



There's No There, There – Regulatory Capture by Metaphor and “AI” Hype

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Some questions

Please also see the prerecorded video

Will Generative AI DDOS the Commons?¹

which is joint with [Kathryn Kure](#). That presentation talks about larger structural problems with generative AIInt.

This talk will instead focus on more technical questions about

What *is* AIInt?

and in particular, if it is anything like it is currently being mythologized to be in the hype/PR tidalwave we are surfing at the moment.

¹Hint: the answer to that question is "Yes, unless people who are active in the open movement are very active, right away."

Aside: Wait a second, “AInt”?

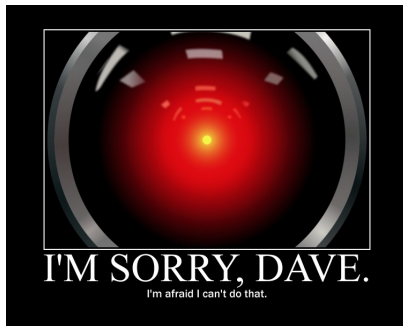
Words matter.

Don’t call it “Artificial Intelligence”/“AI.”

Kate Crawford has a thoughtful critique of these terms.² ...Less thoughtfully:

Run, the machines are coming to kill us!

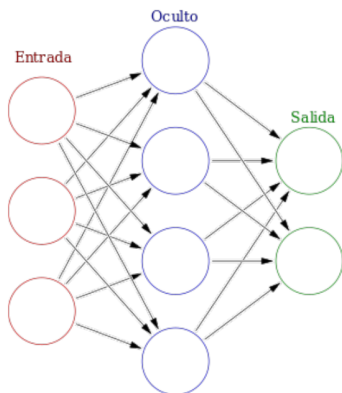
“AInt” is one alternative: less accurate than one we’ll use later in this talk, but shorter and more fun.



HAL9000 I'm Sorry Dave Motivational Poster by Cryteria released under CC BY 3.0 Unported

²See her book *Atlas of AI* and, e.g., [an interesting interview in which she summarizes some of the issues](https://poritz.net/j/share/TNTTRCbM).

What is AI nt, really?



Nothing more than a statistical model of text, or of images, or of images with text.

Yes, statistical models are powerful and wonderful, but there is nothing particularly new, philosophically or structurally, about how they are being used here.

What is new is how much data is fed into them, a product of enormous datasets available today from the Internet, and the data structures inside the programs.

One important (new-ish) data structure is called a “neural network.”

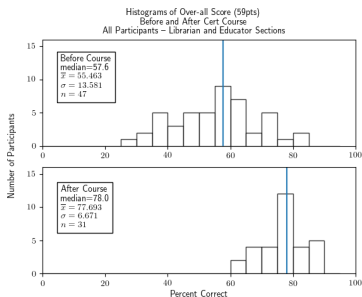
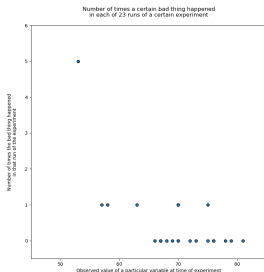
Colored neural network es by Cburnett released under CC BY-SA 4.0

Also “nothing **less**” than a statistical model

Don't get me wrong, I *love* statistics and statistical models:

I've worked as a data analyst, taught many, many sections of introduction to statistics, and even written a statistics OER.

Few things give me as much joy as a well-labelled histogram or scatterplot.

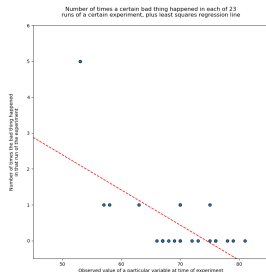


But statistical models are **tools**. Like all tools, they have no **agency**

The [online Cambridge dictionary](#) says a tool is: “something that helps you to do a particular activity”

You have agency, tools do not.

From descriptive statistics to statistical models



Here's one straight trend line.

We might have just put a ruler down and “eyeballed” it, but instead, we use here the Least Squares Regression Line (LSRL).

The LSRL is given by some moderately complex formulæ much beloved of stats students.

Those formulæ and the corresponding behavior of the LSRL, including things like how it changes depending upon outliers, is very well understood by mathematicians

Basically, the coefficients of the LSRL are found by *orthogonal project* – essentially, casting a shadow straight down – in 23 dimensions.

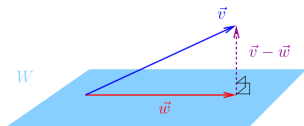


Figure 2.5 from Linear Transformations on Vector Spaces by Scott Kaschner and Amber Russell is released under [CC BY-SA 4.0](#)

Extrapolation

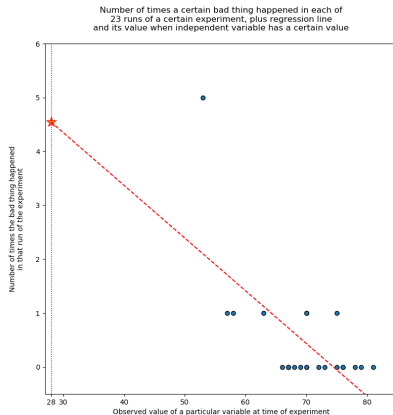
Suppose you were a team of statistically smart engineers who made that graph the night before another run of the experiment.

Suppose the prediction for value of the independent (x) variable the next day was **28**

You might make this graph.

If the consequences of many “bad things” was something over-all “terrible,” you might tell your bosses to stop the experiment.

They would, of course, ignore you, citing “extrapolation.”



Consequences



As you history of science buffs will have known, this was the Challenger disaster of 28 January 1986.

The independent (x) variable was the temperature (in $^{\circ}\text{F}$) at the time of launch

The “bad things” were burn-through spots in the booster rocket O-rings.

Too many burn-throughs and it might fail catastrophically.

It is a true story that engineers tried on 27 Jan 1986 to convince their managers to scrub the next day's launch, because of the predicted temperature.

Image from NASA is in the public domain in the US and likely elsewhere.

“Generative” statistical models

That predicted value of a LSRL for a new value of the independent variable is using a statistical model to *generate* output.

An assignment I could give to a first course of folks learning programming:

Write a program that produces output which looks statistically like the results of flipping a biased coin.

The program takes as input a single parameter, the bias level.

*The output is either **Head** and **Tail**.*

*In the long run, the statistics of the sequence of a string of **Heads** and **Tails** should show the statistical bias given in the parameter.*

That's also *generative statistical modelling*. Which is such a stupid term statisticians don't use it.

That's very similar to what “generative AI” is doing (plus a little extrapolation behind the scenes), which somehow is not considered a stupid term.

Summary and contact info

Summary [AKA “the tl;dr”]:

- “AIInt” is fun; so is “the farting cat”
- “statistical models for money and power concentration” is also good.
- whatever name, it’s just a tool, it has no agency
- a good and useful tool, sometimes
- grifters, racist tech-bros, and useful idiots
- (...and maybe time-traveling cyborgs?)
- the MBs of parameters are a compressed version of the TB of training data
- **mansplaining/extrapolatoin as a service**
- these people are lying to you (ask me for examples)
- e.g., it’s clearly a copyright violation
- (but **IAmNotALawyer!!!**)
- the dangerous experiment was neoliberal capitalism
- but the elite in the rich countries ran it anyway
- don’t blame Mahmoud or anyone in the AI WG for this talk, it’s all on me!

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