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Recent Revelations of Illusion in the Net or *Red*

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In these troubled times, there are solutions.

Some of these solutions include technology, tried and true technology as well as new technology. One issue is identifying and implementing appropriate technology to help solve human problems as well as enhance the quality of human life. Dare I use an expression from Costa Rica "*pura vida*" or the "good life"?

I have commented previously that some of the global economy has evolved into an illusion. For example, we recently saw confirmation that the pharmaceutical companies have been inventing diseases (illusion with deceit) then selling the cure, typically in the form of medications which are an illusion or ineffective magic in response to a fake or false or illusory disease or condition, often leading to great and real adverse impacts individually and collectively.¹

Not new. Some appears to source in the early 1970s.

Make no mistake this is in the financial markets.² Deceit adversely impacts true investing in both capital and labor. These issues of deceit imbedded in the pharmaceuticals impacts their value and ability to pay dividends. Another classic is Credit Default Swaps. The Lehman Brothers debacle back in 2008 was illustrative. These illusions do, in fact, destroy physical capital including this home of ours the great planet earth. These illusions destroy labor or us human beings as well. These illusions limit our ability to innovate.

¹ See here, e.g., <https://www.vox.com/science-and-health/2018/6/14/17458726/depression-drugs-suicide-side-effect> and here. <https://www.yahoo.com/news/malady-mongers-drug-companies-sell-treatments-inventing-diseases-10004036>.

² One needs to use care here. Not all investments work out as planned. Thus, merely because an investment does not work out in no way implies *per se* deceit. One also must use care as to blaming those who are not responsible.

Mr. Jaron Z. Lanier is an innovator with respect to computers, the internet and virtual reality, among other areas, commencing in the 1960s to this very day. Dare I suggest his contribution to innovation and his discussion are heroic? He is currently employed by Microsoft Research.³ He also is now speaking on these issues of illusion and deceit.

The article imbedded below is authored by Ms. Olivia Solon. She folds in on herself at the end but first reveals yet another illusion, systemically on a global scale.

There is no such thing as an “artificial computing machine intelligence”, as a simple casual factual matter. This is nothing to be feared or viewed as limiting what we as human beings can accomplish.⁴ This is the essence of this very article.

I have actually engaged in the deceit discussed in the article below using human voice simulation software which I purchased at Egghead, a small office supply store across the street from my office in Boston. I forget the cost but it would have been trivial.

I bought the software as a fabulous way to intentionally deceive one of my former colleagues who was causing a great deal of difficulty.

Part of that difficulty was the very fact that my former colleague flat out refused to avail himself of the computer technology for which the firm had paid, the investment of our collective capital. He literally tossed a few thousand dollars of computer equipment into a corner of his office for all to see including clients and staff.

Among other matters, he refused to learn how to use this fabulous tool which was new to us at the time. Again, while I do not precisely recall, I would imagine it was about the year 1993, some 25 years ago.

We had certainly introduced the computer to the firm prior to 1979, long before I joined. The technology which my colleague tossed into the corner was our first large scale investing in mature technology by putting “personal computers” or PCs on every desk with internet and intranet connectivity within the USA firm and the larger global firm.

In any event, the former colleague in question promised to learn how to use the computer when the computing machine spoke to him in an intelligent manner.

³ Here is the Wikipedia link for Mr. Lanier https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jaron_Lanier . A simple google search will lead to a plethora of his discussions. I encourage people to listen to his views.

⁴ In this area of study, there is an extraordinary film entitled *Ex Machina* written and directed by Mr. Alex Garland. I found this film to be more than merely enlightening. I will add that I found it to be a “rip roaring great flick”. Not all education is a boring chore. A copy is in Chapple Blondet’s libraries. It is mostly spoken in English but with ample subtitles. I do encourage people to view this film. Here is Wikipedia [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ex_Machina_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ex_Machina_(film)) .

Well, I did indeed make the machine speak to him including using his name via this software which simulated human speech explicitly including responding to his questions. He did not meet his end of the deal but his reaction to that deceit of me was, well, worth the small sum I paid for that software back some 25 years ago.

New tech?

Creating the illusion of machine intelligence via humans behind a veil like the Wizard in Oz, pretending to be “intelligent machines” is deceit.

We live in an age or *epoche* of illusion or an illusory age. We need to change this. It is dangerous for all of us. In this process of change, we need to restore the computer to its rightful place as an extraordinary tool for us human beings to use to enhance human life.

We then need to redirect some of this human energy to engage in serious and much needed innovation to help us solve these great problems we face today. There are solutions. Solutions only us human beings can innovate. Indeed, many of these solutions are not awful but do require us to change our behavior a bit.

I will add here that I have been honored to work to this very moment with extraordinary people who truly understand these principles specifically including extraordinary tried and true technology as well as new computer and software technology. Some reside here in Escazú as well as the larger Central America, some in Europe, some in Asia, some in South America and some in North America. Some even work in areas of finance.

Indeed, there are solutions, some of which do include computing machines.

The article from: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2018/jul/06/artificial-intelligence-ai-humans-bots-tech-companies>

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The rise of 'pseudo-AI': how tech firms quietly use humans to do bots' work

Using what one expert calls a ‘Wizard of Oz technique’, some companies keep their reliance on humans a secret from investors

Olivia Solon in San Francisco

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Some companies use humans to train AI [Artificial Intelligence] systems; others secretly depend on them while claiming to have scalable AI [Artificial Intelligence] tech.

It's hard to build a service powered by artificial intelligence. So hard, in fact, that some startups have worked out it's cheaper and easier to get humans to behave like robots than it is to get machines to behave like humans.

"Using a human to do the job lets you skip over a load of technical and business development challenges. It doesn't scale, obviously, but it allows you to build something and skip the hard part early on," said Gregory Koberger, CEO of ReadMe, who says he has come across a lot of "pseudo-AIs" {false artificial intelligence}.

"It's essentially prototyping the AI {artificial intelligence} with human beings," he said.

This practice was brought to the fore this week in a Wall Street Journal article highlighting the hundreds of third-party app developers that Google allows to access people's inboxes.

In the case of the San Jose-based company Edison Software, artificial intelligence engineers went through the personal email messages of hundreds of users – with their identities redacted – to improve a "smart replies" feature. The company did not mention that humans would view users' emails in its privacy policy.

Being human: how realistic do we want robots to be?

The third parties highlighted in the WSJ [Wall Street Journal] article are far from the first ones to do it. In 2008, Spinvox, a company that converted voicemails into text messages, was accused of using humans in overseas call centres rather than machines to do its work.

In 2016, Bloomberg highlighted the plight of the humans spending 12 hours a day pretending to be chatbots for calendar scheduling services such as X.ai and Clara. The job was so mind-numbing that human employees said they were looking forward to being replaced by bots.

In 2017, the business expense management app Expensify admitted that it had been using humans to transcribe at least some of the receipts it claimed to process using its "smartscan technology". Scans of the receipts were being posted to Amazon's Mechanical Turk crowdsourced labour tool, where low-paid workers were reading and transcribing them.

"I wonder if Expensify SmartScan users know MTurk workers enter their receipts," said Rochelle LaPlante, a "Turker" and advocate for gig economy workers on Twitter. "I'm looking at someone's Uber receipt with their full name, pick-up and drop-off addresses."

Even Facebook, which has invested heavily in AI [Artificial Intelligence], relied on humans for its virtual assistant for Messenger, M.

In some cases, humans are used to train the AI [Artificial Intelligence] system and improve its accuracy. A company called Scale offers a bank of human workers to provide training data for self-driving cars and other AI-powered systems [artificial intelligence systems]. “Scalers” will, for example, look at camera or sensor feeds and label cars, pedestrians and cyclists in the frame. With enough of this human calibration, the AI [Artificial Intelligence] will learn to recognize these objects itself.

In other cases, companies fake it until they make it, telling investors and users they have developed a scalable AI [Artificial Intelligence] technology while secretly relying on human intelligence.

Alison Darcy, a psychologist and founder of Woebot, a mental health support chatbot, describes this as the “Wizard of Oz design technique”.

“You simulate what the ultimate experience of something is going to be. And a lot of time when it comes to AI [Artificial Intelligence], there is a person behind the curtain rather than an algorithm,” she said, adding that building a good AI [artificial intelligence] system required a “ton of data” and that sometimes designers wanted to know if there was sufficient demand for a service before making the investment.

This approach was not appropriate in the case of a psychological support service like Woebot, she said.

“As psychologists we are guided by a code of ethics. Not deceiving people is very clearly one of those ethical principles.”

Research has shown that people tend to disclose more when they think they are talking to a machine, rather than a person, because of the stigma associated with seeking help for one’s mental health.

A team from the University of Southern California tested this with a virtual therapist called Ellie. They found that veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder were more likely to divulge their symptoms when they knew that Ellie was an AI system [artificial intelligence system] versus when they were told there was a human operating the machine.

Man 1, machine 1: landmark debate between AI [artificial intelligence] and humans ends in draw. Others think companies should always be transparent about how their services operate.

“I don’t like it,” said LaPlante of companies that pretend to offer AI-powered [artificial intelligence powered] services but actually employ humans. “It feels dishonest and deceptive to me, neither of which is something I’d want from a business I’m using.

“And on the worker side, it feels like we’re being pushed behind a curtain. I don’t like my labour being used by a company that will turn around and lie to their customers about what’s really happening.”

This ethical quandary also raises its head with AI systems [artificial intelligence systems] that pretend to be human. One recent example of this is Google Duplex, a robot assistant that makes eerily lifelike phone calls complete with “ums” and “ers” to book appointments and make reservations.

After an initial backlash, Google said its AI [artificial intelligence] would identify itself to the humans it spoke to.

“In their demo version, it feels marginally deceptive in a low-impact conversation,” said Darcy. Although booking a table at a restaurant might seem like a low-stakes interaction, the same technology could be much more manipulative in the wrong hands.

What would happen if you could make lifelike calls simulating the voice of a celebrity or politician, for example?

“There’s already major fear around AI [Artificial Intelligence] and it’s not really helping the conversation when there’s a lack of transparency,” Darcy said.

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