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INFO601

12 December 2024

Performing Intelligence: A Review of Simone Natale's Book *Deceitful Media: Artificial*

Intelligence and Social Life after the Turing Test

As artificial intelligence (AI) continues to become a dominant part of daily life, it is essential to dispel the myths and understand the true nature of the technology. There is a tendency for the diffusion of AI technologies in communication, industry, and culture but the role of AI is not well defined. In *Deceitful Media: Artificial Intelligence and Social Life after the Turing Test,* Simone Natale discusses the cultural, historical, and technological background of the deceptive AI paradigm that is yet to be understood. In a similar manner, Kate Crawford's *Atlas of AI* builds on these ideas as she explores how AI is a part of social, political, and even environmental infrastructures and brings to light the prices we do not see of these technologies. Thus, Natale and Crawford offer important insights on how the cultural and historical construction of AI affects its social embedding and call for a critical approach to the discourse on this revolutionary technology (Crawford 3-5). Through a critical analysis, Natale unpacks how these systems create illusions of sentience and intelligence and, in doing so, gain the trust of its users while hiding its limitations. This book provides a basis for understanding the essence of the so-called "intelligent technologies" of AI and the consequences for society. Natale's work is not only relevant, but also important as it makes people rethink their interactions with these tools.

Deceitful Media is a collection of chapters that discuss the performative aspects of AI through historical, cultural, and ethical contexts. In the first chapter, he gives a historical account

of the development of AI and focuses on the Turing Test as well as early AI programs like the

ELIZA and PARRY, which were oriented towards the simulation of intelligence. In the second

chapter the author moves to the technical design and function of the AI systems and explains

how these systems simulate human behavior through preprogrammed replies. In the third chapter

Natale moves to the discursive framework that enables AI's illusions, media representations, and

the anthropomorphizing of the AI systems in societal interactions. In the fourth chapter the

author discusses the social acceptance of AI technologies and the consequences in the interaction

with the public and society. The fifth chapter, which is the ethical heart of the book, focuses on

the topic of users, the exploitation of AI for the purpose of surveillance and spread of fake news,

as well as the responsibility of the users, developers, and institutions. All the chapters are

relevant to Natale's main claim, but this review will mainly focus on chapters one, three, and five

as they give a good history of the topic as well as cultural influences and ethical implications of

AI's deceptive strategies.

Natale argues that AI has the appearance of intelligence which is far from the real thing.

This thesis unseats the narrative that has dominated discourse on AI, particularly in the last

couple of years, that these systems are autonomous and possess cognitive intelligence like human

beings. Through a history of the field, an exploration of cultural representations, and an analysis

of the ethics surrounding it, Natale disenchants these technologies to challenge the readers'

fantasies of their own participation in producing them. His analysis draws attention to the role of

media, users, and institutions in maintaining these illusions of AI as sentient. His process of

historical approach, cultural critique, and specific examples of cases builds up his assertion of

understanding the social implications of AI. This cross between technology and culture is a

theme that is found throughout this book and gives readers a clear insight into the prevalence of AI deceit today.

In the first chapter, the author gives a historical account of the evolution of the false reality and true imitation of AI. Natale states that the intelligence displayed by these systems are a "put on one"; this is due to design, user inputs, and the cultural context that defines these technologies. This is what he calls "performative intelligence", which involves the imitation of human behavior to gain trust and engagement; a practice that can be traced back to the principles of the Turing Test, a key point to Natale's main argument. According to the Turing Test, developed by Alan Turing in the year 1950, if a machine /computer can maintain a text-based conversation with a human being then it should be considered as intelligent. However, as Natale explains, this standard is based on the imitative rather than constructive learning (18-20). Natale underlines that this standard became more important than the ability to understand, which changed the course of AI's development towards building systems that act intelligent but are not. In Natale's view the Turing Test, as a cultural and technological standard, made intelligence into a performance that entailed fooling judges into believing that computers were intelligent, thus shaping the course of AI enrollment and its perception among the public (Natale 18-20).

With the help of the case of the Turing Test and its conceptual evolution, Natale demonstrates how some of the first AI systems such as ELIZA and PARRY perform intelligence. ELIZA, written by Joseph Weizenbaum in the 1960s, was an imaginary therapist that gave the user's input a canned response. Even though it had no idea what was going on, users personalized the program and perceived it as understanding them. As an example, Natale uses this to show how, in the case of interactional cues, people can be led to believe in intelligence (30-35). PARRY, a program written in 1970 to mimic the thought movements of a

schizophrenic, took the performative nature of AI to the next level. PARRY's interactions were bound to certain psychological mechanisms and yet it was able to maintain a coherent mental state, and this was perceived as proof of intelligence. These early examples show that the representations of AI, particularly CAs, have consistently focused on the user's perception of the system rather than its real capability, a trend that is evident in today's applications (Natale 35-40). According to Natale, these early systems have set the precedent for contemporary chatbots and assistants that employ the same strategies to create an illusion of understanding. This historical continuum supports his claim that the perception of intelligence of the existing AI is due to strategies that shape user perception rather than actual advancement in technology (Natale 80-85). This book is useful as it does not only explain the origins of the performative nature of AI but also the effects of these early practices.

The third chapter is dedicated to understanding the cultural narratives that keep AI illusions going, which are the role of media and the role of users in perpetuating those illusions. In Natale's view, AI's coverage in popular culture is largely positive and AI is usually depicted as sentient or even omnipotent. This pattern is illustrated by such movies as *2001: A Space Odyssey* and *Her*, which shows AI as entities that have emotional intelligence and can develop relationships with humans. For instance, in *2001: A Space Odyssey* "HAL 9000" is shown to be a strategic machine with emotions while in *Her*, an AI entity is shown to be able to fall in love (Natale 65-70). As Natale explains, such representations make people expect more from the AI than they should, which leads to anthropomorphizing.

Natale continues this discussion into everyday human's interactions with AI where he explores how users engage with digital personal assistants such as Alexa and Google Assistant. He notes that in these cases, users ascribe anthropomorphic characteristics to these systems, such

as conversational tones as well as gendered voices. This only serves to enhance the users'

perception of the system as intelligent, which in turn leads users to treat it as more human-like.

As Natale points out, not only does this design choice reinforce the perception of intelligence but

it also raises several ethical concerns, including the reinforcement of gender stereotypes (Natale

75-80). This point is consistent with Chin and Robison's findings in their research, *'How AI Bots*

and Voice Assistants Reinforce Gender Bias', where the authors show how the default female

voice of these assistants propagate binary gender roles. Chin and Robison state that the frequent

use of female voiced AI assistants only strengthens the stereotype that women are passive and

will fulfill anyone's request. For example, these technologies perpetuate the stereotype of

answering harsh or rude remarks by the user in a servile manner. Although developers have

started changing the responses to harassment, the base connection between the gendered voice

with the subordinate role is still evident (Chin and Robison 6-8). Thus, Natale's and Chin and

Robison's analyses make clear that the anthropomorphizing of AI through gendered and

performative design has cultural and ethical ramifications on a larger scale. This crossroads of

culture and technology therefore has implications on the themes of deception and stereotypes by

asking important questions on the effects of creating technologies that not only trick users into

thinking they are intelligent but also those that perpetuate negative stereotypes.

As mentioned, this phenomenon is also further reinforced by the decisions made by the

designers of these applications, including the conversational tone as well as the responses that

Natale points out as unethical. He claims that such approaches rely on anthropomorphism and

play on users' emotions to make them trust the systems (Natale 75-80). This raises an important

ethical question as these design decisions play on people's psychology to gain their trust in

systems that are in fact artificial. In the process of developing applications that mimic human

behavior, developers can make people depend on the applications for real human emotions and moral decisions. According to Natale, this is not only misleading to the users but also deflects accountability from the developers, hiding the flaws and prejudices of these tools. Intelligent appearing technology makes people feel safe, while forgetting about the ethical implications and real-world effects of putting performative AI in various aspects of life, including the medical field, or surveillance systems (Natale 160-165).

Chapter five is the ethical cornerstone of the book and focuses on the question of the user's agency in the creation of AI's illusions. According to Natale, users are not only consumers of the performed intelligence but also co-producers. When people engage with the AI systems as sentient beings, they reinforce and perpetuate the constitutive fictions of these technologies' ethical consequences (120-125). For instance, Natale discusses AI in surveillance technologies where he explains how facial recognition systems, which are presented as neutral tools for enhancing security, are trained with biased data sets that target vulnerable groups. This means that these systems are easily embraced by the public given that they view them as value free and cannot see how they may be used to violate people's rights (Natale 140-145). According to Natale, this is the performative AI at its worst as it camouflages its shortcomings under the cloak of intelligence. Natale also looks at how, for instance, deepfakes and automated writing propagate AI-generated misinformation by harnessing the appearance of realness. This leaves users to unintentionally spread false information. This is a situation made possible by AI's ability to create content that looks real, highlighting the ethical dilemmas that should be a concern to designers of such applications (Natale 150-155). While Natale scolds' users, he does not forget about developers and institutions that shape users' actions. He denounces the practices of corporate strategies that employ friendly tones and emotional appeals as intentional manipulation

of consumers' behavior with no regard for ethics, as previously mentioned. According to Natale, there is a need to promote accountability in the development of such tools and services, and need for policy changes (160-165).

One of the important aspects of the book is that it uses historical perspective, media influence, and ethical considerations to describe the phenomenon of AI in society. Natale's discussion of the Turing Test and its cultural impact is beneficial to understand the performative nature of AI while his analyses of ELIZA and PARRY are concrete examples of his argument. Also, his critique of user engagement in Chapter five is particularly powerful as he connects individual actions to general problems such as surveillance and fake news.

Although, Natale's analysis is rather occidentalized as he mainly refers to Western culture and films including *Her* and *2001: A Space Odyssey*, which depicts AI in an anthropomorphic and dystopian manner (65-70). However, the lack of non-Western references can make the book seem narrow minded. For instance, in the view of Xiao Ge and his colleagues, people from different cultures hold different models of AI. For example, in their study Chinese participants view AI as a part of their surroundings while Westerners seek AI as an extension of self. This study also pointed out that in East Asian societies, AI is considered as an entity that is part of people's everyday lives, which is quite different from the Western image of AI as a hierarchical entity (Ge et al. 11-12). Thus, Natale's work does not take into consideration these cultural specificities and, therefore, does not explore how the social status of AI is shaped in various cultures. This viewpoint would be fine if he specified this focus on Western culture more in the text instead of generalizing his arguments for society as a whole. This comparison shows that there is a need to expand the current AI discourse to include cultural specificities to deal with cultural implications of these technologies (Ge et al. 11-12).

Deceitful Media is an insightful analysis of post-truth AI, both a powerful and informative account of the phenomenon, especially regarding the historical, cultural, and ethical context. This book is a useful read for anyone wanting to know more about the relationship between AI, culture, and society in the contemporary world, especially for students, scholars and professionals. This research by Natale can be considered an informative introduction to the fundamental notions of understanding the state of modern media, which calls for a more critical and knowledgeable approach to the role of technology in our lives. There is still much to do, however, especially in so far as non-Western cultural frameworks and the different levels of societal adoption of AI technologies are concerned. *Deceitful Media* is a coherent and properly articulated addition to an already extensive and growing collection of writings on AI and its interactions with society. Through dissecting the constructs of AI's intelligence, Natale makes people question their use of these technologies. *Deceitful Media* provides a sound analysis of the relationship between AI, culture, and ethics in the contemporary world, making it a valuable contribution to the discussions on AI and society.

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