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The Loss of Interest in the Modern World and the Future of AI

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Abstract

Variation in human interaction has been posited as a central factor in social adaptations and the evolution of human institutions. Such variation appears to have decreased over time as modern society has become more dense and face to-face interaction has decreased. The consequences of this decrease in variation may result in reduced social innovation and personal satisfactions, producing a variety of pathological conditions detrimental to social evolution. The role of new computer technologies like AI may accelerate these detrimental factors or produce new avenues for variation. Where such variation can come from and its likely effects on individual happiness and social evolution is discussed.

Keywords

Variation; Uniformity; Satisfaction; Social order; Integration; Communication; Artificial Intelligence

1. Introduction

When I was a young man in the 1960s, I read one newspaper a day. Mainly that was all I could afford, though I often went to the library and read some foreign papers and would watch KQED's World Press program. In the years since, I have come to read 4 papers a day, the *Financial Times*, the *New York Times*, the *Marin Independent Journal* and the *San Francisco Chronicle*. I have been most interested in local papers, in the 1960s, my library reading included the *Call-Bulletin*, the San *Francisco Examiner*, the *Oakland Tribune*.

In the past I used to feel there was so much going on in the world, that no one could really come to be informed of events and the curiosities of people. There seemed to be so much more variation, differences of opinion and new ideas than in the past. I do not think that it is age that leaves me now to think that in reading my papers, various blogs and news sources, that there is less "happening." I think instead that there is less variation. It seems to me, from more than a half century of study of humanity as an anthropologist who has written books and articles, used film and video and coded and used a variety of computer languages, that the sad consequence of the spread of media and the cultures of industrial society, that there has been an amalgamation of not only knowledge, culture and experience but a comprehensive diffusion of themes and goals to such an extent that we all come to do the same things, expect the same results and produce the same voice from a shrinking number of threads. Margaret Mead (1964) once mused on the threat to human culture due to culture contact and modern technology. On the one hand, she investigated the conditions for the production of "gifted" individuals, especially where novel combinations of culture produce beneficial adaptations, on the other hand, she was concerned with the degradation of culture due to contact, industrial media swamping local arts and ideas.

2. Reality, New, Old and Recycled

Some 30 years ago I began to have the experience of déjà vu, not the process of cryptomnesia (the reappearance of forgotten information or experience), nor Jung's evocation of archetypes of the collective unconscious, but the recognition of elements in media stories, especially movies, TV programs or theater with former performances. While I was aware that all artists draw from the past, for example, most of Shakespeare was drawn from Greek and Roman sources or myths and history. On an even earlier context, it is clear that the story of the Odyssey was drawn from the Sumerian tale of Gilgamesh (Cary & Warmington, 1929). Rather, it became clear to me that there was a diminution of source, with cultures collapsing in the face of industrial sources, the original, authentic production of ideas and experience was producing a narrowing of the possibilities of creativity. As writers and artists mined aboriginal peoples for unfamiliar knowledge to appropriate and merge with the forms of industrial media (FAAM, 2021), these indigenous universes of mind began to disappear like the consciousness of people with dementia. Problems with new AI sources of data have become a significant concern, (Jones, 2024). Some of the limitations are due to restrictions on use of the "Data Commons" (Longpre et al., 2024). This might be compared to the loss of individual and mass memories as in the Bubonic Plague or the destruction of Native American literature (Caldararo, 1994).

Therefore, as the uniformity of cultures comes to limit the opportunities for creativity, the reproduction of themes becomes increasingly compressed, and into this AI will abstract a continuously pared and reformed minute quantity of difference until the expectation of difference will be itself a novel experience. It is possible that AI could plunder the behavior of other animals, but this would likely model like the end point of the social insects which I have described in my 2017 book.

3. Sources of Newness and the Hum of the Hive: Noise Rules

If inputs for human creativity are derived from variation in experience and learning, as humans lack instincts which would also be stultifying in this scenario if they existed, and these experiential sources become uniform and common, then where could new data arise? Some Behaviorists might argue that differences in physiology, development and genetics could produce necessary innovation in perception and behavior. This might be true, but it brings up a central problem, what is the necessary amount of variation to maintain needed novelty for a society? Discourse analysis can inform us on a variety of ways social relations are changing meaning of actors' intentions and understanding of their context in life (Ziskin, 2019). However, qualitative analysis has not been directed specifically at user satisfaction or self-referencing of meaning in action. Is boredom the enemy of social order or is creativity? How much is related to satisfaction or happiness? There is some evidence that creativity is linked to happiness and feelings of wellbeing as reported by Tamlin Conner and associates at the Department of Psychology of the University of Otago, New Zealand. The problem here is the definition of creativity and the way to achieve it (Moran, 2010). Training for roles is essential, and predictability is necessary in everyday life. Yet as McClelland (1961) found in the study of several quite differently organized societies, the goals of society and how it values individual behavior sets up patterns for general behavior that define the expectations of individuals and sets limits to variation. Between the variation in learning in families and in institutions, creates opportunities for individual achievement and the limits necessary for order that society requires. If learning processes become so uniform that variation is rare and suppressed, then can the society achieve? The same is true in findings of the relation of boredom and creativity, especially in gender identity and expectation (Karazi-Presler & Lomsky-Feder, 2024).

There has been considerable research since Durkheim's classic study of suicide on the nature of modern social environments and depression. In the past 100 years this work has reinforced the idea that premodern social life was more rewarding by several factors, though it is thought that part of this is due to culture change, increased population density and reduced individual roles in community ritual and meaning (Fabrega, 1997; Hidaka, 2013; Wallace, 1966). Some ethnologists like W.C. Allee (1938) suggested from experiments with rodents that as social distances became smaller and interactions more crowded, human wellbeing would suffer with decreased fertility, increased aggression or depression and suicide (Tsai et al. 2024). This is especially increasing among the elderly as modern social environments atomize leaving older individuals without social support (Conwell et al., 2011), though suicide rates in general have only risen to levels seen after World War II (Vankar, 2024).

While the internet provides some degree of interaction and a semblance of human contact, the explosion of views, information, disinformation, distraction and anxiety by the constant reinterpretation and repetition of data, images and reference to emotion, appear to constrain and limit the individual to retain a useful reference point. In a

traditional society where values are reinforced generationally and have utility to sustain relationships and produce satisfaction in work and meaning in life, this "hum of the hive" as information is coherent (Caldararo, 2020). The nature of the internet as a mechanism as useful and wholistic is yet to be determined.

4. Conclusion

Because human social evolution as complex eusocial systems is new, having only appeared some 10,000 years ago in simplest form as food producing villages, we cannot project the kinds of adaptations that will be necessary for humans to survive increased density. We usually assume that technology will allow for benefits and satisfactions in various kinds of comforts. However, this posits that there is no limit to modifications of human social needs within individual development and adjustment. Montagu (1971) and Henry (1963) questioned this assumption and argued that the repercussions following increasing density were likely to overwhelm technological distractions (e.g., TV, internet, virtual porn) and enhance dangerous existing patterns like racism and nationalism (Montagu, 1997). Another problem is the nature of noise. Human produced noise has become a major selective pressure for many animals, though measuring the cumulative effect is still developing (Berger-Tal et al., 2019).

It is obvious that humans evolved in small scale social environments of less than 70 people for most of the past 200,000 to 2 million years. Living in dense urban systems is much like the nature of insect life and we need to understand how social insects adapted to such drastic conditions to prepare for our future. Perhaps AI can have a positive role in this, perhaps not, but while the potential for de-escalation of human population density vectors is unlikely (unless devastating wars or disease occur), the need for human touch, care and the mental status that reflection and empathy can produce will be central factors for transitions for individuals. The role of psychedelics in this process has often been proposed in the past 70 years and research (Caldararo, 2022) in this shows promise, though indigenous discoveries in this area have been characterized as functional and adaptive (see for example, Duerr, 1985). Yet it is an area that lacks certainty while opening vistas of miraculous potential or simplistic loss.

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