is fear, the natural uncertainty generated by an exponential future in many people. The second is emotion in the face of what is coming. I find myself within the second group, I am excited at the fan of possibilities opening itself to us, a second opportunity in order that this time we do better as a society.

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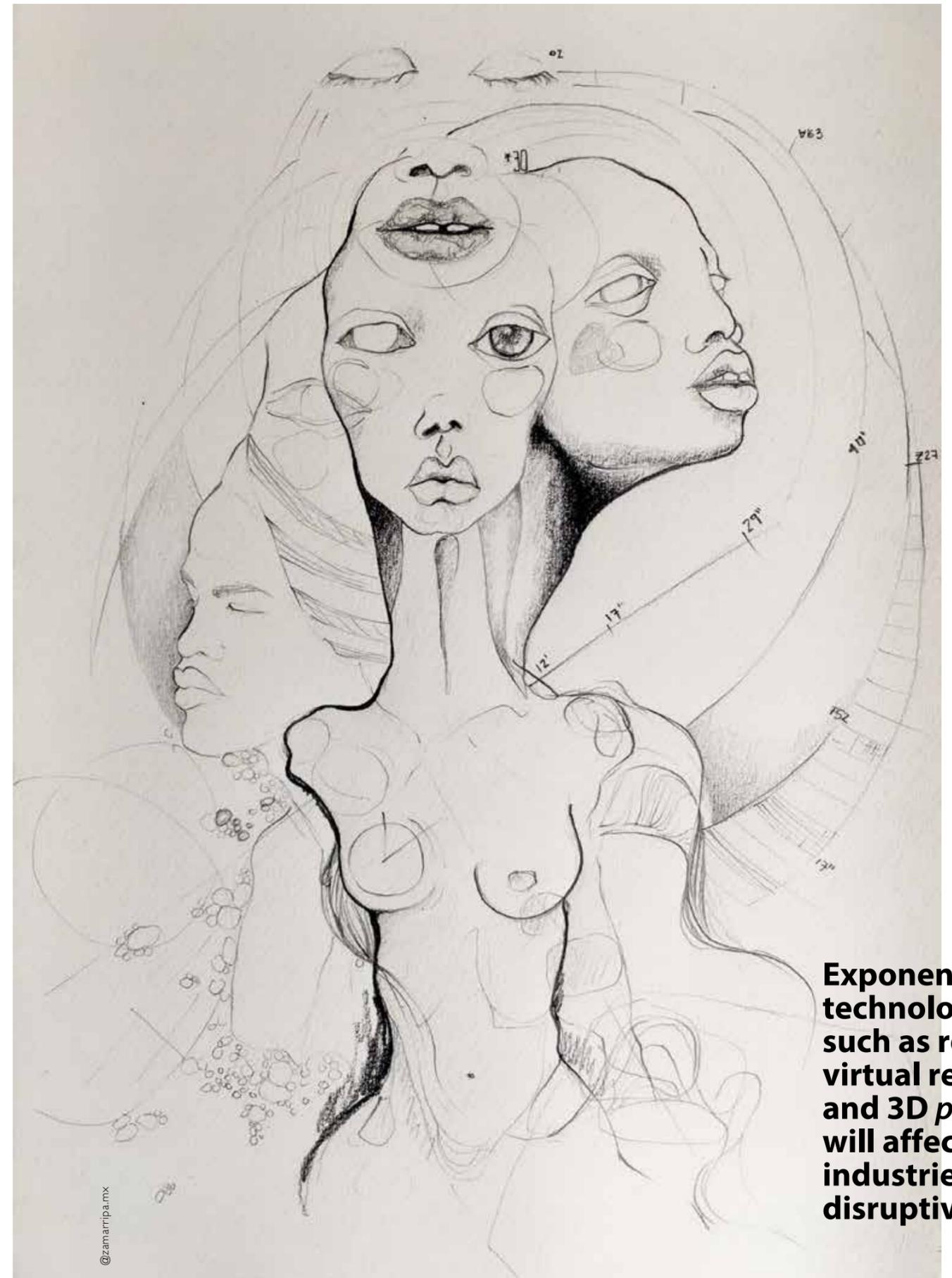
Exponential technologies such as robotics, virtual reality and 3D *printing* will affect industries in a disruptive way.