




Speaker Profile: Tommy Lexen

Executive Creative & Cultural Adviser | Speaker & Writer

Designing the Human Layer of the Future

Most speakers on the future hand you a forecast. Tommy Lexen hands you a design brief. He has spent 20 years building the places in which societies gather: World Expo pavilions, cultural districts and public worlds made for millions of strangers at once. His argument is that the future arriving with AI is not weather to brace for. It is being designed right now, mostly by people who do not realise that is what they are doing. The question he puts to a room is the one the whole conversation keeps dodging:

What kind of society are we actually building, and who gets to decide?

His case rests on practitioner delivery and two centuries of historical evidence, and it doesn't behave like a policy talk. It moves from predictive policing databases to cosplay at comic cons, from a cellist playing an instrument made in 1752 in front of a Metallica mosh pit to a Soviet psychology experiment that ended up becoming 'The Traitors'. The range is the point. The patterns that decide whether a society holds together show up in the unlikeliest places, and the talks are built to make a room see them.

The effect is to change how a room reads the present, without tipping into doom or hype. Audiences leave with a sharper view of the decisions in front of them, and a reason to believe they hold more power over what comes next than the headlines allow. The register is confident, evidence-led and properly entertaining, drawn from inside the rooms in which what we all end up seeing, feeling and experiencing gets decided.

The Core Argument

Most futures are not chosen. They accumulate. Tommy calls this **The Drift**. It is what happens when reasonable decisions get made inside briefs too narrow to hold their consequences. Nobody sets out to design a lonelier, less flourishing society. It arrives through a thousand separate choices that each made sense at the time. AI just makes that pattern faster. The risk of this moment is not only lost jobs or synthetic content, it is reaching a highly capable future without having designed the society we want to live in when we get there. The piece that keeps falling out of the brief is what he calls **The Human Layer**: the trust, belonging and shared experience that hold people together. That layer does not assemble itself. It has to be built.

Signature Keynotes

TALK ONE

The Undesigned Future (and the Room Where It Happens)

The society we drift into and the society we choose are not the same thing.

Tommy's flagship keynote, and the foundation of his forthcoming book. It opens on a question the AI conversation keeps avoiding: what kind of society are we building for the child who is 7 now and will be 32 in 2051, and who gets to decide?

The answer brings responsibility closer to the room. The people with the most power to shape what comes next are not only governments and technology companies. They are the practitioners, cultural leaders, designers and commissioners already deciding what the rest of us will see, feel, trust and gather around. Most of them hold more design power than they think.

Drawing on 20 years of delivery and two centuries of evidence, Tommy shows that societies rarely plan their best outcomes directly. They plan the conditions. Britain's post-war settlement did not plan The Beatles or the British New Wave. Sweden's home computer reform did not plan Spotify, Klarna or Minecraft. South Korea's cultural policy did not plan BTS, Parasite or a child in England dancing to K-pop a generation later. Nobody planned the outcomes. Somebody planned the conditions.

The room gets

- A name for the pattern most organisations are living through: The Drift.
- A way to read the AI transition as a live design question rather than a forecast to survive.
- Historical evidence that deliberate investment in culture and belonging returns more than anyone predicts.
- A sharper sense of who is already in the room where the future is being shaped.
- A question to carry back into every brief: what conditions are we creating?

Ideal for

Main-stage conferences; cultural, civic and government leadership; experience economy and destination development; AI, futures and strategy summits.

"The people with the most power to design the society that comes after this disruption are not the ones everyone is watching. They are already in the room. The question is whether they know it."

TALK TWO

The Human Layer (Trust, belonging and work after AI)

Why the AI conversation keeps telling us to brace for the future – and what changes when we decide to build it instead.

We have started talking about artificial intelligence the way we talk about the weather. Something gathering beyond the horizon, to forecast and brace for. Something that happens *to* us. That framing runs through the essays, frameworks and policy papers coming out of the major labs. AI moves, people adapt, the future arrives, and the rest of us hope to be cushioned when it does.

Tommy argues that this story is doing quiet damage. The AI transition gets described through jobs because employment is the part we know how to count. But work was never only about money. It gives people a shape to the day, a reason to be somewhere, a position in relation to others. When that moves, something deeper moves with it.

This keynote opens up the social fabric underneath the jobs: belonging, trust, dignity and shared experience. Tommy calls this The Human Layer and argues it is missing from most of the rooms where AI strategy gets made. Drawing on AI policy, urban design and his own work building places where strangers gather at scale, he makes a direct case. People are not the variable to be managed. They are part of the design.

The room gets

- A human way to read AI disruption without sliding into doom or hype.
- A clear line between economic cushioning and social design.
- Tommy's expanded decision lens: People, Society, Planet, Profit.
- A practical way to spot what has fallen out of the brief.
- A stronger question for leaders: what does this technology do to The Human Layer around it?

Ideal for

Leadership teams; AI and future-of-work conferences; policy and civic audiences; innovation and strategy summits; cultural institutions.

"The future is not being done to us. It is being built, and the only question worth asking is whether you pick up a tool or pull up a chair."

TALK THREE

Let's Be Frank: No More Innovation Theatre

We don't have an innovation problem. We have an honesty problem.

The same scene plays out in meeting rooms across the world. A client opens a deck and asks for something innovative. Everyone nods. Workshops follow, maybe a lab, maybe a pilot, a prototype that photographs well. Then nothing gets built that shifts behaviour, revenue or reputation. Everyone moves on, and the cycle repeats.

Tommy calls this Innovation Theatre, and he is honest that he has been inside it. Across two decades delivering World Expos, opening ceremonies and cultural destinations, he has watched organisations fail at innovation for reasons that rarely make the post-project review. The problem was not a lack of ideas. The problem was that nobody said what everyone in the room already knew.

AI has raised the stakes. It makes execution cheaper, content easier and ideation faster, which sounds like freedom until organisations use it to produce more forgettable work at higher speed. This keynote names the dysfunction without cynicism and offers a way out, starting from one plain question: why does this need to exist? If a team cannot answer that honestly, the work is already in trouble.

The room gets

- A name for the dysfunction people recognise instantly: Innovation Theatre.
- A frank way to talk about weak briefs and performative experimentation.
- Tommy's Purpose, Passion, Impact test for deciding what deserves to be built.
- A way to kill weak ideas early without killing ambition.
- Permission to stop performing innovation and start making work that matters.

Ideal for

Agencies, studios, brands and entertainment companies; marketing and strategy leadership; creative leadership offsites; teams asked to do something with AI without a reason why.

"Purpose isn't a nice-to-have anymore. It's the only advantage that can't be automated, replicated, or bought."

Why Tommy

Tommy Lexen FRSA is a Swedish-born, London-based Executive Adviser, Creative Strategist and Cultural Futures Consultant. The thread through his work is a single question: what holds a society together, and what tears it apart.

For more than 20 years he has designed large-scale cultural and entertainment experiences across four continents, including the UK Pavilion at Expo 2025 Osaka, the Mobility Pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai, Exploria at Mandai Wildlife Reserve in Singapore, WWF Earth Hour, and giga-projects including NEOM and Qiddiya. His work sits where culture, technology and society meet, helping governments, institutions and creative organisations build the environments where people gather and negotiate shared futures.

He was Managing Director and Chief Creative Strategist at Immersive International, and earlier a Senior Producer at the Tony and Olivier award-winning 59 Productions, where his projects included Palace in Motion at Qasr Al Watan in Abu Dhabi, the largest permanent projection-mapping show created at the time, alongside work for the Metropolitan Opera New York, the Smithsonian National Museum of Asian Art and the Royal Opera House Muscat. In 2023 he co-founded ROARR, turning Mosi-oa-Tunya (Victoria Falls) into the world's largest canvas for nature storytelling.

He trained first as a playwright and theatre-maker, which is where his interest in society began. He is a Fellow of the RSA, was Senior Creative Adviser to UNEP's Science-Policy-Business Forum and completed the University of Cambridge executive programme in the Art and Science of Futures Thinking. He is now writing his first book, *The Undesigned Future*.

Speaker Engagements include

Closing keynote at Pro Integration Future (NEC Birmingham); Immersive Experience Futures at Brompton Technology (London); InnovateX at the Wellcome Collection (London); MAPIC (Cannes); Dubai Boat Show (Dubai); UN Stockholm+50 at Berns (Stockholm); UK House at SXSW (Austin). Guest lectures at LCC, UAL and the Royal College of Art (London).

Upcoming: A+E Lab at The Dockyard (Chatham); guest lectures at the School of Creative Arts, University of Hertfordshire; Central Saint Martins (UAL); and Royal University of the Arts (Stockholm).

After one lecture at London College of Communication (LCC), a design student posted:

"He called it drift. The idea that most futures aren't chosen, they accumulate. The sum of reasonable decisions nobody was watching. Not chaotic, not malicious. Just unintentional."

That is the argument landing in the room it was built for.



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