

The Popcorn Report: ParanoiaLand

The New Global Zip Code



Are you hearing that giant whooshing noise? We are.

It's the sound of millions of Americans turning their heads and looking over their collective shoulders. In deep panic and desperate alarm. Why?

We are all, to one degree or another, living a paranoid lifestyle. Here at Faith Popcorn's BrainReserve, where we are always alert to the trembling of **Trends**, we define this national paranoia phenom as: "A pattern of exaggerated reactions and responses to both small and large events – some real, some imagined – that are shaping our interactions with the planet, government, business, friends, and even family."

This goes far beyond and is more soul-rattling than an absence of trust. Trust is when you believe someone. Paranoia is when you are convinced someone is out to get you, and won't be convinced otherwise. And why should you be? There are battalions of existential enemies.



It could be the deep state, if you're on the right. It could be Machiavellian oil companies, if you're on the left. It could be a pissed-off planet that is fed up with being brutalized, if you're simply trying to breathe. Or it could be some crazy person with an AK-47 that you innocently stumble upon when you're minding your own boring business, or that your kid does. God forbid.



Consider what we've been through in the last few years, including a from-nowhere pandemic that killed more than a million Americans. And we still don't know if it was a species-jumping virus, an accidental lab leak, or an intentional one. Political polarization is putting us at each other's throats, and that deep anger and concomitant vulnerability is amping up the paranoia threshold.

In a deeply prophetic article from the Nation titled "This is Life in Paranoid America," the writer describes a conversation between his father and schizophrenic brother and then compares it to "America's divided, almost schizoid version of social discourse... it's as if this country was suffering from some set of collective, auditory hallucinations."

The manifestations of this are everywhere. The New York Times recently ran a story about reasonable but hyper-fearful women who are compiling "If I go missing folders," even though the likelihood of this is vanishingly small. Paranoia vanquishes logic. Yet the line between legitimate fear and unnecessary freakout is increasingly blurred. TikTok, with some 150 million users in the U.S., is regarded by some as a spy-keyhole for China.



My Obsession



I'm very interested in c, (meaning the speed of light) the singer-songwriter, known as Grimes. She reflects what's new and next InCulture and a fierce advocate for our cyborg-selves of tomorrow.

"[We are homo-techno](#), a new species. Computers have accelerated our evolution." This belief that we will soon be uploaded into computers permeates her music.

She is also a feminist. Listen to "[We Appreciate Power](#)" which contains the lyrics, "AI will reward us when it reigns," and, "If you long to never die, baby, plug in, upload your mind." Sung like a true Futurist.

She loves Iain M. Bank's book *Surface Detail*, which reads like a metaversian saga crossed with a complex video-game. And then there's her style: She usually covers her hands with demi gloves, (shades of Karl Lagerfeld), and sports a face-painted rock-tot look or an Asher Levine digital fashion futuristic vibe which you can see in "[Shinigami Eyes](#)". I recently spoke with Asher, who took me through the creative process when designing for Grimes. [Click to watch](#).

Is that reality or paranoia? And the news that thousands of commercial pilots are lying about their medical status can create or intensify our fear of flying, not to mention that only 5% of the checked plane luggage is scanned.

One more not small thing to bring shivers to the spine is the fact that the four techno oligarchs (Andreessen, Thiel, Zuckerberg, and Musk) are manipulating AI to sell us on their versions of our future with VR, Web 3, human enhancement and forays to Mars.

In our work, which is to apply the sweep of our 17 Trends to the Future of great enterprises and brands – as consumers buckle under forces beyond their ability to control or even understand – we see enormous implications for ParanoiaLand.

We've asked our team of trend-seeking-missiles, future-gazers, and impact-trackers to weigh in with their thoughts on how paranoia will impact broad swaths of the consumer landscape.

Pharma: Just because we're paranoid, doesn't mean bad things aren't happening.

The big news is that on May 25, 2023, Elon Musk's Neuralink received FDA approval for human trials. This is amazing on two fronts.

First, after his horrendous treatment of tan macaque monkeys by inserting a chip and torturing them into slow painful deaths, he is now free to do the same on human subjects.



Second, we are 'buying' that his application intentions are pure: To restore full body functionality for those with severed spinal cords and to cure blindness. I believe that his main purpose is to invade our brains, gaining access to our thoughts as well as implanting messages on this precious terrain. It's already in the Zeitgeist; there's a new movie called *Dream Scenario* which realistically dramatized a lab with the capability of inserting advertising messages into our thoughts.

The Truth of Neuralink will be stranger than the movie.



What's Popping: Snacks, Soda & Alcohol ↓

Smart CEO's are getting paranoid and they're not wrong. Ozempic and Mounjaro will definitely cut the consumer's cravings for snacks and sodas. These drugs also suppress the desire for alcohol, although it doesn't seem like the makers and distributors are 'woke' to this threat yet. When the insurance companies cover the cost of these drugs, CPGs bottom lines will get thinner.

Banking: The data breaches, scams, and losses keep coming. Deepfake technology is quickly rendering voice authentication moot as a mere three seconds of speech can be spun into a person's voiceprint. Zelle, touted as uber-convenient, has refunded only 3,500 of the 192,878 fraud cases reported in an 18-month period, a portent of problems to come.

The rise of synthetic identities – which merge bits of personal data to create “people” who don't exist – threatens every person's security. “Who really are you?” becomes the overriding question. Confusing, even to yourself.



What about AI manipulating the market and profiting in a way that we basic humans don't understand? Is that how you want your retirement fund growing, thanks to an algorithm that's shrouded in secrecy? What if the magic formula (and your funds) suddenly tanked?



What's Popping:

The financial institution that can radically reinvent their business with impenetrable, DNA-driven security will be the one to own Tomorrow. And something near-future: A mere mortal assigned to your account who is available 24/7 to answer, serve, support, and protect your money.

Sounds simple?

Then why is it only available to the very wealthy?

Food: Claims about “natural” and “organic” don't matter. Not with soaring food insecurity. With 75% of our fish rife with microplastic, chicken tainted with multidrug-resistant Salmonella, produce contaminated with parasitic brain worms and our pricey bottled water harboring so much Rx drug runoff that hydration becomes a choice between thirst quenching and a threat to our health.





What's Popping:

“100% human safe.” Some brands will go all in on clinically clean, others will snap up farms to cultivate and control their own pure, allergen-free crops, while others will invest in packaging sensor tech that reveals the composition, sourcing, and microbial status within.

But the big news is FDA just approved lab-grown meat (some Kosher and Halal) with no animals killed in the process. Gorgeous.

To those who cling to their current path, it's over and out.

Home: There's reason to worry, obsess (panic, even) everywhere.

“Crazy weather” leaves our abodes damp and black-moldy, with flourishing antimicrobial-resistant fungi. Wildfire smoke, which locked down 128 million Americans indoors recently, will become a daily scourge. New pandemics will race through HVAC systems, sickening millions, especially children. Cases of the highly contagious RSV are currently doubling, threatening to eclipse the devastating numbers seen last year.



Our **AtmosFear** Trend, (b.1982) defined as “Polluted air, contaminated water, and tainted food stir up a storm of consumer doubt and uncertainty,” surges to psyche-crushing levels. Not to mention the possibility of toxic opioids leaking, sneaking, drifting over from the neighbors' place. Our sanctuary will have to be sealed, scrubbed, and protected like never before.



What's Popping:

Paranoia-rattled residents will need emotional support from bot concierges and protection at an almost-military level. Tech will enhance homes to anticipate and disarm pathogens. Dwellings will become fortresses against crime and intrusive surveillance courtesy of a robot security detail. (Their human counterparts could turn on you.) Is this kind of utopian/dystopian living what those billionaires are planning with their mysterious NorCal land grab?

These categories are seemingly diverse – spanning pharma, finance, food, health, home and beyond – but are inexorably linked. Paranoia will transform each, giving rise to a myriad of strategic marketing opportunities that demand maximum innovation and payback with endless loyalty.

Because, if you can get someone who is paranoid to fall in love with your brand, they won't believe anyone who tells them to leave you.

