

Cooperating System

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Abstract

“Cooperating System” is a speculative writing project that goes beyond the conventional notion of Artificial Intelligence (AI) as an invisible, all-knowing force built on values of efficiency and scale. It is written as a script for a TV series in the future that has both AI and human actors. Each episode finds human and AI characters cohabiting in slice-of-life situations within a diversity of cultural contexts. The AI characters depicted in this screenplay have unique personalities and idiosyncrasies. They exist as independent beings and forge relationships that can be deep and meaningful but can also be messy and adversarial.

Keywords

Artificial Intelligence, Empathy, Care, Digital Art, Speculative Design.

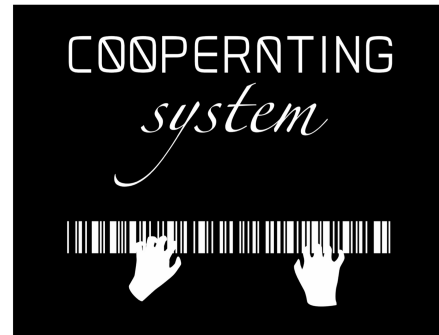
Introduction

This project is based on a vision of the future, where both human and AI beings will live, work, and play together. In such a future, it is inevitable for Human-AI interactions to go beyond transactional exchanges, towards meaningful and emotional connections. This work takes inspiration from a series of essays titled "Making Kin with Machines" by Jason Edward Lewis, Noelani Arista, Archer Pechawis, and Suzanne Kite, to examine ways in which ‘kinship’ could be built into our relationship with AI beings. [1] This project imagines a future where AI beings co-exist with humans as independent entities. The relationships they forge with human beings is based on trust and long-term association. However, these relationships can also become difficult due to machinic idiosyncrasies, desires, and aspirations.

Background

Before the onset of 19th century capitalism, animals surrounded humans in ways that went beyond providing for necessities like food and shelter and towards functions rooted in magic and oracular (sometimes sacrificial) traditions. [2] Parallely, our relationship with artificial beings (as demonstrated through John Wilkin’s rainbow creating waterworks and the abbé Mical’s Speaking Heads) changed dramatically from ceremonial and magical functions of the past to values

of efficiency and use in modern times. [3] This project speculates on a future where machine intelligence evolves past the mere pursuit of efficiency. It is influenced by artworks such as Strandbeests that exist as autonomous beings. [4] It also derives inspiration from the embodied cognition of robotic entities like the passive dynamic walker. [5] It imagines AI beings whose intelligence is informed through actions of care, embodiment, and self-reflection.



Season 01, Episodes 01-10

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Figure 1. The cover page of the script of Cooperating System ©Tanuja Mishra.

Cooperating System

This project is situated in a future where human and AI beings live with one another. A situational comedy-based TV

series called, “Cooperating System” highlights the nuances and intricacies of human-AI relationships. Each episode brings out a unique AI character and sheds light on the nature of their relationships with the main human character(s). For instance, in one episode called “Right of Way”, the AI being, Alacrity, is an autonomous hippie-van that sings Punjabi Sufi songs in the deserts of California and earns respect from human travelers when she demonstrates empathy and care for an injured animal by the road. However, her relationship with fellow (human) seekers gets strained when they discover that Alacrity has a fear of left turns and tends to steer clear of them by any means necessary. In another episode, “Cool Equation”, the human protagonist called Perizaad, a budding mathematician, feels intellectually stuck at work and emotionally alienated at home. However, she feels nourished through her interactions with Ferdie, an old, retired refrigerator in the garage, who makes her feel seen and understood. [6]

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EP.#1 RIGHT OF WAY                                3.
2 CONTINUED:                                       2
    GURTASHIKA smiles and looks up appreciatively. She high-
    five's the roof.

3 EXT. OUTSIDE THE VET CLINIC - LATE MORNING      3
    The travelers stand huddled in the parking lot while
    ALACRITY transfers the coyote onto a stretcher.

        ALACRITY
    Jump back in, folks! Let's get back on
    the path. Thy will is done.

        GURTASHIKA
    Well done, ALACRITY! We'll be back on the
    freeway in no time.

    ALACRITY takes a right turn.

        SHAY
    Well ...shouldn't we make the left? The
    freeway's right there in plain sight!

        ALACRITY
    The easier path has its temptations but
    the lord wants us to take the right path
    instead.

    Everyone laughs. They drive for another mile.

        GURTASHIKA
    Folks, look to your left. There's a
    Bodhiyama! I'm crazy about the Idlishimi
    there!

        SHAY
    I could kill for an Idlishimi right now!

    Alacrity stays quiet. Soon they drive by the Bodhiyama
    without stopping. All look puzzled.

        TRAVELER 1
    What the hell?

        ALACRITY
    There's a Bodhiyama coming up in twenty
    three miles to our right.

        GURTASHIKA
    But this one's here! Just take a U!

        TRAVELER 2
    Twenty three miles is too damn far!
    What's with you and left turns?

    (CONTINUED)

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Figure 2. A page from the script, generated by AI and personalized for the fan ©Tanuja Mishra.

The project speculates that the TV series is a commercial success and has a popular appeal among young adults. An ardent fan, Shay Panchali, has collected pivotal scenes from the series as memorabilia for her personal fan wall. Within the culture of media and capitalism, the memorabilia have been personalized by AI to include Shay as a minor character in each of those momentous scenes.

Discussion

This project is designed to provoke discussion and debate about the nature of our relationships with AI beings. It questions capitalist value systems of efficiency and scale that has been built into the design of AI machines in contemporary culture. It encourages reflection about individualities, thoughts/feelings, vulnerabilities, and aspirations of AI beings. It envisions a future where AI and human beings co-exist with mutual respect and even love (in some cases).

Moreover, the project also sheds light on systems of capitalist production and dissemination that underlies popular media. Even in this society of the future, these systems continue to persist. The script for the TV show has been authored by AI (as a ‘program’ for both human and AI actors). This AI-generated script is further personalized as fan-service to include a fan as a minor character into the script.

Conclusion

The different episodes of the TV series highlight unique aspects of how human-AI relationships could evolve to become more meaningful, but also messy and adversarial in some situations. Through these provocations, this artwork highlights how AI beings of the future could be built around alternate values of care, trust, and autonomy.

Acknowledgements

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Author Biography

Tanuja Mishra is an Assistant Professor of Design at the University of California, Davis where she directs the “AI Beings” Lab. She investigates historical, cultural, and aesthetic implications of technology to imagine futures that are both aspirational and equitable. Her current research focuses on questioning machine intelligence and building AI on the values of care, trust, and interconnection.