

COMPUTER SAYS F.U.

Maybe robots are a lot smarter than us humans

Words by Richard Asher

It's not hard to find prophets of doom when it comes to artificial intelligence. Listen to the likes of Steven Hawking and Elon Musk, and you might start to believe we humans only have a couple of years left as bosses of this planet. Embodied AI is the danger, they fear, because its super-robots might get so smart they'll turn around and destroy us. AI, the darling child of both the venture capital and startup world, has certainly been getting its share of slander.

But AI is already a critical channel in our tech ecosystem – we just need to exploit it better, everywhere from boardroom to back yard. And the good news is that I think there's a lighter, brighter side to it all.

You see, I'm dying for the day when the robots have the *nous* and the backbone to stop us when we're being brainless. Because humans do brainless rather well, despite our ability to create robots. Perhaps our ultimate investment in technology could be using those robots to cut out some of the madness for which history might judge us.

Let me explain. See, most of us have the potential to think like computers, but we let pride, stubbornness, habit and emotion get in our way. You know how your Uncle Bob won't be told he's wrong? Ever? What if it were a ruthless, neutral machine, with algorithms coursing through its proverbial veins, pointing out his idiocy? Without the human element to the criticism, would he perhaps listen then?

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Many times, almost every day, I would love to see such a machine in action. Ironically, it's usually our very use of technology that might keep it most busy. When your colleague complains about traffic, yet makes no attempt to ride share, this would be a perfect moment for a bit of AI intervention. A gentle slap across the face and a robotic, 'No, stupid! You're being a stupid human being!' might stun him, and much of our equally mindless species, to move in a smarter, less selfish and more efficient direction when it comes to commuting.

When my girlfriend refuses to make use of the silent button on her phone, which wakes me up throughout the night, I would love this AI machine to be around. When I try pointing out the ludicrousness of her digital addiction, and mention that there are people who can help her deal with it, I feel I'm

in physical danger. But what if an app were to give her the order to switch off? Would she argue with her beloved phone? I see potential.

For a supposedly smart species, we are so dumb, so much of the time, that we need a little help. We smoke things that do lasting damage to our bodies, we hurt each other in blind rages and we have a strange habit of spending money we don't have. We make everything out of plastic, then throw it in bins and kid ourselves that it just disappears. Then we are shocked that there is an enormous swirl of plastic circulating the Pacific Ocean. If a UFO landed and saw this, the aliens would surely shake their heads and wonder how we've gotten as far as we have.

Humans don't like to listen to humans, even when they're right. Sometimes a referee isn't a bad thing. Our judgement calls en masse tend to be even

more clouded. Look at Brexit. From the day the referendum result was announced, there's been an 'oh, what have we done?' feeling floating around the UK. A feeling that maybe they got it wrong. If it proves to be so, then history will look back and ask why a country-full of people who thought they made a mistake sat back and watched the mistake play out when they had plenty of time to change their minds. And the answer might be that they didn't have a robot to override the clunky politics with common sense.

This area is where AI can really earn its keep. Let the machine brazenly chastise us and squirt water in our faces when we're being fools, when we're in denial, or when we're being unforgivably lazy. Not only could this make a terrific Father's Day present, but it might just make the world a better place, too. **GQ**

