

Human Conditions

Exploring the messy, contradictory, and newfangled side of creativity



Nearly one year has passed

since OpenAI introduced Chat GPT, marking a significant milestone in the AI landscape. And as the array of tools at our disposal has expanded, so has the attention from Capitol Hill, the FTC, and almost every other regulatory body. This heightened scrutiny has ignited a spectrum of discourse on AI, from smart, necessary think pieces about the risks of AI bias to warnings of complete AI-driven dystopia. And Sam Altman's brief departure and subsequent return from OpenAI has made everything in between feel like an extra-bleak soap opera.

In the spirit of "nobody knows what will happen, but it's important to talk about it, anyways," we interviewed Joe Lazar and Andrew Kessler, Article Group's co-founders, about their thoughts on the AI revolution, society's prognosis, and, most importantly, whether or not our agency will crumble and we'll all lose our jobs.

Is the rapid rise of generative AI a unique phenomenon, or have we seen something like this before?

JL: Picture the early days of social media – that's the closest parallel, but it's not quite the same. We don't know exactly what the ramifications are yet. We're talking about a technology that's evolving at warp speed, outpacing anything we've seen before. Rich people are about to get way richer. Maybe it's more like the shift from horse-drawn carriages to railroads. Welcome to a new wave of progress, I suppose.

AK: I think it's a societal shift in the order of modern computing, but happening at a much faster clip. I think that it will ultimately cause huge disruptions, but it's also very fun to play with. That's the real paradox of generative AI: it will absolutely wreak havoc, but it also allows you to do all kinds of very fun things you wouldn't be able to do otherwise.

How do you see generative AI continuing to evolve? What other things do we need to be scared of?

AK: To me, AI's growth potential is massive. It's possible it could surpass human intelligence and compassion. But there's a catch. Will we use AI to enhance humanity, or will we use it as a tool for profit? This is crucial because AI is on track to outperform professionals like doctors and lawyers. Imagine AI diagnosing cancer better than any physician. The upside? Potential universal access to top-tier healthcare. The downside? Our current economic system isn't set up to harness this for the greater good. It's a pivotal moment: AI could be a force for incredible progress or a source of profound disruption, depending on how we steer it.

JL: Here's a dose of optimism. Andrew's right – AI will excel in tasks we humans used to handle, bringing its pre-programmed efficiency and precision. But remember Doogie Howser, M.D.? There's one episode where Doogie is flying through patient after patient — he's in the ER, I think— and feels like he's killing it. But then a woman comes in who he's absolutely stumped by. Runs tests, nothing. Can't find a quick diagnosis in his notebook. And then he decides actually to *learn something* about her. Finds out she's been eating off of these newly-inherited plates and has given herself lead poisoning.

That realization wouldn't have happened if not for human connection. In this analogy, AI won't uncover the lead poisoning. And that's the thing — AI depends on the data we feed it. Its scope is vast, but the nuance and creativity of the human mind are irreplaceable. That's where real value lies, in making connections AI can't.

What's something that can't be explained by generative AI?

JL: Nostalgia. It could describe it, but I don't think it could explain it.

AK: It's an interesting question. I'm just imagining AI evolving to become a hundred times smarter and more compassionate than us. Does that demote humans to just another species in the grand scheme? Or, if AI becomes smarter without compassion, could we become mere resources for its growth? It raises the question: Are we truly special, or just part of a larger system? We've birthed a technology that might redefine our place in the world. It's a profound, almost unfathomable shift. Like in the movie 'Her,' we're venturing into territory that challenges our very understanding of humanity and our role in the universe. I really don't know if there's anything that can't be explained.

JL: Andrew's right about AI's simulated compassion and connection. It's fascinating — AI can almost mimic emotional intelligence, offering responses that meet our need for validation. This could be revolutionary, even challenging therapists' roles. But there's a limit: I really believe AI is no match for human unpredictability and genuine creativity.

AI might produce a song using Wilco's catalog that sounds like a Wilco song. But predicting Jeff Tweedy's *next song*? That's beyond its grasp. That unpredictability is the essence of human creativity.

What's your responsibility as an agency leader when it comes to generative AI?

JL: Honesty is key. We need to be upfront about AI's potential impact. I'm optimistic for our team because our strength lies in connecting unique ideas for our clients, a skill AI hasn't mastered and I don't think will. And the essence of human interaction — the in-person experiences with all their subtleties — is irreplaceable. This reality might not immediately affect our business model until we find a way to capitalize on it.

As for our responsibility, it's about mastering generative AI use. We shouldn't replace human roles blindly, but we definitely should leverage AI to enhance our services and improve work life.

AK: Our job as leaders is to identify and cultivate the unique value we can provide. AI will likely replace routine, non-creative tasks, but as Joe said, there's still a significant role for human creativity and ingenuity in business. It's about finding and nurturing those aspects where we excel beyond AI.

Is there a moral to this story?

AK: I guess be careful what you wish for. AI's efficiency might become so extreme it could undermine humanity itself. We're outsourcing our thinking for leisure, but are we really gaining free time? Or are we just shifting towards a future where there's nothing left for us to do?

JL: I agree. It's a pretty dire situation. The future of humans will increasingly depend on our unique qualities. We need to be more human as AI takes over more tasks. And we will. There will always be more ways to be human than there will be ways to replicate humanity.

AK: Exactly. Like mastering chess, what once seemed impossible for AI is now a reality. This shifts the definition of what's uniquely human. And I guess that's why we're right here.

