

Title:

Almost Future AI

Authors:

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Abstract:

Artificial intelligence and data-driven technologies have become ubiquitous parts of our lives. Accompanying their proliferation are increasingly frequent encounters with 'mutant algorithms', 'biased machine learning' and 'racist AIs' that make familiar forms of near-future fiction pale in comparison. In these examples, we come to observe a feature of algorithmic technologies, which Louise Amoore describes with the notion of foreclosure. AI and machine learning tools that inscribe a certain future based on prediction from past observations foreclose a multitude of other possible futures, be that in the form of a predictive policing, border control, or school grading algorithm. Faced with this potential to foreclose and/or defer potential futures, can we turn to fiction and narrative to offer alternatives for how AI could and should be? Can we move beyond the perception of inevitability and powerlessness in relation to these technologies that often characterises public attitudes?

The JUST AI project set out to map the UK's AI and data ethics landscape with a view to intervening in the field to center values of care, solidarity and justice. As part of our effort to shift discussions about AI and data ethics and introduce marginalised and underrepresented perspectives, we have commissioned a group of authors and poets, Irenosen Okojie, Adam Marek, and Tania Hershman, to critically engage with the subject and produce short pieces. In order to support the creative process we have facilitated interactions between the authors and researchers working on AI and data from technical, humanities and social science perspectives. These pieces will serve as a catalyst to inspire public dialogue that moves beyond the tropes of utopia and dystopia, as well as to introduce new points of friction that can generate alternative discussions around AI and data ethics among the research community.

This contribution will offer a reflexive account of the process of facilitating engagement between creative practitioners and AI (ethics) researchers, as well as an analysis of public and expert dialogue events structured around the commissioned pieces of fiction.

Bio-bibliography

Alison Powell is the Director of the JUST AI network. She is Associate Professor in Media and Communications at the London School of Economics. Her research examines how people's values influence the way technology is built, and how ethics in practice unfolds in technology design contexts. Alison experiments with participatory and public engagement methods to investigate how we generate knowledge about technology, citizenship, and our futures. Her previous projects include the Horizon 2020-funded VIRT-EU, which examined ways to develop ethics in practice among Internet of Things developer communities, and Understanding Automated Decisions, which considered the possibility and consequences of explaining how algorithms work using design methods and an interactive public exhibition. Alison also shares her insights about how people make knowledge about the city through 'data walking' – see www.datawalking.org – and her public writing at <http://www.alisonpowell.ca>.

Selected publications:

- Ustek-Spilda, F., Powell, A., & Nemorin, S. (2019). Engaging with ethics in Internet of Things: Imaginaries in the social milieu of technology developers. *Big Data & Society*, 6(2), 2053951719879468.
- Powell, A. B. (2018). Moral orders in contribution cultures. *Communication Culture & Critique*, 11(4), 513-529.
- Powell, A. (2016). Hacking in the public interest: Authority, legitimacy, means, and ends. *New media & society*, 18(4), 600-616.

Imre is a Research Officer in JUST AI and a PhD candidate in Social Research Methodology at the LSE. He studied Philosophy in Vienna and holds an MSc in Biomedicine and Society from the LSE. His doctoral work looks at human enhancement technologies and draws on quantitative and qualitative methods to understand how different values inform public attitudes. In the past, Imre had worked on a variety of projects, including an EU FP7 effort studying the ethical acceptability and social desirability of neuro-enhancement technologies, and freelance research for Nesta on AI governance and innovation-enabling regulatory approaches. He recently co-edited a volume on the ethical dimensions of commercial and DIY neurotechnologies. Imre is passionate about new forms of facilitating societal reflection on desirable futures and he is the founder of Hack the Senses, a design collective at the interface of the arts and the sciences. In JUST AI, he works mainly on mapping and analysing the UK AI ethics landscape.

Selected publications:

- Bard, I. (2020) Tailoring Reality - the ethics of DIY and consumer sensory enhancement. in: Bard, I., Hildt, E. (eds.) *Ethical Dimensions of Commercial and DIY Neurotechnologies*. Academic Press

- Bard, I., et al., (2018) Bottom-up Ethics - neuroenhancement in education and employment. *Neuroethics* 11 (3), 309-322

Louise Hickman is a senior researcher with the JUST AI network. She is an activist and scholar of communication and uses ethnographic, archival, and theoretical approaches to consider how access is produced for disabled people. Her current project focuses on the automation of care and access work, particularly the use of real-time transcription by freelance workers. She uses an interdisciplinary lens drawing on feminist theory, critical disability studies, and science and technology studies to consider the historical conditions of access work, and the ways access is co-produced through human (and primarily female) labor, technological systems, and economic models and conditions. Louise has previously served as a convenor of UC San Diego's Feminist Labor Lab and a member UCSD's Design Lab and the Critical Design Lab. She holds a PhD in Communication from the University of California, San Diego, and is currently working on her first manuscript: "The Automation of Access."

Selected publications:

- Hickman, Louise and David Serlin, "Towards a Crip Methodology for Critical Disability Studies." *Critical Disability Studies Manifesto*, Ed. Garland Thomson, Rosemarie, Kent, Mike and Ellis, Katie. Print. (2018)
- Hickman, Louise, "Accessing Crip Collegiality: The Politics of the Standardization of Real-Time Captioning." *Catalyst: Feminism, Theory, and Technoscience Journal*, (Spring 2019)